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Karen C. Waters  
*Sacred Heart University*

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## A Clinical Practicum Experience to Prepare Teacher Candidates for Early Literacy Instruction

Karen C. Waters, Ed.D., Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT



At a small university in the Northeast Region of the United States, a traditional classroom within the College of Education is converted into a site-based reading clinic. Replete with individual wooden cubbies, bookcases, book bins, and several pint-sized, leather-like chairs in the primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, this space resembles the American elementary classroom in both form and function. Children's furniture sits on a multicolored crescent-shaped rug, approximately 12 feet in diameter at the far left corner of the room, lending coziness to the area where the children will gather for the weekly interactive read-aloud. A spindly easel on wheels is pivoted toward the rug, displaying an afternoon message on crisp white chart paper, which will be read to the children just prior to the interactive read-aloud lesson on *Babushka's Doll* (Polacco, 1995). At the bottom of the easel is a grill-like metal shelf expected to accommodate an infinite number of over-sized *big books*, which have, once again, spilled onto the floor.

Finally, a fully stocked country basket of semi-nutritious snacks, including cheese and crackers, pretzels, chocolate chip granola bars, rice cereal squares, and juice boxes, sits on a table at the opposite end of the room patiently waiting for the children to dismantle its contents as they settle down to read with their tutors. This child-friendly space was intentionally created so that its weekly residents would be responsive to learning while taking comfort for granted.

It is 3:55 p.m., and the tutors are first to arrive. These teacher candidates have opted to take the elective in clinical practicum to enhance their professional repertoire of literacy pedagogy through the structured experience of working with a struggling reader. They have already worked an entire day in the field as interns at nearby public schools; nevertheless, they come bounding through the heavy door into the classroom and hustle to prepare their work stations before the arrival of the children. There is playful conver-

sation and an occasional lament about the daily grind in the life of an intern—"I can't believe I had cafeteria duty again today!"—is heard, as they work quickly to organize their tutoring materials: gradient texts and trade books, sentence strips, post-its, magnetic letters, glitter-glue sticks, stickers, notebooks, and colored markers. To an onlooker, the room is a confusing combination of clutter, colors, and chaos; however, the seasoned educator wisely acknowledges a space that has been transformed into customized learning stations awaiting occupancy. At precisely 4:00 p.m., each tutor greets his or her first-, second-, or third-grade student at the door as if he or she has been impatiently waiting all day for the child's arrival.

### Historical Background of Teacher Preparation in the United States

Over a decade ago, in a critical examination of the status of teacher preparation, Hoffman and Pearson (2000) warned the reading community to assume positions of leadership in establishing research agendas that would evaluate teacher effectiveness, teacher preparation, and best practices in the teaching of literacy. They cautioned teacher educators that if they "[didn't] take initiative and responsibility for setting a research agenda, someone else [would]" (2000, p. 41). With the inception of the standards-based education and the demands of an evolving political, historical, and technological world (Barone &

The teacher candidate, fortified with the theories and content standards of literacy, yet deprived of structured opportunities to practice his or her craft, is juxtaposed with the preservice teacher and the demand to be competent in delivering classroom reading instruction. Providing the apprentice teacher the opportunity to work with a diverse struggling reader, administer assessments, develop case studies, design and implement instructional plans, receive immediate and corrective feedback on the quality of their instruction, and engage in shared self-reflection and collaboration on issues of practice is the essence of Clinical Practicum.

Morrell, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010), traditional methods courses for preparing preservice teachers for classroom reading instruction in the elementary school could no longer support the ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic tapestry of today's classrooms.

At the same time, prompted by poor national literacy test scores and an apparent philosophical division between phonics-first and meaning-first approaches to reading instruction, Congress created the National Reading Panel, whose charge was to identify the necessary skills for comprehensive reading instruction (Walsh, Glaser & Wilcox, 2006). The emergence of five components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary have since been referred to as the "pillars of literacy" (2006, p. 8) for inclusion within an instructional system for the delivery of comprehensive and scientifically based reading research.

