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# Perceived Effectiveness of Special Reading Teacher's Preparation Through the Reading Practicum Experience

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# Perceived Effectiveness of Special Reading Teacher's Preparation Through the Reading Practicum Experience

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
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Perceived Effectiveness of Special Reading Teacher's

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Practicum Experience

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Abstract

Special reading certification in the state of Missouri requires a candidate to complete coursework that involves two three hour practicum experiences. These experiences must entail working with students in kindergarten through grade 12. The practicum experiences are designed to provide significant instruction in the area of reading strategies for struggling readers. Since the advent of No Child Left Behind (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2009b) there has been an increased demand for special reading teachers. Many universities have experienced an increase in the number of students seeking special reading certification.

This qualitative study focuses on the three models of practicum experiences provided at Lindenwood University, a liberal arts college located in the Midwestern United States. The candidates for special reading certification at this university are required to complete two practicum experiences with one practicum addressing elementary students and the other addressing secondary students. A survey was developed to determine how well prepared candidates perceived they were as a result of their participation in the two practicum experiences. Surveys were mailed to 300 candidates who had participated in the practicum experiences at Lindenwood University. Fifty surveys were returned to the university with returns for each model receiving almost equal distribution.

Three models provided at the university were investigated which included the School District Model whereby candidates were supervised in the district where they worked by the special reading teacher. The second model, the After School Model involved candidates tutoring struggling readers at a local elementary school twice weekly after school hours. The third model investigated was the Camp Read-A-Lot Model which involved candidates tutoring children in

reading in a camp setting during the summer for three weeks. Instructors for each practicum experience were interviewed in addition to the surveys that were completed by the candidates for purposes of triangulation in data collection.

I believed that each practicum had strengths and perhaps some weaknesses that could be corrected as a result of this study to ensure that all candidates felt prepared to assume the challenges involved in becoming a special reading teacher.

The results of the study indicated that the practicum experiences were each unique and that many strengths and some weakness were identified by the candidates. I was able to make recommendations regarding supervision, resources, collegial support, and authenticity of the format of the practicum experiences. I believe that these suggestions will strengthen an already appropriate experience by providing more authentic, hands on experiences for special reading candidates. I also believe that these suggestions, and the format of these three practicum models, would be models that other universities might determine are best for their special reading candidates.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

# Chapter One– Special Reading Teachers

## *The Special Reading Teacher Practicum*

If a person is illiterate, he or she will have difficultly completing job applications, reading the newspapers, understanding legal documents, passing a driver's test and generally functioning in a society that depends heavily on written communication. In Missouri alone, seven percent of the adult population lacks basic prose literacy skills according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003, p. 1). Concurrently, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy has reported (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2003, p. 1) that 20 % of Americans were unable to complete job applications, use computers, understand written text or read legal documents and were therefore considered, "functionally illiterate", which means that the aforementioned tasks could not be completed independently. In a nation with such a wealth of educational opportunities, it is difficult to understand why so many individuals remain in the illiterate category.

It is my belief that educators in the United States need to be more efficient when investigating and analyzing early instruction in reading for the children of this nation. "The first years of school establish the essential foundation of literacy that enables all future literacy achievement" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 2). Children need to be read to and read with, early and often. They need to practice reading at an early age to establish the importance of reading and the enjoyment that can be garnered through reading. The early development of good reading habits will help children sustain their desire to read and will assist in future academic and social endeavors.

In the United States, the law entitled, No Child Left Behind, (NCLB) has been in

effect since January 8, 2002 (MODESE, 2009c). NCLB was authorized under the administration of George W. Bush. "The Act represents the President's education reform plan and contains the most sweeping changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act since it was enacted in l965" (State of New Jersey, Department of Education, 2006, p. 1). The law mandates that all students need to be at or above the proficient level in reading by the year 2014 ( MODESE, 2009a). This law was established as a means to hold schools accountable for each student's academic success. Each state must assess students using high stakes standardized tests. In the state of Missouri, students in grades three through 12 are tested yearly in the area of reading and mathematics using the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test (MODESE, 2005). At the current time, President Obama has proposed changes in the NCLB law in his initiative identified as, Race to the Top, (MODESE, 2010) which has not yet been passed into law (see Appendix B).

As a result of NCLB legislation, the need for qualified special reading teachers has increased exponentially. The call for special reading teachers occurred since classroom teachers did not have the background knowledge to diagnose and remediate reading difficulties, primarily as a result of the minimum requirements for coursework in reading for certification at the elementary, middle school, and secondary levels. In the state of Missouri, the requirement for preservice teachers seeking elementary certification includes a total of eight semester hours in the area of reading. Middle school certification only requires five hours in reading methods, and secondary certification only requires two semester hours in basic reading instruction. Those seeking special reading certification are required to have 12 hours in reading methods (see Appendix A for

State of Missouri Certification Requirements). The coursework for classroom teachers has been designed to give preservice teachers an overview of methods and pedagogy involved in teaching reading. Only one three credit hour class, during one semester, is mandated in the state of Missouri for the elementary preservice teacher to learn about diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties. This same course is not required in either middle school or secondary school certification in Missouri. These two courses only scratched the surface of the myriad of difficulties classroom teachers faced with struggling readers.

Perhaps this lack of reading coursework is reflected in literacy scores, which have made little progress between 1970 and 1998 as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (1998, p. 4). The 1998 report showed some minimal gains in reading for children from ages nine to 13. However, when the total scores of the children were taken into consideration for all age groups tested, there was little if any gain in the area of reading. Kreimer (2009), in the *Dallas News*, reminded educators that, "three-quarters of third graders who can't read well are still deficient in ninth grade and often even into adulthood" (p. 1). Kreimer further indicated that proficiency in reading continues to be a problematic area, even with current emphasis being placed on establishing proficient reading skills. As a direct response to these issues, Kreimer stated, "More reading teachers are being sought to overcome these obstacles to education. Many schools are starting to spend more time on reading and math while cutting back on other subjects" (p. 1 ). School districts realized that to be successful in all academic areas at all levels students must first be proficient in reading. Without the ability to read, students were unable to determine what was expected of them in the classroom, and kindergarten

through 12th grade students were unable to perform the basic skills needed to move forward academically. Special reading teachers were employed to assist classroom teachers in the task of helping children become proficient readers.

*The Role of the Special Reading Teacher*

The role of the special reading teacher differs from that of the classroom teacher. The special reading teacher is not required to prepare for instruction in other core areas such as science or social studies. The focus of the special reading teacher is reading literacy which encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The special reading teacher has had specific training in the area of diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties which, in Missouri, must include at least six hours of practicum experience working directly with kindergarten through 12th grade students in the area of reading literacy. A special reading teacher may also serve as a reading intervention teacher who works with struggling readers and provides intensive instruction. The special reading teacher could also be a reading coach or literacy coach whose responsibilities include professional development and assistance to classroom teachers. The International Reading Association Style Guide (2008) stated that, "They provide essential leadership for the school's entire literacy program by helping create and supervise a long-term staff development process that support both the development and implementation of the literacy program over months and years" (p. 2). The role of the special reading teacher may also encompass that of reading supervisor or reading coordinator. This particular role involves "developing, leading, and evaluating a school reading program from kindergarten through grade 12" (p. 2). In addition, the reading supervisor or coordinator may assume some of the responsibilities of the literacy coach.

Special Reading teachers may remediate students who are not on grade level through a push-in or pull-out program, coach classroom teachers or teach side by side with them, provide resources, team teach, test students, progress monitor the students they serve, assist classroom teachers with progress monitoring, attend meetings such as those held for diagnosis of disabilities whereby an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed, provide advice for administrators regarding use of resources and personnel, attend conferences and workshops and provide professional development for school staff (International Reading Association, 2000, p. 2). With the diversity in job descriptions, the difficulty lies in determining the appropriate instructional process for candidates. Although the International Reading Association has provided guidelines for special reading teacher certification, there is no universal acceptance regarding the definitions of the role of the special reading teacher. The role of the special reading teacher is often determined by the needs of the district.

Frost and Bean (2006) supported the fact that there is incongruity in defining the role of special reading teachers. School districts are now hiring literacy coaches who are often, but not always, special reading teachers to, "serve as catalysts for implementing this model of professional development in schools" (p. 1). The diverse role that special reading teachers are asked to assume precipitates the necessity for colleges and universities to address these needs within the context of the required coursework and practicum experiences.

*Requirements for Special Reading Certification in Missouri*

Candidates seeking special reading certification in the state of Missouri must have certification in another area prior to receiving special reading certification. Certification

could have been in elementary, early childhood, middle school or secondary education. Further, the candidates must have two years of classroom teaching experience and must complete the coursework prescribed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) before certification will be granted. In compliance with this requirement, the program for this study at Lindenwood University requires candidates for special reading certification to have two years of teaching experience, although they may begin coursework once they have initial certification. Missouri's program for special reading certification mimics the program offered by several other states. Most states require prior certification in another area of education. Illinois and Arizona both require initial certification prior to special reading certification. Illinois, like Missouri, requires two years of classroom teaching along with completion of an approved program of study in reading (Illinois State Board of Education, 2010, p. 1; Arizona Department of Education, 2010, pp. 1- 2).

The special reading teacher program is designed to provide more intense theory to application for the candidate for special reading teacher. Typically, many states also require a minimum of six hours of practicum experience for special reading candidates.

The practicum experience that must be completed by each candidate in Missouri entails working with children in the area of literacy at both the primary and intermediate grade levels since certification is for kindergarten through 12th grade. The state of Missouri requires that students have six credit hours in the practicum experience, encompassing both remediation and diagnosis of reading difficulties for Missouri Requirements, "The reading practicum can be defined as that portion of a graduate education program that provides a setting in which the candidate implements strategies

for the correction and remediation of reading difficulties" (O'Neil, 2004, p. 1). The requirements for special reading certification in Missouri are based on standards developed by the International Reading Association and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and include a combination of classroom instruction and participation in the practicum.

Although the state of Missouri requires that the special reading teacher candidate have at least six hours of practicum experience working directly with children in kindergarten through grade 12 in the area of reading literacy, districts may hire teachers as coaches or place them in the role of a special reading teacher regardless of the certification that they hold. Once again, the inability to define the specific qualifications and role played by the special reading teacher makes it difficult to prescribe the appropriate coursework and practicum experiences.

No Child Left Behind (MODESE, 2009b) mandates that schools be held accountable for progress in the area of literacy. The state and federal government expectations included the fact that public schools would show steady improvement in mathematics and reading literacy. Early measures designed to assist schools in the intervention process to improve literacy included programs for young students in the primary grades through the Reading First Initiative which addressed five areas: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Comprehension, and Vocabulary. However, the program has not been successful in significantly improving reading instruction (Toppo 2008, p. 1).

In another related article, Sam Dillon (2008) of the *New York Times* indicated that he believed special favors for friends of the Bush administration were put before the

educational process for the children. Dillon and Toppo (2008) pointed toward a recent government report on the lack of success with The Reading First Program. Failure of The Reading First Program was reported in a recent study by the United States Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences (2008) which disclosed that children in schools receiving Reading First financial allocations scored no better than their counterparts in schools that did not receive Reading First assistance. Recently, a bill was introduced in Congress to extend the area of concentration on reading development from kindergarten through grade three to all levels including high school. Current research in the area of literacy points to the need for ongoing instruction beyond the primary years. The Reading First Program was purported to be the answer for remediation of reading difficulties for young children. The failure of this program to produce the desired effect spurred legislators to look beyond the primary grades for remediation and diagnosis of reading problems.

> Long-awaited legislation to replace three federal reading programs—Early Reading First, Reading First, and Striving Readers—was introduced last week by U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., and would authorize $2.35 billion in funding to improve reading and writing in kindergarten to 12th grade. (Zehr, 2009, para. 1-3)

The Early Reading First, Reading First, and Striving Readers programs were funded in 2009 by the United States federal government and are a part of the 2010 federal budget.

With the reauthorization of programs, such as Reading First and the addition of the Striving Readers program, the need for reading teachers has increased. Universities and colleges found it necessary to develop courses to provide instruction for teachers certified in other areas to qualify them to become special reading teachers. Universities

and colleges have been working to establish best practices in the methodology used to inform, instruct, and prepare teachers for the role of a special reading teacher. A number of educational reformers have argued that for teachers to be successful in constructing new roles they needed opportunities to participate "in a professional community that discusses new teacher materials and strategies that support the risk taking and struggle entailed in transforming practice" (McLaughlin & Talbert, l993, p. 15). Administrators, classroom teachers, specialists, and professional development instructors must support each other in the effort to affect changes that will lead to lasting growth and achievement in reading literacy. Additionally, parents must be educated about and involved in the process of change. New materials and strategies for assisting the children in reading required trial, and sometimes error, to perfect the best methodology.

Putnam and Borko (2000) indicated that, "When diverse groups of teachers come together in discourse communities, community members can draw upon and incorporate each other's expertise to create rich conversations and new insights into teaching and learning" (p. 8). Lindenwood University, the location of my study, has been able to offer the required coursework for special reading certification along with three different practicum models. The practicum experience is designed in Missouri so that candidates seeking special reading certification participate in two three credit hour practicum courses. Each practicum provides the opportunity for the candidate to work with children in the area of reading. One three credit hour course was developed for candidates to work with students in kindergarten through fourth grade, and the other practicum was developed for candidates to work with students from fifth grade through 12th grade, since certification for special reading teachers encompasses kindergarten through 12th grade.

*Lindenwood Practicum Experiences*

Lindenwood provided three different models by which special reading candidates may complete the six hours of practicum required by DESE. Each practicum experience involved different levels of supervision, collegial support, at diverse locations. The models included the School District Model, the After School Model and the Camp Read-A-Lot Model. Each model was unique in the way that it delivered instruction and prepared prospective Special Reading Teachers through the practicum experience.

My study will examine how well prepared candidates perceived they were to transition to a special reading teacher position. By studying the perceptions of prospective special reading teacher candidates, I will to be in a position to make recommendations to Lindenwood University regarding changes in the instructional process for special reading candidates. I will be able to suggest ways to redesign or restructure how and what strategies are imparted by the instructors or refine how the practicum is supervised in order to help the candidates feel more confident in their ability to transition to a special reading teacher position.

*The School District Model*

The School District Model required the candidate to tutor a child or children in the school district where the candidate was employed under the supervision of the building reading specialist using a syllabus provided by the Lindenwood instructor. Candidates developed lessons for an individual child, kept a log, did pre and post testing, wrote reflections, and taught lessons to a specific child. The reading specialist evaluated the lessons and provided feedback to the candidate. The candidates were also mentored in the area of testing, district policy, parent contact, and reading strategies to be used with

struggling readers. All assignments and materials were turned in to the Lindenwood instructor for evaluation and grading. While immediate supervision was provided by the special reading teacher in the school where the candidate worked, quality of assignments, assessment, and grading remained the responsibility of the Lindenwood instructor.

*The After-School Model*

The second model, the After School Model, required that Lindenwood candidates tutor a child in a local elementary school after school. Children were identified for participation in the program by their classroom teacher and the Lindenwood practicum instructor. Lindenwood candidates wrote reflections, did pre and post testing, as well as developed and presented lessons for a child with reading difficulties. The tutoring occurred twice a week under the supervision of the Lindenwood instructors for a period of 45 minutes to one hour for each session. The Lindenwood instructor evaluated and provided feedback which was conveyed on site while candidates were teaching lessons to their assigned student. Continuous, intense, ongoing instruction was implemented by the instructors in the practicum throughout the tutoring and during the class that followed.

*The Camp Read-A-Lot Model*

The third model, the Camp Read-A-Lot Model required Lindenwood candidates to participate in Camp Read-A-Lot for three weeks during the summer session. Children applied to participate in the program and when accepted, first through sixth grade students were assigned to a Lindenwood practicum candidate for pre and post testing, lessons, and instruction. Children were present for two and a half hours Monday through Friday for three weeks. Lindenwood candidates, did pre and post testing, wrote formal lessons, wrote reflections, kept a log and received ongoing, intense instruction daily to

introduce new reading strategies. Lindenwood candidates tutored the assigned child on a one-to-one basis under the supervision of the instructor.

All three practicum models required the special reading candidate to be a reflective practitioner continually acquiring better ways to help students succeed. The practicum initiated the hands-on experience which allowed the candidate practitioner to try newly learned activities for remediation in reading.

As a classroom teacher, in Missouri, the preservice teacher has only been required to participate in eight hours of coursework dealing with methods and diagnosis of reading difficulties. The practicum experiences for special reading teacher certification have become an important model for practicing hands-on activities with children to assist the candidates with remediation of reading problems with their assigned child or children. Moreover, the practicum experiences provided opportunities for candidates to research appropriate resources and then develop appropriate lessons for the first through sixth grade students with whom they were working. In reflection, it was expected that the prospective special reading candidate examine current practices with an eye toward ways to improve the instructional process.

*Purpose of the Study*

I will examine special reading teacher candidate's perceptions of preparedness through the reading practicum. My study will include candidates who have completed one or more of the three reading practicum models: the School District Model, the After School Model, and the Camp Read-A-Lot Model. Supervision and collegial support from classmates in the program or peers at the public school will be examined to determine changes that can be made to further improve each practicum experience by determining

the strengths of each and how those strengths can be intertwined throughout all of the practicum models to best prepare candidates for their role as special reading teachers.

Through surveys provided for the candidates and interviews with the instructors connected with the practicum, I feel that perceived effectiveness can be analyzed to determine the strengths of each model and these strengths can be infused into each model thereby providing the candidate with confidence in his or her preparedness to assume the role of a special reading teacher. Providing appropriate, timely instruction that stresses the theory to application process has always been a concern of universities and colleges that have teacher certification programs and special reading teacher programs.

> Teacher educators have long struggled with how to create learning experiences powerful enough to transform teacher's classroom practice. Teachers, both experienced and novice, often complain that learning experiences outside the classroom are too far removed from the day-to-day work of teaching to have a meaningful impact. (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 5)

With the information garnered from this study, perhaps some of the concerns regarding appropriate instruction for special reading teachers can be addressed equally as well in each of the practicum models.

*Background of the Writer*

As an adjunct professor who has taught Elementary Reading Methods, Elementary Language Arts, Children's Literature, Analysis and Correction of Reading Difficulties, and two practicum classes over the past seven years, I have been an observer and instructor of certified teachers (candidates) seeking special reading certification. The degree of expertise that the candidates bring to the special reading program ranges from

those who have had a minimum of eight credit hours of reading coursework for prior certification to those candidates who have had from three to 15 years of teaching reading in the general education classroom to those who have had from two to three years experience as a special reading teacher or literacy coach even though certification for special reading had not been completed. Regardless of background knowledge, the common thread that ties the candidates together is the belief that teachers can never learn too much about how to support their students in the development of good literacy skills. I know that as a novice teacher in the classroom, I felt unsure about what strategies to use to assist my struggling readers. After several years of searching and trying new strategies and tactics, I believed it would benefit my students if I returned to the university and prepared myself to be a special reading teacher. As I watched my colleagues in the public school sector struggle with the same issues, I believed that with a better understanding of theory and the means to apply the theory I could assist other teachers and the children in the area of literacy. Also, it was my overriding belief that two professionals working together was better than one working alone because each would be able to provide strategies for helping the struggling reader. This led me to change jobs so that I could work in a collegial, cooperative setting for teaching reading. As the newly hired special reading teacher for grades K-five, I was able to formulate my own program for struggling readers in my school. I was able to see students individually, in small groups, or within the classroom setting. I developed a pull-out program for children who needed intensive instruction. I worked with small groups of children who needed enrichment in reading. I taught side by side with the classroom teacher in grades two through five. Additionally, I became the writing specialist for all grade levels.

Six out of the eight years I was a reading specialist, the students in the elementary school where I worked scored in the top 10 in the state on high stakes tests for Communication Arts. The classroom teachers and I formed a bond and found success through the work done collaboratively to assist the children in reading. As Putnam and Borko (2000) stated, individualistic, isolated learning is not conducive to the construction of knowledge. "Rather, interactions with other people in one's environment are major determinants of both what is learned and how learning takes place" (p. 5). The ability to work as a team proved to be best practice as the children continued to thrive in reading and writing.

*Research Questions*

My research questions focused on the perceptions students had regarding their experiences in the reading practicum process. This study will provide insights into best practices and constraints faced in each of the models.

1. How well prepared do special reading candidates perceive they are upon completion or during the two required reading practicum experiences?
2. What is the special reading candidate's perception of the level of collegial support from classmates or colleagues in each practicum model?
3. What level of supervision do the candidates perceive is provided through the practicum?
4. What resources or strategies do prospective reading specialists perceive best prepared them to become certified reading specialists?

Therefore, the opportunity to ascertain student perspectives about their own learning may help support revisions of the models currently being offered at Lindenwood

University during the reading practicum experience. The information from this study will also provide insights for other universities with similar reading practicum models. The results will be used to improve the practicum experience for candidates seeking special reading certification. Not only do schools need qualified teachers, schools also need high quality teachers with the skills to help the students become critical, creative readers. Classroom teachers face both a time crunch in preparation of materials for the whole class and they may lack the background knowledge and skills to diagnose and remediate reading difficulties.

*Definition of Terms*

*Adjunct Professors:* Professors hired by the university to teach a specific course or courses. Adjunct Professors, at Lindenwood University, may teach as long as they have at least a Master's Degree. They are neither full time nor part-time faculty. This definition applies to Lindenwood University and may not accurately reflect the definition of adjunct professor from other institutions of higher learning.

*Basal Reader:*

> Basal readers/basal reading series are highly organized reading textbooks used to teach reading and associated skills to schoolchildren. Stories are chosen to illustrate and develop specific reading skills, which are taught in a strict pre-determined sequence. Basal readers contain stories in which limited vocabulary is introduced in a controlled fashion from certain word lists which gradually escalate in difficulty. (Penn State University Library, 2009, para. 1)

*Basic prose literacy skills*: "Prose literacy measures how well you understand and use information found in newspapers, magazines, novels, brochures, manuals or flyers. Most

adults use prose literacy to answer questions, to learn how to do something or for entertainment" (Educational Testing Services, 2009, para. 2).

*Candidate:* For this study, candidate will refer to a certified teacher seeking certification in the area of special reading at Lindenwood University.

*Clinical Experience:*

> Supervised student teaching or internships that are conducted in approved educational settings such as a public or accredited nonpublic school or classroom. Students in professional education programs are immersed in the learning community and are provided opportunities to develop and demonstrate competence in the professional roles for which they are preparing. (MODESE, 2008, para. 4)

*Clinical Faculty:* "Faculty from schools, preschool through grade twelve, and institutions of higher education responsible for instructing, supervising and assessing preservice education students during student teaching assignments, internships or other field experiences." (MODESE, 2008, para. 5). Clinical faculty may be employed by Lindenwood University or may be employed by a public school district.

*Collegial Support:* Support provided in the practicum experience between one student or a group of students to, "promote each other's professional growth and instructional expertise" (Johnson and Johnson, 1990, as cited in North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995, para. 1)

*MODESE:* Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

*Field Experience:* "Venues, in which students in professional education programs may observe, assist, tutor, instruct, and/or conduct research. Practicum coursework may occur

in off-campus settings such as public or accredited non public schools or classrooms" (MODESE, 2008, para. 7).

