Preservice Teachers Defining and Redefining Reading and the Teaching of Reading

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Abstract

This qualitative study was developed to explore changing beliefs about literacy teaching and learning in the context of one required introductory English Language Arts course. Research questions targeted shifts in individual as well as group responses from a current class of teacher candidates interested in PreK-Grade 8 classroom teaching. Research methods included pre- and post-course surveys, and reflective narrative statements on mid-term "exit cards"; these tools were designed to support course improvement as well as gather data that might facilitate the development of other courses and programs. Important implications emerged for teacher preparation in the area of literacy education. Many of the teacher candidates reported transformation of ideas in relation to the conceptualization of reading and the teaching of reading, shifting from word-oriented approaches to meaning-oriented approaches. Offering opportunities to recall, unpack, and share experiences with other teacher candidates appeared to provide a useful context for interrogating and reinforcing perspectives, or adopting new beliefs, about the teaching of reading.

Purpose of the Study

This study, following previous research of a similar scope (Brenna & Dunk, 2018), was designed to track changing beliefs about literacy teaching and learning in the context of one required introductory English Language Arts (ELA) three-credit course for teacher candidates (TCs). The project was developed to explore and support deepening understandings on the part of these TCs and to offer findings that might enhance teacher education practices related to elementary literacy teaching pedagogy. Surveys and exit passes were completed on a voluntary basis and data from these were explored in light of the following research questions:

- What definitions of reading and understandings about the teaching of reading do preservice teachers bring with them into an introductory English Language Arts class related to elementary education?
- What shifts in definitions and understandings about reading and the teaching of reading occur throughout this course?

The three-credit-unit ELA course that offered the context for this study was organized around key outcomes that focused on developmental characteristics of learners across all stages of reading and writing as well as major instructional approaches, including assessment strategies, within language rich classrooms. Major assignments involved the completion of semantic maps related to course readings (Bainbridge & Heydon, 2018), a

term exam, and five portfolio assignments based on the following: a directed reading lesson; a language experience lesson; an independent writing lesson; a miscue analysis; and a classroom floor plan designed to enhance literacy learning.

Context of the Study

At the Canadian university where the study took place, elementary TCs are required to take two English Language Arts pedagogy courses in order to meet Ministry of Education teacher certification requirements. This study was conducted in the context of the first of these two courses, and typically students in this course are in their third year of a four-year undergraduate preK-8 program (see Table 1 for ELA course outcomes, connected to the Saskatchewan Teacher Education, Classification and Certification TECC Goals and Competencies). The course was instructed by co-author Beverley Brenna, who consciously created the syllabus to deliver opportunities for TCs to unpack previous experience with reading instruction (as children and in any other school experiences undertaken previous to this course). The course outcome that underpinned this work was "identify key issues related to English Language Arts/ELA" and this outcome translated into a focus on different perspectives of reading instruction with associated teacher understandings, student practice, and student assessment examples.

The textbook used in this course (Bainbridge & Heydon, 2017) utilizes terminology around four perspectives of reading instruction to include the following:

- "bottom-up", a more traditional, phonics-first transmission models, where meaning proceeds from parts to the whole (Gough, 1972);
- "top-down", exemplified in Smith (1971) (where reading is considered to be a language-thinking process with meaning proceeding from whole to part);
- "interactive" (a combination of whole to part and part to whole processing, where reading is defined as a cognitive process) (Rumelhart, 1977, 1994); and
- "social-constructivist" (where meaning is constructed on the basis of the social background of readers and the social context of the reading itself), relating to Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory wherein the reading and the text are seen to have a reciprocal relationship.

The course instructor did not favour "bottom-up" approaches, and offered personal case study student-examples where children who had learned to rely on phonics alone without the application of other comprehension strategies were unsuccessful meaning-makers during and after reading. Readings from this text and in-class activities supported TCs in developing understandings of all four perspectives. In addition, while questions on the pre-course survey asked TCs to respond to topics connected to some of these perspectives (including an identification of the "best reader" from miscue examples where assessment resulted from the perspective taken), the instructor did not return to these questions with her own viewpoint prior to the delivery of the post-course survey. In this way, students were given an opportunity to unpack their current beliefs, listen to each other, and consider more deeply the basis of all four perspectives prior to completion of the post-course survey, without being asked to memorize or reiterate one perspective for examinations or other testing purposes.

Table 1

ELA Course Outcomes

- identify key issues related to English Language Arts (ELA)
- discuss developmental characteristics of learners in emergent, early and fluent stages of reading and writing
- identify characteristics of speakers for whom English is an Additional Language and strategies for classroom application
- identify the major instructional approaches for teaching emergent, early, and fluent readers and writers (language experience approach; prepackaged basal/levelled books' approach; children's literature approach)
- begin to apply assessment strategies to emergent, early and fluent reading and writing, including miscue analysis
- identify key objectives for teaching with rich and diverse children's literature (oral and written) including resources by Indigenous authors
- present ways to create a rich, diverse, and engaging environment for literacy teaching and learning, considering *language rich* classrooms
- plan and deliver a beginning repertoire of teaching strategies related to reading and writing including use of the Directed Listening/Reading Thinking Activity (DLTA/DRTA) and Think Aloud Framework (with an emphasis on active comprehension strategies)
- demonstrate beginning familiarity with ELA curriculum

In terms of the schedule and context of this course, TCs met once weekly for 15 weeks. Each session was 2.5 hours in duration. As part of their program, most of these TCs also registered in field experience opportunities which occurred two full days per week over approximately two-thirds of the term. Portfolio assignments in this ELA coursework connected course content and practical experiences working with children.

Literature Review

Post-secondary Teacher Education and Literacy Instruction

Contemporary views related to quality teaching of reading include beliefs that it occurs across the curriculum and is a "complex, multidimensional phenomenon" (Croninger & Valli, 2009, p. 101). There has been extensive previous documentation of particular preservice methods' literacy instruction in relation to positive performance assessments of teacher candidates (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2010), the increase of pedagogical research in reading (Clift & Brady, 2005), and remaining gaps in research (Hoffman et al., 2005; Maloch et al., 2003; Pomerantz & Pierce, 2010; Timperly & Alton-Lee, 2008; Risko et al., 2008).