Less than a year after the publication of their seminal article arguing for the need for teacher educators to become involved in teacher preparation reform, Hoffman and Pearson's (2000) prophetic pronouncement was realized with the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB; 2002), the landmark federal legislation mandating every state to develop a rigorous assessment system to measure the reading and math achievement of every student in grades 3-12. Now, 11 years later, reading statistics have not improved significantly: Approximately 25% of first graders do not have the requisite preliteracy skills in phonemic awareness to increase the likelihood that they will be successful readers by third grade (Walsh et al., 2006), and 70% of students in grades 4 and 8 are still reading at basic and below basic levels of comprehension (NAEP, 2009).

More recently, attempts to professionalize teacher education have only succeeded in politicizing schools of education and polarized schools of thought as to how best to prepare teacher candidates to teach. Some states have implemented a system for licensure that requires a) initial certification candidates to pass one or more rigorous examinations in literacy instruction (Barone & Morrell, 2007; CT Foundations of Reading Test, 2009), and b) schools of education to report candidate assessment data to State Boards of Education and the federal government. Finally, the federal government distributes Title II funding to universities in accordance with the rates of state licensure for its teacher candidates (HEA, 2002).

Additionally, voluntary participation in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is another course of action taken by schools of education to control for program quality through a complex assessment system aligning specific course assignments to the corresponding standards of the discipline of the Specialty Professional Associations (SPA; NCATE, 2007). Of concern to teacher educators participating in the NCATE process is the perception that the university is now bound by rigorous assessments that may or may not align with the realities of the classroom (Barone & Morrell, 2007). Further, a growing amount of disappointing student data linking teacher quality to student learning underscores the need for substantive clinical experiences within teacher preparation programs (Hoffman, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Walsh et al., 2006).

Literacy professionals and teacher educators have advocated for robust and extensive field experiences and coursework to provide teacher candi-

dates with the knowledge and skills of the profession (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Dearman & Alber, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Hoffman & Pearson, 2000; IRA Position Statements, 2003, 2004; IRA, 2007; LeCornu, 2005; Lefever-Davis, 2002; Scott & Teale, 2010/2011; Snow, Burns & Griff, 1998).

### A Context for Clinical Practicum

Currently in its fourth year of implementation, the Clinical Practicum is an elective course within an established 39-credit post-baccalaureate initial certification program yielding a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) at the university. This elective course, independent of the teacher candidate's two-semester internship and 10-week student teaching experience, offers preservice teachers the opportunity to assess and teach a diverse struggling reader under the watchful eye of experienced university faculty. All course participants have completed a foundations course in literacy instruction as the prerequisite prior to enrolling in Clinical Practicum, designed specifically to extend and build on teacher candidates' content and pedagogical knowledge from previous coursework. Powerful teacher education programs "integrate theory and practice" in "[re]designing courses to build on one another [adding] up to a coherent whole" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 122).

My position as a university professor, entrenched in the professional development of preservice teachers, has enabled me to witness the evolution of university teacher preparation: from theoretical coursework to limited practical application, to the inevitable test-taking for teacher licensure. The teacher candidate, fortified with the theories and content standards of literacy, yet deprived of structured opportunities to practice his or her craft, is juxtaposed with the

preservice teacher and the demand to be competent in delivering classroom reading instruction. Providing the apprentice teacher the opportunity to work with a diverse struggling reader, administer assessments, develop case studies, design and implement instructional plans, receive immediate and corrective feedback on the quality of their instruction, and engage in shared self-reflection and collaboration on issues of practice is the essence of Clinical Practicum.