The term, field experience, may be used interchangeably to respresent the same meaning as practicum expereince.

*High Stakes tests:*

> Typically refers to major state or national standardized school achievement tests administered periodically to students at various grade levels. The phrase "high stakes" is used to signify that these test results carry a great deal of weight among school personnel, government agencies, politicians, community leaders, and the general public. These test results often are used to make important decisions about students, teachers, and their schools, such as graduation, grade promotions or retentions, selection for highly competitive programs or schools, or staffing and budget decisions. (Center for Public Education, 2006, para. 1)

*IEP:* Individual Education Plan

*IQ:* Intelligence Quotient

*Missouri Assessment Program*

> The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) is one of several educational reforms mandated by the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. As a result of Secondary Education to identify the knowledge, skills, and competencies that Missouri students should acquire by the time high school is completed high school and to evaluate student progress toward those academic standards. The Department engaged teachers, school administrators, parents, and business professionals from throughout the state to develop the Show-Me Standards/GLEs. Strands and the

> assessment system that evaluates students' proficiencies as represented by the Show-Me Standards/GLE Strands. (MODESE, 2005, p. 1 )

*Progress Monitor*: "Progress monitoring is a set of asessment procedures for determining the extent to which students are benefiting from classroom instruction and for monitoring effectiveness of curriculum" (National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, 2006, Section Two, para. 1).

*Pull-out:* "In a pull-out intervention program, the child receives reading help outside of his or her classroom" (Talk to a Teacher and Reading Help Live, n.d., para. 2).

*Push-in:* "In a push-in intervention program, the person who is going to help the child comes into the classroom to work with an individual or a small group" (Talk to a Teacher and Reading Help Live, n.d., para. 1).

*Reading Recovery:* Reading Recovery is a highly effective short-term intervention of one-to-one tutoring for low-achieving first graders. The intervention is most effective when it is available to all students who need it and is used as a supplement to good classroom teaching (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2010, para. 3).

*Success for All (SFA)* is a whole-school reform model that includes a reading, writing, and oral language development program for students in prekindergarten through eighth grade. Classroom reading instruction is delivered in daily 90-minute blocks to students grouped by reading ability. Immediate intervention with tutors who are certified teachers is given each day to those students who are having difficulty reading at the same level as their classmates (United States Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2007 para. 1).

*Special Reading Teacher* – For this study, a special reading teacher is defined as a teacher who has completed the requirements for certification in the field of special reading and has earned the appropriate reading certificate in the state of residence and employment.

*RTI*- "Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners. Students' progress is closely monitored at each stage of intervention to determine the need for further research-based instruction and/or intervention in general education, in special education, or both" (RTI Action Network, 2010, para. 1).

*Limitations*

The limitations of this study include the fact that the participants were from only one university. To ensure confidentiality, I did not ask for specific demographics such as gender, ethnicity, etc. Special reading teachers are almost exclusively female. A more diverse sample from different university programs would have provided more generalizable results; however, every university's special reading teacher program and model is different. Most research on special reading teacher preparation focuses on one college or university program. The survey provided for candidates that had not been used or tested prior to this study. However, I used a content validity panel consisting of university professors to ensure the quality of the instrument.

Additionally, there was no way to control whether the candidate indicated participation in the correct practicum experience. Three candidates may have indicated that participation occurred in the After School Model when, in reality, it was the School District Model. If it was clear, by the statements made by the candidate that an error was made in identification of the practicum experience. I moved the information to the correct model during my data analysis. However, if it was not clear but had some characteristics

that appeared to belong to another model, I recorded the information in the model that was indicated by the candidate. Therefore, there could be a slight discrepancy in data collection. The employers of the candidates were not surveyed, and no observations were made during the study.

While the rate of reply was deemed sufficient for the study at approximately 16%, there was not an overwhelming response by those invited to participate. However, this study is expected to provide key information that will assist the university in revising and updating current coursework and practicum classes for special reading certification.

*Conclusions*

The process for teaching reading has changed significantly over time as has the definition and job description of special reading teachers. Current laws dictate high stakes testing and mandate levels of proficiency expected of each child in reading. Reading practicum classes have necessarily had to change to meet the demands of the 21st century not only in remediation areas of reading but in the general education classroom. Teachers bear the responsibility for preparing youth to function in a highly literate society. Special reading teachers now play many roles in districts serving as coaches, professional development presenters, resource people, progress monitors, remediation supporters, and advisors to the administration. Colleges and universities continue to examine and investigate the best way to provide practical experience to assist special reading candidates as they strive to become special reading teachers who are confident, well prepared, and able to assist any and all students who require reading help.

While reading has always been an integral part of the educational process, never before has its importance been as apparent as a separate area of study. The body of

research continues to evolve providing insights into best practices and best professional development for teachers. Examining the practicum experience provided for prospective special reading teacher preparation will assist schools of higher education in formulating a program that best suits the needs of its candidates so that they leave the experience with a wealth of knowledge about how to become more effective teachers of reading.

*Summary*

In the next chapter, I will examine current research and practice to try to determine common threads in successful programs of preparation for special reading teachers. For this study, I surveyed alumni from reading practicum classes from Lindenwood University to determine if the practicum experience models provided the necessary background knowledge for the candidates to transition from the classroom to the position of a special reading teacher with confidence. Items on the survey and the interview questions were based on the literature reviewed in the next chapter.

# Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review will include a brief historical examination of how reading has been taught over the past century. Research will also include discussion of the ever changing role of special reading teachers, how special reading teachers function as a part of the staff in a school district, and how they provide assistance and resources for students, staff, and other school district personnel. Preparation for special reading candidates through the practicum experience will be perused with particular interest in the viability and perception of special reading candidates regarding their preparation through the reading practicum experience and their thoughts about their transition from the classroom to a special reading teacher position.

## *Historical Aspects of Teaching Reading*

> Prior to the 1950s, little emphasis was placed on reading as a separate area of study. One of the groundbreaking but controversial publications of this period was, *Why Johnny Can't Read-And What You Can Do About It,* by Randolph Flesch (as cited in Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 34). This book exemplified a growing interest in reading research and its relevance to educational practice" (Ruddell, 1955 as cited in Alexander and Fox 2004, p. 34).

As interest and knowledge of the reading process grew, so too did the need for continued empirical and longitudinal studies focused on how to address the difficulties children experienced in reading and writing. Alexander & Fox, further purported that although reading was always considered a vital segment of the educational process in the United States during the 1950s, "There was no concerted effort to marry research knowledge and instructional practice until much later in the 20$^{th}$ century" (p. 34). While theory was being

taught during this time, little, if any attention was given to using the current research to drive instructional practices. Instead, children were being taught through the use of worksheets, workbooks, and a basal reading series, *Dick and Jane,* written by William Gray and Zerna Sharp. Toppo (2004) stated that,

> Anyone who learned to read in the last century got at least a taste of phonics, but the *Dick and Jane* stories actually were a calculated attack on phonics: The authors believed children learned to read best by memorizing a small handful of "sight words" and repeating them over and over – the "look/say" method. (p. 2)

Parents and researchers alike believed that the *Dick and Jane* books precipitated some of the problems that developed during that time period in reading for American children. This was due primarily to the lack of phonics or subskills instruction for beginning readers and the reliance instead on the, look-say method. Stories were contrived and written to support repetition of words and phrases. The stories lacked a strong main idea because they were written to provide practice with specific vocabulary. The quest for the best way to teach reading to children continued.

*Reading Instruction in the 1950s and 1960s*

Utilizing research from the 1950s and 1960s, with, "growing concern about students' lack of reading achievement, reading specialists were employed as 'remedial reading teachers' to work directly with students experiencing difficulty" (Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003, para. 2). Programs in public schools during the 1950s and 1960s involved pulling students out of the general education classroom with the intent to provide intense instruction on an individual basis. The identification and treatment of the reading difficulty was similar to what a person might have experienced when visiting a physician

with a medical issue. The ailment would be diagnosed and a course of therapy would be recommended (Alexander and Fox, 2004, p. 35). The child would be assessed using a standardized test that might show a deficiency in decoding skills but the test did not indicate clearly the areas of strength. For instance, the test would be analyzed to determine areas that were low such as decoding or vocabulary and the treatment would follow with instruction in decoding or identification of new words. The teacher modeled the skill with continuous repetition and practice to remediate the problem.

Instruction in the 1960s included practice with new strategies, practice for smooth, expressive reading, and repeated reading of the same book. These interventions were found to make little difference in the instructional level of the students involved (Kennedy, Birman & Demaline, 1986, as cited in Alexander & Fox 2004).

> The task for this generation of reading researchers, therefore, was to untangle the chained links of behavior involved in reading so that learners could be trained in each component skill. The act of reading consisted of the competent and properly sequenced performance of that chain of discrete skills. (p. 36)

As a direct result of this thinking, researchers converged with the idea of determining the sub skills that were needed to enable a child to learn to read. Researchers determined that the ability to recognize and name letters of the alphabet was a good way to predict future success in reading (Wood & McLemore, 2001, p. 1). Researchers also found that students were more successful in learning to read when they were taught phonics (Wood & McLemore, p. 2). Out of this need to understand and refine the sub skills needed for reading, the Project Literacy Program came into fruition at Cornell University under the direction of Dr. Harry Levin. The role of the project was to determine the effects of

speech acquisition on learning to read (Alexander & Fox, 2004 p. 36). As theories surfaced regarding the effects of speech on the reading process, the main body of research began to investigate the effectiveness of using phonological awareness and phonics to help children decode unfamiliar words.

*Reading Instruction in the 1980s and 1990s*

In keeping with the research that had been conducted in the Project Literacy Program, as the late 1980s and early 1990s approached, the focal point of teaching reading was the use of phonics to translate sounds, assemble words, phrases and sentences (Times People, 1993). The prevalent belief of this time period was that if the child experienced difficulty with skill acquisition, then an individual reading program would be recommended after establishing the child's area of deficit. Students who were found to possess an adequate IQ would be expected to move at their own pace under the direction of the special reading teacher who would do repetitive work in the area of phonetics. Also, still existent during this time, was the belief that reading was linked to language development, which Chomsky believed to be an innate function of the human mind. He believed that human beings had an innate means for developing or acquiring grammatical skills which would then lead to literacy acquisition (Chomsky, 1957, p. 13).

The demands for better trained experts in the area of literacy development increased during this time period. Preparation of special reading teachers experienced a metamorphosis in the 1980s and 1990s in an attempt to improve reading instruction. The initiation of the reading clinic or practicum experience model came into fruition during this time to provide more authentic, hands on experience for candidates' training in the area of special reading. Special reading candidate training focused on continuous

assessment and progress monitoring with struggling readers. Teacher observation and anecdotal notes, along with written assessments, pointed toward improved reading or lack thereof for the young children who were taught individually or in small groups. It was also during this phase that teachers began keeping authentic student work in a portfolio to indicate literacy progress along a continuum (Carr, 2003). Teachers generally kept a copy of written work from the beginning of the school year and a copy of written work from the end of the school year for comparison to determine progress. The portfolio was then passed on to the next teacher for the following year.

The practitioners of the 1990s also expounded on the belief that the prior knowledge children possessed when they participated in reading, or their schema, affected how and what was learned in reading. Early intervention and instruction with explicit, directed teaching and thinking activities was believed to precipitate increased understanding of printed text and better use of skills for decoding (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981 as cited in Alexander & Fox, 2004; Hansen, l981 as cited in Alexander & Fox, 2004; Rapphael & Wonnacott, 1985 as cited in Alexander & Fox, 2004; Tierney, Readence, & Dishner as cited in Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 43). In the past, theory to application was not the norm in the teaching of reading. However, as research-based strategies emerged, educators began to examine best practices to remediate reading difficulties focused on the latest research involving instructional strategies.

The 1990s saw the shift away from remedial assistance on a one-to-on basis and the learning focus turned toward small group learning. "Literacy research sought to capture the shared understanding of the *many*, rather than the private knowledge of the *one*" (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 46). The belief was that children would learn from the

discussions and thinking of their peers in the classroom. In individual instructional situations, children did not have the opportunity to access the thinking of their peers. Woodward and Talbert-Johnson (2009, p. 192) stated that schools often instituted small group pull-out programs for struggling readers to target specific areas of concern in reading more effectively when the atmosphere was quiet and the students were working on similar problems. Reading Recovery (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2010) and Success for All (United States Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2008 p.1) are examples of small group and individualized instruction. Of course, there were concerns about pulling students out of class for reading instruction because it was felt that they missed much from the regular classroom and that the instruction provided by the special reading teacher may not integrate well into what was being learned in the classroom. Change continued to occur with researchers beginning to understand that there was no one right way to teach reading. Instruction needed to be tailored to the needs of the children.

Alexander and Fox (2004) stated, "As the 90s wound down, there were forces at work that boded a change in the way learners and learning were perceived and studied within the literacy community" (p. 50). The researchers and school principals from this decade examined the reading process, the presentation of the text, and for the first time, student interest and motivation along with the multifarious aspects of the nature of reading itself (p. 53). No longer was reading considered just the acquisition of a set of related skills, decoding, or the reading of linear text in a basal reader textbook. With the advent of technology during this time, literacy became much more than reading a textbook as children began to explore reading through other media systems.

With the movement away from reading as a subset of skills, new research emerged. It became more apparent that the results of the research should be the driving force behind instructional practices. During this time, federal programs like Title I, provided federal funds to districts to give extra assistance for students who were deemed at poverty level and who received free and reduced food assistance at school (United States Department of Education, 2010). The resultant research caused the changes that are being experienced today in many public schools involving not only special reading teachers, but also the literacy coaches.

*Reading Instruction after the 1990s*

The changes that occurred after the 1990s saw the introduction of literacy coaches in the public school system. Literacy coaches were sometimes special reading teachers who modeled lessons, critiqued classroom teachers' lessons, and provided professional development among their other duties. However, there were districts that hired classroom teachers as literacy coaches, and they were not required to be certified special reading teachers. The International Reading Association defined a reading specialist as, "a teacher for students experiencing reading difficulties, a literacy or reading coach, or as a supervisor or coordinator of reading/literacy" (Literacy Coaching Clearinghouse, 2008, para. 1). The definition does not clearly state or indicate that a teacher must be a certified special reading teacher in order to meet the criteria provided. Therefore, the amount of training a special reading teacher or literacy coach possessed in reading could vary from one or two required courses in reading methods to several courses in methods, diagnosis of reading difficulties and other reading related coursework including the practicum experience.

Bean et al, (2009) explained the need for special reading teachers in the twentieth century. Special reading teachers were to establish reading programs to address the needs of students in the general education classroom especially those who were at risk of failing to develop grade level reading skills. They intimated that schools needed special reading teachers who were well versed and able to apply sound reading strategies, knew how to administer and analyze assessments, and were not afraid to assume a leadership role within the building and district regarding interventions, professional development, and suggestions for changes in the reading program (Reading Rockets: International Reading Association, 2000). During this time period, research continued in the area of reading remediation. "A demand for congruence between classroom and specialized instruction led reading specialists to work alongside teachers in the classroom" (Birmen & Demaline as cited in Bean, Swan & Knaub 2003) (p. 1).

Since classroom teachers were not sufficiently prepared during attendance at the college or university to diagnose and remediate reading problems, special reading teachers with many more hours of coursework in reading became indispensible in the process of helping struggling readers work toward fluent, proficient reading.

*Current Trends in Literacy Instruction*

The delivery of services has changed over time, in that, special reading teachers now serve in multiple roles, often teaching side by side with classroom and special education resource teachers. In addition, special reading teachers are utilized in locating and developing resources for interventions and providing professional development for staff members. Special reading teachers also administer tests, analyze the results, make

recommendations, and monitor student progress in reading. They often carry a caseload of students who see them in a pull-out program for intense reading instruction.

Since the advent of No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, districts have found it necessary to hire more special reading teachers to test students in reading and writing and provide appropriate interventions for struggling readers and writers in compliance with the mandate to have all students functioning at or above the proficient level in reading by the year 2013-2014 (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). Classroom teachers and special reading teachers were expected to, "address the five target areas identified by the National Reading Panel" (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009, p. 191).

The areas of instruction included: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and phonics. In addition to NCLB, the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, which many schools are currently adopting, has spurred an increased need for personnel who are highly qualified and who are quality special reading teachers. The premise of the RTI model was that students would receive interventions to assist in literacy before they failed rather than after they already failed for a period of time. RTI, a three tiered model, provided for interventions by the classroom teacher, and if that failed, then intervention may occur through the special reading teacher or resource teacher. Should those prescribed interventions not prove successful, the student could then be referred for testing for special education services. "All teachers need to be highly qualified to reach reading" (Dole, 2004, p. 463). With high quality interventions by well trained individuals, the number of students struggling in reading can be reduced. Therefore, the need for ongoing professional development of teachers has increased concurrently. I

believe that with sufficient methods and training for both classroom teachers and special reading teachers, reading difficulties for most students would be well on the way to proficiency, which is the expected goal for the year 2013-2014.

*Suggested Qualifications for Special Reading Teachers and Literacy Specialists*

In a position paper of the International Reading Association (2000, p. 1) a research-based description is provided of the qualities sought in a special reading teacher. The IRA stated that in addition to knowing content, special reading teachers need to be grounded in current theory and know how to organize a classroom for optimal learning with little interruption due to student behaviors. Additionally, special reading teachers elucidate strategies, stress metacognitive thinking, encourage students to strive to reach new heights in reading, and assist those students who find reading to be an arduous task.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) provides the opportunity for teachers to apply for board certification in the area of literacy, reading, and language arts. The National Board also prescribes specific standards that must be met by the candidate in order to receive National Certification. This certification is open to any teacher or experienced professional who has the necessary background, skills, pedagogy, and ability to assess students and analyze the assessments to provide appropriate instruction in literacy development (NBPTS, 2009). The standards are rugged and clearly hinge on knowledge, cognitive ability, analytical skills, and the ability to interact with students who are in need of support and problem solving skills. Having National Board Certification carries with it a certain amount of prestige. Districts see National Board certified teachers as teacher possessing superior skills. Teachers are not

required to be state certified in the area for which they are seeking National Board Certification but must be certified as a teacher in some area prior to applying.

The requirements for certification as a special reading teacher or coach differ among individual states. Most state requirements include some, if not all, of the following: graduate work, exit exams, teaching experience, coursework in reading, and completion of at least six hours of reading practicum working with students in primary and intermediate grades. Additionally, the roles and titles differ from state to state, but there is a basic assumption that regardless of the title, the primary function is to help struggling readers become proficient readers. Missouri has its own set of standards for certification which include initial certification as a teacher in some other area with two years of permanent teaching experience, coursework, classroom experience, and at least six credit hours of practicum experience involving work with kindergarten through 12th grade students.

*Lindenwood University Special Reading Programs*

Lindenwood University began offering coursework for graduate students in September of 1987, and the first mention of certification of special reading certification appears in the 1991/92 Graduate Catalog (*Lindenwood University Graduate Catalog*, 1991, p. 10). The education courses offered by Lindenwood received approval from DESE in 1987. Today, students are required to contact DESE for deficiencies in the area of special reading for program planning purposes. After receipt of this information, a program of study is designed for the individual student, based on their previous education coursework. Candidates may choose to complete a Master of Arts degree while fulfilling the requirements to become a special reading teacher. However, candidates may also

choose to complete only the coursework required by the state of Missouri to become a certified special reading teacher.

Lindenwood's special reading coursework is designed in accordance with the requirements provided by DESE and addresses the standards developed by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. "The standards answer the question, "What should reading professionals know and be able to do?" (International Reading Association 2003, p. 2). The International Reading Association provides descriptors of several terms such as reading specialist (special reading teacher), literacy coach, and reading coach. If special reading teachers have specific standards, then there must be a structure to provide them with appropriate training for how to diagnose and remediate reading problems. Special reading teachers at Lindenwood complete coursework such as Evaluation of Intellectual Skills, Special Education Counseling, Reading Methods classes, Analysis and Correction of Reading Difficulties, and two practicum experiences designed to assist candidates in learning how to assess students, progress monitor, remediate problems, and help the student achieve proficiency in reading.

*Research in Practicum Effectiveness*

The practicum coursework for prospective special reading teachers can be working with a student individually, working with small groups, working within the general education classroom, assisting in a pull-out program, or providing a tutoring program. Required in the academic program for special reading teachers in Missouri is a six hour practicum experience, although no specific model is mandated or recommended.

I researched the practicum coursework of graduate level students seeking special reading certification who worked with individual children through the university reading clinic. Carr (2003) indicated, "Little is known about teachers' actual practices and the extent to which literacy course objectives carry over into their classrooms" (p. 256). Carr's study was focused on an eight week summer reading program at a regional midwestern university that provided the practicum experience for 12 to 14 classroom and special education teachers seeking special reading endorsement. Approximately 28 children from ages five to 16 participated in the program each summer; two were assigned to each candidate. Candidates were surveyed several years after the completion of their course of study. Blind surveys were sent to 109 special reading teachers, former special reading candidates, who participated in the summer practicum from 1990 through 1998. Of the surveys sent out, 64% were returned (p. 259).

During Carr's (2003) study, candidates complied with the trends in the general education classroom. Special reading teacher candidates learned new ways to deliver instruction to students. Students met and worked in small, collegial groups with the teacher facilitator from the university. Teachers worked collaboratively with classroom teachers too and other resource teachers. Reflection became a way to look at what took place during the tutoring sessions, how well it happened, and whether or not the instruction accomplished what was needed.

Carr's (2003) study included a survey for former candidates that inquired about how well prepared the they felt they were in specific areas such as, "observation and assessment of individual student's oral reading" and "modeling and scaffolding comprehension and word-recognition skills" (p. 260). Carr wanted to determine if the

primary focus of the practicum experience, which was to mimic actual situations for diagnosis of reading difficulties and provision of opportunities to introduce strategies and instruction for remediation with actual struggling readers, was a success. "Contextualized learning, based on the principle of transfer of training indicated that for maximum transfer of skills learned, the instructional setting for teachers should be similar to their school assignment" (Harris & Sipay, 1990, as cited in Carr, 2003, p. 257). Carr explained that classroom teachers worked with small groups and differentiated in their classroom daily so the practicum experience should also provide differentiated approaches and learning opportunities for the candidates in order that they might experience working with struggling readers using many different strategies and methods. Carr also wanted to determine if students' felt more prepared when they worked with small groups in an area that allowed for, "teacher collaboration, reflection, and peer problem solving" (p. 256) Carr cited the fact that the candidates became a working community dependent on the feedback of their colleagues and the collegial support of their peers. Candidates learned to share their successes and how to assist each other in the process of helping struggling readers.

After reading this article, I began to see how Lindenwood, with its three models, provided differentiated instruction which allowed the candidate to work in a situation similar to that which is a part of his or her daily instruction. As Carr (2003) went on to further explain, classroom teachers rarely had the opportunity to work one-on-one with students, so training in this area made sense. However, Carr questioned whether this type of training for prospective special reading teachers was authentic to the situation. "The reading clinic where graduate students worked one-on-one with children to diagnose and

remediate reading problems was once a staple of graduate reading certification programs" (p. 256). Throughout the article Carr maintained that the university instructors involved in the study believed that small groups presented a more viable program for children than those designed to be administered for individuals. It was during this time period that Fountas and Pinnell (1996) published their highly acclaimed book, *Guided Reading,* which influenced instruction in the regular classroom and instruction provided by special reading teachers. Fountas and Pinnell's beliefs corroborated with the theory of other literacy researchers of the nineties that believed that small group instruction was a more authentic training scenario for special reading candidates since that presented an authentic opportunity for children to discuss, hear each other's opinions, and see good reading modeled. However, as the 21st century approached, some literacy researchers returned to the idea that individual instruction for struggling readers might best serve the interests of the child.