Clift and Brady (2005) reviewed research occurring between 1995 and 2001 that targeted the impact of methods courses, specifically interrogating studies of reading and English Language Arts teacher education practices. Risko et al. (2008) examined broad themes of teacher educator practices related to the teaching of reading. Conclusions from

both reviews identify the importance of structured teaching formats and opportunities to practice pedagogical knowledge with children. Additionally, Risko and Reid (2019) suggest that literacy teacher candidates benefit from "mentored opportunities during preparation for debriefing and reconciling prior beliefs with new knowledge and theories about pedagogy" (p. 425). In a summary discussion related to a particular issue of the *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Lyon and Weiser (2009) conclude that teachers "need to be taught specific, evidence-based strategies in their college courses and during effective professional development, both of which should be geared toward improving literacy through empirical research" (p. 479). These sentiments are echoed in a recent survey of practicing elementary teachers who called for university faculty to prepare teacher candidates in a wide variety of methods related to reading instruction (Brenna & Chen, 2013).

Massey (2002) presents connections between research and practice relating to the importance of preservice teachers' existing knowledge and the necessity of assisting and revising previous assumptions about literacy learning. These findings support a model of adult learning that reflects developmental learning stages on the part of preservice teachers, suggesting that TC's previous experiences produce concepts that require time to identify and revise. For example, in Massey's study, the TCs demonstrated a tendency to ask their students strictly recall questions after reading, rather than explore other types of comprehension teaching and assessment. The results of Massey's study suggest "the need for university educators to confront preservice teachers' existing knowledge, helping the students to bring it to a conscious level" (p. 121). This recommendation supports the importance of strategically reflexive coursework as well as presenting a sound theoretical knowledge base related to the teaching of reading (Risko, Roskos, & Vukelich, 2002; Smith, 2009).

Massey's (2002) findings match reports from Clift and Brady (2005) in terms of the differential change that happens in preservice English Language Arts coursework when methods courses and field experiences introduce ideas that preservice teachers do not initially accept. Critical, however, is understanding what ideas are initially brought to bear on TC's conceptualizations of reading instruction, as understanding students' initial views can assist both instructor and students in subsequent explorations. As Ciampa and Gallagher note (2018), examining the beliefs about preservice teachers in relation to reading instruction is an increasingly important area of study. Preservice teacher education is an area where practitioner research continues to play a prominent role (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), and thus opportunities to model such research in the undergraduate course context of this inquiry were deemed valuable to students over and above whatever findings transpired.

In response to a view that TCs come into B.Ed. programs with considerable practical knowledge about the teaching of reading, negating the importance of methods courses taught by faculty with specializations in literacy education, this study serves to explore the knowledge that a particular group of TCs carried into their first of two ELA courses. Universities seeking to shift curriculum courses into blended, interdisciplinary offerings where ELA might be proposed as embedded content within another subject area would be encouraged to interrogate further the notion that adult readers automatically understand the reading process and therefore the teaching of reading.

Definitions of Reading

Reading instruction can be identified as a social practice that includes applications of decoding, text-meaning, pragmatic understandings, and critical practices (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Various leaders in the field of Education advocate for highlighting particular aspects of reading instruction, especially related to ages and stages of instruction, however for the purpose of this study, reading was broadly defined as a receptive act of communication that involves skills and strategies in the four areas delineated below and adapted from the work of Luke and Freebody (1997):

- decoding—strategies for identifying words in text;
- meaning-making—the process of synthesizing textual ideas into comprehensive understandings;
- pragmatics—applying culturally-based communicative competence and recognizing opportunities for broader insights about text; and
- critical practices—using critical literacy to assess stereotypes and voices yet unheard in various messages and media.

In Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017, the ILA (2017) outlines outcomes synthesized from research and literature for the preparation of high-quality literacy professionals. Specific to TCs preparing to teach in a pre-Kindergarten to early elementary setting, the ILA's standards speak directly to the importance of theoretical, conceptual, and evidence-based foundational knowledge around the developmental stages of reading, writing, and oral language. Additionally, the ILA's standards highlight the necessity of a deep understanding of curriculum and evidence-based instructional approaches that support the development of the foundational reading skills (i.e. concepts of print, alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, fluency), as well as vocabulary and comprehension.

Relying on one instructional approach that privileges reading at the word level over meaning-making across phrases, sentences, and larger units, is considered to be a historical practice not supported by current research, as described by Bainbridge and Heydon (2017) under the "bottom-up" perspective of reading instruction. Bottom-up activities are typically associated with isolated skill drills, phonics' worksheets, and emphasis on phonics' decoding in the absence of other meaning-making strategies. Reading from this view is thought to mature from part-to-whole progression as students learn letters and sounds, and then words, and then tackle sentences and longer constructions. Older students might spend considerable amounts of classroom time on grammar lessons separate from aesthetic or efferent reading opportunities or self-initiated writing. What became apparent in our current study was that beliefs emerging from our data could be catalogued as "bottom-up" or alternate to "bottom-up"—and we refer to these dualities as "word-based" and "meaning-based."

What specific beliefs about reading and reading instruction do the TCs in the current study bring with them into introductory English Language Arts coursework? Do shifts occur in these beliefs during the course as it unfolds? And if so, what kinds of changes appear in belief systems related to reading and reading instruction in the framework of an initial three-credit elementary ELA course? Research has shown that new teachers tend to incorporate strategies previously experienced during their own schooling (Barnyack & Paquette, 2010) and thus interrogations of current beliefs at the preservice teaching level

are important baselines for trajectories forward. Discussions about TC's transformation as reading teachers were deemed valuable as part of this inquiry.

