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Emerging Theoretical Models of Reading through Authentic Assessments among Preservice Teachers: Two Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

This two-part study examines the emerging understanding of the reading process among preservice teachers (PTs), enrolled in a teacher preparation course on diagnostic reading. The study focuses on the use of reading assessment tools to understand the process of reading, while using reading inventories for diagnostic as well as pedagogical purposes. PTs' self-reflections support a developing insight into the reading process. Through the process of inquiry and self-reflections, PTs discovered critical issues related to literacy, namely, metacognition, prior knowledge, cultural factors, instructional implications, and content area reading. These findings have implications for the teaching of reading as inquiry-based instruction, enabling teacher candidates to build their understanding of the reading process through an emerging personal model.

INTRODUCTION

A reading course widely offered in most teacher education programs, relates to assessment and instruction in reading. The course emphasizes assessment and instruction techniques in reading that are appropriate for elementary and middle school students. The intent of the course is to prepare preservice teachers (PTs) to build knowledge of various types of formal and informal assessment tools, appropriate methods for data collection, and ways to interpret the data in order to make informed instructional decisions. During one such course at two independent educational institutions, we investigated the preservice teachers' developing knowledge of the reading process, impacted by the administration of informal reading assessments. The PTs were enrolled in reading courses at two independent teacher preparation programs: one in the Southeast and one in the South in the United States. In these two case studies, tools for reading assessment include traditional reading inventories. Typically, a reading inventory (often referred to as an informal reading inventory) is a non-standardized, individually administered series of word lists and graded passages, accompanied by comprehension questions. One of the major reasons for administering an informal reading inventory (IRI) is to

determine a student's instructional reading level as determined by a book publisher. From this information, teachers can provide publisher appropriate instructional materials for reading to students.

We argue that preservice teachers learn to develop self-generated personal reading models by engaging in the administration of authentic assessment practices using an IRI with children. We examined the following two research questions:

1. How does the administration of reading inventories influence PTs' beliefs about reading process?
2. How does the administration of reading inventories build a professional knowledge base of teaching reading strategies amongst preservice teachers?

Within the paradigm of a teacher education course in reading assessment, we investigated developing knowledge of literacy development and its impact on informed decision making process with respect to instructing children to read. The findings of the two studies support that reading assessment tools provide a personal involvement in discovering a higher order understanding of the reading process. The assessment tools provided a platform to launch an informed discourse, leading to negotiate and build a personalized reading model. The implications of the study relate to broader areas of language development/linguistics and reading assessment coursework in all teacher preparation programs. This study demonstrates that reading teacher educators have a significant impact on PTs' developing understanding of the reading process within the field experiences of college-based assessment and diagnostic reading courses.

A recent study (Bain, Brown, & Jordan, 2009) showed that more attention should be paid to teaching critical evaluation skills as a part of initial training of future educators. Practicing teachers are the links between parents and school, and teachers who particularly work with children with disabilities. The possibility to pass on misinformation poses a potential dilemma that should be addressed in teacher training programs. In response to a recent shift toward informal measures of teaching/assessment in reading education, Briggs, Tully, and Stiefer (1998) investigated assessments and instructional strategies being taught in teacher education programs in five Midwestern states. Surveys of reading education professors at state universities indicated that direct, informal assessment measures are being taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Borba (2008) emphasized use of real public school classrooms to teach prospective teachers that no commercial reading program can accomplish what a skilled teacher can. The study showed that the education students learn literacy lessons at an elementary school where pedagogy and practicum are integrated within each class period. Investigations into how preservice teachers experience and evaluate teacher education coursework and field experiences can be found in the recent literature (Davies, Brady, Rodger, & Wall, 1999; Romano, 2002). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) discuss the 'knowledge-for-practice' and 'knowledge-in-practice' with reference to college-based courses and field-based experience. The hands-on field-based experiences further strengthen the connection between theory and practice in university based courses and, at the same time, provide an opportunity to preservice teachers for 'learning by doing.' The diagnostic reading course is meant to provide one such opportunity.

BACKGROUND ON THE TWO-PART RESEARCH STUDY

The two studies were carried out independently in two different geographic locations. The common elements in both studies included: administering reading inventories to students one-on-one, identifying students' instructional reading levels and their use of reading strategies, evaluating oneself by taking a pre-post self evaluations (Mariotti & Homan, 2001), and presenting case studies as course products. PTs were both undergraduate and graduate candidates who belonged to the College of Education with majors in teacher education. The differences in the two research studies included the following: PTs in Research Study 1 worked in a school setting for second graders; PTs in Research Study 2 were enrolled in a distance learning course who administered the assessments to students at various grade levels in mixed settings (school and home).

