UNDERSTANDING THE VARIOUS INFLUENCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION PRE-
SERVICE TEACHERS’ APPROPRIATION OF CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL TOOLS
FOR TEACHING READING

By

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To Adam— It had to be you, wonderful you.
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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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SERVICE TEACHERS’ APPROPRIATION OF CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL TOOLS
FOR TEACHING READING

By
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Working under an activity theory framework, the purpose of this study was to investigate
how learning experiences in special education teacher preparation programs related to teacher
candidates in the context of reading instruction for struggling readers and students with
disabilities. More specifically, this study examined the interactions among special education pre-
service teachers, their university preparation in reading, and their practicum experiences, with
the ultimate goal to understand how these interactions influenced the pre-service teachers’
appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. Investigating how pre-service teachers interact
with their various preparatory experiences is important to understanding the extent to which
teacher education makes a difference for prospective teachers.

To understand the influences on special education pre-service teacher appropriation of
conceptual and practical tools grounded theory methods were used. Six special education pre-
service teachers, who taught reading to struggling readers and students with disabilities during a
practicum experience, participated in the study. In addition to pre-service teachers, their
practicum cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and reading methods course instructors also
participated. The data sources consisted of participant interviews, videotaped classroom
observations, the Reading in Special Education (RISE) observation instrument, pre and post concept maps, and prior experiences and beliefs surveys.

Grounded within the data on pre-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and practical tools, a theory emerged from three analysis phases (i.e., open, axial, and selective coding). In summary, six pre-service teachers were all affected by influences comprising individual and social context activity systems, though the extent to which these activity systems affected individual pre-service teachers varied.

From the activity systems, four concepts emerged as chief mediators of pre-service teacher appropriation of tools. Of these concepts, the most important was opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice. Without such opportunities, pre-service teachers struggled to appropriate tools to higher levels. While opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice emerged as the core concept, three component concepts (a) personal qualities, (b) motivation for knowledge assimilation, and (c) access to knowledge also played a role in the appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. The interactions of the core concept and the component concepts worked to either facilitate or hinder tool appropriation. In the best case, the concepts worked in positive ways, thus facilitating pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools. In this instance the interaction of supportive personal attributes, a future goal as a special educator, and a positive special education practicum experience with plentiful opportunities to situate explicit, systematic reading knowledge in practice led to high levels of tool appropriation.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*, a report that condemned the American education system for not preparing students to compete in an increasingly competitive global society. In the years following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, critics of teacher education argued that the proposed failure of American schools was due to teacher education programs having no measurable impact on the production of high quality teachers, or on student achievement (Hess, 2001; Walsh, 2001). Critics further argued that a teacher’s verbal ability and subject matter knowledge were key factors in improving students’ achievement (Hess, 2001; Walsh, 2001). Hess and Walsh represent scholars who supported the deregulation of the teaching profession whereby prospective teachers would be able to enter the classroom without completing any education coursework. Supporters of deregulation believe that traditional teacher preparation programs are too lengthy because of unnecessary requirements such as courses in pedagogy and student teaching experiences; these restrictive preparation programs discourage capable and talented people from entering the classroom.

Opposing the deregulation position are supporters of teacher education, for example the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) and its spokesperson Linda Darling-Hammond. NCTAF (1996) published a report suggesting increasing the professionalization of the nation’s teachers. For example, NCTAF recommended reinventing teacher preparation and professional development and rewarding teacher knowledge and skill. In essence, the NCTAF report argued for greater teacher preparation and increased standards to enter the classroom. Thus, a longstanding debate has ensued between those who advocate for greater professionalization and regulation of the teaching profession, and those who advocate for the deregulation of teaching and the abolishment of formal teacher education programs. The
debate between deregulationists and those who support teacher preparation has centered on the question: *Does teacher education make a difference?* To answer this question, an increase in comparative studies appeared starting in the early 1990s.

**Comparative Studies**

Debates concerning teacher education and its role in preparing highly qualified teachers have lead to multiple comparative studies. In comparison studies, researchers compare the practices of teachers from various preparation programs (typically traditional vs. alternative route) in hopes of determining which programs produce more effective teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, Wyckoff, 2006; Kennedy, 1991a; Harris & Sass, 2007; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Nougaret, Scruggs, & Mastroppieri, 2005; Sindelar, Daunic, & Rennells, 2004; Wenglinsky, 2000). While the design of these studies seems straightforward (i.e. compare teachers with more preparation and teachers with less preparation) a plethora of hidden complexities makes drawing conclusive inferences virtually impossible. For example, the programs that are compared in these studies are quite heterogeneous. Specific programs within the categories of *traditional* and *alternative route* can vary dramatically, thus making it difficult to draw valid comparisons. For example, Laczko-Kerr & Berliner compared Teach for America (TFA) graduates and graduates from traditional teacher education programs in Arizona and found that graduates from traditional programs were able to secure stronger student achievement scores. The implication from this study is that teachers from traditional preparation programs are of higher quality than teachers from alternative route programs. But as Zeichner and Conklin (2005) point out, this seemingly straightforward conclusion shrouds a more complicated picture. The teachers comprising the traditional preparation group attended several different university-based programs, all of which differed in their characteristics and structure. Similarly, the TFA graduates differed in the amount of mentoring, additional training, and other supports they
received. The variation in training and preparation the teachers in this study received prevents us from knowing which program features made a difference in teacher quality.

In a similarly designed study, Nougaret et al. (2005) studied special education teachers and their classroom practices. They found that graduates of traditional teacher education programs, on a validated classroom observation instrument, outperformed alternative route teachers who had participated in six hours or less of teacher education coursework. While the results of this study indicated that special educators with more extensive preparation outperformed teachers with less extensive preparation, like the Laczko-Kerr & Berliner (2002) study, the Nougaret et al. study did not account for some important differences between and within the two groups of teachers. The sample of 40 teachers was drawn from five different Mid-Atlantic States. The university based traditional preparation programs were not uniform across states, nor were the nontraditional programs. The programs differed in number and types of required courses. Moreover, the teachers from the nontraditional programs all entered teaching with various Bachelor’s degrees, thus they had different backgrounds. The important differences between and within program types, made it difficult to understand what specific aspects of teacher preparation made a difference in the teachers’ practices.

The abovementioned complexities that accompany comparative studies have led some scholars to argue that such comparative studies are not terribly productive in studying the effects of teacher preparation (Boyd et al., 2006; Humphrey & Wechsler, 2005; Kennedy, 1991; Wenglinsky, 2000). These teacher educators believe that more informative investigations are those that examine the interactions among preparation, school context, and attributes unique to prospective teachers.
For instance, Kennedy and her colleagues at the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (1991) conducted the Teacher Education and Learning to Teach (TELT) study. The TELT study consisted of longitudinal case studies of 11 preparation sites representing various preparation approaches across the stages in a teacher’s career (for example, traditional and alternative pre-service, induction and in-service). Kennedy found that not only did the pre-service programs differ dramatically in terms of their focus, structure, and requirements, but they also differed in the types of pre-service teachers they attracted. Prospective teachers’ beliefs about teaching and their teaching ambitions played a role in their choice of academic institution. As the TELT researchers argued, the outcome of any preparation program, therefore, is a function of both program features and individual teacher candidates.

In 2000, Wenglinsky studied the relationships between institution characteristics, their programs, and teacher effectiveness as measured by teacher licensure examination scores. The results indicated that (a) private institutions outscored public institutions (b) universities outperformed colleges, (c) programs with large numbers of traditional students did better than programs with fewer numbers of such students, and (d) institutions with diverse faculties performed better than programs with predominantly white faculty members. Chief among Wenglinksky’s implications was that teacher preparation programs could not be uniformly labeled effective or ineffective. The effectiveness of a particular program was dependent on its various characteristics.

Five years later, Humphrey and Wechsler (2005) studied prospective teachers from seven alternative certification programs and found that teacher development was not dependent solely on participation in a specific program; rather teacher development was a function of the interaction of preparation program, school context, and the candidates’ prior experiences. Like
Kennedy (1991), Humphrey and Wechsler found that program outcomes were a function of program characteristics and design and the program participants.

Finally, the Pathways to Teaching study conducted by Boyd et al. (2006) supports the idea that there is more variability in teacher effectiveness within preparation programs than there is between preparation programs. Boyd and his colleagues studied graduates of various pathways to teaching in New York City. They found that though graduates of traditional preparation programs secured higher student achievement scores in the first few years of teaching, these differences were often small and dissipated after five years. Differences in effectiveness were far greater within pathways than between them.

The studies by Kennedy (1991), Wenglinsky (2000), Humphrey and Wechsler (2005), and Boyd and his colleagues (2006) demonstrate that though comparative studies can inform researchers of some general differences in various preparatory routes to the classroom, they fail to provide an in-depth look at the relationships between participants and programs. According to Kennedy, “without such an in-depth examination, findings from comparison studies cannot contribute much to reform efforts in teacher education” (Kennedy, 1991a p. 12). Furthermore, Boyd et al. (2006) and Humphrey and Wechsler (2005) asserted that basic comparisons at the program level are not particularly useful, because participants experience programs so differently. The participants’ backgrounds, school contexts, and program features all interacted so that despite being in the same program, each participant had a unique experience. According to Humphrey and Wechsler, a more beneficial design would be in-depth case studies at the participant level.

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) panel on research and teacher education supports the need for more in-depth types of studies of preparation programs and
teacher learning. Representing the position of the AERA, Zeichner and Conklin (2005) posit that the complexities of teacher education programs need to be acknowledged by studying the program components, their settings, and their participants. Particularly useful are studies that: (a) are situated in relevant theoretical frameworks, (b) connect teacher characteristics, teacher learning, teacher practices, and teacher education, in specific disciplines, (c) examine teacher education students and the instructional contexts of teacher education, and (d) examine teacher education curriculum, instructional practices, and organizational arrangements (Zeichner, 2005). Amassing a deeper, more comprehensive body of knowledge on how teachers learn should better inform our policy decisions about how to craft teacher education.

The position taken by the AERA consensus panel is supported in the research on teacher learning. The research on teacher learning calls for a sophisticated model that can account for teachers’ prior experiences, beliefs, knowledge, and practice (Borko & Putnam, 1996; Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Humphrey & Wechsler, 2005). In conceptualizing teacher learning it is important to understand how individuals interact with teacher education experiences, for example how they interpret field experiences and methods courses and how they grow professionally by interacting with other professionals (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). Such a complex conceptualization of teacher learning will help teacher educators capture a more accurate picture of how prospective teachers learn. This view of teacher learning particularly is relevant for special education teacher education, as the intricacies involved in teaching students with disabilities create a more complicated context for teacher learning. For example, special education pre-service teachers must be (a) prepared to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, (b) work in a variety of classroom contexts and service delivery models, and (c) work collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders including administrators, general educators, paraprofessionals, and
parents. Furthermore, by studying teacher education programs carefully, we can provide answers to many questions about the degree to which teacher education programs can make a difference in the preparation of prospective teachers and the ways in which programs can do so.

**Conceptual Framework: Activity Theory**

A framework for research on teacher learning that holds much promise for studying the interactions among pre-service teacher experiences, knowledge, and practice is activity theory. Activity theory “focuses on the interaction of human activity and consciousness within its relevant environmental context” (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999 p. 62). Activity theory started as a Soviet concept with strong ties to Vygotsky and his theory of mediation until a rebirth in interest occurred in the 1970s (Daniels, 2001; Graue, 1993). Activity theory has been applied to the field of technology, especially human-computer interactions (Nardi, 1996). Additionally, in the 1980s several studies in the field of education analyzed cultural resources and constraints available in a setting that influence activity (Graue, 1993). For example, Weisner, Gallimore, and Jordan (1988) investigated sibling care arrangements and how they apply to school interactions. More recently, scholars have argued that activity theory is an appropriate framework for examining teacher learning because according to activity theorists, context affects learning and a person’s actions affect the context (Fairbanks & Meritt, 1998). Thus, activity theory accounts for individual influences on learning such as prior beliefs, knowledge, and experiences, as well as the various contexts in which teacher learning is situated, for example, contexts like methods courses and internships. Activity theory also rejects the one-way transmission of knowledge model and instead values how the learner’s actions influence the learning context and vice versa.
In 1999, Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia adapted the tenets of activity theory to the field of education. The activity theory framework developed by Grossman et al. served as a foundation for the conceptual framework guiding this investigation of teacher learning and tool appropriation. It should be noted that the model relating teacher learning and activity theory can be applied to both in-service and pre-service teachers, but each population has its own set of opportunities, challenges, and contexts. Studying both in-service and pre-service teachers is beyond the scope of this paper, thus this investigation focused exclusively on pre-service teacher learning. The conceptual framework that guided this work is presented in the next section.

Using the elements of activity theory as indicated by Grossman et al. (1999), the researcher developed a conceptual framework to guide the study (see Figure 1-1). Pre-service teachers, typified by their individual characteristics, enter the social contexts of pre-service teacher learning. In other words, pre-service teachers, armed with their prior experiences and beliefs, knowledge, personal attributes, and personal goals and expectations enter the teacher preparation program. As indicated by Fairbanks and Meritt (1998), the individual’s actions affect the pre-service teacher preparation context, which in turn affects learning. Thus, according to activity theory, it is the interaction of the individual with the teacher preparation context that translates into learning. In this study, the teacher education program’s activity systems consist of university coursework, field placements, and practicum experience. These activity systems overlap because they exist as connected relationships rather than discrete experiences (Grossman et al.). Each activity system has a specific set of objectives, resources, and structural features.

From each of these activity systems, pre-service teachers acquire pedagogical tools, categorized as either conceptual or practical. Teachers use pedagogical tools “to guide and implement their classroom practice” (Grossman et al., p. 13). Conceptual tools are broad
principles and ideas that help guide teachers’ decision making. Examples of conceptual tools include learning theories such as reader-response theory or scaffolding. Practical tools, on the other hand, are specific skills and strategies with immediate utility such as journal writing, use of textbooks, or daily oral language.
Figure 1-1. Conceptual framework
The pre-service teachers then appropriate, or adopt, certain practical and conceptual tools. The extent to which they adopt a pedagogical tool (either practical or conceptual) depends on the level of agreement and congruence between the influences of the individual, the teacher educators, and the context (Grossman et al., 1999). Additionally, appropriation of tools is dependent on learners’ acquisition of the content knowledge, or subject matter, needed to support various tools. For example, a teacher who lacked content knowledge of letter sounds would have difficulty implementing practical tools like blending or segmenting phonemes effectively.

Grossman et al. identified five levels of appropriation. The lowest level is lack of appropriation whereby a pre-service teacher does not adopt a tool. The lack of appropriation may result because the pre-service teacher lacks sufficient knowledge of the tool, because the pre-service teacher’s beliefs do not support the tool, or because a context is not conducive to utilizing the tool. The second level is appropriating a label. In this level, the pre-service teacher learns the name of a tool but does not know any of the tool’s features (Grossman et al.). The third level is appropriating surface features in which the pre-service teacher knows some of the tool’s features but does not know how those features work together or fit with content knowledge to create a holistic picture of the tool (Grossman et al.). The fourth level is appropriating conceptual underpinnings. In this level, the pre-service teacher understands the theory behind the tool (Grossman et al.). The final level is achieving mastery in which the pre-service teacher possesses the skills to use a tool effectively (Grossman et al.). To reach mastery may require years of practice. Pre-service teachers engaging in a practicum teaching experience will probably not have enough time to reach mastery levels.

Depending on characteristics of the individual pre-service teacher and her learning contexts, pedagogical tools will be appropriated at different levels. Tools that have been
appropriated at higher levels become the accessible practices a pre-service teacher can draw from during her teaching (Grossman et al.). Another way to think about the formation of accessible practices is that the appropriated tools come together to form a pre-service teacher’s tool kit of instructional practices. The pre-service teacher’s practice is based on the number of available tools and the level to which each one has been appropriated. For example a pre-service teacher will use a practical tool such as morning meeting if she believes in it, if she has sufficient knowledge to support it, and if she is placed in a context that is conducive to implementing it.

**Statement of the Problem**

Using activity theory as a framework, it is evident that there are many factors that influence teacher learning as it relates to the knowledge and experiences necessary for teachers to enact practice. Special educators face additional challenges and complexities when instructing students with disabilities. For example, special educators must apply their broad-based teacher training to a multitude of student needs, academic content areas, and instructional levels as well as assuming multiple roles within their schools (Blanton et al., 2003), thus it might be difficult for them to apply tools, as they must weave together their knowledge of the students, curriculum, and specific interventions with their general education colleagues. Furthermore, limited numbers of special education field placements and internships may result in special education pre-service teachers not having quality contexts in which to enact their knowledge of teaching students with disabilities. Because of the differences between general educators and special educators, researchers in the field of special education need to conduct studies that include the complexities known to characterize special education. It is critical, therefore, that special education teacher education researchers devote time and energy to investigations aimed at unraveling the complex connections between special education pre-service teacher preparation, knowledge, and practice (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). In pursuing these types of inquiries, researchers can add to the
growing body of empirical research in special education teacher education that is becoming increasingly important for crafting sound educational policies that apply directly to students with disabilities.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study, therefore, will be to investigate how learning experiences in special education teacher preparation programs relate to teacher candidates in the context of reading instruction. It is important to note that the tenets of activity theory, as they have been adapted to pre-service teacher learning, could be applied to any content area. Because of the NCLB Act’s specific emphasis on improving the reading achievement of students, the present investigation is limited to the area of reading instruction.

This study examines the interactions among special education pre-service teachers, their reading preparation, and their enactment of reading instruction. Using tenets of activity theory, this study will investigate the following questions: (a) what role do individual characteristics of learners, namely their incoming prior beliefs, experiences, knowledge, expectations, and concerns play in the appropriation of conceptual and practical tools, (b) what are the influences on special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools during classroom reading instruction and (c) how do activity settings and their social structures mediate special education pre-service teachers’ acquisition of knowledge related to reading instruction? According to the guidelines suggested by Zeichner (2005), investigative questions such as these are valuable because they examine teacher education students and teacher education contexts and curricula, all situated in the relevant theoretical framework of activity theory and in the specific content area of reading.

**Definition of Terms**

- **KNOWLEDGE.** Knowledge in this study refers to content knowledge that supports
conceptual and practical tools for reading instruction for students with mild disabilities, specifically learning disabilities (LD).

- **Appropriation.** Appropriation “refers to the process through which a person adopts the pedagogical tools available for use in particular social environments and through this process internalizes ways of thinking endemic to specific cultural practices” (Grossman et al., 1999, 15).

- **Pedagogical Tools.** Pedagogical tools refer to “the tools through which teachers construct and carry out teaching practices” (Grossman et al., 1999, 13). There are two types of pedagogical tools: conceptual and practical.

- **Conceptual Tools.** Conceptual tools refer to principles, ideas, and frameworks about teaching that guide teachers’ decisions, such as theoretical principles like constructivism, student motivation, and instructional scaffolding (Grossman et al., 1999).

- **Practical Tools.** Practical tools refer to practices and strategies that serve as direct and immediate resources for teachers (Grossman et al., 1999). Textbooks, unit plans, behavior charts, and journal writing prompts are all examples of practical tools.

**Delimitations of the Study**

The present study participants were special education Master’s level students at a large Research Intensive University. Thus, participant pre-service teachers do not represent the general population of special education pre-service teachers, nor do the reading course instructors represent the general population of teacher educators. Additionally, the schools in which the pre-service teachers completed their practicum placements were limited to a midsize school district in North Central Florida. Finally, the participants were chosen based on selection criteria and their willingness to participate. With a limited sample size, it was inevitable that some pre-service teachers would be excluded from the study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

To be successful equipping prospective teachers with the beliefs, knowledge, and practices that will ultimately raise student achievement, it seems that preparation programs will have to be able to account for and accommodate the needs of individual pre-service teachers. By accommodating pre-service teachers’ individual needs, the hope is that preparation programs and the activity systems that comprise these programs will help prospective teachers reach the highest levels of appropriation of tools. An important question for teacher educators, therefore, is what would either facilitate or stand in the way of higher levels of tool appropriation? What personal attributes of pre-service teachers would facilitate the appropriation of tools? What prior beliefs and understandings about teaching and students either support or hinder more advanced tool appropriation? Finally, what types of activities and experiences within the larger preparation activity system further the appropriation of conceptual and practical tools?

The purpose of this literature review is to accumulate evidence that will shed light on the aforementioned questions. According to Grossman et al. (1999), to understand how and why pre-service teachers appropriate tools at different levels, it is critical to examine two broad concepts, the individual characteristics of the learner and the social context of learning. Within each of these broad concepts are factors that can either hinder or facilitate tool appropriation. This chapter reviews the literature in these two areas by highlighting research that answers the following questions: (a) what characteristics of individual learners facilitate knowledge acquisition and tool appropriation and (b) how should the social contexts that mediate pre-service teacher learning be structured so as to maximize the acquisition of knowledge and appropriation of tools? Before answering these questions, however, this chapter provides a brief
review of Grossman et al.’s five levels of appropriation. Next, the research on characteristics of individuals will be reviewed. The third section focuses on social contexts of pre-service teacher learning. Following the reviews of these areas, this chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary that links the existing literature with the research questions this study addresses.

Although the research goal of the present study is to examine the literature on pre-service special education teacher education in the content area of reading, few such studies exist. The majority of pre-service special education teacher education studies examine (a) pre-service teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about inclusive education and students with disabilities and (b) the effects of collaborative programs between general and special education (Pugach, 2005). Due to a limited number of investigations situated in the joint areas of special education and reading, this literature review will focus on the research on pre-service teacher preparation in general education and wherever possible, highlight relevant research from the fields of special education and reading.

**Five Levels of Appropriation**

Figure 2-1 depicts the five levels of appropriation according to Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999). The extent to which tools are appropriated “depends on the congruence of a learner’s values, prior experiences, and goals with those of more experiences or powerful members of a culture, such as school-based teachers or university faculty” (Grossman et al., p. 15).
In circumstances of high congruence between pre-service teachers, practicum cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and university instructors, it is assumed appropriation will reach higher levels.

The lowest level is lack of appropriation. At this level tools are not adopted (Grossman et al., 1999). There are a variety of explanations for why a pre-service teacher might not appropriate a particular tool. A pre-service teacher’s personal beliefs, prior experiences, or cultural background could be at odds with the tool, thus resulting in the pre-service teacher rejecting it. For example, a pre-service teacher who subscribes to a teacher-directed teaching style might reject knowledge and tools related to cooperative learning. A different example
would be when pre-service teachers are being taught new knowledge that is too abstract or
difficult for them.

Grossman et al. (1999) calls the second level *appropriating a label*. This level occurs
when a tool is appropriated only at a superficial level. For example, if a pre-service teacher
knows that oral reading fluency involves students reading out loud but does not know specific
practices to improve oral reading fluency or why it is important. The next level is *appropriating
surface features*, in which a learner knows some features of a tool but is missing a broader
conceptual understanding of how all the features work together to create a complete tool
(Grossman et al.). Knowing that direct instruction includes both guided and independent practice
but not knowing how to determine when students are ready to move from guided to independent
practice is an example of someone who has reached the level of *appropriating surface features*.

The two highest levels of appropriation are *appropriating conceptual underpinnings* and
*achieving mastery*. Pre-service teachers who have appropriated the conceptual underpinnings of
a tool have acquired a deep working knowledge about the tool, thus allowing them to use the tool
in a variety of situations. For example, pre-service teachers who have a deep understanding of
curricula and can draw from the strengths of each in various teaching situations have
appropriated conceptual underpinnings. Grossman et al. (1999) cautioned that pre-service
teachers can achieve this level but still be unable to translate the knowledge into practice. For
example a pre-service teacher might accept new tools and knowledge only to be discouraged
from using them during the practicum experience. A pre-service teacher might learn about the
importance of providing students with disabilities accommodations in the general education
classroom but then be given a practicum placement in which students with disabilities are not
included in the general education classroom. In this instance, the pre-service teacher has a deep
understanding of accommodations but cannot enact this knowledge during the practicum experience.

The highest level is achieving mastery. This level is reached when pre-service teachers can eventually use a tool efficiently and effectively in their own classrooms. This level extends beyond the pre-service preparation context and may take several years to achieve. It will not, therefore, be possible to include the level of mastery in this study.

**Characteristics of Individual Learners**

As mentioned previously, under activity theory, learning (or lack of learning) occurs as a result of the influences of the individual and social learning contexts. In this section, literature with respect to pre-service teachers’ characteristics will be reviewed. These characteristics include pre-service teachers’ prior experiences with schooling, their incoming knowledge and beliefs about content, their personal attributes, and finally their personal goals and expectations. Research pertaining to each of these characteristics follows.

**Prior Experiences with Schooling**

As pre-service teachers enter the preparation context, they bring with them their prior beliefs, knowledge, and experiences as students during their own K-12 school. Lortie (1975) refers to pre-service teachers’ prior knowledge about education as “the apprenticeship of observation.” Their recollections from their own education backgrounds have a powerful effect on their learning and knowledge in the preparation context and on their practice and decisions as future professionals (Calderhead & Robson, 1991).

The literature in general education indicates that pre-service teachers often enter preparation programs believing they are experts in teaching because of their prior experiences as students (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). Bullough and Stokes (1994) examined pre-service teachers’ personal metaphors about teaching and found that
they were “unrealistically optimistic about their future teaching performance” (p.211).

Furthermore, they lacked sophisticated ideas about teaching, learning, and students. Harlin (1999) found that pre-service teachers enter preparation programs with a traditional view of teaching in which they “dispense” information (Brookhart & Freeman). They subscribe to a transmission view of teaching whereby teachers are the authority on knowledge and students are passive recipients of information; thus, they see learning as simple and mechanistic and acquired through listening, reading, and memorizing (Richardson, 1996). Their prior experiences with good teaching do not result in a deep understanding of the complexity of teaching because the knowledge, skills, and decisions characteristic of good teaching are often invisible (Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001). Thus, they view teaching as easy (Lortie, 1975), a view that is problematic for any prospective teacher, but particularly problematic in special education where deep-seated knowledge of curriculum, evidenced-based strategies, and student needs is necessary to provide quality instruction to students with disabilities (Stough & Palmer, 2003) or other struggling learners (Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2000).

It is important to note that for most special education pre-service teachers, the role of prior experiences is different. Pre-service teachers who enroll in special education preparation programs were most likely general education students during their K-12 schooling, thus they may have few personal experiences with special education (Pugach, 2005). Special education teacher educators should be aware that pre-service teachers’ limited prior exposure to special education might result in incomplete and/or inaccurate knowledge and beliefs about special education. Or, the opposite could be true. Pre-service teachers’ beliefs about special education may be less solidified and more likely to be influenced by special education preparation programs.
From the literature on pre-service teachers’ prior experiences with schooling, it seems possible that these experiences with schooling could initially derail their tool appropriation for teaching special education. For one thing, pre-service teachers view teaching as simple and could have difficulty, therefore, acquiring and enacting challenging pedagogical content knowledge such as explicit and systematic phonics instruction. Pre-service teachers’ traditional views of teaching could prove problematic if they are enrolled in preparation programs that emphasize constructivist, student-directed learning styles because student-directed learning styles are at odds with the traditional instructional style with which they are most familiar. Finally, entering preparation programs already feeling like experts could make them resistant to constructive criticism from university instructors, field supervisors, and cooperating teachers. Of course, without an in-depth investigation, the ways in which any of these prior experiences with schooling will truly influence individual pre-service teacher’s appropriation of tools is mere speculation.

**Incoming Knowledge and Beliefs about Content**

When providing reading instruction for students with disabilities, there are two broad content areas from which pre-service teachers would need to draw knowledge. One area is knowledge about students with disabilities and their learning and behavioral needs. The other is knowledge about reading instruction. The amount of incoming knowledge pre-service teachers possess about these areas and the alignment of their incoming beliefs with content presented in the preparation context will presumably affect their knowledge appropriation (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992). In other words, we know that their beliefs act as powerful filters during their coursework (Hollingsworth, 1989; Pajares, 1992). Additionally, pre-service teachers’ prior knowledge of the population they intend to teach and their prior knowledge of appropriate instructional practices for this population can also filter what they learn. For instance, some pre-
service teachers might not have an understanding that students can have learning disabilities (LD) in conjunction with above average intelligence. This lack of knowledge and understanding of dual exceptionalities could interfere with incoming knowledge about the high academic expectations that should be placed on gifted students with LD and the necessity for these students to be placed in gifted or enrichment classes.

In the following sections, the researcher reviewed the literature on pre-service teachers’ incoming knowledge and beliefs about content related to reading and disability. Although there is a substantial amount of research on pre-service teachers’ beliefs about content knowledge, it is interesting to note that after reviewing the literature on teacher candidates, Brookhart and Freeman found that entering teacher candidates place more emphasis on nurturing aspects of teaching rather than academic aspects. Pre-service teachers’ preoccupation with nurturing students could interfere with their acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge because they are more concerned with the affective aspects of teaching rather than the academic ones.

**Incoming knowledge and beliefs about reading and struggling readers.** As pre-service teachers enter teacher preparation programs, what knowledge and prior beliefs about reading do they bring with them? Included in this section are five studies that investigated this question. Wham (1993) examined pre-service teachers’ theoretical orientations to reading, by asking 35 pre-service teachers and their cooperating teachers to complete DeFord’s (1985) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP). DeFord identified three theoretical orientations teachers may draw upon in their instructional practices. One emphasizes sound/symbol relationships. The second orientation is based on specific skills, such as using context clues, root words, affixes, and acquiring sight words. The last orientation is a holistic approach. The pre-service teachers completed the TORP before their commencing their undergraduate coursework. At that time,
23% scored in the phonics range and 77% percent scored in the skills range. None of the pre-service teachers scored in the whole language range. The results of this study could bode well for special education teacher preparation programs that emphasize the importance of an explicit, systematic phonics-based reading program that includes strategies to help students with disabilities decode unknown words. Almost a fourth of the pre-service teachers entered the preparation program already subscribing to a phonics-based approach to reading and three-fourths believed in a skills-based approach that provides students with strategies to tackle unknown words.