Tuten and Jensen's study (2008), unlike Carr's study (2003), in their article titled, "Re-visioning the Reading Clinic Experience: Tutoring at the Edge of One's Comfort Zone" investigated an after-school program whose focus was on working with an individual child. "Although most were comfortable teaching a whole class, working one-on-one with a struggling reader was a challenge" (p. 25). Tuten and Jensen thought that special reading candidates needed to know how to work with individual students who were struggling in reading. I know that as a classroom teacher, it was easier for me to focus on the problems of a group rather than just one child. It seemed that I could justify the extra time spent with a group better as opposed to taking the extra time for just one child. Focusing on the group did not require in depth analysis but rather a generalization

of what needed to be done to assist the children with reading strategies. In contrast, Tuten and Jensen felt that classroom teachers in their afterschool reading practicum experience actually needed to learn how to work with and diagnose individuals if they were to provide maximum assistance to help struggling readers become proficient readers. Therefore, their practicum experience encompassed work with individual children as opposed to working with small groups as discussed by Carr. The commonality between Tuten and Jensen's study and Carr's study was that they were both carried out to determine if candidates were more comfortable and better informed when they had the opportunity to work with their peers.

Tuten and Jensen (2008) also focused their study on the change from a practicum model that was basically an isolated model where candidates worked in small rooms tutoring students to one that was more of a, "community model" (p. 25). Tuten and Jensen wanted to assist the candidates in making the shift from a deficit model of instruction for children to a strengths-based instructional process. Rather than focusing on students' weak areas, candidates would focus on helping children learn by using what they already knew about how to read and problem solve. Tuten and Jensen believed that the candidates would experience less tension regarding their limited expertise in teaching reading if they worked less in isolation with individual students and more in a classroom community setting where they could access ideas and problem solve with peers. The candidates would work with one student over a period of two semesters and the instructors would analyze if students appeared less stressed and more comfortable in their redesigned environment. Tuten and Jensen believed that the community setting would allow for, "interaction and opportunities for shared instruction" (p. 25).

The teachers who participated in the study by Carr (2003) had received prior instruction in testing, assessing, and theoretical perspectives on methods for teaching reading. Carr indicated that the premise of this study espoused the belief that small group instruction was more aligned with the general education classroom. Within the context of their practicum experience, prospective special reading teachers were taught how to test students, provide instruction, and assess progress using various materials such as standardized tests, informal reading inventories, and benchmark testing through programs like The Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation, The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the QRI Informal Reading Inventory (Carr 2003). Those tests were a base for measuring which skills the child lacked that impeded proficient reading. The instructors believed that the clinical setting, if well supervised by professional staff, could be a precursor for developing excellent diagnostic and instructional skills. Carr's study was designed to examine situations that were veritable instructional opportunities for teachers. Educators were assigned two students, who were mainly primary age students with whom they worked for the entire eight week period. In Tuten and Jensen's (2008) study the research conducted with the candidates spanned the length of two semesters.

Carr (2003) also analyzed the support that educators believed they received from their colleagues in the practicum along with the group problem solving skills that were stressed. Tuten and Jensen (2008) had a different focus for their study. While they considered the collaboration among the candidates, they were more concerned with changes in the prospective special reading teachers' attitudes, comfort level during remedial instruction, and how candidates functioned and changed over the period of two semesters of approximately 15 weeks each. Tuten and Jensen believed that their

candidates would show improvement in self efficacy as they spent more time with the same struggling reader. The research questions that Tuten and Jensen addressed included the following: What changes did graduate students' exhibit in their understanding of literacy instruction for struggling readers? What affective changes did graduate students' exhibit in their approach to working with struggling readers (p. 25)? The restructured practicum course required back to back practicum experiences which had not been required in the past. Candidates worked with the same elementary child in addition to an intermediate student who would have been in fifth grade or above. The first practicum dealt with individual assessments to determine areas of strength rather than areas or deficit as had been the practice in the past. The second practicum dealt with design and implementation of an individual reading plan for the struggling reader. Instructors provided assessment strategies in the first practicum and acted as observers and mentors in the second practicum providing feedback, suggesting strategies, and meeting with the candidates in a discussion forum to share concerns, successes, and questions. The switch was from the deficit model to teaching to the student's strength. Data collection was analyzed by looking at candidate's daily record of activities (DRA) sheets that they turned in daily. The candidates turned in approximately 18 to 24 DRA sheets which included information regarding resources, books, activities, and strategies. Twenty eight candidates participated with 25 candidates being from the elementary sector, two candidates were early childhood teachers, and one candidate was not in the education field at the time of the practicum.

However, in their final analysis, Tuten and Jensen (2008) discussed collegial support and cooperative instruction that resulted with the redesigned practicum for the candidates during the two semesters when this study was made.

Carr (2003) indicated that the rationale for the importance of collegial support was supported by the fact that special reading teachers were generally considered to be support staff that provided assistance to classroom teacher, and they were required to work conjointly with their professional peers. Tuten and Jensen's (2008) study focused on the, "conceptual and emotional shifts (we) found embedded in the graduate students' documentation of their tutoring sessions" (p. 25).

Participants in Carr's (2003) study were surveyed several years after participation in the Practicum in Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading Difficulties to determine if candidates felt well prepared to become special reading teachers. Eighty eight percent of those surveyed reported that the practicum or reading clinic had a positive effect on reading that they would teach in the future (p. 265). Some strengths of the clinical experience included increased knowledge regarding the teaching of reading skills, the importance of collegial discussions, the ability to interpret monitoring data, and the knowledge of differences in student learning styles and prior knowledge (p. 265). "Teachers reported that they were well prepared in assessment and that they frequently used informal literacy assessment techniques taught in the practicum" (p. 266). Additionally, candidates reported that they had sufficient knowledge of skills as a result of the practicum. Carr's (2003) conclusion was that reading clinic participation was found to be a successful tool for special reading preparation and that it should continue to exist to prepare prospective special reading teachers. I believe that the success of this

particular type of reading program occurred because the special reading candidates were well supervised had peer input, and practiced and learned in an authentic setting. The question that remained in my mind was whether small groups are a better learning opportunity for the children than a program designed and delivered for an individual child?

Interestingly, Tuten and Jensen (2008) also indicated that their students' practicum experiences in their college-based after school program called, Literacy Space, was adequate for the provision of reading strategies, use of assessments, and practice in developing appropriate lessons for struggling readers (p. 25). However, the after school reading clinic or practicum experience for candidates was stressful because they were being asked to function in a new role as diagnosticians and instructors for reading problems for individual students. Tuten and Jensen (2008) garnered this information through special reading candidates' completion of their Daily Record of Activity sheet regarding their tutoring experiences. These sheets were then coded, and themes located through analysis by the instructors involved in the practicum. The instructors believed that the practicum experience was not in alignment with the candidate's role as a classroom teacher which was geared toward whole group interaction. Tuten and Jensen defined the changes that were made in the clinical experiences for special reading candidates to make it less stressful and more authentic. The approach of the clinic changed to a format that allowed and even encouraged cooperative discussions and blending of ideas and theories between candidates to help determine how to best support the struggling reader. Candidates' thoughts and ideas about the clinical experience were self recorded and provided an opportunity for the instructors to evaluate the students'

perspicacity regarding readiness to be special reading teachers after completion of the hands on, direct teaching experience with one child over a period of one year in two separate semesters of the practicum experience, as opposed to the eight weeks in Carr's study. The time period, eight weeks, and method for providing the practicum was different in Carr's (2003) study then in Tuten and Jensen's study (2008) which was over two semesters. Some other commonalities existed within the two programs. The most glaring similarity was the fact that both practicum experiences focused a portion of the study on collaboration among the special reading candidates and self reflection on practice as way to evaluate effectiveness with the children being assisted with reading strategies.

In both Carr (2003) and Tuten and Jensen's (2008) reading clinics, a child was not diagnosed solely through the use of standardized tests. Multiple tests and observations, some of which were done by the candidates, were used to define the particular reading difficulties each child exhibited. Additionally, the main theme of the practicum switched from trying to remediate deficiencies to using the child's known strategies and strengths to design an appropriate plan of action to increase reading growth.

In Tuten and Jensen's (2008) practicum experience, prospective special reading teacher candidates spent the first semester of the clinical experience determining what appeared to be causing the failure to thrive in reading for one student in a primary grade who attended the special reading clinic. Also, to provide a more varied experience, special reading candidates were required to tutor another individual who was struggling but did not attend the reading clinic. This student was in an intermediate grade. Throughout the tutoring experience, graduate classes continued for the candidates to

provide opportunities for forums, further strategic instruction by the university instructors, along with presentations by the instructors. Dominant in the instructional process for the special reading candidates was the sharing of resources and the opportunity to follow a child for one whole year. Tuten and Jensen further expounded on the belief that it was most important for them, as instructors, to be a part of the forum discussions rather than just be someone who evaluated the candidates' performance or imparted their wisdom about remediation of reading problems (2008). During discussions, the university instructors were able to provide directions to resources and model appropriate reading strategies.

The clinical experience changes were brought to fruition to allow the special reading candidates a venue where newly learned reading strategies and problem solving skills could be executed, peers could share ideas, and this could be accomplished in the actual process of assisting struggling readers. Tuten and Jensen (2008) indicated that there were significant changes in how special reading candidates approached instruction as time progressed in the clinical setting. Changes the researcher noted in the candidates during the clinical experience included a switch from the use of commercially made programs with the children to the use of real books with phonics, comprehension, and problem solving skills intertwined throughout the sessions. The candidates gained confidence and were less stressed when experimenting with new options for helping the child improve reading proficiency. With the improvement in the child's reading proficiency came the metamorphosis for the candidate. They no longer solely regarded the instructors or themselves as the persons in control of instructional practices and procurement of suitable teaching materials. Rather, the candidates found that when the

children were encouraged to express ideas and interests as well as suggest books and projects, interest levels soared and reading confidence and ability increased. Tuten and Jensen further stated about the clinic, "We wanted to push the graduate students to the edge of their comfort zone by giving them the opportunity to try out instructional practices and materials, and look at diagnosis and remediation through a different, more multifaceted lens" (p. 30). Evident in this study was the fact that special reading teacher candidates must know theory, practice, and must have sufficient opportunities in a safe atmosphere to try new things in order to find specifically what best suits each individual student's needs as a learner (p.31).

The amount of time, instruction, and realistic setting of this afterschool college based program, was called Literacy Space. Participating in the practicum precipitated the change in the candidates' perceptions of their ability to function as special reading teachers. Given that the time allotted for working with the struggling reader was a period of one year, ample time was provided for strategies to be ingested, practiced, and learned by the children. Their success and growth in reading led to the feelings of success for the special reading candidates. This program stressed individual diagnosis and individual attention for struggling readers and special reading candidates. In Carr's (2003) study, the time allotted for instruction both for candidates and children was only eight weeks during the summer. Yet both programs reported success with training special reading teachers and helping struggling readers reach higher levels of reading expertise.

I believe that the professionalism and instruction provided through the coursework in both situations along with reflections, collaboration and the desire to learn by the candidates precipitated the success of both of these different, but viable practicum

programs. These two studies were described in such detail because they provided models of practicum experiences and methods of evaluation with Carr (2003) using a survey of the candidates' and Tuten and Jensen using the DRA to analyze results. Most research on special reading teacher preparation focused on general guidelines for the whole program rather than focusing on the practicum experience.

Current queries in my study regarding perceived preparedness of candidates' centers on the issue of whether candidates feel prepared to facilitate appropriate instructional strategies that will aid children in developing sound reading skills. This includes comprehension, fluency, and problem solving skills. Both President Clinton and President Bush agreed that schools needed more support for struggling readers and that funds needed to be available to assist children who needed support (Lassonde & Richards, 2009, p. 1). However, the best use of these funds is still being debated today as President Obama works to reauthorize NCLB and institute the new program known as, Race to the Top (see Appendix B for the Executive Summary for Race to the Top).

The quest for the best model to use to prepare candidates to become special reading teachers should include the belief that the practicum experience needs to be as close to authentic in nature as possible. However, taking this into consideration, not all candidates will thrive in the afterschool clinic program because not all candidates bring the same background knowledge to class, and not all candidates possess the stamina needed to function in an afterschool program after having taught all day as a classroom teacher. Synchronously, not all supervisors or professors bring the same knowledge or experiential background to the coursework. Also of importance is the fact that not all candidates will thrive in an eight week summer practicum because it is more compressed,

and candidates may find it difficult to focus after having just completed the regular school year. Also, not all candidates will be able to structure their summers to accommodate this commitment. However, other models for special reading candidates exist.

In the book, *Literacy Tutoring that Works,* the editors, Cynthia Lassonde and Janet Richards (2009) agglomerate information from several experts in the field of reading education to analyze the successes and concerns surrounding practicum experiences provided for prospective special reading teachers. The researchers in this book, published by the International Reading Association, provide vignettes and research regarding afterschool, in-school, and summer reading practicum experiences for special reading candidates seeking reading certification through various college and university graduate programs. The question still remains what can be added to each of the practicum experiences to strengthen each practicum experience which would allow candidates to enter the field of special reading feeling most prepared for the challenge of remediating struggling readers.

In the forward of the book, *Literacy Tutoring that Works* (2009), Rasinski explained to the reader that struggling readers' show improvement when they read more, especially when they read books as opposed to isolated words or worksheets. Also evinced is the belief that continuous quality instruction supports students in their betterment as readers. The forward further extrapolates the theory that it should not be problematic for school districts to develop and maintain programs that provide tutoring for students who are struggling in reading. However, "in reality, although clear in concept and seemingly easy to implement, tutoring programs in reading require thoughtful

planning and implementation. If not, the tutoring program may not be worth the effort" (Lassonde & Richards, 2009, p. xi). I found this book valuable in evaluating the practicum experiences I read about. I had adequate information regarding candidate backgrounds and whether these practicum experiences were the only type offered at each of the colleges or universities.

The affects of some tutoring programs are suspect in remediating struggling readers. This could not be more apparent than in the failure of the federally funded program, referred to as Reading First, an initiative of NCLB passed during the George W. Bush administration. The program was fashioned to afford early intervention for primary students in kindergarten through grade three. Additionally, the program was to dispense funds for teacher training in reading through continuous professional development and the introduction of strategies and methods for remediation that were supported by scientific research (United States Department of Education, 2009). However, well intentioned this program may have been, it was fraught with alleged scandal in the handling of funds for districts as indicated in a recent report published in the *Washington Post* on May 2, 2008. The author cited government reports indicating little if any improvement for struggling readers in this program compared to their peers who were not in the program (Glod, 2008, para. 4). The major criticisms of the plan include the pedagogy or theory of the program which relied heavily on the use of phonetics and paid little attention to other methods of teaching or remediating reading difficulties. The conflict of interest, reported in the *Washington Post*, surrounding this program focused on the fact that some of the representatives in government had ties to companies that provided the materials used in the program. "Federal investigators have found that some

people who helped oversee the programs had financial ties to publishers of Reading First materials" (para. 4).

If federally funded programs have failed to assist struggling readers, then perhaps the answer lies in the structure provided to prepare candidates to become special reading teachers. The International Reading Association publication, *Literacy Tutoring That Works,* examined the concept of instructional practices for candidates through the summer practicum experience. In a chapter titled, "Literacy Camp: An Effective Summer Intervention" Burgin, Bandre, and Hughes (2009), included combined research to, "prepare education students from the University of Arkansas in Little Rock to teach reading and provide professional development for novice classroom teachers" (p. 157). The study was designed to provide data that would inform the participants regarding effectiveness of the summer practicum experience and whether metacognition helped the children become more proficient readers and writers. The design of the practicum was such that a classroom teacher and a candidate were given a small group of children, approximately ten to fifteen students per classroom, which allowed for adequate time to provide individualized instruction as needed. The camp was established with the cooperation and provision of facilities at two elementary schools. Continuous, collaborative planning occurred between the candidates and the certified teachers through lunchtime discussions on a daily basis. Curriculum was derived from a combination of research conducted by Carla Soffos, Linda Dorn, and Marie Clay. The daily schedule, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., included time for familiar reading, shared reading, guided reading, writer's workshop, interactive read aloud, and writer's shared time. Due to the desirable student teacher ratio, time was sufficient to provide individual assistance for

children. Close monitoring of increased problem-solving skills through oral discourse provided the impetus for introduction of new strategies. At the close of camp the first year, although no significant gain could be statistically reported, participants agreed, "Regardless of reading level increases, teachers believed that children's reading strategies at point of difficulty improved" (p.161). Subsequent reporting in years two and three of the program showed statistically significant gains for children in third and fourth grade with first and second grade students maintaining their reading levels. Entering the fifth year of the summer experience, a literacy interview was designed to assist educators in the task of accurate data collection. This survey involved a face to face interview with children individually at the beginning of the experience and at the end of the experience in the summer program. While the gains of children attending camp were of importance during this study, the focus of this investigator's study is that of preparedness for prospective special reading teachers.

Graduate students and teachers involved in the Burgin, Bandre, and Hughes, (2009) summer literacy program concluded that most important to them in their development was the luxury of having time dedicated specifically to the teaching of literacy with no pressure to prepare for other subject areas as they are required to do as classroom teachers. The collegial relationships and rapport built with each other fostered bonds that allowed for open discussion, sharing of ideas, and opportunities to learn. Building a team with common goals and attitudes cultivated a cohesive, group-oriented approach to problem solving and development of instructional formats. The teachers and graduate students met daily to support each other and discuss strategies for remediation. Burgin et al., concluded, "Also central to the program's success was daily rather than

weekly planning and the direct relationship between the assessments we administered and the plans teachers collaboratively created each afternoon" (p. 160). Much like Carr's (2003) research concerning summer reading practicum coursework, candidates' experience during this summer literacy practicum came in the form of small groups of children. The cohesiveness and collaboration of the group of candidates was stressed as a key to success. The one difference in Burgin, Bandre, and Hughes' model of the practicum that may have contributed to its success was the fact that candidates worked directly with a novice certified classroom teacher, thus lowering the student teacher ratio, and both teacher and candidate collaborated regularly with university instructors, thus providing an authentic experience for those involved in the practicum experience.

The limitation of Burgin, Bandre and Hughes' (2009) study for my purpose was that little was included in the chapter regarding the instruction provided for the candidates through this experience other than the fact that the university professors helped develop surveys for the children participating in the reading camp experience. There was a successful outcome of improved reading and writing for students participating in the camp, and the writers of this chapter explicitly concluded that they could not determine any one distinct strategy that precipitated the success. Rather, it was a combination of the elements of the program like shared planning, teachers' attitudes, and the students themselves who were prevalent in the overarching improvement in reading ability. This infers then that the candidates and teachers in the program demonstrated that they were prepared to diagnose and remediate problems in reading for their students (p. 170). The summer practicum experience was deemed successful for

both the struggling readers and the candidates who provided the instruction for the children.

Further evidence from O'Neil, in her 2004 dissertation, *Graduate Reading Students' Perceptions of Their Summer Reading Practicum Experience,* attributed feelings of adequate preparededness for special reading teachers in the summer reading practicum experiences she observed to the length or challenge of the education experience in general. She further indicated that a solid theoretical base that the certified teachers, who were special reading candidates, brought to the practicum through opportunities previously experienced in their own classrooms affected the successful outcome of the program. O'Neil explained that candidates at two different Pennsylvania universities with similar practicum experiences were assessed by their instructors through the use of reflective journals, observations of authentic teaching situations, surveys, and preparation of daily lessons for the assigned children. There were 10 participants from one university and 28 participants from the second university for a total of 38 candidate participants. O'Neil's focus was primarily concerned with how well prepared prospective special reading teachers believed they were through the summer practicum at the two universities. Although the programs at both institutions were similar in nature, there were some differences in reflective journal writing and the key roles played out at each site. O'Neil stated that, "Some of the graduate students were more involved in the administrative roles of planning the summer programs, while others benefited from the expertise of supportive district staff and district reading specialists" (p. 89). O'Neil further stressed the need for more studies in the area of preparation for special reading teachers that encompasses a wider array of institutions across the nation. As can be

discerned from the research so far, the common element in preparing candidates to become special reading teachers lies not with the structure of the practicum but rather with the cooperation, instructional process, reflection, and dedication of those involved in the practicum experience.

The limitation of O'Neil's dissertation (2004) was that the research focused only on one summer program with two different universities and did not include any details of alternative methods for providing the special reading practicum experience. Additionally, the researcher's literature study, while informative, did not include much specific information about special reading preparation, perhaps indicating a need for more research in this area. Instead, it focused more on the preparation of teachers in general. O'Neil concluded that the summer practicum was successful in terms of candidates' perceptions of preparation although they did express concerns regarding the length of time provided to complete projects and assignments during the summer practicum. Candidates also expressed concerns about the grade level of the child assigned during the practicum and the fact that this was done arbitrarily without consideration of the wishes of the candidate (pp. 88 & 89). However, this was a viable model of instruction for prospective special reading teachers since special reading teachers are generally assigned to more than one grade level and can be assigned anywhere between kindergarten and grade 12. O'Neil did not examine any alternative models for preparation of candidates to become special reading teachers although her study did include candidates at two Pennsylvania Universities that had similar programs. What would a candidate do if he or she was unable to attend these sessions due to prior commitments such as teaching

summer school? Also of concern to me was whether the summer practicum satisfied the needs of all candidates in the area of supervision and instruction.

I found the information in O'Neil's (2004) literature review focused on overall teacher preparation. I would have liked to read more specific information that addressed special reading teacher preparation and how it differs from preparation for the regular classroom. However, O'Neil did indicate that at the time of her research there was a limited amount of information available for her to access regarding strictly special reading teacher preparation and the practicum experience. I felt strongly that the dissertation provided good evidence of teacher preparation in general and that the results of the study addressed candidate perceptions of preparation as a result of analysis of the surveys candidates provided. This research provided some validity regarding the success of the summer practicum experience and its ability to provide adequate instructional strategies and learning for special reading candidates in an authentic setting. After reading O'Neil's dissertation, I wanted to be more specific in my research since there had been more written about the special reading practicum since her dissertation was completed. Quinn (2009) is a more recent look at a practicum experience located in the city of Philadelphia School System.

Quinn (2009) provided an introspective look at the preparation process in some Philadelphia schools involved in a partnership with a local university for special reading candidates. Candidates came from two different elementary schools and the study focused on the practicum held in the spring of 2006. Holy Family University provided the faculty who taught classes and supervised the after school practicum experience. Quinn indicated that the program was committed to the following:

> Holding all graduate classes for the teachers at the school along with conducting literacy events there, coaching the graduate students (the teachers at the school), and working in the classrooms during the school day would be a much more significant and unusual process than my prior experiences. (p.132)

In contrast to the previous examples or models, this model provided tuition reimbursement for up to 24 teachers and included a total of 27 credit hours of paid classes that would qualify the teachers for special reading certification. Some of the graduate students were mandated by their district to participate in the after school reading program known as Power Hour, which met twice weekly. University instructors' responsibilities included observational experiences regarding actual teaching with struggling readers, and they also provided appropriate materials and strategies for the prospective candidates to use when tutoring children. Classes were also held twice weekly to provide opportunities for learning, sharing discussion, and practicing the use of assessments for reading. Much like the Lindenwood After School Model, candidates were required to keep written notes about their experiences with their respective students and they were required to analyze what went well, what was a continuing issue with the child's reading, and what they might be able to do better or different to help the child improve more rapidly.