This study was designed to assist the instructor of the current course in providing the necessary experiences to support learning; to make conscious to the TCs their initial thoughts, to be explored further throughout the course; and to offer a picture of the understandings of these preservice teachers at this point in their teacher education journey—a picture that can be compared to the understandings of TCs in previous years as well as explored comparatively to the ideas of groups of TCs in future studies. An exploration of the beliefs that TCs bring with them into ELA coursework is also important in light of the recent shifts seen in university contexts, this context included, related to the importance (or lack of importance) of literacy-related pedagogy.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study was framed as a post-secondary classroom-based inquiry with social constructionism applied as a lens for exploration, allowing that there is a real world relative to the knower where "meaning is not discovered but constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). In terms of our topic choice, ideas about the teaching of reading and, in fact, reading itself, are social constructions, and related definitions are acknowledged as connected to time and space. Previous studies have explored the beliefs of preservice teachers related to reading instruction from quantitative perspectives (e.g., Barnyack & Paquette, 2010) to mixed-methods (e.g., Ciampa & Gallagher, 2018) and qualitative perspectives (e.g., Brenna & Dunk, 2018). We anticipated that this study might add to broader findings in relation to preservice teacher education as a transformative context. In addition, Mezirow's (1997) notion that expanding a frame of reference—the structures of assumptions through which we understand experience—offered the potential for transformation as it applies to the forward journey of undergraduate students in relation to ELA pedagogy.

Methods

Data Collection

This research was conducted by two researchers: a faculty member instructing an introductory ELA course for preservice teachers in an elementary (PreK – Grade 8) cohort, and a research assistant who collaborated on the review of the literature, data analysis, and the writing of this paper. Participants were 42 TCs enrolled in this course who provided anonymous responses on a semi-structured survey, given at the beginning and end of the term, as well as exit cards completed mid-term, all directed towards teaching elementary ELA with a specific focus on reading instruction (see Appendices A & B for survey questions).

Although the study was developed within a frame of "assessment for learning" and "assessment as learning" (Hume, 2010) as part of typical classroom practice, all of the surveys and exit cards were completed on a voluntary basis with flexible submissions of the pre-course survey and the exit cards into a basket the instructor brought to class. For the final response on the post-course survey, where perhaps the most pressure might exist on participants to conform to what they thought the instructor wanted to hear, the departmental secretary exchanged places with the instructor at the end of class and collected student responses in an envelope that was subsequently sealed and retained in the secretary's locked filing cabinet. This envelope was provided to the researchers only after

final marks were distributed. Because the data were collected anonymously and voluntarily from participants in a framework of course improvement, no participant permissions were required according to ethical procedures' guidelines (as per the REB response Beh 17-392 Letter of Exemption).

Survey Instrument

The survey utilized in this study was adapted from an original instrument produced to track teacher beliefs (Gove, 1983; Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1991) and participant responses were examined initially (at the beginning of the course) to plan subsequent lessons, as would typically happen with a survey of this nature, and then at the end of the term (after final marks had been distributed to students) in order to develop conceptual categories and related data patterns that might illuminate shifting understandings of literacy teaching and learning. In addition to definitions of reading and understandings about how it should be taught in early and middle-years' classrooms, the TCs were asked to reflect on any sort of transformation that occurred over the university term in relation to changing beliefs about literacy education.

Of the 42 possible participants in the pre-survey, 100% chose to submit responses during class time, and the TCs attached pseudonyms to all materials submitted. Of the 41 possible participants in the post-survey, 90% of the class submitted responses (on 37 post-surveys, with absences accounting for the missing responses).

The survey instrument was adapted from previous surveys related to literacy teaching (Brenna and Dunk, 2018; Gove, 1983; Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1991) and expanded from previous use in terms of specific questions about the teaching of reading. Use of pseudonyms allowed the researcher to examine the beliefs of particular TCs over time as well as compile general responses and changes to these responses as a comprehensive group.

Exit Cards

As well as the pre- and post-surveys, data was also collected on "exit cards" utilized mid-way through the semester. The exit card is a formative assessment strategy (Hume, 2010) consisting of written answers on an index card submitted, in this case anonymously, at the end of class. It allows students to summarize their understanding while instructors gain a time-referenced snapshot of learning. Information from this open-ended tool was collected in terms of self-identified changes occurring by mid-term. In terms of response rate, 85% of the TCs submitted exit card information (with absences from class that day accounting for missing responses). The researchers delayed reading these exit cards until the course had ended, at which time analysis techniques were applied to the exit cards as well as both surveys.

Data Reduction

As data reduction is an important part of the research method (Smagorinsky, 2008), we have outlined our processes here. Responses on the surveys (applied pre- and post-course delivery) were read question-by-question, in the order of questions provided, beginning with perusing all of the answers to the first question across all surveys. Notes were made categorizing narrative responses into groups based on similar content or positioning in response to the question; numbers were tallied to display totals where "yes"

and "no" answers were given. Where participants skipped or otherwise ignored a question, no attempt was made to determine or predict their rationale for doing so and their response was simply not counted in the accumulated result.

Data Analysis

Content analysis (Berg, 2009; Merriam, 1998) was applied to the data set derived from the surveys and exit cards. Thematic analysis of the available data occurred with Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-phase guide in mind. As the data was reduced, which occurred as the surveys and exit cards were read and re-read, initial ideas were jotted down, on large sheets of chart paper, and possible patterns highlighted. Once the reduction phase was completed, the data was examined to produce initial codes referring to the TCs' early and changing definitions of reading and understandings about the teaching of reading. Themes were then sought and reviewed, and, finally, named prior to the production of this report. The data that emerged reflected either "word-based" or "meaning-based" literacy teaching pedagogy, and these two codes were utilized in thinking about TC beliefs in relation to potential teaching practice. As the data were explored with these findings in mind, key quotes were identified to represent various perspectives shared by the TCs on the surveys and exit passes.