Investigating teacher perceptions about reading, Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, and Chard (2001) assessed 252 pre-service teachers and 286 in-service teachers on two measures, the Teacher Perceptions toward Early Reading and Spelling (TPERS) and the Teacher Knowledge Assessment: Structure of Language (TKA:SL). The TPERS measured teachers’ perceptions towards explicit and implicit instruction, and the TKA:SL measured teachers’ knowledge of reading. Specifically, the researchers measured teachers’ phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge. The data were analyzed according to the teachers’ experience, pre-service or in-service and according to their positions, general education or special education. Bos et al. found that overall, the teachers lacked sufficient knowledge about reading instruction. The pre-service teachers answered 53% of the knowledge questions correctly and the in-service teachers answered 60% of the questions correctly. In terms of perceptions towards reading instruction, all teachers rated explicit instruction higher than implicit instruction, though the in-service teachers’ ratings were higher than the pre-service teachers. The special educators ranked explicit instruction higher than the general educators. Like Wham’s (1993) study, this study indicated that pre-service teachers are likely to enter their preparation programs with positive perceptions.
of explicit instruction, though their lack of knowledge about phonemic awareness and phonics could prove to be a barrier to higher levels of appropriation regarding reading tools and knowledge.

Cheek, Steward, Launey, and Borgia (2004) also conducted a study on pre-service teacher perceptions. In this study, the researchers gave The Teachers’ Reading Aptitude “Voice” Scale (TRAVS) to 153 pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers responded to a series of reading belief statements designed to connect reading beliefs to teaching styles. The assessment had four teaching style categories: experiential, instructional, relational, and provisional. Experiential, the ability to plan for meaningful experiences for students and linking instruction to their background knowledge was the style valued most. Interestingly, they value this experiential teaching style most, but it is at odds with their tendency to gravitate towards a transmission mode of instruction. These findings may reflect problems associated with examining entering beliefs without examining how they evolve in practice.

A study that provided insight into teachers’ perceptions about struggling readers was conducted by Schell and Rouch (1988). The researchers administered a semantic differential survey consisting of bipolar adjectives to a group of pre-service and in-service teachers. For example, one pair of bipolar adjectives was lazy and diligent. The participants used the adjectives to rate their feelings about students in low reading groups. After running an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) the researchers found that pre-service teachers perceived the low reading group more negatively compared to in-service teachers. Pre-service teachers perceived the low reading group more negatively compared to the high reading group. The pre-service teachers’ poor perceptions of students in low reading groups, groups most likely composed of struggling
readers and students with disabilities, could influence their knowledge appropriation of reading instruction for students with disabilities negatively.

Nierstheimer, Hopkins, and Dillon (2000) studied what pre-service teachers believed should be done to help struggling readers. In this study, 67 pre-service teachers completed questionnaires and interviews. Nierstheimer et al. found that the pre-service teachers believed that children struggle with reading because of their home situations and because their parents did not read to them. They also felt struggling readers had inadequate reading strategies at their disposal. Finally, the data indicated that pre-service teachers assigned the responsibility of reading instruction to others including parents, reading specialists, and tutors. This finding is particularly concerning for special education pre-service teachers, as schools often charge special educators with the responsibility of teaching struggling readers.

Incoming knowledge and beliefs about students with disabilities. The majority of studies on teachers’ beliefs and attitudes concerning students with disabilities have focused on in-service general educators and (a) their beliefs and attitudes about inclusive education and students with disabilities, (b) the effects of their pre-service preparation, and (c) the relationship between diversity and disability (Pugach, 2005). Fewer studies have examined pre-service teachers’ incoming beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about students with disabilities. This section provides information on four such studies.

In 1999, Hutchinson and Martin, conducted a qualitative study analyzing pre-service teachers’ responses to dilemma cases about students with disabilities. The results indicated that the pre-service teachers lacked knowledge for helping students with disabilities, especially those who exhibit behavior problems. Additionally, the pre-service teachers’ beliefs indicated a lack of commitment to the most challenging students.
Two years later, Taylor and Sobel (2001) conducted a survey study of 129 pre-service teachers’ beliefs about disability. These researchers found that the pre-service teachers held high expectations for students with disabilities. Moreover, the pre-service teachers believed it was their responsibility to provide an equitable education to all students. But when it came to their knowledge about how to help students with disabilities, the pre-service teachers admitted they lacked knowledge about how to adapt instruction and create classrooms where students with disabilities would succeed. Similarly, Cook (2002) surveyed 181 pre-service teachers about inclusive education and found that they rated their ability to teach students with learning disabilities higher than other disability groups, but that they still questioned their knowledge and preparedness to teach in an inclusive setting.

Finally, in the most recent study, conducted by Garriott, Miller, and Snyder (2003), 239 pre-service teachers were surveyed about their beliefs concerning inclusive education and students with mild disabilities. The majority of the participants (55%) believed that students with mild disabilities should receive instruction in general education classrooms. Forty-five percent of the participants, however, believed students with mild disabilities should be placed in special education classrooms because these students would receive more individualized attention in such classrooms. Like the participants in the Taylor and Sobel (2001) and Cook (2002) studies, the pre-service teachers in the Garriott, Miller, and Snyder (2003) study expressed concerns for their lack of knowledge and skills to teach students with disabilities.

The studies on pre-service teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about students with disabilities seem to provide mixed findings. The one qualitative study provided evidence that pre-service teachers hold negative beliefs about students with disabilities and inclusive education (Hutchinson & Martin, 1999), while two of the survey studies indicated that pre-service teachers’
hold positive beliefs about students with disabilities and their placement in general education classrooms. In the third survey study, the participants were nearly evenly split in their beliefs about students with disabilities being educated in general education versus special education classrooms. It is important to note that these “one shot” surveys did not follow pre-service teachers throughout their preparation programs or into their future classrooms. We have little understanding, therefore, of how their beliefs were shaped over time or how these beliefs influenced classroom practice. One finding, however, was consistent across all four studies. The pre-service teachers readily admitted that they lacked the requisite knowledge and skills to successfully teach students with disabilities.

Relating the findings from these studies back to the activity theory conceptual framework, pre-service teachers’ incoming beliefs and knowledge about students with disabilities could work to influence their appropriation of tools in various ways. For pre-service teachers who enter preparation programs with positive beliefs about students with disabilities in inclusive education, it seems they will be met with more congruence during their special education training. The opposite could be true for pre-service teachers who hold negative views but who are enrolled in collaborative preparation programs or programs emphasizing inclusionary practices. The fact that the pre-service teachers realize they lack sufficient knowledge to help students with disabilities could facilitate their tool appropriation about special education. The pre-service teachers might pay particular attention to this information because they are lacking it and know it is critical to their success as teachers.

In this section, literature on individual characteristics of pre-service teacher learners has been presented. Up to this point, the research presented has focused on pre-service teachers’ prior experiences with schooling and their prior beliefs and knowledge about the content areas of
reading and disability. The final two areas of research that are classified under individual characteristics of learners are personal attributes and personal goals and expectations. This section concludes with a review of these two areas.

**Personal Attributes**

What are the personal attributes of pre-service teachers who are successful in their knowledge acquisition and completion of a preparation program? Research supports two attributes, reflection and self-efficacy, as being important factors in pre-service teachers’ success. In the following section, research on reflection and self-efficacy is presented.

**Reflection.** Reflection can be thought of as a deliberative cognitive process involving sequences of related ideas aimed at solving a practical problem (Hatton & Smith, 1995). In other words, reflection is the stepping back and thinking about the past or it is the evaluation of a problem with the hopes of developing a solution. Research has shown that the personal attribute of reflection influences pre-service teacher learning and success. Richards and Morse (2002) conducted a case study of a pre-service teacher, Alisha, a successful pre-service teacher who consistently attained high achievement in her preparation program. At the time of the study, Alisha was supporting the literacy needs of students with disabilities during her student teaching experience. Richards and Morse characterized Alisha as compassionate, calm, composed, positive, and reflective. Alisha’s personal attributes, especially her reflectiveness, influenced her practice in positive ways. By thinking about her students and their individual needs, Alisha was successful differentiating her instruction and providing her students with literacy tasks commensurate with their ability. Two years later, Garmon (2004) conducted a case study of a pre-service teacher who successfully acquired multicultural awareness and sensitivity towards student diversity. Like Richards and Morse, Garmon found that the student’s open disposition and self-reflectiveness were among the key factors influencing her success. Unlike Richards and
Morse, however, Garmon did not tie the participants’ personal attributes to her classroom practices.

**Self-efficacy.** A second important attribute characterizing successful pre-service teachers is self-efficacy. According to Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998), self-efficacy is a term for a teacher’s judgment of his or her capabilities to bring out desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among the most challenging students. The concept of self-efficacy in pre-service teacher education is important, because as Bandura (1995) pointed out, people’s beliefs about their abilities will determine how much effort they put forth in situations and how resilient and persistent they will be in the face of obstacles.

One potential obstacle for pre-service teachers is their student teaching, a time when their self-efficacy has been shown to decline (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990). As Hoy and Woolfolk point out, the challenges of assuming teacher roles and responsibilities could disrupt pre-service teachers’ prior beliefs that teaching is easy, thus making them feel less capable. Under activity theory, it seems pre-service teachers who are more self-efficacious will reach higher levels of knowledge appropriation because they will persevere despite challenging coursework or practicum teaching placements.

In 1980, Mundel-Atherstone examined the psychological characteristics of pre-service teachers who received high ratings during their student teaching experience. These pre-service teachers’ personality profiles indicated they were poised and self-assured (self-efficacious), but the ways in which these profiles affected the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools and knowledge was never discussed. Alisha from the Richards and Morse (2002) study also was found to have a high sense of self-efficacy. She had high expectations for her students and a high internal locus of control, meaning she felt she had the ability to influence her students’
achievement. In another study, pre-service teachers who exhibited high levels of self-efficacy were rated highly on lesson presentation, questioning, and classroom management by their cooperating teachers (Saklofske, Michaluk, & Randhawa, 1988). Poulu (2007) investigated contributory factors to pre-service teachers developing self-efficacy. Poulu found that sources of pre-service teachers’ self-efficacious beliefs included a positive stance, enthusiasm, the ability to perceive students’ needs, and the ability to effectively organize instructional activities.

**Personal Goals, Expectations, and Concerns**

The final individual characteristic is personal goals, expectations, and concerns. As Grossman et al. (1999) pointed out, the reasons prospective teachers enter teacher education programs will likely mediate their learning. Additionally, there is much research on teacher development that shows teachers, both in-service and pre-service, proceed through a series of phases that regulate their concerns and anxieties about teaching. In the following sections, research on pre-service teachers’ goals and expectations and their concerns is reviewed.

**Personal goals and expectations.** Several researchers have examined how pre-service teachers’ personal goals influence their preparation experiences. Grossman et al., (1999) found that teacher candidates’ varying reasons for entering the teaching profession mediated their learning. In this study, one pre-service teacher wanted to make instruction fun, while another wanted to provide students with the necessary tools for literacy. These differing goals “led to different degrees of value on pragmatic literacy skills and their role in the language arts curriculum” (p. 25). In their review of 44 studies on teacher candidates, Brookhart & Freeman (1992) found the most cited reasons pre-service teachers gave for entering the teaching profession were to work with children, satisfy altruistic, service-oriented goals, and because they were driven by intrinsic sources of motivation. Although Brookhart & Freeman examined
teacher candidates’ motivations, their review did not explicate how or whether these motivations affected their preparation experiences. A different study, however, did link pre-service teachers’ goals with their preparation experiences. Sudzina and Knowles (1993) searched for explanations for why some pre-service teachers “fail” before completing their preparation programs. They found that pre-service teachers who entered their student teaching with unrealistic goals experienced many struggles. One pre-service teacher in their study felt his job was to “save the kids and the world” (Sudzina & Knowles, p. 259). This participant’s unrealistic goal proved to be his undoing because he challenged his cooperating teacher’s authority and her actions under the pretense of doing what he considered to be the “morally correct thing” (p. 259).

In addition to their personal goals and motivations for entering teaching, pre-service teachers’ expectations concerning their preparation program can influence their learning. Pre-service teachers expect that field placements and practical teaching experiences will be the most beneficial (Book & Freeman, 1986), perhaps resulting in their rejection of incoming knowledge from their university coursework, especially if the pre-service teachers cannot discern any direct practical applications. Sudzina and Knowles (1993) found that pre-service teachers who did not succeed in their preparation programs often failed to allocate sufficient planning time. These students underestimated the difficulties involved with planning for and delivering instruction for a classroom of students. Their lack of planning and organization often resulted in their practice being disjointed and unresponsive to student needs.

Concerns. Over the past 40 years, considerable research has accumulated supporting the notion that teachers’ concerns evolve through a series of stages (Berliner, 1988; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Fuller, 1969; Kagan, 1992; Pigge & Marso, 1987, 1990). This research has shown that during their preparation programs, the extent to which pre-service teachers value
various kinds of knowledge is largely dependent on their teaching concerns; thus, knowledge that is found to be useful in addressing their concerns and anxieties is appreciated more and given more attention. This line of research is important to understanding how pre-service teachers appropriate tools and knowledge because it can possibly provide explanations for why certain types of knowledge are more easily appropriated compared to others.

In a seminal article, Fuller (1969) outlined a three-phase developmental conceptualization of teacher concerns. Under the Fuller model, the three phases are (a) pre-teaching, (b) early teaching, and (c) late teaching. The pre-teaching phase occurs before the pre-service teacher has had any teaching experiences. At this time, the pre-service teachers’ concerns are vague, consisting of generalized apprehension and anxiety. Fuller referred to the pre-teaching phase as a time of non-concern. Concerns observed during the early teaching phase focus primarily on the self. Pre-service teachers worry about their adequacy as a teacher, their ability to manage students, and their evaluation by supervisors. In the final phase, concerns shift from the self to the students. Here teachers are more concerned with their impact on their students. It should be noted, that as with many stage or phase theories, for example, Kubler-Ross’s (1969) Five Stages of Grief, individuals do not proceed through phases in a regimented fashion. How and whether an individual proceeds through all the phases is largely dependent on the individual and his or her personal circumstances. Pigge and Marso (1990) corroborated the Fuller (1969) model in a longitudinal study of 153 pre-service teachers. Pigge and Marso found that as pre-service teachers progressed through their preparation program, their concerns shifted from those of self-survival to those centering on the task of teaching and being an effective teacher.

The research related to pre-service teachers’ personal goals, expectations, and concerns plays an important role when examining the influence of pre-service teachers’ individual
characteristics on their learning. The literature reviewed in the previous section showed that pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools could be influenced by (a) their reasons for entering the field of education, (b) their expectations of their preparation program, (c) their expectations of teaching itself, and (d) their personal concerns and anxieties about teaching. Of critical importance to teacher educators is the research that indicated pre-service teachers enter preparation programs with naïve expectations about how difficult teaching is and how much planning is necessary for delivering effective instruction. For special education pre-service teachers, this seems particularly important, as these teachers will need to invest much time planning so they are able to provide targeted instruction for students with disabilities. Also important is the research that showed pre-service teachers place most value on practical experiences, such as field experiences and student teaching. Finally, according to the Fuller (1969) model, before pre-service teachers will be ready to devote attention to securing high student achievement, they need to rectify their concerns with their own adequacies as developing teachers.

According to the conceptual framework guiding this study, individual characteristics of learners comprise just one source of influence on pre-service teacher learning. The other potential sources of influence are the social contexts of pre-service teacher learning, namely, the various components of teacher preparation programs. The remainder of this literature review will present research on the social contexts of pre-service teacher learning and the features of these contexts that either support or hinder pedagogical tool appropriation.

**Social Contexts of Pre-service Teacher Learning**

Armed with their prior experiences, knowledge, beliefs, expectations, and concerns, pre-service teachers enter the social contexts of pre-service teacher learning. Within preparation programs, pre-service teachers are exposed to a variety of learning contexts and pedagogies. In
thinking about how pre-service teachers acquire knowledge and practice, it is important to examine what the research says about features of teacher preparation programs that hinder or support tool appropriation. In particular, what are the characteristics of programs that have proven successful in preparing pre-service teachers?

Several studies have shown that effective preparation programs have a shared vision for teaching that permeates coursework and field experiences. In 2000, Darling-Hammond conducted case studies of seven exemplary teacher education programs. She found that the programs had a shared understanding of good teaching across all preparation stakeholders and across all courses and field experiences. Fang and Ashley (2004) conducted an in-depth study of pre-service teachers’ interpretations of a field-based reading block that combined three courses in reading instruction that previously had been taught separately. The combination of the three courses allowed the course instructors to collaborate extensively to develop a coherent programmatic vision, resulting in the pre-services teachers developing a comprehensive knowledge base about reading instruction for struggling readers. Finally, the International Reading Association (2003) sponsored NCEETPRI study of eight exemplary reading preparation programs and found these exemplary reading programs were characterized by a literacy vision that was shared by all instructors.

Subsequent IRA studies compared graduates of exemplary reading preparation programs to graduates who did not complete specialized reading programs. The results indicated that the graduates of the exemplary reading programs performed better during their first three years of teaching than did graduates who did not complete the reading programs. These graduates demonstrated more sophisticated and appropriate beliefs. Specifically, graduates of exemplary programs valued their preparation, adopted a mindful and responsive instructional stance, and
sought ongoing support for themselves and their students (Maloch et al., 2003). These graduates also scored higher on the TEX-IN2 observation instrument, which assesses the classroom literacy environment (Hoffman et al., 2005). According to the levels of appropriation under activity theory, the high level of congruence infused in these programs will most likely support pre-service teachers’ tool appropriation.

In addition to shared vision, the alignment of coursework and field experiences is a critical component of effective preparation programs. Darling-Hammond (2000) found that exemplary programs contained at least 30 hours of field experiences that supported concurrent coursework. Pre-service teachers needed extensive opportunities to apply their new knowledge in practical settings (Fang & Ashley, 2004; IRA, 2003). Duffy and Atkinson (2001) analyzed the reflection essays, lesson plans, and tutoring logs of 22 pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher education courses to see how these students’ beliefs about struggling readers and reading practices evolved over the course of a year. The pre-service teachers took courses focused on reading instruction and the assessment of diverse learners. Both courses had an internship component with the assessment course requiring the pre-service teachers to tutor a struggling reader. After completing qualitative content analysis, the researchers found that the pre-service teachers improved in their abilities to integrate their personal, practical, and professional knowledge about reading instruction, and they decreased their misunderstandings surrounding reading instruction. They increased in their ability to critically analyze reading instruction in terms of theory and best practice and reported increased estimations of their preparedness to teach struggling readers. Linek et al. (1999) studied the beliefs and self-reports of pre-service teachers from three different literacy methods courses. Seven pre-service teachers were in a course that had no field placement. Twenty-five students were enrolled in a course that had an unsupervised field
placement, and eight pre-service teachers were in a course with a supervised field placement. Students who were in the course that had no field placement reported feeling overwhelmed from not having an opportunity to enact their newly acquired literacy knowledge. The students in the courses containing field placements reported that the field placement and its related practical activities were most influential to their learning. Finally, Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) conducted a literature review on teacher preparation and found that the quality of student teaching experiences varies, but the best experiences are characterized as being focused and well structured.

Another important feature of effective preparation programs is methods courses designed to deepen pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (1991) examined seven pre-service teacher programs. The researchers found that the main distinction between the programs’ influence on pre-service teacher learning was whether a program’s substance was considered traditional or reform. Traditional programs paid little attention to subject matter and emphasized classroom organization. Reform programs emphasized subject-specific teaching. From the review on pre-service teachers’ incoming knowledge and beliefs, this factor seems especially important because there is evidence that pre-service teachers lack knowledge about phonics and phonemic awareness (Bos et al., 2001). Finally, in their study of pre-service teacher beliefs, Nierstheimer et al. (2000) found that pre-service teachers’ participation in an intense reading tutoring program for struggling readers helped the pre-service teachers adopt more interventionist beliefs about helping struggling readers. The reading tutor program provided the pre-service teachers with opportunities to enact pedagogical content knowledge about reading.
Several studies have linked teachers’ participation in courses emphasizing pedagogical content knowledge with student achievement. Monk (1994) found that teachers’ participation in mathematics courses designed to provide pedagogical content knowledge resulted in a value-added effect on students’ achievement. Guarino, Hamilton, Lockwood, and Rathbun (2006) studied kindergarten teachers and found that those teachers who participated in more methods courses in reading and mathematics reported more classroom practices known to be associated with greater student achievement compared to teachers with fewer courses.

Finally, preparation programs should be collaborative across activity systems. Cooperating teachers have a profound impact on pre-service teachers (Wilson et al., 2001), thus teacher educators need to form productive and collaborative partnerships with cooperating teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; IRA, 2003). Sudzina and Knowles (1993) found that pre-service teachers who “failed” during their preparation program often had student teaching placements characterized by mismatches in philosophies, methods, and styles between the pre-service teacher, the cooperating teacher, the field supervisor, and the preparation program as a whole. More recently, Pierce (2004) found mismatches between pre-service teachers’ literacy coursework and their student teaching experiences. The pre-service teachers in this study expressed frustrations because they could not implement their newly acquired knowledge during their student teaching experience. For instance, the pre-service teachers learned about the value of small, flexible groupings for reading instruction, yet their student teaching experiences made use of whole-group instruction, thus proving to be obstacles to enacting the new knowledge about reading groups.

There is only one analysis that examines the current state of special education teacher programming in light of research on exemplary teacher education programs. Brownell, Ross,
Colon and McCallum (2005) found in a review of special education programs, the faculty stressed the importance of collaboration and well-planned and well-supervised field experiences. These programs also focused on issues of diversity and on the evaluation of student learning either through direct or indirect assessment. The special education programs adopted more positivist rather than constructivist epistemological views, with few programs revealing a strong programmatic vision. Finally, the special education programs stressed general pedagogical knowledge such as instructional methods and individualized education plans rather than subject specific pedagogy. It can be assumed that the well-planned field experiences that characterize effective special education programs will support pre-service teacher learning and tool appropriation, however, the lack of a strong programmatic vision could prove to be a barrier because pre-service teacher might not receive congruent messages. Also, knowing that pre-service teachers enter preparation programs with lack of knowledge for teaching reading to students with disabilities, the lack of subject specific pedagogy could also be problematic in integrating knowledge to appropriate tools. These are merely speculations as Brownell et al. did not tie the special education programs to important teacher or student outcomes.

The above literature indicates that effective general education pre-service teacher programs are cohesive, collaborative, and purposefully designed to deepen pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2000; IRA, 2003; Wilson et al., 2001). With only one analysis of special education teacher preparation programs, the field of special education is in need of more studies that examine and evaluate various preparation program elements. Specifically, what program components seem to matter in special education pre-service teachers’ construction of knowledge? Do prospective teachers’ incoming beliefs and knowledge differentially interact with these program components? Finally, what are the implications of special education
programs that emphasize general pedagogical knowledge over pedagogical content knowledge? In other words, what are the implications of programs that emphasize knowledge of general instructional practices over knowledge that is necessary to effectively convey content to students? All of these questions represent potential sources of influence for knowledge acquisition and tool appropriation.

**Conclusion**

As this review of the literature has shown, the individual characteristics of pre-service teachers such as their incoming beliefs, prior experiences, expectations, attributes, and concerns are influential to their learning. Their beliefs and prior experiences are based on pre-service teachers’ own time spent as students. Pre-service teachers’ prior beliefs and experiences will likely influence the degree to which conceptual and practical tools are appropriated. Where there is congruence between pre-service teacher prior beliefs and new tools and knowledge, appropriation should be supported. In instances where a pre-service teacher’s prior beliefs and experiences are in opposition to new tools and knowledge, appropriation will difficult (if not impossible). For teacher educators hoping to alter pre-service teacher beliefs to support new tools and knowledge, extensive time and support will be necessary (Kennedy, 1991; NCRTL, 1991; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). The research also indicated that pre-service teachers’ personal expectations, attributes, and concerns are influential to their learning. In essence, pre-service teachers pay particular attention to those experiences that they believe are most relevant and useful to helping overcome their concerns.

In the area of special education, however, the role of incoming beliefs, experiences, and expectations is not well understood in the literature yet. The majority of pre-service teachers have had few prior experiences in special education and with students with disabilities. These
pre-service teachers may be open to new understandings about special education, or their lack of prior experiences and knowledge may be large barriers for teacher educators to overcome.

The structure of social learning contexts, namely the preparation program, is an important factor in facilitating or hindering the appropriation of tools by pre-service teachers. First, preparation programs that support teacher learning have a shared vision and alignment across coursework, personnel, and field experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fang & Ashley, 2004; IRA, 2003; Wilson, et al., 2001). It can be assumed that tool appropriation will be easier if pre-service teachers receive similar messages and philosophies throughout the preparation program. For example, a pre-service teacher who completes a reading methods course emphasizing the benefits of explicit systematic reading instruction and then witnesses this type of instruction during a field placement will more likely appropriate such conceptual and practical tools.

Second, exemplary programs provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to deepen pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2000; NCRTL, 2001). For special education pre-service teachers, opportunities to deepen pedagogical content knowledge may not be as readily available compared to their general education counterparts. Traditionally, the field of special education has been characterized by a lack of subject specific preparation, more often emphasizing general pedagogical practices.

Finally, effective programs are characterized by collaboration across university personnel and cooperating teachers in the field (Darling-Hammond, 2000; IRA, 2003; Wilson et al., 2001). A lack of coordination and communication between the university context and field experiences can lead to confusion and frustration on the part of the pre-service teacher and therefore will affect knowledge appropriation negatively.
Unfortunately, the limited existing research base on special education teacher programs jeopardizes clear understandings of how these programs influence special education pre-service teacher learning and knowledge acquisition. In other words, especially in the field of special education, there is still much work to be done to determine the ways in which teacher preparation matters. It is crucial, therefore, that we engage in research that will illuminate the ways in which special education pre-service teachers acquire knowledge and appropriate pedagogical tools for teaching students with disabilities and the role(s) preparation programs play in this acquisition and appropriation.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how learning experiences in special education teacher preparation programs relate to teacher candidates in the context of reading instruction. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of pedagogical tools for reading instruction, as it is enacted in the classroom, for students with mild disabilities. Empirical data collected from classrooms in which special education pre-service teachers enact reading instruction will be used to develop grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Such grounded theory will help gain an understanding of the interactions among special education pre-service teachers (specifically their individual characteristics), their social contexts for reading preparation, and their enactment of reading instruction.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical perspective underlying this qualitative study is constructivism. A critical tenet of constructivism is that individuals are viewed as active agents, acquiring knowledge about the world through experiences with their environments (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism is well aligned with the principles of activity theory. For example, a primary tenet of constructivism is that multiple realities exist and that the knower and respondent (in this case teacher educators and pre-service teachers) co-create understandings of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The idea of multiple realities and multiple knowers and respondents coincides with activity theory’s position that learning occurs across various learning contexts. In the constructivist framework, the participants’ perceptions and meaning-making are of primary importance (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). With constructivism as the theoretical perspective, the
participants are viewed as the experts, and their constructions of knowledge will be of particular interest.

In this study, it is assumed that pre-service teachers are active participants in constructing and enacting their knowledge about teaching reading to students with disabilities. The pre-service teachers’ knowledge about reading instruction for students with disabilities is a product of their prior experiences with schooling and their ongoing interactions with the various experiences in the Unified Elementary PROTEACH program. According to constructivism, the pre-service teachers in this study may construct knowledge for reading instruction and knowledge about students with disabilities differently, despite completing the same preparation program. By gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the various ways in which pre-service teachers construct knowledge about reading instruction for students with disabilities, hopefully, special education teacher educators can use this information to craft effective special education preparation programs that will benefit pre-service teachers from a variety of backgrounds.

**Research Design**

To answer the research questions of this study, qualitative research methodology was employed. The purpose of qualitative methods is to gain in-depth information that leads to greater understandings about social phenomena (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research methodology necessitates close examination of a social phenomenon in its natural settings so that rich descriptions about the phenomenon can be produced (Merriam, 1995). Such in-depth examinations allow researchers to gain insights about a phenomenon and subsequently, develop a plan of action. The descriptive and inductive nature of qualitative inquiry can lead to the formation of hypotheses and theory, allowing the researcher’s analyses to have explanatory
power. Therefore, qualitative research was appropriate to study how pre-service teachers construct knowledge and explain how they interact with their preparatory experiences.

Qualitative methods are well suited for investigations aimed at studying social phenomenon for which there is little existing information. The lack of information about special education teacher preparation programs and their influence on pre-service teachers’ constructions of knowledge makes qualitative methods ideal for this study.

Sample Selection

Pre-service Teachers

To understand how individuals and teacher education programs interact, it was necessary to secure a sample of participants who had heterogeneous beliefs, knowledge, and prior experiences concerning reading instruction and students with disabilities. It was important to recruit participants whose incoming beliefs, prior experiences, and most importantly, knowledge about reading instruction differed, so that the researcher could discern and explain differences in their interactions with their preparation program and in their appropriation of instructional tools and knowledge. To obtain such a sample, the participants were selected using purposive criterion sampling techniques that were grouped into two phases, each of which is described below.

Phase I sample selection. The purpose of phase I sampling was to create a list of pre-service teachers whose practicum placement environments fit the study parameters. To participate in this study, pre-service teachers had to (a) be first semester special education Master’s level students in the Unified Elementary PROTEACH program, (b) have fall 2007 Alachua County practicum placements in elementary classrooms that required work with students with mild disabilities, and (c) provide reading instruction to students during the practicum placement. The researcher worked in conjunction with the special education
supervisor of field experiences to generate a list of pre-service teachers who met the above
selection criteria. Eighteen pre-service teachers fit the selection criteria.