RESEARCH STUDY #1

The study began with a school inviting a partnership with a small college in the South. This was seen as an opportunity for college students enrolled in a diagnostic reading course who are required to diagnose students' reading levels to be placed in the school setting. Undergraduate and graduate teacher education candidates that were enrolled in a diagnostic reading course were required to participate in administering informal reading inventories to all the second graders in the local school. The products consisted of surveys, conversations, reflections, interviews, and writing samples which were collected by the researcher. The setting for field work was the identified local school. The school curriculum included areas of religion, social studies, computer education, physical education, and fine arts. The second grade teachers wanted all their students tested to find out their graded reading levels. The ongoing process of student assessment and final products provided meaningful data for this study.

Participants

Fourteen PTs were examiners for the sixty-two (62) second graders in two classes. Each PT was assigned four to five children. There were six juniors and one senior in undergraduate studies. Seven Master's Alternative Teaching (MAT) graduate students participated in the project. Only MAT students participated from the Master's level course because of scheduling. The course was offered in the evenings. Many of the students were working full time; only the MATs who already had the responsibility of interning in labs in day classrooms were available. The undergraduates met at the school for an hour to three hours during the first week and two hours during the second week. Sixty-two second graders (31 students in each classroom) participated in this study.

Data Sources and Collection

Primary sources of data were: (1) PTs' written analyses; (2) pre-post self-evaluations; (3) PTs' reflections; (4) interviews and meetings with PTs, classroom teachers, and principal; (5) classroom teachers' self-evaluations; (6) PTs' recorded second graders' readings; and (7) field notes (see Appendix A). Secondary sources of data were: (1) classroom lists of reading levels;

(2) second grade students' journals; and (3) published materials for testing purposes. Testing took place at the school site, using the materials found in each PT's packet. Initially, all PTs were asked to administer a reading interview, the Burke Reading Interview (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). Copyright permission from the publishers was obtained for the specific graded IRIs. The Qualitative Reading Inventory-II (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995) and the Linking Reading Assessment to Instruction (Mariotti & Homan, 2001) were the main sources for graded level reading material. A variety of forms were taken from the Mariotti and Homan (2001) workbook (i.e., "Oral Reading Behavior Analysis Form" and "Summary Sheet"). A "Miscue Analysis Procedure II Retelling Summary" (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987) and "Retelling Profile" (Irwin & Mitchell, 1983) were also included.

Methods and Data Analysis

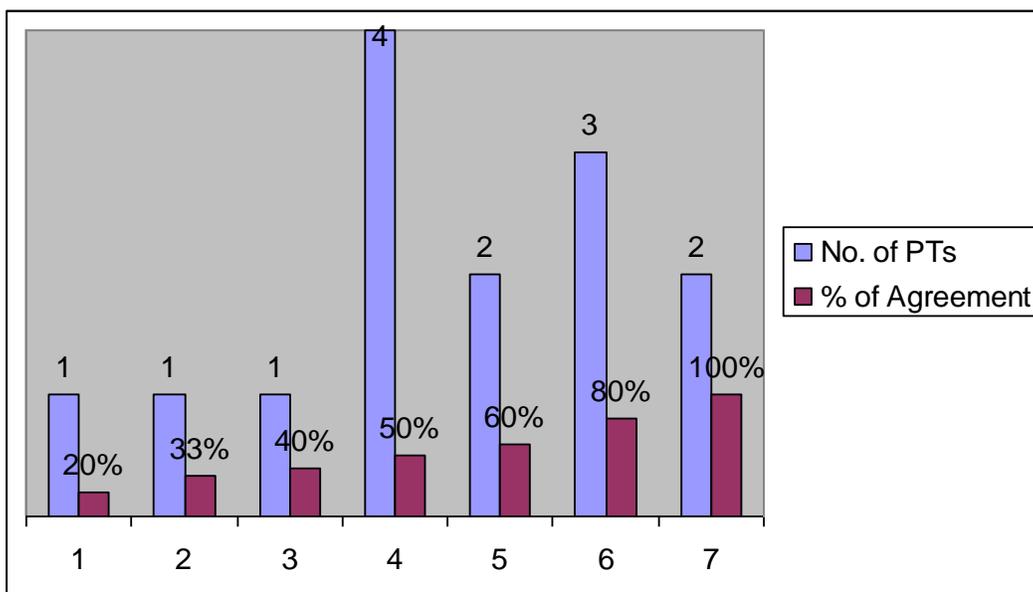
To understand PTs beliefs about their own level of proficiency in reading diagnosis before and after the course, all PTs were administered the 'Self-Assessment of Proficiency in Reading Diagnosis' (Mariotti & Homan, 2001). This assessment employed a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing limited skill and 5 representing strong skill of reading behavior. The pre- and post-assessment results were tallied. It was important to understand the impact on PTs learning from the beginning to the end of the course.