One of the research questions of Quinn's (2009) study included, "What impact does a professional development partnership have on the teachers who participate in the program?" (p. 134). Quinn indicated that there were certain tendencies noted by both the candidates and those students being tutored that pointed toward the positive outcomes that occurred in the tutoring process. Quinn believed that there were differences to be found in the responses from candidates and that the, "qualitative difference in teachers'

response to instruction and professional development – especially in the areas of collaboration, cultural understanding, and differentiation of instruction is noteworthy" (p. 138). Much like previous authors, as a result of human differences and beliefs, it was difficult to analyze exactly what was successful in the program. However, it was apparent through data collection and discussion with candidates that their confidence was heightened particularly in the areas of diagnosis and remediation of literacy problems. Candidates found that working with their colleagues played a crucial role in their development along with the provision of support and instruction from the university professionals. This program also provided them the opportunity to practice and learn in an authentic setting with children.

Quinn's (2009) program mimics the Lindenwood After School program in many aspects including university supervision, recruitment of children for the program, and student records of practicum experiences. However, the incentive of having tuition reimbursement could have recruited some students who may not have been fully committed to becoming a special reading teacher but rather took advantage of the program as a way to earn salary credits. The author of this chapter indicated that some candidates dropped out of the program early on but does not specifically state how this affected the overall outcome of the program.

It is also important to note that Quinn (2009), like Burgin et al., (2009), found it difficult to pinpoint specifically what particularly precipitated the success of this program but indicated that much could be learned from this experience and that it was crucial for all involved to fixate on the notion of the uniqueness of each child and the need to design programs accordingly. Ever present was the collaboration piece, instructional aspect, and

reflections written and analyzed to help drive instruction. Further exploration of practicum experiences would help me determine which model or models might provide the best support for Lindenwood candidates.

In their after school program (Metcalf, Bessette, and Gibbs, 2009) explained the outcome of a partnership they were involved in through St. Mary's University which was designed to prepare certified teachers to become special reading teachers. The program provided assistance for struggling readers during the evening hours twice weekly. The candidates were fulfilling a portion of the 24 hours of instruction required by the state of Texas to receive special reading certification. Children were recruited for the program from both the elementary venue and the middle school venue. The university planned the program to include two weeks of intense learning for the special reading candidates who would then take what they had learned and apply it during the six week period set aside for working with the children. The purpose of the practicum was to provide authentic opportunities for special reading candidates to practice and hone their skills in teaching reading and at the same time to provide appropriate assistance for students who needed help with reading skills.

Much like the Lindenwood Camp Read-A-Lot experience and After School practicum experience, Metcalf, Bessette, and Gibbs' (2009) child participants completed a reading interest survey at the start of the program and again at the end of the program which determined if, or how, their demeanor regarding reading had changed. Children indicated a strong desire or willingness to be a part of the after-school program. They were able to provide examples of things learned and relationships that had been forged with the candidates. Once again, this was much like the Lindenwood Camp Read-A-Lot

practicum. Family surveys also proved positive feedback regarding new experiences in the area of reading at home. When the candidates completed the time allotted to assist children with reading, they remained at the school to continue learning instructional strategies in a class setting with the professors which is also the case during Lindenwood's After School practicum experience and Camp Read-A-Lot experience. Metcalf, Bessette, and Gibbs' study was a mixed method study using such data as candidates' notes on each child they worked with, in addition to reflecting on what they witnessed as they assisted the children. The observational information was examined in combination with the quantitative results from the standardized tests. The study by Metcalf et al., stated, "The main focus of the observations for this research is the effectiveness of the program to improve children's reading skills and motivation to read" (p. 98). The researchers also sought to determine how the program affected the home situation as far as reading was concerned. Metcalf et al. also indicated that candidates' lessons were designed to address the needs of the child and were focused on areas of strength and interest. The researchers felt that the main constraint in their study was the length of time of the study which they felt was, "of short duration" (p. 100), taking place over six weeks. Upon assessing the benefits for the special reading candidates through a survey, Metcalf et al. ascertained that students believed they were successful with the children because they had the opportunity to practice and utilize the strategies learned during classroom instruction. Further, the candidates indicated that they felt more positive about their expertise in the area of reading literacy as a result of participation in this program. The candidates also felt they were able to provide opportunities and appropriate learning strategies based on the child's individual strengths and weaknesses.

One student remarked, "I received firsthand experience working with students in reading. It allowed me to apply what I was learning in class to real situations." (p. 105) Therefore, the researchers concluded that this type of graduate program for special reading candidates was a successful way to prepare graduate students for certification and entrance into the field. This method of evaluation, surveys, and participation was similar to the methods employed in the Camp Read-A-Lot and After School practicum experiences at Lindenwood. I continued my search for programs similar in nature to those offered at Lindenwood for the practicum experience, but I was unable to locate any research that involved three separate models through one university. However, I was able to find more research on each of the models individually.

Peck (2009) explored and delineated the opportunities that candidates have through the practicum provided for them in two urban settings. The graduate students must complete 50 hours of tutoring during the practicum in order to complete the Literacy Master's Degree Program. The practicum was held off campus, and the candidates worked with students in seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. Another site was utilized for the practicum that included students in an elementary setting. Both programs were tutoring situations that took place after the close of the regular school day. Students were encouraged to access assistance from the reading specialists at these two schools. Instruction was provided through coursework at the university. Much like Quinn's (2009) after school practicum and the summer practicum of Burgin, Bandre and Hughes' (2009), candidates were required to complete assessments, keep data, develop individualized instructional strategies, and reflect regarding their own practice. Working alongside their peers in the program was encouraged. The instructor regularly viewed

lessons and progress in reading for the children and provided feedback and direction for further instructional practices. Additionally, as in several of the other practicum programs, copious notes were required of candidates to determine growth in the area of pedagogy and delivery of strategies to their students (p. 120). Although the university professor was on site during some of the tutoring sessions, she indicated in her limitations that she felt it would be more beneficial to have been at every tutoring session to better assist the special reading candidates (p. 122).

As a result of this practicum, Peck (2009) concluded that candidates in the special reading program needed to be exposed to research from several authors to encourage the candidates to keep abreast of new ideas and strategies. The last important outcome or conclusion was the effect of collegial, cooperative work (p. 123). Peck also expressed the concern that she was not prepared to supervise candidates in an urban setting. The instructor was concerned about her own safety in a low income, inner city setting. She was also concerned about whether her car would be there when she came out of the school. However, she quickly realized that she was safe, and her car was untouched in the Philadelphia elementary school that was in "corrective action" (p. 132). The candidates were eager to learn, and the instructor was ready to provide new opportunities for the candidates. After completing the practicum, candidates indicated that they were ready to transition to special reading teacher positions with a better sense of pedagogy and possessed the ability to diagnosis reading difficulties.

Also in an urban setting, Nilsson (2009) described a reading practicum program developed at a large, urban, public university which provided instruction and authentic opportunities for special reading candidates in an after school situation on the university

campus. Special reading candidates attended class in one semester and then provided tutorials for small groups of struggling readers the following semester. Children were chosen for the program through teacher recommendation and assessment of literacy skills through the testing process. This program was unique in that special reading candidates near the end of their university training provided assistance to special reading candidates who were just beginning their program of study.

The author, Nilsson, (2009) reminded the reader that the current role of special reading teachers is and will continue to change its focus as special reading teachers are asked to act more in supervisory capacity and as presenters rather than as support personnel for struggling readers. To determine what changes needed to be made, Nilsson visited other college and university programs to garner ideas for changes that would better prepare candidates to become special reading teachers, coaches, and professional development presenters. Nilsson described the primary change made in her program,

> I implemented a community-of-practice framework within our literacy center because this framework embedded opportunities for candidates in literacy education to gain an introductory experience coaching or serving as a resource to other graduate students in their role as tutors. (p.142)

Looking to the future, Nilsson suggested that the program be extended to allow the candidates near the end of their program of study to assist teachers in a school setting with resources, instructional practice, and assessment of struggling readers. The purpose of the study was to analyze the learning process for upperclassmen that provided a quasi-coaching situation for underclassmen. The stated purpose was to give those near the end of their special reading teacher program an opportunity to experience coaching,

presenting, instructing, and opportunities to provide the means and ways to disseminate information to parents, teachers, and administrators first hand. The program also provided collegial support for the newcomers in the special reading program.

Children in Nilsson's (2009) practicum attended the one-to-one tutoring program at the university on alternate weeks for a period of 90 minutes. The special reading candidates near the end of their program of study assisted the newer members by aiding in the development of appropriate remedial strategies, and they also assisted in the analysis of testing data. Additionally, the upperclassmen kept anecdotal records when they watched instruction occurring between children and tutors, and as a result of the note taking, they were able to provide additional assistance to the new special reading candidates.

Nilsson (2009) cited some limitations with this study which included the fact that she was both a professor and the one completing the study. My study faces the same limitation since I am also an instructor involved in each of the practicum experiences offered for prospective reading specialists. Nilsson was also concerned about whether receiving a grade by those near the end of their special reading instruction in some way affected their engagement with their colleagues who just started the program. However, Nilsson was able to discern through their writing that the upperclassmen believed that they had grown in their understanding and experience through the program and that they felt better prepared to assume the role of special reading teacher or coach in their respective districts. Nilsson's practicum candidates exhibited a growing sense of responsibility for addressing the needs of an ever-widening circle of individuals, and became increasingly familiar with various aspects of mentoring, including familiarity

with ways to build collegiality with the content and cognitive tools essential to the work (pp.45-46). It is the belief of this researcher that this particular program provided both excellent instructional opportunities for special reading candidates and that it also provided an excellent opportunity for the participants to practice their craft firsthand.

Examining many afterschool and summer practicum programs led me to the conclusion that both practicum experiences provided adequate instruction for the candidates, supervision of the candidates was appropriate, materials used for assessment and instruction were age and ability leveled, collaboration was a key component of each practicum and paramount in the success of the program was the reflective practitioner continuously search for the best way to help struggling readers succeed. I then investigated if these same factors would be found in a practicum model that took place during the school day.

Frey, Lapp, and Fisher (2009) discussed a program in an urban school district that involved interventions for students who were behind in reading in order to prevent them from being retained. This program, while not identical, mimics a good portion of the Lindenwood model for the school district practicum.

Frey, Lapp, and Fisher (2009) expressed the fact that retention was seen as a time to allow students to mature or a time to provide extra assistance to help students gain better reading proficiency. The professors involved in the program designed the plan to provide extra assistance to students during the hours that they regularly attended school. The program would provide ancillary services beyond the general education classroom. The questions that the program addressed included whether students would perform better in the area of literacy, would fewer students repeat a grade, and would students

continue to show improvement as they moved on to the next grade? The university professors selected a "quasi-experimental, mixed methodology design for this study because random sampling of the children could not be employed, as we could not retain some children before offering them what we perceived as additional proactive instruction" (p. 37). The participating elementary schools in this program both had high numbers of students on the poverty level, and a large number of them learned English as a second language. Both schools were similar in demographic makeup and student population. Assessments were completed using the Developmental Reading Assessment test. Students were tested; areas of strength and weaknesses were identified both from the assessment and classroom teacher, and tutoring commenced during the second week of the program. The process used for instructions had many similarities to the Reading Recovery program developed by Marie Clay (1993). Students were tutored individually, and times were flexible in order to control the amount of time and subject area students would miss in the general education classroom to attend tutoring. The designers believed that it was important that students, who would be pulled out of class for intensive instruction, not be taken from the same subject area class each day. This strategy was employed to prevent the student from falling behind in content area class time.

Frey, Lapp, and Fisher (2009) noted improvement in test scores from the beginning of the program to the end. The outcome of this program was that students did increase reading ability and, while they may not have caught up to peers in the class, they did narrow the gap. Future testing also supported the belief that the tutored students would maintain the gains they made during the tutoring process. The authors believe that the program worked because, "We attribute the success of this tutoring program to

several essential elements including the provision of additional individualized instruction, ongoing assessment of progress during tutoring, and coaching support for tutors" (p. 42). Frey, Lapp and Fisher do not identify how tutors were chosen, whether they were certified teachers, or whether they were a participant in a university class. However, conclusions can be drawn regarding the success of the program through their collection of reflective comments from the candidates. They indicated that their focus shifted from the mechanics or set–up of the practicum to the best way to help children read (p. 42). Out of this experience came suggestions for design of the practicum and critical questions candidates had about their instructional process. Candidates began to see that the way instruction was delivered and the authentic books used not only helped children refine their reading strategies but it helped the children develop an interest in reading.

After reading Tuten and Jensen (2008), it was clear that the researchers provided data that assisted readers in their understanding of the structure of their practicum and how it had a positive effect on how the candidates approached their own learning process. Candidates learned to rely more on authentic books and less on prepared programs to remediate reading difficulties. This was a definite shift away from programmed reading, basal readers, and worksheets.

*Authentic Reading Instruction*

Special reading teacher candidates must have opportunities to work with actual students who have authentic reading difficulties under the supervision of an expert in the field of literacy development. Commeyras and DeGroff (1998) put it best when they said, "There is no doubt that the U.S. public expects the nation's educators to teach every child to read, to enjoy reading, and to use reading to make informed decisions as citizens in a

democratic society" (p. 434). Commeyras and DeGroff's article, "Literacy professional's perspectives on professional development and pedagogy: A United States Survey" examined literacy instructor's beliefs regarding the instructional process in the area of literacy. These researchers investigated "literacy professionals' perspectives on professional development and pedagogical practices" (p. 435). Commeyras and DeGroff also examined through questionnaires to what extent the reading of books and articles dealing with literacy affected the way teachers viewed instructional practices in teaching children to read. Teachers were questioned about their work habits with colleagues, whether or not they had done research, types of professional reading they had experienced, and what was known about authentic assessment, particularly in the area of work samples assembled, as ongoing assessment for each child. Literacy teachers were also asked about areas of interest with the intent of determining if the teachers were more willing to read literacy material if it pertained to those things they found intriguing. Also included in the research were questions that addressed experiential background since many educators believed that experience denoted knowledge and if one was knowledgeable then one must have experience. Development of the Likert scale questionnaires used by Commeyras and DeGroff went through a series of stages with research specialists and then were piloted by a group of pre-service teachers in order to determine if the design focused on the specific areas of experience, professional reading, and beliefs about literacy instruction and if wording was adequate to support the research questions. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were given an opportunity to make unprompted remarks. The procedure that Commeryras and DeGroff took in

establishing validity of their questions was much like the process I followed in determining what to ask Lindenwood instructors and candidates.

*Responsibility of the University When Preparing Special Reading Candidates*

With the continuous search for the best way to teach reading to children comes the responsibility on the part of colleges and universities to find the best way to prepare teachers to become special reading teachers. While research in this area is now more plentiful than in past years, the question is a difficult one to answer conclusively. During my reading and research for my dissertation about the practicum experiences of candidates for special reading certification, what appeared consistently was the fact that candidates needed to experience authentic situations with children needing remedial assistance in reading. Another key component was the involvement of the instructors from the university or college. Candidates needed to experience different assessment formats for struggling readers, and the experiential background and training of both the instructor and the candidate affected the candidates' feelings of self efficacy. Also dominant throughout the research was the necessity to provide appropriate resources and instruction in strategies for remediation of reading difficulties for use by the candidates as they work with children. Instructors needed to provide constructive feedback to candidates to promote growth as they strive to become special reading teachers. I could not locate any research regarding other institutions of higher learning that provided three different practicum models for candidates seeking special reading certification. Lindenwood's three practicum opportunities seemed to align in many ways with each of the programs that I examined. In my research, it appeared that the model was less pertinent than the supervision and instruction provided by the instructors, the availability

of resources, the authenticity of the experience, and the opportunity to practice the newly learned skills.

*Summary*

As O'Neil (2004) found during her research connected with the summer practicum experience in her dissertation, it was difficult to find specific information regarding candidates' perceptions about how well the practicum experience prepared them to assume the role of a special reading teacher. I felt that I had an advantage as research has been more forthcoming as a result of NCLB by virtue of the fact that a major portion of this law addressed reading proficiency for children. There remains, however, a need to continue research on how to help struggling readers reach proficient reading levels. One question that continues to challenge researchers is what is the best way to prepare special reading candidates?

Barone and Morrell (2007) delineated the problem adherent in determining the most appropriate instructional practices for special reading teachers. It partly reflected the fact that there was not a sufficient amount of research to support best practice training.

> We simply do not have the research base we need—a convergent program of research in which content and method in teacher preparation or professional development programs have been manipulated, and accompanying changes in teacher knowledge, teacher behavior, and child outcomes charted. Nor can we wait for that research base. (p. 169)

Barone and Morell believed that the best and most efficient process at this time and date is to learn by observing master teachers and spending time examining one's own practices through constant deliberation. Further practice and restructuring of instruction

can then occur to make learning more effective for the special reading candidate (p. 169). The authors indicated, "This model assumes that teacher educators practice a form of teacher education in reading that is based on current research; they then assess the effectiveness of this instruction; this reflection results in possible improvements and thus generates new learning" (p. 269). In their concluding comments, the authors of this essay review expressed their concern regarding the instructional process provided for special reading teachers through universities along with their apprehension that not there will not be enough qualified teachers available in the future. Barone and Morell further contemplated the need for instructors at universities to step away from the classroom and strongly address the needs of universities to provide assistance financially, theoretically, and in the court of public opinion (p. 179).

> Unfortunately, a reliance on academic discourse by literacy educators is not convincing the public that teacher-education programs are essential to the preparation of researchers. We believe that teacher educators need to move away from strictly academic discourse to persuade the public, and in particular foundations, think tanks, and state and federal governments, that they are worthy and necessary to teacher preparation. (p. 179)

It is difficult to assess the quality of the educational process for special reading teachers since the requirements for certification differ widely from state to state. Dole, Liang, Watkins, and Wiggins (2006) wrote an article entitled, "The state of reading professionals in the United States." During their research for this article, they discovered that most states do require some graduate coursework for special reading and in some states, a master's degree. However, these writers also ascertained that there was disparity

regarding the need for prior teaching experience and that although most states required some experience, there were some states that did not require any teaching experience prior to becoming a special reading teacher (p. 195).

In an area so vital for children, it was most disturbing to find that there is apparently no continuity in job titles, job descriptions, or types of coursework required for those seeking to be special reading teachers. Dole et al.(2006) also found that collaborative or team teaching was not encouraged in many states, leaving the special reading teacher isolated from his or her peers with no collegial support. This article also discussed the job of the reading coach versus the role of the reading specialist. "Coaches are new to the reading field and less than half the states surveyed have them" (p. 197). In their conclusion, Dole, et al. stated, "Delineating the differences between the various reading professions and preparing these teachers, specialists, and coaches to meet high-quality standards of practice for their positions only improve the overall quality of reading instruction in U.S. schools" (p. 198). It is a difficult task to prepare a candidate to become a special reading teacher when the job description and title differ so widely from place to place. One thing that stands out, however, is that candidates need time to learn and practice new reading strategies to determine not only what works for the children but what they are able to teach well. A doctor would not be expected to go out and perform surgery without having had appropriate instruction, guidance, and practice. Neither would a pilot try to fly a plane without knowing the technology involved in flight.
This chapter included current research regarding the practicum experiences of candidates for special reading teacher certification. Chapter Three will be concerned with the methodology used to collect data for this study.

# Chapter Three – Methodology

## *Type of Study*

This research is a qualitative study designed to investigate the perceptions of candidates regarding their preparation for special reading teacher certification through the practicum experiences at Lindenwood University. In the previous chapter, I examined research regarding practicum experiences for special reading teacher candidate. In this chapter I will explain the method used to collect the data from Lindenwood University participants consisted of surveys from the candidates for special reading certification, and for the purpose of triangulation, instructors, who facilitate the practicum experiences, were interviewed. Using more than one data collection method allowed me to analyze responses from more than one source.

A qualitative study was the most appropriate research method for this study because I was interested in finding out candidates' perceptions regarding their preparedness. It would have been difficult to analyze this quantitatively. In addition, I was interested in the quality of the three practicum experiences offered at Lindenwood University for candidates for special reading certification. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) defined the role of researchers in a qualitative study as follows: "Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, are more concerned with understanding situations and events from the viewpoint of the participants. Accordingly, the participants often tended to be directly involved in the research process itself" (p. 15). My study was focused on determining what, if anything caused one practicum experience to be better suited for preparing candidates for special reading jobs. Views of the candidates and instructors involved in the three practicum models affected the analysis of each practicum experience.

*Research Setting*

The practicum experience is a part of the master's level coursework Lindenwood University that is required through DESE for certification in the area of special reading. Each candidate is required to complete six hours of practicum experience. Lindenwood University is a liberal arts university with over 10,268 students spread over the main campus and approximately sixteen satellite campuses. The education program is one of the largest programs offered at Lindenwood University. Currently there are over 2,565 students enrolled in education classes at Lindenwood.

Camp Read-A-Lot generally has between 60 and 75 students each year in the practicum experience. The afterschool program serves approximately 30 to 40 special reading candidates in the spring and about the same number in the fall semester. The in-school program numbers fluctuate widely serving, anywhere from ten to thirty students during the fall and spring semesters. This study was conducted using only the candidates and instructors on the main campus since the numbers at the satellite campuses, which number between 12 and 16 depending on the semester, were small in numbers, and inconsequential for this study ( Jeff Weinrich, personal communication, November 11, 2009).

*Participants*

Participants in my study were special reading candidates who had previously participated in one or more of the three practicum models provided for special reading certification purposes through Lindenwood University. Candidates were all certified teachers who had completed two years of teaching in the classroom or who were currently completing two years teaching as a classroom teacher in response to DESE

requirements. Candidates were identified from the spring of 2006 through fall of 2009 at Lindenwood University who fit this criterion. This particular date was chosen because it was the second year for the After School practicum experience and the seventh year for the Camp Read-A-Lot practicum experience with this instructor. I felt that it was not appropriate to survey candidates in the first year that the After School program was started since, like all new programs; the first year may not have been as well organized as proceeding years. This date also provided a large pool of candidates to survey which I felt would provide me with a substantial amount of completed surveys.

The Provost of Lindenwood University granted permission to access the names and addresses from the university database. All candidates were seeking special reading certification through master's level coursework which included participation in at least six credit hours of the practicum experience. Not all of the candidates were seeking a master's degree. Some candidates may already have earned a master's degree in another area, and some candidates may have been seeking special reading certification without completing a master's degree program. The population I studied involved candidates who were all certified in other areas such as elementary education or early childhood education. In other studies, some of the candidates were preservice teachers who were not yet certified to teach in any area but who were taking advanced training in the area of literacy. This phenomenon concerning preservice teachers may have occurred due to the differences in the certification process in each state.