**Phase II sample selection.** The purpose of phase II sampling was to ensure that the final
sample was small to allow for in-depth examination and time in the field and included
participants who represented diverse backgrounds and knowledge bases. The researcher asked
the 18 pre-service teachers to complete an open-ended survey assessing their beliefs and prior
experiences as well as a concept map that assessed their knowledge about reading instruction.
The survey and concept map are included in Appendix A. After reviewing the surveys and
concept maps, the researcher narrowed the sample size to eight pre-service teachers. To narrow
the sample from 18 to 8, the researcher used a variety of criteria. First, the researcher sorted the
concept maps into three groups according to their level of detail and sophistication. The
groupings represented low detail and sophistication (N=4), medium detail and sophistication
(N=9), and high detail and sophistication (N=5). Then, within each of the three groups, the
researcher evaluated the pre-service teachers’ prior experiences with children with disabilities,
their experiences during their K-12 schooling, and their beliefs about reading instruction for
students with disabilities, looking particularly for pre-service teachers whose prior experiences
and beliefs varied. The result was eight pre-service teachers who varied in their prior
experiences, beliefs, and knowledge.

Before establishing the final sample, the researcher questioned each of the eight pre-
service teachers individually about their concept maps. This allowed the researcher to gain a
clearer understanding of the pre-service teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about reading
instruction. Additionally, the researcher questioned the eight pre-service teachers about their
practicum placements. Two pre-service teachers were dropped from the final sample because,
though their practicum placements were in inclusive classrooms, they reported having little individual interaction with students with disabilities, thus they were eliminated from the final sample.

The final sample was narrowed to six pre-service teachers. This sample size allowed for in-depth examination and fieldwork while also including a representation of various backgrounds, beliefs, and prior knowledge. The researcher attended the pre-service teachers’ practicum seminar class and invited the final six pre-service teachers to participate in the study. The participants were recruited under the permission of the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB) as well as the department of Research, Assessment, and School Information of the School Board of Alachua County (Appendix B). Decisions for participation were strictly voluntary. For her participation, each pre-service teacher received a $50 gift card and was exempt from one class assignment from the practicum seminar course. Specific information about each participant is included in a subsequent section.

It should be noted that the researcher also administered The Content Knowledge for Teaching Reading Survey developed by Phelps and Schilling (2004) as part of the sample selection procedure. The Phelps and Shilling Content Knowledge for Teaching Reading Survey is comprised of 119 items categorized into 3 subscales: (a) knowledge of content in comprehension, (b) knowledge of content and teaching in comprehension, and (c) knowledge of content in word analysis. This assessment was intended to help the researcher discern differences between the pre-service teachers’ incoming knowledge about teaching reading. The survey results indicated, however, only slight differences in the pre-service teachers’ scores. The average of the final six participants’ scores was 89 out of 119 items. The six participants had
scores in the mid-80’s to 90’s, with the exception of one student, Kristy, who scored more than 15 points below the mean.

**PROTEACH Instructors and Field Supervisors**

Because teacher educators and field supervisors are active agents in facilitating pre-service teachers’ acquisition and enactment of knowledge, it was necessary for the researcher to understand the perspectives teacher educators brought to preparation contexts. Furthermore, according to activity theory, teacher educators and field supervisors are an integral part of activity systems, thus their participation in this study was essential. The pre-service teachers’ field supervisors and teacher educators who taught reading methods courses were invited to participate in the study. The pre-service teachers named a total of three field supervisors and seven teacher educators. The researcher sent an email inviting these field supervisors and teacher educators to participate. The researcher received positive replies from all three field supervisors and six of the teacher educators. One teacher educator did not reply to repeated email and phone messages. The field supervisors’ and teacher educators’ participation was strictly voluntary and was secured with the approval of the UFIRB (Appendix B).

**Cooperating Teachers**

Similar to the field supervisors and teacher educators, cooperating teachers are important agents in the larger preparation activity system, thus the cooperating teachers’ perspectives were sought. To examine the role of the cooperating teacher in helping the pre-service teachers construct knowledge about reading instruction, the cooperating teacher paired with each of the six pre-service teachers was invited to participate via phone or email. All six cooperating teachers agreed to participate in the study. Their participation was strictly voluntary and was secured under the permission of the UFIRB as well as the department of Research, Assessment,
and School Information of the School Board of Alachua County (Appendix B). For her participation, each cooperating teacher received a $25 gift card.

**Participant and Practicum Placement Information**

Based on the results of the selection procedures, six pre-service teachers (5 Caucasian; 1 Indian) were recruited for this study. In the following sections, information about each pre-service teacher, including her prior experiences and beliefs, her cooperating teacher, her practicum placement, and her reading coursework is provided. Table 3-1 provides a summary of this information. Table 3-2 provides more specific information about each pre-service teacher’s practicum placement. All names, including school names, have been replaced with pseudonyms.

**Pre-service Teachers and Cooperating Teachers**

**Anita and Mrs. Adams.** Anita was 22 years old and of Indian descent. Anita attended an international school in Thailand for grades pre-K through 12. Anita valued this experience because of the diverse make-up of students and teachers. Anita’s mother was a teacher at this school. Anita hopes to one day be an international schoolteacher.

During the PROTEACH program, Anita was placed in Kindergarten, first, and second grade inclusive classrooms. She described the Kindergarten and second grade classrooms as being wonderful experiences, which allowed her to see many theories put into practice. Her second grade experience, however, was not as helpful because she viewed many of the instructional practices to be ineffective and obsolete.

When asked about her beliefs about how best to teach students with disabilities how to read, Anita’s response centered on the importance of “systematic, step-by-step direct instruction formats.” She believed in the use of small group instruction and “providing students with multiple opportunities to practice and generalize their skills.” Finally, Anita believed modeling
good reading habits, sharing enthusiasm for reading, and reading for different purposes is important.

Anita’s practicum placement was in a 3rd grade inclusive classroom at Washington Elementary. Washington Elementary School’s percentage of students on free/reduced lunch was approximately 36 and its minority rate was 43%. During the 90-minute reading instruction block, the 3rd graders were ability grouped into above grade level reading classrooms and at or below grade level reading classrooms. Anita’s class for reading instruction was the average to below average reading group, and within this reading classroom, there were 4 students with mild disabilities.

Anita’s cooperating teacher was Mrs. Adams. Mrs. Adams was a general educator who began her teaching career as a Kindergarten teacher at a private school, after which time she taught 4th grade for 9 years in public schools. Mrs. Adams has been at Washington Elementary for two years, and this was her first time teaching 3rd grade. For reading instruction, Mrs. Adams used the district adopted Harcourt Brace reading series and she also pulled in elements from the Success for All (SFA) model.

Colleen and Mrs. Carter. Colleen was 22 years old and Caucasian. She attended school in a predominantly white middle-class school district in New York. Before completing her practicum, she had no experiences teaching children to read. She did, however, have more extensive prior experiences with students with disabilities as her younger brother was diagnosed with Autism. Her pre-internship placement was in a 5th grade inclusive classroom, and she also spent a semester volunteering at a school for students with emotional handicaps.
Colleen believed that it is “crucial to teach students with learning disabilities how to read because it is a vital life skill.” In her opinion, the “best approach is to discover how each child learns the best and tailor the instruction individually.”

For her practicum, Colleen worked with Kindergartners and 1st graders at Clinton Elementary. Serving approximately 800 students, Clinton Elementary was the largest of the schools in this study. About one third of the students at this school were on free/reduced lunch and 45% of the student population was classified in the minority rate. The service delivery model that was used in Kindergarten and 1st grade was a push in/pull out model for reading and math. Colleen worked with the lowest ability students for reading and math in Kindergarten and 1st grade.

Mrs. Carter, Colleen’s cooperating teacher, was in her 14th year of teaching. Mrs. Carter had taught in elementary self-contained special education classrooms for 12 years until Clinton Elementary transitioned to an inclusive model. For the past 2 years, Mrs. Carter has worked as a co-teacher in inclusive Kindergarten and 1st grade classrooms and has also worked as a resource teacher for students who need intensive remediation. For reading instruction, Mrs. Carter used the Harcourt reading series but also relied on Reading Mastery.

Kristy and Mrs. Kirk. Kristy was 27 years old and attended school in rural South Carolina in predominantly low SES schools. She dropped out of school her senior year and received her diploma through an adult education program. Before beginning her practicum, Kristy had few prior experiences with students with disabilities. One of her prior field experiences was in a 5th grade inclusive classroom in a rural area.
Kristy believed reading should be a fusion of both phonemic awareness and phonics and a holistic approach. In her view, students should interact socially. Finally, Kristy felt that it was important to “assess students and accentuate what they were good at.”

Kristy’s practicum was at Kennedy Elementary, a school comprised of approximately 460 students. At Kennedy Elementary, almost half of the students were on free/reduced lunch and were minorities. Kristy completed her practicum in a multi-age K-2 inclusive classroom.

Mrs. Kirk was Kristy’s cooperating teacher. Mrs. Kirk was in her 35th year of teaching as a general educator, and taught all grade levels from K-5. At the time of the study, Mrs. Kirk taught a multi-age inclusive class of Kindergartners, 1st, and 2nd graders. For reading, Mrs. Kirk used the Harcourt Trophies reading series and structured reading around a program called the Daily 5. The Daily 5 was composed of time for students to read to self, read to others, be read to, practice writing, and practice word work.

Melanie and Mrs. Monroe. Melanie was 22 years old. As a student she attended predominantly white, middle class schools. For three summers, Melanie worked at a camp for students who had hearing or speech impairments or who were developmentally delayed. Prior to her practicum, Melanie had experiences in an inclusive 1st grade classroom. When discussing her beliefs about reading instruction for students with disabilities, Melanie thought it was important to “teach them to their appropriate learning style. Test different methods, then use what works best and gets the best results.”

Like Colleen, Melanie’s practicum placement was at Clinton Elementary. Melanie was in an inclusive 2nd grade classroom. In the 2nd grade at Clinton Elementary, the students were placed in leveled reading groups. For reading, Melanie and her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Monroe, worked with the two lowest ability reading groups, using Reading Mastery.
Mrs. Monroe, now in her 10th year of teaching, began her teaching career as a Kindergarten teacher and then moved to 2nd grade. She then became a Title 1 teacher, after which time she worked as a consultant for SRA McGraw-Hill for 3 years. She returned to the classroom as a second grade teacher. As the primary reading instructor for the most fragile 2nd grade readers, Mrs. Monroe used Reading Mastery.

**Nancy and Mrs. Nell.** Nancy, 25 years old, attended a mixture of suburban and rural schools. Her high school was comprised of a diverse student body with a large number of ESOL students. Nancy completed UFLI training and tutored a child with a learning disability. All of Nancy’s PROTEACH placements were in schools with high numbers of students on free/reduced lunch. Her practicum placement was at Roosevelt Elementary, a school of about 460 students. Approximately 90% of the students at Roosevelt Elementary were on free/reduced lunch and nearly 100% were in the school’s minority rate. Nancy believed teachers must find students’ strengths and build upon them because this will help in working on their weaknesses. She also valued providing students with individual attention commenting, “it is important to work with these students one-on-one as often as possible.”

At Roosevelt Elementary, Nancy was placed in an inclusive 3rd grade classroom. For reading instruction, the school followed the Success for All (SFA) model, a model that requires ability grouping across the entire school population. Nancy and her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Nell, were responsible for teaching students who were reading on a 3rd grade 2nd month level.

Mrs. Nell was in her 7th year of teaching as a general educator at Roosevelt Elementary. Her teaching experiences were in 2nd and 3rd grade. For reading, Mrs. Nell used the Harcourt Trophies reading series as well as materials from the school wide SFA curriculum.
**Tricia and Mrs. Taylor.** Tricia was 22 years old and attended a private college preparatory school for grades K-12. This school emphasized Judeo-Christian values and was composed of primarily upper-middle class white students. Tricia’s prior field experiences were in a 1st grade classroom and in a high school class at an alternative school for students with emotional handicaps.

When asked about her beliefs about reading instruction for students with disabilities, Tricia said, “I believe students with disabilities learn how to read when someone takes a vested interest in their progress. One-on-one and small group learning helps, as well as repeated, explicit, direct instruction and plenty of opportunities to practice.”

For Tricia’s practicum, she was placed at Lincoln Elementary School. This school’s population consisted of about 45% of students on free/reduced lunch and about 42% in the minority rate. Tricia worked with a special educator who provided a variety of services to students in grades K-3. Tricia and her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Taylor, had a resource room, but they also provided small group instruction in students’ general education classrooms.

Mrs. Taylor was in her 32nd year as a special educator. She had a variety of experiences during her teaching career including being a 1st grade general educator, a self-contained special educator for students with mental handicaps, a hospital homebound teacher, a special education resource teacher, and a special education inclusion teacher. She has taught in both elementary and middle schools as well. For reading instruction, Mrs. Taylor used both the Harcourt Trophies reading series as well as Reading Mastery.

**Unified Elementary PROTEACH Program**

The six pre-service teachers participated in the Unified Elementary PROTEACH program, which is a joint program between the School of Teaching and Learning and the Department of Special Education. The PROTEACH program was the overarching social context
in which the pre-service teachers’ preparation took place. According to the PROTEACH handbook:

The Unified Elementary Proteach program (UEP) is designed to prepare teachers with a dual emphasis in elementary education and mild disabilities. All graduates also will be prepared to work with students who are English Speakers of Other Languages. The purpose of this program is to prepare teachers who are capable of: (a) creating and maintaining supportive and productive classrooms for diverse populations and (b) working collaboratively with school personnel, families, and members of the community to develop alternative ways of educating all children, including those who present unique instructional and/or behavioral challenges to teachers.

With the exception of a few elective courses, all PROTEACH students completed uniform programs. Once completing the undergraduate program requirements, pre-service teachers were awarded a Bachelor of Arts in Education (B.A.E.). Then they chose a specialization for their fifth year of Master of Education coursework. All of the participants in this study chose a special education specialization. Among the courses pre-service teachers took while participating in this study were Intervention for Language and Learning Disabilities, Mild Disabilities Concentration: Assessment, Curriculum, and Instruction, ESOL Curriculum and Assessment, and Assessment in General and Exceptional Student Education. In addition to coursework, PROTEACH students engaged in a series of field experiences, which took place in the community and local schools. These field components commenced in the fifth semester of undergraduate study and culminated in internships during the graduate year of study.

**Reading Courses and Instructors**

Six teacher educators taught courses related to reading instruction to the six pre-service participants. The courses were Emergent Literacy, Reading in the Intermediate Grades, Intervention for Language and Learning Disabilities, and University of Florida Literacy Initiative (UFLI) tutoring. Information about each course and its instructor(s) is provided in the following sections.
**Emergent literacy.** The purpose of the Emergent Literacy course was to provide pre-service teachers with an overview of the reading process in early readers. The course objectives included:

- To gain a general understanding of the development of literacy in young children (grades K-3).
- To identify common terms and concepts related to literacy and use them comprehensibly in discussions and demonstrations.
- To describe and implement reading instructional practices based on scientifically-based reading research.
- To identify and define the critical elements of reading instruction in grades K-3 and demonstrate examples of effective instruction for each element.
- To demonstrate the ability to assess early literacy skills and use assessment data to inform instruction (including grouping and planning appropriate lessons).
- To demonstrate the ability to critically review and use a core reading program.
- To identify grouping practices and their purposes in reading instruction and describe the process for using grouping effectively.
- To describe a framework or approach for identifying struggling readers and providing support for them.
- To gain an understanding of the link between language and literacy development and the link between language disabilities and the development of reading disabilities for culturally and linguistically diverse students.
- To design an environment that enhances literacy development based on knowledge of research based practices.
- To identify characteristics of a struggling reader and components of an intervention plan to address the students’ needs.

To achieve these objectives, pre-service teachers were required to participate in class demonstrations of reading skills, conduct an observation of early reading instruction, participate in Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) training, complete a case study of a struggling reader, and complete a core reading plan description.
Two course instructors, Instructors A and D, taught the Emergent Literacy class to the study participants. Although they taught different sections of the course, these two instructors had the same course objectives and requirements. Instructor A was a doctoral student studying early childhood education, and this was her 4th time teaching the Emergent Literacy course. Anita and Tricia were enrolled in Instructor A’s section. Instructor D had her Master’s degree and was an adjunct instructor for the university. Instructor D had taught several PROTEACH courses including Teachers and Learners in Inclusive Schools, Core Teaching Strategies, and the Emergent Literacy Course. Instructor D taught Colleen, Kristy, and Melanie.

**Reading in the intermediate grades.** The purpose of Reading in the Intermediate Grades was to prepare pre-service teachers to deliver explicit, strategic, literacy instruction to diverse learners in the intermediate grades. The course objectives were as follows:

- Encapsulate the processes of proficient readers
- Designs activities that develop all PK-12 students’ critical and creative thinking through effective strategy instruction that fits the complexity and diverse needs of intermediate readers
- Integrate reading instruction across the curriculum
- Develop a “problem-solution” model that follows the principles of assessment-guided instruction
- Create a learning environment that promotes thinking, active learning and relates to students’ interests and ideas
- Locate professional development for identified areas of needed to implement a balanced Literacy Framework

Instructor B was a Specialist student in the Teaching and Learning Department. This was her first time teaching the Reading in the Intermediate Grades course and enrolled in her section were Colleen and Anita. Instructor E was a Lecturer in the Teaching and Learning Department who specialized in curriculum and instruction, particularly in the area of reading. Kristy, Nancy,
and Tricia were in Instructor E’s course section. Like the Emergent Literacy course, the
instructors for the Reading in the Intermediate Grades followed a similar course structure.

Interventions for language and learning disabilities. The purpose of this course was to
develop pre-service teachers’ understandings of language development and disorders. The course
objectives included:

• Identify the sequence of expressive and receptive language development and the
  components of language structure.

• Relate theories of language acquisition and learning, including those of second language
  learning.

• Understand the organization of written and spoken English according to the five major
  components of language

• Analyze assessments to identify communication difficulties and select appropriate,
  evidence-based interventions.

• Select strategies for integrating communication instruction into educational settings.

The only participant who had taken this class was Nancy and her instructor was Instructor F.
Instructor F, a doctoral student in the Special Education department, had taught this course more
than four times before, in both face to face and online formats.

UFLI tutoring. The purpose of the UFLI tutoring program was to provide pre-service
teachers with a tool that would help them understand the in-depth process of learning to read.
The program was designed to be used daily with a tutee according to the following components:

• Gaining Fluency (5-8 Minutes)
• Measuring Progress (3-4 Minutes)
• Writing for Reading (10 Minutes)
• Reading a New Book (10 Minutes)
• Extending Literacy (2-8 Minutes)

Instructor C facilitated all of the UFLI tutoring training sessions. Instructor C, an Associate
Professor in the department of Special Education, specialized in early reading instruction,
particularly for struggling readers, and she was the primary developer of the UFLI tutoring program.

**Field Supervisors**

Three field supervisors participated in this study. Each field supervisor had extensive experiences in the field of education. The responsibilities of the field supervisors included conducting classroom observations of the pre-service teachers during their practicum placement and conducting pre and post lesson conferences. The field supervisors were in an evaluative position, helping the pre-service teachers understand their strengths and weaknesses to ultimately improve their classroom practice. The field supervisors’ primary evaluative tool was the Pathwise observation tool. Information about each field supervisor is provided below.

**Mrs. Grant.** Mrs. Grant worked in the field of education for 37 years as an elementary teacher, an assistant principal, and an elementary principal. After retiring from the school system, Mrs. Grant wanted to stay involved in the field of education and contacted the coordinator of the internship program about securing a position as a field supervisor. This was Mrs. Grant’s third semester as a field supervisor. Mrs. Grant supervised Anita, Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia.

**Mrs. Smith.** Mrs. Smith has been in the field of education for over 16 years. She taught Kindergarten, 1st, 4th, and 5th grade. Periodically throughout her teaching career, she left the classroom to run her own business. This was Mrs. Smith’s third semester as a field supervisor and she supervised Kristy.

**Mrs. Baker.** Mrs. Baker was a Special Education doctoral student who had a Master’s in special education and a Master’s in social work. Prior to enrolling in the doctoral program, Mrs. Baker had more than six years teaching experience with students with emotional handicaps and behavior disorders in all grade levels. The majority of her teaching experience was at the middle
at high school levels. She also had administrative experience as a dean and a principal of an all girls’ residential facility. This was Mrs. Baker’s first semester as a field supervisor, and she supervised Nancy

**Procedure**

The purpose of this study was to examine special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools and acquisition of knowledge of reading instruction for students with mild disabilities, primarily focusing on interactions among special education pre-service teachers (specifically their beliefs and prior experiences), their reading preparation, and their enactment of reading instruction. Data collection and analysis procedures addressed such a purpose.

**Data Collection**

This qualitative study was conducted using videotaped observations, interviews, open-ended surveys, and artifacts as sources of data. Detailed descriptions of data collection procedures are presented in the following sections.

**Observations.** For each pre-service teacher, three videotaped observations were conducted. The purpose of the observations was to record the participants’ reading instruction and classroom practices during their practicum experience. The observations enabled the researcher to see the level (according to Grossman et al.’s (1999) five levels of appropriation) to which the pre-service teachers were appropriating tools for reading instruction, a critical component of the activity theory framework. The videotaped classroom observations also enabled the participants to view their teaching and reflect on their reading practices during subsequent interview sessions.

The observations occurred at roughly the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. A data collection timeline is provided in Table 3-3. The observations were scheduled ahead of time and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes depending on the length of reading lesson.
During each observation, the researcher took extensive observation field notes on a laptop computer. When completing field notes, the goal was to focus on the tools, knowledge, and strategies used by pre-service teachers and the level to which they were appropriated. These field notes provided rich descriptions of the participants’ reading instructional practices and proved to be helpful in triangulating the data. To help ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the field notes, an external auditor was asked to view four (or roughly 16%) of the videotaped observations and complete field notes. The researcher and the doctoral student compared field notes for the four observations, verifying that both persons observed the same instructional practices.

Immediately following each observation, the researcher rated the pre-service teachers’ reading practices using the observation instrument tool that Brownell et al. (in press) modified from Baker, Gersten, Haager, Dingle, & Goldenberg (2004). The Reading Instruction in Special Education Observation Instrument (RISE) consists of 22 items that address the following areas: Instructional Practices, General Instructional Environment, Decoding, Comprehension, Classroom Management and Overall Classroom Practice. Observers use a 1-4 Likert scale to evaluate a teacher’s performance on each of the 22 items. A score of 1 represents “Low Quality” for an item and a 4 represents “High Quality.” The purpose of using the RISE in this study was to document the pre-service teachers’ growth over time, thus serving as a rudimentary indicator of the pre-service teachers’ enactment of reading instruction knowledge.

Brownell and her colleagues validated the RISE using four forms of evidence (content validity, response process evidence, internal structure validity, and criterion validity). Content validity was established through discussions informed by research on effective special education and reading instruction and experts’ input on teaching and observing in special education.
classrooms. For response process evidence, the researchers conducted pilot tests using the instrument. Research members debriefed after the pilot observations and discussed use of the instrument and the participants’ performance. Internal structure validity of the RISE was established by examining corrected item-total correlation coefficients for the entire instrument and each of the subscales. Corrected item-total correlation coefficients ranged from .5 to .8. To establish criterion validity, Brownell et al. employed hierarchical linear modeling analyses to determine the proportion of variance contributed to student reading achievement gains by average overall practice as well as subscale scores on the RISE. The proportion of variance contributed to gains in oral reading fluency by overall classroom practice was .37 for beginning teachers. General instructional environment contributed 48% of the variance, and classroom management contributed 59%. Reliability of the RISE was established by calculating alpha coefficients for the entire scale (.92) and subscales (.88 to .94).

To establish inter-rater reliability, an external auditor who was instrumental in the development of the RISE was recruited and asked to watch two videotaped (approximately 11%) observations and rate the pre-service teachers. The inter-rater reliability between the external auditor and the researcher was 86%. Inter-rater reliability was calculated by dividing the number of “hits” between the external auditor and the researcher by the total number of items that were rated. A hit was defined as a .5 or less difference between the external auditor and the researcher. For example, if the external auditor rated an item on the RISE as 3.5 and the researcher rated the same item as 3.0, this was considered a hit.

Pre-service teacher interviews. For each pre-service teacher, the researcher conducted three interviews (one before any classroom observations, one conducted in conjunction with classroom observations, and one at the end of the data collection phase). The interviews
consisted of semi-structured questions (Appendix C). The interview protocol were developed based on guiding principles from the activity theory framework, literature review, and pilot study. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and was tape recorded and later transcribed. The interviews were important data sources under the activity theory framework because they allowed the researcher to understand each pre-service teacher’s individual characteristics as well as their social contexts of learning. It was through interviews that the researcher gained critical insights into potential interactions between the pre-service teachers and their preparation program.

The purpose of the first interview was to elicit the pre-service teachers’ perceptions concerning their knowledge, coursework, beliefs, and prior experiences for teaching reading. In the second interview, participants reflected on the sources of knowledge and program experiences they drew from as they enacted their practice in reading instruction. This interview followed the first classroom observation. During the second interview, the pre-service teachers viewed and reflected on video clips of their teaching. Specifically, the researcher asked the pre-service teachers to describe where they learned about various classroom practices and the purpose for using those practices. The final interview focused on the participants’ experiences in the various activity systems and how these experiences influenced their knowledge of reading instruction. Additionally, the participants again reflected on video clips from the second and third classroom observations.

Teacher educator interviews. The researcher interviewed the participants’ reading methods instructors one time during the study. Interviewing the course instructors followed the tenets of activity theory in which multiple people make up activity systems and mediate the context for learning. Similar to the pre-service teachers, the instructors were asked questions
about their courses including the content and learning experiences. These interviews not only served to triangulate the data, but they also assisted the researcher in understanding the types of tools pre-service teachers had exposure to during their coursework.

These interviews were semi-structured (Appendix C) and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Like the pre-service teacher interviews, the teacher educator interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Similar to the pre-service teacher interviews, the interview protocol was derived from the conceptual framework. In addition, interview questions revolved around aspects of the reading course syllabus.

Cooperating teacher interviews. One critical activity system for the pre-service teachers in this study was their practicum placement. It was their practicum placement that allowed them to translate their knowledge in an authentic teaching situation. A large influence in the practicum placement is the cooperating teacher, thus it was vital that each cooperating teacher was interviewed at least one time. The goal of interviewing the cooperating teachers was to understand their beliefs and knowledge about reading instruction, their prior teaching experiences, and their perceptions of the pre-service teachers’ tool appropriation.

The cooperating teacher interviews were semi-structured (Appendix C) and lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The interview protocol was derived from the conceptual framework as well as from the researcher’s observation field notes. The cooperating teacher interviews occurred after the first or second classroom observation but before the third observation. The topics included in this interview included the cooperating teacher’s background, class information, reading philosophies, and goals for the pre-service teachers.
Field supervisor interviews. Field supervisors represent an important link between the university setting and the practicum placement, thus they are an integral part of both of these activity systems. It was important, therefore, to include their perspectives in this study. The goal of these interviews was to understand the field supervisors’ perspectives on reading and their perceptions of the pre-service teachers’ reading knowledge and enactment of reading instruction.

Each field supervisor was interviewed one time. These interviews were semi-structured (Appendix C) and lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The interview protocol was derived from the conceptual framework. The cooperating teacher interviews occurred after the first or second classroom observation but before the third observation.

Prior experiences and beliefs survey. At the beginning of the study, each pre-service teacher completed a four question open-ended survey assessing their prior experiences with K-12 schooling, reading instruction, and students with disabilities. The survey is included in Appendix A. This survey also addressed their beliefs about proper reading instruction for students with disabilities. This survey was not only a data source, but as discussed previously, it was also used in the sample selection procedure.

Concept map. At the beginning and end of the data collection period, each pre-service teacher completed a concept map about reading instruction (Appendix A). The concept map served as an informal assessment of their prior knowledge for reading instruction and was used as part of the sample selection procedure. This map also documented the factors the pre-service teachers believed were essential to becoming a successful reader. In the middle of the concept map was reading instruction, and the pre-service teachers were asked to incorporate as many concepts about effective reading instruction as they were able.
**Artifacts.** The researcher collected course syllabi for the participants’ reading methods courses to serve as data triangulation mechanism and as a discussion piece during the interviews. Pre-service teachers and teacher educators looked at the syllabi and reflected on the learning experiences and objectives of the course.

The researcher also examined the participants’ program plan including their sequence of courses and field experiences. As part of the Unified Elementary PROTEACH program, the plan was uniform for all participants. The program plan helped document the various experiences that pre-service teachers might have drawn from as they enacted their reading instruction during their practicum placement. The program plan also served as a data source in the description of the PROTEACH program. For this study, it was important to provide a rich description of the participants’ program, as the program was the overarching context in which their learning took place.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is a method to systematically analyze qualitative data by utilizing explicit and analytic procedures (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Unlike objectivist or positivist paradigms, in constructivism, reality is subjective, the product of the observer’s experiences, biases, and interests (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory is based upon the participants’ experiences that are grounded in the raw data. By grounding the analyses in the data, the researcher was able to develop a theory that described the interactions between special education pre-service teachers and their preparation, but more importantly, it facilitated the development of a theory that explained the role of the interactions in the enactment of practice. Grounded theory methods are especially useful when studying the microcosm of interactions in particular settings and when new theoretical explanations of a phenomenon are
needed (Grbich, 2007). The lack of existing theory to explain the interactions involved in special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools makes grounded theory an ideal method for this study.