Emerging Themes

Themes named as a result of the coding phase reflected terminology used to reflect various theories of reading. Our dual codes included the following: "word-based"—referring to notions of reading pedagogy that involve a transmission model from part (letters and sounds) to whole (meaning), consistent with what has been called "bottom-up" processing (summarized in Bainbridge & Heydon, 2017); and "meaning-based" —referring to notions that privilege whole to part processing, consistent with what has been called "top-down" but also not inconsistent with social constructivist or interactive pedagogy, as summarized in Bainbridge & Heydon, 2017. Figure 1 presents coding examples of survey data related to respondents' perceptions of best reader.

"Word-based" Pedagogy -the focus of teaching relates to student recognition of individual letters and sounds	**"Meaning-based" Pedagogy -the focus of teaching relates to reader comprehension of text**
Identification of "Best Reader": This reader is taking time to sound out syllables. The mistakes that were made are still close to the sound of the actual word (even though the substituted word makes no sense in the passage). (Ty8424, Pre-Course Survey)	*Identification of "Best Reader": The student read 'canal' right the first time…* (and then substituted) *channel* (a word that is*) similar to a canal*. (Luna, Post-Course Survey)
Identification of "Best Reader": Reader C (is the best reader) *because they are sounding out better*	*Identification of "Best Reader": My previous definition* (of good reading) *was more about getting everything*

than Reader B. (Marie4, Post-Course Survey)	*correct, my new definition is more focused on understanding what has been read.* (Mackenze6, Post-Course Survey)

Figure 1. Coding Table Examples

Limitations of this qualitative study involve researcher interpretation of data and potential error in this regard. In addition, because the course content privileged particular theories of reading instruction, it is possible that student responses mirrored textbook or instructor stances without representing actual transformation of beliefs. Anonymity of responses and requests to track and share evidence of transformation were applied to the study with the intent to ameliorate these limitations as much as possible.

One of the segments of the pre- and post- survey included a request for respondents to rate where they would spend the greatest amount of instructional time. It is important to note that instructor beliefs about this question were not shared. In this way, the researchers were able to access participants' thinking on this topic, note any variety of responses on this section of the survey, and document the shifting perspectives of the TCs over time, while not seeing TCs deliver any form of memorized response of instructor perspective.

We are conscious that, as a result of the parameters of qualitative research, our findings are not generalizable outside the boundary of this group of participants. However, we do think that our results are intriguing and worthy of consideration by other researchers seeking to examine the journey of TCs as elementary reading teachers. In addition, we believe our study has evidence to offer in terms of post-secondary program development, underpinning a rationale for theory and practice related to teacher education and the teaching of reading.

Findings

Preliminary Definitions and Understandings of Reading

At the beginning of the course, this group of TCs generally appeared to ascribe to "word-based" teaching methods and definitions of reading that related specifically to decoding on the basis of phonics information. This was demonstrated in the popularity of offering phonics as a support for a child's miscue (question #4 on the survey, Appendix A). On that survey, 32 respondents (n=42) emphasized "sounding it out" as a key strategy they would offer to the child. "Word-based" perspectives were also evident in the number of students in agreement with (14 respondents) or on the fence about (13 respondents) unrehearsed oral round-robin reading activities in future classrooms, and many TCs suggested that oral fluency would result from this practice in addition to potential for teacher assessment of correct reading of words.

The final question on the pre-survey asked students to identify "best reader" on the basis of three different readers' miscues, and 29 TCs (69%) selected as "most capable" the third child who substitutes a phonically-close mispronunciation of the word "canal" (vs 13 TCs—31%--who selected the reader who read "canal" correctly the first time and then substituted it for a semantically similar word in a subsequent insignificant miscue).

The pre-survey also generated general definitions of literacy involving a number of variations on "reading and writing" with a few responses that also included oracy and

comprehension components. When completing a subsequent statement "Good readers…" most TCs on the pre-survey focused very generally on comprehension while a few others on oral fluency and "correctness." Even fewer included specific decoding and comprehension strategies, while others suggested affective traits such as confidence, persistence, and enthusiasm. It was interesting to note the discrepancy between meaning-based considerations here, and earlier recommendations on the same survey that denoted a priority for word-based reading.

When completing the statement "Exemplary reading teachers…" it was noted that the responses often leaned towards general statements related to supporting diverse learners as well as promoting other affective teaching skills such as patience. When specific responses were included, they almost always suggested attention to a "product" of reading, such as helping students "understand… the material", or "teaching literature" where the literal meaning seemed to be a target of the activity, rather than attention to "the process" of reading, such as modelling and encouraging active reading strategies.

A striking difference in response was apparent in the data resulting from the questions: "I think teachers of reading in grade 1…and grade 8…should regularly…", where the grade 1 commentary included responses related to reading aloud to students, and the grade 8 commentary involved responses related to independent reading by students followed by worksheets/questions. Furthermore, when responding to a question about ways to assess reading development, most respondents presented considerations of the product of reading, such as requirements for comprehension questions and student summaries along with vocabulary tests and oral reading examinations. Only 1 TC on the pre-survey specifically mentioned the identification of reading strategies—typically considered as exploring the process of reading (e.g., Afflerbach, 2018)—as a method to assess reading development.

Of the respondents on the pre-survey, 31% suggested it was good practice in a 1:1 reading context to immediately correct a child when an oral reading error was made, 40.5% stated that it was good practice to immediately correct a child over a spelling error, and 35.7% opted to practice unrehearsed oral round-robin reading in their future classrooms, with many highlighting assessment as a key purpose, although 35.7% indicated mixed feelings about this activity. "Yes, we did it when I was a student and I didn't mind," was one response, but "It could embarrass readers who aren't as strong." Another TC justified that "Reading aloud is important to learn." When considering the introduction of all vocabulary words prior to reading, 64.3% felt this was a necessity while 31% suggested most vocabulary words were better identified in context than prior to reading, and 4.8% were undecided or had mixed viewpoints about this practice. See Figure 2 for more information in this regard and comparisons with post-survey data.