College course meetings took place for five, one hour sessions. With respect to assigning a child for reading assessment, the second grade students were assigned at random to PTs by each of the two second grade teachers. In coding, each PT was assigned a number (1-14: 1-7 = undergraduate PTs and 8-14 = graduate PTs), while each second grade student was assigned a letter, double letters in some cases.

Identified reading levels of all the 62 students were determined by the 14 PTs; we matched them against the identified reading levels for those students by their classroom teachers. The purpose was to compare how close the PTs' assigned levels for the students compared with those assigned by their teachers. Each classroom teacher responded to the findings by commenting at the final meeting and with the evidence of student/reader book placement, either Level 6 or 7, and the analysis of the student's writing stage of development. In addition, each teacher and the principal received an Interim Report. These data provided triangulation. Mostly, all PTs (examiners) except for number 7 had approximately a 50% agreement with the classroom teacher. Number 7, however, had an 80% teacher agreement for her 5 students she tested. As a note, this PT also showed the widest range of improvement and learning according to her post self-evaluation, indicating improvement in 18 of the 20 statements, with 3-4 places on the 5-point Likert scale. Comparisons of agreement between each of the 14 PTs diagnosis of reading levels for their assigned students (ranging 4-5 students per PT) with those of the classroom teachers' identified levels of the same students can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that there were seven clusters of PTs and Classroom Teachers. The ratio of PTs to Teachers ranged from 1-to-1 (as in Clusters 1-3) to 4-to-1 (as in Cluster 4). There were two PTs whose diagnosis of reading levels for their students met with 100% agreement with the assigned reading level placement of the same students by their teacher (Cluster 7). Three PTs' diagnosis of reading levels for their students met with 80% agreement with the assigned reading level placement of the same students by their teacher (Cluster 6). In general, 11 of the 14 PTs showed 50% or more agreement with that of the regular teacher's diagnosis.

Figure 1. Percentage of Agreement Between PTs and Classroom Teachers Regarding Placement of Reading Levels for Assigned Students



Note-taking and dialoguing during meetings between PT and the second grade classroom teachers in terms of teacher education students' findings and interpretations helped all participants to have a better understanding of the testing process. At the same time, PTs felt professional and more confident about discussing their findings with practicing teachers in a professional setting based on the classroom discussion and PTs self-reflections at the end of the course.

FINDINGS

To understand PTs' beliefs about their own level of proficiency in reading diagnosis, the pre- and post-self assessments of proficiency in reading diagnosis results were revealing. The tallied data indicated that most PTs improved by two to three places on the scale from 'Limited Skill' towards 'Strong Skill.' PTs gained more confidence in their literacy skills. It is interesting to note that on specific items in the questionnaire (Questions 3, 10, 11, 13-15, 17, and 19), participants considered themselves to have learned the most (see Appendix C). These questions related to: administering and interpreting the Concepts of Print Test (Item 3), administering an IRI (Item 10); determining students' reading levels based on IRIs (Item 11); analyzing a student's oral reading miscues (Item 13); developing a cloze test and its interpretation (Item 15); writing a summary diagnostic report (Item 17); and grouping students for instruction (Item 19). Interestingly, the one statement showing least learning was related to instrument's Item 4: Read and follow directions in test manuals. The PTs indicated that they knew how to read test manuals on the pre-assessment survey.

At the final meeting at the school, a conversation emerged which again presented a valuable learning environment. When a PT stated that her student could not concentrate because he was sitting in a rocking chair during testing, the teacher confirmed the student was easily

distracted. When Examiner #2 (PT) reported her student's writing stage as "derivational" and reading instructional level at grade 4, the classroom teacher found this information, "impressive." The teacher did not dispute the levels and was delighted to have evidence of the students' successful performance. The PT examiner continued to point out another student who needed a lot of directions and showed the teacher, student L1's writing sample. This conversation demonstrated that the PTs were beginning to create a cognitive understanding of the testing process, to understand the student's use of strategies, to decide why a response was given, and then to think about the response's appropriateness.