The purpose of grounded theory is to either generate a theory from empirical data or elaborate on an existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). When grounded theory methods are used to generate a theory, the emerging theory is developed after the raw data are decontextualized, reassembled, and reorganized. One method of decontextualization is constant comparative analysis or also known as microanalysis (Charmaz, 2000; Corbin & Holt, 2005; Glaser, 1978). This type of analysis helps the researcher compare people, incidents, and categories (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1978) to tease apart subtle relationships. When grounded theory methods are used to elaborate on an existing theory, researchers modify existing theory as new data are collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this investigation, grounded theory methods were used to both generate and elaborate on theory. The researcher collected empirical data and generated a theory explaining the influences on special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools, but the researcher used activity theory as a guiding framework and modified it to reflect the unique complexities of a special education context.

The grounded theory process consists of a three-stage process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. A comprehensive list of codes is provided in Appendix D. In the first stage, open coding, codes or labels are developed for the data line by line. These codes represent concepts, which are abstract representations of events, objects, and interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Differentiating instruction, tension between ideal and reality, and open to feedback are some open code examples from this study. As concepts accumulate, they are
grouped into more abstract categories. To further define a category, its properties and dimensions are developed. Properties are the characteristics of a category and dimensions represent a property’s location on a continuum (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theory formulation begins as properties align along various dimensions. In this study, the researcher began the grounded theory process by open coding the interview transcripts and observation field notes line by line. Whenever possible, the researcher incorporated in vivo codes which are the participants’ exact words. The researcher completed memoing for secondary data sources such as artifacts, and used these memos as support for the derived codes and categories. During the various coding stages, the researcher recorded reflections and questions as memos in a study reflection log (Appendix E). Finally, the researcher secured the help of an external auditor who open coded a random selection of four interview transcripts (or 13%) to verify the open codes and emerging axial codes. In general, the external auditor’s codes matched those of the researchers. Although there were minor variations in the codes, these differences did not seem to change the overall emerging themes or outcomes. For example, the researcher coded one data chunk as congruence between university coursework while the external auditor coded the same chunk overlap in university courses. In instances where data chunks were coded differently, the researcher and external auditor met to discuss the differences and bring to light any hidden biases.

In the second stage, axial coding, the data are reassembled by making connections between categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In essence, a category that emerged in the open coding stage is linked to all its subcategories (Grbich, 2007). To reassemble the data, the analyst searches for answers to questions such as why, how, where, and when (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Answering these types of questions facilitates the development of relationships. For instance, asking when and why pre-service teachers are open to feedback helped bring forth
relationships between pre-service teachers, their field supervisors, and their cooperating teachers. Also helpful is the use of a paradigm which is an organizational scheme consisting of conditions, actions, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Conditions are the circumstances under which an experience occurs. Actions are individuals’ responses to issues that arise under those conditions, and consequences are the outcomes of individuals’ actions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further constant comparisons should be made to verify, elaborate, and validate the emerging hypotheses that may result from the use of a paradigm. Such constant comparison can strengthen the explanatory power of the emerging theory.

The outcome of the final stage, selective coding, is formal theory development. Selecting a central category that is consistent across the data to represent the predominant research theme refines the theory. In this study, the central category or core concept was *opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice*. A tool to help elucidate the relationships between the core category and the other categories is a cognitive diagram (Corbin & Holt, 2005). To increase the credibility of the grand theory, analysts look for negative cases, or outliers, and attempt to explain these negative cases as variations of the formal theory.

**Verification**

In qualitative research, establishing credibility and trustworthiness enhances validity. The researcher established credibility and trustworthiness through triangulation, member checking, rich descriptions, peer debriefing, reflective journaling, and the use of external auditors. The researcher triangulated the data by collecting multiple pieces of evidence (interview, observation, and artifact data). Furthermore, the data were triangulated from the interview data from the various study participants (pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and teacher educators). Throughout the interview process the researcher engaged in member checking presenting the initial findings and impressions to the participants and asking for their
feedback on the emerging themes about their appropriation of conceptual and practical tools and the influence of various experiences on their enactment of reading instruction. Through in-depth examination of the data, rich descriptions of the participants, contexts, and interactions were developed. The researcher also employed peer-debriefing measures by conferring regularly with her committee chair. Finally, the researcher secured a series of external auditors who were not affiliated with the study. These external auditors verified the researcher’s field notes, open codes and axial codes, and RISE scores.

**Study Limitations**

Although a variety of techniques were employed to promote credibility and trustworthiness, there are still some limitations to this study. The small sample size limits the generalizability of these findings, thus it would be inappropriate to assume these findings apply to all special education pre-service teachers and all preparation programs. Also, in qualitative research, it is often difficult for researchers to separate themselves from their personal experiences and biases. By maintaining a reflective journal throughout the study and engaging in peer-debriefing the researcher aimed to bring any personal biases to the forefront.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

When employing qualitative methods, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher is an integral part of the data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). A researcher’s subjectivities are inseparable from the data, and thus must be acknowledged. In fact, the researcher has an obligation to examine the intersection of the study and the self.

My formal training as an educator began when I was admitted to an accelerated Master’s program in elementary education. After securing my first teaching position as a third grade general educator in an inclusive classroom, I realized that despite completing a graduate program, I was ill-prepared to teach children how to read. The Master’s program included only
two reading methods courses, and neither was designed to address the specific literacy needs of struggling readers. I found teaching children to read, especially struggling readers and students with disabilities, was the hardest task I had ever faced. Some of these students had already rejected school because of their constant struggles with learning to read, and as their teacher I felt helpless as to how best to teach them.

As time past, I got better at teaching reading, but I still did not know how to help every student. I knew that there was so much more that I needed to learn about teaching, and after having the opportunity to be a mentor teacher, I became interested in helping other teachers. I know that many of my students did not get the instruction that they needed because I was not knowledgeable enough as a teacher. I feel in many ways that I did my first class of students an injustice. These feelings and beliefs have greatly shaped how I have approached my research in my doctoral program. My focus is on reading because I feel that this is the area in which young children need the most support. I also focus on pre-service teachers. I want prospective teachers to enter their classrooms more prepared than was my experience. I do not want them to look back on their teaching careers and have regrets that they did not serve their students well. I believe that by better preparing teachers, students will be the ones who reap the benefits.

My experiences as a student and a teacher have influenced how I developed this study on pre-service teacher knowledge for reading instruction. I want my research to help inform teacher preparation programs so that teachers and students experience success. From my prior experiences as a researcher, teacher educator, and former classroom teacher, I am approaching this investigation with several beliefs about teacher education and reading instruction. I believe that teacher education can make a difference in beginning teacher quality, if the teacher education program is designed to offer prospective teachers extensive opportunities to acquire
pedagogical content knowledge and apply it in authentic teaching situations. Teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, and experiences act as filters for their practice, thus teacher educators should pay particular attention to the incoming beliefs and prior experiences of pre-service teachers. Teachers who draw from extensive knowledge about students and effective teaching practices are better equipped to increase student achievement. Reading instruction for students with disabilities is best when it occurs in small, flexible groups, is systematic and explicit, and addresses the needs of individual students.

**Presentation of Findings**

Included in this dissertation are well-documented, comprehensive descriptions of the influences on special education pre-service teachers’ acquisition of reading instruction knowledge and explanations for how these influences interplay to promote or hinder the enactment of practice. The findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 describes each pre-service teacher’s appropriation of tools and the specific activity systems under which this appropriation occurred. To illuminate the ways in which the pre-service teachers’ learning occurs and how this learning is translated into classroom practice, interview excerpts and examples of classroom practice are included in chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a grounded theory for how various influences interact as special education pre-service teachers appropriate conceptual and practical tools for reading instruction for students with mild disabilities.
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<tr>
<th>PT</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>CT</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>FS</th>
<th>Reading course</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
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<td>Mrs. Grant</td>
<td>Emergent Lit.</td>
<td>Instructor A</td>
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<td>Instructor C</td>
</tr>
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* This course instructor was unavailable to participate in the study.
Note. PT: Pre-service Teacher, CT: Cooperating Teacher, FS: Field Supervisor
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<th>Minority rate</th>
<th>Cooperating teacher</th>
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| August (Weeks 3 and 4) | Study presentation and participant recruitment  
|                     | Informed consents provided  
|                     | Prior Experiences Survey administered  
|                     | Phelps & Schilling (2004) survey collected  
|                     | Pre-concept maps collected  
| September (weeks 2 and 3) | Pre-service teacher interviews #1 conducted  
| September (week 4) & October (weeks 1-2) | Observations #1 conducted  
| October (weeks 2-4) | Pre-service teacher interviews #2 conducted  
| October (weeks 1-5) | Reading course instructor interviews conducted  
|                     | Course syllabi collected  
| October (week 2) | Field Supervisor interviews conducted  
| October (week 2) | PROTEACH program plan collected  
| October (weeks 1-5) and November (week 2) | Cooperating Teacher interviews conducted  
| October (weeks 3-5) and November (weeks 2-3) | Observations #2 conducted  
| October (week 4) and November (weeks 2-5) | Observations #3 conducted  
| November (week 5) and December (weeks 2-3) | Pre-service teacher interviews #3 conducted  
|                     | Post-concept maps collected  
|                     | Member checking  

Member checking
CHAPTER 4
PRE-SERVICE TEACHER ACTIVITY SYSTEMS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the activity systems that mediated six special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools for teaching reading, as well as explain how these activity systems operated to influence the pre-service teachers’ beliefs and practices. Evidence of influences of the individual and influences of social contexts on pre-service teacher learning was collected through interview and artifact data and evidence of appropriation of tools was collected through videotapes of observations, observation field notes, and scores on the Reading Instruction in Special Education (RISE). During a series of three interviews, the participants reflected on their prior experiences and beliefs concerning reading instruction for students with disabilities and struggling readers. Additionally, participants answered questions about the influences they drew on as they appropriated tools for reading instruction. Pre and post concept maps served as additional evidence of the participants’ knowledge about reading instruction. The video taped observations and observation field notes documented the pre-service teachers’ instructional practices. Interview data coupled with observation data provided insights into the levels to which the pre-service teachers appropriated conceptual and practical tools about reading instruction.

Table 4-1 depicts the selective and axial codes for this grounded theory study. The selective codes represent shared influences, while the axial codes represent the variations of these influences across participants, thus the selective codes were the same across the six participants, but the axial codes varied. The first column of Table 4-1 illustrates the selective codes, followed by columns documenting the axial codes specific to each pre-service teacher. In parentheses, each axial code is classified under one of three activity systems (individual, university, or practicum). As indicated by the columns in Table 4-1, participants were influenced
either positively or negatively by the various activity systems. For example, for one participant, Colleen, characteristics of her practicum and her UFLI training were the foremost influences on her appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. For Anita, her prior experiences and coursework were the predominant influences on her beliefs and tool appropriation. Nancy was an example of how some influences work to have a negative effect. Nancy’s personal attributes and challenging practicum experience stood as barriers to her successful enactment of reading tools in the classroom.

Throughout this chapter, an extensive discussion of the influences on all six of the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools as indicated by Table 4-1 will be presented. Rich, thick descriptions of (a) individual influences, such as prior experiences and personal attributes, (b) influences of social contexts, including practicum placements and university influences, and (c) evidence of appropriation of tools for each pre-service teacher are presented in the following sections, with excerpts from interview and observation field note data. All participants are identified using pseudonyms.

Anita

Anita entered her practicum placement with extensive and varied prior schooling experiences as well as a developed sense of a personal teaching style. She also relied on her university coursework to guide her beliefs and teaching practices. As a result, Anita’s beliefs about how tools should be appropriated were influenced by her individual experiences, ideas, and coursework. In the end, however, Anita’s lack of opportunities to situate her knowledge of special education and beginning reading instruction in her practicum left her feeling ill-prepared to teach struggling readers and students with disabilities how to read.
Influence of the Individual

Prior experiences. Anita’s mother was a teacher and consequently, while growing up, Anita spent a great deal of time in her mother’s classroom. Anita’s mother was not a special educator, but she did have special education students included in her classroom; thus, Anita had years of experience observing students with disabilities being included in general education classrooms. These prior experiences played a large role in Anita’s beliefs about how students with disabilities should be included in general education classrooms, as well as her knowledge of appropriate instruction for students with disabilities. As she reflected on her mother’s influence, Anita said, “it’s just so interesting to see how her practices and working with those children and being able to reach some of them at some point in time always had an effect on me” (9.14.07). Her mother’s “effect” translated into an intrinsic motivation to help students with disabilities succeed. Although Anita was not held accountable for the progress of students with disabilities in her practicum, she consistently focused on meeting their instructional needs, as well as those of struggling readers. Anita’s concern for students with disabilities was exemplified when she expressed discouragement because a special education student named Keith, “is such a hard worker, he tries so hard, but there are no real accommodations in place for him.”

Evidence of the influence of Anita’s prior experiences in her mother’s classroom was found on her pre-concept map, as she included ideas about differentiated instruction, ability grouping, and the need for students to receive direct instruction and small group practice.

Personal attributes and concerns. Anita described herself as “very organized” and “very systematic.” These attributes served her well in some regards because her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Adams, praised her “wonderful” lesson plans that clearly indicated a large amount of planning. Being systematic and organized, however, also got in Anita’s way. In one instance, Anita planned to ask students comprehension questions in a guided reading group. After
spending an extensive period of time asking questions, the students became less engaged resulting in off task behavior. Instead of changing the activity when students became disengaged, Anita continued with the pre-planned activity of asking comprehension questions until the students’ misbehavior escalated and the lesson was disrupted completely. Anita’s rigid adherence to her pre-existing lesson structure made it difficult for her to adapt to changes as they occurred in the classroom.

Influence of Social Contexts

Practicum placement. Anita’s practicum placement was in a third grade inclusive classroom and her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Adams, was teaching third grade for the first time. Although there were students with disabilities in the classroom, Anita felt that she was not learning how to address their reading needs properly. There are four possible explanations for Anita’s concerns about her ability to teach struggling readers based on her practicum experience, each of which is detailed below.

First, Anita never observed a special educator providing special education services to the students with disabilities, nor did she observe many classroom accommodations being made for those students as indicated above in her comments about Keith. In describing the classroom instruction Anita observed, “the actual reading instruction was not as explicit as I feel it should have been” (12.11.07). After watching many students with disabilities struggle from a lack of explicit instruction, Anita’s beliefs about the need for systematic, explicit instruction were only strengthened.

Second, for reading, the third grade teachers divided students into one of two groups, above grade level and at or below grade level. Anita and Mrs. Adams were responsible for teaching reading to the students who were at or below grade level. Although responsible for students who were reading below a 3rd grade level, Anita indicated that reading instruction in the
classroom focused on grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension, with little attention to phonemic awareness, phonics, or fluency. Furthermore, Anita indicated that instruction she observed was “very teacher-oriented, focused on passing the FCAT, [and filled with] silent seatwork” (10.16.07). The researcher’s classroom observations confirmed Anita’s comments. During the researchers’ three classroom observations, students spent the majority of their reading time on comprehension and vocabulary activities, often completing worksheets independently at their desks. Moreover, the vocabulary and comprehension instruction was not targeted towards struggling readers. Observation data indicated small group instruction in vocabulary and comprehension was uniform across students regardless of their individual needs. Thus, Anita did not have much opportunity to practice delivering intense, targeted instruction gauged at meeting students’ individual needs in reading. Anita expressed a lack of opportunity to apply what she had learned about struggling readers and students with disabilities, thus leading to a lack of confidence to help such students.

Third, Anita was not afforded much freedom in her planning for instruction. When Anita tried to bring in ideas from her Emergent Literacy course about using read-a-louds in conjunction with pre-reading strategies, she was met with resistance from the students who were not accustomed to such instruction. Anita said, “the students think I am a bit crazy when I tell them to go through and look at the pictures” (10.16.07). The result was that Anita decided not to interfere with Mrs. Adams’ pre-established teaching objectives, documented by her comments, “I don’t have much lee-way with planning what I want to do with a lesson. I guess I don’t want to interfere with [Mrs. Adams] teaching, so I just go along with the things she needs me to do.”

Finally, Mrs. Adams stated, “I have essentially been a fourth grade teacher and I even started this year as a fourth grade teacher, and then we didn’t have enough classes for fourth
grade, so I got booted down to third” (10.26.07). Mrs. Adams went on to talk about how she was more comfortable teaching writing than teaching reading, thus Anita did not have a cooperating teacher who was herself comfortable with teaching children how to read, especially those students for whom learning to read is challenging. In essence, Mrs. Adam’s interview statements confirmed Anita’s lack of opportunity to apply her knowledge about teaching reading to struggling students.

**University influence.** Anita left her practicum feeling unprepared to teach reading to students with disabilities despite having completed university coursework that she believed helped her understand how to provide effective reading instruction. For example, she felt the Emergent Literacy course provided especially meaningful experiences in her reading coursework. She learned about the five components of reading and how to assess students using DIBELS. Anita appreciated how learning about the five areas of reading and learning about reading assessments gave her a deeper understanding for the reading process and “how it plays out in the classroom” (9.14.07). However, she thought that the university provided an ideal model of teaching that was sometimes incongruent with classroom practice. Anita talked about it in terms of “a gap in what we’ve learned should be good [instruction] and what we’ve seen [in classrooms]” (9.14.07). This gap was problematic for Anita because she rarely saw the practices from her coursework applied in classroom settings; thus, it made understanding and adopting these practices more difficult.

Although Anita perceived a gap between the university and classroom, she thought her field supervisor, Mrs. Grant, helped bridge the gap. Anita appreciated Mrs. Grant’s role in helping her reflect on her teaching. Anita said, “the feedback is usually very helpful because [field supervisors] are objective” (10.16.07). Anita said in some instances, she changed how she
taught because of the feedback provided by Mrs. Grant. For example, one suggestion Mrs. Grant offered was to incorporate more wait time when questioning students. One time, however, Anita, rejected Mrs. Grant’s feedback. Anita described

I am very systematic and Mrs. Grant [suggested] switching things up, but it makes me nervous when I have to switch things up. I guess it is just a teaching style, but I am very systematic in that we are going to do this first and then this, so [Mrs. Grant’s advice] is something that I found hard to take in. I am not going to do that. I kind of discarded that I guess (10.16.07).

Anita was not willing to change her personal teaching style because of the discomfort it created.

**Appropriation of Tools**

The influence of her mother’s teaching practices and her faith in university coursework caused Anita to be quite critical of the practices she observed in her practicum both in terms of reading instruction and in terms of the instruction provided to students with disabilities. From Anita’s standpoint, the role of her individual prior experiences and the role of coursework were the chief mediators of her appropriation of tools. With little guidance from her cooperating teacher regarding reading instruction or instruction for students with disabilities, data from the RISE indicated that Anita improved in her overall classroom practice, but only by a half of a point, going from a score of 2 to a 2.5 over the course of the semester.

Anita’s biggest obstacle to instruction was her pacing and classroom management, a concern confirmed by her initial score in this area on the RISE (a score of 1.5) and by comments made by Anita, herself, and by Mrs. Adams. After watching a videotape of her instruction, Anita reflected on what she would like to improve in her teaching stating, “Time management. If someone is answering a question, I get too drawn into that question and I get off from what we are actually doing” (10.16.07). Anita thought many of her classroom management problems stemmed from her limited time in practicum. Anita explained
I would be trying to get back into teaching, so it would be ‘pay attention to me’, trying to get students to zone into me when I was there because I wasn’t there for very long each day. We are there for 4 hours 3 days a week (12.11.07).

Anita’s reflections were confirmed by Mrs. Adams who stated

My biggest goal for her, is time management. She has wonderful, wonderful plans but she gets too deep into one part of the lesson and it will take far longer than she ever intended for it to take. If too much time is spent on it then you can start losing the kids’ attention (10.26.07).

Going further, Mrs. Adams talked about the difficulties interns have with classroom management stating

I think the classroom management really comes from both a combination of the fact that the intern is not used to having to deal with classroom management issues, and also the fact that it’s not their class. I think sometimes [interns] are kind of timid about getting onto a child for misbehavior because it’s not their class and they don’t want to do something wrong (10.26.07).

Anita’s lowest scores on the RISE were on items focusing on providing continuous and intensive instruction and maintaining student interest and engagement. For example, in one guided reading lesson, Anita and the students were reading about the gold rush and got into an involved discussion about gold that lasted several minutes, after which Anita had difficulty regaining the students’ attention. Anita’s difficulties could, in part, be explained by her rigidity and her difficulty managing unexpected events during instruction. This is an example of how individual attributes mediate tool use.

During classroom observations, Anita did not teach phonemic awareness, word study, or fluency, mostly because she did not have the opportunity, thus she did not receive any scores on the RISE for these areas. In comprehension instruction she went from a 2 to a 3 because of her multiple opportunities to apply her comprehension knowledge. For two of the three observations, Anita completed guided reading lessons with a small group of students, focusing predominantly on comprehension. In terms of tool appropriation, there is evidence Anita appropriated
conceptual underpinnings of guided reading and the use of questioning. She was observed posing comprehension questions, both lower order and higher order having students take turns reading, and using vocabulary and comprehension activities with the text. When talking about guided reading, Anita talked about the importance of small groups and using guided reading to work on skills for which students might need additional practice. Thus Anita, knew the meaning of the term *guided reading*, she knew the practices that support it, as well as the rationale for its use.

For the third observation, Anita did a whole group comprehension lesson in which she worked with the students on sequencing. For part of this lesson, Anita had the students work in cooperative groups and she attributed knowledge of this practice to her TESOL class. The culminating activity was for the students to put a series of events in proper sequence. Anita commented that though she had learned about assessment from her three courses in it, it was not until she went to grade the students’ sequencing assignment that she realized she “needed to put a lot more thought into the grade, like making a rubric for it and being more objective” (12.11.07). From her coursework, Anita had appropriated some ideas about assessment but applying her knowledge to the classroom helped her think more deeply about assessment and how it should be done. Applying her reading knowledge during practicum helped Anita understand assessment from a practical and conceptual standpoint, thus helping her reach higher levels of appropriation.

**Interplay of Influences**

Anita learned beginning reading practices in her Emergent Literacy course, but without the opportunity to enact this knowledge by teaching struggling readers, Anita was uncertain of her ability. In the final interview, Anita mused about her ability to teach struggling readers and said, “I think I would be able to but I haven’t seen myself be able to [teach struggling readers] yet, so I can’t say yes I *know* I can do that” (12.11.07). Similarly, Anita finished the semester feeling only
somewhat confident in her ability to teach students with disabilities. In the absence of extensive opportunities to work with students with disabilities, Anita relied on her knowledge from her coursework and her observations of her mother’s inclusive classroom, stating, “I may not have had that experience but with what I know, I think I can adapt and teach those kids, so that is my only consolation” (12.11.07).

**Colleen**

Colleen entered the PROTEACH program with a well-defined goal of being a special educator, a goal that resulted from her prior experiences with a sibling with a disability. Although Colleen talked about various concepts she learned from her university coursework, this knowledge was not solidified and clear until Colleen was able to see it or use it in a classroom setting. For Colleen, the most important university experience was the UFLI training she received. At the end of the semester, Colleen’s knowledge about beginning reading instruction and reading instruction for struggling readers had greatly increased due to her placement with a Kindergarten/first grade special educator and the opportunity to apply her UFLI training.

**Influence of the Individual**

**Prior experiences.** Colleen had a brother who was 11 years younger and who was diagnosed with Autism at an early age. Watching him grow up was a large influence on Colleen’s desire to be a teacher and her beliefs about teacher quality and special education. She explained

> He’s gone through so many years of ups and downs and it is really so dependent on the teacher because there were some years that were so wasted because of low expectations or just letting him get away with whatever he wanted (9.18.07).

Her observations of her brother’s experiences fueled her desire to become a special educator.
The schools Colleen attended utilized self-contained models, thus Colleen had little interaction with students with disabilities during her own K-12 education. Colleen recalled, “I don’t think I remember who the ESE teachers were or even their names or saw the kids. Some kids were special ed the whole way through and you just didn’t see them that much” (9.18.07). Coming into the PROTEACH program, however, Colleen had well-established beliefs about the need for individualized instruction for students with disabilities and the diverse nature of classrooms, due to her experiences with her brother, as indicated in the first interview when she talked about “how different kids in your class are going to be and how individualized everything needs to be [to meet their needs]” (9.18.07).

Colleen had little memory of learning to read stating, “I don’t even remember learning to read, I don’t remember anything about it, I don’t even remember learning letters” (12.5.07). Coming into the PROTEACH program, Colleen thought learning to read was “just a natural process that everyone learns, it was something that just happened” (12.5.07).

**Personal attributes and concerns.** Colleen’s personal attributes and concerns may have influenced her learning. Her interview data indicated Colleen took initiative to learn more. The curriculum Colleen’s practicum teacher adopted utilized short sight word books. After using the books for a few lessons, Colleen realized she did not know the books’ purpose. Instead of continuing to feel confused and wait for her cooperating teacher to notice, Colleen took initiative by asking how she was supposed to use the books.

Additionally, the evidence suggested that one of Colleen’s concerns was to be liked by her students. When describing a memorable day, Colleen talked about the day her tutoring student ran up to her and gave her a hug. She was happy that “he likes me” (12.5.07). Moreover, Colleen said, “you build such a relationship with students, they are like your little brothers” (12.5.07).
Observation data from her first lesson confirmed Colleen’s desire to be liked by students. Several times throughout the lesson, instead of establishing herself as an authority figure and setting clear expectations, Colleen took an informal tone with students, giggling at their misbehavior rather than correcting it.

**Influence of Social Contexts**

**Practicum placement.** Colleen’s practicum placement was with Mrs. Carter, a special educator with 14 years of experience, who had supervised many interns. Mrs. Carter taught Kindergarteners and first graders using a combination of service delivery models including push-in, pull-out, and co-teaching. All of the students Colleen and Mrs. Carter worked with were struggling with reading or math. According to Mrs. Carter the students she worked with “are the ones that need that extra little oomph” (10.23.07). Mrs. Carter’s direct involvement in providing instruction for students had a positive impact on Colleen. Before her practicum, Colleen only entertained the idea of being a self-contained teacher, because in a prior field experience she observed a special education resource teacher who did not have much responsibility or interaction with students. Seeing Mrs. Carter’s success as a special educator who provided students with disabilities instruction in a variety of ways, however, helped Colleen see that models besides self-contained could be good for students. Colleen said

> I really wasn’t about a push in or pull out model. That’s not what I wanted to do...But in Mrs. Carter’s case, she actually runs her own center and has the same kids everyday, so it is more consistent than I thought it would be. And the kids are so excited about it (9.18.07).

Colleen’s practicum with its variety of service delivery models had both benefits and drawbacks. On the positive side, Colleen had multiple sources of knowledge including Mrs. Carter, general educators, and paraprofessionals. The large number of adults with whom Colleen worked helped her learn a variety of accommodations. For example, when asked about her use of
highlighters to help a student with Autism, Colleen credited the paraprofessional with showing her the strategy. Colleen’s use of trackers to help students keep their place on a page came from the general educator’s supplies. On the negative side, however, Colleen lacked participation in lesson planning and instructional decision-making. According to Colleen:

There was a classroom teacher and an intern and an assistant and us and so it was like five teachers in one room which was great for grouping but not for instructional decisions. I did not have any voice in reading. In reading I feel like the intern was a little controlling herself. I did not come across any personal conflict but I did not try to take control of anything, so I guess the planning, I did not have much exposure to (12.5.07).

These restrictions were echoed by Mrs. Carter who said

Since we do so many different things, in reading, it’s pretty much decided for Colleen and we tell her what is going on. Because I co-teach, we [the teachers] actually do the planning together and then we tell Colleen what’s being done so she just carries that out (10.23.07).

Although Colleen was not involved in lesson planning, Mrs. Carter did have a plan for involving Colleen in successful teaching opportunities. Mrs. Carter attempted to help Colleen ease into the classroom gently, so that she would not drown in classroom management issues initially. According to Mrs. Carter:

Behavior management is always the hardest as beginning teachers. It’s really being comfortable enough with your curriculum that you can focus on the behavior management, and it is the behavior management that should come first. But most people focus on the curriculum and they forget the behavior management part of it (10.23.07).

As a result, she had a clear plan for Colleen’s involvement in the classroom. Mrs. Carter had Colleen implement Reading Mastery lessons “because [Reading Mastery] is very straightforward so all [pre-service teachers] have to focus on is the behavior management” (10.23.07). Mrs. Carter also talked about giving Colleen explicit guidance on working with small groups of students. Mrs. Carter stated

[Colleen and I] have talked about managing behaviors of large and small groups, how it is different. It seems like when you do a small group, you tend to back off a little and that’s a mistake some people make because those kids can get just as hyper as a large group. They can get away from you real fast. So we’ve talked about setting clear
expectations and setting those rules and consequences. And that eliminates that busyness and the wandering that always leads into trouble (10.23.07).

Observations of Colleen supported Mrs. Carter’s views and mentoring. Colleen’s RISE score on classroom management rose from a 1.5 to a 3 by the end of the semester.

**University influence.** Colleen had mixed feelings about the role of her university coursework. She identified a mismatch between what she was learning from the university and what she observed in her various placements. She commented, “what we learn is new and it is researched and up and coming and not necessarily in the schools. We were learning one thing and [schools are] not doing that, for example, cooperative grouping” (12.5.07). Colleen also indicated that the conflicting messages she received from various university course instructors about the need for direct instruction did little to help her formulate her ideas about how to approach teaching. She stated, “I am kind of torn because I feel like in everything we learn there are two things, direct explicit instruction and then there’s don’t do that, do this, and I am [confused] which is it” (12.5.07)

In reflecting on those experiences that were most influential, Colleen did discuss one university requirement, her UFLI training. According to Colleen:

UFLI was actually really big and we did not realize how much it helped us. We were [upset] we were tutoring for free, but I realize now that really helped because it is that one-on-one and you see how kids read. It was really helpful because I planned, I thought oh they really need to do this and I would take a game and not do the game but do something with the cards of the game. I was thinking more creatively (12.5.07).