### Purpose

The purpose of this article is to explore teacher candidates' tutoring experiences within a university clinical practicum to acquire an understanding about how their unique interactions with struggling readers and research-based methodology contribute to their pedagogical understandings of literacy instruction. First, I summarize the grand learning theories with which the pedagogy of literacy aligns, and reference the curricular methodology of *Teach Reading Well* (IRA, 2007), providing the conceptual framework and the evidentiary base for the institution of the Clinical Practicum. Next, I describe the components of clinical tutoring and seminar, comprising the

framework for clinical practicum, which includes teacher candidates' written self-reflections. Then I analyze the evolving stories of three teacher candidates, prior to, during, and following their enrollment in Clinical Practicum to illustrate the ideals of a rich clinical experience through a structured apprenticeship within an innovative program. Finally, I link candidates' experiences to the research and articulate the benefits for incorporating an authentic apprenticeship model into a traditional teacher preparation program.

### Theoretical and Pedagogical Principles within the Conceptual Framework

#### Theoretical Perspectives

The principles of constructivism are inherent within the framework Clinical Practicum. Constructivist theory holds that social experience is affected by interactions with others, and that students come to understand about themselves as learners when they deliberately employ metacognitive strategies and self-reflection (Lambert et al., 2002). Within this realm, a weaving of the learning theories of Vygotsky (1978), Freire (1997), and Schön (1983), as forerunners of discourse and reflexive

practice, anchor the ideals of introspection, self-reflection, scaffolding, and collaborative problem-solving, and are further explained.

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development refers to the "distance between the actual developmental level [of the learner] and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Freire's (1997) humanistic worldview emphasized the unity between teacher and student in a co-construction of knowledge that evolves into a relationship of reciprocity and mutual respect. Finally, the phenomenon of "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 59), provides the theoretical anchor for the institution of reflective practice, whose rationale is substantiated with opportunities for teacher candidates to link theory with instruction as they acquire essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions of professional educators.

#### Curricular Methodology

The core of features for creating sustainable university teacher preparation programs delineated within the document, *Teaching Reading Well* (IRA, 2007), the commissioned study and collaborative effort between the IRA and the Teacher Education Task Force (TETF), provide the curricular and philosophical inspiration for Clinical Practicum. Further discussion of the elements including the content of literacy, faculty and teaching, apprenticeships, diversity, resources, and vision for reading education (2007, p. 1) are contextualized within the explanation of clinical activities.

The essential principles that guide my work with teacher candidates subsequently influenced the ways in which they interacted with children.



Clinic-in-Action

An embedded support system allowed teacher candidates to assimilate new learning through instructor guidance, which was extended through a transactional relationship between teacher candidate and child in a tutoring partnership (Risko et al, 2008).

### Clinical Practicum

Prior to the commencement of clinical practicum, teacher candidates attended a rigorous a three-hour mandatory orientation session in preparation for working with a struggling reader from the primary grades. Consistent with the recommendations of the experts to “teach for social change,” a “Clinical Curriculum” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 122) provided assessment tools and curriculum resources to address the pillars of phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, (NICCHD, 2000) and writing. Teacher candidates learned how to administer a variety of criterion and norm-referenced assessments, and employ the rudiments of data analysis to create an intervention plan commensurate with the strengths and needs of the students. For purposes of this article, a diverse struggling reader is defined as a child whose racial, ethnic, cultural, language, or socioeconomic background contributes to his or her inability to read on grade level and may include the academic or physical challenges that may affect a child’s ability to read (Vacca & Vacca, 1999).

The clinical curriculum included use of high frequency word lists, leveled texts, and additional resources, including an abundance of leveled text for teaching foundational skills. A syllabus explained course goals, objectives, and the required course assignments, including weekly written self-reflections that were submitted electronically following each class session. Additional technological curricular resources included a web-based link

to a university-produced instructional streaming video depicting a typical tutoring session (Waters, 2008), enabling teacher candidates to observe the modeling of each component in the format. Finally, participants had access to online materials, which offered a continuum of downloadable gradient text in fiction and nonfiction to target students’ needs.

Because the student enrollment is ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse within the university reading clinic, the teacher candidates were required to differentiate or reinvent instruction, explore multiple approaches to the solution of a problem, and work through paradigm

methodology, established at the outset of the course, participants became proficient in identifying the students’ areas of strength and weakness and design instruction consistent with the results of their data.