The PTs' reflections provided further evidence of what they learned and what material they found confusing. The final exam for the course required the PTs to submit a one-page reflection on the "sharing" of the test results with the teachers at the school, and submit a separate page of their comments on how valuable the "instructional recommendations" were to them as candidates in the teacher education program (see Appendix B). Instructional recommendations consisted of specific reading strategies to match the needs of students. Preservice teachers' reflections were closely examined, using a method of 'grounded theory' (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). The following two categories emerged: insights into students' reading strategies, and meaningful learning experiences for the examiner.

Insights into Students' Reading Strategies

Teacher candidates were beginning to demonstrate insight into children's learning and application of reading strategies as demonstrated by their observations and reflections. Below are listed some notes verbatim from PTs' reflections:

PT A: The main problem I found with student [U] was in her comprehension... provided limited responses. I probed her, and that helped. Overall, she did not seem to have a good grasp on any of the stories. Maybe she was uninterested in the content of them. They were expository as opposed to narrative which are more interesting to most young children. She seemed to be reading the story with a focus on actually reading it correctly as opposed to focusing on what the story was about. In her retellings, she did not provide me with much information either. [U] did not have too many problems with word recognition at the lower levels.

PT B: Student W... her overall reading level is first grade, with...comprehension level... stronger. I am of the opinion that the line item validity of the text and its follow-up questions are a bit weak. You must first engage the student with meaningful, relatable material. The second passage, *The Gold Rush*, [W] had numerous pauses with eleven words aided. She answered only half of the comprehension questions: What happened to those who didn't find gold? (They became farmers or merchants). Student W [responded], 'They left.' I would recommend the following to help her make connections with vocabulary and the content of the story, (1) TVC (Teaching Vocabulary in Context); and (2) Reader's Theatre.

PT C: Student [CC], attends to initial phonic clues, is very self-confident, uses context clues/language clues, linguistic clues, visual and phonic clues, reads fluently, has excellent vocabulary skills, uses meaning cues, visual cues (graphic), [and] may need to slow down reading in order to gain more comprehension from text. [Reading Needs] The student has misconceptions, and has a tendency to think she is always correct. Her writing stage indicates Letter Name moving into Transitional, she 'spells the majority of

words correctly, but still has some misspelled [misspelled] words.’ Words are incomplete, ‘baet’ for ‘bet’; ‘cazans’ for ‘cousins.’ The examiner’s instructional recommendations included, increase silent/oral reading opportunities, encourage independent reading, practice transforming the story-using keeping journals or logs, Readers Theatre for practicing and decoding words, and Teaching Vocabulary in Context (TVC).

These comments indicate the deeper awareness of understanding of reading process where they provided evidence based on students’ literacy behavior for their instructional recommendations.

Meaningful Learning Experiences for the Examiner

Teacher education candidates are the teachers of tomorrow. When PTs are placed in school settings, they learn from practicing in-service teachers. Below are notes from PTs in the study listed as examiners:

Examiner #1: I appreciated the fact that the teachers at [the school]... were so helpful in examining the scores of their students. It is important to hear that perspective because we are diagnosing their students after only one session and the teachers have had them all year long... I was also glad to hear about what the other examiners did and the problems that they faced.

Examiner #2: The teachers listened to what we had to say... At one point they even looked at each other, as if they could not believe we were right on target. When I left I felt that all of the hard work I had put into this course paid off... gave me a little more confidence.

Examiner #3: During our office meeting we discussed: Student Y shows huge fluctuations in scores... at independent level (2nd grade) for word accuracy. However, he was at a frustration level for comprehension. [He] was at a frustration level for 3rd grade word accuracy, however... at an independent level for comprehension.

The comments from PTs reflect their building confidence as they received feedback from the classroom teachers of the students. No amount of teaching in the classroom at the college level would have generated the confidence and the level of self-efficacy that was built during these interactions with children and teachers in the school setting.

We found that the students related to their own reading experiences at first and then looked at the areas of cueing systems (graphophonics, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) in the reading process. As PTs develop their knowledge, they seem to question what the reader is doing as well as what the reader is thinking (strategizing). Further, they question if the experience (testing) was valid.

Evidence of the running record markings (as described in the PTs’ textbook, Mariotti & Homan, 2001) indicated a more in-depth awareness of the cueing systems. From this analysis, the PTs created quantitative and qualitative information that was important, not only to determine reading levels, but also to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the reader’s use of strategies and stances. All of the PTs’ assigned scores to students and their comments were reviewed and examined with respect to Word Recognition (WR) and Comprehension (C) for individual child.