When considering five activities to teach students to read or become more proficient readers, 31% of the respondents indicated that the most classroom time should go to Introducing New Vocabulary, 14.3% selected Setting Purposes for Reading, 19% selected Reading (Silently or with a Partner), 16.7% selected Responding to Reading Activities, and 19% selected Worksheets to Teach Skills and Strategies. See Figure 3 for a comparison to post-survey data.

Shifts in Definitions and Understandings

Exit Card Data. By mid-term, the TC's informal reflections on "exit card" documents identified their beliefs at this point in time, and 94% of the TCs indicated that their definitions of reading and/or ideas about teaching reading had changed during the course so far. Callynn, a student in this course, indicated that "Before, I believed that the reading process was about sounding out letters/words to learn a letter/word. However, I now understand that it is much more complex and there are many different strategies to use." Bertha indicated that her definition had broadened to include "phonics, semantics, syntax" as well as pragmatics and that "all of these can be used at the same time." Cosmo addressed that teaching the reading process involved "new strategies and approaches…rather than just giving the student a book and hoping for the best." Katniss verbalized that "there is much more to this process" than she had originally understood, echoed by Kelly who said that "…learning how to read is not as simple and straightforward as it seems" and Rae who indicated that "each student has a unique fund of knowledge and each student learns in their own way, at their own pace."

A few TCs also indicated that the reading process shifts throughout one's lifetime "from infancy to adulthood." Marie specified that "my definition has definitely changed. Before I didn't really consider the reading strategies that emergent readers use, such as reading the pictures."

Other TCs suggested that, in the field of education, reading-teacher philosophies have also changed over time to reflect new understandings. Rose summarized that "the reading process involves pre-reading strategies as well as during-reading and after-reading strategies"—something she had not considered before.

On the exit cards, many TCs identified new teaching strategies in their repertoire. Jacqueline stated that "When I read with students before this course in volunteering situations, I was quick to correct students if they have a miscue. Now, I do not correct the error unless it affects the overall meaning of the book." Jean stated, "I feel a lot more comfortable in the process." A number of TCs reflected that learning to read was not going to appear as a linear process in their students and that it would be important to demonstrate a variety of strategies to support individual learning as a "whole-part-whole process and that all cueing systems must be taught." PWW's key point about teaching reading was that it meant "giving students the skills needed to be good readers" in a process that Rae suggested "involves a lot of observation" of students to "get them where we want them to be….you can't teach one way and expect every student to get it." Timothy indicated cross-disciplinary connections when saying "I didn't realize how much of ELA can be used in other classes."

Post-Survey Data

At the end of the course, the post-survey data also suggested changes from pre-survey understandings. When considering supports for a child's miscue (question #4 on the post- survey, Appendix B), most of the TCs suggested that a miscue wasn't a problem unless it affected meaning. A popular response on the post-survey involved letting the child continue reading and then later considering if mini-lessons were warranted based on the significance of the miscue. Only 4 TCs (n=37), or 11% of the respondents, relied on phonics as an immediate support in their response to this question in contrast with 76% who favored phonics in their responses on the pre-survey.

"Meaning-based" reading pedagogy seemed to underpin most of the students' responses on the post-survey, with attention to the process of reading in terms of strategy teaching and contextualized reading assessment, and this was also evident in the number of TCs who indicated that they would not practice unrehearsed oral round-robin reading with their future students (35 respondents) with the 2 remaining TCs indicating that they might do this type of activity but only with readers who volunteered. Question #11 on the post-survey asked students to identify "best reader" on the basis of three different miscues, and 20 TCs (54%, compared to 31% on the pre-survey) selected Reader A who read "canal" correctly the first time and then substituted it for a semantically similar word in a subsequent miscue while 17 TCs (46%, compared to 69% on the pre-survey) selected Reader C, who substituted a phonically-close mispronunciation of the word "canal," as most capable.

The post-survey also elicited more fulsome definitions of literacy than presented on the pre-survey, with more references to oral as well as written language. More references were made to comprehension as well, with additional emphasis on confidence, purpose and communicative competence as well as acknowledgement of multiple forms of literacy and connections to literacy across the curriculum.

In terms of "good readers," most TCs continued to focus on comprehension while mentioning multiple strategies and individual learning needs of students. Oral fluency and "correctness" thinking on the pre-survey were replaced on the post-survey with the idea that "mistakes" at the single word level are part of the reading process.

When completing the statement "Exemplary reading teachers…" responses appeared to be more specific than at the beginning of the course, including modelling and other strategy-teaching opportunities as well as references to assessment and student motivation. Only one TC left this section blank on the post-survey while on the pre-survey five TCs omitted it.

Shifts in Thinking: From Attention to the Product of Reading to the Process of Reading

In contrast to data on the pre-survey, which overwhelmingly emphasized reading as a "product" based on correct word reading, data from the post-survey commonly suggested attention to "the process" of reading as well as the importance of overall comprehension of text. In addition to referencing various literacy strategies, many responses to "I think teachers of reading in grade 1…and grade 8…should regularly…" demonstrated more awareness that teacher read-alouds and independent reading are important at both age levels. This was a striking change from the pre-survey and included advice for teachers in both grade-level scenarios to read aloud to their students, model strategies, encourage independent, interest-based reading through a variety of materials, and support their students' listening skills, questioning skills, and reflections and connections to text. Minority voices on this part of the survey still indicated that teachers should read aloud to the younger students only and plan independent reading for the older students only, along with one comment about using worksheets and cross-curricular reading strategies only in older grades.

When responding to the post-survey question about ways to assess reading development, many responses here also involved considerations of the process of reading. Focus on process included ideas related to miscue analysis and running records as well as utilizing assessment opportunities within the context of Directed Reading/Listening

Thinking Activities and other contexts for observing "before, during, and after-reading comprehension". In addition, a number of TCs mentioned think-alouds and general observations/anecdotal records as well as the implementation of choral reading frameworks in which to conduct assessment.

Of the respondents on the post-survey, almost all of them suggested it was not good practice to immediately correct a child when an oral reading error was made, or immediately correct a child over a spelling error, with some qualifiers as to when correction might be useful. This contrasts to responses on the pre-survey where a larger number of respondents indicated that reading miscues and spelling errors should be immediately corrected.