*Interview with Instructors at Lindenwood University*

The instructors interviewed in this study all worked at Lindenwood University and had all been involved in each of the three practicum experiences. Each instructor,

however, had one model in which he or she was the person responsible for the set-up, assessment, and facilitation of the program. Instructors were interviewed face to face with a set of open ended questions which included demographic questions and questions that pertained directly to the practicum experience. The interview included four demographic questions and 15 questions that pertained directly to the practicum experience. (see Appendix C, ) The interview was audio taped to remove the distraction of the interviewer taking notes. No names were placed on the audio tape verbally or in writing. Although each instructor had involvement in each practicum model, the interview addressed specifically the model that he or she facilitated as director or lead instructor. Interview times ranged from 25 to 35 minutes in length, and one of the three interviews was much more detailed than the others since the instructor involved had been a part of one of the practicum experiences longer than the others interviewed. See Table 1 for information regarding the practicum model, length of time of the interview and the length of time the practicum experience has been offered at Lindenwood University.

Table 1

*Interview with Instructors who Facilitated the Practicum Experience*

| Practicum Experience Model | Length of Interview | Years Program Existed |
|---|---|---|
| School District Model | 35 minutes | 13 years |
| After School Model | 25 minutes | 5 years |
| Camp Read-A-Lot Model | 24 minutes | 6 years |

*Instrument Development*

After reading research about different practicum experiences for special reading teacher candidates, I developed a set of questions that I believed would provide the

necessary insights into how well prepared candidates felt after completing one or more of the practicum experiences. The set of questions, which included eight Likert scale type questions and six open ended questions, were shared with several professors at Lindenwood University and changes were made to clarify questions to provide optimum responses for analysis assuring content validity. The same process was employed for the development of the interview questions for the instructors so that the questions had a mix of demographic responses and response that would provide insights into the practicum experience from the standpoint of instruction practices, supervision, collegial support, and collaboration with peers. Experiential information was gathered to help the investigator analyze results or comments provided by the participant.

*Collection of Data*

Surveys were mailed to over 300 candidates along with consent forms and a self-addressed stamped envelopes for returning the surveys to Lindenwood University. Surveys were collected through United States mail and were addressed to the Education Department at Lindenwood University. This method was used to provide the best opportunity for anonymity for the participants. Returned surveys were sorted by the practicum experience information provided by the candidates. An excel spreadsheet was created to record the responses in the Likert scale portion and written responses were recorded for future analysis. Analysis was facilitated by coding responses under categories such as collegial support, introduction of new strategies, supervision, and availability of resources. The codes for the analysis were developed as the responses were analyzed. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) supported the use of this type of analysis when

they stated that, "administering questionnaires and interviewing the participants can be a valid and productive way to assess the accuracy of observations" (p. 593).

Fifty, approximately 16.6% of the surveys sent out, were returned and although the number received was not as high as expected, I felt that since I had an almost equal number for each practicum experience, I could analyze, and learn about each practicum from this pool. See Figure 1 for the percentage of the responses received for each practicum model.

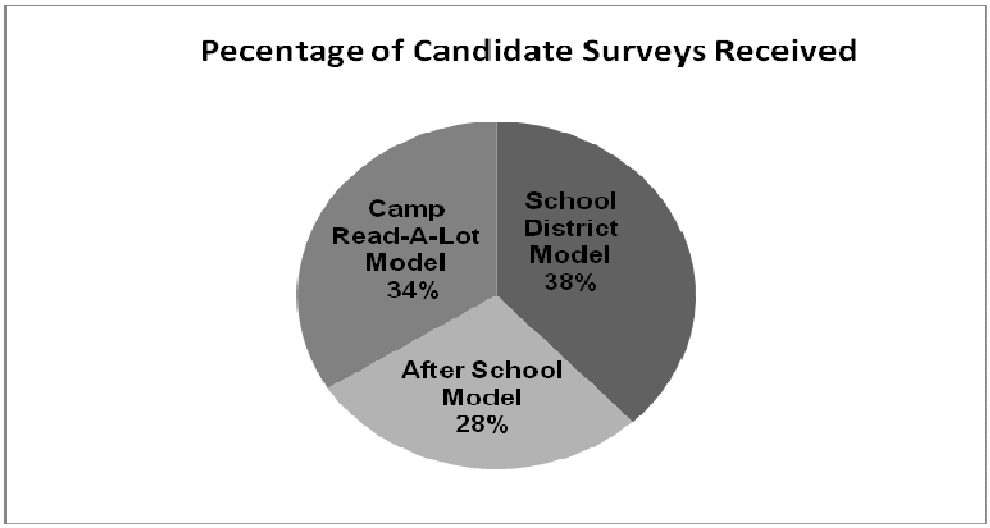


*Figure 1.* Percentage of candidate survey responses for each model

The instructors involved in the practicum experiences on the main campus participated in the interview and since the number of candidates served by the satellite campuses was minimal, it was decided that interviews would not be effective for this study.

*Study Limitations*

Limitations of the study included the fact that the investigator worked for the university being examined, and I was, in fact, part of the practicum program. Since I was a part of the faculty involved in the practicum experience, I asked the administrative

assistant to interview me first using the questions I developed before I interviewed the other instructors so that their responses would not influence my remarks during the interview process. I wanted my responses to be spontaneous without outside influence that would cause me to over-analyze my statements. When I interviewed the other instructors, I did not prompt or respond to their remarks to remove the possibility that I may manipulate their answers in some way.

Additionally, the instructors being interviewed have, at one time, participated in all three of the models being investigated in the practicum experience. Also, the candidates being interviewed all had similar background in public school teaching positions and similar educational backgrounds at institutions of higher learning. However, it should be noted that the instructors involved in the practicum experiences at Lindenwood University obtained their master's degree from different universities which does provide some diversity in pedagogical interpretation.

Another possible limitation to this study is that all of the candidates in the study attended Lindenwood University and all participated in the practicum program as a part of the coursework mandated by the state for special reading certification. Lindenwood was the only university that I studied that provided the opportunity for students to choose which form of the practicum they wanted to complete. The other universities I studied only provided one type of practicum experience.

*Protection of Human Subjects*

A survey for the candidates was constructed using a Likert scale with five being the strongest agreement and one being the least agreement. The survey consisted of eight questions which were set up as a Likert scale and six open ended questions for which

candidates were asked to write responses. The survey was mailed to the candidates along with a self addressed stamped envelope and consent form asking that the surveys be completed and returned to the administrative assistant in the education office of Lindenwood University. There was no identifying information included in the survey. (see Appendix C, IRB) The administrative assistant removed the consent form from the envelope when it was returned to protect the anonymity of the participant. Participants were not asked to furnish a name or even the date that they were in attendance at the university. While experiential background was gathered in the questionnaire section of the survey, no school names were required or provided for me.

Anonymity of those surveyed was protected as no names or identifying information appeared in this research. The name of the university was a pseudonym used to protect the university and its participants from identification. Since surveys were opened by the administrative assistant who removed the consent to participate form before delivering the survey to me, I had no way to identify who completed the survey. The audio taped interviews required no names and no names were written on the case or outside portion of the audio tape. Participation in the survey and interview was voluntary.

*Summary*

Over 300 surveys were mailed to special reading candidates and email invitations were sent to three instructors at Lindenwood University. Education faculty encouraged students verbally to complete and return the surveys for the study. Fifty surveys were returned and the surveys for each practicum were about equal minus one or two. The instructors involved in each practicum experience were interviewed and the interviews were transcribed from the audio tapes and analyzed as a part of this study to provide

background information regarding the structure, supervision, and instructional practices of each practicum.

# Chapter Four– Results

In the previous chapter, methodology was explained. In this chapter, I will analyze the results of the data collected. The results will provide a framework for change to enhance the practicum experiences at Lindenwood University and other universities and colleges that are investigating best practice for the training of special reading candidates.

## *Purpose of the Study*

This study was designed to investigate the perceptions special reading candidates had regarding their preparation through the practicum experiences offered at Lindenwood University. There were three models offered for completion of the six hours of practicum required by DESE for special reading certification. The first practicum model was the School District Model, which candidates accessed by working under the supervision of a reading specialist in the district where the candidate was employed. Ninety hours were required of the candidate with 45 hours of direct student contact and 45 hours of work with the special reading teacher in the district during the semester. The second practicum model was the After School Model whereby candidates tutored at one of the local elementary schools after the normal school day ended for one hour twice weekly for 14 weeks. Model three of the practicum experience involved participation in Camp Read-A-Lot at Lindenwood University. Candidates tutored children in a camp setting on campus for a period of three weeks Monday through Friday for two and a half hours daily. One hour was spent in one to one tutoring and the remainder of the time was spent in group literacy activities.

I wanted to complete this study in order to glean from each practicum the

experiences that the candidates perceived best prepared them to transition from the classroom to a certified special reading teacher position. The research questions included:

1. How well prepared did prospective reading specialists perceive they were upon completion or during the two reading practicum experiences in EDU 523 and EDU 526?
2. What was the graduate candidate's perception of the level of collegial support from classmates or colleagues in each practicum model?
3. What level of supervision did the candidates perceive was provided through the practicum?
4. What resources or strategies did prospective reading specialists perceive best prepared them to become certified reading specialists?

*Analysis of Data from Special Reading Candidates*

To get an overall picture of how successful each practicum was in the eyes of the candidates, I averaged the numbers for each of the Likert Scale questions under the individual models. The questions may be viewed in their entirety in Appendix C (see Appendix C for IRB). This figure provided an overall visual representation of the responses received from candidates.

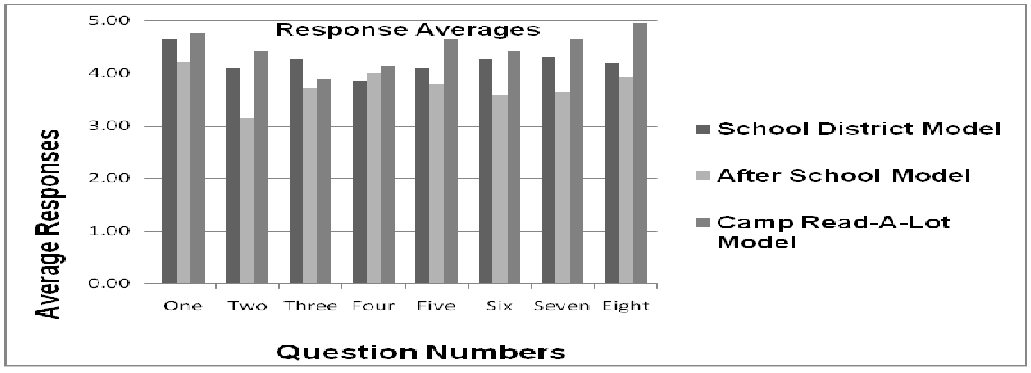


*Figure 2.* Average responses for practicum models

The open ended questions were designed to allow the candidates to elaborate on their experiences during the practicum. In addition, the open ended portion of the survey provided the impetus for candidates to discuss their perceptions regarding the transition from classroom teachers to special reading teachers. As I analyzed the data collected from these surveys, commonalities appeared as did differences in candidate perceptions.

The surveys for the candidates provided information pertaining to perceptions of preparedness through the individual practicum models. The Likert scale portion of the surveys asked specific questions that I felt would provide a picture of how prepared candidates felt in specific areas. Following are the responses by the candidate to the questions asked in the Likert scale portion of the survey. Candidates were asked to rate the questions using five as strongly agree, four as agree, three to represent undecided, two as disagree, and one as strongly disagree.

Table 2

*Question Responses – School District Model*

| Student | One | Two | Three | Four | Five | Six | Seven | Eight |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| A2 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| A3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| A4 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| A5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| A6 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| A7 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| A8 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A9 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| A10 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| A11 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| A12 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| A13 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| A14 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| A15 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| A16 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| A17 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| A18 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| A19 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| A20 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |

Table 3

*Question Responses – After School Model*

| Student | One | Two | Three | Four | Five | Six | Seven | Eight |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B1 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| B2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| B3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| B4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| B6 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B7 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| B8 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| B9 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| B10 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| B11 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| B12 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| B13 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| B14 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

Table 4

*Question Responses – Camp Read-A-Lot Model*

| Student | One | Two | Three | Four | Five | Six | Seven | Eight |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| C2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| C3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| C4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| C5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| C6 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| C7 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| C8 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C9 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| C10 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| C11 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| C12 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| C13 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| C14 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| C15 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| *C16* | *4* | *4* | *4* | *4* | *4* | *4* | *4* | *5* |

*Correlation between Candidate Surveys and Instructor Interviews*

The interviews with the instructors who facilitated each practicum model at Lindenwood University also presented similar yet sometimes diverse responses regarding their beliefs about the preparation of candidates to become special reading teachers through the various models offered for the special reading practicum experience. My analysis of the surveys and interviews provided insights into the function of the individual practicums which answered my research questions and provided me with appropriate recommendations for change to improve each practicum experience and to strengthen the outcome, or perception of preparedness for each prospective special reading teacher.

Instructors were interviewed to gather demographic information, insights from the instructors' analysis of course evaluations and reflections written by candidates assisted the instructor in providing a snapshot of what they thought candidates' perceptions were

about how well prepared they were through the practicum experience. Instructors' responses also indicated how accessible they felt they were when a candidate required assistance or clarification of techniques. Instructors also elaborated on opportunities for collaboration with their colleagues who taught the other practicums. This provided me with the opportunity to determine interactions, sharing of ideas, and collegial support among the instructors.

The duration of the interviews with the instructors lasted between 24 minutes and 35 minutes. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed by me. I organized the information into categories that provided the best opportunity to examine similarities and differences in responses. Instructors were cooperative and eager to share information regarding the practicum experience that they supervised.

*Interview with Instructors*

The instructors were interviewed by me and their responses were taped on audio cassette. I later transcribed their responses to determine if they if their background and experience may have played a role in the perception special reading candidates had regarding their preparedness to become special reading teachers after having completed the practicum experiences at Lindenwood University. I also wanted to determine what, if any, information or thoughts the instructors might have had regarding the preparation of the candidates.

*Instructor's Teaching Experience and Background Knowledge*

After analyzing the interviews from the three instructors, it was obvious that each had areas of expertise but all had experience with learning disabled children and those who were struggling with reading. Two of the instructors were certified reading

specialists and the third instructor had much experiential background with reading difficulties but did not have state certification. All of the instructors had been employed by Lindenwood University for more than five years and the instructors were all teaching other related coursework in the reading area. Each instructor interviewed had at least a Master's Degree with one instructor having her Ph.D. Another common factor for all three interviewees was the fact that they all had extensive coursework themselves in the area of reading and had all worked in the capacity of a special reading teacher.

*Faculty Collaboration*

Collaboration among the staff is limited but exists from the standpoint of sharing successes and discussing problematic instructional concerns or ways to differentiate for students. In the Camp Read-A-Lot Model, daily collaboration occurs before, during, and after the practicum meets. In addition, instructors meet before camp begins to establish protocols for the candidates and the children for the first day. Opportunities for collaboration in the After School Model were present during each tutoring session.

While collaboration among the instructors in the various settings is not a scheduled opportunity, all instructors are open to conversation. Syllabi for the practicum experiences are coordinated so that each instructor holds the candidate responsible for specific teaching standards.

*Instructor Accessibility*

Throughout the interview process with the three instructors it was obvious that all of them were accessible through email, telephone, and by personal contact. Additionally those participating in the After School Model and Camp Read-A-Lot Models were present before, during, and after the practicum experience to confer directly with

candidates. The instructor for the School District model is available as needed but most of her candidates deal directly with the special reading teacher in their building who supervises their practicum experience.

*Instructor's Remarks on Preparation of Candidates*

The instructor for the School District Model indicated that her candidates share their thoughts on how they sometimes are asked to work outside their comfort zone and that it is a good learning experience. The School District instructor stated, "They (the candidates) were very proud of their students making gains and reading successes." The School District Instructor also explained that candidates were learning to work with parents who were involved with their children and those who were not involved. All three instructors indicated that involvement with parents was good practice and that the practice provided a feeling of, "making a difference" with the children.

One thing unique to the School District Model and the After School model was the opportunity to provide information to the classroom teacher regarding strengths and weaknesses observed with the child. In the Camp Read-A-Lot Model, there was no opportunity to provide information for the classroom teacher since class assignments from the public schools were usually not made prior to the close of camp. However, all three practicum experiences required that candidates prepare a letter for the parents with recommendations to help remediate the child's reading difficulties.

The Camp Read-A-Lot instructor mentioned the following comment from a student, "Wow! I didn't realize that this strategy worked." The candidate's expression indicated a feeling of self efficacy as she was able to help her assigned child with a difficult reading problem. Another candidate comment shared by one of the instructors

was, "I know so much more now about what I do next to help my child." I believe that all in all the instructors believed that the candidates felt prepared to go out and work as special reading teachers.

*Additional Comments from the Instructors*

One instructor remarked, I am passionate about children learning to read and I want my candidates to be passionate also. I want to send them out to teach as well prepared as I can so that when they get out there on their own they can be successful. One of the instructors indicated that she wished all methods classes were handled in the same way as the reading practicum because this gave the candidates the best opportunity to have a meaningful experience and learn about commitment to supervision of children. This instructor also added that she felt the special reading practicum experiences encouraged and allowed for immediate feedback which she felt was most beneficial to preparing candidates to assume the role designated by the district in the area of reading. Concern was expressed by one instructor regarding the lack of supervision for those candidates who were not observed directly by the instructor. She stated, "I am afraid they could enter the field without remedial techniques or prompting techniques or how to scaffold a task."

*Practicum Experiences as Envisioned by the Instructors*

*Supervision of Candidates*

One of the instructors indicated during the interview that until this semester she had been sending her candidates in the School District Model to special reading teachers that she knew well and whom she believed to be well qualified to supervise Lindenwood special reading candidates. In this particular model, candidate instruction was provided

by the special reading teacher in the district where the candidate was employed. Candidates had the opportunity to learn the protocols, strategies for remediation, and testing routine under a master special reading teacher in their district. Candidates learned about the needs of the students in the district where they worked and they learned how to do progress monitoring and formative testing with an eye toward possible future employment as a special reading teacher in the district. However, Lindenwood University, beginning with the spring of 2010, put in place a new system for placing students with special reading teachers for their practicum experience through the School District Model. The instructor no longer assigns candidates to teachers; instead the Field Experience Coordinator will be requesting the placements. Therefore, familiarity with the special reading teacher who supervised candidates in School Districts longer exists. The ability to control who supervised the candidates will be diminished. It is significant to note, however, that only a small number, two out of 50 students required assistance with placement during the fall 2009 semester. In the After School Model and Camp Read-A-Lot Model, supervision of the candidates' learning and assessments of their skills will continue as a constant with the Lindenwood instructors, a known entity.

*Candidate Training and Resources*

Candidates in each of the practicum experience models received instruction designed to prepare them to administer an Informal Reading Inventory. Candidates learned how to write a case study, introduce remedial reading strategies, develop appropriate lessons that addressed the child's strengths, and opportunities to work in a collegial setting. The candidates designed developmentally appropriate literacy games, participated in discussions with instructors or peers, and communicated with

parents regarding their child's strengths and weaknesses in reading. Also included in the After School and Camp Read-A-Lot Models was the use of commercially designed games for reading literacy practice such as Scrabble Slam, Scrabble Junior, Apples to Apples, Hangman, and much, much more. Other resources were also commonly used and websites for practice of reading skills were supplied by all of the practicum facilitators. In the School District Model the record of the use of games or activities was furnished through the log or notebook turned in by the candidate to the instructor for grading. The written evidence supported the belief by the instructor that appropriate activities and games were used to assist the candidates during instruction with the child or children to whom he or she was assigned. In fact, one of the assignments on the syllabus for the School District Model includes the making of a game to address a remedial skill needed by the child being served by the candidate in the practicum. While all three practicum experiences seem very much alike in many ways, the glaring difference appears to be that two practicum experiences, After School and Camp Read-A-Lot, have the university instructors on site and the third model, the School District Model, provides this opportunity only when the candidate is assisting the supervising special reading teacher during the school day. The university instructor is not on site for the candidate in this model since supervision is provided by the special reading teacher in the district where the candidate is assigned.

*Strengths of the Practicum Experiences*

Among the strengths of each of the practicum experiences, as indicated in the instructor interviews, is the fact that each experience provides authentic, hands on opportunities for candidates to work directly with children. The approach to instruction

through these practicum experiences is both a remedial and a developmental approach. All three practicum experiences also provide in depth instruction regarding the use of assessment to drive instruction and strategies are presented to help candidates teach to the child's strength. All of the instructors indicated that feedback was an important feature of the practicum experience.

A unique strength of the School District model, expressed by the instructor, was that it provided experiences for the candidates in the district where they were employed. The candidates learned the protocols, philosophy, and the district policies regarding parent permission and involvement when working with struggling readers. Since all districts are different and they use different curricular materials and this gave the candidates an opportunity to gain confidence and comfort using the same assessments that their district required. Additionally, candidates had the chance to walk in the shoes of the reading specialist with authentic situations.

The After School Model and Camp Read-A-Lot Model were beneficial and different from the School District Model because the instructor was consistently present during tutoring with the children. Their presence allowed for immediate feedback for the candidates along with immediate correction of inappropriate instruction. Lesson evaluation was done frequently and corrective processes were initiated on site during reading instruction. Those candidates participating in the School District Model received feedback and assistance from the special reading teacher in the district. The After School Model also provided the opportunity for candidates to do progress monitoring and track the students over a period of fourteen weeks. Data collection and use of the data was a strength of the After School Program as well as the School District Program. While data

collection was also important in the Camp Read-A-Lot Model, the duration of camp, three weeks, was not conducive to collecting a significant amount of information.

*Challenges Faced by the Practicum Candidates*

All three of the instructors discussed the intensity and amount of work required to complete the practicum experiences. Also discussed was the fact that reflections, an important piece of the practicum experiences, must be completed in a timely fashion otherwise authenticity of the response was in jeopardy. It was difficult for candidates to provide adequate responses if they did not do this work immediately. The reflection diminished in its importance when it was left for completion at a later date because details would became fuzzy and more difficult to interpret.

Another challenge faced by candidates in all three practicum models involved locating and using appropriate reading materials for the children. It was not so much a lack of resources as the fact that it was taxing finding the time to access the needed resources from the university library. Time was of the essence and time was what was difficult to find for the candidates considering all of the requirements for the practicum. Apparent in the line of challenges was learning to shift gears mid-lesson because the strategy used with the child was not successful. One instructor remarked, "You have to remember that if they are going to be working in a real school setting they will have to develop lessons everyday and deal with needed changes."

One last situation that bears mentioning as a challenge for candidates in the School District Model was that some candidates were employed at private and parochial schools that did not have special reading teachers on staff. Therefore, these candidates had to find a local public school where they could complete their practicum. This

presented a problem as far as time was concerned for the candidate to tutor outside of the normal school day.

*Children Involved in the Practicum Experience*

Children recruited for the practicum experience were identified using different processes for each of the practicum experiences. In the School District Model, the instructor indicated that children served were identified by the special reading teacher and were usually on the special reading teacher's caseload. Children in the After School Model were identified by their classroom teachers and parents were contacted with an invitation from the Lindenwood instructor who provided information and a permission slip for the parents allowing the child to participate in the After School tutoring program. For the Camp Read-A-Lot Model, the instructor sent brochures to schools, individuals, and a copy of the brochure was put on the university web site inviting parents to sign up their children for reading camp.

