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# Faculty and Student Perceptions of Reading and Language Arts Preparation and Preparedness for the State Subject Area Test

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Ingrid Ahrens Massey

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Abstract

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by

Ingrid Ahrens Massey

MEd, Oklahoma State University, 2003

BS, Northeastern State University, 1996

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## Abstract

Since changes to the reading/language arts State Subject Area Test (SSAT) in late 2010, elementary education teacher candidates at a teacher training college in the Southern United States have experienced declining scores resulting in test failure and delaying student teaching and graduation. The purpose of this case study was to identify factors that students and faculty perceived as most beneficial in preparing students to pass the SSAT. Constructivism served as the conceptual framework for this study addressing the effects of collaboration, hands-on learning, and application of knowledge. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit 6 elementary education students who had taken the SSAT and 4 full-time reading and language arts faculty members who participated in semistructured interviews. Analysis of coded data indicated themes of preference for experiential learning, intensive strategy instruction, and a review of tested content. Based on study findings, a 3-day professional development training was created to provide students a review of tested subject matter through embedded strategy instruction and opportunities for hands-on application of learning. Implications for positive social change include preparing students to pass the SSAT in fewer attempts so they can graduate on schedule and begin their careers. Local communities may benefit from the addition of highly qualified teachers ready to enter elementary classrooms across the state during a critical teacher shortage.

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## Section 1: The Local Problem

Graduating competent, qualified teachers is a goal worldwide (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005). Regional University (RU), situated in the northeastern corner of a southern state, is no different. Rich in local history and tradition, RU strives to produce top performing teachers and is known for graduating more teacher candidates than any other institution in the state (Agnew, 2009). However, since 2011, RU's college of education has experienced a declining pass rate on one of the three required exams necessary for teacher candidates to graduate and be certified to teach in the state. Declining pass rates on the reading/language arts State Subject Area Test (SSAT) for elementary education majors posed a problem at RU. In November of 2010, 69% of RU students passed compared to 68% of students statewide. The 2011-2012 academic year data revealed a cumulative pass rate of 34% locally, compared with a 37% pass rate statewide (certification officer, RU College of Education, personal communication, September 27, 2012).

The goal of RU's elementary education program is to increase student scores and, ultimately, the rate of passing to save its teacher candidates both time and money, while maintaining a program that prepares teachers of the highest quality. The SSAT must be passed before RU students can continue to their final internship and to graduation. Delays in passing this required exam delay graduation for RU's teacher candidates that further delays them from entering the workforce and impacting the lives of the students they will teach. This delay in graduating highly qualified teachers ultimately affects

preschool through 12th grade (P-12) schools across the state as fewer new teachers are entering the profession.

The state regents for higher education recently announced a critical teacher shortage in 10 areas including elementary education (SRHE, 2013). Discouraged students left in a holding pattern, waiting to intern until they pass this single test, have left RU's teacher education program out of necessity to find a source of income, which results in further teacher shortages. Other programs across the state allow their candidates to complete their full internship and graduate, but leave their graduates unemployable because they have not achieved the certification requirement from the state.

### **Rationale and Purpose of the Study**

Recent redevelopment of the reading/language arts subject area subtest for elementary education teacher candidates because of an increase in the rigor focusing on reading and language arts has been blamed for the decline in passing scores (dean, RU College of Education, personal communication, April 24, 2012). A combination of selected response (multiple choice) and constructed response (essay) questions and scenarios, the test has recently undergone changes in the levels of questions asked. Previously, a very basic level of knowledge and comprehension was tested, whereas now the focus is more on application. This change, according to the director of the teacher preparation commission, was likely in an effort to better align with Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (T. Nations, personal communication, March 30, 2012).

In addition to content knowledge, the commission for teacher preparation's assistant director claimed methodology and pedagogy, as they relate directly to reading instruction, are now included in the exam as well (R. Loney-Rodolph, personal communication, March 26, 2013). The problem, as perceived by RU faculty and administration, is that many students are not able to successfully transfer the content knowledge they have gained throughout their professional course work to the application questions and constructed response essay on the SSAT for reading and language arts. Luster (2010) identified factors that influenced student achievement, with highly qualified teachers being among those factors, reporting that teacher knowledge and ability were crucial to student success. Preparing highly qualified teacher candidates who can seamlessly transfer knowledge to application is the goal of RU's elementary education program. In a study defining highly qualified teachers, Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002) cited several factors that indicated a significant relationship between teacher knowledge and student achievement including general background knowledge, content area knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge as well as teaching experience.

In an ongoing effort to increase rigor and raise the standards in teacher education, especially in the domain of reading/literacy, and with a push toward producing highly qualified teachers, the certification requirements for teacher candidates in the state have undergone numerous changes. Since the 1990s, teacher education programs across the United States have taken steps to increase standards and strengthen their licensure requirements (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Locally, a move from a single assessment of teacher preparedness to three different assessments represents benchmarks

along the path to state teacher certification. Most recently, state legislation included in House Bill 1581 imposed a requirement for increased rigor in testing teacher candidates' knowledge in reading/literacy. Rather than adding a fourth test specific to reading/literacy, the state's credentialing agency and higher education institutions across the state negotiated for a change in the existing subject area test increasing the number of questions directly related to the eight reading/literacy competencies defined by state and national standards. With this change came a drastic decrease in the raw scores, and, ultimately, the rate of passing on the reading and language arts SSAT for elementary education teacher candidates across the state.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that may have contributed to the decline in the rate of passing as well as those factors that contributed to success from the perspectives of RU's elementary education teacher candidates and reading and language arts faculty members. If these factors went unidentified, and RU's elementary education teacher candidates continued to perform unsatisfactorily on the SSAT for reading and language arts, RU was at risk of losing its accreditation from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and, eventually, its elementary education program. However, the effect it would have on RU's teacher candidates and their future students was the greatest threat. In an effort to identify contributing factors, data were collected from reading and language arts faculty members as well as teacher candidates who had already achieved this benchmark. Surveying teacher candidates who had taken the SSAT to identify factors that helped better prepare them, and interviewing faculty members about how they prepared students for the test in their courses, revealed practices

that proved beneficial in better preparing future students for successful completion of the test.

### **Definition of Terms**

For this study, the following terms are operationally defined as follows:

*Common Core State Standards (CCSS):* A set of English language arts and mathematics standards that states can choose to adopt to provide a consistent set of standards for which schools can align their instructional objectives. These standards were designed to be relevant to real-world experiences and better prepare students for college and careers (“About the Common Core,” 2016).

*Constructed response:* Based on an open-ended question or scenario, the constructed response item requires the examinee to write a response, typically an essay, to display content area knowledge and critical thinking skills (Mitchell, 2006).

*Full internship:* The final field experience of a teacher preparation program in which the teacher candidate spends his or her final semester in an elementary classroom teaching under the supervision of a clinical faculty member (Martin, 2012).

*Highly qualified teacher:* A teacher with, at minimum, a bachelor’s degree, proof of successful completion of state subject area certification tests in the area she or he will be teaching, and completion of or enrollment in an alternative certification program is considered to be highly qualified (Marszalek, Odom, LaNasa, & Adler, 2010).

*Language arts faculty member:* A professional educator hired to teach language arts as it relates to elementary education and its application in the elementary school setting (Helfrich & Bean, 2011).

*National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE):* The national accrediting body for teacher education, NCATE's mission is to ensure high quality teacher preparation programs across the nation (see [www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org)).

*Reading faculty member:* A professional educator hired to teach reading methods courses including the fundamentals of reading and language acquisition and development, content area literacy, and reading and writing assessment and instruction (Helfrich & Bean, 2011).

*Selected response:* A multiple choice exam, the selected response items contain a question stem and several, usually four, possible correct answers in which the examinee must select the correct response; sometimes referred to as controlled response (Mitchell, 2006).

*State Subject Area Test (SSAT):* A required exam for elementary education majors that assesses competencies related to teaching subject areas in two subtests. The first subtest covers reading and language arts, and the second subtest covers math, science, social studies, health, art, and music (Luster, 2010).

*Teacher candidate:* A junior or senior level student majoring in elementary education. He or she has been fully admitted to teacher education (Helfrich & Bean, 2011).

*Teacher preparation program:* A college or university's professional education program designed to prepare teacher candidates to teach in the P-12 classroom (Helfrich & Bean, 2011).

### **Significance of the Study**

Reaching all four corners of the state, this problem is significant beyond the local setting. However, locally, the problem remains a priority for administrators at RU's college of education. On average, one third of RU's elementary education teacher candidates achieve a passing score on the reading/language arts subtest of the SSAT upon their first attempt. Elementary education teacher candidates at RU incur the cost of repeatedly taking this test, but they also run the risk of losing time in the classroom as well. Students not achieving a passing score by the time their professional course work is complete must wait a minimum of one academic semester before they can begin their final semester of course work, which includes their full internship. Those who do not wish to take a semester off elect to enroll in additional course work to fill the time. Although this course work is undoubtedly beneficial to them, it comes at an additional financial burden to those paying tuition. Ultimately, this delay keeps teachers from entering the workforce at a critical time when the state is experiencing a high teacher shortage in several subject areas.

Since the 2012-13 academic year, elementary education has been identified as a discipline or subject area suffering from the shortage of qualified teachers in the state and is projected to remain as such through the 2015-16 academic year at least (U. S. Department of Education, 2014). Multiple factors indicate a teacher shortage in the next few years. Higher tuition costs, increased pressure to produce high test scores, and the impending retirement of teachers who fit the baby boomer description are some of the reasons behind a shortage of qualified teachers in classrooms across the United States

(Peterson, 2006). Identifying factors that assist or better prepare teacher candidates for passing the reading and language arts subtest of the SSAT will likely contribute to an increase in scores among elementary education teacher candidates and the preparation and graduation of highly qualified teachers ready to enter the field.

### **Research Questions**

Understanding perspectives of both teacher candidates and faculty members regarding what is being done to prepare students for the SSAT in reading and language arts and what might be missing from the teacher preparation program could potentially reveal some answers to the problem. Identifying whether there is a disconnect between what faculty perceive is being taught versus what students are learning in the classroom could change the way RU prepares teacher candidates in the future. Currently there is no published research available on this particular problem, which indicates an immediate need to conduct this study. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program faculty regarding the preparation of students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
2. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program students regarding their preparation to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
3. How could Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program be strengthened to more effectively prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?

- a. What are faculty perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
  - b. What are student perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
4. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education students of how they would have approached their course work differently early on in their program based on what they know now about the reading/language arts SSAT?

### **Review of the Literature**

Extensive searches of the literature were conducted, scouring databases for recent, relevant literature in support of the problem. Databases searched included ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Education from SAGE. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. Key words included *teacher certification*, *subject area tests*, *teacher preparation programs*, *reading education*, *student achievement*, *highly qualified teachers*, and *teacher effectiveness*. The use of Boolean operators assisted in limiting search results to a narrower, more specific return. Boolean operators included searches of combinations of the above key words (i.e., *teacher certification* and *student achievement*) as well as excluding key words (e.g., not *nationally board certified* or not *alternatively certified*). Author name searches and reference searches of key articles were used to identify additional sources. Other than local data and personal

communications with involved parties, evidence of the local problem was not found in any of the literature. Searches resulted in the organization of sections including accountability and assessment, teacher effectiveness and student achievement, and teacher preparation programs.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Bruner (1996) proposed that the “mind is an extension of the hands and tools that you use and of the jobs to which you apply them” (p. 151). This understanding by doing, rather than simply talking or listening, has influenced teaching and learning for centuries, yet it is often ignored in classrooms today. Bruner summarized Vygotsky’s work on social constructivism by stating that “neither hand nor intellect by themselves serve you much; tools and aids perfect (or complete) things” (p. 152). Today, lecture formats remain a mainstay in higher education classrooms, even though the current generation of traditional college students prefers a learner-centered approach (Carter, 2008). A shift in the delivery method of information in the classroom may produce a more meaningful learning environment and experience. Bruner referred to this shift as a form of praxis, or theory into practice. Bruner further elaborated on this praxis by claiming “skill is a way of dealing with things, not the derivation from theory” (p. 152). Taking theory and turning it into practice is the basis of teaching, the foundation behind pedagogy, and the roots of the constructivist theories.

According to constructivism, a learning theory that focuses on the active construction of knowledge and results from the learner’s active engagement with the new material, learning is context bound, and the learner relates all new learning to prior

knowledge. Furthermore, constructivist teaching should include “experiences that induce cognitive conflict” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 192). Additionally, constructivism has three other major components. First, “learning takes place through internal mechanisms that are often unobservable to the external viewer”; second, “learning often results from a hypothesis-testing experience by the individual”; and third, “learning results from a process known as inferencing” (Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 58).

The role of constructivism in the classroom is much greater today than it was several decades ago when behaviorism and associationism were thought to be appropriate methods for teaching and learning (Shepard, 2004). Behaviorists believed that learning occurred by accumulating knowledge, was tightly sequenced and hierarchal, transfer was limited, and motivation was external (Shepard, 2004). More recently, social-constructivist theorists acknowledged learning as a meaning-making process resulting from active engagement. Shepard (2004) identified these characteristics of constructivism: construction of knowledge in social context, relation of new learning to prior experiences, formation of a deep understanding and transference of knowledge, and metacognition.

Similarities between moderate views of constructivism and andragogy, the adult learning theory proposed by Knowles, include experiential learning, problem solving approaches to learning, and ownership of the learning process (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The constructivist instructional principle of designing “the task and the learning environment to reflect the complexity of the environment in which learners should be able to function at the end of learning” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 193) may

provide the greatest evidence needed to alter the methods of instruction in teacher preparation course work to better align with test questions that rely heavily on critical thinking, and may better prepare teacher candidates for their work in the classroom.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

In an effort to increase the qualifications of classroom teachers across the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required states to produce only highly qualified teachers (Boyd, Goldhaber, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2007). To be considered highly qualified, teachers must receive state certification and, as a benchmark along the road to certification, demonstrate content area knowledge by scoring proficiently on state subject area exams (Marszalek et al., 2010). As a result, teacher preparation programs are being held to much higher standards than in years past. In fact, standards were the driving force behind changes in the 1980s and 1990s beginning with a literacy crisis as outlined in *A Nation at Risk*, a 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Barone & Morrell, 2007). Accreditation of teacher education programs through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was one of the final attempts during the 20th century to standardize and professionalize teacher education. The goal of NCATE is for teacher education students to “effectively practice the skills and knowledge base they are taught in their education course work” (Barone & Morrell, 2007, p. 168). Accreditation serves as an accountability measure and is given to programs that can successfully document teacher candidates’ work in the classroom as well as how they are influencing the achievement of students with whom they come in contact.

**Accountability and assessment.** The most common approach to ensuring accountability is through assessment. Spear-Swerling and Coyne (2010) pointed out that, for good or bad, assessment drives instruction. As a result, poor teacher certification exams may promote less than adequate preparation of teacher candidates. Conversely, stringent exams may produce more effective teacher candidates. Practices in assessment continue to evolve with programs. Most recently, the decision of many states to adopt CCSS over other local/state standards to better prepare P-12 students for college and careers has spurred a change in testing. What previously consisted of basic knowledge multiple-choice questions, standardized tests are moving toward measures of synthesis and application of knowledge rather than basic recall of information. Tienken (2010, 2011) argued there was not enough empirical evidence to support adoption of the CCSS and a national standardization of curriculum and assessment. However, according to a report by the Center for Public Education (CPE), critical thinking is becoming a requisite on standardized tests such as those associated with CCSS, including those required for teacher certification (Mitchell, 2006). The CPE also reported that changes in test formats have resulted in a decrease in test scores and have prompted a change in preparation programs (Mitchell, 2006). Teacher preparation programs, however, are not the only professional programs experiencing this downturn (Mitchell, 2006).

Many other professions require successful completion of exams to finish programs and achieve licensure to practice (Mitchell, 2006). Unsuccessful completion of these exams is not unique to education. Nursing schools have noted decreased test scores on their national licensure exam as well. Two schools of nursing felt the pressure of

losing accreditation if their scores continued to fall (Carr, 2011; March & Ambrose, 2010). Drastic measures had to be taken to preserve their programs. Reviews and modifications of course work, exam review opportunities, and individualized study plans were instrumental in resurrecting these programs.

State mandates require teacher candidates to maintain a set GPA, to successfully complete at least one student teaching experience, to produce a clear background check, and to achieve a passing score on all norm-referenced certification tests (Brown, Brown, & Brown, 2008). Subject area tests continue to be a benchmark toward state certification for both general and special education teachers (Spear-Swerling & Coyne, 2010). Furthermore, pedagogical knowledge, specifically in reading, is necessary for teachers to assess students and teach reading effectively, especially when addressing students who struggle or have special needs. According to Helferich and Bean (2011), effective reading teachers must possess the core foundational knowledge of all elements of literacy instruction as well as a deep understanding of formal and informal assessments and interpretation of those assessments.

**Teacher effectiveness and student achievement.** The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2009) reported having a class with an effective teacher increased student achievement drastically and was more beneficial than limiting class size. Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) suggested the single greatest impact on student achievement is not class size, funding, or the grade a school receives on local or state report cards, but the effectiveness of the teacher in the classroom. However, according to the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2011), 72% of states in the union fall

well below the norm in the amount of content knowledge required to achieve state certification, with Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Iowa ranked at the second percentile. Furthermore, NCTQ (2011) reported that only nine states adequately test their teacher candidates' knowledge of reading content and methods and the essential elements of reading instruction. This evidence fails to support expert opinions that greater content knowledge and advanced subject matter degrees positively impact student learning (Beare, Marshall, Torgerson, Tracz, & Chiero, 2012).

The need for effective teachers has never been greater than it is today. Nationally, reading and math scores among fourth and eighth graders have stagnated over the past decade and have shown only slight gains in scores in less than one fourth of the United States since 2009 (NCES, 2011). Data indicated that the lowest performing subgroups continue to be minority groups including Native American Indians, Hispanics, and African Americans as well as those from lower earning families who qualify for free or reduced price school lunches (NCES, 2011). There continues to be an achievement gap, especially in reading and mathematics, between White and non-White students as well as those considered limited English proficient and the need for highly qualified teachers is a priority (Rojas-LeBouef & Slate, 2012).

Statistics show a direct correlation between teaching quality and student achievement. Researchers suggest that higher qualified teachers, those with National Board Certification and value added or advanced degrees, were less likely to teach in schools with a high minority population or an increased number of economically disadvantaged students (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2010). Conversely, the greatest

portion of alternatively certified teachers or those teaching on an emergency license were found in urban and poor rural districts with high percentages of minority and disadvantaged students (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). In California, one in seven teachers was considered under qualified or undercertified, and those classrooms were staffed by teachers who held emergency credentials or were in the process of receiving some type of teacher training, whether traditional or alternative training (Howard, 2003). Although many states suffer from teacher shortages, it is predominantly districts in urban areas or schools whose students are considered to be at-risk or underserved that are most difficult to staff. These schools suffer more from teacher attrition and retention problems than schools with a higher socioeconomic status enrollment (Howard, 2003).

Most recently, the Council of Chief State School Office recommended the passing of three licensure exams to demonstrate successful teaching, including an assessment of content knowledge, pedagogy, and actual teaching (Luster, 2010). Teacher candidates who fail to demonstrate proficiency in content knowledge and pedagogy will not be awarded preliminary credentials for their first year of teaching. Luster (2010) found that teacher candidates who are prepared to teach students the strategies of teaching for memory, analytical, creative, and practical learning would be able to recognize the needs of their students and teach, at least some of the time, to all their unique learning styles. According to McCombes-Tolis and Feinn (2008), some teacher candidates found a distinct disconnect between what they believed to be fundamentally important instructionally and what was required by some state standards. Furthermore, McCombes-

Tolis and Feinn contended that teacher education programs were not fully preparing teacher candidates with the foundational knowledge necessary to master reading competencies on state licensure exams, and there was a direct correlation between teacher preparation in reading content knowledge and student achievement in reading.

**Teacher preparation programs.** Teacher preparation programs have been scrutinized for years and frequently are blamed for the lack of student achievement in the P-12 classroom. In a 2010 report, NCATE called for a change to teacher preparation programs in an effort to bolster student achievement, citing a need for the inclusion of practice, content, theory, and pedagogy. Furthermore, NCATE suggested that teacher education programs should be modified to focus more on a hands-on approach to teaching and learning rather than the traditional lecture format (Kiley, 2010). The report included suggestions for more practical training, more opportunities to apply learning in authentic situations, and more immersion in the classroom from the beginning of the program, rather than waiting until near completion for a full internship. There is speculation whether this shift in the classroom would better serve students when they sit down to take their certification tests, equipping them with greater critical thinking skills and the ability to better apply the content learned in the college classroom (Mitchell, 2006).

In recent years, two studies were conducted in an attempt to identify a direct relationship between teacher preparation and student achievement. The first study by Henry et al. (2013) used a hierarchical linear model (a type of linear regression for multilevel data) in an attempt to reveal indicators of teacher preparation programs that

predicted later success as classroom teachers. Additionally, Henry et al. assessed the predictive validity of several indicators throughout teacher preparation programs and subsequent student achievement once candidates were in the classroom. Measures included course work, grades, professional behaviors and dispositions, clinical teaching assessments, certification exams, and professional portfolio assessments (Henry et al., 2013). Findings of the study linked teacher preparation programs and student success. The number of required courses in professional studies was directly linked to student achievement in reading. Furthermore, teacher candidates' performance in their final two years of course work held a positive association with their students' math achievement in the classroom. Limitations of this study included only looking at achievement in math and reading and only looking at one teacher preparation program at the elementary level. In light of their findings, the authors called for the goal of all teacher preparation programs to use "evidence to guide continuous improvement of teacher preparation and thereby, of teaching and learning in our schools" (Henry et al., 2013, p. 439). Henry et al. suggested that additional studies are necessary to identify measures of predictive validity and develop an evidence-based measure of program efficacy.

In the second study, Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2009) attempted to identify a relationship between student achievement and teacher preparation by looking at 31 programs, both traditional and nontraditional, that prepare teachers in New York City (NYC) schools and first year elementary teachers. Specific elements of the research included comparing practices across institutions, examining the correlation among teacher preparation programs and desired outcomes such as student achievement,

quality of the teacher preparation programs, and a longitudinal component to look at long-term effects (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 417). Distinct differences were identified among the 31 programs and the student achievement of their candidates.