Students' combined WR and C graded scores of one class showed 18% had an instructional 4th grade reading level, while the other class had only 6%. The makeup of the classes reflected, to a large part, the PTs findings. The analysis, however, added an understanding outside of the student's assigned graded reading level. In other words, the suggested instructional strategies for the classroom teachers included responding to literature (i.e., writing and discussing activities), building vocabulary through brainstorming and mapping activities, participating in cooperative learning activities, developing cognitive skills for making inferences, retellings, finding story elements, and engaging in aesthetic reading stance.

METAREFLECTION

Comparisons of PTs' pre- and post-assessments showed learning development in their language analysis, knowledge of professional language, and content. The course was important to monitor PTs' development for learning opportunities. This research study provided opportunities for PTs that helped them understand and apply quantitative and qualitative analysis procedures. In turn, this experience supported an understanding of the Informal Reading Inventory as an instrument to measure reading levels, understand readers' strengths and weaknesses in use of reading strategies, and most importantly, the instrument's limitation for determining grade level reading material appropriateness. In this way, the PTs can understand readability formulas and use them with care.

The qualitative analysis supported thinking through and analyzing the reader's understanding of the reading process, the relationship of readers' use of strategies to word recognition and comprehension, and how it relates to developing reader fluency. Further, the PTs' voices in this study showed an understanding of appropriateness of pedagogy and the notion of "assessment informing instruction." The PTs' analysis, however, added an understanding beyond the student's assigned graded reading level. The concepts of literacy development, as well as readers reading stances were dominant. The "reading stance" (Rosenblatt, 1978) emerged in PTs' comments on how they determined readers' strengths and weaknesses, as well as writing stages of development.

RESEARCH STUDY # 2

In this study, pre-service teachers enrolled in the reading course, called 'diagnostic teaching of reading' for undergraduate and graduate students administered the following assessments, Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2001) and Qualitative Reading Inventory (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). After administering the assessments, preservice teachers reflected on their experience of administering a 'reading inventory' in open-ended written responses. Open-ended inquiry allowed us to gain insight into the PTs' viewpoints and experiences of administering assessments. From our perspective, the purpose of reflection was two-pronged, instructional and diagnostic: to study the impact of 'administering reading inventories' on PTs' knowledge of the reading process, and to diagnose the 'instructional reading level' of a child. The reflections informed the instructor through the emerging conversations and experiences of the given group.

Teachers' beliefs can affect the quality of their instruction. Teacher educators are challenged to provide for authentic instructional contexts than traditional knowledge-based curricula to their pre-service teachers. In the process, both teachers and teacher educators must be reflective and analytical about their own beliefs and practices.

There is very little research on use of assessment tools, such as the IRIs, BRIs, QRIs as pedagogical instruments to teach the reading process in teacher preparation programs. Cazden's (1988) idea of performance before competence is useful because it emphasizes the role of active participation as a means of building competent beliefs about reading practices. From this perspective, transmission-oriented instruction has weaker potential for enabling new learning than participation in joint activity (Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995).

Participants

Case study participants were 26 preservice teachers (PTs) at an urban university in a Southeastern state. The PTs were a mix of undergraduates and graduate candidates pursuing degrees in Elementary/Early Childhood Education/Special Education. All PTs were enrolled in a reading elective course that focused on diagnostic reading tools, methods, and techniques. The course was a distance learning course delivered via satellite. The synchronous class with two-way audio and one-way video met once a week for three hours during the semester.

Data Sources and Collection

Primary sources of data collection were: (1) reflections written in journal entries of pre-service teachers, (2) classroom discussions, (3) reading profiles of children based on reading inventories, and (4) reflective comparison of BRI and QRI submitted by each pre-service student.

Methods and Data Analysis

During the course, PTs administered various reading assessments, such as the reading inventories, Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the Phonemic Awareness tests, to name a few. For the purpose of the study, the authors focused on 'reading inventories'. The two reading inventories used by PTs were Basic Reading Inventory and Qualitative Reading Inventory. After administration of the reading inventory, PTs wrote their reflections about what they learned from the administration of the inventories. These typed reflection sheets were turned in to the instructor and provided raw data for the study.

Data were analyzed following the constant comparative method of Glazer and Strauss (1967). This consisted of reading and rereading the students' written responses and assigning them broad code categories. As the data were read and reread, categories emerged that addressed the research questions. The responses were examined to determine patterns and categories that emerged in the students' thoughts about their knowledge of the reading process. The responses of students ranged from 'epistemological' to 'practical applications as instructional tools' in classroom, as reflected in following comments of PTs:

I was amazed how many different possibilities there are for a child's reading level. In the past, I had only heard reading levels referred to as a certain grade. Such as, 'Jim is reading on a third grade level', but I never fully understood exactly what this meant either. I now have a better understanding on how children are classified.

