

Chapter 3

Using Action Research to Transform a Traditional Reading Practicum: Developing Preservice Teachers as Researchers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how faculty from the University of Central Florida collaboratively worked to transform an undergraduate reading practicum course utilizing action research and case study methodology. Seeking to develop preservice educators as teacher researchers, the reading faculty responded by developing and implementing the Action Research Case Study Project. This semester-long project required faculty to redesign the course to reflect this emphasis. This chapter includes the modifications made to the course content, the creation of rubrics for evaluating the project, and feedback mechanisms employed to facilitate student success. The project has been implemented for two semesters; various data sources are shared to document the effectiveness of the project including faculty input, survey data, student work examples, and student reflections.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher preparation programs have received criticism for their preparation of teacher educators, especially in the area of reading (Greenberg, McKee, & Walsh, 2013). Moats (2020) has suggested that teacher preparation programs use research to guide instruction by specifically providing better and more “deliberate instruction in reading, spelling, and writing” (p.25). Moats (2020) further recommended that internships be designed to allow preservice teachers opportunities to collaborate with peers and mentors. Similarly, in 2015, the International Literacy Association (ILA) published a preliminary report on teacher preparation recommending that practica focus on developing preservice educators’ “ability to design literacy instruction and monitor growth” (p.8). Additionally, the ILA (2018) suggested that teacher educators rethink their own teaching practices and disrupt “the divisions between theory and practice (courses and practicum) and ensure that practice-based work is part of every course experience” (p.5). The ILA further proposed that teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to ask questions and use research to grow their practices.

But how do those who prepare teacher educators perceive their preservice teachers’ preparedness to teach reading? To determine how “internal experts” (Lacina & Block, 2011, p. 326) viewed the preparedness of preservice literacy teachers who completed their teacher education program, Sharp, Raymond, and Piper (2018) purposively sampled literacy teacher educators using a survey aligned to the ILA’s (2010) standards for classroom teachers. Their study revealed that in the area of assessment, over 50% of literacy educators believed their preservice teachers were only slightly or somewhat prepared to select, develop, administer, and interpret assessments for specific purposes, likewise over 50% felt their preservice teachers were only slightly or somewhat prepared to communicate literacy assessment results and implications to a variety of audiences.

Concerned with mounting criticism towards literacy teacher preparation programs, the ILA and the National Council of Teachers of English (2017) gathered a task force to examine and analyze research on literacy instruction in teacher preparation programs. The task force found “substantial evidence documenting the impact of teacher preparation courses and field-based experiences” (ILA/NCTE, 2017, p.2). They identified four critical quality indicators that contribute to improved preservice teacher learning and performance: knowledge development, application of knowledge in authentic contexts, ongoing teacher development, and ongoing assessments. The Action Research Case Study Project (ARCSP) described in this chapter meets all of these indicators and is a response to criticism and concerns regarding the preparation of preservice teachers, particularly in the area of assessment and instruction. Through a focused field experience, engagement in a professional learning community, and explicit guidance and mentoring, preservice teachers purposely assessed, planned, and monitored a school-aged student using case study methodology through an action research process. Engaging in the ARCSP resulted in preservice teachers increasing their data literacy and yielded their development of a teacher as researcher mindset.

The decision to move to an Action Research Case Study Project grew out of an attempt to address the ILA/NCTE indicators while also increasing the integration of research in undergraduate education. Reading faculty from the University of Central Florida reflected on their current course assignments and responded to these concerns and recommendations by redesigning an upper division elementary education reading course to be research-intensive using an action research process with case study methodology. The University of Central Florida is a large urban university situated in Orlando, Florida. One of the largest teacher preparation programs in Florida, the Elementary Education program places preservice teachers

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