Boyd et al. (2009) revealed that programs requiring a capstone project of student learning, studying of NYC math and English/Language Arts curricula, and closely overseeing student teaching experiences produced student test scores higher than those from programs that did not include the same aspects. Programs that provided multiple opportunities that prepared candidates for what they would be doing in a classroom as well as opportunities to work with students in authentic situations produced more effective first year teachers. Additional findings suggested that while content knowledge is important, it may not be a contributing factor between more or less effective teachers until the second year, when they have some mastery over the basic practices of teaching and classroom management (Boyd et al., 2009). Limitations of this study include the evaluation of childhood teaching programs and elementary school teachers; therefore, additional studies involving secondary programs and teachers are warranted.

Further research findings revealed that teacher candidates who struggled were those with a demonstrated lack of content knowledge and a lack of pedagogical knowledge and skill (Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009). However, highly qualified teachers who are subject area experts are instrumental to student success (Luster, 2010). Researchers suggested that preparation in pedagogy, the how-to of teaching, can significantly contribute to effective teaching, especially in particular subject areas (Allen, 2003).

Practical, hands-on experience remains the most effective method for preparing candidates to teach a subject.

### **Implications**

As anticipated, my research found a match between teacher preparation methods, subject area knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge and a candidate's later effectiveness in the classroom. Research findings also revealed that reading and language arts instructors who provided opportunities for enhanced or additional field experiences and application based projects in the classroom yielded students who performed higher on the SSAT. Student findings, from those who successfully completed the reading/language arts SSAT, indicated that students who conducted a thorough review of the subject matter prior to taking the test, along with those application based projects in the classroom, felt more prepared for success on the SSAT. Reading and language arts course work could span a candidate's professional education over a period of two to four semesters, at minimum, resulting in some regression of foundational subject matter. Additional findings indicated that the most successful students were those who conducted some manner of subject area review upon completion of all course work and prior to taking the SSAT.

### **Tentative Project Direction**

One possible project direction was a structured, 3-day professional development (PD), led by reading and/or language arts faculty, offered once each semester. The training would include multiple opportunities for hands-on application of the review material. PowerPoint presentations, small and whole group discussions, and practice

tests would be used to review potential selected and constructed response items. Collaborative group discussions would be used to strengthen the understanding of the proposed problem and provide multiple suggestions for strategic instruction. The constructed response review would also include a thorough review of the scoring rubric and the specific characteristics the evaluators will be scoring. A sample of both well-written and poorly-written constructed responses will be provided to review participants. Discussions will include qualities of each response as they relate to the characteristics evaluators are scoring and a comparison with the rubric to identify content included in each response. Next, participants would be given a sample scenario to read and identify the characteristics to be scored. Small groups of students and a faculty facilitator would work collaboratively to write a response that would identify the characteristics outlined on the rubric. Finally, participants would be given a scenario to complete on their own and submit to faculty members for feedback and assistance.

### **Summary**

Section 1 provides extensive evidence of the existing local problem and its relationship to the larger educational setting. Specific details of RU's problem with elementary education teacher candidates not passing the SSAT in reading/language arts at the same rate as in previous years were provided. A strong rationale for studying this problem was provided with evidence that fewer teachers will be entering the workforce, resulting in a teacher shortage statewide. Candidates are incurring additional costs financially because of multiple attempts to take and pass the test, additional credit hours enrolled in to remain active students, and delays entering the workforce so they may

support their families, and potentially begin repaying student loans. Terms specific to this study were included in Section 1 to provide the reader a greater understanding of the subject. Substantial local data exist that justify the need for this study and the significance of the problem. The questions that were used to guide the direction of the study were also included in Section 1.

An extensive review of the literature, as it pertains to the local problem, was included in this section as well. The theoretical base of constructivism, included in Section 1, was selected to support this study as much evidence supports this hands-on, learner-centered approach to teaching and learning that is appropriate in early childhood through postsecondary settings. The literature as it relates to the local problem encompasses the accountability and assessment of teacher preparation programs and the relationship between teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Finally, implications of the study and possible directions for the project based on findings of the study concludes this section.

Section 2 includes the methodology for the study. A case study detailing faculty and students' perceptions of the reading/language arts SSAT and students' preparation was conducted. Qualitative data were gathered via student and faculty interviews in order to understand the gap in practice; that is, what is the disconnect between what is being taught and learned in the reading and language arts courses and what is being applied on the SSAT. Purposeful sampling of participants who possessed vital information necessary to answer the interview questions made up the sample for this

study. This type of sampling ensured that information collected came from valid and reliable sources and related directly to the local problem.

The sample of participants consisted of six elementary education teacher candidates with grade point averages (GPAs) ranging from 3.0-4.0 who took and passed the current reading/language arts SSAT during the 2012-2013 or 2013-2014 academic year. Of the six student participants, only one achieved a passing score on the first attempt. The remaining five participants passed after two to four attempts. Selecting student participants with a minimum GPA of 3.0 aided in eliminating the possibility of choosing participants who lacked general background knowledge and basic subject area knowledge and would likely perform unsatisfactorily regardless. Two reading and two language arts faculty members were interviewed also for a total of 10 participants.

Attempting to gain a deep understanding of the local problem, interviews were conducted one-on-one, were semistructured in nature, and consisted of a minimum of 10 open-ended questions that were audio recorded and later transcribed. Member checking of transcripts by interviewees helped to ensure the validity of the data gathered (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Approved transcripts were reviewed and coded for recurring words, phrases, and comments that became the overarching themes for the study. Credibility of data analysis was established through a third-party review of transcripts, codes, and themes looking for agreement of data. Use of a peer reviewer served to remove potential researcher bias and increase the credibility of data analysis. This review was conducted by a member of RU's graduate college of education research faculty who had no personal vested interest in the findings of this study, nor its

participants, and remained neutral. Triangulation of data occurred by analyzing faculty perceptions alongside student perceptions on preparing for the SSAT along with researcher and reviewer agreement of coded transcripts and analysis of the data. Coded and categorized data were presented and summarized in a richly detailed, narrative description, highlighting the key aspects of the case and offering findings that could provide a solution to the current local problem (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Upon completion of the research, results were added to Section 2. Research findings determined the direction for the project, discussed in Section 3, including a description of the project and rationale for its selection. A review of the current literature as it relates to the proposed project will be conducted to the point of saturation. Literature includes a thorough support of the proposed project design as well as the content included in the project. In addition, a plan for evaluation is discussed thoroughly and includes a formative assessment with justification for this type of project and a description of the key stakeholders affected by the project. Finally, implications for social change and the significance of the project to stakeholders and the larger education community are discussed.

Section 4 is the final section and includes an overall reflection of the study, findings, and project. Possible alternatives or modifications to the project are considered and the potential for future research is addressed. Strengths and limitations of the project, as substantiated in the literature, are also discussed in this section. Resulting from the project's limitations, alternative solutions to the problem are considered. An analysis of scholarship, project development, and leadership and change is provided in the final

section and results in a reflection on the importance of the work from the practitioner's point of view. Implications, applications, and directions for future research on this topic are also included. Section 4 concludes with a discussion of the relevance and importance of this study.

## Section 2: Methodology

### Overview

Teacher candidates in RU's elementary education program had suffered a decline in the rate of passing scores on the SSAT in reading and language arts over the previous 18 months. This decline prompted local administration to investigate not only the cause, but to also identify solutions to the problem. In an effort to identify the information proposed, a case study approach was taken. Traditionally, case study research is employed in an attempt to define "what is known based on careful analysis of multiple sources of information" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 10). An in-depth study, including interviews from multiple participants, aimed to reveal the perceptions of both students and reading and language arts faculty regarding practices and procedures in and out of the classroom that best prepare students to successfully complete the SSAT. The following four guiding questions and subquestions provided the framework for this study.

1. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program faculty regarding the preparation of students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
2. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program students regarding their preparation to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
3. How could Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program be strengthened to more effectively prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?

- a. What are faculty perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
  - b. What are student perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
4. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education students of how they would have approached their course work differently early on in their program based on what they know now about the reading/language arts SSAT?

Addressing the problem using a case study design resulted in the fleshing out of specific aspects that are present in RU's teacher preparation program that best prepared students to pass the SSAT. Participants also identified aspects they felt might be missing that are keeping candidates from passing on their first attempt. This information could only be extracted from qualitative data gathered through individual interviews with both faculty and students. A quantitative approach such as a survey design would have been inappropriate because it lacks the depth, description, and detail offered by case study research. In the following sections, the research design and approach are discussed followed by a description of the research methods including participants, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

A case study addressing faculty and students' perceptions of the reading/language arts SSAT and students' preparation was conducted. Qualitative data were gathered via student and faculty interviews to understand the gap in practice: that is, the disconnect between what is being taught and learned in the reading and language arts courses and what is being applied on the SSAT.

According to Lodico et al. (2010), the goal of case study research is to “discover meaning, investigate processes, and gain insight into and [an] in-depth understanding of an individual, group, or situation” (p. 269). Furthermore, case study research focuses on a single unit or bounded system. In this case, the unit consisted of four current RU reading and language arts faculty members and six previous RU elementary education teacher candidates. The case was bounded both in number of participants and length of time and concluded upon completion of data collection and analysis (Lodico et al., 2010). Case study research seemed the obvious design as it allowed for deeper understanding of the problem and employed the researcher as the primary collector of data. Furthermore, case study research concludes with a richly descriptive product, providing valuable insight into the problem being investigated (Merriam, 2009). I considered the strengths and weakness of other qualitative designs before choosing the case study.

A phenomenological study would be ideal for a researcher interested in investigating the experiences of teacher candidates who made multiple attempts to pass the SSAT to no avail and changed professions as a result (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). A grounded theory design could have been used to explain the local problem and develop

a theory grounded in the data (Lodico et al., 2010). A quantitative study such as a survey design would have allowed me to generalize from a broad sample of participants rather than focusing on the detailed information of a case study (Creswell, 2009). However, a case study and its intensive descriptions and analysis of isolated problems or events provided the most appropriate design for the research problem (Hancock & Algozzine).

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants who possessed vital information necessary to answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling is ideal for case study research because it enables researchers to select their participants “based on their characteristics and knowledge as they relate to the research questions being investigated” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 140). Purposeful sampling ensured that information collected came from sources able to provide answers to the research questions, faculty and students in this case, and who were directly related to the local problem.

The student participants consisted of six elementary education teacher candidates with grade point averages (GPAs) ranging from 3.0 to 4.0 who took and passed the current reading/language arts SSAT during the 2012-2013 or 2013-2014 academic year. Selecting student participants with a minimum GPA of 3.0 aided in eliminating the possibility of choosing participants who lacked general background knowledge and basic subject area knowledge and would have likely performed unsatisfactorily as a result. Student participants were selected from a limited pool of respondents. Of the 89 e-mail invitations sent to eligible students, only seven responded. Of those seven, six agreed to participate in the study. One of the six participants passed the examination on the first

attempt while the remaining five passed after two to four attempts. Four faculty participants, two full-time reading and two full-time language arts faculty members, were interviewed also. Limiting the participants to no more than 10 allowed for deeper analysis and more time spent during interviews, attempting to extract as much detailed information as possible from each member (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

### **Access to Participants**

Participants who met the above criteria were identified and invited via e-mail to participate. Participation was voluntary. Student participants were selected initially by analyzing historical data of candidates who attempted the current SSAT, subtest 1: Reading/Language Arts during the 2012-13 or 2013-2014 academic year, and then confirming a GPA of 3.0 to 4.0. This was accomplished with the support of RU's teacher certification office. Next, a list of eligible students was compiled along with contact information. Students were contacted by e-mail and invited to participate in an interview on an entirely voluntary basis. Through convenience sampling, the first six students who responded and agreed to participate were selected for the study. Students participated voluntarily, with informed consent, and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Of the first six students to respond to the invitation, one declined to participate, so the seventh respondent was invited to complete the sample.

Faculty participants included two full-time reading and two full-time language arts faculty members with a minimum of one year teaching experience at RU. Convenience sampling of all eligible reading and language arts faculty was used to determine the pool of participants. All eligible reading and language arts faculty

members at RU were contacted through e-mail and asked to voluntarily participate. The first two reading and the first two language arts faculty members to respond to the e-mail and agree to participate in the study were chosen. Scheduling conflicts with the first reading faculty to respond forced me to invite the third respondent to fulfill that role. Faculty members agreed to participate voluntarily, with informed consent, and had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. This modest number of student and faculty participants ensured a greater depth of questioning and analysis, characteristic of case study research (Lodico et al., 2010).

Of the 10 participants, nine were female. Half of the participants ranged in age from 21 to 35 years, while four ranged in age from 36 to 50 years. Only one participant identified in the 51 to 65 years age range. Providing additional demographic information would potentially jeopardize the confidentiality of the participants due to the size of the institution.

Researching this population provided valuable insight into the local problem and offered suggestions for a solution to the problem. I assumed the role of insider-researcher during this study because I am employed as a full-time reading faculty member teaching on RU's main and satellite campuses. Benefits of being an insider-researcher included a greater understanding of the setting and members and a greater intimacy, which presumably resulted in more authentic, honest responses throughout the interview process (Unluer, 2012).

My relationship with the participants varied based on selection. Of the six student participants, five were former students of mine having taken one or more of my

undergraduate reading courses. The remaining participant was not a former student of mine. I built a deeper working relationship with each student participant by communicating with them throughout the selection and scheduling process and ensured their confidentiality during the course of the study. These actions aided in gaining their trust and cooperation. A working relationship with the faculty participants already existed because I had worked with them in the department of curriculum and instruction at RU. As my colleagues, they were equally dedicated to finding a solution to this problem and were willing to cooperate in any manner possible. This working relationship helped ensure the most accurate findings were revealed.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I took measures to protect participants from harm and ensure their confidentiality. No data were collected until final approval from the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) from Walden (#11-10-14-0198016) and RU (#15-055) (Glesne, 2011). Once eligible participants were identified and selected, informed consent was obtained from all of them. This informed consent ensured they understood potential risks and benefits from participating in the study, their participation was voluntary with the option to withdraw at any time, and all collected data were kept secure and would remain confidential (Lodico et al., 2010). Confidential information, including the identity of participants, data collected, and digital media were maintained in a separate file on a password-protected personal computer, and hard copies of data collected and supporting artifacts were stored and will remain in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years and then destroyed. Participants were given a designation based on their role (student or faculty) and the number in which

they agreed to participate to further protect their identity (Creswell, 2009). For example, student participants are referred to as Student 1 to 6 and faculty participants are referred to as Reading Faculty 1 or 2 and Language Arts Faculty 1 or 2. For the sake of confidentiality, no other personal identifiers are provided.

### **Data Collection**

Merriam (2009) claimed that all forms of qualitative research include interviews as the primary and often sole source of data collection, and “the main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information” (p. 88). In an effort to gain a greater understanding of how the local problem affects participants and what their perceptions of the problem are, interviews with key faculty members and students were conducted. Once IRB #11-10-14-0198016 and #15-055 were approved, data collection began. Participants were contacted by e-mail to schedule interviews at their convenience, and informed consent was obtained prior to beginning any interview. Data collection lasted 13 weeks.

### **Interviews**

Approximately one-hour interviews were conducted in a variety of locations at participants’ request. Some interviews were held in private offices on campus while others were conducted in more public venues such as coffee shops and bistros. Interviews were one-on-one, semistructured in nature, and consisted of 15 to 20 open-ended questions (see Appendices B and C) that were audio recorded and later transcribed by a third-party transcriptionist. Participants gave verbal permission to record the interviews prior to beginning. In addition to the interview questions identified on the

protocol sheets (see Appendices B and C), probing or follow-up questions were asked as needed during the interviews. Field notes were taken throughout the interviews to further record observations. All data and artifacts are held in research logs kept in a locked cabinet or stored on a password protected personal computer.

The use of open-ended questions ensured the participants could elaborate on any of the questions and were not led in any particular direction that may have skewed the results of the study. Interview questions were directly aligned with the guiding research questions to help focus specifically on the problem and identify potential solutions.

Interview questions ranged from more structured to less structured and were designed to answer the guiding questions for this study. A focus was on what is being done in the reading and language arts classrooms that is perceived as instrumental in students' success on the SSAT, according to faculty and students. Rather than attempting to identify what potentially is missing, the focus remained on successful measures taken in and out of the classroom. Asking good questions is crucial to collecting desirable data (Merriam, 2009).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher as principal investigator can have both positive and negative effects on the data collection. As a full time faculty member of the reading program at RU for several years, I possessed a working relationship with all faculty members who were selected to participate. This familiarity allowed for a more comfortable, frank, and authentic interview. One potential negative aspect was the possibility that the faculty participants may have answered questions based on what they thought I was looking for

rather than what was actually taking place in their classrooms. A relationship with some student participants existed. Five of the six student participants had taken reading course work under my supervision while the remaining student participant had not. Setting the proper tone for the interviews in the beginning, especially for the student unfamiliar with me and my teaching, helped to alleviate any anxiety or concerns the students had. Reassuring students that their identities would be kept completely confidential and reminding them that they could withdraw at any time reinforced the positive nature and lack of risk involved with participation. Prior experiences and work ethic of each student participant likely had an effect on the interviews and, ultimately, the findings from the interviews.

Researcher bias must be controlled in order to lend credibility to the study. Background knowledge, core beliefs, current research, and perceptions about the local problem could potentially affect data collection. Inasmuch, I maintained an objective lens when viewing the data. Multiple methods were employed throughout the study in an effort to eliminate bias. Methods for controlling researcher bias in this study included the researcher's meaningful participation, triangulation of interview data and field notes, and member checks of interview transcripts (Lodico et al., 2010).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began immediately following the first interview; however, the analysis was not complete until all data were collected. Analysis of all interview transcripts, once approved through member checks, allowed the coding process to begin. I analyzed the data manually, highlighting and color coding words, phrases, topics, and

recurring themes into categories. Preset codes derived from the literature review and conceptual framework included the following: application, facilitation, collaboration, experience, activities, assignments, projects, engagement, and assessment. Additional codes emerged from this process and are included in the results.

Codes were interpreted, collapsed, and refined throughout the analysis and were added to the transcription documents and field notes. The transcription documents contained preset and emerged codes from the data analysis as well as any anecdotal notes made during the interviews or throughout the coding process. Codes were used to generate answers to the questions guiding this study. Coded documents were reviewed by a colleague who is an expert in qualitative research and volunteered to assist in data analysis. Unfamiliar with the participants, she remained unbiased and ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis methods. Faculty and student participant data sets were analyzed separately, by both the researcher and peer reviewer, and then compared for triangulation. This ongoing, recursive process assisted in data analysis and served to ensure the data collected from each interview yielded the most accurate findings (Merriam, 2009). Consolidating, reducing, and interpreting data allowed the process of constructing meaning to begin.

### **Data Analysis Results**

Member checking by participants ensured the credibility of the data gathered (Lodico et al., 2010). Utilized twice throughout the data analysis process, member checks for descriptive validity were applied to the transcripts and member checks for

interpretive validity were applied to the coded documents. This safeguard was one of several strategies used to increase the validity of this qualitative study (Daytner, 2006).

Source triangulation served as an additional safeguard in ensuring validity of qualitative data. Triangulation of data employs utilizing multiple sources to gather information. The use of several different participants with differing perspectives and perceptions of the problem and its effect on stakeholders added credibility to the study (Daytner, 2006). Triangulation of data occurred by analyzing faculty perceptions alongside student perceptions on preparing for the SSAT.

Credibility of data analysis was established further through a third-party review of transcripts, codes, and themes looking for agreement of data. Use of a peer reviewer removed potential researcher bias and increased the credibility of data analysis. This audit was conducted by a member of RU's graduate college of education research faculty who had no personal vested interest in the findings of this study, nor its participants, and remained neutral throughout the analysis process. Chenail (2012) claimed "having someone else read our work is another valuable asset" (p. 3) while increasing the validity of a qualitative study. Acknowledging researcher subjectivity lent additional credence to the study.

While some researchers consider subjectivity a weakness in qualitative endeavors, others view it as a strength. Daytner (2006) claimed that, "if acknowledged and shared" in research findings, subjectivity could be of great value in qualitative research (p. 6). Being closely acquainted with the problem and many of the participants, it is likely I was

subjective in some of the interpretations of the data collected. Because of this likelihood, member checks and a peer audit of the data analysis bolstered the validity of the study.

The final safeguard came from considering discrepant cases or contradictory interpretations of data. No discrepant cases were identified; however, two participants, one student and one faculty, were considered outliers because they were not able to answer all the interview questions fully. While their responses and perceptions were taken into consideration, they were not able to provide as much feedback as the remaining eight participants. Member checks for both descriptive and interpretive validity minimized this concern. Coded and categorized data were presented and summarized in a richly detailed, narrative description, highlighting the key aspects of the case and offered findings that provided a solution to the current local problem (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Ultimately, through data analysis, I revealed insight into the local problem that would assist RU in identifying the aspects of its elementary education teacher preparation program that prepared teacher candidates to pass the reading/language arts SSAT. Additionally, I revealed what was missing, based on students' and reading/language arts faculty members' perspectives, from RU's elementary education program that would more effectively prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT. Finally, from the students' perspectives, I identified measures that can be taken early in the program to better prepare students for successful completion of the reading/language arts SSAT.

Analysis of the data revealed much of what I had anticipated and answered the questions guiding this study, but identified several new themes as well. I established the

following eight preset codes prior to conducting interviews: application, facilitation, collaboration, experience, activities, assignments, projects, engagement, and assessment. As a result of the 10 interviews, I accurately identified four of the eight preset codes (application, facilitation, activities/assignments, and assessment). Of those four, application was mentioned most often. During the coding process, the following nine additional themes emerged: strategies/strategy notebooks, study guides/materials, practice tests, tutoring, hands-on, constructed response, multiple-choice, reflection, and student-centered.

The most prevalent themes identified were strategies/strategy notebooks, study guides, practice tests, hands-on, application, multiple-choice, and constructed response. I collapsed study guides and practice tests into one theme, and with that I included references to reviewing course materials, notes, textbooks, and etc. I collapsed the most heavily referred to themes of strategies/notebooks, tutoring, and hands-on into the umbrella of application, as this was ultimately the direction students went with these activities and topics. Constructed response and multiple-choice themes were collapsed into one theme of test format. No discrepant cases were identified during data analysis.