For Colleen, the UFLI tutoring provided an opportunity for her to plan instruction, something that she felt was lacking in her practicum. In fact, Instructor C who trained the preservice teachers in UFLI felt that one of the benefits of UFLI was that “there is a lot of tutor decision-making throughout” (10.30.07). The UFLI tutoring also gave Colleen more insight into the reading process because “it did show you what goes on in [kids’] heads, how they attack
words and I had never seen kids do that, so it definitely made it more real, especially how they progressed” (12.5.07).

**Appropriation of Tools**

For Colleen, the combination of her UFLI tutoring knowledge, Reading Mastery, and the basal reading series provided Colleen with structure and guidance, thus her overall classroom rating and her scores on phonemic awareness and word study all increased over the course of the semester, with her final word study score reaching a 3.5. As discussed earlier, guidance from Colleen’s knowledgeable cooperating teacher helped Colleen’s classroom management rating increase 1.5 points over the course of the semester. Of primary importance to Colleen was the influence of her practicum placement, because it helped her appropriate tools and knowledge related to beginning reading instruction, as well as classroom management strategies, all of which is described below.

From observing Mrs. Carter and a general education teacher, Colleen adopted the use of positive reinforcement using extrinsic rewards such as Skittles and pretzels. For Colleen, the positive reinforcement “helps” and “is a wonderful thing” (10.11.07). Observation data confirms her use of positive reinforcement and its powerful effect on her classroom management. In one lesson, Colleen rewarded four students who had followed directions by giving them each a Skittle. Upon seeing that some students had received a reward, a fifth student, John, who had crawled under his chair, immediately returned to the table and got back on task. After watching this video clip, Colleen spoke about how she relied on using positive reinforcers with the students because the reinforcers encouraged students to “be good.”

For Colleen, the most important influence in her appropriation of tools about reading instruction was the opportunity to situate them in practice. Without this opportunity, Colleen had difficulty seeing the need for various tools presented in her coursework. She described learning
about phonemes and phonemic awareness in her Emergent Literacy course and “not being able to stand it. When I was learning it I was thinking oh my God, I know how to say a /b/” (9.18.07)!

But Colleen went on to describe how being in her practicum helped her understand the need for knowledge such as phonics and phonemic awareness, stating, “that stuff took me a while to realize that it was helpful” (10.11.07). She described how during one lesson she realized she did not really know the correct way to produce the sound /b/ even though during her coursework she thought learning the letter sounds was useless.

In another lesson, Colleen had students use mirrors to observe the shape their mouths took when producing various letter sounds. When asked about this tool, Colleen said, “I remember we talked about it in Emergent Literacy. I think it was one of those things we learned before we were in the [practicum] classroom so I never really thought about it that much” (10.11.07).

Colleen, however, chose to implement the mirrors after observing the general educator use them with the students. It is unclear whether Colleen eventually would have enacted her knowledge about using mirrors if she had not seen it modeled during her practicum. Instructor D who taught Colleen’s Emergent Literacy course confirmed Colleen’s statements when she said, “I don’t think [pre-service teachers] realize the benefit of the course until they walk away from it. They grumble through it” (10.8.07).

At the end of her practicum, Colleen’s knowledge of beginning reading had increased. Her pre-concept map included only six broad terms like predicting and phonics, but her post concept map was much more detailed with 28 ideas, including the five major components of reading, as well as their meanings and ways to teach them.

**Interplay of Influences**

Colleen’s final statements confirmed the powerful role her practicum played in her learning. Colleen’s aspirations to be a special educator coupled with a positive special education
practicum experience strengthened her desire for helping students with disabilities as well as her confidence in delivering reading instruction. When asked about her confidence in teaching reading, especially for struggling readers, Colleen replied, “before this semester I was like I don’t want to do it, so when I got this semester, I was a little intimidated but now I definitely feel a lot more confident and I feel like as much as the coursework prepares you for it, it is definitely seeing it that makes it real. Obviously experience is the best teacher” (12.5.07). Mrs. Carter had similar thoughts stating, “it’s easy to learn the stuff at college, but you know, I feel for those teachers who don’t do their 5th year and their internship and stuff like that, I don’t know how you could do it, you have to have that internship and you have to have those placements. That is really where you learn to teach I think” (10.23.07).

Kristy

Throughout the study, Kristy encountered several challenges as she tried to integrate her personal teaching philosophy with ideas from her coursework and her practicum. She struggled to reconcile her personal ideologies, which supported holistic reading instruction and her course instructors’ ideologies about the need for systematic, explicit reading instruction. She also had difficulties executing reading instruction because of her own misunderstandings and lack of knowledge about reading. For Kristy, the appropriation of tools concerning reading instruction was contingent upon her having opportunities to enact tools in practice, as well as extensive time to reflect on her instruction and receive feedback and extensive support from her cooperating teacher and field supervisor.

Influence of the Individual

Prior experiences. Kristy, 27 years old, was the oldest of the six participants. Being older than the majority of her cohort, Kristy “felt a little separated” from the other pre-service teachers. In addition to a difference in age, Kristy’s own educational background seemed to set
her apart from her peers. The data indicated that as a student, Kristy was limited by her academic ability. On her prior beliefs and experiences survey, she wrote about acting out in math class because she did not understand and then being seated in the back of the classroom. She also wrote about dropping out of high school her senior year, receiving her diploma through an alternative adult education program.

Her academic struggles seemed to follow her into her college studies as well. Of all the pre-service teachers who took the Phelps & Schilling (2004) reading survey at the beginning of the semester, Kristy scored the lowest. Her personal struggle to understand reading and the teaching of reading was documented several times throughout the study. Kristy spoke about her own difficulty understanding when words would take a long vs. short vowel sound. Mrs. Kirk, her cooperating teacher commented, “I think she has a lot of growth in that area to go yet with reading and understating how reading works” (10.4.07). During one observation, Kristy tried to help a student decode irregular sight words like where and of. After watching her videotaped lesson, and seeing the difficulties the student was having, Kristy talked about how her “teacher fog probably made him foggy” (10.9.07). Mrs. Kirk, who had seen Kristy instruct students to decode irregular words, said she had to explicitly tell Kristy that irregular words should not be decoded; rather, they have to be memorized. Despite Mrs. Kirk’s instruction, Kristy still had trouble understanding the concept of irregular sight words, as indicated by her comments in a subsequent interview when she talked about trying to have students hear the sound /ou/ makes in the word could.

**Personal attributes and concerns.** Although Kristy had difficulties understanding aspects of the reading process, she had several personal attributes that supported her throughout the semester. Kristy was reflective, often recording her thoughts, questions, and self-proclaimed
weaknesses in a journal. Throughout the semester, Kristy was willing to admit when her lessons did not go well, asserting, “I knew I didn’t do a good job” (11.29.07). Kristy was aware that her lack of knowledge affected her instruction negatively. She talked about wanting to convey ideas to students “with the lightening speed they need. I don’t want to be standing up there thinking and confused” (10.9.07).

As a result of her strong desire to improve, Kristy was open to feedback from her cooperating teacher and field supervisor stating, “I love that constructive feedback because I would rather someone tell me what I did wrong rather than you did perfect, all 5’s” (11.29.07). Mrs. Kirk confirmed, “the thing about Kristy is she’s really open to you know, you helping her or telling her, ‘you know Kristy, that’s not going to work’, or you ‘really didn’t do that well’” (10.4.07). In an effort to improve her practice, Kristy was not afraid to ask for help, seeking it from multiple sources. In addition to her cooperating teacher and field supervisor, Kristy also went to the several faculty members at the university when she needed help.

Finally, Kristy was a diligent worker and dedicated to her students and to the teaching profession. Most weeks Kristy worked more than the required number of hours at her practicum placement. Mrs. Kirk said, “Kristy, she wants to do the right thing. And she really tries hard and she shows a lot of initiative about a lot of things. She’s very good with the children when she’s working with them” (10.4.07). Speaking about a career in teaching, Kristy said

I am not there because it is easy and I want to have a great time. There are a million jobs that are easy. I knew I was there for [students]. I want to intimately know my students’ needs and I want to know their interests and I want to be committed to teaching them (11.29.07)!

**Influence of Social Contexts**

**Practicum placement.** Kristy’s practicum placement was in a multi-age K-2 inclusive classroom with Mrs. Kirk, a general educator with 35 years of experience. Although being in a
multi-age classroom exposed Kristy to three grade levels simultaneously, she struggled with developing and delivering appropriate instruction for students at various grade levels. In one lesson, Kristy was teaching the concept of contractions to three of the younger students. After watching her videotaped lesson, Kristy realized that the concept of contractions was too challenging for the students, especially because she presented multiple types of contractions in the same lesson. Reflecting, Kristy said

There were just so many different types of contractions and I wasn’t sure that I was actually getting to work with the right words. Yeah, that was a lot of different contractions to throw on them and it is hard. I am not dumb, but it is hard for me (11.29.07).

Kristy’s practicum had a large impact on her beliefs about reading instruction. At the beginning of the semester, Kristy believed that reading instruction should foster students’ “aesthetic love” of reading. Included on Kristy’s pre-concept map were ideas such as social interaction, holistic, organic, drama, and poetry. In essence, Kristy believed in a whole language approach to reading instruction.

Initially, the reading instruction provided in Kristy’s practicum aligned with her incoming beliefs. Mrs. Kirk used a program called the Daily 5, which was comprised of (a) reading to self, (b) reading to others, (c) being read to, (d) word work, and (e) practicing writing. According to Mrs. Kirk, “I really feel that the children need to be more involved and more ownership in their learning, so what we started this year is called The Daily Five” (10.4.07). The premise of instruction being more student-directed matched with Kristy’s initial beliefs. After having spent time in the classroom using this particular reading program, however, Kristy harbored doubts about its effectiveness. She was concerned that “pretty much you leave [students] alone and let them read” (9.11.07). In fact, according to the Daily Five program, for 30 minutes each day, students are supposed to read silently. Kristy was most concerned about the struggling readers, as
indicated by her statement, “I don’t know about the students who are struggling. Are they reading, or are they looking at the book because they are out there on their own” (11.29.07)?

After having spent a semester using the Daily Five program, Kristy’s beliefs about reading instruction had changed. Although she still loved the idea of a whole language and literature based approach to reading, she came to believe that this approach was not beneficial for the students who struggled with reading. Therefore, Kristy drew upon the tools she learned in her reading methods courses. At the end of the semester, when asked about her beliefs about how students best learn to read, she responded

They learn best by having concrete and explicit instruction; something really clear, this is what it is and this is what I need you to do. They need that immediate feedback. They need those multiple opportunities to respond, the clear expectations and clear goals that they meet to have more of a sense of I am learning to read. I am improving (11.29.07).

Kristy’s post-concept map supported her new beliefs in that she included multiple ideas related to explicit instruction, modeling, benefits of direct instruction, and early intervention.

In addition to her beliefs about reading, Kristy’s practicum placement forced her to examine her beliefs and practices concerning planning for instruction. Before watching the videotaped lessons, Kristy admitted, “I wasn’t putting a lot of time into preparing and so it is awakening [seeing] how I am on my feet” (11.29.07). Kristy realized that spending time planning her instruction in advance was crucial to her success because with more time spent planning lessons came more coherent and explicit instruction. As indicated by Mrs. Kirk, for Kristy, it was especially important that she think about what she would need to know ahead of time and how she was going to present concepts to the students.

University influence. For Kristy, university coursework was an important influence. In fact, it was a special education PROTEACH instructor and her passion for special education that sparked Kristy’s interest for special education. In relation to reading, two experiences, learning
phonics in her Emergent Literacy course and her UFLI training, were especially meaningful for Kristy. Although learning phonics was “difficult” and “painful,” Kristy likened it to medicine, “you need it” (9.11.07). Although Kristy realized the importance of learning phonics during her coursework, once she tried to translate this knowledge into practice, she encountered difficulties. Kristy described how she knew the sounds letters make but she felt nervous making the sounds, especially when she had to make them explicit for students. Conversely, Kristy felt more positive when she had an opportunity to apply skills in a structured way, such as when she was implementing UFLI tutoring. Kristy said, “UFLI taught me so much. I can see immediate results with any student” (11.29.07). Kristy may have felt more confident with implementing UFLI tutoring because as indicated by Instructor C, “UFLI is a pretty directed experience. There is a lot of tutor decision-making throughout but it’s very guided. You base your decisions on really specific things. You go through the same steps so its pretty comfortable” (10.30.07).

Kristy had mixed feelings about the role of the field supervisor during her practicum. On the one hand, Kristy felt like the feedback provided by her field supervisor, Mrs. Smith, was helpful. After trying to implement a lesson on graphic organizers, Kristy felt completely frustrated that it ended in what she described as “disaster.” Mrs. Smith offered feedback, and when Kristy tried the lesson again incorporating the feedback, it was more successful. The difference between the two lessons was the amount of content. In Kristy’s first lesson, the graphic organizer included too much information and students became overwhelmed. Mrs. Smith’s feedback was to reformat the graphic organizer so that it covered fewer skills. On a different occasion, however, Kristy indicated

I am in the middle of working with [Mrs. Kirk and Mrs. Smith]. It’s me in the middle and the field supervisor on one side and the teacher on the other and I am trying to validate what each of them are saying and expecting from me in a way that fits with what I think and believe, and it is difficult (11.29.07).
Kristy described how she felt distressed when she received feedback from Mrs. Smith that contradicted the feedback she was receiving from Mrs. Kirk. Kristy went on to talk about how she got frustrated when Mrs. Kirk would tell her how to structure a lesson and after delivering the lesson, Mrs. Smith would critique the very lesson Mrs. Kirk had developed. In these situations, Kristy felt conflicted over the disparate feedback.

**Appropriation of Tools**

For Kristy, the influence of the practicum was crucial to her appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. She talked how the practicum helped her transfer her learning. It was after teaching a lesson that Kristy was able to gauge how much she really understood a particular concept or tool. Kristy’s interview statements indicated that she was most successful appropriating tools when she (a) enacted her knowledge in practice, (b) had time to reflect on the outcome, (c) discussed her performance with someone who could provide her with feedback, and (d) had an opportunity to practice the lesson again. Although drawing on multiple sources of support, Kristy’s scores on the RISE never increased more than a half point. On the overall classroom rating, Kristy increased from 2 to 2.5. It seemed Kristy’s personal difficulties understanding the reading process constantly interfered with her delivery of reading instruction for students, thus an instance of individual influences mediating the appropriation of tools.

Throughout the semester, there were few instances that indicated Kristy had appropriated tools and knowledge about reading instruction to levels higher than surface features, especially related to phonemic awareness and phonics instruction as indicated by the observation and interview data. For example, at the end of the semester, Kristy still did not completely understand irregular words and how they should be taught. During the final observation, Kristy had students try to sound out the word *could*. In the final interview it was clear Kristy did not know that *could* is an irregular word.
In another instance, Kristy experienced difficulty when she tried to incorporate phonemic awareness knowledge from her UFLI training into her daily reading instruction with her practicum students. During a guided reading lesson, Kristy tried to include the use of Elkonin boxes. Her lack of a deep understanding for the underlying concepts of Elkonin boxes, however, foiled her instruction. Instead of using Elkonin boxes to practice the phonemic awareness skill of segmenting individual phonemes, Kristy had the students use the boxes to write down the onset and rime of various words. Several times during the lesson, Kristy’s confusion about Elkonin boxes resulted in her changing her directions. As students became more confused, they became less engaged in the lesson.

In addition to phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, Kristy also experienced problems delivering comprehension instruction. In one lesson, Kristy was teaching a small group of students about a comprehension strategy called *fix-it up*, a concept she had learned in her Intermediate Reading class. During the lesson, however, she had the students randomly pick words from a passage. The students chose the words *pull*, *pulled*, and *pulling*, none of which were conducive for applying the fix-it up strategy because they already knew the meanings of the words. Reflecting on this lesson Kristy admitted, “right off the bat [the words] seem really easy, they shouldn’t be using those words. I don’t even know if it is valid to work with those words” (11.29.07). Thus Kristy knew her lesson was not successful, but the interview data indicated she did not understand the fix-it up strategy well enough to think of ways to improve the lesson for the future. Kristy had appropriated the label of the fix-it up strategy and a few of the surface features but her instruction and later reflections indicated that she did not understand all of the features of the strategy or its underlying concepts.
Kristy’s appropriation of tools seemed to be highest in one particular area of reading—fluency. Not only did Kristy understand the three components of fluency (speed, accuracy, and prosody), but also she was also able to translate that knowledge into effective instruction. In fact, Kristy’s highest score on the RISE was a 3.0 for fluency instruction. While working with one student, the observation data indicated that Kristy explicitly taught him the meaning of prosody, she modeled reading with prosody by reading out loud using expression and proper inflection, and then used echo reading to have the student practice reading with prosody.

**Interplay of Influences**

Although Kristy’s practicum experience changed her beliefs about effective reading instruction for struggling readers, she had few opportunities to observe or enact explicit instruction, therefore, it is unclear to what degree she will be successful in implementing this kind of instruction at a future time. Kristy’s appropriation of tools seemed to be contingent upon her opportunities to situate her knowledge in practice and then have time to reflect on her instruction.

At the end of the semester, Kristy affirmed that she felt she could be successful teaching struggling readers. She expressed doubts, however, about her ability to teach students with disabilities, stating, “it is hard for me to work with students with special needs and find an accommodation that helps the content be more accessible for them” (11.29.07). She mentioned she knew she needed to make accommodations for individual students, but she felt like she had not received enough coursework on how to do so.

**Melanie**

Entering her practicum with few prior experiences with struggling readers and having had negative coursework experiences, the practicum placement was the most important influence on Melanie’s appropriation of tools. Melanie’s practicum teaching experiences centered on reading
instruction for struggling readers and her cooperating teacher had specialized knowledge of
reading interventions and curricula, thus creating an environment rich in opportunities for
Melanie to enact her beginning reading knowledge and receive content specific feedback.

**Influence of the Individual**

**Prior experiences.** As a student, Melanie attended schools that utilized self-contained
service delivery models. She stated, “I don’t remember anybody ever being special ed in the
classroom. SLD classes, they weren’t part of our classes. I just remember it being the SLD wing
of the building” (9.12.07). She went on to talk about how she did not have much experience
being in classes with struggling students as she was pulled out for gifted classes. Although
entering the PROTEACH program with few prior experiences with special education or
struggling readers, Melanie quickly developed a personal desire to help students with disabilities.
In relating why she chose to major in special education Melanie indicated, “The more I got into
special ed classes, the more, it tugged at my heart. These kids are falling through the cracks for
really, no reason and I think everyone absolutely deserves a chance to get the best education
possible” (9.12.07). Her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Monroe, who was impressed by Melanie’s
drive and determination to help fragile learners, confirmed Melanie’s passion for helping
students with disabilities.

**Personal attributes and concerns.** In addition to her personal interest in working with
students with disabilities, Melanie consistently reflected on her instruction, took responsibility
for her students’ learning, and strived to implement the most effective instruction. Reflecting on
her opinions about structured reading programs like Reading Mastery, Melanie said

> It does take away from my creativity but it works and you have to do what works, my job
is meant to do what works, and it works from what I’ve seen. It is very structured and
sometimes I get bored with it, but it is not about me it is about [students] (11.30.07).
After watching one of her videotaped lessons, Melanie reflected on an activity that did not go as well as she would have liked. Melanie asked her small group of students to complete a workbook page on using context clues that accompanied the Reading Mastery curriculum. The activity turned out to be too challenging for the students, but rather than blaming the curriculum or the students, Melanie took responsibility and said, “that was probably my fault for not thinking they might not have known that” (11.30.07).

Finally, Melanie did not shy away from challenges or difficult tasks. She talked about connecting and relating to students as a challenge, “a challenge she wants to meet” (9.12.07). Although working with students who struggled with reading was difficult, according to Melanie, “working with them has made me want to be with them more” (9.12.07). Mrs. Monroe confirmed Melanie’s strong work ethic when she said, “Melanie is more than willing to learn, that’s something a college can’t instill in someone, it’s just her optimism, her “roll up her sleeves” attitude” (10.7.07).

**Influence of Social Contexts**

**Practicum placement.** Two aspects of Melanie’s practicum made it particularly meaningful and beneficial for her future goal as a special educator. One aspect was the extensive teaching opportunities with struggling readers, and the second aspect was a cooperating teacher who had extensive knowledge of reading instruction for struggling readers.

Melanie was placed in a second grade inclusive classroom with Mrs. Monroe, a general educator, who was responsible for teaching the two lowest reading groups across the second grade team. According to Melanie, it was this teaching experience that really made a difference in her own reading knowledge about reading instruction for students with disabilities. Having to teach reading to students who experienced difficulties made her go back and hone her knowledge. Melanie talked about having “to basically go back and learn the alphabet” further...
stating, “this is the first time I have actually had to do it myself with the kids as opposed to just being told okay this is what it is, learn it, but actually having to do it made it more relevant for me” (10.10.07).

In addition to influencing her knowledge, Melanie’s teaching experiences during her practicum influenced her core beliefs about special education and reading instruction for students with disabilities. Melanie said

Before, I was not an advocate for inclusive classroom at all. I thought this is ridiculous, the teacher can’t do it, why are all these kids, meaning special ed kids, losing out on instruction because someone wants them in a normal classroom. They need to get what they need to get. But since being in a classroom with special ed kids, I would definitely push for [inclusion] because I have seen the kids that are struggling excel, they do well. I don’t think it is applicable for every special ed kid, but there’s definitely some students who can succeed and I think that they deserve it. I like seeing faces of kids and working with kids and I don’t want them to be the odd kid or anything like that (11.30.07).

Furthermore, upon seeing the success that her practicum students experienced when they received explicit, systematic, intensive, small group reading instruction, Melanie felt that these students “have to have it or they are not going to get it” (11.30.07). For Melanie, the practicum placement was proof that students with disabilities could be included in general education classrooms and yet still receive the intensive instruction that they needed.

Melanie attributes the success of her practicum to Mrs. Monroe. Although Mrs. Monroe was not a special educator, her prior work as a Title 1 teacher and a consultant for the McGraw Hill publishing group resulted in her extensive knowledge about reading, specifically for struggling readers and students with reading disabilities. As a former publishing consultant, Mrs. Monroe had a plethora of manipulatives and reading resources at her disposal, and Melanie was free to use them in her instruction. Mrs. Monroe’s extensive collection of resources helped Melanie see the variety of ways instruction can be made more concrete and engaging for students. Observation data verified her use of manipulatives in her instruction. In one lesson,
Melanie made use of letter sound cards displayed on the wall, while in another lesson, she used dry erase boards with Elkonin boxes on them, and finally she used a specialized board game that helped the students practice spelling.

When it came to lesson planning, Mrs. Monroe was a source of support for Melanie. Mrs. Monroe was always willing to answer Melanie’s questions about an upcoming lesson, and in fact Mrs. Monroe had a sequence of support she used when helping Melanie so that her lessons could be as successful as possible. Mrs. Monroe said

I have her watch some components, and then I have her step in while I’m there to coach and get her a little more comfortable with the language. And then we talk about looking at the next day, some of the activities that she could do on her own and we make a copy of the teacher’s edition to take home with her to practice and then she comes in and teaches the lesson and then we debrief after the lesson about what went well and things that didn’t go well and what we would do differently. And go from there (10.7.07).

In addition to support with lesson planning, Mrs. Monroe provided Melanie with specific feedback related to reading in conjunction with feedback on general instructional practices. Mrs. Monroe’s coaching resulted in Melanie consistently delivering coherent lessons during all three observations.

**University influence.** When it came to her reading coursework, Melanie expressed discouragement and frustration. She spoke about her Emergent Literacy course as a negative experience, “the class was so disorganized that I felt I got a major disservice and didn’t learn that much about reading. I didn’t want to teach reading after that class, and everyone in the class will tell you that. I don’t know if it’s [the course instructor’s] fault, or just miscommunication” (9.12.07). Melanie’s negative feelings had a lasting impact, because when she needed to go back and learn more about phonemic awareness and phonics to prepare for one of her practicum lessons, Melanie was resistant to referring back to her Emergent Literacy course materials
because she did not think the class was worthwhile. In speaking about her Intermediate reading
course, Melanie said they did some good lessons, but she did not recall anything specific.

Interview data indicated that for Melanie, the knowledge she was exposed to during her
coursework only became clear and meaningful when she had an opportunity to link it to
classroom practice. Melanie stressed that, “it’s finally clicked now that we’re working with kids,
oh that is what [course instructors] meant. I never felt I actually got a grasp of it until we stated
doing it in the placement” (9.12.07).

**Appropriation of Tools**

Melanie’s positive practicum experience, with its structured curriculum and
knowledgeable cooperating teacher, supported her reading instruction. Over the course of the
semester, Melanie’s overall classroom practice rating on the RISE increased from 3 to 3.5. By
the final observation, Melanie received a rating of 4 on both phonemic awareness and phonics
and 3.5 on fluency, some of the highest scores across all of the participants.

According to Melanie, observing Mrs. Monroe and having to teach students helped her
appropriate knowledge of individual letter sounds, including the proper way to say all the letter
sounds as well as other information like whether a sound is voiced or unvoiced, stopped or
continuous. Although Melanie’s Emergent Literacy class covered information about the letter
sounds, Melanie reported she did not truly appropriate this knowledge until being placed in her
practicum. Observation data confirmed Melanie’s appropriation of the letter sounds while
teaching in her practicum. During a review, Melanie pointed to the letter b and asked one of the
students for the proper sound. The student said /bah/ and Melanie corrected him by saying, “it’s
not /bah/ it’s /b/, it is a stopped sound” (10.2.07). Here is an example of how Melanie’s social
context mediated her knowledge, helping her appropriate knowledge about letter sounds that
moves beyond just the letter’s label and basic sound.
Melanie also appropriated tools about positive reinforcement and behavior charts linked to extrinsic rewards. Melanie described how one reading group in particular posed some formidable behavior problems, thus Mrs. Monroe decided to implement a formal behavior plan. The students each had a behavior sheet and would earn x’s in a grid when they demonstrated appropriate behavior. When a student’s grid was full, he or she would earn a reward. Seeing how well the behavior plan worked, Melanie incorporated it into her instruction. During all three observations, Melanie rewarded students with an x on their sheet when they successfully completed work and when they were exhibiting appropriate behavior. The influence of Melanie’s practicum placement on her classroom management was beneficial because, of the six participants, her scores on classroom management were among the highest.

Finally, Melanie appropriated conceptual and practical tools regarding proper instruction for students with disabilities, instruction that is engaging, intensive, explicit, and systematic. Melanie understood that engaging students in instruction was critical, and she expanded on the Reading Mastery curriculum to make it more engaging. During one observation, Melanie added a mini lesson on phonemic segmentation using Elkonin boxes that were displayed on magnetic dry erase boards. When asked about expanding Reading Mastery to include the mini lesson, Melanie said

I am sure you are supposed to stick to that rigid structure all the time but I think that can get really tedious. I think using this manipulative is different, it is engaging plus they get to do it themselves, so it is reinforcing the lesson. It is the same skill, just a little different and fun. It is almost like a treat but without losing what we are really trying to accomplish (11.30.07).

Here Melanie was not bound by the curriculum, rather she used its structure in conjunction with her own knowledge of reading and effective instructional practices, thus serving as evidence of Melanie’s appropriation of curriculum as a tool.
Melanie also learned about the power of small group instruction that is intensive. Her interview comments indicated her understanding of the purpose of small group instruction reached conceptual levels. She talked about two students who had made extraordinary growth in the small group and whose progress monitoring scores indicated they were nearly ready for the larger, on grade level reading group. Reflecting on the two students Melanie surmised,

The whole point of small groups is to speed them along, get them back into the regular class, and they have to go at a way faster pace to get there. That was like, right there for me, ah-hah, with the right instruction, they can learn and make massive leaps (11.30.07).

Melanie’s post concept map corroborated her appropriation of tools about reading instruction for students with disabilities. Whereas her pre-concept map only included information about the five areas of reading, her post-concept map included ideas about instruction needing to be explicit and systematic.

Interplay of Influences

Before entering her practicum, Melanie felt least confident in her abilities to teach reading, something she attributed to her negative coursework experiences. After completing her practicum with Mrs. Monroe, however, Melanie felt that providing beginning reading instruction to struggling readers was the area she felt most prepared to teach. Observing the students’ success throughout the semester confirmed her desire to be a special educator, and her beliefs changed to accept inclusive models that are designed to provide struggling readers with intensive reading instruction.

Nancy

An especially important influence for Nancy was her family. Having a brother with a disability resulted in Nancy wanting to be a special educator. Her practicum placement was also an important albeit negative influence. Being placed in a challenging classroom, with little
guidance or flexibility, had lasting negative repercussions, culminating in Nancy questioning her abilities as a teacher, particularly a special educator.

**Influence of the Individual**

**Prior experiences.** Nancy’s motivation for being a special educator originated from observing her brother’s academic struggles. Nancy’s brother was placed in self-contained special education classes and Nancy believed his teachers had low expectations of him and did not provide him with the quality education he deserved. Her experiences with her brother also shaped her beliefs about special education and the need to include students in the general education class.

In addition to having a strong desire to help students with disabilities, Nancy also had interest in helping students from high poverty homes. Her practicum placement and prior field placements were in schools with the lowest SES levels in the district.

**Personal attributes and concerns.** Although Nancy wanted to help students from high poverty homes, several barriers stood in her way of successfully working with such students. First, Nancy was shy, soft spoken, and timid. She admitted that she did not think she had the personality to work in high poverty schools.

Second, Nancy’s background was not similar to the students she taught. When talking about what was most difficult about her practicum, Nancy acknowledged, “being from a very different background from some of the students. Not that I thought less of them because of it, but because maybe I did not have that real understanding of where they come from” (12.12.07). Her prior experiences and responses on the beliefs survey confirmed the background differences Nancy described. Nancy attended rural and suburban schools as a student. Although there was some cultural diversity in schools Nancy attended, her honors classes were “mostly White.”
Nancy’s practicum class, however, was composed of all African American students with the majority of them qualifying for free/reduced lunch.