At the same time, teacher candidates had multiple opportunities in seminar “to enhance their multicultural understandings” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 9) through peer interaction and rigorous discussion. Cochran-Smith et al. (1999) urged a university-community partnership to ensure collaboration, consider the interests of local stakeholders, and develop a common vision about what “teaching for social change” (p. 243) looks like.



To-with-by model (Mooney, 1990)

matic barriers and personal bias (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; IRA, 2007). Hence, the organic experience of working with diverse struggling learners is contextualized within an authentic apprenticeship, rather than infused with ancillary measures to “integrate social justice into the fabric of the preservice curriculum” (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt & McQuillan, 1999, p. 233). Working with the curricular

Conferences at the end of each tutoring session enabled teacher candidates to establish a rapport with parents, while building a partnership, which continues in subsequent tutoring cycles in clinical practicum with each new crop of teacher candidates.

### Clinical Tutoring

Each teacher candidate was partnered with a first, second, or third grade struggling reader in a one-to-one ratio

of tutor-to-child for 12 sessions of 90 minutes in duration. A 60-minute tutoring session consisted of specific time designations for instructing the child at his/her instructional and independent levels in the various aspects of the literacy process, including guided reading, word study and vocabulary building, expressive writing, and comprehension. In this approach (Mooney, 1990), tutors scaffolded instruction in a gradual release of responsibility as the child assumed greater control over the literacy processes. The remaining 30 minutes of tutoring consisted of instructor modeling of research-based instructional strategies for the systematic delivery of particular aspects of the literacy process, followed by individual and collaborative opportunities for teacher candidates to conduct lessons in similar fashion.

**Seminar**

Following the tutoring sessions, teacher candidates participate in Clinical Seminar following for an additional 90 minutes. Clinical Seminar provided a forum for professional development where teacher apprentices engaged in reflective inquiry and community discourse related to tutoring activities. Additional course readings enabled the teacher candidates to link their work with student learning, participate in inter-collegial collaboration in problem-solving problems of practice, and examine their teaching and learning methods to heighten their awareness as practitioners (Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

**Candidates' Written Self-Reflections**

In Freirian mode (Freire, 1997), candi-

dates' weekly written self-reflections, submitted electronically for my feedback, were co-constructions of learning between my students and me, and comprised the basis for ongoing dialogue: upon receiving the candidate's journal, I provided written commentary to guide them in the development of a deeper understanding of the principles of literacy instruction and to help them plan for the next tutoring session. After the completion of her first running record, Melanie wrote:

*Today I saw the importance of determining a correct reading level for a child and how the wrong level can hinder the assessment process. Before working with her, I was under the impression that my student was a level 18 [late first grade level]. With this understanding, I decided to give*

Component	Duration	Description
1. Guided Reading	20 minutes	With the tutor's help the child reads gradient text at his instructional level from a variety of leveled texts. Student's instructional level is defined as the level at which the student can read 90-94% of the text unassisted.
2. Word Study	10 minutes	With the tutor's help the child sorts, reads, and spells words with common elements using one or more of the six syllable types.
3. Writing	10 minutes	By him/herself, the child writes on a self-selected topic or in response to literature from text, although the tutor provides assistance as needed.
4. "Easy" or Independent	10 minutes	By him/herself, the child reads favorite story at "just right" or independent reading level. Independent reading level is defined as the level at which the student can read 96-98% of the words unassisted as determined through a running record.
5. Interactive Read-Aloud	10 minutes	Tutor reads to the child from a quality piece of literature one or two levels above the child's instructional level, wherein the child is still able to comprehend the text. During the Interactive read-aloud (IRA) the tutor pauses frequently at pivotal junctures in the story to allow the student to make predictions, pose questions, and discuss the events of the story. The IRA is frequently implemented as a small group lesson.

