Early Literacy Teacher Education Project (ELTEP)
Project Overview

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Project Overview

The Child Research and Study Center in the School of Education at the University at Albany has an extensive history of research into approaches to preventing reading difficulties through interventions with children and professional development for primary grade teachers. This research has demonstrated that effective instruction can prevent most early reading difficulties. The Center has recently received funding from the U.S. Department of Education through the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) that will allow us to:

- Make available instructional materials and resources intended for teacher preparation coursework designed to support the development of expertise related to early literacy development and instruction (ELTEP Resources),
- Evaluate the extent to which pre-service and in-service teachers benefit from the use of these resources in courses within their teacher education programs, and
- Prepare a set of “user friendly” webinars and related instructional resources that, at the conclusion of the project, will be made available to teacher educators (TEs) who were not participants.

The overall goal of the project is to enhance the preparation of pre-service and in-service teachers with regard to their ability to provide effective instruction to early literacy learners, particularly those who struggle at the early stages of learning to read.

To assist institutions in evaluating their own teacher preparation programs, an online Knowledge of Literacy Instruction (KOLI) survey will be made available to participating institutions to administer to students at the beginning and end of their teacher preparation program(s). Students will be given the option of releasing these survey data for use in the context of a research study which will evaluate the impact of the use of the instructional content made available through the project on the knowledge and skills of students across participating institutions.

Content of the Instructional Resources

The foundation of the instructional content is a comprehensive and responsive approach to early literacy instruction known as the Interactive Strategies Approach (ISA; Scanlon, Anderson & Sweeney, 2010; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002). Participating instructors will engage in webinars during which the content of the ISA modules will be discussed. The modules are tied to early literacy goals and will address the following topics:

- Introduction to Early Literacy Development
- Motivation for Reading and Writing
- Development of Phonological and Alphabetic Skills
Introduction to Alphabetics
- Purposes and Conventions of Print
- Phonological Awareness
- Letter Naming
- Letter-Sound Association
- The Alphabetic Principle and Alphabetic Code
- Larger Orthographic Units and Multi-Syllabic Words

- Word Learning
  - Strategic Word Learning
  - High Frequency Word Learning
- Oral Language and Vocabulary
- General Knowledge and Comprehension

In addition to time devoted to the instructional content, a substantial portion of each webinar will be devoted to how the teacher educators might best use the project resources to engage and support their students’ learning, with attention given to both in-class and out-of-class activities. Additionally, presenters will share the insights of teacher educators who have previously used the resources, with an aim toward highlighting and avoiding potential stumbling blocks, particularly for pre-service teachers. Following the webinars, instructors will have access to the resources (e.g., PowerPoint slides, exemplary videos, readings, and child work samples) to use in their courses. Participating teacher educators will receive $30/hour for participation in the webinar components of the research project.

Origin of the Instructional Resources

This project is based on an Institute of Education Sciences (IES) development grant which allowed us to collaborate with a group of 10 teacher educators from across New York State to modify and refine a professional development program we had successfully used with in-service teachers (a listing of teacher educators who participated in the project is available upon request). The goal of that study was to make the professional development resources useful within the context of a pre-service program and to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the resources’ effectiveness in increasing pre-service teachers’ knowledge and skills. The teacher educators who collaborated on the development of the materials also piloted their use while teaching the first literacy methods course in their institutions’ literacy sequence - the targeted course for that project. As we collaborated with the teacher educators on the previous project we began to define ways in which use of the resources could be enhanced, to better meet the needs of both faculty and students. Most importantly, all agreed that there was too much content to effectively address in a single undergraduate methods course. Further, some of the content was judged to be too sophisticated for undergraduates taking their first literacy methods course.

Building on what we learned through the IES project, the Early Literacy Teacher Education Project focuses more broadly on teacher preparation programs rather than on an individual course within a program. Undergraduate and graduate programs which prepare students to
become elementary classroom (i.e., early childhood, childhood), literacy, and/or special education teachers are all eligible to participate. In this way, institutions and programs can review the course resources and decide for themselves the best fit for each of the project modules. The current project also incorporates the use of online technologies for initial introduction to the content through a series of webinars for teacher educators who wish to use the resources in their courses and for ongoing access to the resources and support in their use.

Selection of Participant Institutions

Potential participant institutions are being solicited at teacher preparation institutions across New York State. Institutions that prepare elementary level teachers, literacy teachers, and/or special education teachers are eligible if, on average, they graduate at least 25 pre-service students per year in any undergraduate program that is targeted by the project and/or 10 students per year in a graduate program targeting literacy or special education certification.

Institutions expressing interest will have the opportunity to engage faculty from candidate programs in webinars in which information about the project will be presented followed by a question and answer session. Individual faculty members will also be encouraged to contact the researchers privately if they so choose. Throughout the recruitment process, we will stress that participation by individual members of the instructional faculty/staff must be completely voluntary. Expressions of interest will be gathered through confidential internet polls distributed to email addresses of full time faculty and instructors as well as adjuncts and teaching assistants who are active at the time the poll is conducted.

Because this project is particularly focused on supporting adjunct, graduate assistant, and new professors, the “vote” will involve all current teacher educators and will ask for a decision on each of two questions:

1. Do you agree to your institution’s/program’s involvement in the project?

2. Do you wish to participate in the project by engaging in the webinar series and utilizing some of the project resources in your courses?

This will allow an institution to be eligible for participation without highly experienced teacher educators feeling the need to become involved. In answering this poll, respondents will also be asked to indicate their role in the institution (e.g., adjunct, graduate assistant, lecturer, assistant professor, etc.) so that we can determine whether there is sufficient interest among the targeted groups to warrant enrolling the program in the project.