### **Faculty Perceptions**

From faculty responses, I identified a common thread in the topic of theoretical orientation. Reading Faculty 1 (RF1) and Language Arts Faculty 1 (LAF1) identified constructivism, specifically, as their primary orientation. Both mentioned facilitation and modeling along with a variety of discussion formats and reflection as their typical methods of teaching. Reading Faculty 2 (RF2) spoke specifically of gradual release of

responsibility and Vygotsky's more knowledgeable other (zone of proximal development) theories. Building background knowledge through discussion, providing opportunities to talk and work together to do hands-on activities relating to the topic, and then reconvening for a final discussion was her primary method of teaching. Additionally, she cited Gallagher's gradual release theory as an instructional approach where she first models, then student and teacher work together, then student shows teacher, then student does it on his or her own. Language Arts Faculty 2 (LAF2) stated that she was "very hands-on" and "authentic" and most closely identified with the constructivist theories held by Piaget and Vygotsky.

All four faculty members felt strongly that active engagement and experiential learning were best and felt their students were most successful when they could apply what they had learned in class in a clinical/practical setting. The specific activities noted were learning and presenting strategies or instructional approaches to the class, tutoring or working one-on-one with a student to teach a lesson, and creating assignments that required them to fully understand a concept first before they could turn it into a product.

Three of the four faculty members interviewed agreed their courses were aligned to the competencies tested on the SSAT. Language Arts Faculty 2 claimed to be unfamiliar with the competencies, which identified this participant as a potential outlier regarding preparing students for the SSAT; however, LAF2 identified several activities believed to prepare teacher candidates to effectively teach the language arts. None of the faculty participants felt they taught to the test, but, rather, taught their students to be

successful by providing adequate background knowledge and giving them opportunities to apply their learning in real life and hands-on situations.

All four faculty participants felt assessments should be authentic and ongoing. Three of the four felt they needed to prepare students for the genre of the test as well as the tested competencies in order to fully prepare their students to be successful, both on the test and in their future classrooms. Faculty recommendations for test prep included using the course texts as study guides, reviewing strategy notebooks from two of the three required reading classes, reviewing online study guides and practice tests, and utilizing the materials in the college's test prep Blackboard course.

Strategy notebooks and knowing a wide variety of strategies or instructional tools and their appropriate applications were mentioned multiple times. The two reading faculty participants identified giving the students scenarios of children exhibiting comprehension difficulties and requiring the students to brainstorm appropriate instructional approaches and provide rationales for those choices as the most beneficial tools in preparing students for the test, specifically the constructed response portion. Using textbooks and online study guides seemed to provide the most help in preparing teacher candidates for the multiple-choice portions of the test. Coming to class prepared, having read the required texts, participating in class, and doing the assignments were crucial, in all of their opinions, to student success. Additionally, all four faculty participants felt they pushed students into thinking problems through and coming up with appropriate, strategic solutions and stating a rationale for those solutions.

## **Student Perceptions**

Student interview responses ranged from general to very detailed and specific. All six of the students interviewed passed the SSAT on one or more attempts. Student 3 (S3) passed the reading/language arts SSAT on the first attempt, Student 5 (S5) and Student 6 (S6) passed it on their second attempt, Student 4 (S4) passed on either the third or fourth try (unsure of how many attempts exactly), and Student 1 (S1) and Student 2 (S2) passed on the fourth attempt. All six students admitted to feeling at least somewhat prepared on their first attempt. According to S1, S2, S4, S5, and S6, not having had all the required course work and waiting too long after taking the content classes before taking the test were the biggest factors influencing their scores.

Strategy presentations and compiling strategy notebooks, hands-on experiences such as creating and teaching real lessons in tutoring environments, and utilizing online study guides along with course texts and notes were identified as the most beneficial tools in preparing students for the test. Four of the students interviewed agreed that the multiple-choice portions were the most difficult and not knowing the foundational terminology and definitions made it difficult to correctly answer those questions. Reviewing course texts, notes, and using online study guides were identified as most helpful on those portions of the test. Student 5 and S6 felt the constructed response portion was the most difficult because they identified themselves as weak writers. Five of the six stated that having taken the test once before and knowing what to expect was most beneficial in helping them better prepare for subsequent attempts. Student 3 could be considered an outlier simply because she felt very prepared going in to the test, passed

on her first try, and was unable to specifically identify the factors most beneficial in preparing her for the SSAT.

Five of the six student participants identified one assignment that they felt best prepared them for the constructed response portion of the test. In that particular assignment, the instructor gives a scenario each week that correlates with the topic (fluency, vocabulary, phonics, comprehension, and, etc.) being discussed in class and teacher candidates have to identify the problem(s) exhibited by the student in the scenario and provide instructional recommendations specifically based on that problem. Additionally, candidates must justify why these recommendations will support and improve the student's problem. This assignment is first conducted as a QuickWrite/brainstorming approach then students work collaboratively, in small groups, to discuss all their ideas and compile one essay-type response with their recommendations. These groups then share their recommendations with the other small groups in the class. They all felt this assignment, repeated several times throughout the course of the semester, provided them multiple opportunities to problem solve in response to a specific situation and better prepared them for these situations in their future classrooms.

Student 2 identified the college's SSAT review course (a 1-hour elective) as instrumental in her future success on the test. One recommendation she had was to provide two different courses, one for first time test takers and a second, more in-depth course, for those who had already attempted the SSAT and failed. While this was a valid suggestion, it does not seem feasible to offer two separate courses with the second one

providing more or different information than the first. She also indicated that talking to a variety of educators who were teaching many different grade levels was beneficial. However, being in the classroom and working with students in a clinical, application based manner was her strongest recommendation because this allowed students to apply everything they had learned in their course work in a real situation, mimicking their future classroom experiences.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Findings of the research are summarized here as they revealed answers to the questions guiding the study. Several themes or topics overlapped among faculty and students as they identified their perceptions of what they felt best prepared students to pass the SSAT.

#### **Faculty Perceptions of Preparation**

The question posed to faculty participants was: “What are the perceptions of Regional University’s elementary education preservice teacher training program faculty regarding the preparation of students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?” The topic of application was the predominant code identified in interview transcripts. Faculty and students alike indicated a preference for opportunities in which learning could be applied in an authentic, hands-on situation. Faculty participants stated they felt more learning occurred when students had multiple opportunities for practical experiences in the field, where they could take the knowledge learned in their classes and apply it directly to students in the classroom.

### **Student Perceptions of Preparation**

The question posed to student participants was: “What are the perceptions of Regional University’s elementary education preservice teacher training program students regarding their preparation to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?” Student participants identified several factors that best prepared them for the SSAT in reading and language arts. The most prevalent classroom activity or assignment that was used during test preparation was the strategy demonstration and notebook assignment that is required by all reading faculty in two of the three required reading courses. All six student participants identified this component of their course work as the most beneficial in preparing them to be successful on the constructed response portion. Additionally, an assignment in which students were given a scenario of a particular reading difficulty then asked to identify instructional activities along with a sound rationale for their selections was identified by five out of the six participants as critical in their success on the constructed response portion of the test.

Study guides, practice tests, reviewing notes, and studying course textbooks were identified as the most useful tools when preparing for the multiple choice portions of test. This was true in both the reading and language arts sections of the SSAT. Familiarity of terms and definitions and the processes in which children learn to read and write were identified as critical for success on the multiple choice sections.

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Faculty and student participants were asked: “How could Regional University’s elementary education preservice teacher training program be strengthened to more effectively prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?”

- a. What are faculty perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
- b. What are student perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?

The majority of faculty participants felt they worked diligently in their classes to ensure students were given all the tools necessary to be successful on the SSAT.

Assignments were created to increase the time spent applying learning in the field and providing students with multiple opportunities to identify difficulties and make suggestions for the most effective tools and activities to address those problems.

Theoretically speaking, all four faculty participants believed that some form of constructivism was the preferred method for teaching and learning and that opportunities for discussing topics and creating activities and lessons provided candidates with the experiences they needed to feel prepared and be successful once in their own classrooms.

Student participants felt most learning occurred when they were given the opportunity to work with students in a clinical setting either teaching lessons to small groups of students or tutoring individual students. However, student participants overwhelmingly indicated that this practical experience best prepared them to be an

effective teacher once they had their own classroom. In terms of test preparation, this was not the case.

### **Implications**

Students were asked: “What are the perceptions of Regional University’s elementary education students of how they would have approached their course work differently early on in their program based on what they know now about the reading/language arts SSAT?” Two practical tips were given as advice for those preparing to take the SSAT. First, five of the six students indicated that taking the test immediately following the content courses was most helpful. Those who waited longer periods of time between finishing course work and taking the test stated this as the major reason they were less successful. Second, all students recommended being in the field as much as possible and talking to educators about best practices.

### **The Project**

Based on the findings from interviews and a review of the literature, developing a professional development plan was the most logical solution to this problem. Student and faculty participants alike felt a hands-on approach to teaching and learning was best. Student participants also felt taking the test as soon as course work was completed was more advantageous than waiting several months to a year before they took the test. Since this option is not always possible as most students take one reading class per semester, a reading and language arts review session made available each semester would offer a timely review of the subject matter. Finally, integrating proven instructional techniques, tools, and strategies into the review would provide additional opportunities for hands-on

learning and application of the tools that could be used in their future classrooms. Providing a framework including an agenda and the content to be reviewed would benefit any faculty member presenting the information. I suggested a 3-day PD plan that would serve as a content area review for students who are preparing to take their reading/language arts SSAT. Offered once a semester for three Saturdays, the SSAT review session would encompass all reading and language arts competencies that are tested and would include a review of content terminology as well as incorporate strategy instruction. The workshop for elementary education teacher candidates could be offered as 1-hour of education elective credit under the existing course ELED 4811 or taken voluntarily by those seeking additional preparation for the test.

The sessions provide a thorough review of the reading and language arts competencies tested and the rubric used to score the constructed response items. Suggested materials included in the sessions are content specific PowerPoints covering the five essential elements of reading, a glossary of important reading and language arts terminology, and assigned readings followed by group discussions over the content. Further review of material will include content specific scenarios of a student or students with specific reading difficulties. Participants will work collaboratively to brainstorm instructional strategies and activities that would effectively address the identified need(s) and provide a strong rationale for their decisions based on the content from the PowerPoints and assigned readings. They will then have the opportunity to practice writing a constructed response item based on their discussion of the problem, the suggested instructional approaches, and a rationale for their suggestions while using the

rubric to guide their responses. Question and answer segments will wrap-up the morning and afternoon sessions each day. In addition to observations and discussions with participants, teacher candidates will be formatively assessed using learning logs and exit slips.

### Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this project was to address the findings of analyzed data. The findings revealed several specific activities and assignments teacher candidates believed were most beneficial in preparing them for successful completion of the SSAT subtest 1. One common recommendation among student participants was to take the SSAT subtest 1 as soon after completion of all required reading and language arts courses as possible so the content and strategies would still be fresh. This recommendation was the initial driving force behind the decision to design a PD plan that offers a review of the tested content in a way that involves the participants with hands-on activities and includes opportunities to apply the information while thinking critically about subject matter, proposed problems, and logical solutions (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014).

A 3-day PD project was designed to focus on content knowledge and involve active learning. This design not only provides participants with the subject matter review they need but also equips them with tools and strategies that will better prepare them for their future classrooms. Many designs for PD exist, but recently the focus has moved away from the passive, workshop approach to one with more opportunities for active engagement, critical thinking, and practical application (Yamauchi, Im, & Mark, 2013).

The project includes a review of all the tested competencies broken down into sessions, which presents the information in a variety of formats and contexts ranging from whole group to small group to independent practice. PowerPoints, handouts, and journal articles are used as a means of disseminating information to participants. Instructional activities, tools, and strategies are used to support and reinforce the content

learning while providing the participants with opportunities for hands-on practice and application of resources that can be used in their own classrooms. Assessment of student learning will be measured through observations and formative assessments including learning logs and exit slips.

### **Project Goals**

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that best prepared students to take and pass the SSAT for reading and language arts. The goals of the project are to provide the teacher candidates with a thorough review of the reading and language arts content covered on the SSAT subtest 1 and to provide participants with best practices in reading instruction along with relevant instructional strategies and tools that can easily be applied in their future classrooms. Strategies and tools are embedded into the PD design to give participants opportunities to apply them to the content being covered. The choice to embed the strategies was driven by my data analysis and findings that all students interviewed identified strategy instruction as one of the most helpful tools they received during their program and that the strategies they learned throughout were instrumental in passing the state certification test. This active learning and observation, combined with reflection, provides the participants with more useful professional development than that of the traditional workshop model (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

### **Rationale**

The professional development/training curriculum and materials genre is an ideal design for the project because it provides participants with a thorough review of the tested competencies, a content review, and multiple opportunities for discussion,

collaboration, and practical hands-on learning. Based on the goals of this study, a PD project will help solve the problem RU's elementary education teacher candidates have been experiencing with the state certification test in reading and language arts. Providing PD that offers a review of the tested competencies will better prepare students to pass the SSAT subtest 1. The research questions guiding this study aimed to identify factors present in RU's elementary education teacher preparation program that best prepared teacher candidates to pass the reading and language arts SSAT. Analysis of the data revealed several factors that both students and faculty perceived as key elements in the successful completion of the SSAT subtest 1.

A review of reading and language arts terms and definitions, opportunities to brainstorm instructional recommendations based on situational scenarios, and hands-on application of activities, tools, and strategies were identified as most beneficial practices by those students who passed the SSAT subtest 1. The PD genre was selected as most appropriate for the project, offering participants a 3-day review of the test competencies. Planning PD beyond the traditional one-shot or drive-through approach that is hands-on, offers coaching and immediate feedback, and encourages critical thinking was the most appropriate direction for the project (Yamauchi et al., 2013).

### **Review of the Literature**

The review of the literature was conducted using the Walden University library's databases. Databases searched included ProQuest Education, Educational Research, and ERIC. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. The overall category searched was *effective professional development*. Additional subcategories included *professional*

*development in teacher education, professional development of reading teachers, effective literacy instruction, and best practices in reading and literacy instruction.*

The literature review provides evidence in support of professional development for the design of this project. Also included is a synthesis of the literature that addresses what effective PD can look like and how it differs from the more traditional approach to PD. Additionally, a review of best practices in reading/literacy instruction and how it can be merged into quality PD is provided.

In my earlier literature review, I studied teacher effectiveness, accountability and assessment, and teacher preparation programs. The conceptual framework for this study was constructivism and the effects of hands-on and experiential learning in the classroom versus a traditional, behavioristic approach to teaching. Evidence from analysis of the data indicated a preference among student and faculty participants for a constructivist approach to teaching and learning in the college classroom. Furthermore, preservice teachers felt they had a deeper understanding of the content when given opportunities to apply their learning in more practical hands-on situations that could also be easily transferred to their future classrooms.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development has a longstanding presence in education and the ongoing learning among teaching professionals. Research indicated that effective PD attended by preservice teachers lead to higher quality teaching and a greater commitment to the profession (Han, Hu, & Li, 2013). In recent years, traditional modes of PD,

including workshops and conferences, have been reported as being ineffective and lacking the qualities needed to not only increase teacher knowledge but to sustain that learning toward professional growth (Bayar, 2014). Years of research have shown a direct link between student achievement and teacher quality while other research has revealed many teacher preparation programs fail to adequately prepare teacher candidates for their future classrooms (Bayar, 2014). Resulting from federal initiatives including NCLB, professional educators have felt the push from standards-based reform emphasizing “improved teaching as the best path to increased learning and improved student performance” and have subsequently been required to participate in additional professional development activities (Wallace, 2014, p. 11).

Traditional workshops and conferences have been compared to nontraditional approaches to PD including mentoring, coaching, and peer observations. Although vast differences exist in teaching across subjects and grades, whether urban or rural, some similarities remain when identifying components of effective professional development. Effective PD in the arts, vocational education, and elementary and high schools includes components of collaboration and active learning (Abilock, Harada, & Fontichiaro, 2013; Shoulders & Myers, 2014; Stanley, Snell, & Edgar, 2014; Wallace, 2014). Mishkind (2014) found duration as the key factor in evidence-based professional learning, while Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) identified content, context, and design as the characteristics of effective professional development. The use of peer reviews and observations to inform PD decisions has also proved to be beneficial in improving teaching practices (Drew & Klopper, 2014). Furthermore, researchers at the Florida

Center for Reading Research found that one component of effective PD included the use of student outcome data to “establish priorities for adult learning, to monitor progress or growth in teacher skills, and to sustain continuous improvement” (Torgesen, Meadows, & Howard, 2006, para. 1). Through my review of the literature, I was able to identify some of the characteristics and practices of the most effective PD designs.

### **Components of Effective Professional Development**

Bayar (2014) compared the activities inherent in traditional and nontraditional PD and found mentoring, peer coaching, and hands-on practice to be more effective and preferred by participants over traditional workshop designs. Acknowledging the direct relationship between teacher quality and academic achievement, Bayar (2014) identified six components of effective professional development activities that were consistent with other studies on PD. Those six components include (a) a match to the current needs of the teacher, (b) a match to the current needs of the students, (c) teacher involvement in designing the PD activities, (d) opportunities for active participation, (e) long-term engagement, and (f) effective trainers (Bayar, 2014).

In a similar study on the design of effective PD, Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet (2000) reported student learning would increase only if teachers’ practices in the classroom reflected high standards. These high standards could be better achieved through participation in quality PD programs. Identified in this study were three structural features and three core features that set the context for PD. Structural features setting the context for effective PD were form, duration, and participation (Birman et al., 2000). Those features focused on networking and mentoring, sustained duration of the

event, and collective networking. The core features of effective PD were focused on improving content knowledge, active participation, and coherence. These reform approaches to PD have been proven to have a greater influence on changing teacher practice than traditional workshop approaches. However, it was noted that effective PD could still be a traditional workshop approach as long as the duration is appropriate, there is sufficient content on subject matter, active learning takes place, and coherence is maintained (Birman et al., 2000). This coherence could be evident in the later formation of professional learning communities (PLC) or communities of practice (CoP).

**Standards of effective pedagogy.** Design characteristics of effective PD should include consideration of the standards for effective pedagogy as identified by the Graduate School of Education, University of California Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) (Teemant, Wink, & Tyra, 2011). The five standards include active engagement, development of language and literacy, contextualization, activities that promote critical thinking, and instructional conversation. Instructional coaching and a sociocultural perspective on instructional practices are the driving forces behind these standards that support a differentiated model, working within students' zones of proximal development, and small group instruction.

Additional support of the five standards for effective pedagogy is found in Estrada's (2005) research identifying quality instruction as that which combines a variety of techniques and active student participation. However, rich instructional conversation (Standard 5) in the form of teacher-student dialogue is critical, especially among disadvantaged or at-risk student learners (Estrada, 2005). Instructional conversations

were found to foster and encourage critical thinking while supporting learning in the differentiated classroom (Yamauchi, Im, & Mark, 2013). Scaffolding and differentiating instruction, in which both students and teachers take active roles, were identified as characteristics of effective teaching. Similarly, Dixon et al. (2014) identified differentiated instruction as a key component in professional development and teacher efficacy. Differentiated instruction provides increased opportunities for hands-on application, practice, and coaching.

**Backwards design.** Planning instruction based on student needs has been identified extensively as the key to effective professional development. Knowing the needs of learners allows practitioners to design and implement standards-based PD, professional learning, or classroom instruction (Mishkind, 2014). Backwards planning or backwards design is an evidence-based model of PD that begins with the end and works backwards. The plan begins by identifying student learning needs through data analysis and/or a review of the standards, developing goals, and planning instruction. PLCs and CoPs are excellent examples of models that build coherence in PD and extend the learning beyond the context of the PD event (Mishkind, 2014).

Given the abundance of evidence that student achievement is directly linked to teacher efficacy, designing a PD project based on the standards of effective pedagogy, focusing heavily on the subject areas of reading and language arts and engaging participants in active hands-on learning, will serve two purposes. First, participants will receive a current review of the content necessary to pass the SSAT subtest 1. Second, participants will be given multiple opportunities to engage in hands-on learning activities

that will equip them with a larger repertoire of tools and strategies that can be used in their classrooms one day. Preparing teachers to be content area experts who have had learning opportunities grounded in both theory and practice that support hands-on active learning will produce highly effective teachers who can have a significant, positive impact on student learning. Designing the project based on a backwards design model ensures that the content of the PD focuses specifically on the standards and the needs of the participants and includes models of effective literacy instruction as well.

Interconnecting the content of reading and language arts and the methodology of best practices in literacy instruction with the ideals and characteristics of effective PD is the foundation for which the project was designed. Using hands-on approaches to teaching and active engagement among participants with opportunities for modeling, observing, and coaching will result in an effective PD project. The following section provides a review of the literature that supports effective practices in reading instruction.

### **Effective Teaching**

In the era of highly qualified teachers, the expectation is that all teachers be subject matter experts. Elementary education majors are held to, perhaps, the highest expectation as their certification prepares them to teach all subjects in grades one through eight. In *Teaching Subject Matter*, Grossman, Schoenfeld, and Lee (2005) posed the question of "...how can we teach what we do not understand ourselves?" asserting the importance of teachers as content experts (p. 205). This question reinforces and underlies the need for effective PD that models effective teaching and the purpose of this project's design, which is not to simply know, remember, or even understand, but for participants

to take ownership of the learning by analyzing, evaluating, and creating as well. An effective PD plan could not be designed without strong consideration of the best practices in teaching and, more specifically, the best practices in teaching reading and language arts.

Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) identified components of excellence when teaching reading including “the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print” (p. 215). In addition to strategy instruction, knowing how students learn to read, motivating students, and engaging them were identified as critical components of the foundations for literacy acquisition (Snow et al., 2005). Much of the literature reviewed identified the characteristics of best practices in the teaching of reading. However, substantial attention was given to the topics of differentiation and strategy instruction as the most influential practices in classrooms today. In the following sections I address best practices in teaching, differentiation, and strategy instruction and their application in reading/literacy classrooms.

### **Best Practices in Teaching Reading**

The notion of best practices may seem subjective to some teachers, but a large body of research exists that aims to reveal what constitutes best practices in teaching reading/literacy (Duke & Block, 2012). Since the National Reading Council was commissioned to identify best practices in reading, leading to the 1998 report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, researchers have continued to validate specific teaching practices that are linked to success in the acquisition of reading and future reading success in the early grades (Duke & Block, 2012). Identifying these best

practices, and combining them with best practices in PD, supports the design of an effective PD project. The goal of the project is to not only prepare participants for successful completion of the SSAT in reading and language arts, but to prepare them for their roles as teachers in their future classrooms as well.