**Figure 1.**

*60-Minute Tutoring Format . Procedure for a 60-minute tutoring session adapted from Fountas & Pinnell (1996, p. 27).*

*a running record with a level 16 text, which was supposedly below my student's independent level. However, as the student read aloud, I soon realized that the text was too difficult for her. So I learned that regardless of the text level that corresponds to a child's performance, it is also important to have a variety of texts available in order to properly and effectively instruct a reader.*

**My response:**

*Melanie, today you learned a valuable lesson in diagnostic teaching: No one leveling system for gradient text is pure. You planned appropriately in having a variety of leveled texts on hand.*

**The following week, Melanie wrote:**

*Today I was able to gain insight into Becky's reading abilities through another running record. When analyzing it, I could see that Becky did not seem to use meaning when reading. In overrelying on visual or graphophonic cues in words, she is not reading to make sense of the story. For example, Becky substituted "kind" for "kid," "owners" for "opinions," and "every" for "even," —and she kept reading without stopping. I'm going to help her to integrate the cueing systems in reading for meaning.*

This excerpt from Melanie's journal reveals a pre-service teacher's attempts to assimilate the language of literacy instruction on a number of levels as she strives to acquire

an enhanced conception about the content, pedagogical, and procedural knowledge of the discipline through the utilization of the running record (Clay, 1993). Melanie's specific references to graphophonic cueing, (Temple, Ogle, Crawford & Freppon, 2011), not only conveys her understanding of how a child learns to read, but also presumes an internalization of the reading process. Her discussion of the child's miscues in oral reading position her as a burgeoning professional whose pedagogical insights have already extended beyond the first rung on the trajectory of teacher knowledge (Callahan, Griffo, & Pearson, 2009). Thus, Melanie is beginning to assimilate the habits of mind of the professional educator as she gradually becomes conversant in the language of literacy.

Melanie's insights, in many ways, are typical of those experienced by teacher candidates in negotiating their recursive roles of teacher-in-training and student of reading pedagogy as the following narratives will demonstrate.

### The Stories of Three Teacher Candidates

#### Tatiana

Tatiana came to the United States a little over 15 years ago from the Ukraine, but had become fluent in English through formal schooling in her native country. After obtaining her Bachelor of Arts in technology, she enrolled in the teacher certifi-

cation program to obtain her master's degree. Neither expecting nor asking for special consideration as an English Language Learner (ELL), Tatiana enrolled in the requisite foundations course in reading, oftentimes questioning the methods that appeared to be antithetical to the way she had learned to read as a child. Eventually, she came to understand that the principles of literacy pedagogy were consistent with constructivist learning theory espoused by professors in her other classes.

During Seminar, Tatiana continually compared the concept of phonological awareness to the way she learned to read in her native language: Recalling the syllable types, Tatiana wrote that learning about phonics was as enlightening for her as it was beneficial for the student with whom she worked. As a fluent reader, Tatiana intuited how to chunk an unfamiliar word into its constituent parts without having specific knowledge of the terminology for the individual phonics elements. Having to teach the specific phonics elements to the child she tutored, Tatiana realized that she was learning as much as her student.

In a recursive process between teaching and learning, Tatiana became metacognitively aware of herself as a co-learner with her student. She realized that an effective teacher possesses both a conceptual and a discrete knowledge of the terminology. Through seminar, she developed her interpersonal skills in having an opportunity to interact with peers and openly discuss her literacy practices through collaborative problem solving, which she described as follows:

*There was respect and friendliness, and we felt that we were part of the family. We reflected in writing. We reflected after the lessons. We*

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*reflected with the group. And that helped because, especially in the first sessions, I felt like I'm not the only one who has questions, and my child is not the only child who has [reading] difficulties.*

Tatiana's experiences in clinical practicum not only imbued her with the pedagogy of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, but empowered her with the knowledge that she could be an effective teacher. She wrote, "I saw myself as a teacher." She summed up clinical practicum experience succinctly: "[In clinic] you see theory and practice working together. To see that connection is incredible."