Another candidate wrote,

I am now more attuned to the various strategies that could be incorporated into my curriculum to support the various levels of readers that are in a given classroom. By using and understanding the reading inventories, I will be better able to help students increase their reading level through the use of deliberate and varied reading strategies.

FINDINGS

The study represented a qualitative investigation into the evolving understanding of the reading process among PTs. Analysis of the data revealed several patterns that were classified under three categories: personalizing (affective), metacognition/diversity, and instructional.

Personalizing (Affective)

Most effective learning occurs when the learner personalizes information and relates to it. Children read texts; when they extend the text to their lives to make connections, learning becomes even more meaningful. Similarly, the responses received from the PTs revealed connections, links to their own literacy experiences. As one PT responded, “When I was learning to read I don’t remember being asked about comprehension. Then at some point in the higher grades, that was all that mattered.” Another noted, “In addition to learning about the way other people read, I learned a lot about the way that I read.”

While PTs not only shared their own experiences in the light of new information obtained from administering reading inventories, one student wanted to extend the experience to her own child as reflected in the following statement, “As a mother of a four-year old, I envision myself administering these to my daughter each summer before the school year begins.” Another PT revealed, “I was surprised to find how little I really knew about reading styles, and comprehension. I assumed because a child could pronounce a passage with ease, they probably understand what they read. This is just not true, so I will personally change the way I examine children’s reading. I learned a lot from these two tests (BRI and QRI).” This reflected how new information and learning impacted their immediate environment when translated into action.

Metacognition & Diversity Issue (Cultural Bias in Assessments)

Observations about preview, background, prior knowledge, setting purpose, and monitoring were coded under a ‘metacognition’ category. PTs referred to more than one occurrence of ‘prior-knowledge’ and ‘cultural understanding’ as factors affecting performance of children on reading assessment tasks. For example, one PT wrote, “I noticed that if the student was familiar with the subject or knew most of the words he read at a good steady pace. But when the topic was unfamiliar, the student became frustrated and aggravated.”

PTs were beginning to see that there was more to how children learn to read than what met the eye. As one PT indicated, “I learned that a student may appear knowledgeable in reading but be considerably weaker in one area than another. I also learned (as I have found myself when taking previous tests such as the GRE), that content, prior knowledge and interest in the subject strongly affects the student’s ability to comprehend and willingness to answer questions. The QRI helped me to realize how much prior knowledge plays as a part of the reading process.”

Another candidate corroborated the same issue of cultural bias in the reading inventories administered during the course in the following comment:

I do feel that my student had the advantage when answering some questions and was at a disadvantage when answering others. Living in a rural area surrounded by nature and farms gives her prior knowledge that was helpful when reading some of the passages and answering some of the questions. This is a very common problem with most nationally developed tests and there does not seem to be a solution to the discrepancy. I just hope that in the end, every test is balanced enough to provide an accurate depiction of the reading level of the student, or whatever other knowledge the particular test is designed to measure. This is why, 'kid watching' and other types of evaluation are so important in the classroom. No student should be evaluated using one single test or other measure.

PTs understood the importance of using multiple assessment indicators to evaluate students. They also perceived the critical issue of cultural bias in test items due to varied prior knowledge of children. One PT noted, "The limitations of the inventories would need to be understood if I were giving the inventories to students with limited English Proficiency or with students who exhibit some form of test taking anxiety. I also found that some of the words used in the vocabulary and in the passages reflected regional differences and that I would need to be sensitive to these differences or make allowances for difficulty in passage comprehension." Another PT revealed, "Some readers might be at a disadvantage if their environment and culture are different from the passage. For example, a country person would not know what an alley or curb is (Johns, 2001, p. 145). A city child may not know what camp is, or even if he knows the word, he might never have experienced a camp" (Johns, 2001, p. 142).

Issues not only related to linguistic and ethnic diversity but also related to literature selection. The following observation can be a meaningful starting point for a discussion on 'challenged literature and texts' in the schools as PTs brought insight into selection of texts pertaining to background of students:

The student I worked with did not like one of the story selections in the BRI. It was a story about immortality. He said that he did not believe the story because of his beliefs in the Bible. He felt uncomfortable when answering the questions to this story. I feel this story should be replaced. If the student feels uncomfortable about a story because he believes the story is about something that he feels strongly against, then he should not read it. As teachers, we need to be careful when choosing the stories our students will read.