*Candidate Responses to Open Ended Questions*

*Transition from the Classroom to Special Reading*

Candidates were questioned about transitioning from the classroom to a position as a special reading teacher. In two of the practicum experiences, the School District Model and the Camp Read-A-Lot Model, there were two candidates in each experience who indicated that they had not yet transitioned to a special reading teacher position and they remained in their current positions as classroom teachers. At least four of the candidates in the After School Model indicated that they had not yet transitioned to a special reading teacher position. It was interesting to note that at least one or two candidates in each model indicated they felt the transition to a special reading teacher

position was seamless. One student in the Camp Read-A-Lot Model indicated, "I really don't know. I've only been a classroom teacher. From my practicum it would seem that is may be easier to be a specialist." In addition to those comments, two candidates in the School District Model indicated that they were already special education teachers and that having had experience in that field they felt confident that they were well prepared to assume the role of a special reading teacher.

An area that candidates indicated was a concern in the transition was the ability to schedule time with classroom teachers to provide their services for the children. One student in the School District Model explained, "Time and preparation were the number one concerns when transitioning from classroom teaching to reading specialists." Another candidate in the School District Model expressed concern regarding knowledge of the timelines administration of assessment tests and completion of records. "Learning the timeline for giving, completing, and recording assessments and paperwork." Of concern to one student in the After School Model, was the lack of direction on how to prepare a special reading teacher schedule around the classroom schedule.

Candidates in all three models expressed a concern regarding the need for more intense instruction in the middle and high school areas. Specifically in the School District Model and After School Model, candidates expressed that they felt unprepared to work with students beyond the elementary level. Two candidates, in the School District Model, expressed concern regarding the transition from a lower elementary position to an upper elementary special reading position. Two candidates in the School District Model, or 10%, were also concerned that they were not prepared to handle students with other

disabilities such as diminished mental capacity, learning disabilities, and behavior disorders.

Another major area of apprehension was the fact that candidates did not know what type of special reading assignment they would get and they were concerned about whether their experiences had been broad enough to cover literacy coaching, interventionist, and special reading teacher. There were not enough resources provided for these anomalies in the special reading teacher arena.

*Collegial Collaboration as Perceived by the Candidates*

Consistent in all three practicum experiences was the desire by candidates to have more time working with peers in a small group setting in addition to individual instructional practices. Candidates felt that their position as a special reading teacher would require them to work with students in small groups. Additionally surveys also indicated that more time in general with colleagues and peers was desired by the candidates for sharing of ideas and brainstorming.

*Areas that Need More Time in the Practicum Experience*

Again reiterated by candidates was the need to have more experience with middle school and high school children. Candidates in the Camp Read-A-Lot experience felt that they would benefit from more in depth instruction on being a literacy coach.

Three of 20 school district candidates desired more modeling by professors and also felt they would benefit from, "time to meet while the practicum was going on with the Lindenwood instructor supervising the practicum." One student suggested biweekly meetings with the Lindenwood instructor to provide opportunities for questions, time for collaboration with peers, and an opportunity to converse with an expert in special reading

instruction. Use of different assessment tools was suggested by candidates in the School District Model. A few candidates in the After School Model expressed the concern that too much time was spent on basics of teaching reading and not enough time was spent on remediation techniques and diagnostic skills. However, in the same set of surveys, one student thought more time should be spent on the theory about how children learn to read.

*Areas Candidates Perceived Needed Less Time in the Practicum Experience*

Candidates in the After School Model stated that some classes were not helpful and that all classes should pertain to learning reading skills. Candidates in Camp Read-A-Lot and the After School Model of the practicum would prefer less time spent doing reflections and less time completing lesson plans. Also, candidates in all practicum situations wanted less time with individual children and more time with small groups. This was a repetitive theme throughout the open ended questions in the survey.

Candidates in the After School Model felt that an inordinate amount of time was used organizing things in order to hand them in for a grade. The time used to complete the case study, while necessary to report progress, needed to be streamlined so it could be completed more efficiently. Another suggestion that came from the Camp Read-A-Lot Model was that class size be limited so that candidates could receive better feedback, more one on one instruction, and intense assistance from the instructors. Once again, however, there were ten of the 50 candidates who felt that the time in the practicum was well used in all three models.

*Areas of Strength in the Practicum Experiences*

Consistent throughout all three practicum experiences were remarks from one third of the candidates who completed the survey which indicated that candidates would

not change a thing about the practicum. One student in the Camp Read-A-Lot practicum stated that he or she felt that any gaps in the first practicum would be cleared up in the next practicum experience. Also acknowledged by the candidates in the Camp Read-A-Lot Model was the expertise and background knowledge of the instructors which validated and strengthened the learning process. Once candidate also remarked, "I thought the practicum had the right balance of lesson time and fun time. I would not change a thing." One of the School District candidates responded, "It was all valuable." The responses from the After School Model included, "I feel the experience was adequate." Each practicum had approximately one third of the candidates who were fully satisfied with the way the practicum was conducted.

*Availability of Resources and Materials for Optimal Candidate Instruction*

It was obvious after analysis of all three practicum model surveys that candidates believed that many resources and web sites were provided to assist them while instructing their assigned children. However, accessing the materials outside of the practicum still was time consuming and sometimes difficult. In all models, the candidates felt that handouts were appropriate, instructors were the best resources, and books furnished by the instructors were useful. There was one area that was consistent in all models and that was the need to practice using other assessments besides the Informal Reading Inventory such as the Developmental Reading Assessment.

*Candidates Perceptions Regarding Instruction and Assessment by Instructors*

Candidates in the School District Model indicated that there was little, if any contact with the Lindenwood instructor during the practicum experience. These candidates indicated that they were satisfied with the feedback given them by the building special reading teacher.

In addition, candidates felt that the final evaluation by the Lindenwood instructor was fair and provided helpful feedback.

Candidates in the After School Model expressed that they felt the assessments given by the Lindenwood instructor were fair and on target. The candidates thought the instructor was thoughtful and feedback was appropriate. One candidate indicated that she felt she would have benefited from more constructive feedback. Another candidate stated, "She was very fair, on target, and extremely helpful."

The candidates in Camp Read-A-Lot stated that the instructor was, "spot on." Candidates felt that praise was appropriate, critiques were gentle but effective, and that alternatives were offered when corrections were needed. Candidates expressed that the instructor was fair and always available to listen to concerns regarding grades or work in the practicum experience. One student stated, "The reports and documents that were graded seemed appropriate in quantity and depth."

*Background and Experience of Candidates*

Experience of the candidates, in the School District Model, included four candidates who were certified as special education teachers. These candidates had from three to 13 years of experience. Four candidates also indicated that they were already working as special reading teachers with one additional candidate working as a literacy coach. All candidates were initially certified in another area other than reading. Candidates were most experienced in grades kindergarten through eighth grade with 50% of the candidates teaching in a primary classroom. All candidates had been certified initially in another area.

The candidates in the After School Model did not have quite the same background as those candidates in the School District Model. There were two candidates with special

education background. Two candidates were already working as special reading teachers. However, the majority of the candidates, as in the School District Model, had worked with primary age students in the regular classroom. All candidates had been certified initially in another area.

The background of the candidates attending Camp Read-A-Lot was more similar than different from those attending the After School practicum experience. Only two candidates had special education background and five candidates were already working as special reading teachers or literacy coaches. All candidates were previously certified in another area. There was a little more diversity as far as the grade levels represented in the experiential background of the candidates. While the majority of the candidates taught elementary school, one candidate was a middle school teacher and another candidate was a high school teacher. Three candidates were primary teachers and the rest of the candidates, not mentioned previously, were spread out over the other elementary grades.

*Summary*

The overarching theme that stands out to me as I analyzed the information from both the candidates and the instructors was the fact each practicum experience was different but in many ways the same. Resources were abundant, supervisors were accessible, assessments were fair, and feedback was provided. Overall, candidates felt that the experience provided for them prepared them to make the transition from classroom teacher to special reading teacher. However, there were some concerns expressed by the instructors, particularly regarding supervision of those candidates who participated in the School District Model. The concern centered on the fact that the special reading teachers supervising candidates from

Lindenwood may not be well prepared for this task and since these teachers are no longer a known entity for the instructor placement with these specialists could adversely affect the instruction provided.

Other concerns expressed by candidates centered on the amount of assignments required and the lack of time for completion of the work during the practicum considering the amount of time candidates have to tutor students, develop lessons, collect data, and resources to best serve the children. The concern was mentioned by at least one candidate in each of the practicum experiences.

While collegial support was evident in the After School Model and the Camp Read-A-Lot model, candidates in the School District Model had little contact with the Lindenwood instructor. I believe that lack of contact in the School District Model with fellow candidates may have led candidates to feel isolated with little opportunity to work with peers. As one candidate indicated, "I wish we had more time for sharing experiences." As mentioned previously the most pressing concern was the feeling expressed by candidates that they felt unprepared to deal with middle school and high school students who were struggling in reading. Candidates felt very comfortable with the instruction provided for elementary school children but would like more opportunities to learn strategies for adolescent children.

The second area of concern focused on scheduling issues for special reading teachers. A total of six candidates expressed that they were unsure about how to set up schedules for their struggling readers taking into account their children's regular education classroom schedules. However, in the School District Model candidates have the opportunity to see this first hand. Consequently, the After School Model

and Camp Read-A-Lot Model should address these concerns. When schedules are addressed, each practicum experience would provide better situations for preparation as a special reading teacher. Chapter Five will elaborate on ideas, suggestions, and recommendations to improve all three practicum models provided at Lindenwood University.

# Chapter Five- Discussion and Implications for the Practicum Experience

In the previous chapter, I presented the data that was collected from the candidates. In addition, I correlated the information garnered during the interview with the Lindenwood instructors. As a result of the data, I have made some suggestions that might serve to further strengthen the three practicum experiences provided at Lindenwood University.

This study analyzed candidates' perceptions regarding their preparedness to transition from the role of classroom teacher to that of special reading teacher upon completion of their practicum experiences. It was my goal to determine if the best qualities of each individual practicum, as seen through the eyes of the candidates, could be incorporated throughout all practicum experiences to provide optimum learning and preparation in each model and assure the candidates that they possess the same skills as other candidates in the other models. Inversely, I wanted to discuss the areas that candidates in each practicum believed were positives in each individual practicum experience. This analytical process would enhance the instructional experience for all candidates by providing best practices across the board.

The practicum experiences provided at Lindenwood University are unique in that three different models are offered for fulfillment of the six hours of practicum required for certification through DESE. During my research, I was able to locate articles, books, statistics, and other pertinent information that dealt with special reading practicum experiences, literacy rates, and best practice for literacy instruction. What I was not able to find was another university in Missouri besides Lindenwood University that offered three different practicum models for candidates seeking special reading certification in

compliance with state certification requirements. Most universities offered only one type of practicum experience.

To provide optimum learning for candidates in diverse settings that promote differentiation, Lindenwood continues to provide the practicum experience for special reading teacher candidates in a School District Model, After School Model, and the Camp Read-A-Lot Model. These opportunities provided candidates with choices for accommodation of their learning styles, their preferential instructional mode, time constraints, and professional needs. Additionally, it provided opportunities for candidates to select one model for the first practicum and another model for the second practicum, thus providing a diversified experience along with the opportunity to learn under the supervision of two different instructors. Of course, some educators might feel that candidates were not qualified to determine which practicum would best suit their learning style and experiential background. However, I found that candidates were aware of the options within each practicum model and were able to choose that which best addressed their current needs.

*Student Perceptions Regarding the Transition to Special Reading Teacher*

When the candidates were surveyed regarding their perceptions about their preparedness to become special reading teachers, the responses varied. However, at least four candidates replied that the transition was easy. One candidate said, "I really didn't have a difficult time transitioning. I was ready for the challenge." Another candidate expressed the belief that anything she didn't learn in her first practicum she would learn in her second practicum. It should also be noted that seven of the 50 candidates surveyed expressed that they had not yet moved from a classroom teaching position to a special

reading position. Four other candidates indicated that they were already special reading teachers or literacy coaches. The experiential background may well have affected how prepared a candidate felt to make the transition from classroom teacher to special reading teacher.

*Recommendations for the School District Model*

During participation in the School District Model, candidates see the struggling readers and the special reading teacher that they work with on a daily basis during the school week. While the supervising special reading teacher is certified in the state of Missouri there could be some concern about the knowledge and leadership skills the supervising teacher posses. In this model, the university instructor does not have the ability to control the expertise and quality of the special reading teacher supervisor. One instructor remarked,

> For instance for students in 523 and526 that is viewed as typically independent I truly feel that they are as entitled to feedback as those that are taking it as an undergraduate course because some of them have not really received feedback on their remedial techniques unless we are going out and reaching them. I am afraid they could enter the field without remedial techniques or prompting techniques or how to scaffold a task so that is an idea outside the questions you have asked.

In addition, there would be some concern if a candidate was not currently employed in a school district. However, in my years in the program I have only known one candidate who was not employed by a district. This candidate was placed in a local school with a special reading teacher who was willing to supervise the candidate. I believe that this should be handled by the Field Experience Coordinator who places

students for observations required in other coursework at the university in the School of Education.

Another concern voiced by two candidates, or 10% of the respondents, was that little contact is made with the university instructor during the course of the practicum, leaving the instructional process and supervision of the candidate primarily in the hands of the special reading teacher in the candidate's district. One candidate out of 19 on the School District Model survey remarked,

> I feel strongly, that bi-weekly or monthly classroom meetings with the professor should have been part of the program. Allowing students to ask questions, hear from prior students' experiences, collaborate with peers and converse with an experienced reading specialist would have been beneficial.

Another candidate in the School District Model, indicated that she would have liked more time with the professor (instructor) and child using and modeling reading strategies. "I would have liked additional class times to meet while the practicum was going on. Maybe use some non-contact hours to meet with the professor." One other candidate explained that, "During the course of the practicum, there was little or no instructor contact." This remark was provided in response to the question that the survey elicited regarding assessment by the university instructor. Given these three remarks, it can be inferred that some time with the instructor from the university would have provided candidates with another perspective and additional strategies for remediation of reading difficulties. This may be a something that can be added to the current School District Model.

The special reading teacher who supervises the candidate should continue to be provided with assignments and a syllabus from the university instructor so that candidates will continue to have a variety of experiences and opportunities to work with children.

Candidates in this practicum actually received relevant instruction because it was provided in the district where the candidates worked and perhaps hoped to be hired. One candidate indicated, "My reading specialist was full of useful suggestions and shared her broad knowledge base of teaching and reading." The materials, assessments, and policies that the candidates experienced prepared them for a special reading teacher position. One candidate said, "I had plenty of resources, I was lucky." Another candidate indicated, "I particularly enjoyed the variety of materials, lessons, and activities." It does not appear that additional resources are needed or required in the School District Model.

While there did not seem to be a lack of resources or materials, there was one area that two candidates out of 19 addressed as a concern. Both candidates indicated that they were unsure about Senate Bill 319 and they wished that more time had been spent on this particular law and its implications for special reading instruction. Therefore, I propose that resources be added and discussions ensue regarding laws and policies that affect reading instruction.

Another concern candidates expressed focused on the issue of small group instruction versus individual instruction. Six of the 19 candidates surveyed expressed the desire to have more opportunities to teach in small group settings. As one candidate remarked, "I wish I had spent less time with individual students and more with small groups. Once again, just ask the mentor teachers to provide more experience with small groups." Perhaps some of the assignments can be geared more toward small group

instruction since special reading teachers are often asked to work with small groups as opposed to individuals. This would provide more diverse instruction for the candidates.

*Recommendations for the After School Model*

The After School Model provided the candidates with the opportunity to work with a struggling reader twice a week for one semester. The skills and knowledge of the instructor were well known and validated through the instructor's resume and experiential background at the university level.

The candidates closely followed the progress made by the child as a result of their instruction. However, it appeared that little time was available for peer collaboration during the practicum as candidates worked in several different rooms in the elementary building. While instructors were on site, they moved from room to room to assist candidates during instructional time. Candidates worked with only one child and did not have the opportunity to work with small groups. One of the 14 respondents indicated she would like, "team teaching, targeting more kids, discussions with peers on interaction with kids." It is suggested that perhaps candidates would benefit from a meeting time when all candidates could share and learn from each other, therefore, providing collegial support for one another.

The strength of this particular experience, however, may have been the opportunity to work in an authentic setting with children who were identified with deficiencies in specific areas of literacy instruction. One candidate explained, "Working with struggling readers was most challenging and rewarding, yet sometimes frustrating."

Candidates had the opportunity to provide feedback to classroom teachers, and the university instructors were able to field and answer questions regarding instruction on the

spot. Other concerns voiced by the candidate involved finding appropriate resources that their district recommended. One of 14 candidates indicated in response to the question about the transition to a special reading teacher that, "Finding district approved material to use with the struggling readers was difficult." Therefore, I believe that the university instructors could and should canvas local districts to ascertain what type of testing materials and resources they have approved for use with struggling readers and then provide opportunities for candidates to use these assessment and materials. In contrast to the School District Model where candidates felt resources were abundant, four of the 14 candidates in the After School Model indicated that more resources were needed in the practicum. As one candidate stated, "More resources should be available for struggling readers and time to organize them." Other candidates wanted more, "outside resources such as 'Words Their Way' and more practice with running records."

Although the candidates were working in a local public school district, they still felt that they needed current assessments, more choices, and more strategies for struggling readers.

*Recommendations for the Camp Read-A-Lot Model*

When considering the Camp Read-A-Lot Model, the time period candidates worked with children was compressed, the camp only lasts three weeks, leaving limited time for reflection, correction of instructional strategies, and attempts at remediation for the child involved. One candidate commented, "I wish I had more time to help my student and I wish I had seen more progress." Another candidate shared her feelings, "I still don't feel prepared enough to take the step out of the classroom. Struggling readers can have so many difficulties and I don't feel like I can help them after just one

practicum."However, an advantage of this model was that the instructor was on site at all times to facilitate the instructional processes that were used, not to mention the opportunities for collegial support and discussion. In my opinion, as facilitator of Camp Read-A-Lot, if candidates used their time wisely, reflections could be completed quite easily on a day to day basis, and the compressed time period actually worked in their favor. However, it would be difficult for candidates to take another course or hold another job while completing this practicum experience because of the daily time commitment. While the duration of the camp was short, the candidate and the student met daily, and the rapport built between the two contributed positively to the instructional process. Time for group activities was also available on a daily basis. Two of the 16 candidates explained that they felt the balance of lessons time and activity time as appropriate. As one candidate explained, "I thought the practicum had the right balance of lesson time and fun time. I wouldn't change a thing." The resources in the practicum helped to address the needs of the children. Regarding resources, five of the 16 candidates agreed that the resources were more than adequate and only one candidate commented, "It would have been nice to practice the Developmental Reading Assessment or other programs." Also mentioned by two candidates was the usefulness of the required text for locating remedial strategies. Therefore, it is recommended that candidates be given the time to practice and learn about the Developmental Reading Assessment and that other assessment materials be purchased and practiced during the Camp Read-A-Lot practicum.

*Recommendations for Program Data Collection*

There are some areas which could be improved in all three practicum experiences

that would make them stronger. While this study was able to garner sufficient information to make some assumptions regarding how well prepared candidates perceive themselves, it would be better, if this type of study were done again, to include exit interviews such as those that are written in the overall summary in the notebook for the School District Model. That would provide responses that would be recent, and there would be no error in identifying which practicum was involved. Numerous onsite observations during the practicum experience would also yield information for analysis about the inner workings of the practicum. It would also be beneficial to interview candidates after certification has been completed and again following the end of the first six months after the transition to a special reading teacher position. This would enable the candidate to be more specific about whether preparation had been adequate. Since the role special reading teachers play in a district is so diversified, interviewing them after the transition could provide insights into how to expand their instruction process in the practicum. This information may provide opportunities to better prepare the special reading candidates for their role as a leader in their respective schools and districts.

*Recommendations for the Leadership Role for Special Reading Teachers*

Many special reading teachers are expected to assume a leadership role and are considered the experts who can provide professional development for other staff members in the area of literacy. "Reading specialists can play a critical role in the professional development of teachers. Most reading specialists have deep knowledge about the reading process and about high quality reading instruction" (Dole, 2004, p. 470). Woodward and Talbert-Johnson (2009) indicated that it is a natural result of their expertise and knowledge that special reading teachers are called upon to serve in the role

of a professional development presenter and instructor. Few classroom teachers have been asked to assume this role so their experience in this area is limited. As one candidate replied when asked what was the most difficult transition in the transition from classroom teacher to special reading teacher, "Not knowing exactly what role I am to take, teacher, professional development leader, or RTI designer." A good portion of the practicum experience, therefore, might address how to locate current research, efficient practices for organizing workshops and professional development, and how to prepare presentations for colleagues, staff and parents.

*Strategies and Instructional Practices*

Each of the practicum experiences would benefit from additional instruction for candidates regarding strategies and instructional practices for students in middle school and high school. Sixteen percent of the respondents to the survey expressed a desire to learn more about middle school and high school struggling readers. "More time is needed learning materials for other age groups that are older kids since I am familiar more familiar with younger age groups." Another candidate remarked, "I would have like to see a model program for struggling readers at the high school level." More resources need to be made available for candidates. Perhaps bringing in special reading teachers from middle school and high school as speakers would be informative and useful for special reading candidates. One candidate expressed her concern about not having enough strategies and answers for teachers to use with struggling readers. She said, "Teachers come with tons of questions. I had to get used to the idea that I don't know all the answers." Discussion groups and question and answer sessions with these expert special reading teachers would provide a wealth of knowledge about needs in middle school and

high school. Assessment kits that address grade levels above the eighth grade should be purchased to provide opportunities for practice with testing material for middle and high school students. Two of the three instructors in the Lindenwood practicum experiences have had experience that mainly focused on struggling readers in the elementary years. In addition, it is a recent phenomenon that special reading teachers have been hired for middle school and high school. This may account for the focus of the practicum experience addressing elementary age students. Data collected from the candidates also indicated that less than 10 % of them had experience beyond the fifth grade. Therefore, the practicum models may have been designed for students in the elementary grade because that is where the majority of the candidates were working.

*Testing Materials*

Candidates should be exposed to a larger variety of testing material besides the Developmental Reading Assessment, the Informal Reading Inventory, and the Rigby PM Benchmark kits available in the Camp Model. One candidate out of 16 who returned the survey explained, "Planning for individual children. So much of a reading specialist's job is based on individual needs and monitoring of progress." The After School Model should also provide opportunities for exposure to several assessment tests, not just those used by the district where the practicum experience is being held. Two of the nineteen candidates in the School District Model remarked, "For me, I needed to spend more time using different assessment tools."Another candidate in the School District Model commented, "I would have liked to learn about the Wilson Reading program for decoding."While the School District Model focuses on the protocols used by the District, if candidates had the opportunity to meet with the Lindenwood instructor a few times

during the practicum experience, they could be introduced to a wider variety of assessment materials that would prepare them for positions outside the district in which they are employed.