### Gavin

Gavin's internship and subsequent student-teaching experience offered him a rich opportunity to work with struggling readers in from Kindergarten through Grade 6 in the implementation of his school's intervention program prior to taking the clinical practicum course. As an intern working in partnership with the third-grade teacher at his school, Gavin had been responsible for implementing the district's scripted intervention program to students who had been identified for intensive instruction. He wrote that although he was able to draw readily on the content knowledge he had acquired in the foundations course in literacy, the district's mandated program afforded little flexibility for making instructional decisions.

Thus, the transition from the prescribed routine of the school-based intervention program to the flexible clinical format required Gavin to summon and synthesize all that he had learned through previous coursework in literacy and his field experiences. Whereas Gavin had previously

Development of pedagogical and professional expertise requires expert observation, critical and formative feedback, and multiple opportunities for the apprentice to practice a wide variety of approaches in responding to the needs of a struggling reader (Darling-Hammond, 2006, Hoffman et al., 2005; IRA, 2007).

depended on the structure of the intervention program for procedural guidance, he was now confronted with the realization that clinic placed him in a quasi-autonomous situation that would require him to make lone instructional decisions for which he would be accountable. He could no longer rely on a one-size-fits-all approach, a scripted routine, or in-program assessments for instructional support. Gavin wrote:

*I was nervous pretty much . . . you [referring to me as the instructor] handing over the reins and saying: 'Here's a child. I want you to take the assessment data we have [and] choose [additional] screening-type assessments (which you did give us), but straight from the start, we were in there working one-on-one with the student, and it was just me for the first time, and it was exciting!*

Gavin's initial trepidation gave way to self-empowerment, acknowledging his growing ability to make instructional decisions in working with the struggling reader. He was excited to realize that he possessed a natural inclination for literacy pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. On the verge of developing expertise that transcended the university clinic into the elementary classroom, he felt prepared to take on the role of teacher. He wrote:

*Now I feel comfortable talking about and administering the specific tests and even just the pedagogy of teaching literacy. If I were in my own classroom I feel like I could just sit*

*down and have a good starting point using the graded word list assessment.*

Gavin easily perceived the connection between his coursework in foundations of literacy and the practicum as he continued to describe how he was able to reconcile the learning theories with scientifically based reading research:

*I felt like I did have a strong theoretical understanding, a conceptual understanding of the different components of teaching literacy, but I wasn't as comfortable putting theory into practice. But I really was able to understand it, once I got my hands on it in clinic.*

Without hesitation, Gavin admitted that participation in the clinical practicum had enhanced both practice and pedagogy. Instead of referring to himself as a graduate student, preservice teacher, teacher candidate or apprentice, he already saw himself as an educator, as he spoke with the confidence and poise of a wise and seasoned professional: "It goes along so well with everything we had learned throughout the coursework, and it really just brought literacy instruction to life for me."

After completing clinical practicum, Gavin continued his year-long internship at the school to which he was assigned where he continued to provide intervention to at-risk students targeted for tiered instruction through Response to Intervention (RtI) (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn 2008): a format for differentiated or tiered

As a smaller learning community designed to equip teacher candidates with the skills and knowledge of the professional educator, the university clinical practicum is a sanctuary for teacher candidates and instructors to examine their practices in symbiotic partnership. The clinical practicum is not only a safe environment to practice the skills of a teacher, but an authentic context for grappling with pedagogy, cultural diversity and the wider educational community in promoting social change.

instruction addressing the needs of students functioning below district's literacy benchmarks. Subsequently, Gavin's school administration offered him a position as a long-term substitute, even before graduating from the teacher preparation program at the university.

In a recent e-mail, Gavin was excited to report that his long-term substitute position had led to an offer as a third-grade teacher. A reading professional-in-the-making, Gavin has already changed the literate lives of many children.

### Stephanie

Although Stephanie had already obtained initial certification in another state, she enrolled in the graduate program at the site of this study to obtain her master's degree after graduation. With no job prospects, Stephanie thought that additional schooling might position her as a more attractive hire. Prior to taking Clinical Practicum Stephanie had acquired multiple experiences in working with young children in literacy: a work-study partnership with a local school at the undergraduate level working with two of the lower-achieving groups in a first grade classroom during student teaching.