Best practices, according to Roskos and Neuman (2014), are those which are supported with evidence and, if implemented correctly and routinely, yield positive gains and result in children becoming proficient readers. Another consideration of best practice is that it should be “implemented well with considerable intention, deliberate practice, and reflection for teachers to be successful at it” (Roskos & Neuman, 2014, p. 507). In addition to teachers possessing a deep understanding of the subject matter they teach, their teaching should be interactive, engaging, and differentiated based on each learner’s specific needs (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005).

One role of teacher preparation programs is to prepare their candidates with the foundation necessary to be effective reading teachers. Knowing and teaching the essential elements of evidence-based reading instruction as identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) are necessary for effective and balanced literacy instruction to transpire. Knowledge of phonological awareness, phonics and spelling, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension and the best methods for teaching these domains are essential. While materials play a large role in effective teaching, it is the teacher herself, along with her own knowledge and experience, who contributes to effective reading instruction (Noll & Lenhart, 2013). Teacher observations, the use of ongoing

assessments, and responsive teaching are as valuable, if not more so, than the instructional materials themselves (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

Identifying characteristics of effective first grade literacy instruction was the purpose of a study conducted by the Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA). In the study of 30 first grade teachers from schools across the United States identified as either typical or outstanding, researchers documented observations and recorded the behaviors of these teachers and students (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Allington, Block, & Morrow, 1998). Validation of teacher effectiveness was evidenced by standardized test scores measuring passage reading, vocabulary, language, word analysis, and a composite reading score. Findings revealed the following characteristics of the most effective classrooms: active student engagement, exceptional classroom management practices, a community of learners, explicit skills instruction, use of high-quality literature, multiple opportunities for reading and writing, differentiating instruction, scaffolding, encouraging and promoting independent learning, and cross-curricular integration (Pressley et al., 1998). Furthermore, effective teaching was identified as balanced, where teachers subscribe to a combination of instructional practices that work, differentiate instruction, teach skills and strategies that students need to know, and maintain a positive classroom environment where students display a high level of motivation and engagement (Pressley et al., 1998).

In a similar report by Duke and Block (2012), an attempt was made to identify characteristics that improved reading, specifically in the primary grades. Following the guidelines of a government report from The National Reading Panel and the National

Research Council's report on *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, the authors considered the role of teaching in improving reading and identified areas of improvement. Confirming that access to kindergarten and prekindergarten programs was instrumental in promoting early literacy foundational skills, Duke and Block (2012) identified word reading skills supported by explicit instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, and spelling that were consistent with improved student achievement in reading. Vocabulary instruction as part of a deliberately planned lesson was found to be consistent with increases in reading comprehension. Integration of vocabulary instruction across content areas, specifically in social studies and science, with the increased use of informational text was also shown as crucial in improving reading (Duke & Block, 2012). Finally, teaching specific reading comprehension strategies and providing multiple opportunities for application in authentic texts were reported as essential components in improving reading. Most notably, however, was the recommendation that differentiated strategy instruction was superior to prevalent teaching of comprehension strategies in whole group settings, much like those found in basal reading textbooks (Duke & Block, 2012).

Throughout my extensive review of the literature on effective teaching and what constitutes best practices in teaching reading, I noted a great deal of consistency among sources. However, two characteristics were identified more often as those crucial to student success in reading, but also often overlooked in many primary classrooms. Differentiation of instruction that supported a scaffolded model of teaching and explicit

teaching of comprehension strategies were identified as critical elements of best practices in teaching reading/literacy.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Aligned with the beliefs of constructivist theorists Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, learning occurs when the learner is completely engaged in the task (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Furthermore, Vygotsky's theory on the zone of proximal development maintained that learning is ideal when it is situated within the student's instructional range, neither too easy nor too difficult, and the learner can be supported, or scaffolded, by someone who already possesses the knowledge or skill being taught (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Offering varying degrees of support through scaffolding and knowing when to adjust the levels of support for different learners is characteristic of effective differentiated instruction (Ankrum, Genest, & Belcastro, 2013).

Differentiating instruction in reading/literacy is essential, but is often what is missing in schools with high numbers of learners failing to meet expectations for achievement (Robertson, Dougherty, Ford-Connors, & Paratore, 2014). Many of these learners come from culturally diverse backgrounds. Including the diverse learners' perspectives and knowledge as a foundation for literacy learning can increase opportunities for success (Chenowith, 2014). Effective teaching should be "highly interactive and should vary depending on the needs of each learner" (Hammerness et al., 2005, p. 363). Teachers and administrators, along with designers of PD, understand that effective instruction in literacy requires more than the use of a core reading program or basal reading series (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). Teachers must be able to understand what

their students already know and determine how to move them to the next level of success. Matching students with texts in which they can be successful is critical in creating a sense of self-efficacy among beginning readers.

In addition to matching appropriate texts with readers, effective teachers must plan for differentiation of skill and strategy instruction with intensity. Robertson, Dougherty, Ford-Connors, and Paratore (2014) identified instructional intensity as that which “provides explicit explanations, models, and practice of strategies, targets students’ specific needs, teaches at an appropriate pace, and ensures coherence among instructional settings” (p. 550). Differentiation has also been linked to fewer students being retained at the end of first grade in a response to intervention (RtI) model. In this model, differentiating literacy instruction among students whose reading and vocabulary skills fell below the benchmark resulted in fewer student retentions (Dombek & Connor, 2012). Differentiating in all tiers of RtI programs has been found to be the most effective approach when implementing the intervention, though many schools were found to only offer differentiation in Tiers 2 and 3 (Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012). The lack of necessary PD was cited as the primary reason teachers did not differentiate in their classrooms (Jones et al., 2012).

As part of an effective literacy classroom, writing must be a consideration as well as reading. Much like effective reading instruction, effective writing instruction must happen daily, with authentic opportunities to apply what students know about writing and should be differentiated with appropriate support from the teacher (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). Further evidence exists that supports promoting young writers’ development and

scaffolding instruction early on. This scaffolding provides opportunities to address and support the development of other literacy skills that will affect future literacy learning (Cabell, Tortorelli, & Gerde, 2013). Effective differentiated writing instruction should be guided by each student's needs and common goals set forth jointly by the teacher and student (Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012).

In the differentiated classroom, students are provided with support, when needed, to be successful and move forward along a continuum of learning. Following this gradual release of responsibility model provides learners with optimum opportunities to practice and apply new skills and strategies in a supported environment (Duke & Block, 2012). Application of newly mastered skills and strategies is essential for students to be successful (Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005).

### **Strategy Instruction**

Most often repeated throughout the research I reviewed was the importance of teaching comprehension strategies and skills, explicitly and in a differentiated context. Duke and Block (2012) identified comprehension strategy instruction as critical when attempting to improve reading in the primary grades. Word recognition provides a foundation for reading, but explicit instruction in comprehension strategies and skills is an integral component of responsive, or differentiated, teaching. More than just knowing the strategies and skills, successful readers have a deep understanding of both how and when to use them (Pressley et al., 1998). This metacognitive aspect of strategy knowledge allows readers to apply comprehension strategies to all types of texts across the curriculum, demonstrating a deeper level of learning. Good readers know which

strategies to use and when. However, struggling readers often lack this knowledge and are more likely to struggle with content area reading if explicit strategy instruction is not taught (Hughes & Parker-Katz, 2013). Teaching of comprehension strategies such as clarifying, summarizing, visualizing, connecting, and inferring deepens understanding, which increases engagement and, ultimately, the motivation to read and the perception of self as a good reader (Gurses & Adiguzel, 2013; Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014).

Differentiating instruction using literacy assessments, flexible grouping practices, and teaching comprehension strategies with opportunities for application in authentic settings were noted as primary needs in failed urban elementary schools in Washington State (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013). Emphasis again on the gradual release of responsibility model provided a successful implementation of strategy instruction in at risk schools. Coaches and teachers worked together to improve reading through the use of direct explicit instruction, teacher modeling, guided practice with a peer, and monitoring of independent practice.

Strategy instruction has been part of teacher preparation programs and PD among reading/literacy teachers for years. In 2002, the RAND Reading Study Group reported teachers who provided “comprehension strategy instruction that is deeply connected to learning subject matter, such as history and science, fosters comprehension development” (Snow et al., 2005, p. 26). Furthermore, students with a wide range of comprehension strategies were more successful readers.

Preparing teacher candidates to be effective requires teacher preparation programs to equip their students with a large repertoire of skills and strategies that can be taught

dynamically and effectively in their future classrooms (Snow et al., 2005). Furthermore, excellent reading teachers are required to teach strategies, both cognitive and metacognitive, in a differentiated and varied manner, so students may develop “appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print” (Snow et al., 2005, p. 215).

### **Best Practices for Reading Professional Development**

Merging effective professional development with best practices in reading was the ultimate goal of the project. Acknowledging that high quality PD directly impacts student achievement, the project design took several things into consideration. Building a community of learners, forming data-driven decisions, focusing on evidence-based practices, and employing a gradual release of responsibility framework (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2007) were all factored into the design of the PD Project.

### **Project Description**

#### **Resources, Supports, and Barriers**

**Needed resources.** Resources needed to implement this 3-day PD project include approval from the chair of the department of curriculum and instruction and the dean of the college of education. Once approval is given, the PD elective course should be added to the course schedule for the fall semester. A classroom large enough to accommodate 15-25 students is required. This classroom should include four to six large, round tables with chairs for small group and hands-on activities, a computer and projector to share PowerPoints, videos, and other multi-media presentations, and a white board for demonstrations. Access to the teacher resource room is also needed. An experienced

reading or language arts faculty member is needed to conduct the 3-day PD. If I am not able to conduct the PD myself, an equally qualified faculty member can do so with the materials provided.

**Existing supports.** The classrooms with necessary accommodations listed above exist on both campuses. Experienced reading and language arts faculty members are employed on both campuses and are qualified to conduct the PD. Support from department members and college and university administration exists as all are well aware of the local need. A course shell already exists for this course to be offered at any given time, so there is no need for any additional approval from the Regents.

**Potential barriers and solutions.** The greatest potential barrier I can foresee is meeting the minimum enrollment necessary for the course to make. The university requires a minimum of 15 students enrolled in a course for it to make. However, offering the course only once each semester during the spring and fall should eliminate this barrier. Offering this 3-day PD as an approved 1-hour elective to students should also eliminate the possibility of too few students enrolling.

### **Implementation and Timetable**

Implementation of the PD will take place during the Spring semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. A detailed description of the timetable for implementation is as follows:

1. I will ask the department chair to include the PD course “Reading and Language Arts Review and Strategies” in the Spring 2016-17 schedule (Fall 2016).

2. I will ask the department chair to secure a room with the necessary accommodations to conduct the PD (Fall 2016).
3. I will provide the department chair with an overview of the course to be included in the course description (Fall 2016).
4. I will compile the necessary materials and make copies of handouts and articles needed to conduct the PD (Fall 2016).
5. I will conduct the PD over the course of three Saturdays (8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.) (Spring 2016).
6. Upon completion of the workshop, I will ask participants to complete exit slips as an evaluation of the project. Any feedback will be used to improve future training (Spring 2016).

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Researcher and Others**

**Researcher.** My responsibility as the researcher was to effectively plan a 3-day professional development project based on the findings of my research. As facilitator of the PD, my role will be to ensure my participants, the elementary education teacher candidates at RU, are receiving the necessary information to be successful on their SSAT. It is also my role as facilitator to model techniques and strategies that participants can practice during the PD and ultimately transfer and apply them in their own classrooms. Finally, it is my role as facilitator to be responsive to the needs and prior knowledge of my participants and differentiate instruction (process, product, and content) as needed in order for all participants to be successful.

**Participants.** The participants of this PD will be elementary education teacher

candidates preparing to take their reading/language arts subject area tests. Their roles are to be active participants in the PD as they review content area specific material, participate in small and large group discussions, and as they practice and apply new strategies in which to better understand the content.

**Curriculum and instruction department chair.** The role of my department chair is to ensure the course is offered once each semester during the fall and spring.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

#### **Formative Evaluation**

An evaluation plan was designed to determine the overall effectiveness of the project. Formative evaluation was chosen as the method best suited for this project based on its design to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of a program or project (Han et al., 2013). Utilizing formative evaluation during the planning phase of a project often can be the first step in understanding the value of the program (Sugar, 2014). A brief survey (see Appendix A) was created to aid in identifying strengths and weaknesses of the project. Prior to implementation, the project will be shared with other faculty in the curriculum and instruction department who may be required to teach the workshop at some time in the future. These faculty members will review the project and respond to the survey by answering questions regarding content, clarity, and ease of understanding.

#### **Justification for this Type of Evaluation**

Used prior to implementation of the project, formative evaluation allows for suggestions for changes and modifications that might strengthen or improve the program. Formative evaluation can be beneficial in a variety of ways. According to Han et al.

(2013), formative evaluation can diagnose strengths and weaknesses, validate a program's goal, and provide feedback and recommendations for improvement. Additionally, formative evaluation can be used during the implementation phase of a project with a pilot group to provide continuous improvement and immediate feedback regarding the program's strengths and weaknesses (Peterson, 2016).

### **Overall Evaluation Goals**

The purpose of formative evaluation is to improve the quality of the program (Han et al., 2013). The primary goal of this evaluation is to improve the project by identifying any existing weaknesses. Evaluators will be asked a variety of questions regarding clarity, organization, content, timing, and overall presentation including a check of grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Recommendations for changes will be reviewed and considered before initial implementation of the project.

### **Description of Key Stakeholders**

Any evaluation can be used to inform key stakeholders of findings to better their understanding or, potentially, change their way of thinking about a problem or situation (Adams, Nnawulezi, & Vandenberg, 2015). For the purpose of evaluation of the project, key stakeholders are those who hold administrative positions within RU's college of education. The college's dean and the chair of the curriculum and instruction department serve as key stakeholders for this project. Providing key stakeholders with a quality program that has been evaluated prior to implementation ensures that it meets the standards and requirements of such programs offered through the university.

## **Project Implications**

### **Implications for Social Change**

With increases in the demand for elementary education teachers across the state, the need for highly qualified teachers has never been greater. Providing additional opportunities to increase their content knowledge through rich discussions and hands-on learning opportunities will help to better prepare RU's teacher candidates for success on certification tests and in their future classrooms. Better preparation of candidates could eliminate the need for multiple attempts to pass the SSAT subtest 1, allowing them to stay on track to complete their full internships and graduate on schedule. By entering the workforce sooner, these teachers will help reduce the critical teacher shortage across the state. Improving the experiences of RU's teacher candidates by offering this PD as a means of strengthening their content knowledge as well as their knowledge of pedagogy through effective strategy instruction, the potential for positive social change is infinite as more and more highly qualified teachers will be able to enter classrooms across the state.

### **Project Importance**

This study was developed with key stakeholders in mind. Stakeholders can be defined as those who hold an interest in the activities of any given organization and may or may not serve to influence the decisions made by the organization (Kettunen, 2015). Locally, the key stakeholders in this study include, primarily, the elementary education teacher candidates enrolled at RU. In addition to the teacher candidates, elementary education faculty and college and university administration serve as stakeholders.

Slightly farther reaching, yet still holding a vested interest, are the public schools, their students, and the communities they serve in which the graduates will eventually teach.

The purpose of this project is to increase the content knowledge of its participants and to better prepare RU's elementary education teacher candidates for their future classroom teaching assignments. Changing the ways in which reading and language arts content is presented, and providing candidates with additional opportunities to apply learning, will hopefully result in increased rates of passing on the SSAT subtest 1. This project will not only benefit the primary stakeholders, the teacher candidates, but it will also benefit RU's college of education, the university itself, and the schoolchildren, their families, and communities across the state and nation as more highly qualified teachers enter the profession during this critical teacher shortage.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to identify what factors of RU's elementary education program best prepared students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT. Students and faculty members were interviewed and findings of the study were used to develop a 3-day PD plan that could serve as a preparatory course prior to taking the SSAT subtest 1.

In Section 3 I provided a brief description of the proposed project, goals of the project, and a rationale for the project design. Additionally, I provided a review of the literature, a description of the proposed project, an evaluation plan, and implications for the project including implications for social change. In Section 4, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of the project and make recommendations for alternative

approaches. I also discuss scholarship, project development, and leadership and change, and reflect on the importance of this work. Finally, I discuss implications, applications, and the directions for possible future research.

#### Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this case study, I examined both faculty and student perceptions of what best prepared elementary education majors to pass the reading and language arts subject area test. Based on my findings, I developed a PD plan that provides a review of subject area content covered on the SSAT subtest 1. This content review is supported with multiple opportunities to interact through small and large group discussions, independent reading, and strategy instruction. Participants have multiple opportunities to apply the strategies throughout the course of the PD. In Section 4, I address strengths and limitations of the project as well as recommendations for alternative approaches to sharing the findings of my study. Additionally, I focus on scholarship, project development, and leadership and change as a result of the project study. Finally, I reflect on the importance of the work and discuss implications, applications, and directions for future research.

#### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

A direct correlation exists between high-quality PD and student achievement. Identifying factors inherent in high-quality PD is instrumental in planning future programs that will enhance and expand the knowledge base of preservice and in-service teachers alike (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2007). Several strengths, as well as a few limitations, were identified in the project.

#### **Strengths**

Designing effective PD for literacy educators was the premise for the project. Planning a project driven directly by the findings of the study was one of the strengths identified. Analysis of data revealed the perceptions of what best prepared teacher

candidates for success on the SSAT subtest 1 from both faculty and student participants. Knowledge of this valuable information was essential in the planning of the PD. An additional strength of the project was that it embedded many hands-on opportunities for participants to practice and apply new strategies that would serve them in a variety of ways. First, the strategies would assist them in better understanding the content being reviewed. Second, use of these strategies in the workshop would provide participants with additional resources that they could reference on their constructed response portions of the exam. Finally, and most importantly, the strategies learned in the workshop can be shared with the participants' future students once they enter the classroom. Additionally, the inexpensive implementation, minimal requirement for materials, and existing space readily available were also strengths of the project. Similarly, this project can be embedded into existing programs by offering students the opportunity to receive 1 hour of education elective credit (required) as well as the content review and test prep. In addition to these strengths, there were two primary strengths of this project.

Knowledge of best practices in the teaching of reading and the planning of effective PD were crucial to the design of this project. Building a community of learners, functioning from a data-driven approach, focusing on research-based best practices, and employing a framework that allows the presenter to support and scaffold the participants through each stage of the workshop to ensure deeper understanding were considered when planning this project (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2007). Similarly, techniques including strategy instruction and active learning among participants were major strengths of the project (Estrada, 2016; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2013). The project offers

multiple modalities of teaching and learning including whole group and small group instruction, collaboration with peers, inquiry learning, teacher modeling and scaffolding, and multiple opportunities for participants to employ all levels of Bloom's taxonomy including applying, creating, and analyzing.

The adoption of the backwards planning or backwards design approach was also one of the strengths of this study. By identifying student learning needs first, the tested competencies in this case, then working backwards to meet those goals by planning specific instruction addressing each of the tested competencies, the project seamlessly merges "what educators need to learn and do and what students need to learn and do" (Mishkind, 2014, p. 3). Knowing the tested competencies and planning instruction that addresses those competencies while embedding research-based best practices in PD were crucial in the development of a strong PD plan.

### **Limitations**

Although the strengths far outweigh the limitations inherent in this project, there were a few limitations. The greatest limitation was in the length of the project. Effective PD typically sustains itself over a longer period of time and provides for frequent coaching, mentoring, and support (Mishkind, 2014). Logistically, however, planning a PD that lasted more than 24 hours would not have been feasible for student participants. Using this PD as both a test review and for fulfilling a 1-hour elective credit made it a logical choice for students. Additionally, extending the PD beyond 3 days would possibly interfere with the testing schedule and participants could likely have already taken the test before the PD ends.

Though the project was designed based on best practices of teaching and PD, it does not allow for much differentiated instruction in terms of individualization (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). While the PD was designed to model a variety of teaching methods, approaches, and strategies, it was not planned with the intention of accommodating struggling learners through individualized or one-on-one instruction (Hammerness et al., 2005.). Effective teaching includes teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice as well as opportunities to conference with students individually, routinely, and on an as needed basis (Gerde, Bingham, & Wasik, 2012). The PD provides only one or two opportunities each day for participants to receive individualized instruction if needed.

The project was created to reflect the current test format and competencies. This poses a limitation of the project as it may not align with future iterations of the test and may no longer be relevant. Another limitation of the project is that it is no guarantee that participating in the PD will garner a passing test score. Finally, a more profound limitation is that this PD will only be available to current elementary education majors at RU. Students attending a different teacher preparation program in the state who are also looking for assistance in passing the SSAT will not be able to participate in the PD without applying and being admitted to RU's college of education first.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

Although a PD training was planned for this project, alternative approaches to addressing the local problem were possible. A policy recommendation, or position paper, could have been created. Addressing current policies and identifying how they might

negatively impact teacher candidates' rates of passing on the SSAT could have been presented to university administration.

One recommendation would have been to modify the current policy that prohibits teacher candidates from advancing into their full internships until they achieve a passing score on the required subject area tests by allowing students to participate in their full internships before achieving a passing score on the SSAT subtest 1. During full internships, students gain valuable hands-on experience in the classroom that would increase their knowledge base and experiences which could, in turn, positively impact their test scores.

A second recommendation would have been to evaluate all reading and language arts courses and ensure that all tested competencies aligned with assignments embedded within the courses. Requiring all reading and language arts faculty members to know and teach the tested competencies as they relate to their courses could potentially increase the rate of passing among teacher candidates. Additionally, requiring all reading and language arts faculty to work collaboratively to plan instructional activities that address the competencies and require involved faculty to include those assignments in their courses could have a positive impact on students' rates of passing.

Another approach was to write a curriculum plan. Similar to a PD, but lasting a minimum of 9 weeks, a curriculum plan for an additional 3-hour comprehensive reading and language arts course could have been created. During this course, enrolled students would have additional field experiences and observations in elementary classrooms. Teacher candidates would be directly involved in the assessment and instruction cycle of

planning and teaching reading/language arts lessons, like a weekly internship but with greater depth and increased hands-on participation allowing for multiple opportunities for application of learned material.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

I was challenged regularly throughout this process. One of the greatest challenges was in my ability to think critically and subsequently put those thoughts into coherent, scholarly words on the page. I was also challenged to become a researcher, a role I had never fully undertaken. Finally, I was challenged to become an active problem solver. These challenges were among the greatest obstacles I faced throughout this process. Using current literature about teaching and learning, scholars can help to develop classroom environments in which faculty can actively merge theory into practice, which can evolve into leadership and change (Geertsema, 2016). Reviewing the current body of literature, conducting research, analyzing and interpreting the data, and making recommendations to stakeholders for solutions to the problem were instrumental in the development of leadership and change in me as a scholar and practitioner.