Approximately eight percent of the candidates who returned their surveys expressed a desire to learn more about assessment and have more opportunities to try out a variety of sources. "I would like to know what materials other districts are using. For me, I needed to spend more time using different assessment tools." While each of the practicum experiences provide multiple assessment kits, it may be prudent to collect data from local school districts regarding what assessments they require for reading and then Lindenwood could purchase some of these assessments so that candidates would have opportunities to practice with them during the practicum.

*Job Opportunities for Special Reading Teachers*

It was suggested by candidates that more time and focus be spent on the diverse jobs available to those with special reading certification. As one candidate stated,

> I wish more time was spent on how a reading specialist could be a literacy coach and what to expect and how to be prepared for that shift of responsibility and relationships that change. Also, we need to know how to become an effective coach.

Two other candidates indicated that their transition to literacy coach was made more difficult because not enough information was provided about the duties of a literacy coach. Among the roles that should be explored would be interventionist working with the Response to Intervention Team (RTI), Literacy Coach, Resource Teacher,

Professional Development Facilitator, and Special Reading Teacher in a pull-out or push-in program.

*Providing Assistance for Classroom Teachers in Literacy Development*

In addition, special reading teacher candidates need to be familiar with approaches for assisting classroom teachers with strategies, resources, and modeling of solid, research based reading strategies."The reading specialist supports, supplements and extends classroom teaching, and works collaboratively to implement a quality reading program that is research-based and meets the needs of students" (Reading Rockets, 2010, para. 5). While time is spent in all three practicum experiences examining research based interventions for struggling readers, it would be valuable to add to that repertoire by practicing the use of the AIMS web Assessment Program and the Dibels Assessment which are the most popular and current assessments being used in the St. Louis Metropolitan area.

*Scheduling Issues*

Preparation for special reading teacher candidates should also include discussions and models for developing schedules that take into consideration the needs of the classroom teachers. Four of the 50 candidates who responded to the survey indicated that they were concerned about their lack of experience in arranging appropriate schedules that would be most beneficial for children. As one candidate explained, "Scheduling is difficult because we have guidelines in the classroom on how much time to spend on each subject. Reading specialists must schedule around classroom teachers' schedules." Assistance with scheduling could be accomplished by setting up mock schedules and then trying to incorporate the needs of the child who is struggling in reading. Speakers from

elementary, middle and high school could provide insights on how they schedule children who need assistance in special reading. The school where I was employed as a special reading teacher had a rather unique way of doing scheduling and this could be modeled with candidates. There was a committee that met and a Smart Board was used to list all of the assigned special classes, like physical education, art, and music. The committee was then charged with scheduling time for the special reading teacher to see students, the resource times for each class were planned and time was the time scheduled for the counselor to visit classes. This process provided the best opportunity for developing the least restrictive schedule for all classes. Each grade level had a representative on the scheduling committee in addition to the specialists, the counselor, and the principal. This process took approximately two hours to complete and provided a workable schedule for all those involved. Candidates could perhaps also benefit from having two special reading teachers share how they developed their schedules with the candidates. Dole (2004) stated:

> Recently, a new role for the reading specialist has been suggested for schools with large numbers of struggling readers. This role conceptualizes the reading specialist not as someone who works directly with students but as someone who works directly with teachers as a coach and mentor. In this new role the reading specialist supports teachers in their daily work--planning, modeling, team-teaching, and providing feedback on completed lessons in collaboration with classroom teachers in a school. In addition, the reading specialist assists teachers by helping them understand the assessment and instructional cycle and how that

> cycle can help them as they develop lessons and organize their classes for instruction. (Quatroche, Bean, & Hamilton as cited in Dole, 2004, p. 1)

The role of the special reading teacher continues to evolve and change as the needs of the children, district, and laws require. Therefore, the practicum experiences at Lindenwood University need to continue to change and be updated so the practicum experiences reflect the current needs of the candidates in order to best prepare candidates to carry out the requirements of their job.

*Changes to the Camp Read-A-Lot Program at Lindenwood*

At the current time, changes are already underway for the Camp Read-A-Lot practicum model. I can only speak of this model since the other facilitators have not had the opportunity to read this dissertation and make changes. As a result of the findings of this dissertation, as the facilitator, I have purchased three new resources for use by the candidates to better prepare them to assist struggling readers in middle school and high school. The new resources include *Intervention Strategies to Follow Informal Inventory Assessment, So What do I do now?* by JoAnne Schutd Caldwell and Lauren Leslie (2009), *Miscue Analysis Made Easy by* Sandra Wilde (2000), *Academic Language /Literacy Strategies for Adolescents* by Irene Borrego, Emilio Garza, Debra Hirai, and Carl T. Kloock, (2010) and *Reading to Learn in the Content Area,* Seventh Edition, by Judy Richardson, Raymond Morgan and Charlene Fleener (2009).

In addition, the syllabus, which has been used by all three professors in the practicum, is being revised for the one section of the practicum which strictly addresses candidates for special reading certification. In the past, because the practicum serves undergraduates, students in the Master of Arts in Teaching program, and candidates for

special reading certification, the same basic syllabus was used throughout the practicum to provide continuity for the professor and the children involved. However, it is obvious that more time needs to be spent by candidates learning about the diverse roles a special reading teacher may be asked to assume. Therefore, in rewriting the syllabus, more time will be spent accessing articles, books, and strategies for the different roles of interventionist, literacy coach, professional development facilitator, as well as an introduction to leadership skills. To this end, three other sources will be provided for the candidates and they include: *No Quick Fix, The RTI* Edition by Richard Allington and Sean Walmsley (2007), *Literacy Leadership* by Donald A. McAndrew (2005) and *Becoming a Literacy Leader* by Jennifer Allen (2006).

I believe that time should also be devoted to discussion about how to formulate schedules, provide resources for teachers, and lastly discussion and resources should be sought to enhance leadership skills. I am currently exploring the idea of bringing in Human Resource speakers to provide direction for candidates regarding leadership skills, and by next year I would like to have in place resources for Cognitive Coaching training which the founders described as:

> A supervisory/peer coaching model that capitalizes upon and enhances cognitive processes. Art Costa and Bob Garmston, the founders of Cognitive Coaching define it as a set of strategies, a way of thinking and a way of working that invites self and others to shape and reshape their thinking and problem solving capacities. (Center for Cognitive Coaching, 2009, p. 1)

If candidates participated in Cognitive Coaching instruction it would assist them as they began their work with classroom teachers, administrators, and in the area of professional

development district wide. Candidates will assume roles that require leadership skills, problem solving skills, and community building within the school and district. What they learn through Cognitive Coaching will assist them in these areas as well as in the employment of differentiated coaching styles in accordance with the person or persons they are working with at school or throughout the district. Through Cognitive Coaching, candidates will learn to coach rather than evaluate. This training will be invaluable as candidates strive to fill the diverse roles assumed by special reading teachers today.

*Summary*

Other institutions of higher learning may find this research helpful as they refine and update their practicum experiences for special reading teachers. Future research could investigate the perceptions of special reading teacher candidates at multiple universities with similar practicum models. Colleges and universities may want to consider offering three models for completion of the practicum experience. This would provide candidates with opportunities they may not otherwise have in the practicum. Using the programs provided by Lindenwood as a model, institutions of higher learning could also provide differentiation for their candidates in the preparation process for becoming a special reading teacher.

The recommendations provided in this research may also assist colleges and universities as they reflect on best practices for their candidates. It appeared to me during my research that the practicum delivered at many universities, much like Lindenwood, either focused on elementary or secondary but not on both during instructional time through the university. As stated in *Reading Today* (2010), statistics from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show 161,000 eighth graders tested in 2009

showed only one point improvement in the area of reading over the last two years. The NAEP in 2005 reported that students in grade 12 only scored an average of 286 points on a scale of 0-500, making the average in 2005 lower than the average in 1992. These statistics just demonstrate that educators need to do a better job of remediating and assisting struggling readers, especially in the upper grades. Therefore, the suggestion to incorporate more instructional materials and strategies for candidates to assist these older students makes sense, yet college and university programs tend to focus more time on students in primary and intermediate grades. I believe that by sharing this research we can be a catalyst for improving the preparation process for future special reading teachers.

Certainly there are pros and cons in each of the practicum experiences I researched and even though Lindenwood offers three models for completion of the practicum there is still room for change and improvement as suggested in this research. Lindenwood University's practicum models take into consideration the diversity of the candidates, their experiences, the background of the instructors, and the authentic opportunities offered. The positive features of these three models far outweigh the concerns. Lindenwood University should continue to offer the three different practicum models because this is the best way to address the individual needs of the candidates and provide school districts with certified special reading teachers of the highest quality.

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# Appendix A

## State of Missouri Certification Requirements

**MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**
**CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR**
**SPECIAL READING (GRADES K-12)**

**These may be met by courses taken as part of the baccalaureate degree.*
***A combined course of at least three (3) semester hours in Child and Adolescent Psychology may meet these two (2) requirements.*
*Revised April 2005*

**I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:**

**A.** A valid Missouri permanent or professional certificate of license to teach; and

**B.** Two (2) years of classroom teaching experience;

**II. PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS*** (These shall be met by courses of at least two (2) semester hours, unless otherwise specified.):

**A. Foundations of Teaching:**

**1.** **Child Psychology;
**2.** **Adolescent Psychology;
**3.** Psychology and/or Education of the Exceptional Child (including the Gifted); and
**4.** Evaluation of Abilities and Achievement (instruction in interpretation of individualized intelligence tests, formal and informal diagnostic procedures and in prescriptive instruction);

**B. Teaching Methods:**

**1.** Reading (at least three (3) courses required, minimum total of twelve (12) semester hours, one (1) of these courses shall be in Analysis and Correction of Reading Disabilities);
**2.** Language Acquisition and Development or Language Development of the Exceptional Child;
**3.** Behavior Management Techniques; and
**4.** Counseling Techniques (to include communication skills with exceptional children and families of exceptional children); and

**C. Clinical Experiences:**

**1.** Practicum in the Diagnosis and Remediation of Reading and Related Difficulties: A minimum of six (6) semester hours is required for the practicum which should include experience with students at both the elementary and secondary levels. The practicum should require demonstrated competency in student management at both the elementary and secondary levels
.

**MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**
**CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR**
**ELEMENTARY (GRADES 1-6)**

*Revised **January 2008***

**I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:**

**A.** A baccalaureate degree from a college or university having a teacher education program approved by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or from a college or university having a teacher education program approved by the state education agency in states other than Missouri;

**B.** Must have recommendation of designated official for teacher education in the college or university;

**C.** Must have a grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale overall and in the major area of study;

**D.** Must complete the content knowledge or specialty area test designated by the State Board of Education with a score equal to or greater than the Missouri qualifying score;

**E.** Completion of professional requirements, as determined by the recommending college or university, with a score equal to or greater than the Missouri qualifying score;
which may exceed these minimum requirements; and

**F.** Individuals who completed their teacher education program outside of the United States shall provide documentation of completion of course work in the following:

**1.** English Composition, two (2) courses, each a minimum of two (2) semester hours;
**2.** U.S. History, three (3) semester hours; and
**3.** U.S. Government, three (3) semester hours.

**II. PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS:** A minimum of sixty (60) semester hours of professional preparation. Competency must be demonstrated in each topic listed to the satisfaction of the teacher preparation institution.

**A. Foundations for Teaching** (Minimum requirement of ten (10) semester hours):

**1.** Foundations of Education;
**2.** School Organization and Management;
**3.** Personalized Teaching Strategies;
**4.** Self Awareness and Human Relations;
**5.** *Child Growth and Development;
**6.** Psychology of Learning;
**7.** *Psychology and/or Education of the Exceptional Child (including the Gifted); and
**8.** Behavior Management Techniques (Interpersonal Relationships);

**B. Teaching Methods** (Minimum requirement of fifteen (15) semester hours):

**1.** Reading (three (3) courses required, minimum total of eight (8) semester hours);
**2.** As a minimum, the teaching method competencies shall include:

**a.** Children's Literature;
**b.** Language Arts;
**c.** Math;
**d.** Science;
**e.** Social Science to include Geography and Economics;

**f.** Art;
**g.** Music;
**h.** Physical Education; and
**i.** Microcomputer Applications in Education; and

**C. Clinical Experiences** (Minimum requirement of ten (10) semester hours):
A minimum of two (2) semester hours of field experiences prior to student teaching and a minimum of eight (8) semester hours of student teaching in elementary grades are required. Teachers meeting certification requirements for Early Childhood or Middle School teaching certificates will be exempt from this clinical experience requirement. A fully certificated secondary teacher with two (2) or more years of secondary teaching experience may satisfy this requirement through the completion of a two (2) or more semester hour practicum at the elementary level; and

**D. Elementary School Courses:**

**1. Courses appropriate for Elementary grades:**

**a.** Mathematics (two (2) courses, minimum total of five (5) semester hours)
**b.** Economics;
**c.** Geography;
**d.** Health; and
**e.** Art or Music; and

**2. Area of Concentration:**
The student must have a total of at least twenty-one (21) semester hours in an area of concentration.

***Denotes minimum of two (2) semester hours required.**

**MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**
**CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR**
**MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION (GRADES 5-9)**

**Denotes minimum requirement of two (2) semester hours.*
*Revised April 2005*

**I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:**

**A.** A baccalaureate degree from a college or university having a teacher education program approved by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or from a college or university having a teacher education program approved by the state education agency in states other than Missouri;

**B.** Must have recommendation of designated official for teacher education in the college or university;

**C.** Must have a grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale overall and in the major area of study;

**D.** Must complete the content knowledge or specialty area test designated by the State Board of Education with a score equal to or greater than the Missouri qualifying score;

**E.** Completion of professional requirements, as determined by the recommending college or university, which may exceed these minimum requirements; and

**F.** Individuals who completed their teacher education program outside of the United States shall provide documentation of completion of course work in the following:

**1.** English Composition, two (2) courses, each a minimum of two (2) semester hours;
**2.** U.S. History, three (3) semester hours; and
**3.** U.S. Government, three (3) semester hours.

**II. PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS:** A minimum of fifty-three (53) semester hours in professional education. Competency must be demonstrated in each area listed to the satisfaction of the teacher preparation institution.

**A. Foundations for Teaching** (Minimum requirement of twelve (12) semester hours):

**1. The Pupil/Society**—A minimum of eight (8) semester hours with knowledge acquired competency developed to the satisfaction of the teacher preparation institution in the following areas:

**a.** Personalized Teaching Strategies;
**b.** *Adolescent Psychology or Psychology of the Middle Level Child (physical, mental development which includes substance abuse, sexuality and peer pressure concerns);
**c.** Psychology of Learning;
**d.** *Psychology and/or Education of the Exceptional Child (including the Gifted);
**e.** Techniques of Classroom Management; and
**f.** Tests and Measurements and

**2. The School/Society—**A minimum of four (4) semester hours with knowledge acquired and competency developed to the satisfaction of the teacher preparation institution in the following areas, including multi-cultural aspects:

**a.** *Middle School Philosophy, Organization, and Curriculum;

**b.** Legal Foundations of Education;
**c.** Philosophical Foundations of Education; and
**d.** Sociological Foundations of Education; and

**B. Middle School Concentration** (Minimum requirement of thirty-one (31) semester hours):

**1. Middle School Methods** (Minimum requirement of ten (10) semester hours):

**a.** Methods of Teaching Reading (minimum of five (5) semester hours to include one (1) course in Techniques of Teaching Reading in the Content Fields);
**b.** *Middle Level Curriculum and Instruction;
**c.** Teaching of Writing; and
**d.** *Methods of Teaching Specialty Area; and

**2. Subject Area Requirements** (Minimum requirement of twenty-one (21) semester hours): Subject area certification in grades 5-9 will be granted upon the basis of a minimum of twenty-one (21) semester hours with appropriate distribution as determined by the teacher preparation institution and/or the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in one (1) of the following areas:

**a.** Agricultural Education 5-9;
**b.** Business Education 5-9;
**c.** Industrial Technology 5-9;
**d.** Language Arts 5-9;
**e.** Mathematics 5-9;
**f.** Science 5-9;
**g.** Social Science 5-9; and
**h.** Speech/Theatre 5-9; and

**C. Clinical Experience** (Minimum requirement of ten (10) semester hours):
A minimum of two (2) semester hours of field experience prior to student teaching and a minimum of eight (8) semester hours of student teaching in grades 5-9 is required. Teachers meeting requirements for Early Childhood, Elementary, or Secondary certification must complete a practicum with middle level students.

This practicum may be integrated within appropriate required courses.

**(Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008)**

**MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**
**CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR**
**SECONDARY EDUCATION (GRADES 9-12)**

**Denotes minimum of two (2) semester hours required.*
***Required separate verification on transcripts; may be two (2) separate courses.*
*Revised April 2005*

**I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:**

**A.** A baccalaureate degree from a college or university having a teacher education program approved by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education;

**B.** Must have recommendation of designated official for teacher education in the college or university;

**C.** Must have a grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale overall and in the major area of study;

**D.** Must complete the content knowledge or specialty area test designated by the State Board of Education with a score equal to or greater than the Missouri qualifying score. If no content knowledge or specialty area test is designated for the area of concentration, completion of the Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades 9-12 test is required with a score equal to or greater than the Missouri qualifying score;

**E.** Completion of professional requirements as determined by the recommending college or university, which may exceed these minimum requirements; and

**F.** Individuals who completed their teacher education program outside of the United States shall provide documentation of completion of course work in the following:

**1.** English Composition, two (2) courses, each a minimum of two (2) semester hours;
**2.** U.S. History, three (3) semester hours; and
**3.** U.S. Government, three (3) semester hours.

**II. PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS:** A minimum requirement of twenty-six (26) semester hours in professional education as follows:

**A. Foundations of Teaching** (Minimum requirement of eight (8) semester hours):

**1. The Pupil/Society--**A minimum of six (6) semester hours with knowledge acquired and competency developed to the satisfaction of the teacher preparation institution in the following content areas:

**a.** Adolescent Growth and Development (Physical-Mental-Social);
**b.** Adolescent Behavior Management Techniques;
**c.** Psychology of Learning (must include adolescent learning);
**d.** Adolescent Interaction with Others; and
**e.** *Psychology and/or Education of the Exceptional Child (including the Gifted); and

**2. The School/Society--**A minimum of two (2) semester hours with knowledge acquired and competency developed to the satisfaction of the teacher preparation institution in the following content areas, including multi-cultural aspects:

**a.** Legal Foundations of Education;
**b.** Historical Foundations of Education;
**c.** Philosophical Foundations of Education; and
**d.** Sociological Foundations of Education; and

**B. Secondary Methods and Techniques** (Minimum requirement of eight (8) semester hours): A minimum of eight (8) semester hours with knowledge acquired and competency developed to the satisfaction of the teacher preparation institution in the following content areas:

**1.** *Basic Reading Techniques for Secondary Teachers;
**2.** Instructional Strategies for Secondary Teachers;
**3.** *Curriculum, Methods, and Techniques in each subject area specialty;
**4.** Measurement and Evaluation; and
**5.** Microcomputer Applications in Education; and

**C. Clinical Experiences** (Minimum requirement of ten (10) semester hours):
Certification in grades 9-12 should include clinical experience at the secondary level. A minimum of two (2) semester hours prior to student teaching** and a minimum of eight (8) semester hours of student teaching in grades 9-12 is required, except that K-9 or K-12 certification must also include K-6 experience in student teaching. A fully certificated elementary or middle school teacher with two (2) or more years of elementary or middle school teaching may satisfy this requirement through the completion of a two (2) or more semester hour practicum at the secondary level.

**III. SUBJECT MATTER REQUIREMENTS AS SPECIFIED FOR SPECIFIC AREA(S) OF CERTIFICATION CAN BE FOUND AT www.dese.org**

**Teachers must be certificated in another elementary, middle school, or secondary teaching field.*
*Revised April 2005*

# Appendix B

## Executive Summary for Race to the Top

January 19, 2010

The Race to the Top Fund provides competitive grants to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform in four specific areas: (1) Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy; (2) Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction; (3) Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and (4) Turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

The following highlights provide an overview of Missouri's Race to the Top application, submitted yesterday afternoon. The total budget for the application is $743,451,964, with $354,325,000 going directly to participating school districts and public charter schools. The entire application can be accessed on the Department website later this week at www.dese.mo.gov/rt3.

With or without this grant, the Department intends to use the Race to the Top application as a framework for redesigning the Department itself and for driving educational reform over the next decade. The plan will serve as the catalyst to propel Missouri's public education system into the Top 10, nationally and internationally.

### Curriculum and Assessment

Adopt and implement the NGA/CCSSO Common Core Standards for mathematics, reading, speaking, listening, and writing and position the state to adopt forthcoming common standards in other content areas and across the P-20 spectrum.

Fully participate in assessment consortia developing formative, interim/benchmark, and summative assessments of the NGA/CCSSO Common Core Standards for mathematics, reading, speaking, listening, and writing and collaborate with other states to develop assessments in other content areas and across the P-20 spectrum.

Develop a model curriculum framework consisting of course descriptions, unit outlines, measurable objectives, interim/benchmark assessments and scoring guides, suggested evidence-based instructional strategies, instructional timelines, and a state online instructional support environment tied to the Common Core K-12 Standards and all other content areas in the P-12 spectrum.

Design and disseminate grade/subject specific professional development to support the implementation of the model curriculum for all content areas and for all educators from early childhood through higher education.

Align high school graduation requirements with work-ready standards and college-ready standards and expand opportunities for high school students to pursue STEM careers.

Data Systems

Provide required 21st century technology infrastructure and bandwidth to all school districts throughout the State of Missouri by implementing Mo Broadband Now. http://transform.mo.gov/broadband/wiki/index.php/MoBroadbandNow

Direct the implementation of and manage the *Missouri Comprehensive Data System* containing P-20 longitudinal data from multiple sources and state agencies for use by all stakeholders for instructional, research and planning purposes.

Develop a system to link classroom observations to a web-based teacher quality system so that observers and teachers can work collaboratively to capture and identify effective teaching practices based on student performance and leadership activities.

Develop and implement a system to certify Data Teams of teachers and leaders qualified to analyze and use student performance data in driving instructional improvement in every district by June 2011, and in every school by June 2012.

Teachers and Leaders

Work with key stakeholder groups to develop model educator performance assessment systems at the state level. Require LEAs to implement these models or develop – in collaboration with local teachers and leaders and in concert with local agreements – an equally rigorous or proven model.

Develop and implement extensive training modules for the use of performance-based educator assessment systems and monitor the participation of LEAs.

Develop models and provide assistance to school districts to work collaboratively with teachers, leaders and other stakeholders to develop and implement differentiated recognition and reward systems that include features such as fellowships, expanded roles such as coaching and mentoring, and additional time for development and study.

Work with school districts and others to develop models that create disproportionately attractive working conditions in high-need or hard-to-staff schools such as higher pay, flexible schedules, or other incentives.

Develop models and provide assistance to school districts to develop – in collaboration with local teachers and leaders and in concert with local agreements –

plans to provide more students with access to the highest-quality instruction, such as through assignment of students, videotaped lessons, online coursework, new roles for highly-effective teachers, or other means.

Develop partnerships to provide opportunities for additional alternative route programs that include early classroom practice, mentoring and induction programs, and emphasis on teaching hard to staff subjects (STEM).

Create statewide or regional (urban, inner ring or rural) school district partnerships with highly-effective local or national alternative certification providers, such as Teach for America.