Suggestions on the post-survey regarding miscues included things like waiting until the child was finished reading the paragraph and observing to see if a self-correction occurred first. Suggestions related to spelling errors included qualifiers about the process of revision as an opportunity where correction was necessary as well as the importance of data collection for future mini lessons. However, when considering whether or not to offer immediate corrections to reading or spelling, most respondents agreed with Timothy who put it this way: "In most cases, no."

Similarly, on the post-survey, almost all of the TCs indicated they would not conduct unrehearsed oral round-robin reading as a classroom practice. Two respondents who seemed in agreement with the practice, or else undecided, qualified their responses to indicate that in cases where students were capable fluent readers, and/or volunteered for the activity, unrehearsed reading might be acceptable. This thinking contrasts with the high percentage of TCs who indicated on the pre-survey that they would use unrehearsed oral round-robin reading in their future classrooms. See Figure 2 for a comparison between pre- and post-course survey data.

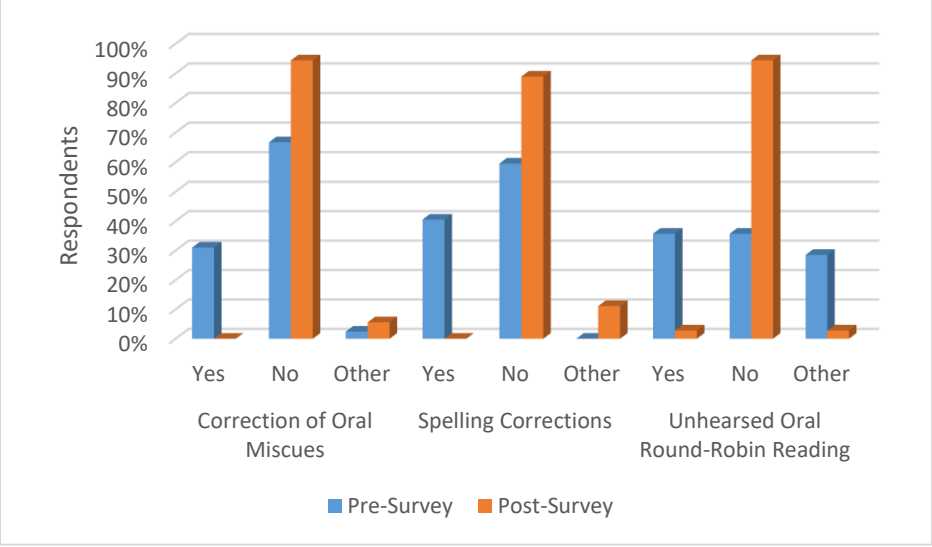

Figure 2. Comparison Between Pre- and Post-Survey Data

On the post-survey, TC responses to the introduction of all new vocabulary prior to reading were similar to their responses on the pre-survey, with 47.2% indicating on the post-survey that this was necessary. Some qualifiers included the idea that very young children needed to learn the words before they read them, and other qualifiers indicated

that older students needed to expand their vocabulary by learning content-area words prior to reading. Undecided or with mixed views were approximately 19.4% of the TCs while approximately 33.3% said they would not introduce all new vocabulary words prior to reading. Most of the latter group qualified their statements by suggesting that students needed practice in word-identification in the literary context. Figure 3 outlines pre- and post- comparisons of the percentage of respondents considering the introduction of all new vocabulary words prior to reading. There did not appear to be grade-level distinctions between respondents who indicated yes or no to this question, as recorded grade-levels corresponding to this question ranged from early years to middle-grade across both response categories.

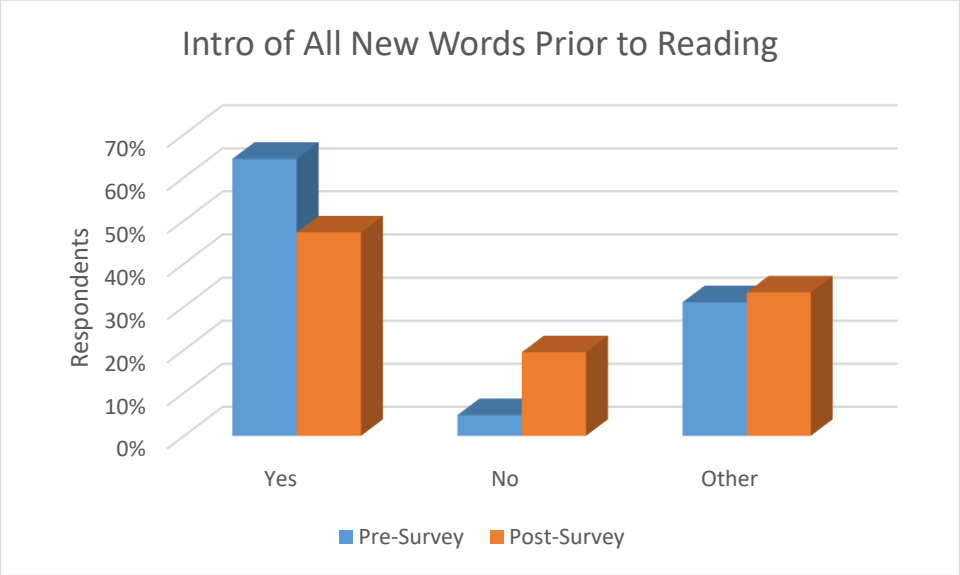

Figure 3. Comparison between Pre- and Post- Survey Data re Vocabulary Instruction

When considering five activities to teach students to read or become more proficient readers, on the post-survey 50% of the respondents voted "reading (silently or with a partner)" in first place (compared to 19% on the pre-survey) while 11.1% placed reading in last place (compared to 23.8% on the pre-survey). Figure 4 offers a comparison of pre- and post-course survey data in this regard.