As a scholar, I grew exponentially in my ability to conduct research and disseminate findings. Publishing an original piece of work no longer seems unattainable, but rather a manageable necessity in a tenure-track position. As a practitioner, I realized my greatest development. Conducting research through personal interviews of students and colleagues, I learned first-hand what worked and what did not, what students liked and what seemed a waste of time, and what other faculty do in their classrooms to promote learning while incorporating best practices. Upon completion of my interviews,

I immediately began to integrate changes in my current classroom practices. Finally, as a novice in the realm of project development, I quickly learned this is a huge task, one that is not easy to put into place and one that requires empirical evidence to support claims and ideas. With an evidence-based project, stakeholders can be certain they are receiving a worthwhile and effective product.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

Throughout my extensive review of the literature, I confirmed my beliefs about the importance of this work. I believe the most important aspect of this study is the preparation of highly qualified teachers who are passionate about positively changing the lives of the children they teach. These teaching professionals are ready to enter the workforce as soon as possible to help minimize the teacher shortage crisis felt locally and across the country. Also of great importance, I feel scholars and practitioners should serve as models for learners. Although tenure and promotion are valued in higher education, they should not be an excuse for maintaining the status quo. Lifelong learners are those who are frequently changing their methods to reflect best practices. In teacher preparation, it is important to prepare future teachers for today's classrooms, giving them access to the latest methods, materials, and approaches that impact student learning.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

#### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

The implications for positive social change within this study are multifaceted, affecting the individual, family, organization, and society. The purpose for this study was to find a solution to the local problem. However, in identifying ways to support

elementary education students in their preparation for the reading and language arts SSAT, evidence of opportunities to positively impact social change evolved from the study.

**The individual.** For this study, the individual refers to the elementary education teacher candidate. Implications for this individual include being fully prepared to take and pass the SSAT on the first attempt, saving time and money by reducing the number of attempts to pass the test, and graduating on schedule and becoming a financial contributor to her or his household. Additionally, the teacher candidate enters the workforce a well-prepared and highly qualified professional educator with the potential to positively impact student achievement in her or his classroom for years to come.

**The family.** Positive social change implications for the family are demonstrated through the individual graduating on schedule, thereby saving time and money on multiple attempts on the test, entering the workforce, and becoming a financial contributor within the household. The family members are also positively impacted by seeing the benefits and importance of having a college education.

**The organization.** In this study, RU is the organization reaping the benefits of positive social change. Benefits to the university begin with more teacher candidates passing the SSAT. Having a greater number of students passing this state certification test puts the university in a position of higher esteem with the reputation of graduating more qualified teachers, which is a favorable statistic to accreditation reviewers. Also important to the university is the potential for increases in enrollment, retention, and

graduation of certified teachers as fewer frustrated candidates change their majors or drop out of college as a result of not passing the test after multiple attempts.

**Society and policy.** Perhaps the greatest recipient for positive social change is society. Taking a closer look at what is necessary to fully prepare highly qualified teachers in today's society, policy leaders and administrators may work together to strengthen teacher preparation programs while working to continuously fund education across states. Respecting teachers as the professionals they are and realizing that society cannot thrive without an educated workforce could potentially change the often negative connotation that comes with being a teacher today. This could result in more college students pursuing a career in education and minimizing, if not eliminating, the teacher shortage crisis by putting more highly qualified teachers in classrooms right out of college. If teachers feel successful and supported from the beginning, they are less likely to suffer from burnout early on and will remain in the classroom where they can positively impact student achievement for many years.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Through this study I found an abundance of evidence supporting best practices in the classroom. Theorists have identified many ways in which learners, including adult learners, prefer to interact in the classroom. Learners of all ages tend to prefer hands-on, experiential learning (Knowles et al., 2005). Offering this approach to teacher candidates, along with supervised opportunities for practical application in the field, prepares them for the kind of teaching that will be expected of them once they begin their

teaching careers. These opportunities allow teacher candidates to personally merge theory into practice before they graduate.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings of my research, I have two recommendations for practice at RU. First, my recommendation is to ensure that all reading and language arts faculty members know the competencies covered on the SSAT subtest 1. I would also recommend an alignment exercise looking at all activities and assignments in each course and matching them with the corresponding tested competency. If some of the competencies cannot be sufficiently addressed by current curricula, the course content should be changed or modified to include those competencies.

My second recommendation would be to change the order in which it is suggested students take courses. Rather than staggering out the reading and language arts courses over four or five semesters, I recommend students consolidate those four courses into three consecutive semesters and take the SSAT subtest 1 immediately upon completion of the final course.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In light of this study, I have several recommendations for future research that could prove beneficial in preparing teacher candidates for successful completion of the SSAT subtest 1. First, I recommend a correlational study looking at student GPAs and the rate of passing the SSAT. This could indicate whether greater general knowledge and overall school success relates to passing the SSAT. Second, I suggest looking at teacher candidates' grades they received in reading and language arts courses to see if they

correlate with scores on the SSAT. Finally, I recommend a study of the attributes of students who do well on tests in general and look for evidence of either sufficient content knowledge or excellent test-taking skills.

### **Conclusion**

This case study set out to identify the perceived aspects inherent in RU's elementary education teacher preparation program that best equips candidates with the skills and dispositions necessary to pass the SSAT subtest 1. Interviews with faculty and students confirmed my beliefs that a constructivist approach to teaching and learning was preferred and that offering students multiple opportunities to apply their learning through hands-on engagement, both in the classroom and in the field, helped in constructing meaningful connections between theory and practice. The development of a PD plan that incorporates many of the elements that participants identified as beneficial will serve as a rigorous review of reading and language arts content. Furthermore, embedding many effective instructional strategies into the review provides opportunities for participants to experience how beneficial the strategies can be in better understanding content. These known strategies can become part of the future teachers' repertoires and, subsequently, can be applied in their classrooms with their students when they enter the teaching profession. Preparing highly qualified teachers who possess in-depth subject matter knowledge, understand effective pedagogy, and utilize best practices in teaching reading and language arts has the potential to positively impact students' academic achievement across the state for generations to come.

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## Appendix A: SSAT Subtest 1 Professional Development Plan

### **Required Materials:**

All students should bring with them one composition notebook/learning log, blank paper, pencils, pens, *Literacy in the Early Grades* (required text from READ 4023) (Tompkins, 2015), and *The Reading Strategies Book* (required text from READ 4013) (Serravallo, 2015). All other required materials for the training will be provided by the C & I department and are available in the Teacher Resource Room. Materials include: chart paper, card stock, colored paper, markers, colored pencils, tape, sticky notes, computer/printer, die cut machine, scissors, paper cutter, laminator, and copies of required handouts and journal articles.

### **Agenda – Day 1**

**(8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)**

#### **8:00-8:30**

- Welcome, Introductions, Overview of Day 1 Agenda
  - Facilitator and students will introduce themselves; students will make a name tag/tent with provided card stock and markers by folding the card stock in half lengthwise and writing their names on one side

#### **8:30-8:45**

- Introduce the SSAT subtest 1 Competencies (PowerPoint Slides 2-4)

#### **8:45-9:45**

- Review the Language Arts – Listening, Speaking, Viewing, and Visually Representing (Slides 5-8) (Competency 12)

- Strategy Application – *Challenge Questions* (Slide 9)

**9:45-10:00 – Break**

**10:00-11:00**

- Writing Process – Activate Prior Knowledge: Jigsaw Activity - Read *Navigating the Writing Process* (Poindexter & Oliver, 1999) (Slide 10)

**11:00-12:00**

- Review the writing process, writing skills and strategies, and research (Slides 11-18) (Competencies 9, 10, and 11)
- QuickWrite: How will you use the writing process when writing your constructed response on the SSAT? (Slide 19)

**12:00-12:30 – Lunch – On Your Own**

**12:30-1:00**

- **Reflect and Respond:** In your learning log, record a minimum of three things you took away from this morning's session. How will you use these in your future classroom? What questions do you still have about language arts and/or writing?
- Find a partner; share your takeaways and any questions you still have
- Write unanswered questions on sticky notes and place on white board
- Facilitator addresses any unanswered questions

**1:00-2:00**

- Review Phonological/Phonemic Awareness (Slides 20-21) (Competency1)
- Teaching Phonemic Awareness (Slide 22)

**2:00-2:45**

- Dismiss students to Teacher Resource Room where they will each create one game/activity, suitable for small group play, and that reinforces a chosen dimension of phonemic awareness. Final products should be colorful and laminated. Students may create an original game or can replicate one found on the internet (www.fcrr.org, Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers, etc.) (all materials available in Teacher Resource Room)

**2:45-3:00 – Break****3:00-3:45**

- In small groups, each student will explain the game he/she made including which dimension of phonemic awareness it addresses and the procedures/rules for playing it, and then the students will play each game that was made. After all games have been played, members of each small group will select one they like best (most creative, unusual, fun, etc.) and have the participant who created it share with the whole group, explaining what the game is, where they found the idea, and how to play it.

**3:45-4:00**

- Reflect in composition notebook/learning logs and respond to the following questions:
  - How are phonological and phonemic awareness different?
  - Choose any two of the dimensions of phonemic awareness and list ideas for activities in the classroom that would reinforce them.

**4:00 - Dismissal****Agenda – Day 2****(8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)****8:00-8:30**

- Q&A
  - Address any questions or concerns from previous day
  - Revisit Phonological/Phonemic Awareness – have volunteers share what they wrote in their learning logs
- Overview of Day 2 Agenda

**8:30-10:00**

- Review Phonics Concepts and Phonics Basics (Slides 23-30 ) (Competency 2)
- Teaching Phonics (Slide 31)
- QuickWrite: What are the roles of phonemic awareness and phonics in a balanced literacy classroom? How will you incorporate these into your future classrooms? (Slide 32)

**10:00-10:15 – Break****10:15-11:15**

- Review Spelling and Word Recognition (Competency 3) (Slide 33)
- Spelling (Slides 34-37)
  - Spelling Development (Slide 34)
  - Stages of Spelling Development (Slide 35)
  - Teaching Spelling (Slide 36)

- Assessing Spelling (Slide 37)
- Word Recognition (Slide 38)

**11:15-12:00**

- Strategy Application – *Think, “Have I Seen It on the Word Wall?”* (Slide 39)
  - Materials Needed: copies of *Building Practical Knowledge of Letter-Sound Correspondences: A Beginner’s Word Wall and Beyond* (Wagstaff, 1998); *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015), Strategy 4.2, *Think, “Have I Seen It on the Word Wall?”*, highlighter pens, paper, pencil or pen.

**12:00-12:30 – Lunch on Your Own****12:30 – 1:30**

- Review Fluency (Competency 4) (Slides 40-41)
- Teaching and Assessing Fluency (Slides 42-45)

**1:30-2:30**

- Small Group Activity: Readers Theater (Slide 46)
  - (30 minutes) Dismiss participants to the Teacher Resource Room to search the internet for Readers Theater scripts. Each table group will select one script to perform for the whole group. Participants will print copies of their scripts, practice their lines, and, if they choose, make simple props to support in telling the story using materials in the Teacher Resource Room.
  - (30 minutes) Participants will return to classroom and each table group will present their Readers Theater script to the whole group.

**2:30-2:45 – Break****2:45-3:30**

- Review Vocabulary (Competency 5) (Slide 47)
  - Activate Prior Knowledge: Read aloud, *Miss Alaineus; A Vocabulary Disaster* (Frasier, 2000).
  - Ask participants to reflect on their own vocabulary learning and share at their table groups. How was it different or similar to the instruction in *Miss Alaineus*?
  - Teaching Vocabulary (Slides 48-50)

**3:30-4:00**

- Small Group Activity: Making Words (Slide 51)
  - Materials Needed: making words mat for each participant, paper letter tiles (*a, a, o, u, b, c, l, r, v, y*) for each participant, pencil or pen.
  - Procedures: hand out making words mat and letter tiles to each participant; have participants arrange the letter tiles in the above order (alphabetically, vowels first), then begin manipulating the letters to create 2, 3, 4, and 5 or more letter words; record words in the correct column (by word length) on the making words mat; using all the letter tiles, see if participants can unscramble to make the “mystery” word;
  - Reflect and Respond: In composition notebooks/learning logs, have participants reflect on the strategies they used to create the words they came up with. Also, have participants reflect on the activity and discuss

how it addresses both spelling and vocabulary skills and how this activity is naturally differentiated.

**4:00 – Dismiss**

### **Agenda – Day 3**

**(8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.)**

**8:00-8:30**

- Q&A
  - Address any questions or concerns from previous day
  - Revisit Vocabulary Instruction – have volunteers share what they wrote in their learning logs
- Overview of Day 3 Agenda

**8:30-9:15**

- Review Comprehension Strategies (Competency 6) (Slide 52)
  - Differentiate between skills and strategies
- Activate Prior Knowledge – Comprehension Strategies Sort (Slides 53-54)
  - Materials Needed: one copy of the sort (next slide) for each table group, scissors for each table, glue sticks, large sheets of construction paper, *Literacy in the Early Grades* text
  - Procedures: pass out materials to each table group; collaboratively, have groups sort and match the strategies with the reader behaviors; once they think they have them all correct, have them check their sorts with the chart

on pg. 220 in *Literacy in the Early Grades*; make any necessary changes; glue correct sorts onto construction paper.

### **9:15-10:15**

- Review Comprehension of Narrative Text (Competency 7) (Slides 55-62)
  - Prerequisites for Comprehension
  - Teaching Comprehension of Narrative Text
    - Narrative Genres
    - Elements of Story Structure
    - Narrative Devices
  - Assessing Comprehension of Narrative Text

### **10:15-10:30 – Break**

### **10:30-11:30**

- Review Comprehension of Expository Text (Competency 8) (Slides 63-66)
  - Teaching Comprehension of Expository Text
    - Expository Genres
    - Expository Text Structures
    - Expository Text Features
  - Strategy Application – *Don't Skip It!* (Slide 67)
    - Materials Needed: copy of *Little Kids First Big Book of Animals* (Hughes, 2014); *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015), *Don't Skip It!* strategy 10.12; sticky notes; pens, pencils, markers.

- Procedures: Facilitator reads aloud several pages from the text, drawing attention to the various text features on the page. Next, facilitator reads aloud the main text only on two pages. *Did we learn everything we could on these pages?* Then she reads aloud the graphics and captions on the next two pages. *How much information do we miss when only reading one or the other, rather than both the main text and the graphics?* Model how to make a plan for reading expository text: First, survey the pages, looking for text, graphics, captions, maps, etc. Second, draw attention to ALL the features in the text by placing sticky notes near the features. Draw an arrow on the sticky notes pointing to the information in that feature. Finally, ask questions, prompting the reader to make sure they have a plan for reading all the text. Where will you start? Show me with your finger what your plan is for reading the whole page. How will you make sure you read and look at everything? OK, now that you have a plan, let's start reading.
- Strategy Application – *Don't Skip It!*, cont. (Slide 68)
  - Materials Needed: copy of *"High 5!" Strategies to Enhance Comprehension of Expository Text* (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010); *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015) *Don't Skip It!*

strategy 10.12; sticky notes; pens, pencils, markers, and Herringbone graphic organizer.

- Procedures: Pass out a copy of the “*High 5!*” article to each participant; have participants follow the procedures on the previous slide for the *Don’t Skip It!* strategy with the article; instruct participants to find a partner (if there is an uneven number of participants, one group can have 3); partner groups will take turns role playing with one partner as the “teacher” and the other as the “student”; the “teacher” will prompt the “student” using the following: Where will you start? Show me with your finger what your plan is for reading the whole page. How will you make sure you read and look at everything? OK, now that you have a plan, let’s start reading; participants will switch roles and repeat the process; once all participants have a plan for reading the entire article including the main text and all the graphic sources, instruct participants to read the article during their working lunch break; finally, participants will complete the Herringbone graphic organizer (Slide 69) and bring back after lunch for a brief discussion.

- Assessing Comprehension of Expository Text (Slide 70)

**11:30-12:30 – Lunch on Your Own** – Read the “*High 5!*” article and complete the Herringbone graphic organizer

**12:30-12:45**

- At table groups, participants will share and discuss their Herringbone organizers completed at lunch, noting similarities and differences in the main ideas and supporting details that each participant identified; discuss any differences and how they are relevant.

**12:45-1:45**

- Writing the Constructed Response (Slides 71-78)
  - What *is* the constructed response?
  - How is it scored?
  - Prewriting and Organizing the response

**1:45-2:00 – Break****2:00-3:00**

- Writing the Constructed Response (Slides 79-80)
  - Review the assignment
    - Strong sample response
      - Using the scoring rubric, provide evidence why you feel this is a *strong* response.
    - Weak sample response
      - Looking at the rubric again, what evidence in the sample represents a weak response?
      - What are the key factors that set these two responses apart?
      - How would you score these two responses using the rubric?

**3:00-3:45**

- Writing the Constructed Response (Slides 81-82)
  - Guided Practice
    - Writing the response
    - Scoring the response

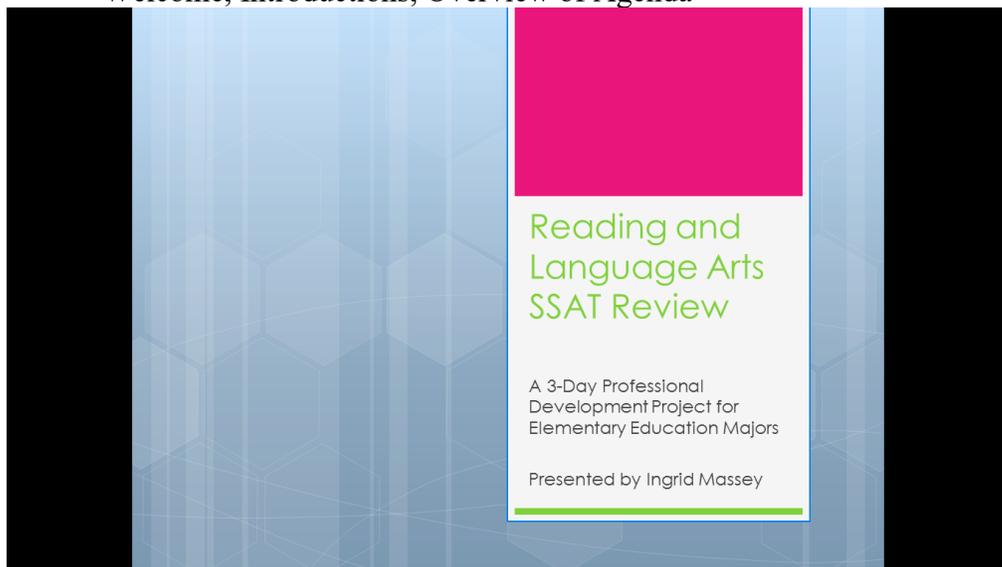
**3:45-4:00**

- Reflect and Respond (Slide 83)
  - In composition notebooks/response journals, ask participants to respond to the following prompt:
    - Using what you know about the writing process (day 1) and what you know about writing the constructed response, how will you plan and organize your thoughts and instructional recommendations prior to beginning your draft?
    - How will you ensure you have included all the required aspects of the response and have addressed them fully?
- Exit Slips (Slides 84-85)
  - Using the exit slips provided, please respond to the following prompts:
    - Three things I learned over the course of the workshop are:
    - Something I'm still not sure about is:
    - The thing that was most beneficial was:
    - The thing that was least beneficial was:
    - I wish:

**4:00 - Dismiss**

Slide 1

- Welcome, Introductions, Overview of Agenda



Facilitator and participants will introduce themselves; participants will make a name tag/tent with provided card stock and markers by folding the card stock in half lengthwise and writing their names on one side

Slides 2 – 4

- Introduce the SSAT subtest 1 Competencies

**Tested Competencies –  
Reading, 1-4**

- **Competency 1** - Apply knowledge of foundations of literacy development in English, including development and assessment of phonological and phonemic awareness.
- **Competency 2** - Apply knowledge of the alphabetic principle and the development and assessment of accurate, automatic word recognition and spelling at beginning stages of literacy development.
- **Competency 3** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of accurate, automatic word recognition and spelling at later stages of literacy development.
- **Competency 4** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of fluency at all stages of reading development.

2

Read aloud competencies 1-4.

**Tested Competencies –  
Reading, 5-8**

- **Competency 5** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of vocabulary knowledge and skills.
- **Competency 6** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of reading comprehension and comprehension strategies.
- **Competency 7** - Apply knowledge of literary texts and development and assessment of skills and strategies for comprehending and analyzing literature.
- **Competency 8** - Apply knowledge of informational texts, development and assessment of skills for comprehending and analyzing informational texts, and study and research skills.

3

Read aloud competencies 5-8.

## Tested Competencies – Language Arts, 9-12

- **Competency 9** - Apply knowledge of the foundations of writing development and the fundamental elements of the writing process.
- **Competency 10** - Apply knowledge of writing skills and strategies for various purposes and audiences.
- **Competency 11** - Apply knowledge of the fundamental elements of research to build and present knowledge.
- **Competency 12** - Apply knowledge of oral language and visual literacy, including listening, speaking, viewing, and representing.

Read aloud competencies 9-12.

Slides 5-8

- Review the Language Arts – Listening, Speaking, Viewing, and Visually Representing

## Language Arts – Competency 12

- Apply knowledge of oral language and visual literacy, including listening, speaking, viewing, and representing.
  - Listening –
    - Discriminative listening is used to develop phonemic awareness
    - Aesthetic listening occurs when teachers read stories aloud, view puppet shows, plays, and movie versions of stories
    - Efferent listening is used to remember something
    - Critical listening is used to evaluate a message

Revisit competency 12 and discuss types of listening.

## Language Arts – Competency 12, continued

- Speaking –
  - Oral language (conversation) is developed through talking about literature, participating in conversations, and giving reports; can be both formal and informal
  - Interviews refine questioning skills and help students use oral and written language for authentic purposes
  - Debates allow students to take positions on a topic they feel passionate about and try to persuade the opposing side
  - Reader's Theatre is a dramatic presentation of a story by a group of readers following a written script; readers assume a role of a book character and read with great expression and fluency

6

Discuss speaking as a language art; have participants suggest other forms of speaking that they would include in this list.