However, Stephanie's previous tutoring experiences had left her unsatisfied and academically hungry for additional literacy strategies, content knowledge and experience.

She was uncertain about her ability to be an effective teacher: "My biggest concern was that maybe this whole time I'd been doing it wrong or that there are other strategies that I could incorporate." Limited opportunities to practice the research-based methods that had been modeled by her instructors left her wondering if she had teaching potential.

She recalled the first time she used the Shared Reading Experience (SRE) (Holdaway, 1979) with the text *May I Bring a Friend* (DeRegniers, 1964) to reinforce the word king for her young tutee who exhibited difficulty in remembering the high frequency word. The SRE is a five day plan for repeated readings using text that is characterized by rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. The procedure includes daily objectives for skill building in word recognition, phonics, and comprehension, that are extracted and then contextualized to ensure student automaticity in oral reading. Implemented initially as a read-aloud, the SRE scaffolds instruction in a gradual release model that ultimately enables the learner to read the story with little teacher assistance. Although mentioned by professors in previous courses, Stephanie had not seen the SRE modeled until she came to clinic.

Stephanie marveled that her tutee learned to recall, retain, and even spell the word king, after the third day of instruction using the SRE

model. Having been successful in the implementation of this procedure, Stephanie recalled how she had been able to apply the SRE to the classroom in her current practice as an early literacy tutor:

*I knew what I was doing! I wasn't doing it right in the past. And now I can see [how it's done]. I've done it one-on-one. I've done it in a small group with other tutors who are also learning. When they [the students] know how to respond to my verbal cueing I realize that I have done it right!*

Stephanie said that the knowledge acquired from taking clinical practicum has imbued within her a sense of confidence that she "has good teaching potential." Her insights about her competence continue with the following illustration:

*I learned a lot from [teaching] Kevin. He was very unique and I learned so much from just interacting with him on a weekly basis. I [also] learned that I need to be clear about my instruction so that my students know how to respond.*

After completing the summer clinical practicum course, Stephanie had planned to begin her internship in the fall, while resuming her part-time position from the previous year. During a meeting with the principal to discuss her responsibilities, she freely articulated a plan to employ data based instruction and progress monitoring to meet the needs of the students targeted for intervention. Subsequently, the principal, clearly impressed with Stephanie's assessment plan, offered Stephanie a full-time position as a literacy tutor, with a promise that Stephanie would be offered the next teaching position that became available.

## Candidates' Experiences and the Link to the Research

The stories of Tatiana, Gavin, and Stephanie are typical of the teacher candidates' narratives in taking Clinical Practicum: the hands-on tutoring of working one-on-one with a struggling reader was a unique opportunity for them to make the connection from theory to practice, yet for each of them the experience was unique. While Stephanie initially referred to the content knowledge of literacy as *jargon*, Gavin discussed the complexities of the reading process with the sophistication and conceptual understanding of a seasoned professional. For Tatiana, the discrete phonics elements and the rules of syllabication provided insights into how best to help the child with whom she was paired. Their statements, experiences, and journal entries, examined for the characteristics that correspond to the level of proficiency on a trajectory of teacher knowledge (Callahan et al., 2009), position each of them as a novice whose professional knowledge expands and evolves with practice (Kibby & Barr, 1999). Thus, the lexicon of literacy is as much of a construct for academic domain knowledge as it is for the conceptual understanding of pedagogical principles related to the discipline.

Tutors assumed a constructivist stance in helping their students "develop new strategic behaviors that merged old knowledge with newly constructed ways of problem solving" (Cox & Hopkins, 2006, p. 259). Reminiscent of Freire (1997), tutors collaborated with their students as coconstructors of knowledge to help them acquire the resources needed to negotiate unfamiliar text. Explicit instruction in the semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic cueing systems by the tutors helped students learn effective ways to develop an efficient system for

decoding and comprehending while self-monitoring their reading (Cox & Hopkins, 2006; IRA, 2007).