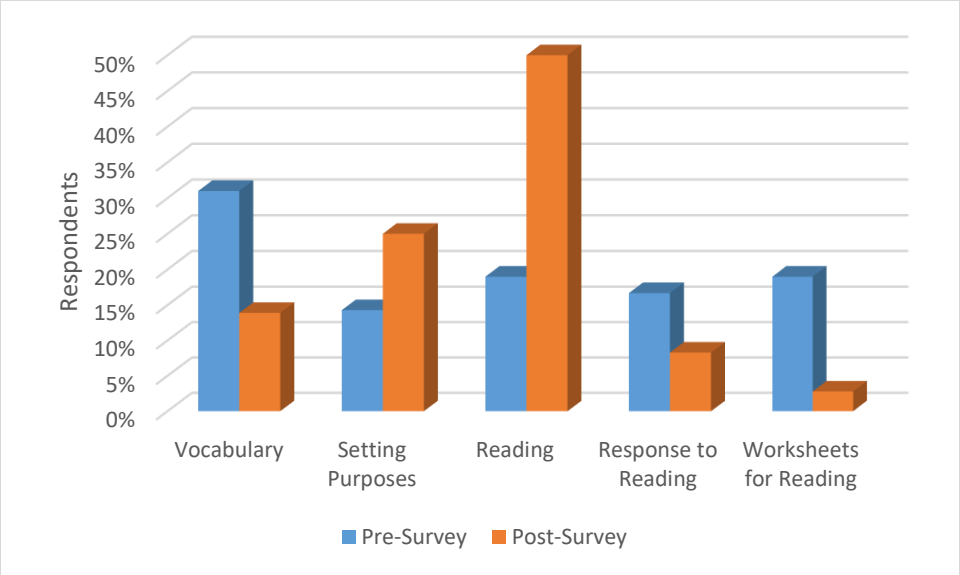

Figure 4. Activities Recommended for the Most Classroom Time

Some quotes from the TCs drawn from the post-survey summarize further their changing beliefs. Breanne said, "I didn't realize how important the teacher/parent reading aloud to the child was, I will make sure to do that a lot." Dawn said "This course has helped me in terms of what to look for when students are struggling and how to help them succeed." Grace suggested that her definition of reading "has gone deeper to focus less on accuracy and worksheets and more on comprehension, knowledge and enjoyment." She also indicated that "I didn't mind unrehearsed oral reading as a student but now I understand its stress."

Discussion

TCs entering this course had narrow understandings of literacy and the teaching of reading without realizing the breadth of content possible. Our study results imply for a number of reasons that required introductory elementary ELA courses are potentially beneficial for TCs. Such courses have the potential to introduce topics that are not common sense or self-explanatory. Preservice teachers bring wide experiences to bear, offering differing responses to various types of instruction in schools, without necessarily knowing, early in their program, which are research-based practices and which are not. If left to elective choices, a route potentially considered as institutions look for new ways to deliver content, TCs might not initially self-select ELA content as a necessary component of their B.Ed programs. Rationales for not choosing ELA curriculum courses may relate to TC's original feelings of confidence regarding the subject matter or else a self-identified lack of competency in previous English coursework that propels them away from further classes.

It is particularly important to note that while a handful of TCs indicated on the mid-term exit cards and the post-survey that their definitions of the reading process or teaching reading had not significantly changed, and found their previous beliefs reinforced by course content, almost all of the TCs surveyed indicated transformation both in terms of their definitions of reading and their ideas about teaching reading. In terms of learning and growth, Heck said "I understand the importance of doing low-pressure activities, where the

children want to read and want to feel engaged in the learning." Katniss stated that "Before this class, I had a very bottom-up view of the reading process. I thought it was more straightforward and didn't allow for much differentiation. Now, I know a number of ways to support a variety of students…" Mackenzie said about her new knowledge of the reading process, "My previous definition was more about getting everything correct, my new definition is more focused on understanding what has been read." Peter's discussion of his learning was particularly profound: "I used to just think reading was just either you get it or you don't. Now I know the major difference between good readers and readers who need more help and time learning."

Quite striking in the comparison of pre- and post-course survey data is how closely similar the advice to teachers of grade 1 and 8 appears in the post-survey responses while TC's advice for grade 1 and 8 teachers is markedly different on the pre-survey responses. The data demonstrating that TCs initially thought that teachers should read aloud to grade one students while assigning independent reading, accompanied by comprehension questions, to grade eight students, was striking. The idea that TCs coming into this course were separating the teaching of reading at different grade levels into such distinctly different pedagogies is a fascinating result that bears further consideration.

These study results support Massey's (2002) discussion of the importance of addressing preservice teachers' existing knowledge in order to assist and revise previous assumptions about literacy learning, considering a developmental stage model of adult learning where TCs' previous experiences produce concepts that take time to unpack and shift. The results of Massey's study suggest "the need for university educators to confront preservice teachers' existing knowledge, helping the students to bring it to a conscious level" (p. 121). This practice supports the importance of strategically reflective coursework as well as a sound theoretical knowledge base related to the teaching of reading (Risko, Roskos, & Vukelich, 2002; Smith, 2009). This finding also matches the review of Clift and Brady (2005) in terms of the differential change that happens when methods courses and field experiences introduce ideas that preservice teachers do not initially accept.

While Massey's (2002) participants demonstrated an initial tendency to ask their students strictly recall questions following reading rather than explore other types of comprehension teaching and assessment, TCs in the current study similarly demonstrated initial reliance on assessments that focused on demonstrated oral reading that gets all the words correct rather than an understanding of what was read and identifying comprehension strategies inherent in a process whereby reading is meaning-making. In addition, many TCs presented "bottom-up" teaching strategies solely related to phonics decoding skills.