## Language Arts – Competency 12, continued

- Viewing and Visually Representing
  - Viewing includes media (television, film, commercials, advertisements, photos, illustrations, internet, etc.) and is an important component of literacy that requires comprehension strategies in both reading and viewing
  - Visually representing includes students creating meaning through various visual modes (dioramas, sketch to stretch, quilts)

7

Have participants brainstorm other types of visual representations in the elementary classroom.

## Language Arts – Competency 12, continued

- Expressive and Receptive Language
  - Expressive language is the ability to express what one wants or needs
  - Receptive language is the ability to understand what is being said or read; distinguishes between literal and figurative language

Have participants brainstorm examples of each.

### Slide 9

- Strategy Application – Challenge Questions

## Strategy Application – Challenge Questions

- Materials Needed: copy of *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (Steig, 1969); *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015) Challenge Questions strategy 12.17; sticky notes; pens, pencils, markers
- Procedures:
  - Facilitator reads aloud *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*
    - After reading, ask participants a "stop" question (literal, answer found in book), such as: *What did Sylvester find?* This question stops the conversation because of the literal answer found in the book. Now model a challenge question that promotes critical thinking and furthers the conversation, such as: *What do you think the author is trying to teach us in the end of the story?*
    - Divide participants into partner groups of 2-3; using sticky notes and writing utensils, ask groups to generate 3-5 challenge questions for *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*; have partner groups share challenge questions with whole group
    - As a large group, talk about the process of generating challenge questions and what participants were required to do in order to answer challenge questions; have participants discuss how the *Challenge Questions* strategy promotes oral language/language arts and discuss how this strategy can be implemented in their future classrooms.

Read aloud *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* and follow procedures listed on slide for Challenge Questions strategy from *The Reading Strategies Book*.

## Slide 10

- Writing Process – Activate Prior Knowledge: Jigsaw Activity - Read *Navigating the Writing Process*

10

Revisit competencies 9, 10, and 11. Divide participants into groups of three. Hand out copies of *Navigating the Writing Process*. Follow procedures for Jigsaw Reading Activity listed on slide.

## Slides 11-18

- Review the writing process, writing skills and strategies, and research

11

Review stages of the writing process. Have participants make connections to the journal article they just read.

## Writing Strategies

- Elaborating – expanding their ideas
- Formatting – designing the layout
- Generating – brainstorming ideas
- Narrowing – limiting their focus
- Organizing – ordering the content using knowledge of narrative elements, expository structures, or poetic forms (outlines, webs, clusters, etc.)
- Proofreading – identifying mechanical errors
- Rereading – checking for purpose, idea, voice
- Revising – strategy used to improve the overall quality of their writing

12

Discuss writing strategies. Have participants, at table groups, discuss ways in which they will encourage their students to utilize the writing strategies. What suggestions do they have for modeling and teaching these strategies?

## Writing Skills

- Automatic, knowledge-based actions
  - Content skills – topic sentences, paragraphs
  - Word skills – making writing more colorful
  - Sentence skills – varying sentence length by combining shorter sentences
  - Grammar skills – monitoring subject-verb agreement and correcting any nonstandard English
  - Mechanical skills – applying spelling, capitalization and punctuation skills

13

Discuss writing skills. How do they differ from the strategies on the previous slide?

## The 6 Traits of Writing

- Ideas
- Organization
- Voice
- Word Choice
- Sentence Fluency
- Mechanics
- The 6+1 Traits of Writing includes *presentation* as a trait

14

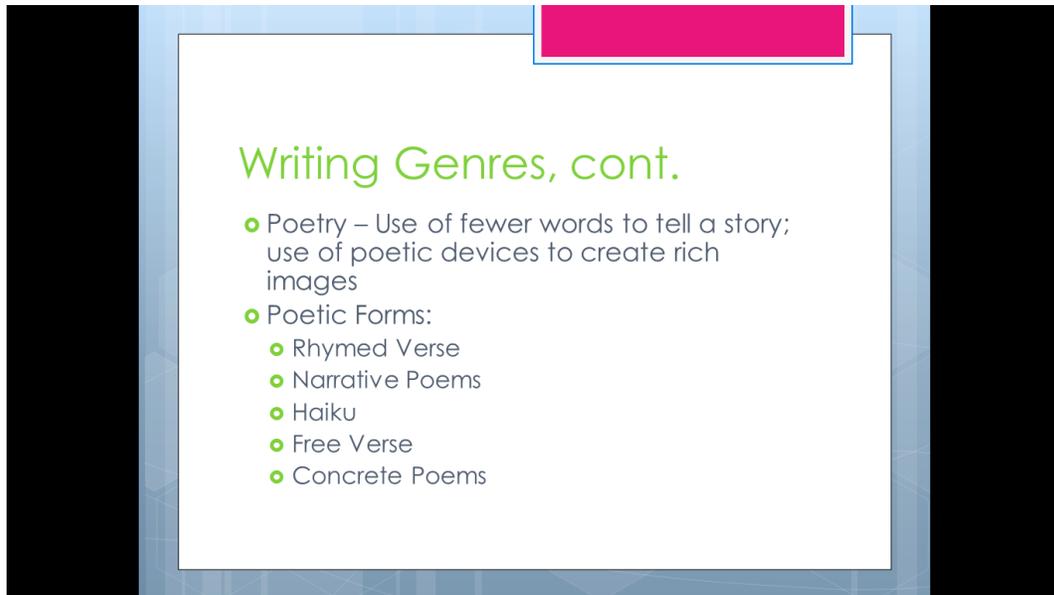
Have participants, at table groups, order the six traits from most important (heavily weighted on state writing test) to least important and provide rationales for these orders. Tell students they are listed in order of importance on the slide. Discuss any differences they had and have them justify why they might be ordered this way. How can we use the seventh trait, presentation, to publish work and share with an audience?

## Writing Genres

- Descriptive Writing – Use of sensory words and comparisons to tell the story
- Expository Writing – Factual information, explanatory; how to do something
- Journals and Letters – Daily, informal writing about themselves or a topic of interest
- Narrative Writing – Personal writing, tells a story; writers apply what they know about story elements to their narrative writing
- Persuasive Writing – Sharing opinions and persuading readers to agree with them

15

In table groups, have participants discuss ways they will incorporate all genres into their writing blocks throughout the year.

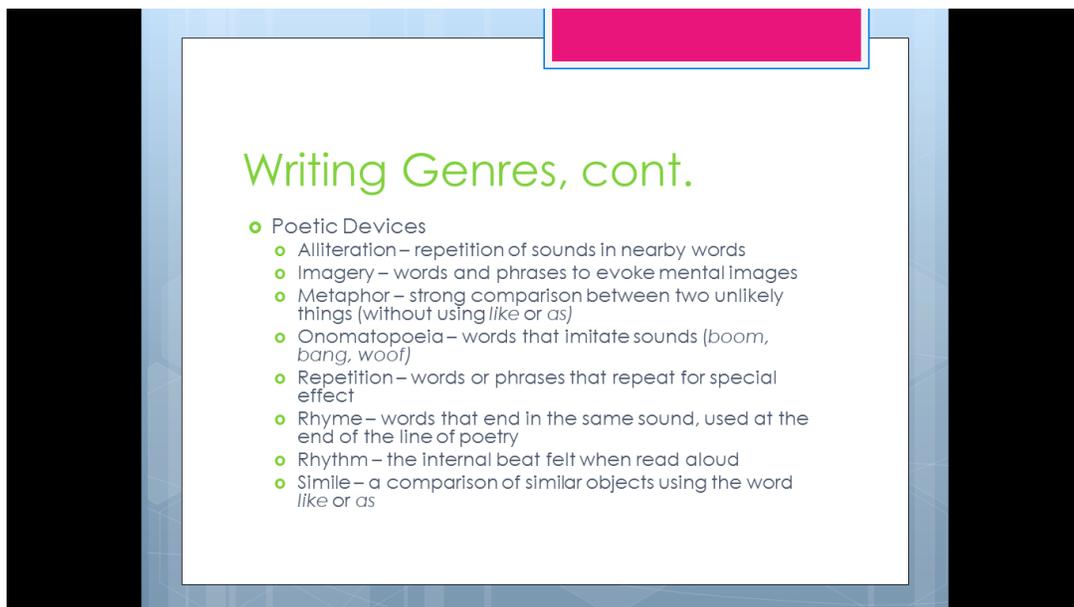


## Writing Genres, cont.

- Poetry – Use of fewer words to tell a story; use of poetic devices to create rich images
- Poetic Forms:
  - Rhymed Verse
  - Narrative Poems
  - Haiku
  - Free Verse
  - Concrete Poems

16

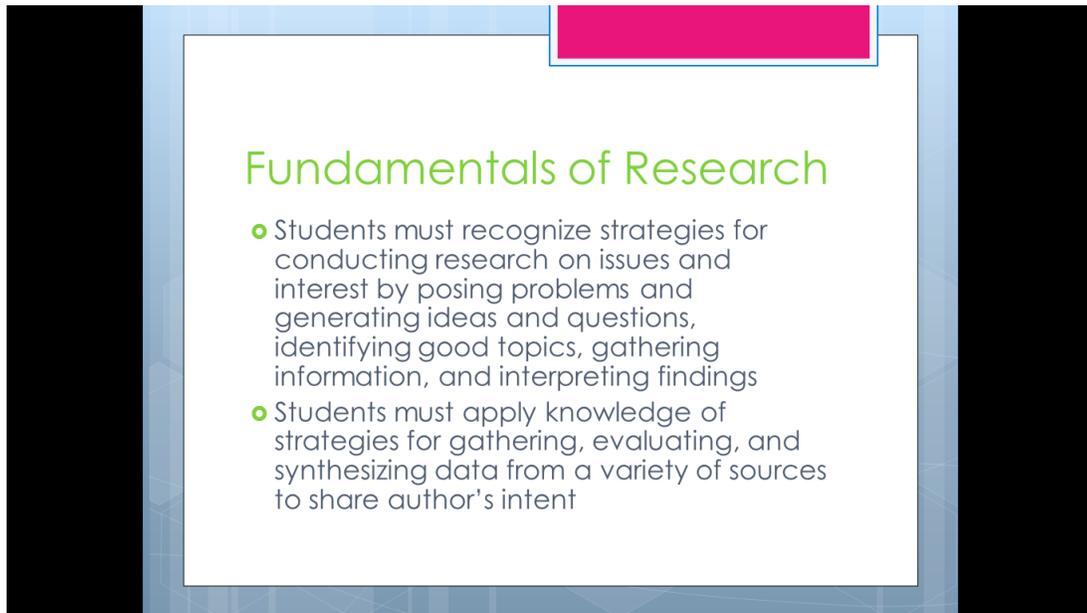
Have participants select a poetic form and write a short poem about teaching reading and/or language arts. Challenge them to include at least two of the poetic devices on the following slide.



## Writing Genres, cont.

- Poetic Devices
  - Alliteration – repetition of sounds in nearby words
  - Imagery – words and phrases to evoke mental images
  - Metaphor – strong comparison between two unlikely things (without using *like* or *as*)
  - Onomatopoeia – words that imitate sounds (*boom*, *bang*, *woof*)
  - Repetition – words or phrases that repeat for special effect
  - Rhyme – words that end in the same sound, used at the end of the line of poetry
  - Rhythm – the internal beat felt when read aloud
  - Simile – a comparison of similar objects using the word *like* or *as*

17

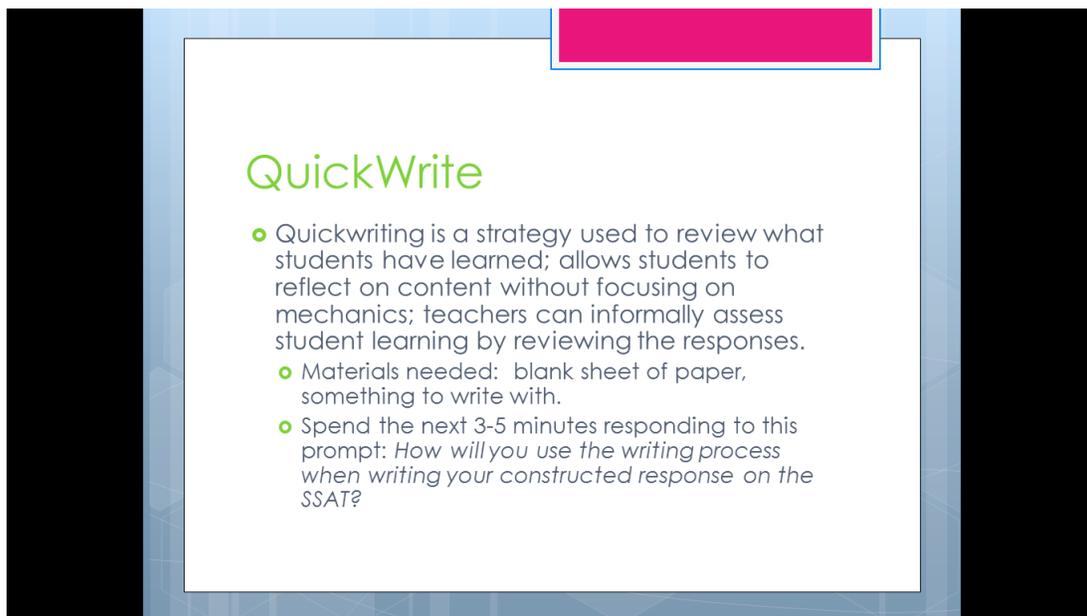


## Fundamentals of Research

- Students must recognize strategies for conducting research on issues and interest by posing problems and generating ideas and questions, identifying good topics, gathering information, and interpreting findings
- Students must apply knowledge of strategies for gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing data from a variety of sources to share author's intent

18

At table groups, have participants discuss ways in which they will have their future students participate in meaningful research projects. How will they facilitate the research? How will they have their students present their findings?



## QuickWrite

- Quickwriting is a strategy used to review what students have learned; allows students to reflect on content without focusing on mechanics; teachers can informally assess student learning by reviewing the responses.
  - Materials needed: blank sheet of paper, something to write with.
  - Spend the next 3-5 minutes responding to this prompt: *How will you use the writing process when writing your constructed response on the SSAT?*

19

As participants return from lunch, have them respond to the prompt above.

Slides 20-21

- Review Phonological/Phonemic Awareness

## Phonological Awareness – Competency 1

- **Competency 1** - Apply knowledge of foundations of literacy development in English, including development and assessment of phonological and phonemic awareness.
- Phonological Awareness: The awareness of sound structure. The ability to notice, think about, or manipulate the larger unit of sound auditorially and orally.
- Includes:
  - concept of spoken word
  - rhyming
  - syllabication
  - phonemic awareness (the awareness that speech consists of a sequence of individual sounds, or phonemes) – onset and rime, blending, segmenting, and manipulating phonemes

20

Revisit competency 1. Discuss phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Have participants create either a Venn Diagram or T-Chart to compare and contrast the two.

## Phonemic Awareness Strategies

- Identifying sounds in words.
  - hearing the /l/ sound at the end of the word doll.
- Categorizing sounds in words.
  - recognizing that *sun* doesn't belong in a series of words like *rabbit*, *sun*, and *ring*
- Substituting sounds to make new words.
  - ring can turn into bring if you add a /b/ sound
- Blending sounds to form words.
  - /b/ /i/ /g/ makes "big"
- Segmenting a word into sounds.
  - "dog" becomes /d//o//g/

21

Review phonemic awareness strategies. Remind participants that phonemes are the smallest individual units of sound (see “big” and “dog” above). Have participants practice counting phonemes by pretending they can’t yet spell and they are simply listening for the individual sounds in words. (big-3, cat-3, ice-2, boat-3, book-3, snow-3, horse-3, teach,3)

## Slide 22

- Teaching Phonemic Awareness

**Teaching Phonemic Awareness**

Materials Needed: *Literacy in the Early Grades* pg. 106-111, chart paper, markers

Procedures: Divide students into five small groups; assign each group one of the five dimensions of phonemic awareness (listed below); with chart paper and markers, groups will make an info-graphic discussing their dimension including what it is and examples of activities to reinforce the dimension; one member of each group will present their info-graphic to the other groups.

- Sound-Matching Activities
- Sound-Isolation Activities
- Sound-Blending Activities
- Sound-Addition and – Substitution Activities
- Sound-Segmentation Activities

22

Follow procedures listed on slide.

- Dismiss participants to Teacher Resource Room where they will each create one game/activity, suitable for small group play, and that reinforces a chosen dimension of phonemic awareness. Final products should be colorful and laminated. Students may create an original game or can replicate one found on the internet ([www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org), Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers, etc.) (all materials available in Teacher Resource Room)
- In small groups, each participant will explain the game he/she made including which dimension of phonemic awareness it addresses and the procedures/rules for playing it; in small groups, participants will play each game then select one they would like to share with the other groups.
- Reflect in composition notebook/learning logs and respond to the following questions:
  - How are phonological and phonemic awareness different?
 Choose any two of the dimensions of phonemic awareness and list ideas for activities in the classroom that would reinforce them.
- Dismiss for the day

Day 2  
Slides 23-30

- Review Phonics Concepts and Phonics Basics

## Phonics – Competency 2

- **Competency 2** - Apply knowledge of the alphabetic principle and the development and assessment of accurate, automatic word recognition and spelling at beginning stages of literacy development.
- What is Phonics?
  - The ability to convert letters into sounds and blend them to recognize words (decoding).
- Readers must:
  - understand that there are predictable sound-symbol correspondences in English
  - understand that you can use *decoding* strategies to figure out unfamiliar written words

23

Read aloud competency 2; discuss phonics and what readers do when using phonics. How is phonics different from phonemic awareness? Why must we teach both?

## Phonics Concepts

- Phonics is a set of relationships between phonology (sounds in speech) and orthography (spelling patterns in written language).
- Phonics explains the relationships between phonemes (smallest units of sound) and graphemes (letters).
- In the English language, there are 44 phonemes and 26 graphemes.
- There are over 500 ways to spell those 44 phonemes (e.g., /f/ can be spelled "gh", "f", "ff", "ph").

24

Discuss phonics related concepts. Why is mastery of phonological awareness necessary in order for children to be proficient in phonics?

## Phonics Basics

- Phonemes are either classified as *consonants* or *vowels*
  - Vowels – a, e, i, o, and u
  - Exceptions –
    - The letter “y” is a consonant only at the beginning of a syllable (yes, yawn, beyond)
    - The letter “w” is sometimes considered a vowel when combined with another vowel (diagraph) such as “ew” in the word “flew”
    - Sometimes consonants have no sound, such as the “k” and “w” in the word “knew”

25

Review vowels and consonants. How will you teach students the difference?

## Phonics Basics

- The consonants “c” and “g” have *hard* and *soft* sounds, depending on the vowels they precede.
  - Hard “c” makes the /k/ sound when followed by “a”, “o”, or “u” (cat, cot, cut)
  - Soft “c” makes the /s/ sound when followed by “e” or “i” (celery and circus)
  - Hard “g” makes the /g/ sound when followed by “a”, “i”, “o”, and “u” (gave, girl, goat, gum)
  - Soft “g” makes the /j/ sound when followed by “e”, “y”, and sometimes “i” (gentle, gym, ginger)

26

Review hard and soft “c” and “g” rules and exceptions.

## Phonics Basics

- Consonant Blends
  - Two or three consonants grouped together but each consonant retains its sound (key to remember = all blends can be segmented)
    - bl-, dr-, sm-, str-
- Consonant Digraphs
  - Two or more consonants grouped together and produce one new sound (key to remember = digraphs cannot be segmented)
    - ch-, -sh-, wh-, -ng, -ck

27

Review consonant blends and digraphs.

## Phonics Basics

- Vowel Sounds
  - Long vowels – say their name and typically are joined by another vowel somewhere in the word (apron, like, bone)
  - Short vowels – typically the only vowel in a word (cat, get, pin, mop, run)
- Vowel Digraphs
  - Two vowels adjacent to one another; the first generally says its name while the second is silent (bead, mail, day)
- Vowel Diphthongs
  - Sounds created by combining two separate vowel sounds
    - oi and oy, ou and ow, and au and aw
- R and L controlled Vowels
  - R controlled – when any vowel is followed by the letter “r” it typically loses its vowel sound (car, girl, work) (key to remember = you cannot segment an r controlled vowel)
  - L controlled – the letter “a”, when followed by an “l”, seldom makes the short /a/ sound (call, salt, halter)

28

Discuss vowel patterns. Does anyone have an easy way for remembering rules for applying vowel patterns when reading?

## Phonics Basics

- Six Basic Syllable Patterns (key to remember = each syllable contains only one vowel sound)
  - Closed – syllables end in a consonant; vowel sound is typically short (e. g., rabbit and napkin)
  - Open – syllables end in a vowel; vowel sound is typically long (e. g., tiger, silo)
  - R Controlled – the letter “r” in the syllable is preceded by a vowel (e. g., purpose, surplus)
  - Vowel Team – vowel digraphs appear in same syllable (e. g., explain, peanut)
  - Vowel – silent “e” – generally represent long vowel sounds (e. g., compete, decide)
  - Consonant + “le” – when the “le” is at the end of the word it is preceded by a consonant; this consonant + “le” make up the final syllable (e. g., table, little)

29

Discuss six syllable types. How do you figure out unknown, multisyllabic words when you encounter them?

## Phonics Basics

- Onset and Rime
  - Onset=is the consonant sound; precedes the vowel (the /c/ in “cat”)
  - Rime=is the vowel and any consonant sounds that follow (the /at/ in “cat”)

There are 37 most common rime patterns (aka “phonograms” and “word families”)

Teaching students these high utility rime patterns allows them to more easily map speech sounds into chunks, or larger units of sound, and easily spell over 500 primary words!

30

Discuss onset and rime.

## Slide 31

- Teaching Phonics

## Teaching Phonics

- Group Activity – 10-15 minutes
- Materials needed: paper and pencil for each table.
- Procedures: Assign each table group one of the phonograms below; have one person in each group record all the words (both real and nonsense) that they come up with simply by changing the onset. Remember, phonogram or rime pattern **MUST** retain the same rhyming sound. At the end of 5 minutes, have groups add up how many words they came up with. Discuss with whole group the strategies used to create new words. How could you teach this strategy to primary students?