Finally, Nancy lacked confidence about her teaching abilities, stating, “I am just wondering how I will handle the classroom by myself” (12.12.07). During observations, Nancy was noticeably nervous, often flushing, clearing her throat, and speaking with a tremble in her voice. According to Mrs. Nell, to improve her teaching, Nancy needed to be sterner because, “she is so soft spoken and sometimes the students are not paying attention” (11.14.07).

**Influence of Social Contexts**

**Practicum placement.** Roosevelt Elementary was a Success for All (SFA) school, which meant for reading, the students across the entire school were ability grouped. Mrs. Nell’s reading class was on a 3.2 level, meaning second half of third grade. For these students, reading instruction centered on fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Under the SFA model, there was also a large writing component. According to Nancy the SFA model and curriculum:

Has its good points and bad points. I don’t like the comprehension questions. They have open ended questions that I guess are that higher order, but then they only have one answer and not even I knew what that one answer was when I am trying to help [students] so I get very frustrated. I do like how they have [word reading] strategies, but I don’t like how they only go with one strategy because there are always different strategies to approach words (10.24.07).

Observation data confirmed Nancy’s frustration with the comprehension questions. Once, while students were working to answer some comprehension questions, they encountered a question that was particularly confusing. Several students asked Nancy for help, but she did not understand the intent of the question. After wrestling to find the answer and being unsuccessful, Nancy and the students had to turn to Mrs. Nell for help, but Mrs. Nell, also confused by the question, resolved the confusion by telling the students to skip it.
When asked about accommodations for students with disabilities in the class, Nancy attested, “I haven’t seen any” (9.20.07). Aside from being placed in reading skill groups, no additional accommodations were made for students with disabilities according to the observation data. For example, students who were reading below grade level were not given any small group intensive reading instruction during the 90-minute reading block. Furthermore, students who exhibited extreme behavior problems were not given any specific behavior management plan. Rather than receiving accommodations, they were moved out of Mrs. Nell’s class.

Despite the removal of the two students with behavior problems, classroom management continued to be a problem in Mrs. Nell’s class, creating much stress for Nancy. Mrs. Nell herself admitted that, “now this is a difficult class and at times it’s a little difficult for me” (11.14.07). Classroom observations confirmed the challenging student behaviors. Students often argued over their assignments, got out of their seats without permission, and shouted across the room. During one observation, two female students were bickering and the argument escalated resulting in the students using inappropriate language, shouting, and rising out of their seats as if to engage in a physical confrontation. Mrs. Nell made one of the two girls sit by her for an extended period of time until both girls were settled and calm.

Although the class posed significant behavior problems, there was no formal classroom management system in place. During Nancy’s first observation, she used different colored paper plates with numbers on the perimeter and clothespins to reward cooperative group work. According to Nancy when teams were on task, she was supposed to move the clothespin around the plate to designate the number of points the team had earned. If a team earned 20 points the students would get a reward. This system was not effective, however, because Nancy said the day of the observation was the only time they used it. On the day of the observation, Mrs. Nell
told Nancy to use the plates, but the students were not familiar with the plates. Not being familiar with the classroom management system herself, Nancy, forgot to move the clothespin during the lesson. During later observations, the paper plates were not used. In a subsequent interview, the researcher asked Nancy why the paper plates were abandoned and Nancy replied

I think the day that I used it was the only day we used it and I don’t know why but it got to where it just wasn’t used anymore. I don’t know if it just got to be too hard to observe everyone or is we just didn’t know what constitutes (points) deserving to go up or down (12.12.07).

Adding more stress to the classroom environment, Nancy felt the school culture overemphasized the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Nancy asserted, “it was almost like they were so afraid to fail the FCAT that they focused a lot of their instruction on preparing for the FCAT. So I was stressed. I can’t imagine how the students must feel” (12.12.07). Mrs. Nell also talked about the need to help students pass the FCAT when she described how they had “FCAT article Friday” when they incorporated strategies to help the students pass the FCAT.

In addition to the classroom and school climate, Mrs. Nell’s mentoring style also created stress for Nancy. Nancy reported that she did not get much guidance when planning and preparing for lessons when she said, “I didn’t really talk to [Mrs. Nell]. She told me to go to the SFA room and get the books and I copied off the lesson from the teacher’s manual and looked at it and that was about it” (10.24.07). Mrs. Nell verified the lack of lesson collaboration when she admitted

We plan it together, well not necessarily plan it together. Basically she plans it on her own because I give her the teacher’s book and she has watched me enough to know what to do. So she basically plans it on her own, all I really do is give her the book and she does the rest (11.14.07).

Receiving adequate feedback was also a problem Nancy encountered. Nancy talked about how she did not get sufficient feedback because, “it is such a busy classroom and I am tutoring
during the resource which is her planning time. It is hard to get her and I email and she had a hard time getting back to me” (10.24.07). When Mrs. Nell did provide Nancy with feedback, the feedback was not specific and did not guide Nancy as to what she should do to change or improve her instruction.

The combination of negative factors affected on Nancy’s instruction and overall confidence. From the observation data, it was clear that as behavior problems unfolded during her instruction, and Nancy did not have effective ways to handle them, students often sought out Mrs. Nell to resolve the problems. Nancy reflected, “I wish I could have built more trust with them, but knowing that I am only there three days a week, it is understandable, plus they know that I am just a helper and she is the main teacher” (12.12.07). Because Nancy had to spend so much time and energy trying to maintain class control, she could not focus on refining her reading instruction. After watching one of her videotaped lessons, Nancy noticed that she had to virtually read from the teacher’s manual when providing reading instruction. She hoped she would have more opportunities to deliver reading instruction because she wanted to move away from always relying on the teacher’s edition and instead develop her own instructional dialogue.

University influence. The role of coursework in Nancy’s teaching is somewhat unclear. She talked about UFLI training being the most meaningful university experience because it helped her have a clearer understanding of the concepts she learned in her Emergent Literacy course. She reported, “being intimidated” after taking the Emergent Literacy course because of the amount of content. All of the Emergent Literacy course instructors confirmed the large amount of course material. In fact, Instructor A commented that a way to improve the class would be to extend it over the course of two semesters rather than just one. Nancy also talked about being intimidated to teach reading because as a good reader, she was not aware of all the
processes that go into reading and learning to read. Her coursework made her realize “how hard reading is to teach” (9.20.07). Although she learned about reading from the university coursework, the confining regimen of the SFA curriculum did not leave Nancy much room to implement any of her reading tools.

Nancy had mixed feelings about the suggestions offered by her field supervisor, Mrs. Baker. Nancy said Mrs. Baker gave her some advice on behavior management that was helpful, but Mrs. Baker’s advice on developing a teaching style was more difficult to accept. Nancy talked about not being able to develop her own style, especially with her practicum class because they were so chatty and hard to control.

**Appropriation of Tools**

Nancy’s timidity and lack of confidence coupled with an extremely challenging practicum placement had negative effects on her tool appropriation and classroom reading instruction. On the RISE, Nancy’s overall classroom rating increased from a 1.5 to a 2, but these were the lowest scores of all the participants. As noted earlier, there was little evidence that Nancy appropriated any tools concerning classroom management. Her classroom management scores remained at 1.5 throughout the semester; the lowest scores in the study.

Nancy seemed to perform better in the area of fluency, with observation data supporting her appropriation of tools related to fluency instruction and the use of questioning during read-a-louds. In fluency, her score increased from a 2 to a 2.5. During the classroom observations, Nancy modeled fluent reading using read-a-louids and the students read passages multiple times using independent and partner reading strategies. Nancy reported that she read the SFA listening comprehension stories in advance and developed comprehension questions to ask during read-a-louds. Observation data confirmed Nancy’s use of questions that covered both lower and higher order thinking. What is unclear is whether Nancy appropriated ideas about fluency instruction
and questioning because the structured SFA curriculum dictated the use of these practices, or whether Nancy drew from the knowledge she learned in her Emergent Literacy course.

**Interplay of Influences**

Three factors seemed to stand in the way of Nancy’s instruction and knowledge appropriation of reading for students with disabilities. Nancy’s timid personality, her lack of confidence, and the challenging context in which she was placed made for a stressful teaching situation. At the end of the semester, Nancy was left questioning herself and everything she had learned. She described how after one especially frustrating day, she left questioning her teaching skills and her beliefs about teaching. In the end, Nancy admitted not feeling confident to teach struggling readers or students with disabilities.

**Tricia**

Several characteristics of Tricia’s background influenced her beliefs and future goals, thus one of the biggest influences on Tricia was the role of the individual. Although the data indicated Tricia learned from her practicum placement, she was resistant to it because of the many instructional restrictions she encountered.

**Influence of the Individual**

**Prior experiences.** Tricia’s mother was a teacher and throughout the study, it was clear that her mother’s influence was important to her. Tricia commented that her interest in special education was sparked because her mother thought special educators could earn more money. In addition to the possibility of earning more income, Tricia wanted to major in special education because she wanted to know how to help all students. Her goal was to be a general education teacher, but she wanted to have strategies to help students with disabilities that she assumed would be included in her class. In speaking about strategies for helping all students, Tricia talked
about developing a “teacher toolkit”, going on to say that she learned about the idea of a “teacher toolkit” directly from her mom.

On her prior experiences and beliefs survey, Tricia described how as a student, she attended the same private college preparatory school for grades K-12, with a graduating class of 42 predominantly upper-middle class white students. Tricia talked about how she did not relate to many of her students. She described how the students in one of her placements were low SES and came from varying backgrounds, going on to say

At times I found it difficult to relate to them and I started feeling like maybe I am not really the best person to reach these kids, whereas I can relate to the kids who have parents who are involved. I don’t know, I don’t want to come across snobby but I can relate to [higher SES] kids and so I feel like I can probably help them better (9.11.07).

Before her practicum placement, Tricia said she had few prior experiences with special education admitting that she thought special education meant “you send your kids to another classroom” (9.11.07). Additionally, she had no recollection for how she learned to read. The first time she had ever thought about how she learned to read was in her reading methods courses.

**Personal attributes and concerns.** Throughout the study, there was evidence that Tricia was reflective and a dedicated student. After viewing her video taped lessons, Tricia was always able to articulate several ways in which she could improve. As will be described in a later section, Tricia consistently reflected on ways to integrate her university coursework with her practicum. Mrs. Taylor’s comments confirmed Tricia’s personal attributes. Mrs. Taylor stressed that Tricia was “doing an excellent job” and that her lesson plans indicated a great deal of prior thought.

One of Tricia’s goals as a teacher was to make learning and reading fun. Several times throughout the semester, Tricia indicated that the reading instruction in her practicum would be better if it incorporated more fun activities, such as reader’s workshop and silent pleasure
reading. Furthermore, as she was exposed to strategies in both her practicum and her coursework she evaluated them based on whether she thought she would have liked them when she was in elementary school.

**Influence of Social Contexts**

**Practicum placement.** Tricia’s practicum placement was with Mrs. Taylor, a special educator with almost 40 years of experience. Mrs. Taylor worked with special education students in grades K-3. Mrs. Taylor and the general education teachers used a combined push-in pull-out service delivery model. Mrs. Taylor used a combination of the basal reading series and Reading Mastery with her students.

Tricia talked at length about the restrictions she encountered during her practicum placement. She asserted

> We do the same thing in my placement everyday like clockwork, there’s not a lot of opportunity to bring in any different kinds of strategies into her curriculum and I didn’t learn Reading Mastery before this semester. So not a lot of things that I learned at UF have been used here. She’s really set in her ways (10.15.07).

Mrs. Taylor told Tricia what needed to be done each day, and Tricia was able to choose “small variations of how to going about doing it” (10.15.07). Tricia gave the example that when Mrs. Taylor told Tricia that the students needed to reread a story, Tricia could choose choral or partner reading, but that was the extent of her instructional freedom. Observation data verified Tricia’s limitations. Observations one and two were almost identical. Tricia conducted guided reading groups on both occasions. For both lessons she modeled fluent reading and had students take turns reading out loud. When asked about her use of index cards with vocabulary words on them, Tricia said, “I wish it was my idea but that is how Mrs. Taylor does it” (12.11.07). For almost every strategy she used, Tricia credited Mrs. Taylor.
Tricia’s instruction was further limited by the use of Reading Mastery in her practicum. Until Tricia was properly trained in Reading Mastery, Mrs. Taylor would not permit Tricia to teach the reading groups that utilized this curriculum. Mrs. Taylor said, “it would be nice if she had [Reading Mastery] training because I would like for her to take over a whole group” (10.8.07). Tricia and the rest of her cohort did not receive Reading Mastery training until November of the fall semester, so Tricia had few opportunities to work with students using Reading Mastery before attending the November training.

Tricia talked about not feeling capable to take over Mrs. Taylor’s instruction because Mrs. Taylor had “such a hard time giving it up.” Tricia went on to say, “some of my insecurities were because she had such a hard time trusting me to take over” (12.11.07). Some of Mrs. Taylor’s comments shed light on her difficulty in giving the instruction over to Tricia. Mrs. Taylor talked about how she used to have practicum students and interns every year but that some of these pre-service teachers did not live up to her expectations. Mrs. Taylor, therefore, was hesitant to accept new pre-service teachers and she was often reluctant to relinquish instruction to pre-service teachers until she was sure they were serious pre-service teachers, capable of doing a good job.

University influence. Tricia’s university coursework was positive. She felt her Emergent Literacy course was especially meaningful because Instructor A “was a good teacher.” As often as she could, Tricia tried to implement the tools she learned from her coursework. In one of her prior placements, she used some of the comprehension strategies she learned in her Intermediate Reading class. Although Tricia did not have much freedom in her practicum placement, she still thought about the tools she was learning from her coursework and how she might have applied them to the classroom. For example, during the study, Tricia had two courses on assessment, thus Tricia talked about how she wished she could see the students’ assessment data so she could
apply some of her assessment knowledge to her practicum. She knew she could not change Mrs. Taylor’s established routine, so Tricia, with the help of her field supervisor, Mrs. Grant, tried to think of small ways to incorporate assessment tools into her instruction. Tricia tried one of Mrs. Grants’ suggestions, which was to take some brief notes on how students did with a particular skill and then use those notes to help differentiate instruction in subsequent lessons. Although Tricia was able to use Mrs. Grant’s note taking suggestion, she was frustrated that she could not try some of the other suggestions because they did not fit in Mrs. Taylor’s established routine.

**Appropriation of Tools**

Although Tricia complained about several aspects of her practicum, her scores on the RISE were some of the highest of all the participants. Her overall classroom rating rose from 3 to 3.5 and her classroom management score remained at 3.5 Tricia was one of the only participants who over the course of the semester had opportunities to implement instruction in all five areas of reading, with no subscale score dropping below 2. In fact, most of her scores on the individual reading components were 3.5. Her post concept map also indicated Tricia had appropriated conceptual and practical tools about reading instruction, especially for struggling readers. While her pre-concept map only included six terms, only one of which addressed the five major reading components, her post-concept map depicted 30 terms, with all five areas of reading, ways to teach them, and concepts about direct instruction.

At the end of the semester, Tricia understood that struggling readers and students with disabilities benefit from explicit instruction. She talked about how it was helpful to see how patient Mrs. Taylor was with the students and the clarity with which she delivered instruction. Although Tricia realized that students improved with the explicit and direct instruction that was a part of Reading Mastery, she still thought the students should “learn about fun things”
(12.11.07). Tricia went on to talk about the need for students to choose “fun” books that they would love to read.

Tricia also acquired knowledge of the letter sounds. She talked about learning the sounds from Instructor C and the UFLI training, but it was not until she used Reading Mastery that she felt confident making the sounds. Observation data from her final observation showed that Tricia had proper knowledge of the letter sounds as she was implementing Reading Mastery. Here is an example in which Tricia appropriated labels and surface features of letters and their sounds, but it is not clear whether she learned more sophisticated knowledge about letter sounds such as the different types of sounds and proper sequences for introducing sounds.

Finally, Tricia appropriated conceptual and practical tools concerning various classroom management techniques including using positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. Mrs. Taylor, and subsequently Tricia, awarded students “yes and no monkey points.” At the end of the week, students who had less than two “no monkey points” earned a monkey prize. The prize was a chance to watch a battery operated, purple stuffed animal monkey scream. During her observations, Tricia was seen giving yes monkey points when students followed directions and completed their individual turns during Reading Mastery. She did, however, give one student a no monkey point for being off task and disruptive. Reflecting on the negative reinforcement Tricia stated she did not think the no monkeys were as effective because after receiving a no monkey, some students got upset and shut down. Tricia further commented that Mrs. Taylor had a strategy for avoiding these types of shut-downs. As soon as a child received a no monkey point, Mrs. Taylor would immediately give the child an opportunity for success, and therefore a yes monkey point and that would bring the student back into the instruction. Reflecting on Mrs. Taylor’s use of positive and negative reinforcement, Tricia seemed to be reaching some
conceptual understanding behind the use of this type of behavior management system, because she not only knew its label and surface features, but she also understood the conditions under which the system could be most effective for students.

In addition to positive and negative reinforcement, the observation data indicated that Tricia also appropriated other classroom management tools. During instruction, Tricia always spoke, slowly, calmly, and quietly. Her tone of voice seemed to calm the students and forced them to pay attention to her. She also reviewed the rules and behavioral expectations at the beginning of each lesson. When asked about this strategy, Tricia said she learned it from Mrs. Taylor.

**Interplay of Influences**

Although Tricia had negative perceptions of her practicum due to its instructional restrictions, the interview and observation data indicated Tricia appropriated valuable tools. What is unclear is whether Tricia will draw upon any of her practicum knowledge in future teaching situations. At the end of the semester, Tricia admitted feeling most confident to teach the areas of reading that she had practiced during her practicum—phonemic awareness and phonics. She stated she felt less comfortable with comprehension because she did not have as many opportunities to teach it. Tricia felt confident to teach struggling readers, especially when given a supportive curriculum like Reading Mastery, but she did not feel as confident to teach students with disabilities, because she lacked knowledge in how to determine individual students’ needs, deliver targeted instruction gauged at those needs, and then evaluate whether the students’ needs were met.

**Summary**

The influences of the individual, university, and practicum placement interacted differently for each of the six participants and their appropriation of tools to teach reading to
struggling readers and students with disabilities. Although there were differences between the
participants and their learning influences, as the next chapter will show, these differences come
together to form an explanatory model of pre-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and
practical tools. In the following chapter, this model, or grounded theory will be discussed.
Table 4-1. Influences on individual pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective codes</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal qualities</strong></td>
<td>Anita: rigid adherence to structure (I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anita: takes initiative(I)</td>
<td>Melanie: determined(I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melanie: takes initiative(I)</td>
<td>Nancy: determined(I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristy: open minded(I)</td>
<td>Melanie: difficoltà with school(I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melanie: determined(I)</td>
<td>Nancy: determines(I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy: determined(I)</td>
<td>Nancy: difficulty with school(I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Colleen</td>
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<td>Kristy</td>
<td>Melanie</td>
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<tr>
<td>accountable for delivering instruction(P)</td>
<td>takes responsibility for student learning(I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melanie</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>accountable for delivering instruction(P)</td>
<td>Tricia</td>
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<tr>
<td>takes responsibility for student learning(I)</td>
<td>wants larger salary(I)</td>
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<td>Nancy</td>
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<td>Tricia</td>
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<td>wants larger salary(I)</td>
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<tr>
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<th>prior experiences observing in inclusive classrooms(I)</th>
<th>UFLI(U)</th>
<th>UFLI(U)</th>
<th>negative Emergent Literacy course(U)</th>
<th>general education cooperating teacher(P)</th>
<th>mother is teacher(I)</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Anita Emergent Literacy(U)</td>
<td>Colleen multiple teachers in the classroom(P)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristy lack of opportunities to observe explicit instruction(P)</td>
<td>Melanie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy Emergent Literacy(U)</td>
<td>Tricia Emergent Literacy(U)</td>
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- Emergent Literacy(U)
- UFLI(U)
- assessment courses(U)
- field supervisor(U)

**Opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice**

- few opportunities to implement intensive reading instruction(P)
- lack of opportunities to plan instruction(P)
- changes reading beliefs(P)
- exclusive work with students with disabilities(P)
- UFLI(U)
- different cultural backgrounds(I,P)

- no classroom differentiation(P)
- gaps between university and practicum(U,P)
- helps identify holes in knowledge(P)
- multiple opportunities to teach reading(P)
- challenging classroom management(P)
- little instructional freedom(P)

- little instructional freedom(P)
- multiple service delivery models(P)
- opportunities for 5 big areas(P)
- changes beliefs about special education(P)
- limited teaching opportunities(P)
- FCAT focus(P)

- gaps between university & practicum (U,P)
- exclusive work w/ students w/ disabilities(P)
- no opportunities for vocab or comp (P)
- opportunities for 5 big areas(P)

- conflicting coursework(U)
- field supervisor(U)
- field supervisor(U)
- UFLI(U)

- gaps between university & practicum (U,P)
- exclusive work w/ students w/ disabilities(P)
- no opportunities for vocab or comp (P)
- opportunities for 5 big areas(P)

- changing reading beliefs(P)
- exclusive work w/ students w/ disabilities(P)
- little instructional freedom(P)

- multiple service delivery models(P)
- opportunities for 5 big areas(P)
- FCAT focus(P)

- changing classroom management(P)
- limited teaching opportunities(P)
- FCAT focus(P)

- gaps between university & practicum (U,P)
- exclusive work w/ students w/ disabilities(P)
- no opportunities for vocab or comp (P)
- opportunities for 5 big areas(P)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective codes</th>
<th>Anita</th>
<th>Colleen</th>
<th>Kristy</th>
<th>Melanie</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
<th>Tricia</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no opportunity for PA, phonics, or fluency(P)</td>
<td>no opportunities for fluency, vocab, or comp (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>confining curriculum(P)</td>
<td>no opportunities for PA or phonics</td>
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</tbody>
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*Note. (I)=influence of the individual; (U)= influence of the university; (P)= influence of the practicum.*
CHAPTER 5
THE GROUNDED THEORY ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHER APPROPRIATION OF CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL TOOLS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a grounded theory on special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools related to reading instruction for struggling readers and students with disabilities. The grounded theory emerged from data that focused on the influences that mediated the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. The influences included those related to the individual and to social contexts, in this case the university and the practicum experience. Chapter four described the impact of these influences on individual pre-service teachers. Developed through cross-case analysis, the grounded theory uncovered the relationships among influences that mediated special education pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools for teaching reading to students with disabilities. The researcher looked for concepts that were consistent across participants, thus completing the cross-case analysis. These main concepts framed all coded data for participants.

The grounded theory provides an analytical explanation of how the various influences interact to promote or hinder pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. Using data from interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts, the researcher examined the role of individual influences and the role of social context influences on the participants’ appropriation of pedagogical tools, all of which comprise activity theory. Integrating the data using constant questioning and comparison, the researcher discovered the core concept, which is the main theme of the study and the component concepts, which interact with the core concept to form a complete theory to understand the appropriation of conceptual and practical tools.

Figure 5-1 illustrates this grounded theory consisting of (a) the three activity systems and the influences contained therein, (b) the core concept and three component concepts that impact
the appropriation of conceptual and practical tools, and (c) interaction of concepts under which this appropriation takes place. For a comprehensive list of each activity system and its constituent influences, refer to Table 5-1.

The shaded rounded rectangle containing *opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice* represents the core concept. This core concept emerged as the most important factor in pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. Without opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice, the pre-service teachers’ adoption of conceptual and practical tools reached low levels at best. This concept becomes inextricably linked to the three component concepts and serves as the primary conduit through which the three component concepts are connected. The rounded rectangles in the middle of the diagram represent the component concepts that either worked to support or hinder pre-service teacher tool appropriation including (a) personal qualities, (b) motivation for knowledge assimilation, and (c) access to knowledge. These three component concepts interacted with the core concept to shape the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. The double arrows linking the core concept to the three component concepts denote two-way interactions. In other words, the core concept influenced the component concepts and vice versa. Although the data did provide evidence of the two-way interactions between the core concept and component concepts, without following the pre-service teachers beyond their practicum experience, it is difficult to fully understand the nature of these two-way interactions. The bidirectional relationships between the core and component concepts, therefore, are represented by dotted lines.

The pre-service teachers’ personal qualities, such as personal attributes, academic ability, future goals, beliefs, and concerns, emerged as important influences. Personal qualities shed light
on how the pre-service teachers perceived themselves, others, and their surroundings.

Additionally, this component concept provided insights into what the pre-service teachers valued and how they approached tasks. While personal qualities influenced pre-service teachers’ opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice, the reverse was also true. For example, Nancy’s timidity thwarted her ability to manage classroom behaviors, which ultimately foiled her reading instruction. The opportunity to appropriate her knowledge in a challenging practicum placement, however, diminished her confidence, leaving her feeling ineffectual. Hence, the interaction between the core concept and personal qualities worked in two directions.

Closely related to personal qualities was motivation, either intrinsic or extrinsic, for knowledge assimilation. This component concept included the pre-service teachers’ impetuses for appropriating conceptual and practical tools. For instance, upon entering her practicum, Melanie had little motivation to learn the phonics knowledge she was exposed to during her Emergent Literacy course. Being responsible for delivering effective beginning reading instruction in her practicum, however, increased her motivation to appropriate phonics tools.

The final component concept, access to knowledge, included all the sources of knowledge available to the pre-service teachers. The relationship between access to knowledge and the core concept also worked in two directions. For example, Kristy had access to phonics knowledge from her Emergent Literacy course, but it was the opportunity to appropriate this knowledge in practice that helped her realize she did not fully understand phonics. As a result, Kristy sought help from her cooperating teacher and field supervisor, thus increasing her access to knowledge.

Though Table 4-1 in chapter 4 presented selective and axial codes to illustrate how various influences affected each of the participants differentially, the grounded theory diagram provides a conceptual framework that relates the various influences and
concepts and explains how they mediated pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools as a collective group, hence the cross-case analysis. As the flow of arrows in diagram 5-1 indicates, the activity systems influenced the various component concepts, which in turn interacted with the core concept to influence the levels at which conceptual and practical tools were appropriated. In the following sections, extensive discussions about the core concept and component concepts and their interrelationships will be discussed.

**Core Concept: Opportunities to Appropriate Knowledge in Practice**

The six pre-service teachers, their cooperating teachers, their field supervisors, and their course instructors all emphasized the necessity of having opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice. The participants talked about how having chances to implement reading knowledge in classroom settings was crucial to pre-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. The practicum, therefore, emerged as the most critical activity system. For example, Mrs. Carter described the practicum as being the place where pre-service teachers “really learn to teach.” The opportunity to appropriate knowledge in practice helped the pre-service teachers realize the relevance and importance of their reading coursework. As Instructor D indicated, the pre-service teachers did not always appreciate the Emergent Literacy course content until they had to implement this knowledge in classrooms. Colleen, Melanie, and Kristy all spoke about how learning phonics during Emergent Literacy seemed unimportant and demeaning until they had to draw on this knowledge to instruct struggling readers. Kristy spoke about how her practicum experience helped her gauge her command of the knowledge from her coursework and UFLI training.

For some pre-service teachers, the practicum and its opportunities to appropriate conceptual and practical tools in practice seemed to signify the point during the PROTEACH program at which their coursework knowledge started to coalesce into a meaningful body of
knowledge and as Mrs. Carter stated “where [they] really learn[ed] to teach.” For these pre-service teachers, positive interactions between (a) opportunities to appropriate conceptual and practical tools in practice and (b) component concepts seemed to be associated with higher levels of appropriation. Unfortunately, not all pre-service teachers had such positive experiences when it came to opportunities to appropriate conceptual and practical tools in practice. The negative interactions experienced by some pre-service teachers appeared to have a detrimental effect on the levels to which their appropriation of tools could occur.

A number of factors, both positive and negative, determined the extent to which the pre-service teachers had opportunities to appropriate their tools in practice. These factors emerged as the predominant influences characterizing the practicum activity system. First, the grade level in which a pre-service teacher was placed greatly influenced the areas of reading she could observe and teach. For example, Anita’s practicum in a third grade classroom meant she had multiple opportunities to teach vocabulary and comprehension, but fewer chances to teach phonics or phonemic awareness. As a result, Anita felt more confident in her abilities to teach vocabulary and comprehension. Furthermore, Anita’s interview statements indicated her knowledge of vocabulary and comprehension was more sophisticated than her knowledge of phonics and phonemic awareness. The opposite was true for Colleen who primarily taught phonics and phonemic awareness to Kindergartners as opposed to vocabulary and comprehension.

Second, the service delivery model employed in the practicum and what participants were allowed to do within the model influenced the participants’ opportunities to appropriate conceptual and practical tools. Participants in inclusive classrooms reported having fewer opportunities to observe special education accommodations and intensive reading instruction compared to the participants who were placed in resource rooms or push-in, pull-out models.
Melanie reported that pulling small groups of students for intensive reading instruction helped her understand the reading process and the specific struggles some students encounter when learning to read. Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia all delivered intensive, targeted reading instruction to small groups of struggling readers because their practicum placements used pull-out models for reading. Anita, Kristy, and Nancy, however, taught in inclusive classrooms where instruction was not differentiated. Although they had some opportunities to work with small groups of students, the instruction was not individualized or intensive.

The third influence and, according to the data, the most important was the cooperating teacher. Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia had multiple opportunities to observe systematic reading instruction because they were paired with cooperating teachers who had extensive knowledge of special education and the instructional needs of students with disabilities. Cooperating teachers paired with Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia were able to provide feedback that was specific to explicit, systematic reading instruction and behavior management, thus Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia were the only pre-service teachers that appropriated tools concerning phonics instruction and specific behavior management plans. Anita, Kristy, and Nancy were paired with general educators who had less knowledge about disabilities and special education reading instruction, thus the feedback they received focused more on general reading knowledge and instructional practices such as instructional pacing and the use of specific feedback.