Instructional Implications

For assessments to be meaningful and effective, they must inform instruction. Assessments must be administered with a clear objective of how they will be used to inform instructional plans for the student. In order for assessments to inform instruction, we must document data, analyze data, and interpret data to formulate hypotheses for instructional activities that result in student learning. The purpose of assessment is to link its outcomes to inform appropriate instruction to occur. As one student indicated, "The greatest importance of these tests are not just to find the reading level, but to find where the student is behind and to implement reading strategies that will improve that particular area of concern." Diagnostic reading courses in preservice programs should include a balance between assessment and

instruction. To be meaningful, a diagnostic tool must inform classroom instruction. PTs need to see connections between assessment results and how they guide instruction. One student wrote rather emphatically, “A class such as this forces you to make changes in how you teach.” Echoing the same thought, another wrote, “Overall, I found that the experience of giving these inventories has provided me with valuable teaching tools independent of the subject or age group that I will be teaching.” PTs perceived the implications of reading inventories to other subject areas in the school curriculum. For instance, one comment read, “The reading inventories are necessary for a teacher so they can better help the student in reading but also in every other subject they will encounter.” One preservice teacher taking the class was an English major, who observed, “I think reading inventory is a must for any English teacher, not just for reading teacher or special education.” In the end, PTs demonstrated an understanding of linking assessment to instruction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study attempted to help prospective preservice teachers gain a richer understanding of the reading process. Often times, PTs seemed to talk the talk of reading teachers. The study shows that when preservice teachers engage in reflective activities, not only do they learn new ideas but also how their thinking deepens based on personal background and field experiences. Ultimately, it provided learning opportunities through discussions of authentic student readers and their practice of reading strategies. Their frustrations and hard questions began a dialogue of how diagnosis needs to identify stages of literacy development and why diagnosis was important to instructional methodology and pedagogy. Further, we explored instructional choices and began to relate these choices to PTs’ beliefs about how students learn to read. The written language of the PTs, both undergraduate and graduate, supported an awareness of terms appropriate for diagnosis and instruction of reading in elementary school.

The results show that the extent of change in prospective teachers’ beliefs and practices was linked directly to their interactions and experiences in the classrooms with students and teachers. The study provided ways to assess the prospective teachers’ growth and understanding of the reading process. The PTs showed dedication and commitment to this learning experience. Their frustrations were voiced during class discussions, meetings and reflections. They wanted to be able to figure out a reading grade level in a smooth methodical fashion. Each time a reader showed a regression or discrepancy in word recognition and comprehension performance levels, some PTs were at a loss. They usually felt much relieved, knowing that it was necessary to understand the reader’s use of strategies and reading stance. It was shocking to them when they realized that a good decoder could have poor comprehension, and that the reverse could also hold true. Finally, after much discussion and debate, they came to logical conclusions in view of readers’ instructional needs. PTs also realized that their hard work was appreciated by the school staff and that they did a good job. Mostly, they felt that they learned something important and related to their study of teacher education in reading. No amount of teaching in the classroom at the college level would have generated the confidence and the level of self-efficacy that was built during these interactions with children and teachers in the school setting.

Implications for PT Education Programs

Years ago, one of the researchers who taught in the city schools of New York, had a conversation in the school hallway with a newly positioned Reading Teacher. It went like this:

Mary, a practicing teacher stated, 'I didn't know what to do, so I thought I would read to them. You know, part of a wonderful book each time we met for reading. They loved it. The trouble is, you know, nobody reads to them. I hope they learn to love to read.'

This is admirable. This is enriching students' lives and introducing them to literature. Nonetheless, if the teacher had a background and knowledge base in language development/linguistics, the expectations and the outcomes would be far more rewarding. In simple ways, she could better choose books for their appropriateness and literacy development. Students could be involved in pedagogy and cooperative learning experiences, building language. Mini-lessons and scaffolding, teamwork and buddy readings, portfolios and writing development, responses to literature, and the Readers' Theatre are some instructional strategies needed to help our teacher education students learn to promote their instruction in literacy. As one PT in the study well-summarized the experience:

The true validity of the instructional recommendations was made very real to me during the course. Being able to actually apply knowledge gained to real-life testing situations was a plus and should not be overlooked in the future by the instructional staff at [the college]. I feel much more confident in my ability to evaluate and prescribe recommendations for troubled readers. This would not have been the case if we, as a class, had been restricted inside the classroom to simply studying about various student reader problems and examples.

We need to make sure that the course on assessment is not taught as a course on tests and measurement, but rather a means to look at assessment in relation to instruction in reading. It should be an assigned, required course, inclusive of lab hours. In many teacher education programs, a reading course may be only one of the elective courses that PTs take for a reading requirement. PTs in some elementary education programs may take a minimum number of reading courses before being certified as a general teacher. The most commonly required reading courses consist of a foundation/survey course and/or a diagnostic and remedial course. In a diagnostic reading course, the teacher educator usually teaches perspective while trying to teach 'content' in terms of formal/informal assessments, and diagnostic tools and tests, global issues of theory and conceptual significance toward understanding of the reading process can be ignored.