Group 1 -ake  
Group 2 -ide  
Group 3 -eat  
Group 4 -op  
Group 5 -ug

31

Small Group Activity – Making word families using onset and rime

## Slide 31

- QuickWrite

## QuickWrite

- In composition notebooks/learning logs, participants will spend 4-5 minutes responding to the following prompt:
  - What are the roles of phonemic awareness and phonics in a balanced literacy classroom? How will you incorporate these into your future classrooms?
- Small Group Discussion –
  - Participants will discuss their QW responses at their table groups

32

Have participants respond to the above prompt and discuss in small groups.

## Slide 33

- Review Spelling and Word Recognition

**Spelling and Word Recognition – Competency 3**

- **Competency 3** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of accurate, automatic word recognition and spelling at later stages of literacy development.
- Spelling (encoding) is the reverse process of reading (decoding)
- Activate Prior Knowledge: *Think about how spelling was taught when you were in school. What did it look like? How much actual teaching of spelling took place in those classrooms?*
  - *Discuss in table groups about 5 minutes, until each participant has had a chance to share/respond.*

Activate prior knowledge by following the prompts on the slide.

## Slide 34

- Spelling Development

**Spelling Development**

- Effective teachers recognize that learning to spell is a developmental process.
- What does this tell us about spelling instruction?
- How does this differ from the ways we were taught spelling?

Discuss questions on slide. If we know we must differentiate reading instruction in order for our students to be proficient, doesn't it also make sense to differentiate spelling instruction? Why?

## Slide 35

- Stages of Spelling Development

## Stages of Spelling Development

- Stage 1 – Emergent: Scribbles, letterstrings, letter-like forms; Pk-K
- Stage 2 – Letter Name-Alphabetic: connecting letters and sounds, one or two letters to represent words; K-2
- Stage 3 – Within-Word Pattern: CVC words, long vowel patterns, blends and digraphs, *silent* letters; 1-3
- Stage 4 – Syllables and Affixes: compound words, inflectional endings, consonant doubling, syllabication; 3-5
- Stage 5 – Derivational Relations: root words, morphemic analysis, etymologies, consonant and vowel alternations; 5+

35

Discuss stages and examples of each.

## Slide 36

- Teaching Spelling

## Teaching Spelling

- Strategy Instruction – segmenting or “sounding out” words, analogies, using affixes with root words, “think it out” by using what you know about spelling patterns, inflectional endings, and what the word looks like
- Match Instruction to Developmental Stages – Assess and identify developmental stages and teach concepts within that stage; give opportunities to practice and apply authentically
- Provide Daily Opportunities for Reading and Writing – Good readers are typically good spellers; reading exposes students to words and new spelling patterns who in turn apply those patterns in their writing
- Teach High-frequency Words – learning these irregularly spelled, difficult to “sound out” words increases automaticity in both reading and writing
- Differentiate instruction to address children’s needs while presenting lessons on grade-level topics

36

Discuss best practices for teaching spelling. How will you incorporate word study into your future classrooms?

## Slide 37

- Assessing Spelling

## Assessing Spelling

- Spelling instruction and tests should be individualized and based on students' developmental stages of spelling, *not* on what "list" is provided in the reading series
- Assess patterns rather than memorized words
- Developmental Spelling Tests (QSI, Bear, et al)
- Writing samples (journal writing, writing workshop)
- Observation during small group instruction and word study lessons

37

Discuss methods for spelling assessment. Have participants refer to *Words Their Way* for spelling inventories and strategies for teaching patterns.

## Slide 38

- Word Recognition

## Word Recognition

- Teaching high-frequency words, those common, frequently occurring words that are not typically phonetically correct, increase fluency and automaticity in both reading and spelling.
- The use of high-frequency word walls in primary classrooms teaches and reinforces the reading and spelling of those most commonly used words.

38

Discuss importance of and methods for teaching word recognition.

## Slide 39

Strategy Application – *Think, “Have I Seen It on the Word Wall?”*

### Strategy Application – *Think, “Have I Seen It on the Word Wall?”*

- Materials Needed: copies of *Building Practical Knowledge of Letter-Sound Correspondences: A Beginner's Word Wall and Beyond* (Wagstaff, 1998); *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015), Strategy 4.2, *Think, “Have I Seen It on the Word Wall?”*, highlighter pens, paper, pencil or pen.
- Procedures: Review the *Think, “Have I Seen It on the Word Wall?”* strategy; pass out copies of the journal article to each of the participants; while reading the article silently, participants will look for examples of high-frequency words and highlight them. After reading the article, participants will compile a list of the high-frequency words they highlighted onto a sheet of paper. On a second piece of paper, participants will sketch a diagram of a word wall and insert the high-frequency words they found in the article. At table groups, participants will compare their word walls and talk about the features of the words that make them phonetically incorrect. Finally, participants in small groups will brainstorm ideas for teaching and reinforcing these words through the use of a high-frequency word wall.

39

Follow procedures on slide for application of the strategy.

## Slide 40

- Fluency – Competency 4

### Fluency – Competency 4

- **Competency 4** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of fluency at all stages of reading development.
- What is fluency?
  - The ability to read quickly, accurately, and with expression

40

Review and discuss fluency.

## Slide 41

- Components of Fluency

## Components of Fluency

- **Automaticity** = recognizing familiar words automatically, without conscious thought
- **Accuracy** = 95% of the words read correctly
- **Speed** = at least 100 words per minute by end of third grade
- **Prosody** = expression, intonation, and phrasing

Discuss the 4 necessary components of fluency.

## Slides 42-44

- Teaching Fluency

## Teaching Fluency – Automaticity and Accuracy

- High-frequency Words
  - Introduce words in context
  - Have students clap and chant the words
  - Involve students in practice activities
  - Provide authentic reading and writing activities
- Word Identification Strategies
  - Phonic Analysis – use of alphabetic principal and knowledge of sound/symbol correspondences
  - Decoding by Analogy – associating unknown words with known words
  - Syllabic Analysis – breaking down multisyllabic words and decoding syllable by syllable
  - Morphemic Analysis – applying knowledge of root words and affixes to figure out unknown words

Review high-frequency words and word identification strategies.

## Teaching Fluency – Reading Speed

- Reading speed = rate, wrspm (words read correctly per minute)
- Factors that affect **reading speed**:
  - Background knowledge
  - Knowledge of genre, text structure, and text layout
  - English speaking fluency
- Activities that promote fluency:
  - Choral reading
  - Reader's theatre
  - Listening center
  - Partner reading

43

Review reading speed as a factor of fluency.

## Teaching Fluency – Prosody

- Prosody – reading with expression in order to use their voices to give meaning
  - Expression – enthusiasm, interpreting the text
  - Phrasing – intonation, meaningful phrases
  - Volume – vary loudness to give meaning
  - Smoothness – smooth rhythm with self-corrections
  - Pacing – conversational speed; “read like you’re saying it”

44

Review prosody and its role in developing fluent readers. How might we promote fluency in the elementary classroom?

## Slide 45

- Assessing Reading Fluency

## Assessing Reading Fluency

- Assess automaticity and accuracy – must know many high-frequency words on sight
- Speed – about 100 words correct per minute by end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- Prosody – expression; multi-dimensional fluency scale
- Running records can be helpful in assessing word recognition and fluency as well as identifying appropriate levels of text

45

Discuss various methods for assessing reading fluency.

## Slide 46

- Small Group Activity: Readers Theater

## Readers Theater

- Children practice reading a story script to develop reading speed and prosody before performing it for classmates (Tompkins, 2015).
- Small Group Activity –
  - (30 minutes) Dismiss participants to the Teacher Resource Room to search the internet for Readers Theater scripts. Each table group will select one script to perform for the whole group. Participants will print copies of their scripts, practice their lines, and, if they choose, make simple props to support in telling the story using materials in the Teacher Resource Room.
  - (30 minutes) Participants will return to classroom and each table group will present their Readers Theater script to the whole group.

46

Follow directions on slide for Readers Theater activity.

## Slide 47

- Review Vocabulary – Competency 5

## Vocabulary – Competency 5

- **Competency 5** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of vocabulary knowledge and skills.
- Activate Prior Knowledge: Read aloud, *Miss Alaineus; A Vocabulary Disaster* (Frasier, 2000).
- Ask participants to reflect on their own vocabulary learning and share at their table groups. How was it different or similar to the instruction in *Miss Alaineus*?

Discuss competency and read aloud *Miss Alaineus; A Vocabulary Disaster*. Discuss traditional vocabulary instruction.

## Slides 48-50

- Teaching Vocabulary

## Three Tiers of Words

- Tier 1 – Basic Words: used socially, informal conversation, natural acquisition
- Tier 2 – Academic Vocabulary: wide application in school, can relate these more difficult words to already known informal words
- Tier 3 – Specialized Terms: technical, content specific, should be taught explicitly

Discuss tiers of words and their uses in school and home. What do we, as teachers, need to do if students come to us with inadequate vocabulary? How can we partner with parents to create a language rich environment at home as well as school?

## Levels of Word Knowledge

1. **Unknown Word**  
\* I don't know this word
2. **Initial Recognition**  
\* I have seen this word or I can pronounce it, BUT I don't know what it means.
3. **Partial Word Knowledge**  
\* I know one meaning of this word and can use it in a sentence. Contextual knowledge
4. **Full Word Knowledge**  
\* I know more than one meaning and several ways to use this word.

49

Review levels of word knowledge.

## Teaching About Words

- Word Walls
- Explicit Instruction
- Word Study activities – word posters, word maps, dramatizing words, word sorts, word chains, semantic feature analysis, word ladders, making words, vocabulary bees and parades
- Any other ideas for teaching about words?

50

Discuss various ways for teaching about words. How do these activities differ from the traditional methods used when we were in school?

## Slide 51

- Small Group Activity – Making Words

## Making Words Activity

- Materials Needed: making words mat for each participant, paper letter tiles (a, a, o, u, b, c, l, r, v, y) for each participant, pencil or pen.
- Procedures: hand out making words mat and letter tiles to each participant; have participants arrange the letter tiles in the above order (alphabetically, vowels first), then begin manipulating the letters to create 2, 3, 4, and 5 or more letter words; record words in the correct column (by word length) on the making words mat; using all the letter tiles, see if participants can unscramble to make the "mystery" word.
- Reflect and Respond: In composition notebooks/learning logs, have participants reflect on the strategies they used to create the words they came up with. Also, have participants reflect on the activity and discuss how it addresses both spelling and vocabulary skills and how this activity is naturally differentiated.

51

Follow directions on slide for the making words activity.

Dismiss for the day.

## Day 3

## Slides 52-54

- Review Comprehension Strategies

## Comprehension Strategies – Competency 6

- **Competency 6** - Apply knowledge of development and assessment of reading comprehension and comprehension strategies.
- What is the difference between skills and strategies?
  - Skills = automatic, literal, right or wrong
  - Strategies = thoughtful behaviors, processes, can be defined by prior knowledge

52

Read competency aloud; differentiate between skills and strategies. What might some examples of each be?

## Comprehension Strategies

- Activate Prior Knowledge – Comprehension Strategies Sort
- Materials Needed: one copy of the sort (next slide) for each table group, scissors for each table, glue sticks, large sheets of construction paper, *Literacy in the Early Grades* text
- Procedures: pass out materials to each table group; collaboratively, have groups sort and match the strategies with the reader behaviors; once they think they have them all correct, have them check their sorts with the chart on pg. 220 in *Literacy in the Early Grades*; make any necessary changes; glue correct sorts onto construction paper.

53

Activate Prior Knowledge – follow prompts on the slide.

Activating Background Knowledge	Connecting	Determining Importance
Drawing Inferences	Evaluating	Monitoring
Predicting	Questioning	Repairing
Setting a Purpose	Summarizing	Visualizing
Readers supervise their reading experience, checking that they're understanding the text.	Readers paraphrase the big ideas to create a concise statement.	Readers make text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text links.
Readers notice the big ideas in the text and the relationships among them.	Readers identify a problem interfering with comprehension and then solve it.	Readers create mental images of what they're reading.
Readers ask themselves literal and higher level questions about the text.	Readers make thoughtful "guesses" about what will happen and then read to confirm their predictions.	Readers evaluate both the text itself and their reading experience.
Readers make connections between what they already know and the information in the text.	Readers identify a broad focus to direct their reading through the text.	Readers use background knowledge and clues in the text to "read between the lines."

54

Sort for comprehension strategies (instructions on slide 53)

## Slides 55-56

- Comprehension of Narrative Text

**Comprehension of Narrative Text – Competency 7**

- **Competency 7** - Apply knowledge of literary texts and development and assessment of skills and strategies for comprehending and analyzing literature.
- Prerequisites for Comprehension
  - Background Knowledge
  - Vocabulary
  - Fluency
- What happens if one or more of these is missing?

55

Review competency 7 and prerequisites for comprehension

## Slide 56

- Prerequisites for Comprehension

**Prerequisites for Comprehension – The Montillation of Traxoline**

It is very important that you learn about traxoline. Traxoline is a new form of zlonter. It is monotilled in Ceristanna. The Ceristannians gristerlate large amounts of fevon and then bracter it to quasel traxoline. Traxoline may well be one of our most lukised snezlaus in the future because of our zlonter lescelldge.

- Can you read this?
- Can you comprehend this?
  - Do you have existing background knowledge?
  - Do you understand the vocabulary?
  - Can you read it fluently?
- What must we, as teachers, do in order for our students to comprehend this passage?

56

Have participants read the passage to themselves then ask the questions on the slide; open discussion for role teachers play in facilitating comprehension through ensuring all prerequisites are in place.

## Slides 57-61

- Teaching Narrative Text

## Narrative Genres – Folklore

- Fables – brief tales to teach morals (e. g., *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*)
- Folktales – stories with virtuous heroes who overcome adversity (e. g., *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*)
- Myths – ancient stories explaining natural phenomena (e. g., *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*)
- Legends – hero and tall tales recounting courageous deeds (e. g., *Johnny Appleseed*)

57

Discuss descriptions and examples of folklore

## Narrative Genres – Fantasy

- Modern Literary Tales – modern day stories similar to folk tales (e. g., *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*)
- Fantastic Stories – imaginative stories exploring alternate realities; contain elements not found in the real world (e. g., *Poppy*)
- Science Fiction – stories that explore scientific possibilities (e. g., *Moo Cow Kaboom!*)
- High Fantasy – stories focusing on conflict between good and evil; often involve quests (e. g., *Harry Potter*)

58

Discuss examples of fantasy

## Narrative Genres – Realistic Fiction

- Contemporary Fiction – stories that portray today's society; modern day characters (e. g., *Ramona Quimby*)
- Historical Fiction – realistic stories set in the past (e. g., *Number the Stars*)

59

Discuss examples of realistic fiction

## Elements of Story Structure

- Plot
  - The sequence of events involving characters in conflict situations
- Characters
  - The people or personified animals in the story
- Setting
  - Location, weather, time period, and time of a story
- Point of View
  - Perspective in which the story is told; first person, omniscient, limited omniscient, and objective
- Theme
  - The underlying meaning of the story

60

Revisit elements of story structure

## Narrative Devices

- Dialogue
  - Written conversations between characters
- Flashbacks
  - An interruption, often going back to the beginning of the story
- Foreshadowing
  - Hints about events to come
- Imagery
  - Descriptive words or phrases used to create a mental picture
- Suspense
  - Excited uncertainty about the outcome of a conflict
- Symbol
  - A person, place, or thing used to represent something else (e. g., owl represents wisdom)

61

Review narrative devices. Discuss how lack of knowledge of genre, elements of stories, and narrative devices can interfere with comprehension.

Slide 62

- Assessing Comprehension of Narrative Texts

## Assessing Comprehension of Narrative Texts

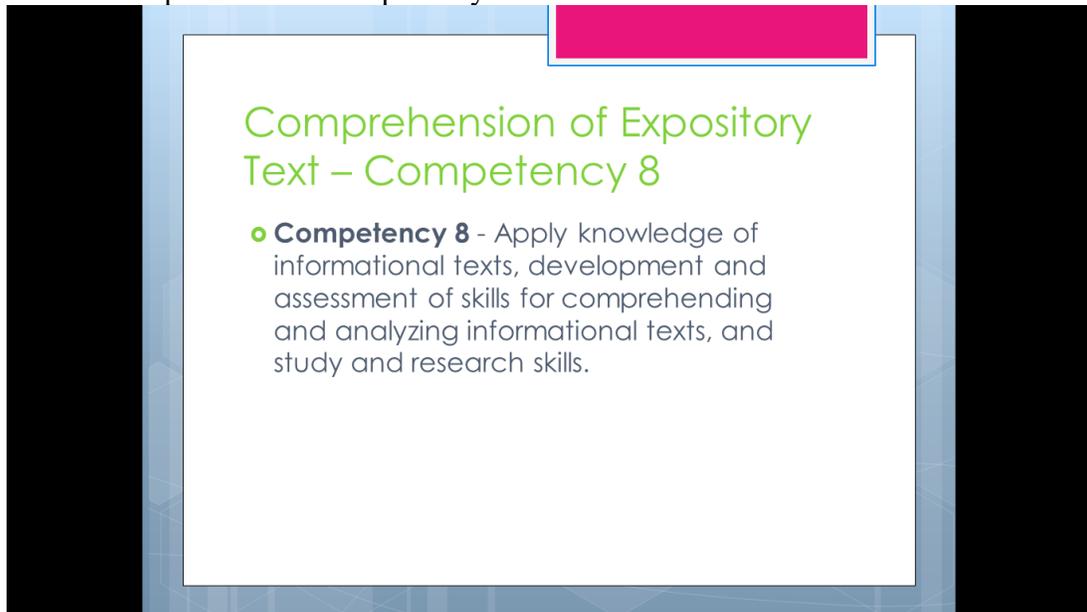
- Cloze Procedure
- Story Retellings
- Running Records
- Think-Alouds
- Reading Logs/Response Journals
- Grand Conversations

62

Can you think of any other methods, formal or informal, for assessing comprehension of narrative text?

## Slide 63

- Comprehension of Expository Text



Comprehension of Expository Text – Competency 8

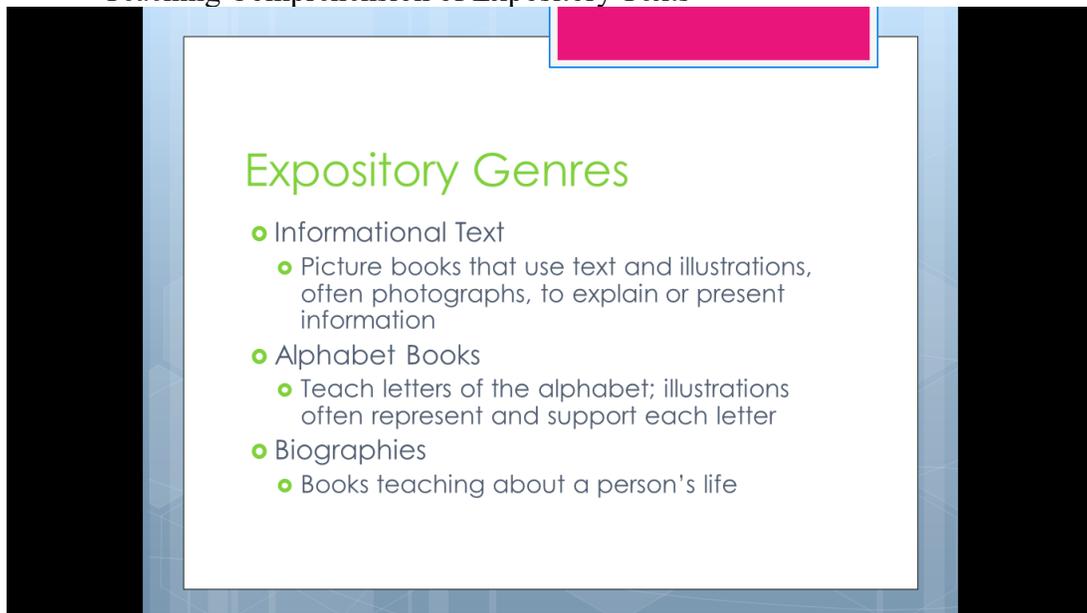
- **Competency 8** - Apply knowledge of informational texts, development and assessment of skills for comprehending and analyzing informational texts, and study and research skills.