Current funding will support the participation of a limited number of institutions. Therefore, depending on the number of institutions expressing an interest and the size of the student population they serve, selection criteria (yet to be fully developed) will come into play. Institutions that submitted a letter of support with our grant proposal will be given top priority.
Another important criterion will be the number/percent of faculty who express an interest in involving their institution in the project.

Institutional demographics will also serve as an important selection criterion as we wish to include a mix of large and small institutions, public and private, and those serving diverse student bodies. Priority will be given to institutions serving high numbers of low income and ethnically diverse students. Institutions interested in the project will be asked to provide information regarding the population they serve and the characteristics of the teaching faculty (e.g., number and percentage of courses taught by full time faculty, ethnic and racial composition of full and part-time faculty (adjuncts and graduate assistants), typical class size at graduate and undergraduate levels, etc.)

Interested institutions that are not selected through this process will be provided with information regarding future participation options in a non–research context.

**Expectations for Participating Institutions**

To participate, institutions must agree to 1) adopt the knowledge survey that assesses the content covered in the instructional resources as a vehicle for evaluating changes in student knowledge from the beginning to the end of the targeted program and to require students to take the survey (online) during the first 2 weeks of their first literacy methods course and during the last few weeks of their final course in the program, 2) facilitate recruitment of students who are completing their teacher education programs in the Spring and Summer of 2011 for the purpose of gathering baseline data on the student outcome measures, 3) encourage instructors who teach literacy methods courses within the program to participate in a 40 hour webinar (distributed over multiple weeks) during which the content of the course resources will be presented and discussed, 4) encourage course instructors to utilize components of the project resources in the courses where they best fit (appropriate technology will be required) and to report on this usage, 5) provide contact information for cooperating teachers and field supervisors so that the impact of the materials on students’ knowledge and instructional practices can be evaluated.

**Expectations for Teacher Educators**

Teacher Educators (TEs) who teach literacy methods courses will be eligible to participate (but clearly cannot be required to do so). Adjunct faculty, graduate assistants, and beginning professors are a particular focus of this project, as they are typically early in their career and less likely to have had the opportunity to read a broad range of the professional literature and/or to develop course resources that reflect the research on early literacy development and intervention. All interested faculty, however, are eligible. Teacher educators may begin their participation in the webinar series any semester (including Summer semesters) beginning in the Spring of 2011 and continuing through Fall 2012. When TEs are about to begin the webinar series, they will be asked to respond to an initial survey concerning their teaching experience at the elementary, secondary, and college level and, for those with experience
teaching at the college level, information will be gathered on courses taught and the frequency with which they have been taught.

TEs will be asked to commit to participating in the 40 hour webinar series related to the ELTEP, to provide feedback on both the content of the webinar series and their experience as participants, and to report on the ELTEP content that they utilize in their courses. They will also be asked to provide class lists for each literacy course they teach following their involvement in the webinar series (through the end of the project in Summer 2013). TEs will also be asked to participate in a brief telephone interview at the end of each semester following involvement in the webinars. The interviews are designed to gather information on the factors that influence the use of the instructional resources at different institutions. Each TE will be provided with a copy of a book related to the content (Scanlon, Anderson, & Sweeney, 2010) and will be compensated for participation in the webinars, surveys and interviews at a rate of $30/hour.

Expectations for Students

Undergraduate and graduate students in participating programs will participate in the evaluation component of the project by taking the knowledge survey and will be given the option of allowing their data on the surveys to be used for research purposes. Students will take the survey twice, once at the beginning of their first literacy methods course, and again when they are nearing graduation. The survey will measure their knowledge of certain language arts concepts and methods, and includes scenarios in which a child’s performance is presented or described, and the respondent is asked to indicate an appropriate instructional response. The survey should take about 60 minutes to complete each time, and will be administered online.

Students agreeing to participate in the research component will also be asked to respond to a self-efficacy survey relating to their preparedness for teaching early literacy learners and, where appropriate, to allow their field supervisors and collaborating teachers to respond to a brief survey regarding the student’s knowledge and teaching skills. Participating students will receive a copy of the Scanlon et al. (2010) text when they complete the Knowledge of Literacy Instruction (KOLI) survey for the first time. Upon completion of the KOLI at the end of their program, student participants will receive a personalized letter of appreciation and a certification of participation in research, documenting their commitment to promoting research-based practices in education. These documents are suitable for inclusion in the students’ professional portfolios.

Additional Logistics

The project will begin with the collection of baseline data on graduating students at the end of the Spring and Summer 2011 semesters and will run through the Summer of 2013. Institutions are asked to agree to participate for that time period, although individuals and

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1 Field supervisors and cooperating teachers will receive a $10 gift card for each student survey they complete.
institutions that initially agree to participate may, of course, discontinue their participation at any time.

Each institution will be asked to assign a campus contact person who will provide contact information for field supervisors and cooperating teachers. We are exploring methods for book distribution – and may ask this person to perform this function as well. The campus contact is not a participant in the research study; he/she will be compensated at a rate of $20/hour.

**Project Timeline**

Click here to see a tabular summary of the various project activities by semester. (Or, if you are reviewing a printed version of the document, see the last page.)

**Confidentiality**

It is important to note that participation is confidential. Research reports will not provide information that could be used to identify the participating colleges, faculty, or students. College administrators will not have access to any individual data gathered from faculty or students, nor will administrators or faculty know which students are participating in the research aspect of the project. Aggregated evaluation data will, of course, be provided.

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The Institutional Review Board at the University at Albany reviews all research projects conducted through the University, to insure that the rights and well-being of the participants in the project are protected. This project has been reviewed by the board and found to be in compliance with guidelines for protecting participants’ rights and well-being. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not be answered by the investigator or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University at Albany at 1-800-365-9139 or orc@uamail.albany.edu.