In collaboration with key stakeholder groups, create a rating system for teacher preparation programs based on the effectiveness of their graduates as measured by multiple measures of growth in student achievement.

Provide competitive grants to teacher and leader preparation programs to focus on STEM and other high need areas.

Restrict funding exclusively to professional development programs that are demonstrably successful in improving teacher effectiveness and student learning, as reflected by measures developed collaboratively by the Department and all stakeholders.

Develop a system to link classroom observations to a web-based teacher quality system so that observers and teachers can work collaboratively to capture and identify effective teaching practices based on student performance and leadership activities.

Develop models for and incent school districts to design instructional delivery systems that provide time for common planning and collaboration for teachers and leaders.

Turnaround Schools

Develop and implement a statewide framework for Quality Schools with three components:

- turn around intervention for schools that have already failed and need immediate and definitive action;
- school improvement support for all schools to address achievement gaps, STEM needs, high school reform or other areas in need of attention; and
- early learning programs to ensure a strong foundation and early intervention for all children and to prevent the need for turnaround in the future.

Reconfigure the Department to develop and implement a statewide, systemic system of support–the Regional Education Services for Leadership and Training (RESLTs) Centers—that ensures quality schools through:

- Quick intervention and strong leadership for turnaround efforts in failing schools and LEAs;
- A tiered system of technical assistance and accountability monitoring to drive school improvement in every classroom, grade, sub-group, school and district;
- Training and technical assistance to building and district-level teachers and administrators in the use of the Missouri Comprehensive Data System;
- Individualized professional development and data team training for teachers and leaders;
- Technical assistance and structure in developing a sound educational foundation for every child through a "braided", system of integrated services to children and families in early learning programs.

Quality Schools—Turnaround

- Work with all stakeholders and experts to develop a Missouri Turnaround Model, including criteria that will be used by the State Board of Education to identify and turn around the State's low-performing LEAs, schools, and groups of students. The model will outline specific measures to address human capital, community and climate and cultural components necessary to create conditions needed for turnaround (e.g.: resources, school schedules, additional professional development).
- Identify and implement turnaround strategies in all failing schools by June 2014.

Quality Schools—School Improvement

- Use the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) to diagnose problems and to recognize and disseminate effective practices in all schools and districts through monitoring and review. The Department will work with stakeholders to establish early-warning systems to identify students at risk of failing or not graduating, schools at risk of failing, and districts at risk of failing and will direct the design of individualized programs of intervention and support.
- Services will be provided through the RESLTS Centers to develop and/or implement model programs as necessary to meet identified improvement areas (i.e. dropout prevention, cultural proficiency, STEM, mentoring, etc.).
- Develop and/or adopt state models based on proven non-traditional recruitment and training models for teachers and leaders. Work with districts to develop—in collaboration with local stakeholders and in concert with local agreements--plans

to recruit and retain effective teachers and leaders for chronically low-achieving or hard-to-staff schools.

 In collaboration with professional organizations, educate local school boards and train principals to effectively use newly developed evaluation systems for teachers and principals (as referenced in Section D).

Quality Schools—Early Learning and Prevention

 Develop a state model for a "braided", seamless, community-based system of early education, including education, health and social services, mental health and other critical support for children and families to ensure that every child is ready for success in kindergarten. Provide initial funding to assist school districts in adopting the state model or developing comparable models for such early learning programs.

 Introduce legislation and secure funding by 2014 to support voluntary universal early childhood opportunities for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

Charter Schools

Missouri will strengthen the charter school authorizing/sponsorship process towards increased accountability to ensure performance and fiscal integrity by:

 implementing standards for sponsorship;

 implementing an evaluation process for sponsors to increase and ensure they are held accountable for their oversight/monitoring;

 implementing guidelines for sponsors that hold them accountable for closing poor performing charter schools;

 proposing a change in statute

 requiring an actual performance contract between the charter school's governing board and the sponsor prior to the school opening;

 defining the terms/conditions under which a charter school may be placed on probation as opposed to being closed;

 permit the State Board to close a charter school, in lieu of the sponsor, for specific cause (academic, financial, etc.).

Offer funding incentives to LEAs to develop and implement independent innovative schools including alternative schools, STEM-related schools or others to meet identified needs. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010)

Appendix C

IRB

Survey and Interview Questions

# LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY

## Application for IRB Review of
### Research Proposal Involving Human Subjects

Proposal

1. Title of Project: Perceived Effectiveness of Special Reading Teacher's Preparation Through the Reading Practicum Experience

2. Dissertation Chair/Faculty Advisor: Department: Extension: e-mail:

**Rebecca Panagos, Ph.D. Education 636 949-4959 rpanagos@lindenwood.edu**

3. Primary Investigator(s): Department: Local phone: e-mail:

**Patricia C. Leitsch Education 636 397-8327 pleitsch@lindenwood.edu**

4. Anticipated starting date for this project: **upon approval** ending date: August, 2010

(collection of *primary* data – data you collect yourself - cannot begin before IRB approval is given)

5. State the purpose of this proposed project (*what do you want to accomplish?*)**:**

**The primary investigator in this study has been working in the reading specialist practicum experience at Lindenwood University for several years and has developed a close working relationship with the other professors who provide instruction in these three models. In fact, all of the professors have provided instruction through all three models at some point in their career. Students seeking certification as a reading specialist in the state of Missouri must have certification in another area first. In addition, they must have two years of classroom teaching experience and must complete the coursework prescribed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education before certification will be granted. Students must complete two three credit hour reading practicum experiences prior to certification which entails working with children in the area of reading literacy.**

**This project will examine three reading practicum models, supervision provided in the practicum, and collegial support from classmates in the practicum. This investigation will be used to determine which model students' perceive as the most effective in the preparation process. Students must participatein two practicum experiences which could involve participation in the same model twice or participation in two different models.**

**School district model - Lindenwood students tutor children in the school district where they are employed under the supervision of the building reading specialist using a syllabus provided by the Lindenwood instructor. Students develop lessons for an individual child, keep a log, do pre and post**

**testing, write reflections, and teach lessons to a specific child. The reading specialist evaluates the lesson. All materials are then turned to the Lindenwood instructor for evaluation and grading.**

**<u>After school model</u> – Lindenwood students tutor a child in a local elementary school in an after school program. Children are identified for participation in the program by their classroom teacher and the Lindenwood practicum instructor. Lindenwood students provide one-to-one tutoring for these children, with reading difficulties, twice a week, under the supervision of the Lindenwood instructors for a period of 45 minutes to one hour each session. Students complete pre and post testing, write lessons, keep a log, write reflections, and have ongoing instruction regarding good reading strategies. Prospective reading specialist practicum students are evaluated while teaching lessons to their assigned child by the Lindenwood instructor.**

**<u>Camp Read-A-Lot model</u> – Lindenwood students participate in Camp Read-A-Lot for three weeks during the summer session. Children apply to be in the program and when accepted they are assigned to a Lindenwood practicum student for instruction. Children are present for two and one half hours Monday through Friday for three weeks. Lindenwood students prepare and present lessons, tutor the children on a one-to-one basis under the supervision of the Lindenwood instructor who is present in the room during instruction. Lindenwood students and the children participate in small group activities with the other children in the room. Lindenwood students, write formal lessons, do pre and post testing, write reflections, keep a log and receive ongoing instruction daily to introduce new reading strategies. Lindenwood students are evaluated while teaching lessons to their assigned student by the Lindenwood instructor. Lindenwood students have a daily debriefing period with their classmates and the instructor to discuss successes, failures, and suggestions for improving instruction.**

6. State the rationale for this proposed project (*why is this worth accomplishing?*):

**K-12 schools today are focused on reading literacy as a result of NCLB which requires that students be at or above the proficient level in reading by the year 2014. (http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml) Many children continue to struggle in this area so larger numbers of reading specialists are being employed to help remediate reading literacy issues. Therefore, a number of teachers, realizing the need for expertise in this area, have continued their education in the reading literacy field. In order to be certified as a special reading teacher, prospective teachers must complete the coursework prescribed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and within the certification requirements they must also complete two practicum courses, one of which is: remediation of reading problems, and the other being diagnosis of reading difficulties. Both of these courses are three credit hour courses offered through Lindenwood University and both require the prospective reading specialist to work directly with a child or children in developing lessons, providing tutoring, doing assessments, and providing feedback for parents and educators.**

**By examining the opportunities, supervision, and collegial support in the practicum for prospective special reading teachers, perceived effectiveness can be analyzed to assist in possible revision of current university coursework.**

**7.** State the hypothesis(es) or research question(s) of the proposed project:

**How well prepared do prospective reading specialists perceive they are upon completion of the reading practicum experience in either/both EDU 523.00 or EDU 526.00?**

**What is the student's perception of the level of collegial support from classmates in each practicum model?**

**What level of the instructor's supervision do the students perceive is provided by the practicum?**

**What resources or strategies do prospective reading specialists perceive best prepares them to become certified reading specialists?**

8. Has this research project been reviewed or is it currently being reviewed by an IRB at another institution? If so, please state when, where, and disposition (approval/non-approval/pending).

**No**

9. Participants involved in the study:

a. Indicate how many persons will be recruited as potential participants in this study.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| LU participants | _____ | Undergraduate students |
| | __X__ | Graduate students – 200 students |
| | _____ | Faculty and/or staff |
| Non-LU participants | _____ | Children |
| | _____ | Adolescents |
| | _____ | Adults |
| | _____ | Seniors |
| | _____ | Persons in institutional settings (e.g. nursing homes, correctional facilities, etc.) |

Other (specify):

b. From what source(s) will the potential participants be recruited?

__x__ LU graduate classes – **Reading Specialist candidates and alumni**
_____ LU Human Subject Pool (LU HSP)
__x___ Other LU sources (specify) **Lindenwood University Reading Specialist Professors**
_____ School Districts _____
_____ Community Agencies (please list) _____
_____ Businesses (please list) _____
_____ Health care settings, nursing homes, etc. (please list) _____

Other (specify):

c. If any persons within the selected group(s) are being excluded, please explain who is being excluded and why. (Note: According to the Office of LU HSP, all students within the LU Human Subject Pool must be allowed to participate, although exclusion of certain subjects may be made when analyzing data.)

**None**

d. Describe the process of participant recruitment.

**Prospective participants will receive a letter requesting their participation in the study.**

**Surveys and consent forms will be attached to letters with a self addressed return envelope. Professors/instructors will be asked to participate through email, in person or by letter. Letters, emails, and personal contacts will request participation and will provide an official consent form. Interviews will be conducted with the instructors/professors using a prepared set of interview questions.**

Provide a copy of any materials to be used for recruitment (e.g. posters, flyers, advertisements, letters, telephone and other verbal scripts.

e. Where will the study take place?

___x__ On campus – Explain: __x___ Off campus – Explain:

**Professors and instructors will be interviewed either on campus or off campus at their convenience.**

**Student/teacher participants will be surveyed by letter with an official consent form and survey attached.**

10. Methodology/procedures:

A. Provide a sequential description of the procedures to be used in this study.

**Three groups of prospective or current reading teachers will be sought: students/teachers who have already completed the two practicum experiences, those who are currently involved in the practicum experience and those who are now certified reading specialists**.

1. **Beginning at IRB approval, I will mail an information letter, survey, and consent letter to recruit prospective reading specialists who have participated in the reading practicum.**
2. **I will mail an information letter, survey and consent letter to recruit those teachers who are now certified reading specialists and who have participated in the reading practicum experience at Lindenwood University.**
3. **I will email or personally contact Professors/Instructors who supervise and teach the reading practicum to arrange interviews and obtain consent forms.**
4. **I will arrange an appointment with Professors or Instructors for an interview at their convenience. I will record the interview and transcribe it.**
5. **I will examine course syllabi to determine course expectations and class or individual meetings.**
6. **I will repeat this process in the Fall of 2009 semester.**

b. Which of the following data-gathering procedures will be used?

Provide a copy of all materials to be used in this study.

__X___ Observing participants in a research setting (i.e. classroom, playground, school board meetings, etc)

___x__ Survey(s) or questionnaire(s) (to be mailed); Created by PI *or* Created by _____

___x__ Survey(s) or questionnaire(s) (in person); Created by PI *or* Created by _____ _____

Computer-administered task(s) or survey(s): Created by PI *or* Created by _____

___x__ Interview(s) (in person)

_____ Interview(s) (by telephone)
_____ Focus group(s)
___x__ Audio taping

_____ Videotaping
___x__ Analysis of secondary data (no involvement with human participants) - **specify source:** Syllabi
_____ Other (specify):

11. Will the results of this research be made accessible to participants? To institutions (schools/district)?

If yes, explain procedures for doing so and attach any feedback forms to be used.

**Yes, the results will be accessible to the participants, professors/instructors, and Lindenwood University.**

**See the recruitment letter.**

12. Potential Benefits and Compensation from the Study:

a. Identify and describe any known or anticipated benefits (perhaps academic, psychological, or social) to the participants from their involvement in the project.

**None**

b. Identify and describe any known or anticipated benefits to society from this study.

**The information from this study will be helpful to the University and other universities with similar reading practicum models. The results may be used to improve the practicum experience for prospective reading specialists.**

c. Describe any anticipated compensation (monetary, grades, extra credit, other) to participants.

**No monetary compensation will be made, grades will not be effected nor will any extra credit be provided to participants..**

13. Potential Risks from the Study:

a. Identify and describe any known or anticipated risks (i.e. physical, psychological, social, economic, legal, etc) to participants involved in this study:

**There are no anticipated risks. Student's names will be confidential. No identifying information will be revealed in the transcript that was recorded. Names of participants will not be a part of the written dissertation.**

Describe, in detail, how your research design addresses these potential risks:

**There are no potential risks anticipated.**

**a.** Will deception be used in this study? If so, explain the rationale.

**Deception will not be used in this study.**

**b.** Does this project involve gathering information about sensitive topics? If so, explain:

**Names of participants will be protected by the use of fictitious names which will be used in the dissertation.**

[Such topics include: political affiliations; psychological disorders of participants or their families; sexual behavior or attitudes; illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating or demeaning behavior; critical appraisals of participants' families or employers; legally recognized privileged relationships (lawyers, doctors, ministers); income; religious beliefs and practices.

Could any of the participants be considered physically or emotionally vulnerable (children,)? institutionalized persons, pregnant women, persons with impaired judgment

**No**

If so, describe the procedures or safeguards in place to protect the physical and psychological health of the participants in light of the risks/stresses identified above. Include procedures for handling any adverse events, providing referrals for services, etc.

**c.** Explain the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and confidentiality of data both during the data gathering phase of the research, in the storage of data, and in the release of the findings.

**Participants will not be asked to provide their name on the survey form. Consent forms will be removed from the envelopes by the education office secretary, Nancy Hoefle, prior to the investigator receiving the survey. No names will be used in any part of the study.**

How will confidentiality be explained to participants?

**In the context of the letter or email, the following statement will appear: "All information received from the survey or through an interview will remain confidential. Names will not be used in this dissertation nor will references be made to any individual in a way that may identify such person. This study may be presented at scientific meetings or published for educational or scientific purposes."**

**d.** Indicate the duration and location of secure data storage and the method to be used for final disposition of the data.

Paper Records

___x__ Confidential shredding after __5___ years.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.
Where? _____

_____ Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

Audio/video Recordings

__x___ Erasing of audio/video tapes after __5___ years.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.
Where? _____
_____ Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

Electronic Data N/A

___x__ Erasing of electronic data after __5___ years.
_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.
Where? _____
_____Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

14. Informed Consent Process:

a. What process will be used to inform the potential participants about the study details and to obtain their written consent for participation?

__x___ An information letter with a written consent form for participants or their legally authorized agents; provide a copy.
_____ An information letter with a written consent from director of institutions involved; provide a copy.
_____ An information letter with written consent from teachers in classrooms or daycare; provide a copy.

Other (specify):

b. What special provisions have been made for providing information to those not fluent in English, mentally disabled persons, or other populations for whom it may be difficult to grant informed consent?

**Participants will be fluent in English.**

15. All supporting materials/documentation for this application are to be submitted electronically with the application to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please indicate which appendices are included with your application. Submission of an incomplete application package will result in the application being returned to you unevaluated__x___ Recruitment materials: A copy of any posters, fliers, advertisements, letters, telephone or other verbal scripts used to recruit/gain access to participants.

___x__ Data gathering materials:

A copy of all surveys, questionnaires, interview questions, focus group questions, or any standardized tests used to collect data.
_____ Information letter or Feedback letter for participants.
___x__ Informed Consent Form : Adult
_____ Informed Consent Form: guardian to sign consent for minor to participate
_____ Informed Assent Form for minors
___x__ Information/Cover letters used in studies involving surveys or questionnaires.

_____ Parent information letter and permission form for studies involving minors.
_____ Medical screening Form: Must be included for all physiological measurements involving greater than minimal risk, and tailored for each study.
_____ Other:

I certify the information in this proposal is complete and accurate.

_____ _____

Signature of Primary Investigator Date

_____ _____

Where applicable: Signature of Faculty Advisor, Date

Course Instructor, or Dissertation Chair

December 30, 2009

Dear Graduate Student/Special Reading Teacher,

I am a doctoral candidate and current Adjunct Professor at Lindenwood University. I have taught courses for the University in the area of literacy for several years including the reading practicum for candidates seeking Special Reading certification. My research will provide information to the University to assist in strengthening the reading practicum experience designed for students seeking reading specialist certification.

I will investigate student perceptions regarding preparation for becoming a special reading teacher through the reading practicum experience at Lindenwood University. This research will examine the many aspects of the process including supervision, instruction, assessment, and participation in the tutoring process with children.

I have attached a copy of the survey and a consent form for you to complete. I would appreciate it if you would participate by completing the information on the survey. Please return the survey and consent form in the enclosed postage paid envelope by January 15, 2010.

All information received from the survey will remain confidential. Names will not be used in this dissertation nor will references be made to any individual in a way that may identify such person. This study may be presented at scientific meetings or published for educational or scientific purposes. If you would like information regarding the findings, you may email me at pleitsch@lindenwood.edu

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback to assist me in evaluating our current practices in the preparation of students for special reading certification.

Sincerely,

Patricia C. Leitsch, MA

# Lindenwood University

## School of Education

209 S. Kingshighway

St. Charles, Missouri 63301

## Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Perceived Effectiveness of Special Reading Teacher's Preparation Through the Reading Practicum Experience

Principal Investigator ___Patricia C. Leitsch_____ Telephone: **636 397-8327** E-mail: pleitsch@lindenwood.edu

Participant_____Contact info

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1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Patricia C. Leitsch under the guidance of Rebecca Panagos, Ph.D. The purpose of this research is to determine prospective reading specialist's perception of how effective the practicum experience was/is in preparation for becoming a reading specialist.

2. a) Your participation will involve

- Completion of a survey about your perceptions of the preparedness for the reading specialist role as a result of your experience in the reading practicum courses.
- You will be asked to fill out and return the survey and consent form one time during the study.

b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately thirty minutes to complete the survey and consent form.
Approximately [200] subjects will be involved in this research.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about how to prepare perspective reading teachers for their role as a reading specialist and may help Lindenwood University better prepare its future reading specialists.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Patricia C. Leitsch, 636 397-8327 or her Faculty Advisor, Rebecca Panagos, Ph.D. at

636 949-4959. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

Participant's Signature Date Participant's Printed Name

Signature of Principal Investigator Date Investigator Printed Name

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE READING SPECIALIST PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

**Please indicate whether you were involved in:** (A.) School District Model, (B.) After School Model, or (C.) Camp Read-A-Lot Model. **Please be sure to fill out one form for each model in which you participated. Thank you.**

EDU 523_____type of program

EDU 526_____type of program

**Circle the choice after each statement that indicates your opinion.**

1. I received adequate support from the instructor or reading specialist in my building during preparation through the practicum experience for becoming a reading specialist.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

2. Collegial support from my peers in the building or classmates in the practicum was an important part of the reading preparation process.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

3. I felt well prepared after completing the practicum experience to take a position as a reading specialist.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

4. I believe that appropriate and adequate amounts of reading strategies were modeled to assist struggling readers during the practicum experience.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

5. There were sufficient resources provided to assist in developing strategies for struggling readers.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

6. An adequate amount of time was provided by the instructor or reading specialist in my building to learn and practice administering the testing protocol for determining reader strengths and weaknesses.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

7. I felt that testing resources were available for my use in the practicum experience.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

8. Children were readily available for testing and instruction during the practicum experience.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

**Please answer the following questions. Use the back of the survey if you need more room.**

9. What was or is the most difficult transition from being a classroom teacher to being a reading specialist?

10. What do you wish you spent more time on in the practicum experience and how could Lindenwood University best address this issue?

11. What do you wish you spent less time on in the practicum experience and how could Lindenwood University best address this issue?

12. Were there any materials or resources that you found to be particularly valuable to you as a reading specialist? If not, what resources or materials would you suggest be added to the practicum.

13. What did you think about your assessment by your instructor?

14. Please provide information about your past experience as a certified teacher, indicating how long you have been teaching

# Interview Questions for Professors involved in EDU 526.00 and EDU 523.00

These questions are structured to begin discussions with my colleagues. We all know each other well and have ongoing conversations regarding the reading practicum.

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been an instructor in the practicum for perspective reading teachers? What other position have you held in the education field that prepared you to be an instructor in Reading Specialist practicum?

2. How long have you been teaching in higher education? Could you explain your qualifications?

3. Have you had classroom experience with children as a reading specialist?

4. What type of assessments do you do to determine if your students are prepared to become special reading teachers?

Questions involving the practicum experience

5. What is the purpose of the reading practicum?

6. How often do you meet with your practicum students to supervise their work? Please describe the type of supervision provided.

7. How do you introduce the testing protocol for the Informal Reading Inventory?

8. If your practicum students must find a child to tutor, how do you assist with the process of locating a child to tutor?

9. How are your students introduced to new strategies for struggling readers?

10. To what extent do your students work with peers in their school building or classmates in the practicum to share and develop lessons for the children they tutor? Please give some examples.

11. Could you provide information about what kinds of reading games, materials, or activities that are used to assist the practicum student in the tutoring process?

12. Could you give me some examples of websites or lists of resources for practicum students to assist then when they are working with struggling readers?

13. What do you think is the most useful part of the practicum experience?

14. What do you think is the most difficult part of the practicum for Lindenwood students?

15. When and how are you accessible for your students if they have questions outside of class?

16. How would you describe the quality of work you receive from your students in the practicum?

17. To what extent do you do collaborative work with your colleagues who teach the same reading practicum?

18. Give some examples of how students have responded in their reflections regarding their participation in the practicum experience?

19. Is there any other information that you would like to provide?

# VITAE

Patricia C. Leitsch currently teaches at Lindenwood University in the School of Education. She has been an Adjunct Professor since 2003. She teaches Elementary Reading Methods, Analysis and Correction of Reading Disabilities, Language Arts, Integrated Children's Literature, and is the Director and one of the instructors in the Camp Read-A-Lot Practicum for special reading teachers. Teaching experience includes first, third, and fifth grade as a classroom teacher and K-5 Special Reading Teacher. Certifications include Learning Disability, K-9, Special Reading, K-12, and Elementary Education, 1-8.

Her specific areas of interest include remediation of reading and writing difficulties and reading and writing for K-12 students in the general education setting.

Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts Degree with emphasis in reading from Lindenwood University.