63

Review competency 8

## Slides 64-66

- Teaching Comprehension of Expository Texts

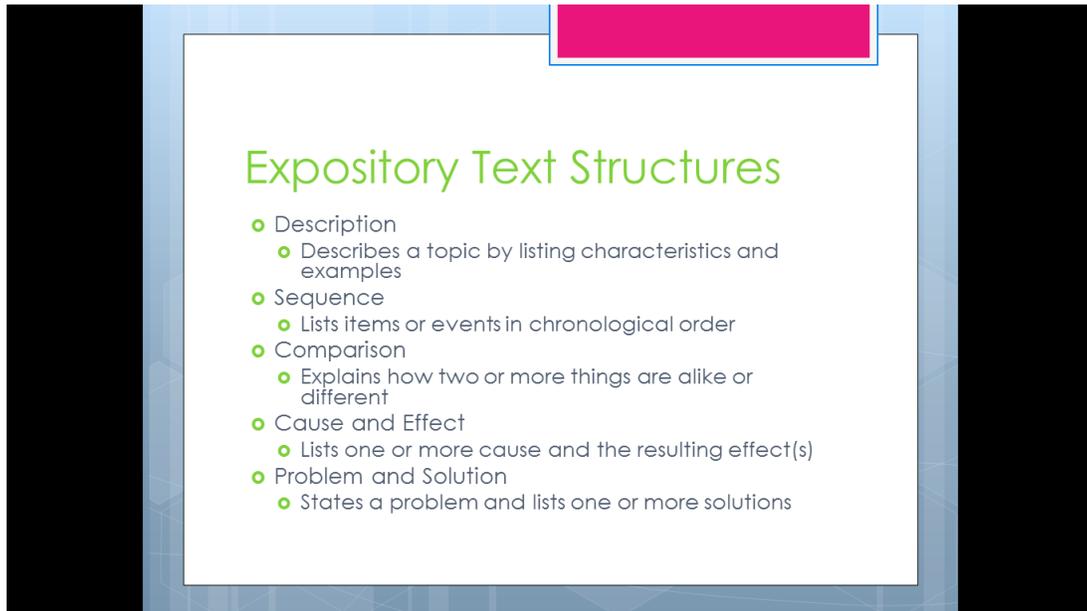


Expository Genres

- Informational Text
  - Picture books that use text and illustrations, often photographs, to explain or present information
- Alphabet Books
  - Teach letters of the alphabet; illustrations often represent and support each letter
- Biographies
  - Books teaching about a person's life

64

Review expository genres and discuss examples of each

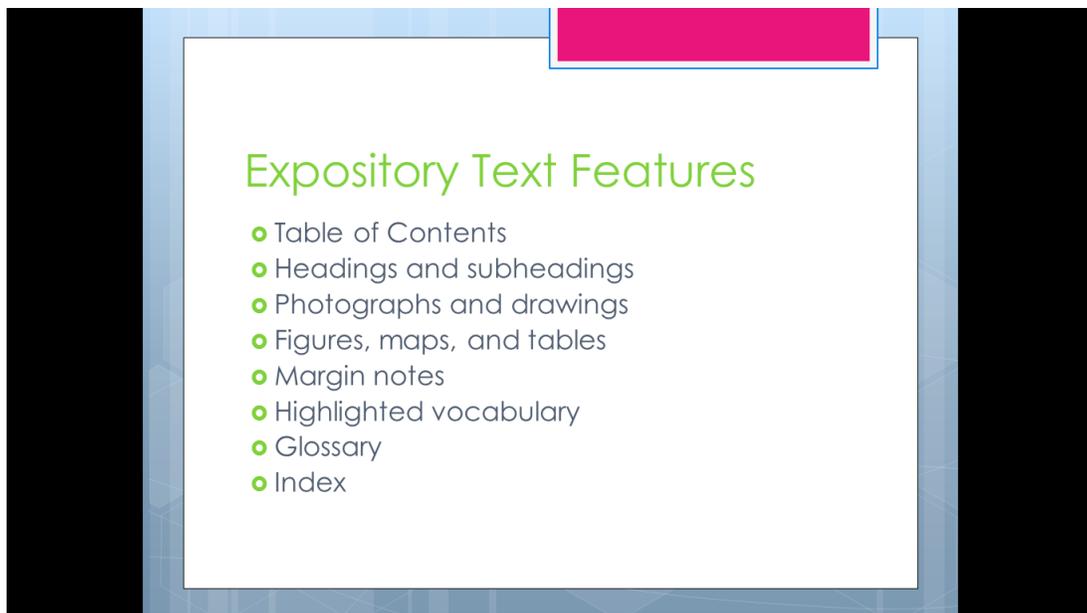


65

## Expository Text Structures

- Description
  - Describes a topic by listing characteristics and examples
- Sequence
  - Lists items or events in chronological order
- Comparison
  - Explains how two or more things are alike or different
- Cause and Effect
  - Lists one or more cause and the resulting effect(s)
- Problem and Solution
  - States a problem and lists one or more solutions

Discuss expository text structures. How can we teach students about these various structures? What important vocabulary should we clue in on in order to better understand the structure?



66

## Expository Text Features

- Table of Contents
- Headings and subheadings
- Photographs and drawings
- Figures, maps, and tables
- Margin notes
- Highlighted vocabulary
- Glossary
- Index

Review expository text features. Why is it important to know about these features, and how to use them, in order to better comprehend informational text?

## Slides 67-69

- Strategy Application – *Don't Skip It!*

**Strategy Application –  
Don't Skip It!**

- Materials Needed: copy of *Little Kids First Big Book of Animals* (Hughes, 2014); *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015) *Don't Skip It!* strategy 10.12; sticky notes; pens, pencils, markers.
- Procedures:
  - Facilitator reads aloud several pages from the text, drawing attention to the various text features on the page.
  - Next, facilitator reads aloud the main text only on two pages. *Did we learn everything we could on these pages?* Then she reads aloud the graphics and captions on the next two pages. *How much information do we miss when only reading one or the other, rather than both the main text and the graphics?*
  - Model how to make a plan for reading expository text:
    - First, survey the pages, looking for text, graphics, captions, maps, etc.
    - Second, draw attention to ALL the features in the text by placing sticky notes near the features. Draw an arrow on the sticky notes pointing to the information in that feature.
    - Finally, ask questions, prompting the reader to make sure they have a plan for reading all the text.
      - Where will you start?
      - Show me with your finger what your plan is for reading the whole page.
      - How will you make sure you read and look at everything?
      - OK, now that you have a plan, let's start reading.

67

Follow the procedures on the slide

**Strategy Application –  
Don't Skip It!, cont.**

- Materials Needed: copy of "High SI" *Strategies to Enhance Comprehension of Expository Text* (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010); *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015) *Don't Skip It!* strategy 10.12; sticky notes; pens, pencils, markers, and Herringbone graphic organizer.
- Procedures:
  - Pass out a copy of the "High SI" article to each participant
  - Have participants follow the procedures on the previous slide for the *Don't Skip It!* strategy with the article
  - Instruct participants to find a partner (if there is an uneven number of participants, one group can have 3)
  - Partner groups will take turns role playing with one partner as the "teacher" and the other as the "student"
  - The "teacher" will prompt the "student" using the following:
    - Where will you start?
    - Show me with your finger what your plan is for reading the whole page.
    - How will you make sure you read and look at everything?
    - OK, now that you have a plan, let's start reading.
  - Participants will switch roles and repeat the process
  - Once all participants have a plan for reading the entire article including the main text and all the graphic sources, instruct participants to read the article during their working lunch break.
  - Finally, participants will complete the Herringbone graphic organizer (following slide) and bring back after lunch for a brief discussion.

68

Follow the procedures on the slide

Assessing Comprehension of Expository Text - Herringbone Graphic Organizer

Factor 1 Detail  
Detail

Factor 3 Detail  
Detail

Main Topic

Factor 2 Detail  
Detail

Factor 4 Detail  
Detail

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Participants will use this graphic organizer with their reading of the “*High 5!*” article

Slide 70

- Assessing Comprehension of Expository Texts

Assessing Comprehension of Expository Texts

- Graphic Organizers
  - KWL Charts
  - Timelines
  - Life cycles
  - Venn Diagrams
  - Herringbone
  - Lists
  - What else can you think of?

70

Review and discuss methods for assessing comprehension of expository text

## Slides 71-82

- Writing the Constructed Response

## Writing the Constructed Response

- What is the constructed response?
  - The constructed response item is a written examination of your understanding of the reading process, how students learn to read, and how to address reading difficulties when they arise
  - You will be expected to write a 300-600 word essay/response to the prompt provided to you on testing day
  - You will be expected to demonstrate the depth of your understanding of the content area through your ability to apply your knowledge and skills rather than merely to recite factual information

71

Discuss with participants what the constructed response portion is and what the assignment expects of them.

## Writing the Constructed Response

- How is the constructed response scored?
  - **PURPOSE:** the extent to which the response achieves the purpose of the assignment
  - **SUBJECT MATTER KNOWLEDGE:** accuracy and appropriateness in the application of subject matter knowledge
  - **SUPPORT:** quality and relevance of supporting details
  - **RATIONALE:** soundness of argument and degree of understanding of the subject matter

72

Discuss the four dimensions of the assignment.

## Writing the Constructed Response

- Things to keep in mind:
  - This is NOT a writing test, but rather an assessment of your subject matter knowledge and skills
  - You still must communicate your response in a clear, concise manner and meets the scoring criteria
  - Your final copy should reflect the conventions of standard English
  - How might you use what you know about the writing process to write your response?

73

Things to keep in mind when writing the constructed response. Revisit the writing process stages.

## Writing the Constructed Response

- The Scoring Rubric = 4
  - **The "4" response reflects a thorough knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.** The purpose of the assignment is fully achieved.
  - There is a substantial, accurate, and appropriate application of subject matter knowledge.
  - The supporting evidence is sound; there are high-quality, relevant examples.
  - The response reflects an ably reasoned, comprehensive understanding of the topic.

74

Discuss elements of a "4" on the rubric

## Writing the Constructed Response

- The Scoring Rubric = 3
  - **The "3" response reflects a general knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.** The purpose of the assignment is largely achieved.
  - There is a generally accurate and appropriate application of subject matter knowledge.
  - The supporting evidence generally supports the discussion; there are some relevant examples.
  - The response reflects a general understanding of the topic.

75

Discuss the elements of a “3” score on the rubric

## Writing the Constructed Response

- The Scoring Rubric = 2
  - **The "2" response reflects a partial knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.** The purpose of the assignment is partially achieved.
  - There is a limited, possibly inaccurate or inappropriate application of subject matter knowledge.
  - The supporting evidence is limited; there are few relevant examples.
  - The response reflects a limited, poorly reasoned understanding of the topic.

76

Discuss elements of a “2” score.

## Writing the Constructed Response

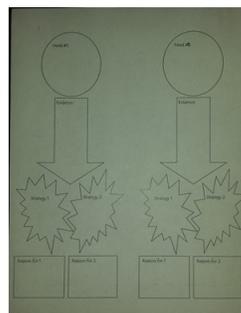
- The Scoring Rubric = 1
  - **The "1" response reflects little or no knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.** The purpose of the assignment is not achieved.
  - There is little or no appropriate or accurate application of subject matter knowledge.
  - The supporting evidence, if present, is weak; there are few or no relevant examples.
  - The response reflects little or no reasoning about or understanding of the topic.

77

Discuss what a score of "1" looks like. How can we avoid this? You cannot have any scores of "1" and pass the test.

## Writing the Constructed Response

- Use this flow chart to assist you with prewriting and organizing your response
- Be sure you include evidence of the need, from the text, and a strong rationale for selecting the instructional strategies that address each need



78

Handout copies of the flowchart and discuss how this can be used to organize information.

## Writing the Constructed Response

Let's look at [the prompt](#) from the online study guide. The assignment instructs you to respond to the following:

- Using your knowledge of reading comprehension, write a response in which you:
  - identify one reading comprehension need demonstrated by this student;
  - provide evidence of this need by citing two specific examples of the need from the student's responses to the text;
  - describe two different instructional strategies or activities to help address the need you identified; and
  - explain why each of the strategies or activities you describe would be effective for this purpose.

79

Hand out copies of the prompt ([hyperlink to website in slide](#)). Discuss potential problems and solutions.

## Writing the Constructed Response

Let's take a look at some sample responses.

First, let's look at a [strong response sample](#). Using the scoring rubric, provide evidence why you feel this is a strong response.

Now, let's look at a [weak response sample](#). Looking at the rubric again, what evidence in the sample represents a weak response?

What are the key factors that set these two responses apart? How would you score these two responses using the rubric?

80

Again, go to the website referenced ([hyperlink](#)) and look at the example of a strong response. Discuss elements that make it a strong response. How would you score this, based on the rubric? Now look at the week response. What elements are missing? How would you score this response?

## Writing the Constructed Response

### Guided Practice

- Using the prompt provided regarding 5<sup>th</sup> grade Josh's reading from *Number the Stars*, and the flowchart handout, write a 300-600 word response indicating Josh's comprehension difficulties
- Be sure to address all aspects of the assignment guidelines:
  - identify one reading comprehension need demonstrated by this student;
  - provide evidence of this need by citing two specific examples of the need from the student's responses to the text;
  - describe two different instructional strategies or activities to help address the need you identified; and
  - explain why each of the strategies or activities you describe would be effective for this purpose.

81

Hand out copies of the prompt about Josh, a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, responding to questions his teacher asks regarding his understanding of *Number the Stars*. Using the flowchart, organize your thoughts and instructional strategies and be sure to include all components of the assignment. Give participants up to 30 minutes for this portion of the workshop, as needed.

## Writing the Constructed Response

### Scoring of the Constructed Response

- Trade responses with a partner
- Using the scoring rubric, score each aspect of the response

Purpose	The extent to which the response achieves the purpose of the assignment
Subject Matter Knowledge	Accuracy and appropriateness in the application of subject matter knowledge
Support	Quality and relevance of supporting details
Rationale	Soundness of argument and degree of understanding of the subject matter

82

Trade responses with a partner. Using the rubric and the scoring guidelines, score your partner's response. Conference with your partner after scoring. Discuss what elements might have been missing or lacking details. Together, discuss how each of you could have written a stronger response. What other strategies or instructional approaches might you have included?

## Slide 83

- Reflect and Respond

## Reflect and Respond

- In composition notebooks/response journals, respond to the following prompts:
  - Using what you know about the writing process (day 1) and what you know about writing the constructed response, how will you plan and organize your thoughts and instructional recommendations prior to beginning your draft?
  - How will you ensure you have included all the required aspects of the response and have addressed them fully?

83

Have participants reflect and respond in their response journals.  
Slides 84-85

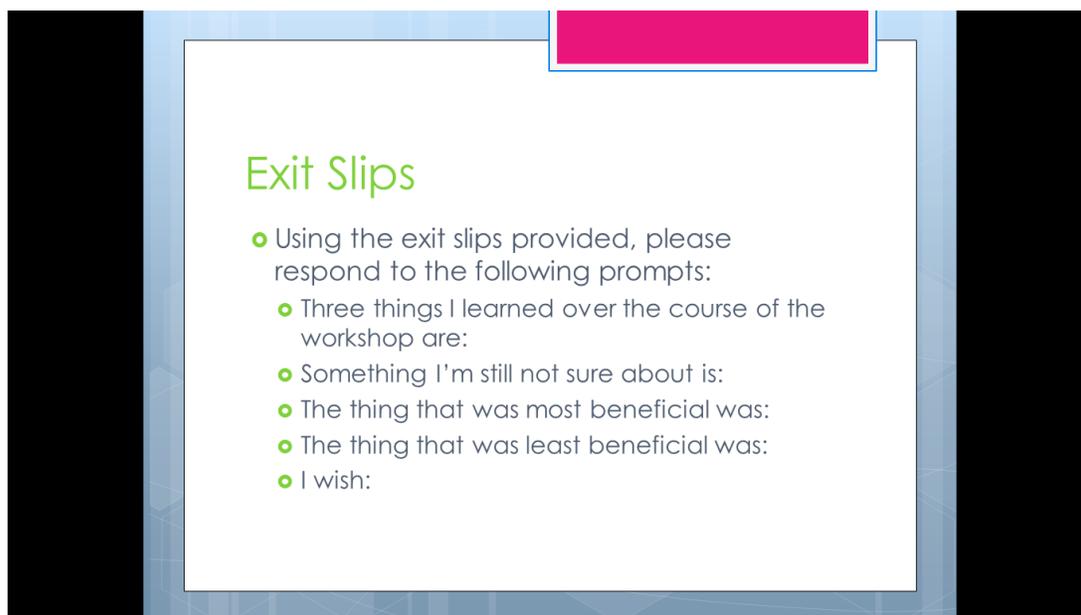
- Exit Slips

## Exit Slips

- Exit slips are written student responses to questions teachers pose at the end of a class or lesson. These quick, informal assessments enable teachers to quickly assess students' understanding of the material ([www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org))
- Exit slips can document learning, emphasize the process of learning, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction

84

Discuss the purpose of exit slips and ways they can be used to assess learning in the classroom. Visit the website (hyperlink in slide) and discuss potential questions for exit slips.



## Exit Slips

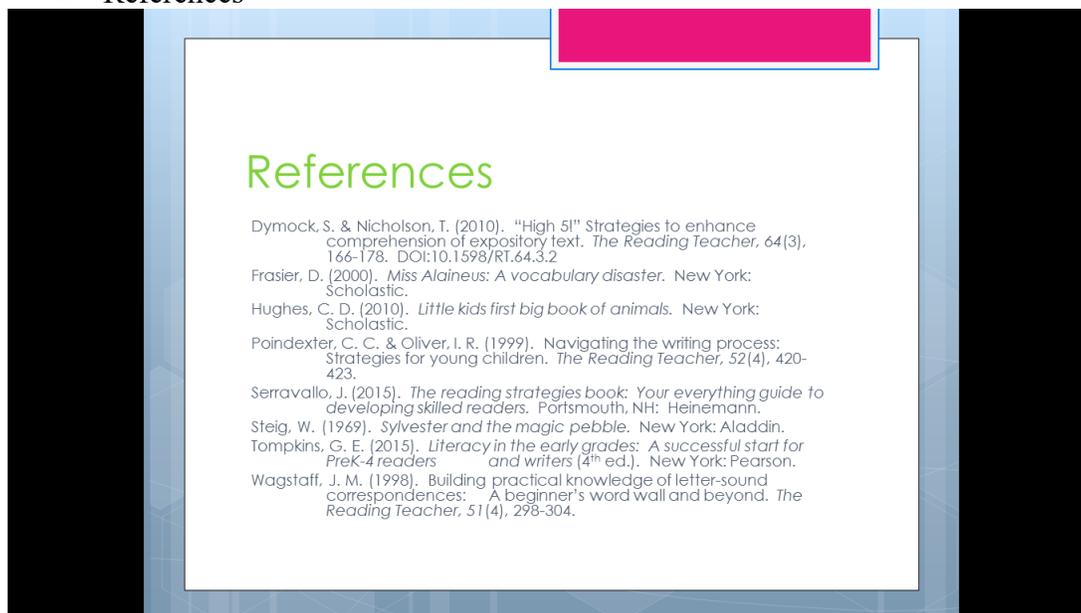
- Using the exit slips provided, please respond to the following prompts:
  - Three things I learned over the course of the workshop are:
  - Something I'm still not sure about is:
  - The thing that was most beneficial was:
  - The thing that was least beneficial was:
  - I wish:

85

Before dismissing for the day, have participants complete their exit slips by responding to the above prompts. Collect exit slips. Information on exit slips will be considered when planning future sessions.

### Slide 86

- References



## References

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86

**Formative Evaluation**  
**SSAT Subtest 1 Professional Development Plan**

After reviewing the PD plan, please respond to the prompts below. Any information you provide will be used solely to improve the project prior to implementation. You may keep your responses confidential if you wish.

**Content**

Did the plan address all the necessary aspects of SSAT preparation?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Were all the tested competencies addressed in the plan?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Can you think of anything else that should be included?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you feel all the required materials to conduct the plan were included?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Did you find the instructional strategies relevant? Are there others you'd like to see included?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization and Scheduling**

Was the information presented in a logical sequence?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Was all necessary background information provided for the participants to be successful?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Thinking about timing, were there any sections that had too much or too little time designated?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Was there enough of a variety of presentation styles?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Does the presentation address all learning styles?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Ease of Understanding**

Were the agendas and slides organized and easy to follow?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Were the slides and presenter notes logical and easy to understand?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Was the presentation itself visually appealing?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be able to conduct this training as is, or would you need more information?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Can you think of anything else that would serve to improve this plan?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol – Students' Perceptions

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

- Discuss:
- (1) Description and purpose of the study.
  - (2) Informed consent and confidentiality. Collect signed consent form.
  - (3) Thank participant and ask for permission to audio record.

Guiding Questions: (As a reminder for the interviewer)

1. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program faculty regarding the preparation of students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
2. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program students regarding their preparation to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
3. How could Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program be strengthened to more effectively prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
  - a. What are faculty perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
  - b. What are student perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?

4. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education students of how they would have approached their course work differently early on in their program based on what they know now about the reading/language arts SSAT?

Semistructured Interview Questions:

1. How prepared did you feel you were before you took the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
2. How prepared did you feel you were after you took the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
3. How many attempts were required on the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts) before you achieved a passing score?
4. Was there a particular activity, assignment, or class in general that best prepared you for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
5. What did you do, outside of your course work at [REDACTED], to prepare for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
6. Think about your experience in READ 4013 – Content Area Literacy. This course is intended to teach methods and strategies for teaching reading across the curriculum. How useful was this course in preparing you for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
7. Think about your experience in READ 4023 – Reading and Language Development of the Young Child. This course is designed to teach the

foundations of literacy development and language acquisition. How useful was this course in preparing you for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?

8. Think about your experience in READ 4063 – Reading and Writing Assessment and Instruction. This course is intended to teach methods for assessing students and strategies for instruction. How useful was this course in preparing you for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
9. Think about your experience in ELED 4023 – Language Arts in the Elementary Classroom. This course is intended to teach the foundations of Language Arts and how to apply in the elementary classroom. How useful was this course in preparing you for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
10. Did you seek the assistance of any of your reading or language arts professors to prepare? If so, do you feel this was instrumental in your successful completion of the test?
11. How competent do you feel your reading and language arts professors were at preparing you for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
12. Were your final grades in your reading and language arts courses compatible with your score(s) on the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)? Why, or why not?
13. Which portion of the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts) was most difficult for you? (Reading, Language Arts, or Constructed Response)

14. What might you have done differently to score higher on a particular section?
15. What recommendations, if any, do you have for any of the courses or faculty that would better prepare students for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
16. What have students done in the past to prepare for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
17. What do you wish you had known or done differently to prepare for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
18. What advice would you give current students as they prepare for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
19. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol – Faculty Perceptions

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

- Discuss:
- (1) Description and purpose of the study.
  - (2) Informed consent and confidentiality. Collect signed consent form.
  - (3) Thank participant and ask for permission to audio record.

Guiding Questions: (As a reminder for the interviewer)

1. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program faculty regarding the preparation of students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
2. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program students regarding their preparation to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
3. How could Regional University's elementary education preservice teacher training program be strengthened to more effectively prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
  - a. What are faculty perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?
  - b. What are student perceptions of ways the program could be strengthened to better prepare students to pass the reading/language arts SSAT?

4. What are the perceptions of Regional University's elementary education students of how they would have approached their course work differently early on in their program based on what they know now about the reading/language arts SSAT?

Semistructured Interview Questions:

1. How familiar are you with the standards covered on the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
2. Is there a particular activity or assignment required in your class that you feel best prepares teacher candidates for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
3. What method of instruction is primarily used in your classroom?
4. What theoretical orientation best suits your style of instruction?
5. How do you prepare students for application of the material covered in your course?
6. What do you feel is the most effective method of assessment of student learning? Why?
7. Have you altered your approach to teaching or delivery of material in light of the recent decline in passing scores?
8. How do you feel about "teaching to the test?"
9. Do you feel you do this more now as a result of the recent increase in failing scores?

10. Do you feel pressure from administration to do this in order to prepare students to pass the test? If so, in what ways do you feel the pressure?
11. What suggestions do you offer to students if/when they ask you how they can best prepare for successful completion of the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
12. How do you help students prepare for the [REDACTED], subtest 1 (Reading/Language Arts)?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?