Furthermore, Anita and Nancy reported they did not receive sufficient feedback of any kind. Anita stated her cooperating teacher did not observe her instruction on a regular basis and Nancy said the feedback she received did not pinpoint ways she could improve her instruction. For both Anita and Nancy the lack of consistent, quality feedback appeared to impact their scores on the RISE negatively because their scores did not improve like those of the other pre-service
teachers who reported they received adequate feedback both before and after teaching a lesson. With the exception of Kristy, the participants who received sufficient feedback and support received the highest scores on the RISE. As will be discussed later, it seemed some of Kristy’s personal qualities impeded her progress.

A final cooperating teacher characteristic that impacted the pre-service teachers’ opportunities to appropriate their knowledge was the extent to which cooperating teachers provided pre-service teachers with teaching opportunities. Nancy documented having few opportunities to teach reading. Similarly, Tricia described how for several weeks at the beginning of her practicum she had to sit back and watch Mrs. Taylor’s instruction because Mrs. Taylor hesitated turning over the class to a pre-service teacher. Although both Nancy and Tricia had opportunities to observe their cooperating teachers’ instruction, this was not as meaningful or insightful as when they delivered instruction themselves. Over time, Tricia was given more teaching responsibilities, thus she reported an increase in self-efficacy, but unfortunately, for Nancy, her limited chances to teach reading seemed to be associated with diminishing levels of self-efficacy concerning struggling readers and students with disabilities.

The fourth factor affecting pre-service teachers’ opportunities to appropriate their knowledge was student characteristics, specifically students’ cultural and economic backgrounds and the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of cultural mismatches between themselves and their students. Nancy and Tricia spoke about how their backgrounds did not match those of their students, thus having negative repercussions on their instruction. Nancy explained how she was unsure how to address the specific needs of her students, all of whom were African American and came from low-income homes. Nancy’s uncertainties affected her self-efficacy negatively, thus leading to behavior management problems, which derailed her reading instruction. Tricia
talked about how she did not know how to help students from low SES homes, stating “I found it
difficult to relate to [kids from low SES homes] and I started feeling like maybe I am not the best
person to reach [them], whereas I can relate to the kids who have parents who are involved”
(9.11.07).

Curriculum was the final influence on pre-service teachers’ opportunities to appropriate
their knowledge in practice. Anita and Kristy were placed in practicum experiences that utilized
the district adopted basal reading series, thus they had more freedom in their lesson planning.
The reading basal, however, was not designed for struggling readers specifically and therefore,
Anita and Kristy did not have many opportunities to enact systematic, explicit reading
instruction. Nancy’s placement used the basal reading series in conjunction with the Success for
All (SFA) program. The result was that Nancy was limited in her freedom to plan lessons and
she did not observe systematic, explicit reading instruction. Nancy talked about how she did not
get to implement many of the tools she learned in her reading methods courses due to the
confining curriculum.

Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia, on the other hand, used the direct instruction, scripted
Reading Mastery curriculum, and as a result, they all reported having little freedom in their
lesson planning. For example, Melanie noted that Reading Mastery took away from her
creativity. Tricia never took credit for any lesson planning due to the constraints of the Reading
Mastery program and the inflexibility of her cooperating teacher’s routines and procedures.
Although they had little voice in what and how they taught, Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia all
learned how to implement instruction using a curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of
students with disabilities. The supportive structure of the Reading Mastery curriculum facilitated
their instruction, perhaps helping them reach higher scores on the RISE. For example, the
Reading Mastery script prompted the pre-service teachers to provide students with specific feedback, give students plentiful opportunities to respond, and include both guided and independent practice. In the end, Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia all supported the use of Reading Mastery despite its scripted nature because of the progress they observed in their students.

Although the opportunity to appropriate knowledge in practice emerged as the most important, or core concept, three other component concepts (a) personal qualities, (b) motivation for knowledge assimilation, and (c) access to knowledge also affected the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. In the following sections, these component concepts and their interactions are discussed in detail.

**Component Concept: Personal Qualities**

The component concept of personal qualities was comprised of several elements, including personal attributes, academic ability, future goals, personal concerns, and beliefs. At the most basic level, personal qualities are internal characteristics that contribute to a person’s individuality. Data showed that all three activity systems influenced the pre-service teachers’ personal qualities.

Personal qualities impacted appropriation of conceptual and practical tools in both positive and negative ways. In general, positive personal attributes such as reflectiveness, dedication, and initiative seemed to facilitate tool appropriation to higher levels. Pre-service teachers whose future goals aligned with their practicum also experienced greater success with appropriation. Pre-service teachers whose concerns centered on the academic needs of their students seemed to reach higher appropriation levels. Finally, the ways in which beliefs interacted with opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice determined the extent to which the pre-service teachers’ beliefs changed. An in-depth discussion of these personal qualities and how they interacted with the other component concepts and the core concept is provided below.
Personal Attributes

In this section, the role of personal attributes, including personality dispositions and academic ability will be discussed in light of the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools. For Colleen and Melanie, personality dispositions played a positive role in their appropriation of tools. Both Colleen and Melanie showed initiative during their practicum placements, actively seeking help and answers to their questions, thus facilitating their instruction and appropriation of tools. For Nancy, aspects of her personality did not help her overcome a difficult practicum situation. Nancy felt her practicum students were particularly difficult to manage. Her lack of confidence and timidity often compounded her difficulties managing classroom behavior, and this seemed to color her perceptions of herself. Thus, Nancy had few positive teaching experiences during her practicum. In the case of Nancy, her personality dispositions coupled with a negative practicum appeared to accentuate her lack of confidence for her own abilities.

For the rest of the participants, personal attributes, including personality dispositions and academic ability played a either positive or negative role in appropriation of practical and conceptual tools, mostly because of how they interacted with the practicum and its opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice. Kristy’s difficulties understanding reading coupled with a practicum that lacked explicit, systematic instruction often limited her appropriation of tools. For example, interview and observation data indicated Kristy did not appropriate conceptual or practical tools about irregular words. During interviews, Kristy often confused irregular and regular words. Observation data showed that Kristy’s lack of appropriation concerning irregular words impacted her instruction negatively. In several lessons, Kristy instructed students to sound out irregular words. When students tried to decode the irregular words, they became frustrated because the words they produced did not make sense. Kristy was also frustrated because she was unsure how to help them. Kristy’s reflectiveness and open acceptance of feedback, however,
simultaneously played a more positive role in her learning. Kristy knew when her lessons were not successful and she readily welcomed any feedback that would help her improve. In an interview Kristy maintained her lessons were more effective when she incorporated feedback from her field supervisor or cooperating teacher. Anita was organized, systematic, and a dedicated student, attributes that supported her learning, but her inflexibility and rigidity made it difficult for her to adapt to classroom changes, often impacting her instruction negatively. For example, during one observation, Anita planned to ask students comprehension questions in a guided reading group. After spending an extensive period of time asking questions, the students became less engaged and off task. Instead of changing the activity when students became disengaged, Anita continued with the pre-planned activity of asking comprehension questions until the students’ misbehavior escalated and the lesson was disrupted.

In general, the presence of positive personal attributes, such as reflectiveness, openness-mindedness, and initiative facilitated pre-service teacher’s learning, whereas a lack of such attributes hindered knowledge appropriation. Moreover, the presence or absence of certain attributes was not as important as the interaction of personal attributes with the practicum. This interaction might have been the key to understanding the role of personal attributes on pre-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and practical tools.

**Personal Concerns and Future Goals**

In addition to personal attributes, the personal concerns and future goals of the pre-service teachers also impacted their tool appropriation. Some of the pre-service teachers had concerns about their relationship with their students. Colleen and Tricia wanted students to like them and have fun in school. Colleen’s desire to be liked by her students seemed to influence her willingness to discipline students. During initial observations, Colleen adopted an informal tone with students, often giggling at their misbehaviors rather than correcting them. As a result of
these management issues, Colleen spent more time attending to student behavior as opposed to considering how she might deliver effective reading instruction. Tricia’s concern centered on making reading instruction enjoyable. Tricia was hypercritical of her placement because she did not feel the instruction was fun for students. Although she attested to the power of direct instruction programs like Reading Mastery for students with disabilities, when asked about her future plans for teaching reading, Tricia focused more on her future goal as a general educator and how she would make reading fun for the students in her classroom. For example, she spoke about giving students silent independent reading time with enjoyable books and structuring her reading instruction around a reader’s workshop model. So, while Tricia’s instruction improved while using Reading Mastery, it is unclear that her beliefs will support the use of structured instruction in the future.

Kristy and Melanie expressed concern over providing students with effective instruction. Kristy talked about wanting to know her students’ instructional needs and giving them instruction “with the lightening speed” they need. Although Kristy struggled to deliver effective reading instruction, her concerns about providing students with proper instruction fostered a willingness to dedicate extra time in her practicum in order to improve her instruction. Melanie spoke about the importance of giving students with disabilities the “right kind of instruction” so they could receive reading instruction in the general education classroom eventually. Melanie was open to challenging teaching situations because she knew they would help her become a better teacher. She spent extra hours learning the letter sounds and the proper Reading Mastery procedures so she could deliver intensive reading lessons to students. Melanie and Kristy’s desire to be special educators and provide students with effective instruction fostered a commitment to improving their teaching.
Nancy’s perceived inability to assert herself with students and her concerns about her capabilities to handle the behaviors of students from low income homes colored her image of herself as a teacher for this population. After battling classroom management issues, with little support to acquire new skills in this area, Nancy felt defeated and inefficacious. Unfortunately, she left her practicum questioning her knowledge and her teaching skills for teaching all students.

Beliefs

Pre-service teachers also entered their practicum equipped with personal beliefs about special education and reading instruction for students with disabilities. The ways in which these beliefs interacted with the practicum experience played a role in how incoming beliefs were substantiated or abandoned.

Three pre-service teachers, Colleen, Kristy, and Melanie, reported changes in their beliefs as a result of participating in their practicum experiences. At first, Colleen and Melanie believed the best service delivery model for students with disabilities was a self-contained classroom. However, after seeing how successful students could be in inclusive classrooms that utilized push-in and pull-out models, both pre-service teachers remonstrated their earlier beliefs and instead adopted pro-inclusion beliefs. Before completing her practicum, Kristy believed in a holistic approach to reading instruction. However, after observing the negative influence of a whole language approach on the reading abilities of her students, Kristy abandoned her holistic reading beliefs in favor of explicit, systematic reading instruction. She knew that without such instruction students with disabilities would struggle.

Anita’s beliefs were also strengthened as a result of her practicum experience, but in a different way. Anita began her practicum experience believing that students with disabilities needed explicit, individualized instruction. Her beliefs were only strengthened when she
observed students with disabilities struggling due to a lack of explicit reading instruction that targeted their individual needs. Anita said

I have seen how in the class I was in this semester there was a lot of cooperative reading activities but the actual reading instruction was not as explicit as I feel it should have been. I think [reading instruction] needs to be more explicit, giving more examples, or actually modeling reading tasks before letting kids go out and try it (12.11.07).

**Component Concept: Motivation for Knowledge Assimilation**

In this study, the pre-service teachers had varying motivations for assimilating knowledge, with some motivations leading to higher levels of appropriation. Based on statements made during interviews, the pre-service teachers’ motivations could be categorized as either extrinsic or intrinsic. The pre-service teachers’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning stemmed from all three activity systems. In general, when pre-service teachers had intrinsic reasons for assimilating knowledge, they reached higher levels of tool appropriation. Below are descriptions of how the pre-service teachers’ extrinsic and intrinsic motivations were influenced by the activity systems and how these motivations interacted with the other component concepts in the grounded theory.

Accountability measures in place at the university and the practicum, such as exams, course assignments, and teaching opportunities, provided pre-service teachers with motivation for assimilating knowledge. In the case of the university, the pre-service teachers’ motivations stemmed from course requirements, motivations that were fueled by the extrinsic reward of earning a passing grade in the course. As a result, Colleen, Kristy, and Melanie learned phonics to earn a good grade in their Emergent Literacy course, but they were not motivated to draw on this knowledge because they did not see how it was useful. It was not until they were responsible for reading instruction in their practicum experiences that they developed more intrinsic reasons for assimilating phonics knowledge. In an interview, Colleen said, “it took me a while to realize
[learning phonics] was important. Now in my practicum I think ‘what does /x/ say? Did I say it right” (10.11.07)? Kristy said, “I want to be able to [teach reading] with the lightening speed [students] need I don’t want to be standing up there thinking and confused” (10.19.07). Once Colleen, Kristy, and Melanie were motivated to learn information, even when it was not a course requirement, they valued their coursework content more, spent more time trying to learn it, and began to understand it on conceptual levels.

In addition to university and practicum influences, individual experiences impacted participants’ motivations to appropriate tools. Anita, Colleen, and Nancy all had family and prior experiences that fostered a desire to become special educators. Colleen and Nancy both had siblings with disabilities. Witnessing their brothers’ struggles in school, especially struggles that were heightened by teachers’ inability to meet their brothers’ needs fostered Colleen and Nancy’s desire to be effective special educators. For Colleen, an encouraging placement intensified her commitment to the field of special education, but for Nancy, a discouraging placement squelched her confidence to be a teacher, much less a special educator. Anita did not have a sibling with a disability but she did have a mother who successfully included students in her classroom. Seeing the success students with disabilities experienced in her mother’s classroom fostered Anita’s drive to help students with disabilities. So when met with a less than successful practicum placement Anita only became stronger in her resolve to be a quality special educator.

For Tricia, individual influences played out differently. Tricia was motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Tricia chose special education as a major because of the possibility of earning more money, but money was not her only motivation. She believed knowledge of special education techniques would improve her skill as a general educator.
According to Tricia, “special education sparked my interest because it was a way to gain more knowledge to help every learner” (9.11.07). Although Tricia professed a desire to learn reading strategies to help all learners, she seemed more motivated to make reading instruction fun when she had her own classroom. She did not acknowledge in interviews how she must continue to use explicit, systematic instruction as it was in the best interest of her students. Tricia was motivated to assimilate conceptual and practical tools associated with reading instruction for students with disabilities because she had little to no choice in delivering other techniques in her practicum. Although Tricia had some of the highest scores on the RISE and observation and interview evidence revealed she appropriated tools about reading instruction and behavior management to higher levels, it is uncertain whether she will ever reach the level of mastery in appropriating explicit, systematic instructional tools. Instead, she may choose to focus exclusively on implementing instruction that students find “fun.”

**Component Concept: Access to Knowledge**

The final component that affected the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools was access. Without access to tools, the pre-service teachers could not appropriate them. Like motivation to assimilate knowledge, access to knowledge is another component concept that was influenced by all three activity systems. Some pre-service teachers had prior experiences that provided them with access to knowledge. Other pre-service teachers had cooperating teachers who had extensive knowledge of special education, serving as a valuable source of knowledge. Finally, some pre-service teachers reported having reading methods courses and field supervisors that helped them acquire knowledge.

The individual activity system influenced pre-service teachers’ knowledge access, but it did so in limited ways. None of the participants reported having extensive early reading memories. All of the pre-service teachers described how surprised they were when they realized
learning to read and teaching students to read is “hard.” Colleen best summarized the group sentiment when she said, “Most of us in college probably learned to read [easily]. You would have no idea how many kids didn’t [have an easy time]. I had no clue, I just thought reading was a natural process and that everyone learns to read” (12.05.07).

Similarly, with the exception of Anita, none of the pre-service teachers spoke about extensive prior experiences with special education. Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia all attended K-12 schools that utilized self-contained service delivery models, thus they did not witness special education students being included in general education classrooms, nor did they observe any accommodations or individualized instruction. As a result, they relied heavily on reading methods courses, special education courses, field experiences, and practicum placements for their special education knowledge.

As stated before, an important influence of the practicum was the cooperating teacher. Cooperating teachers who had extensive knowledge of special education reading instruction served as greater sources of access for pre-service teachers compared to cooperating teachers who had limited knowledge of these topics. In some practicum placements, other school personnel also served as sources of knowledge. Colleen, for example, appropriated several accommodations for students with disabilities from observing a general education teacher. Various curricula provided access to knowledge unique to special education. From their use of Reading Mastery, Colleen, Melanie, and Tricia appropriated conceptual and practical tools related to special education reading instruction, particularly modeling, plentiful opportunities for students to respond, extensive guided practice, and specific feedback.

All pre-service teachers had access to knowledge from the university, though sources of this knowledge varied. The field supervisor was viewed positively across the six participants. All
the pre-service teachers reported that feedback provided by field supervisors was a useful source of knowledge, even though the usability of this feedback varied. Nancy and Tricia both experienced barriers to implementing field supervisors’ feedback because of practicum experiences. For Nancy, a challenging classroom management setting and limited opportunities to teach presented barriers, and for Tricia the inflexibility of her cooperating teacher constrained opportunities to interject new ideas into instruction. Kristy, however, experienced a different situation. Kristy’s practicum provided her freedom to incorporate feedback. Moreover, Kristy’s open-mindedness and desire to improve meant she sought feedback as often as possible and was amenable to constructive criticism. This feedback was particularly important because Kristy, who often struggled to provide students with clear, intensive reading instruction, stated she experienced greater success when she integrated the field supervisor’s feedback into her lessons.

Participants consistently viewed UFLI training as a positive source of knowledge yet, they sometimes did not experience its full benefits due to time constraints. Tricia and Nancy explained that their UFLI tutoring times conflicted with other elements of their practicum experiences. Tricia’s UFLI tutoring time was “sandwiched” between two reading groups in her practicum, thus she always felt rushed to be where she was needed. The result was that Tricia did not have time to reflect on her UFLI instruction before she had to hurry to meet her reading groups. Nancy’s tutoring time occurred during Mrs. Nell’s planning time, therefore, Nancy missed opportunities to plan with Mrs. Nell and receive feedback on her instruction in the practicum.

The two pre-service teachers who reported the most positive experiences with UFLI tutoring also reported having practicum experiences that facilitated their implementation of strategies acquired during tutoring. Colleen and Kristy both had time to implement UFLI tutoring
while attending to other practicum teaching responsibilities. Colleen felt her UFLI tutoring provided additional exposure to phonics knowledge and enabled her to make instructional decisions for her tutee. For Kristy, the UFLI tutoring was helpful because its structure and consistency facilitated her enactment of beginning reading instruction in the classroom.

Specific courses, as well as instructors assigned to those courses influenced pre-service teachers’ access to strategies and ideas in both positive and negative ways. Colleen, Melanie, and Nancy perceived their literacy coursework negatively. Nancy said she felt overwhelmed after finishing Emergent Literacy because so much content was covered. For Nancy, her feelings of being overwhelmed were exacerbated by her negative practicum experience, where she had few opportunities to appropriate knowledge from the Emergent Literacy course. Colleen and Melanie also felt they gained littler from their coursework, but gave different reasons for their unsatisfactory experiences. They thought their Emergent Literacy course was disorganized and did not provide sufficient justification for learning phonics. Going further, Melanie stated, “I felt I got a major disservice because I did not learn that much about reading” (9.12.07). Colleen and Melanie felt that the information acquired in the Emergent Literacy course would have faded from memory if they did not have a practicum that helped them draw upon this knowledge to teach students with disabilities.

Comparatively, Anita, Kristy, and Tricia all expressed gratitude for their reading methods coursework. For Tricia, her Emergent Literacy course was especially beneficial because of Instructor A’s caring personality. Tricia also liked her Intermediate Reading class and described how she used many of the strategies from this course in a prior field experience. Tricia desperately wanted to implement her Emergent Literacy knowledge but experienced barriers when placed in an inflexible practicum. Similarly, Anita and Kristy spoke about feeling
frustrated when they could not appropriate their reading coursework knowledge in their practicum experiences. Thus, the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their university courses and course instructors interacted with their opportunities to appropriate knowledge, affecting the extent to which they appropriated conceptual and practical tools.

**Summary**

The grounded theory presented in this chapter emerged after the researcher completed a cross-case analysis of six special education pre-service teachers providing reading instruction during a practicum placement. The three activity systems (ie. individual, university, and practicum) influenced the core concept and component concepts.

Opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice emerged as the core concept, and its reciprocal relationship with the three component concepts (a) personal qualities, (b) motivation for knowledge assimilation, and (c) access to knowledge seemed to play a role in the levels to which pre-service teachers appropriated conceptual and practical tools.

Although the core concept and component concepts all influenced what pre-service teachers did in the classroom or how they constructed knowledge, the extent of their influence and direction of the influence varied across participants. In the best case, the concepts worked in positive ways, thus facilitating pre-service teachers’ tool appropriation and knowledge acquisition. In this instance the interaction of positive personal attributes, a future goal as a special educator, and a supportive special education practicum experience with plentiful opportunities to appropriate explicit, systematic reading knowledge in practice facilitated tool appropriation. In the worst case, the concepts worked in negative ways, thus hindering pre-service teachers’ appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. In this case, the interaction of personal qualities with a general education practicum experience that afforded few opportunities
to appropriate explicit, systematic reading instruction hindered pre-service teachers’ appropriation of reading tools for students with disabilities.
Table 5-1. Influences on appropriation of conceptual and practical tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity systems</th>
<th>Influences</th>
</tr>
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| The individual   | Prior experiences  
                    | Family characteristics  
                    | Prior beliefs  
                    | Personal attributes or dispositions  
                    | Cultural background |
| The university   | Course instructors  
                    | Reading coursework  
                    | Assessment coursework  
                    | Behavior management coursework  
                    | UFLI training  
                    | Field supervisors |
| The practicum    | Grade level  
                    | Service delivery model  
                    | Cooperating teacher knowledge  
                    | Cooperating teacher feedback  
                    | Instructional freedom  
                    | Opportunities to teach  
                    | Students’ cultural & economic background  
                    | Classroom management  
                    | Other school personnel  
                    | Students’ disability  
                    | Curriculum |
Figure 5-1. Pre-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and practical tools.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to report how the findings from the current study support the existing literature and how they extend it. Also included in this chapter are implications for the research community, teacher educators, and school-based personnel concerning special education teacher preparation.

Discussion

This study and findings generated support scholars’ claims that research elucidating the complexities of teacher education is important (Zeichner, 2005; Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). The findings from this study confirm prior studies of teacher preparation that found great variability within preparation programs at the level of the individual pre-service teacher (Boyd et al., 2006; Humphrey & Wechsler, 2005; Kennedy, 1991; Wenglinsky, 2000). Although all six pre-service teachers completed the same preparation program, dramatic differences between participants and within the program itself led to vastly different outcomes across the six pre-service teachers. In this study, teacher preparation made a difference for all of the participants, but the ways in which it mattered varied and cannot be reduced to a simple equation, thus corroborating assertions made by Boyd et al. (2006) and Humphrey and Wechsler (2005) who surmised that participants experience programs differently.

Although a plethora of individual influences emerged from this study, four appeared to be most significant (a) opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice, (b) personal qualities, (c) motivation for knowledge assimilation, (d) access to knowledge. In fact, interactions of these four influences had the most explanatory power when it came to understanding how activity systems impacted per-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and practical tools. In this section, findings are discussed in light of previous literature.
Opportunities to Appropriate Knowledge in Practice

First, participants in this study, including the pre-service teachers, their cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and reading methods course instructors all attested to the importance of opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice. When pre-service teachers had successful practical opportunities to appropriate their knowledge, they felt more confident and prepared to teach students. They also reported their reading knowledge was most influenced by practical teaching experiences. For example, the pre-service teachers in this study benefited from tutoring struggling readers using the UFLI program. The participants described how UFLI training helped them understand the reading process, address students’ reading struggles, and implement practical tools related to beginning reading instruction. These findings are supported in prior research demonstrating pre-service teachers need opportunities to apply knowledge in practical settings such as tutoring experiences (Duffy and Atkinson, 2001; Fang & Ashley, 2004; IRA, 2003; Linek et al., 1999).

One reason why pre-service teachers in this study valued practicum experiences and field experiences is that they acquired practical tools. This finding is not surprising given what Grossman et al. (2000) learned when they followed pre-service teachers into their first three years of teaching. Grossman and her colleagues found that beginning teachers needed access to concrete teaching strategies. Without such strategies, teachers had difficulty turning conceptual tools into practical ones.

The practicum emerged as a key factor in pre-service teacher learning, but the results from this study shed light on important differences between practicum experiences. For example, not all practicum experiences provided pre-service teachers with positive opportunities to appropriate their reading knowledge in a safe and productive environment. In other words, participating in a practicum experience did not always translate into a positive learning
experience for pre-service teachers. Several factors determined the quality of the practicum. First, poorly structured and unfocused practicum experiences caused stress for pre-service teachers and limited their opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice. Second, qualities of the cooperating teacher influenced the success of a practicum experience. Cooperating teachers who were knowledgeable about special education influenced the pre-service teachers in positive ways. These knowledgeable cooperating teachers provided pre-service teachers with specific feedback about knowledge and strategies related to reading instruction for students with disabilities. The literature review conducted by Wilson et al. (2001), confirmed these findings. These authors surmised that the best placements are well structured and aligned with university coursework. Additionally, the results of this literature review documented that cooperating teachers have a significant impact on the quality of a field placement.

**Personal Qualities**

Findings from this study indicated that several personal qualities made a difference in how pre-service teachers appropriated tools. First, personal attributes worked in positive and negative ways to influence tool appropriation. One personal attribute influencing the pre-service teachers was their propensity to be reflective. Pre-service teachers who were especially reflective spent time thinking about their instruction in relation to their students’ needs. Other researchers found that pre-service teachers’ open disposition and tendency to engage in reflection explained their success in field placements (Garmon, 2004; Richards & Morse, 2002). Specifically, pre-service teachers in these studies were skilled in providing students with differentiated instruction.

In addition to reflection, self-efficacy emerged as an influential personal attribute. The majority of pre-service teachers in this study entered their practicum uncertain of their ability to help struggling readers and students with disabilities. Successful opportunities to appropriate their knowledge in practice, led to higher levels of self-efficacy, whereas, unsuccessful
opportunities reduced pre-service teachers’ sense of self-efficacy. These findings partially support research by Hoy and Woolfolk (1990) that demonstrated pre-service teachers’ efficacy increases in some ways but decreases in others. These researchers found that pre-service teachers who completed student teaching were more efficacious in their ability to motivate students, but they were less confident in their ability to overcome challenges students from difficult backgrounds presented. To understand the development of efficacy in beginning teachers fully, more research is needed.

Other important attributes that emerged in this study included dedication, initiative, and open-mindedness. These and other attributes have been previously supported in the literature. Lessen and Frankiewicz (1992) conducted a literature review on attributes of effective special educators and pre-service teachers. They found successful special education pre-service teachers were relentless, aware, alert, and action oriented. These authors also found that empathetic, warm, and enthusiastic teachers had a positive impact on student gains.

In addition to personal attributes, future goals and personal concerns of pre-service teachers impacted how they appropriated tools. As in previous studies, pre-service teachers’ reasons for entering the profession emerged as important influences. In this study, pre-service teachers evaluated incoming knowledge in relation to their future goals as either general educators or special educators. For example, Tricia did not feel learning a scripted reading program was helpful to her future goal as a general educator. Melanie who wanted to be a special educator, however, valued learning how to deliver explicit intensive phonics instruction because she knew she would be teaching struggling readers and students with disabilities. Similarly, Grossman and her colleagues (1999) found that pre-service teachers placed varied emphasis on
knowledge acquired from literacy coursework depending on how this knowledge aligned with their future goals.

Pre-service teachers’ concerns about a variety of issues such as behavior management and student achievement also impacted their appropriation of practical and conceptual tools. Although all participants in this study had concerns, the nature of those concerns differed. Colleen and Tricia, were particularly concerned with their relationships with their students. They placed a heavy emphasis on making learning fun and being liked by students. Nancy felt concerned about her teaching abilities, particularly her ability to manage student behaviors. Two participants, Melanie and Kristy, were concerned about their abilities to deliver effective instruction to students. Such concerns have been documented widely in the teacher education literature. Several research teams found that pre-service teachers are concerned about their relationships with students, their abilities to maintain student discipline, and their abilities to teach (Berliner, 1988; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Fuller, 1969; Kagan, 1992; Pigge & Marso, 1986, 1987, 1990).

Finally, pre-service teachers’ beliefs impacted their appropriation of tools. Pre-service teachers in this study had strong beliefs that often acted as filters through which they evaluated practicum experiences. For example, Anita and Kristy evaluated reading instruction they observed in their practicum experience in relation to their own beliefs about how students with disabilities should be taught. Anita believed students with disabilities should receive individualized instruction gauged to meet their needs. Anita’s beliefs were strengthened when she observed students with disabilities struggle from a lack of such instruction. Kristy, on the other hand, believed in a holistic, literature-based approach to reading. Her beliefs changed, however, when she witnessed struggling readers fall further behind from a lack of intensive,
systematic, and explicit instruction. Hence, interactions between individual pre-service teachers and their practicum experiences seemed to explain why some pre-service teachers’ beliefs changed while others’ did not. This finding partially supports existing research that investigates the conditions under which teacher beliefs change. Extant research has shown that a variety of variables influence teacher candidates’ beliefs including (a) candidates’ propensity toward reflection, (b) the nature of cooperating teacher and field supervisor feedback, (c) the extent to which candidates observed classroom instruction without receiving corrective feedback, and (d) the extent to which preparation programs encouraged teacher candidates to examine their beliefs (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Kagan, 1992; Munby, 1982; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Richardson & Placier, 2001).