Similarly, a transactional relationship is reprised between teacher candidates and me in an integrated format combining supervised tutoring, instructor modeling, data-based instruction, and opportunities for discussion and self-reflection (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hoffman et al., 2005; IRA, 2007). IRA (2007) described it in this way: Within authentic contexts in which teacher candidates are "exposed to real students" (p. 11), the university instructors not only model best practices, but also function as "mentors who model" (p. 9) by providing substantive feedback and helping teacher candidates to differentiate instruction, make data-based decisions, and engage in peer interaction and collaborative problem solving.

Development of pedagogical and professional expertise requires expert observation, critical and formative feedback, and multiple opportunities for the apprentice to practice a wide variety of approaches in responding to the needs of a struggling reader (Darling-Hammond, 2006, Hoffman et al., 2005; IRA, 2007). As with the child coached to proficiency in literacy through the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), the teacher candidate's knowledge is elevated in similar fashion through a co-constructive relationship with the course instructor. Ultimately, the teacher candidate navigates his or her own learning path in a supportive environment, which generates a similar scaffold for the children in advancing their reading achievement.

## Conclusion: the Institution of a Clinical Experience Within Teacher Preparation

The institution of the Clinical Practicum draws from the principles of cognitive

apprenticeships, reflective inquiry, and literacy pedagogy. Rich clinical experiences that allow teacher candidates to openly discuss their literacy practices through collaborative problem solving are powerful opportunities to enhance one's learning (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Dearman & Alber, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Hoffman & Pearson, 2000; IRA Position Statements, 2003, 2004; IRA, 2007; LeCornu, 2005; Lefever-Davis, 2002; Risko et al., 2008; Snow & Burns, 1998). Within the construct of teacher training, the concept of critical self-reflection emerges as a legitimate strategy for improving and transforming one's practice (Dearman & Alber, 2005; Dufour, 2004; Lefever-Davis, 2002; Mezirow cited by Merriam, 2004; Parry, 2007; Welsh, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006; Servage, 2008; Wood, 2007).

This article considered the core elements of a clinical practicum (Darling-Hammond, 2000), effective professional development (Dufour, 2004), evidence-based curricular methodology, and the grand learning theories in the exploration of teacher candidates' tutoring experiences in literacy. As a smaller learning community designed to equip teacher candidates with the skills and knowledge of the professional educator, the university clinical practicum is a sanctuary for teacher candidates and instructors to examine their practices in symbiotic partnership. The clinical practicum is not only a safe environment to practice the skills of a teacher, but an authentic context for grappling with pedagogy, cultural diversity and the wider educational community in promoting social change.

As an apprentice, the preservice teacher begins with a series of attempts at approximation, much like the artist's tentative brushstrokes on a blank

canvass that gradually become more deliberate as he accrues a fund of pedagogical and content knowledge. The novice teacher is a story-in-the-making, requiring the elements of time and perspective, which transcend the scope of this article. Refinement of practice is an iterative and recursive process in an uneven combination of struggle, experience, and occasional success. Competence, a necessary condition for confidence, presumes the internalization of the set of skills and a demonstration of a complex series of acquired behaviors, eventually leading to more successes and fewer struggles. Practical application is as necessary for the apprentice who is learning to teach as it is for the student who is learning to read—both require sustained commitment, practice, and time.



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*DR. KAREN C. WATERS is Director of the Literacy Specialist Programs at the Farrington College of Education at Sacred Heart University. She came to SHU in 2006, having held a number of positions during her 31 year career in Bridgeport – including director of literacy, elementary school principal, Title I special projects coordinator, grant writer, reading specialist, and classroom teacher. She has presented workshops at local, state, and national conferences on topics including response to intervention, family literacy, the Common Core State Standards, integrating music and literacy, and higher level thinking in urban adolescents. She is a contributing author of Building struggling students' higher level literacy: Practical ideas, powerful solutions (2010) edited by T. Gunning and J. Collins.*

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