Participants' self-reflections supported a developing understanding of the reading process. Best teaching occurs when students are given a wide range of information about a topic and are allowed to come to their own conclusions. Discussing and exploring these issues further in a classroom dialog would be more meaningful for PTs than in a 'transmission' model of instruction about theoretical underpinnings of the reading process. Reading assessment tools provide a personal involvement in discovering the higher order understanding of reading process. The assessment tools provide a platform to launch an informed discourse building and negotiating a personalized 'reading model.' Responses indicated important influences on PTs' personal growth followed by a sense of empowerment. Students' voices reflected the developing competence facilitating a meaningful discussion about the reading process. Through self-

reflections, students experienced the critical issues of metacognition, prior-knowledge, cultural factors, instructional implications, and content area reading in a more meaningful way. Short and Burke (1989) believe that educators need to live their own models. The model for this project helped preservice teachers think about reading process and then develop a conceptual and theoretical base for teaching. Berthoff (1990) says, “We should offer them (learners) assisted invitations to discover what they are doing and thereby how to do it” (p. 59). Above all, this study provides insight into the development of experiences that could be incorporated in a teacher education program in reading courses.

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APPENDIX A. Samples of Field Notes

What Were the PTs Thinking?	
Examiner #13, Student Z	Date tested: March 16, 2000
Instructional Graded Reading Level at 2 nd	
Writing is Early Phonemic Stage: “Writing looks like a string of words, writing-he makes up own rules for spelling-does not space between words.”	
PTs Getting It Right	
Examiner #13 questions if child is “left-handed.”	
WR (Word Recognition) and C (Comprehension) both at frustration level-gr. 3	
WR independent level at gr. 2	
C instructional level at gr. 2	
WR and C both independent levels at gr.1	
Preservice Teachers Providing Teachable Moments	
Examiner#13, Student Z	
“... needs help in word recognition rather than vocabulary (see writing sample).”	
Suggestions: “Activities provide comprehension development.”	
<i>Professor’s Suggestion:</i> A listening activity would provide evidence to show if Student Z is having difficulty in comprehension because he can’t figure out [unlock] the words, or Z is having difficulty in comprehending. Look at Z’s writings: the concepts are more developed than the “early phonemic” stage you identified.	

APPENDIX B. Instructional and Learner’s Strategies

Brainstorming Teaching Vocabulary in Context (TVC) Vocabulary Self-Selection (VSS) Context-Structure-Sound-Reference (CSSR) Concept Webs Semantic Maps Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA)	Authoring Cycle K-W-L Charts Vocabulary Logs Readers’ Theatre
PreReading (PreP) Directed Reading Teaching Activity (DRTA) Reciprocal Teaching Reciprocal Questioning (ReQuest)	Choral Reading Echo Reading
Story Retellings Group Mapping Activity (GMA) Group Literature Discussions	Word Sorting Rhyming Predictable Language

APPENDIX C. Self-Assessment of Proficiency in Reading Diagnosis

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PROFICIENCY IN READING DIAGNOSIS

Directions: Rate your level of proficiency in performing each of the behaviors listed below by circling the number to the right that best describes you. If you do not know what the behavior is describing, circle the number to the left of the behavior. The value of this assessment lies in your honest appraisal of your abilities. Assessing your skills honestly will help you identify the areas in which you should concentrate during the course. Review this form again after you have finished this course to determine your level of progress.

Behaviors	Limited Skill	Some Skill	Strong Skill		
1. Conduct systematic observations of students.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Interview children, parents, and/or teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Administer and interpret the <i>Concepts about Print Test</i> .	1	2	3	4	5
4. Read and follow directions in test manuals.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Interpret standardized reading-test scores.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Administer a standardized reading test.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Develop questions on different levels of comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Informally assess a child's reading comprehension abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Informally assess a child's word-analysis skills and strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Administer an informal reading inventory (IRI) .	1	2	3	4	5
11. Determine students' reading levels based on IRI results.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Record a student's oral reading miscues .	1	2	3	4	5
13. Analyze a student's oral reading miscues.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Administer a running record.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Interpret a cloze test.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Synthesize test data and form conclusions.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Write a summary diagnostic report.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Determine if a student is in need of corrective instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Group students for instruction based on test data.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Assess a student's content reading abilities (science, math, social studies, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5