**Motivation for Knowledge Assimilation**

In this study, it seems that motivation for knowledge assimilation operated in different ways. One set of motivational beliefs influenced participants’ reasons for becoming special educators. Several pre-service teachers were driven by their intrinsic motivation to help all students and in particular, students with disabilities. A second set of motivational beliefs influenced what pre-service teachers learned. For example, Colleen and Melanie exhibited no motivation to develop a deep working knowledge of phonics during their Emergent Literacy course, possibly because they did not see the relevance of learning such information. Upon entering their practicum placements, however, Colleen and Melanie became more motivated to appropriate literacy tools from their coursework because they saw the necessity of such tools when trying to provide explicit, systematic phonics instruction to students with disabilities. These findings align with Brophy’s (1999) model of motivation for accomplishing tasks in education. Under this model, learners are motivated to learn when they perceive tasks “are
neither too easy or too hard” (Brophy, 1999, p. 77) and when they perceive tasks as relevant and valuable.

**Access to Knowledge**

Pre-service teachers’ access to useable knowledge emerged as an important influence on their learning. Coursework content, and perhaps more importantly course instructors, were sources of knowledge. After interviewing the reading methods course instructors and reviewing the course syllabi, it was clear that the PROTEACH reading methods courses were designed to deepen pedagogical content knowledge. For example, the Emergent Literacy course taught pre-service teachers the five components of reading, including ways to teach them to children. Similarly, other researchers have found that effective preparation programs and coursework are designed to deepen pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2000; National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, 1991). When pre-service teachers had access to coursework content that provided them with practical tools that they perceived as useful, they valued that knowledge more and showed a proclivity towards appropriating it in their practicum. Some students rejected phonics knowledge because they did not like it or see the value in it.

The quality of course instructor also seemed to be an important factor in pre-service teachers’ perceptions of coursework content. Pre-service teachers who had skilled organized course instructors valued their coursework more than pre-service teachers who felt their course instructors were disorganized and unclear. This finding somewhat supports social science research that links undergraduates’ course evaluations with their perceptions of course instructors. The social science research indicated that course instructors’ teaching style, either lenient or strict, likeability, rapport with students, organization, and grading practices affected students’ overall perceptions of the course (Beran & Violato, 2005; Jirovec, Ramanathan, & Alvarez, 1998; Smith & Anderson, 2005).
Limitations

As discussed in chapter 1, there are several aspects of the study that limit the generalizability and interpretation of the findings. First, the participants in this study attended a Research Intensive university with high academic standards and the schools in which they completed their practicum experiences were located in a mid-size school district in north Central Florida, thus the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population of special education pre-service teachers. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers in the study worked with elementary students with mild disabilities, therefore these findings may not apply to pre-service teachers who worked with secondary students or students with more severe disabilities. Finally, the participants were chosen based on selection criteria and their willingness to participate in the study. With a limited sample size, it was inevitable that some pre-service teachers would be excluded from the study.

Second, the study did not follow the pre-service teachers beyond one semester of coursework and practicum. The data, therefore, only provided glimpses into the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools over a limited amount of time. It is unclear whether these findings will remain accurate once the pre-service teachers enter into full time teaching positions. Furthermore, the study’s limited time frame makes it difficult to understand fully the bidirectional relationship between the core concept and component concepts. For example, opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice during the practicum may influence pre-service teachers’ future motivations for knowledge assimilation, but without following pre-service teachers beyond one semester, it is difficult to know for certain.

Last, it is difficult to assess how pre-service teachers appropriate tools, particularly conceptual ones. When used collectively, proxies such as the prior beliefs and experiences survey, observation field notes, and concept maps seemed to capture an accurate picture of the
participants’ appropriation, but any potential problems with these proxies could influence the interpretation of the findings. Despite these limitations, the findings from this study offer information for preparing special education teachers and conducting research on this population.

**Implications**

Findings from this study indicate that special education pre-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and practical tools related to reading is dependent on interactions between the individual and the social context activity systems. More specifically, it was the interaction of four concepts (a) opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice, (b) personal qualities, (c) motivation for knowledge assimilation, and (d) access to knowledge that mediated the pre-service teachers’ appropriation of pedagogical tools. These findings have implications for future practice and research in special education.

**Implications for Future Research in Special Education Teacher Preparation**

The results of this study suggest that activity theory might be a viable framework for future investigations in special education teacher education. Activity theory not only accounts for various influences on teacher learning, but it also sheds light on why teachers appropriate tools at different levels. It is a model that examines learning from social and individual levels, thus considering the myriad of complexities that characterize a special education context. Should special education teacher educators chose to use activity theory to frame future studies, they will need to pay close attention to influences like service delivery model, disability, curriculum, and cooperating teacher knowledge of special education. While these factors might not wield as much influence in studies of general education pre-service teachers, they are significant for special educators.

Though the grounded theory methods used in this study produced an explanatory model of special education pre-service teacher appropriation of conceptual and practical tools, the
employment of other research designs would paint a more complete picture of pre-service teacher learning. Social constructionist methods would offer a comprehensive understanding of how pre-service teachers and their course instructors, field supervisors, and cooperating teachers construct knowledge jointly. Discourse analysis methods could provide information about the types of dialogue in teacher education that impact the appropriation of pedagogical tools. Large-scale experimental and quasi-experimental studies could explain the effects of various preparation experiences on pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools. Finally, studies of special education pre-service teachers who work with secondary students or students with more severe disabilities would reveal additional influences that researchers should consider.

Finally, the current study investigated outcomes related to special education pre-service teacher appropriation of tools, but this is only one of many potential teacher education outcomes in need of attention. As argued by Cochran-Smith (2001), one important outcome of teacher education is long-term impact, which has to do with the effects of teacher education over time. Specifically, long-term impact examines pre-service teachers’ practice upon entering the field and the achievement of their students. Relating the findings of the current study to assertions made by Cochran-Smith leads to several unanswered questions. At the most basic level, what are the long-term impacts of teacher education? Is there evidence that teacher education continues to influence teachers once they exit preparation programs? Will the four concepts that emerged in this study continue to influence teachers’ appropriation of tools once they become teachers of record? If so, in what ways? As teachers of record, are there other influences that play a role in the appropriation of tools? What are the long-term effects of personal qualities on teachers? For example, will pre-service teachers who are naturally reflective have an easier time appropriating tools in the future? Once pre-service teachers are responsible for students’ achievement on high
stakes tests, will their motivation for knowledge assimilation be affected? Finally, how does the appropriation of conceptual and practical tools during preparation impact student achievement?

Implications for Special Education Teacher Preparation and Current Practice in Schools

The findings generated from this study highlight several aspects of special education teacher preparation that are important for teacher educators to consider as they prepare prospective teachers. First, as has been found in previous studies, pre-service teachers entered the PROTEACH program with little existing knowledge or experiences concerning special education or students with disabilities (Green & Weaver, 1992; Pugach, 2005; Terrill & Mark, 2000). While general education pre-service teachers may have extensive background knowledge about teaching and learning for general education students, special education pre-service teachers’ prior knowledge about special education will most likely be limited. Moreover, the findings from this study showed that special education pre-service teachers’ incoming beliefs are formulated based on their K-12 schooling experiences, which predated large-scale inclusion models. Several of the pre-service teachers entered their practicum experiences supporting the use of self-contained service delivery models, as was used in their K-12 schools. Special education teacher educators should be aware that a practicum experience that revealed the benefits of inclusive models seemed to sway the pre-service teachers’ beliefs in favor of inclusive practices. This finding supports research on general educators’ beliefs and attitudes about inclusion (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996; McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, & Loveland, 2001; Waldron, McLeskey, & Pacciano, 1999). These researchers found that general educators held favorable beliefs about inclusive practices after having direct, sustained contact with students with disabilities.

Second, it seems experiences pre-service teachers value most are practical because they acquire practical tools. The UFLI training and tutoring component was particularly helpful for
the special education pre-service teachers. As has been found in the literature, tutoring experiences that provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to work with struggling readers are particularly meaningful and beneficial (Duffy & Atkinson, 2001; Niersteimer, Hopkins, & Dillon, 2000). The participants in this study valued the opportunity UFLI gave them to make instructional decisions for struggling readers. Moreover, they appreciated a structured context in which to apply their beginning reading conceptual and practical tools. These results indicate teacher educators need to pay careful attention to the structure and quality of practical teaching experiences, (ie. practicum placements), as they are the predominant vehicles for appropriating tools. Teacher educators are cautioned, however, about the inherent dangers of pre-service teachers applying pedagogical tools without possessing a conceptual understanding behind their use. For example, as was described in Chapter 4, Kristy’s lack conceptual knowledge regarding Elkonin boxes resulted in her using them inappropriately. Grossman et al. (1999) also found that pre-service teachers implemented pedagogical tools incorrectly when they lacked a deep working knowledge of the underlying concepts behind such tools.

The importance of practical teaching experiences raises many questions concerning the proliferation of alternative route (AR) programs. Pre-service teachers enrolled in AR programs typically assume full-time teaching positions while taking education coursework. While this provides AR teachers with plentiful opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice, are these opportunities facilitating higher levels of appropriation? Are AR teachers receiving enough coursework and mentoring to help them develop conceptual understandings of tools? Furthermore, what are the implications of alternative route teachers trying to appropriate conceptual and practical tools while simultaneously being held responsible for student achievement?
Third, teacher educators should attend to practicum placement characteristics that influence pre-service teacher learning, such as how educational services were delivered to students and the types of curricula used. Pre-service teachers placed in practicum experiences that utilized inclusive classrooms in conjunction with push-in or pull-out models reported feeling the most confident to teach reading to students with disabilities and observation data confirmed they were most capable of appropriating tools related to special education reading instruction. Pre-service teachers placed in inclusive classrooms without push-in or pull-out models, or classrooms lacking collaboration between general education and special education teachers, however, did not observe differentiated instruction or accommodations for students with disabilities. In these placements reading instruction was uniform across all students, thus pre-service teachers did not feel prepared to teach reading to students with disabilities. Additionally, observation data and RISE scores indicated their difficulty appropriating reading tools. When it comes to designing special education preparation programs, therefore, teacher educators would be wise to seek practicum placements that utilize a variety of service delivery models. In this study, placements employing resource rooms or push-in pull-out models all used the direct instruction Reading Mastery curriculum. This curriculum appeared to facilitate participants’ appropriation of reading tools as well as their delivery of intensive, explicit, and systematic reading instruction. It seems the built in routines and management strategies associated with Reading Mastery allowed pre-service teachers to focus on reading instruction rather than behavior management. Furthermore, Reading Mastery prompted pre-service teachers to use effective general instructional strategies such as scaffolding, specific feedback, and guided and independent practice. Thus, special education teacher educators might want to provide training in curricula such as Reading Mastery before pre-service teachers engage in student teaching.
Finally, teacher educators should keep in mind cooperating teachers’ influence on pre-service teachers’ practice. In the general education literature, Wilson, Floden, and Ferrini-Mundy (2001), also determined cooperating teachers play a powerful role in pre-service teacher learning. The results of this study extend the general education literature by highlighting cooperating teachers qualities that mattered for special education pre-service teachers. For example, special education pre-service teachers benefited from cooperating teachers who had knowledge of special education and intensive, explicit reading instruction. Special education pre-service teachers also profited from cooperating teachers who offered feedback about the particular needs of students with disabilities, including specific behavioral and academic needs. In essence, cooperating teachers who were knowledgeable about special education and students with disabilities filled in perceived gaps in university coursework.

The evidence from this study indicates two important ideas teacher educators should consider when crafting special education preparation programs. First, it seems critical to provide pre-service teachers with in-depth classroom teaching experiences throughout their program rather than during the final semesters. Participants in this study all contended that practical teaching opportunities were critical to their learning. When provided an opportunity to apply coursework knowledge in practice, pre-service teachers seemed to develop a deeper appreciation of course content. Scheduling reading methods courses in conjunction with practical teaching experiences might facilitate pre-service teachers’ appropriation of tools because they would have immediate opportunities to apply their knowledge in practice. Similarly, the positive impact of systematic, intensive tutoring programs such as UFLI lends credence to the incorporation of such experiences in special education teacher preparation programs. Of course providing special education pre-service teachers with opportunities to apply their knowledge in practical settings
throughout their preparation program is not easily achieved given the limited number of quality classroom placements. Moreover, quality cooperating teachers with specialized knowledge of reading and special education are even harder to find. Providing potential cooperating teachers with training on how to be effective mentors to pre-service teachers is one way to increase the number of quality placements. Technological advances could offer additional solutions. With the advent of cyber-coaching, pre-service teachers can receive feedback from university personnel despite being separated by long distances. Special education pre-service teachers, therefore, could receive special education knowledge and strategies even if they are paired with cooperating teachers who lack knowledge about special education and students with disabilities.

Second, this study revealed the role course instructors play in pre-service teacher learning. Particularly for reading methods courses, the findings indicate instructors who have extensive knowledge of reading, who are skilled teachers, and who can develop positive interpersonal relationships with pre-service teachers will have the most impact on pre-service teachers’ perceptions of course content. Teacher educators, therefore, may want to pay close attention to personnel who are assigned to teach these courses. In some instances, course instructors who are not as experienced or knowledgeable may need training or extra support.

This study’s findings also raised questions about the role local schools should play in teacher preparation. Several pre-service teachers in this study did not feel confident to teach students with disabilities, nor did they seem to appropriate tools to advanced levels. What will happen to these teachers once they graduate and enter classrooms as teachers of record? It appears that if pre-service teachers are not prepared to teach reading or work with students with disabilities, schools will then take on the responsibility of providing such preparation. Is this possible for local school districts? If so, who in the schools should be responsible for helping
novice special education teachers hone their conceptual and practical tools for teaching reading to students with disabilities?

Results from this study suggest some answers to the aforementioned questions. It seems imperative that institutes of higher education (IHE) form collaborative relationships with local education agencies (LEA) so that the transition from pre-service preparation to full-time teaching is as seamless as possible. Additionally, there seem to be some practices that could be implemented at the school level to help support beginning special educators. Providing beginning special education teachers with training in a structured curriculum could help facilitate their reading instruction and classroom management. Additionally, providing beginning teachers with a mentor who is knowledgeable about explicit, systematic reading instruction could help novice teachers sharpen their reading instruction for students with disabilities.

Conclusion

This study contributes to empirical research designed to understand conditions under which teacher education makes a difference in special education pre-service teacher learning. In doing so, it bridges separate lines of inquiry in general education and special education through the use of activity theory applied in a special education research context. This is important because, though similar on the surface, general education research findings are not necessarily applicable to special education questions. In other words, special education researchers cannot assume that findings from the general education literature will be the same once situated in a special education context. The results indicate that the impact of teacher education varies by individual. Pre-service teachers experience preparation programs differently as a result of interactions among their opportunities to appropriate knowledge in practice, their personal qualities, their motivation for knowledge assimilation, and their access to knowledge. The complex interactions that emerged in this study show that research in teacher preparation,
particularly in the context of special education, must capture these complexities if we hope to develop a deep understanding of the role preparation plays in pre-service teacher learning.
APPENDIX A
PRIOR BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES SURVEY

1. Describe your K-12 schooling experiences (what type of schools you attended, other students in your classes, types of teachers etc.)

2. Describe any experiences you have had teaching children how to read.

3. Describe any experiences you have had working with students with disabilities.

4. What are your beliefs about how best to teach students with learning disabilities how to read?

Please complete a concept map about reading instruction. In the space around the circle, please list as many ideas that come to mind when you think about reading instruction.
Dear ProTeach Special Education Pre-service Teachers,

My name is Melinda Leko, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education at the University of Florida, conducting an independent study on the knowledge and experiences preservice teachers draw from during their internship experience. I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Mary T. Brownell. The purpose of this study is to examine the knowledge and experiences preservice teachers draw from during their internship experience. Based on the results of this study, teacher educators will gain insights into how preservice students construct their knowledge about teaching reading. The results could help inform the ways teacher educators structure their reading courses. With your permission, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate, I will be conducting four videotaped observations during your Fall 2007 internship experience. During my observations, I will be using a classroom observation tool and taking notes on your reading instruction practices. Also, I would like to interview you four times throughout the Fall 2007 semester about your beliefs and experiences concerning your program of study. During the interviews, I would like to talk with you about your program plan and past courses. The interviews will last no longer than 60 minutes, and will be outside of your course meeting times at your convenience. You are not required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interviews. Only I will have access to the tapes, which I will personally transcribe, removing any identifiers during transcription. The tapes will be safely stored at my office cabinet until this study finishes, and then will be destroyed. I would like to ask you to complete a knowledge of reading assessment at the beginning and end of the study. The knowledge of reading assessment will last no longer than 60 minutes. Finally, I would like you to complete a prior experiences survey at the beginning of the study. The prior experiences survey will last no longer than 20 minutes. All interview, observation, assessment, and survey data will remain confidential to the extent provided by law and your identity will not be revealed in any oral or written report of this study. In order to respect the rights of participants, results of the study will not be available to any course instructors. Your willingness to participate in this study will in no way affect your evaluation in any of your courses or internship experience. You will receive a stipend of $50 for your participation.

There will be no risks and several benefits for your participation. The observation will not disrupt the learning process during your internship. Potential benefits include gaining more information about reading instruction for preservice teachers. Your participation is strictly voluntary. I will be willing to discuss this study with you at any time and will answer any questions. At the completion of the study, I would like to discuss the findings with you. You have the right to withdraw consent for your participation at any time without consequence. If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at the University of Florida, Department of Special Education, G-315 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville,
FL 32611, (352) 392-0701 ext. 289 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Brownell, at the University of Florida, Department of Special Education, G-315 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0701 ext. 249. Questions or concerns about your rights as research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, P.O. Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily participate in this study and I have received a copy of this description.

____________________________________________                _________________
Signature of Participant                                                                                Date

_____________________________________________
Print Name
Informed Consent

Dear Practicum Cooperating Teacher,

My name is Melinda Leko, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education at the University of Florida, conducting an independent study on the knowledge and experiences preservice teachers draw from during their internship experience. I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Mary T. Brownell. The purpose of this study is to examine the knowledge and experiences preservice teachers draw from during their internship experience. Based on the results of this study, teacher educators will gain insights into how preservice students construct their knowledge about teaching reading. The results could help inform the ways teacher educators structure their reading courses. With your permission, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate, I would like to interview you once during the Spring 2007 semester about your reading course. The interview will last no longer than 60 minutes, and will be outside of your course meeting times at your convenience. You are not required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interviews. Only I will have access to the tapes, which I will personally transcribe, removing any identifiers during transcription. The tape will be safely stored at my office cabinet until this study finishes, and then will be destroyed. All interview data will remain confidential to the extent provided by law and your identity will not be revealed in any oral or written report of this study. You will receive a $25 stipend for your participation.

There will be no risks and several benefits for your participation. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Potential benefits include gaining more information about reading instruction for preservice teachers. Your participation is strictly voluntary. I will be willing to discuss this study with you at any time and will answer any questions. At the completion of the study, I would like to discuss the findings with you. You have the right to withdraw consent for your participation at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at the University of Florida, Department of Special Education, G-315 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0701 ext. 289 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Brownell, at the University of Florida, Department of Special Education, G-315 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0701 ext. 249. Questions or concerns about your rights as research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, P.O. Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily participate in this study and I have received a copy of this description.

____________________________________________                _________________
Signature of Participant                                                                                Date

_____________________________________________
Print Name
Informed Consent

Dear ProTeach Course Instructor,

My name is Melinda Leko, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Special Education at the University of Florida, conducting an independent study on the knowledge and experiences preservice teachers draw from during their internship experience. I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Mary T. Brownell. The purpose of this study is to examine the knowledge and experiences preservice teachers draw from during their internship experience. Based on the results of this study, teacher educators will gain insights into how preservice students construct their knowledge about teaching reading. The results could help inform the ways teacher educators structure their reading courses. With your permission, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate, I would like to interview you once during the Spring 2007 semester about your reading course. The interview will last no longer than 60 minutes, and will be outside of your course meeting times at your convenience. You are not required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interviews. Only I will have access to the tapes, which I will personally transcribe, removing any identifiers during transcription. The tape will be safely stored at my office cabinet until this study finishes, and then will be destroyed. I would also like to request a copy of the course syllabus that accompanies your reading course. All interview and syllabus data will remain confidential to the extent provided by law and your identity will not be revealed in any oral or written report of this study. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

There will be no risks and several benefits for your participation. The interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Potential benefits include gaining more information about reading instruction for preservice teachers. Your participation is strictly voluntary. I will be willing to discuss this study with you at any time and will answer any questions. At the completion of the study, I would like to discuss the findings with you. You have the right to withdraw consent for your participation at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at the University of Florida, Department of Special Education, G-315 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0701 ext. 289 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Brownell, at the University of Florida, Department of Special Education, G-315 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0701 ext. 249. Questions or concerns about your rights as research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, P.O. Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily participate in this study and I have received a copy of this description.

__________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant                                                  Date

__________________________________________________________________________
Print Name
Pre-service Teacher Interview I Protocol

Note: Interview I is conducted near the beginning of the study, but after the participants have completed the knowledge about reading assessment and prior experiences survey.

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about pre-service teacher reading preparation. Your contribution to this study is greatly appreciated.

This interview will help me gain a general understanding about your beliefs, knowledge, and experiences concerning reading instruction. The interview will be recorded for research purposes and its tape will be available upon your request. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

1. To maintain confidentiality, I would like to transcribe your responses under a pseudonym. What would you like your pseudonym to be?
2. Tell me about your early reading experiences.
   -What were they like?
   -Can you remember what kind of strategies teachers used?
   -How did they make you feel?
3. Describe the courses you have had during the ProTeach program that relate to reading instruction?
4. I noticed that you answered _________ on the knowledge about reading assessment. Can you tell me more about this?
   -Why did you pick this answer?
   -What did you think about when you answered this question?
   -Where did you learn this information?
5. Is there anything I have left out about struggling readers that you would like to discuss?

Thank you for your time.
Pre-service Teacher Interview II & III Protocol

Note: Interviews II & III are conducted after classroom observations have been conducted.

I would like to ask questions about your experiences and practices during your internship experience. Like the first interview, this interview will be also recorded for research purposes and its tape will be available upon your request. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

1. Tell me about your internship experience.
2. How do you know what to teach and how to teach reading during your internship experience?
3. When I conducted classroom observations, I noticed ____________. Can you tell me about this?
   - From what knowledge did you draw?
   - Where did you learn this? Please explain.
4. How do your ProTeach courses relate to your internship?
5. Is there anything about teaching reading that I have left out that you would like to discuss?

Thank you for your time.
Pre-service Teacher Interview IV Protocol

Note: Interview IV is conducted at the end of the study

I would like to ask you to help me verify that the information I have collected is accurate. I would also like to talk with you about your program of study. Like the other interviews, this interview will be also recorded for research purposes and its tape will be available upon your request. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

1. Describe your program of study?
   - What courses have you taken that have helped you in your teaching of reading?
   - What experiences have been most meaningful?
2. Where else have you learned about reading instruction?
3. I have a copy of the syllabus from __________ course. Can you tell me about this course?
   - What did you learn from this course?
   - Do you use any of this knowledge when you teach reading during your internship?
4. In our earlier interviews, you said ___________________. Do you still believe this?
5. In our earlier interviews, you said ___________________. What else would you like to add to this?
6. ________________ is something that I have learned from this study. Based on your experience, is this correct?
7. Is there anything related to any of our conversations that you would like to discuss further?
8. Have I left out anything related to this study that you would like to tell me?

Thank you for your participation.
Course Instructor Interview Protocol

I would like to ask you to talk to me about the course you teach in reading instruction. Also, I would like to make sure the information I have collected is accurate. This interview will be also recorded for research purposes and its tape will be available upon your request. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

1. Describe your reading methods course?
   - What experiences are most meaningful?
   - What knowledge do pre-service teachers acquire from this course?
   - Why is ____________ assignment/experience a part of the course?
2. How does this course relate to other reading courses in the program?
3. ________________ is something that I have learned from this study. Based on your experience, is this correct?
   - Is there anything you would like to add or change?
4. Is there anything related to our conversation that you would like to discuss further?
5. Have I left out anything related to this study that you would like to tell me?

Thank you for your participation.
Practicum Cooperating Teacher Interview Protocol

I would like to ask you to talk to me about your participation as a cooperating teacher. Also, I would like to make sure the information I have collected is accurate. This interview will be also recorded for research purposes and its tape will be available upon your request. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

1. Tell me about your teaching experience?
2. Did your preparation program have reading courses?
3. Describe reading instruction for your students?
4. How best do students learn to read?
5. Do you have students with disabilities in your class?
6. How do they receive their special education services?
7. How did you get to have a practicum student?
8. What struggles do you see interns having?
9. What are your goals for _________ this semester?
10. What do you hope she will learn from being in your class?
11. How does she plan a lesson?
12. Is there anything related to our conversation that you would like to discuss further?
13. Have I left out anything related to this study that you would like to tell me?

Thank you for your participation.
Field Advisor Interview Protocol

I would like to ask you to talk to me about your participation as a PROTEACH field supervisor. Also, I would like to make sure the information I have collected is accurate. This interview will be also recorded for research purposes and its tape will be available upon your request. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

1. What is your teaching experience?
2. How did you become a field advisor?
3. Besides Pathwise, what other things do you base your evaluation on?
4. How do you conduct a feedback session?
5. What are practicum students’ strengths? Weaknesses?
6. What are your impressions of their reading knowledge?
7. How do placements differ?
8. From what knowledge sources are practicum students basing their knowledge?
9. What is the perfect placement to link UF knowledge?
10. Is there anything related to our conversation that you would like to discuss further?
11. Have I left out anything related to this study that you would like to tell me?

Thank you for your participation.
## APPENDIX D

### TABLE OF CODES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table D-1. Table of Codes</th>
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<td>support from university</td>
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<td>students need repetition</td>
<td>co-teaching model</td>
<td>no training for cooperating teacher</td>
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<td>classroom management</td>
<td>“comes with time”</td>
<td>classroom management is a necessity for instruction</td>
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Table D-1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open codes</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
<th>Selective codes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>learn by watching</td>
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<tr>
<td>must model reading</td>
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<td>inclusion model</td>
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<td>believes in inclusion model</td>
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<td>hard to control behavior</td>
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<td>unaware of reading complexities</td>
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<td>point sheets</td>
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<td>not deviating from existing structure</td>
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<td>&quot;doing it and seeing it&quot;</td>
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<td>information overload</td>
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<td>doesn't relate to students</td>
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<td>realization of teacher self</td>
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<td>coursework intimidates</td>
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<td>uses curriculum as a resource</td>
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<td>rejected feedback</td>
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<td>loss of classroom control</td>
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<td>strengthen general education skills</td>
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<td>develop &quot;teacher toolkit&quot;</td>
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<td>teacher-directed instruction</td>
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<td>focuses on what students would like</td>
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<td>plans instruction based on student needs</td>
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Table D-1. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open codes</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
<th>Selective codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relates to middle class</td>
<td>poor behavior management is barrier</td>
<td>scripted programs take time to learn</td>
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<td>lack of reading mastery knowledge</td>
<td>teachers must be flexible learning to work with others</td>
<td>communicates before lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>provides formal feedback informal observation</td>
<td>find comfort zone discovering student needs</td>
<td>instruction is differentiated instruction is individualized lesson approval</td>
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<td>limited acceptance of outside knowledge</td>
<td>must enjoy reading university curriculum is disconnected from schools</td>
<td>meeting expectations lost trust with interns accepting of pre-service teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>instructional logistics managing small groups setting expectations establishing procedures university preparation is good</td>
<td>knows sounds believes in phonics believes in placements “must do it to learn it” don't know until you teach it</td>
<td>comfort with curriculum ability to attend to multiple things</td>
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</table>
Table D-1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Open codes</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
<th>Selective codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>push language</td>
<td>structured, sequential</td>
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<tr>
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<td>individualization</td>
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<td>kids get what they need</td>
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<td>no involvement in planning</td>
<td>purposeful plan</td>
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<td>improve time</td>
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<td>must collaborate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>must communicate</td>
<td>must communicate</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX E
EXCERPTS FROM REFLECTIVE LOG

September 20, 2007

Today was my first interview with Nancy. She was very sweet but also very shy. I had to work to get her to elaborate on her answers. Roosevelt Elementary did not start reading instruction until the 2nd or 3rd week of school. Nancy has just been helping out with the kids, not really teaching yet. She agreed to hand out video consent forms for students and then email me a good time to come observe.

October 1, 2007

Today I interviewed Instructor E. She seemed very rushed. I did not feel overly welcome. She asked if it would take longer than 10-15 minutes. I told her I would not take more time than she could give me.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Richards, J. C. & Morse, T. E. (2002). One preservice teacher’s experiences teaching literacy to regular and special education students. *Reading Online, June*.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Melinda Marie Leko was born on April 21, 1980, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Melinda and her family lived in Louisiana until she was three years old; at which time, they moved to Sarasota, Florida. After graduating from Pine View High School in 1998, Melinda attended college at the University of Florida receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology and a Bachelor of Arts degree in criminology in 2001 and being named Valedictorian of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Realizing her love of teaching, Melinda immediately entered an accelerated master’s program in elementary education at the University of Florida. Receiving her master’s in education degree in 2002, Melinda began her teaching career in Levy County, where she worked as a third grade general educator in an inclusive classroom in the rural community of Williston, FL. Two years later, Melinda assumed the position of teacher for gifted students in grades 3-12 in the city of Williston. While taking classes for her gifted teaching endorsement and specialist’s degree, Melinda decided to pursue her doctorate in special education at the University of Florida. She was admitted to the University of Florida as a doctoral student and Alumni Fellow in 2005.

During her doctoral program, Melinda was a research assistant on the OSEP funded leadership grant Project Research in Teacher Education (RITE). Melinda also participated in various research projects through the Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education (COPSSE). Finally, Melinda was appointed to the position of project coordinator for the IES funded project Literacy Learning Cohort (LLC). Her research interests include special education teacher preparation, specific learning disabilities, research methods, and reading.