Description of Teacher Knowledge Research Project (TKP) for Colleges and Universities Considering Participation

**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 most early reading difficulties can be prevented. We have recently received funding from the U.S. Department of Education through the Fund for the Improvement of Secondary Education (FIPSE) that will allow us to:

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

The overall goal of the TKP 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 evaluate the impact of the use of the instructional content on the knowledge and skills of students at participating institutions, students will take an online Knowledge of Literacy Instruction (KOLI) survey at the beginning and end to their teacher education program. Survey data are intended to be used for two purposes: 1) to provide aggregated evaluation data for individual participating programs/institutions to use in identifying potential strengths and weaknesses in the programs, and 2) for research purposes to evaluate the impact of the use of the instructional materials on student knowledge. For purposes of the evaluation component, all students in participating programs will be expected take the survey as a course requirement. Students will choose whether or not to release their data for use in the research component.

**Content for the Instructional Materials**

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
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 TKP materials 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 materials, with an aim toward highlighting and avoiding potential stumbling blocks, particularly for pre-service teachers. Following the webinars, instructors will have access to the materials (e.g., PowerPoint slides, exemplary videos, readings, and child work samples) to use in their courses.

**Origin of the Materials**

This project follows on the heels of 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. The goal of that study was to make the professional development materials useful within the context of a pre-service program and to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the materials’ 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 language arts 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 materials could be enhanced, to better meet the needs of both faculty and students. One needed change became abundantly clear – the sheer volume of materials that were developed was simply too much to be covered in one course. Moreover, the content itself was sometimes overly sophisticated for undergraduates taking their first language arts methods course.

Building on what we learned through the IES project, the Teacher Knowledge 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, reading, and/or special education teachers are all eligible to participate. In this way, institutions and programs can review the course materials and decide for themselves the best fit for each of the ISA 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 materials in their courses and for ongoing access to the materials and support in their use.
Potential participant institutions are being solicited at teacher preparation institutions across New York State. Institutions expressing interest will have the opportunity to engage faculty from candidate programs in webinars in which information about the project will be presented and opportunities to receive answers to questions will be provided. 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 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.

**Selection of Participant Institutions**

Institutions that prepare elementary level teachers, reading teachers, and/or special education teachers will be recruited to participate. To be eligible to participate, institutions must graduate, on average, 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.

Current funding will support the participation of a limited number of institutions. Therefore, depending on the number of institutions expressing an interest, 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 play an important role 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.

Within selected institutions, individual faculty members will be given the option of whether or not to participate in the professional development component of the project which includes 40 hours of webinars and access to instructional materials for use in their classes. Faculty will be compensated for the time they devote to the webinars.

**Expectations for Participating Institutions**

To participate, institutions must agree to 1) adopt the knowledge survey that assesses the content covered in the instructional materials 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 language arts methods course (or the first course they take in which the materials are used) and during the last 2 weeks of their final
course in the program, 2) allow recruitment of students completing their teacher education programs at the beginning of the project, for the purpose of establishing baseline data on the student outcome measures, 3) encourage instructors who teach language arts methods courses within the program to participate in a 40 hour webinar (distributed over multiple weeks) during which the content of the course materials will be presented and discussed. 4) encourage course instructors to utilize components of the project materials (hereafter referred to as Teacher Knowledge Project or TKP materials) in the courses where they best fit and to report on this usage, and 5) provide contact information for cooperating teachers and field supervisors so that the impact of the materials on students’ instructional practices can be evaluated.

Expectations for Teacher Educators

Teacher Educators (TEs) who teach language arts 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 materials that reflect the research on early literacy development and intervention. All interested faculty, however, are eligible. The TEs 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 TKP, to provide feedback on both the content of the webinar series and their experience as a participant, and to report on the TKP content that they utilize in their courses. 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 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 a survey to be used for research purposes. Students will take the survey twice, once at the beginning of their first language arts methods course, and once toward the end of the last course in their language arts sequence. 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 response to the child. The survey should take about 60 minutes to complete each time, and will be administered online.

Students will also be asked to respond to a self-efficacy survey and to allow their field supervisors and collaborating teachers to respond to a 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 run through the Summer of 2013. Institutions are asked to agree to participate for that time period, although individuals and 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 have such responsibilities as distributing books to participating faculty and students, replacing students’ names with institution-assigned ID numbers on any documents collected through the institution, and tracking student enrollment in courses taught by participating teacher educators. 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. Fall 2010

Confidentiality

It is important to note that participation is confidential. Project 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 data gathered from faculty or students, nor will administrators or faculty know which students are participating in the research aspect of the project.

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.