We recognize the value of data from this study in examining the components of the particular course whose context provided a strong foundation for this study. Practitioner inquiries of this nature, whether formally designed as research or connected to instruction as ongoing course and program assessment, are extremely valuable and recommended as important considerations for other ELA instructors. This recommendation corresponds with the wide value of practitioner research synthesized in a number of similarly drawn studies (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

As post-secondary institutions continue to evaluate elementary teacher education programs, it is suggested that results from this study can support continued time allocated to ELA coursework, in particular the teaching of reading pedagogy. A recommendation for

direct and concerted ELA methodology training addresses a concern about the notion of spontaneous schooling—a problematic ideology that suggests adequate teaching can result from a simple knowledge of subject matter and which only serves to replicate transmission models of education (Murray, 2008).

Conclusion

In summary, as post-secondary instructors in Education think about students' changing beliefs in relation to knowledge and practice, the exploration of how TCs involved in introductory elementary ELA coursework identify growth and transformation, as well as specific examples of changing viewpoints, is intriguing and worthy of deep attention. Our research supports the findings of a previous study working in similar territory with TCs involved in an Early Childhood Education cohort (Brenna & Dunk, 2018) as well as other studies advocating for time in class for TCs to become comfortable with new ideas about literacy instruction and to unpack previous beliefs (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2001; Maloch et al., 2003; Risko & Reid, 2019). It appears that the coursework delineated in the context of this current ELA course was supportive to changing beliefs of preservice reading teachers across the elementary grades as well as supportive to questions these TCs had about classroom application of new ideas related to reading instruction.

These results matter in the context of teacher education as many teacher education programs across North America offer courses similar to the one described in this study. The finding that TCs came to the course with varied definitions of reading and ideas about the teaching of reading is insightful, especially in regards to their initial preferences for word-based instruction vs meaning-based instruction. Simply because preservice teachers have themselves learned to read does not mean that they automatically understand the reading process in all its nuances nor best teaching practices for diverse populations in schools. Our findings also underpin a rationale for university coursework in reading instruction that is sensitive to the ideas brought to introductory reading study. We recommend opportunities for extended learning in a sequence of courses designed to tap individual experiences and broaden the range of possibilities for instruction rendered by classroom teachers.

The opportunity to engage in classroom discussions of various theories about the teaching of reading, with strategic experiences unpacking past practice and considering new possibilities, seems very influential in preparing classroom teachers who can identify a range of perspectives and apply breadth of knowledge in evaluating reading programs for elementary students, as well as assess and support the reading process itself. Further research is definitely encouraged to illuminate the transformation of teacher beliefs, specifically targeting the evaluation of particular post-secondary strategies, supporting further insights regarding teacher preparation as well as in-service related to literacy teaching and learning.

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Appendix A: ECUR 309.3 Pre-Survey A
(adapted from Gove, 1983; Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 1991**)**

Please use an anonymous name that you will provide on both surveys (before and after course delivery) **perhaps your middle name and the number of people in your family is an easy one to recall

Pseudonym: _____

Please circle your response to question A, and then go on to answer the other questions numbered 1-10 (point form is fine). Please do not change your answer to A (below) after you have written it.

A. I feel comfortable teaching reading/writing at my preferred grade level(s):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

****

1. **What is your definition of literacy?**
2. **Finish the following statement: "Good readers…."**
3. **Finish the following statement: "Exemplary reading teachers…"**
4. **What will you do when a student is reading orally in a 1:1 reading context with you and reads a word wrong (also called a "miscue")?**
   Is it good practice to immediately correct a child, in the situation above, as soon as an oral reading error is made? Why or why not?
5. **Is it good practice to immediately correct a child, in a writing situation, as soon as a spelling error is made? Why or why not?**
6. **Will you have your students practice unrehearsed oral round-robin reading in your classroom? Why or why not?**
7. **Is it important to introduce all of the new vocabulary words before students in grade _____ (fill in your preferred grade here) read a selection independently? Why/why not?**
8. **List ways you might assess reading development in your students in grade _____ (fill in your preferred grade here):**
9. **Classrooms support many different kinds of activities in teaching students to read or to be more proficient readers. Which activities do you think should occupy the *greatest* amount of classroom time in grade _____(fill in your preferred grade here)?**

Number the following from #1 (greatest amount) to #5 (least amount):

a. Introduction of vocabulary _____
b. Setting purposes for reading _____
c. Reading (silently or with a partner) _____
d. Response to reading activities _____
e. Worksheets to develop reading skills and strategies _____

10. I think teachers of reading in grade 1 should regularly _____ and I think teachers of reading in grade 8 should regularly_____

11. Look below at the oral reading "mistakes" ("miscues") of three readers. The word they have not read correctly is underlined, and what they read instead of that word is written above it. Which of the three readers would you judge as the best or most effective reader based on what you see here? Why?

Reader A

I live near this canal.
Men haul things up and
channel
down the canal in big
boats.

Reader B

2. candle
1. ca
I live near this canal.
Men haul things up and
candle
down the canal in big
boats.

Reader C

2. cannel
1. ca
I live near this canal.
Men haul things up and
cannel
down the canal in big
boats.

B. I feel comfortable teaching reading/writing at my preferred grade level(s):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Questions to Accompany Repeated Delivery of Appendix A at End of Term

ECUR 309 My teaching interests are (circle all that apply): PreK-Grade 3; Grade 4-6; Grade 7 – 8; other age-level context (specify): _____

1. If your definition of the reading process has changed during this course, please identify how your new definition differs from your previous definition.
2. If your ideas about teaching reading have changed during this course, please identify how your current ideas about teaching reading differ from your previous ideas about teaching reading.

Appendix C: Exit Card Protocol Used Mid-Term

Please use the same "anonymous name" that you provided on the pre-survey (before course delivery) **perhaps your middle name and the number of people in your family

Pseudonym: _____

1. If your definition of **the reading process** has changed during this course so far, please identify how your new definition differs from your previous definition.
2. If your ideas about **teaching reading** have changed during this course so far, please identify how your current ideas about teaching reading differ from your previous ideas about teaching reading.
3. If your previous ideas about the reading process or teaching reading have been reinforced during this course so far, please identify what key idea(s) have been reinforced.
4. **Finish the following statement: "Good readers…."**
5. **Finish the following statement: "Exemplary reading teachers…"**