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Self-Perceptions on Efficacy in Reading Teacher Education: A Case Study in an Online Literacy Clinic

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SELF-PERCEPTIONS ON EFFICACY IN READING TEACHER EDUCATION

Introduction

The uncertainty resulting from the current state of the world requires educational institutions to remain nimble in their practices. During the pandemic, the shift to virtual teaching and learning required higher education institutions to transition onsite coursework, including practicum and clinical experiences, to the online environment. As many universities have transitioned from face-to-face coursework to online learning, it is important to consider what this means for educator endorsement programs that have historically been grounded in practice-based approaches and methods. Online teaching and learning is different and unique, which, in recent decades, is giving rise to a new subspecies of traditional teacher education programs, including that of literacy teachers and professionals. In addition to effectively transitioning our coursework to the online space, graduate teacher educators also have the responsibility of ensuring that such coursework results in a positive impact on their students' self-efficacy. In making the digital shift, it is essential to consider whether or not such programs can do so while maintaining the quality and rigor that are at the heart of successful traditional programs, while also ensuring literacy educators leave with a strong sense of preparedness.

For teachers seeking endorsement from their state in the area of teaching reading, successful completion of a clinical component, often referred to as a practicum, is a common requirement. In fact, some accreditation agencies, such as the Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP), require that accredited providers create high-quality clinical experiences in which candidates can develop, apply, and hone their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in their field of specialization (Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation, 2021).

SELF-PERCEPTIONS ON EFFICACY IN READING TEACHER EDUCATION

Within the field of literacy, clinics have been a part of professional educator programs for over 100 years, as a means of providing instructional remediation for students experiencing difficulties (Laster, 2013). The goal of many literacy clinics is to provide teachers with an opportunity to work with school-age students on literacy strategies and interventions under the supervision of a university professor, while also providing developing readers with intensive literacy support (Ortlieb et al., 2012; Pletcher et al., 2019). As 21st century education shifts, so too must our instructional delivery methods and strategies. This is true for teachers working with school-age students, as well as institutions of higher education who are preparing and advancing our teachers.

The focus of this study was to gauge whether or not online graduate-level students (hereafter referred to as "candidates") leave the program feeling highly prepared to effectively plan, design, and implement literacy strategies and interventions with school-age children (hereafter referred to as "students") in need of literacy support. Our work was guided by two overarching research questions, and one sub-question:

1) What are candidates' self-perceptions of their efficacy in planning, designing, and implementing effective literacy instruction, as a result of the online practicum experience?
    a) What are candidates' self-perceptions of the impact on their students' learning as a result of the practicum experience?
2) Do the supervisors' perceptions align with the candidates' self-perceptions of core competencies?

Theoretical Frame & Background Literature

SELF-PERCEPTIONS ON EFFICACY IN READING TEACHER EDUCATION

In this section, we describe the research and theory that has informed our thinking on the importance of considering how the clinical experience might be impacted when shifting to the online modality. This is important because the delivery modality of coursework can affect the self-efficacy beliefs of educators, which is the heart of this study. In doing so, we draw from the early work of Wenger (1998), who describes communities of practice resulting from student-centered learning. Additionally, social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) is a central characteristic of literacy clinics in that, by nature, the clinical experience naturally embeds opportunities for learning to be constructed in its social context. Therefore, our literacy clinic model is grounded in the view that literacy is a social practice that is highly dependent upon the identity constructed by the learner (Gee, 1996; Gee, 2001). Self-identity, then, can be socially constructed based on one's experiences in a learning environment.

The Nature of Literacy Clinics

In our program, we recently established a contemporary iteration of clinical experiences by shifting them to online modalities, while maintaining the same primary tenets and essential practices as our traditional onsite program. Literacy clinics play an imperative role in providing both pre-service and in-service teachers with an opportunity to work with school-age students on literacy interventions in a supervised environment. Historically, clinical experiences are intensive in nature and rigorous by design. While there is a considerable body of research on the history of clinics (e.g., Laster, 2013; Pletcher et al., 2019), there is a paucity of research on online clinical experiences, due to the recency of their inception.

Ortlieb et al. (2012) discussed structured reading clinical programs as an effective source to lead to the improvement of literacy skills and student learning. While the necessity of clinics for achieving student and teacher growth in the on-campus or school-based setting has been

argued (Ortlieb et al., 2012), there is little known about the impacts of such experiences when shifting to online coursework.

Shifting literacy clinics to a digital modality requires many adjustments to supervision, technology, and course design (Vokaitis, 2017), but it is also essential to determine if such adjustments result in positive student experiences and growth of the learner.

Social Cognitive Theory

It is important to recognize how self-efficacy affects academic progress and is crucial for increasing confidence and performance in the online environment. Self-efficacy encompasses an individual's beliefs or perceptions of their ability to execute various leveled tasks successfully while connecting to learning or practice (Bandura, 1986). Effective intellectual functioning, according to Bandura (1993), extends beyond factual knowledge and reasoning and necessitates the use of human agency by self-regulatory contributors (affective, social, and motivational).

According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), a person's efficacy and capacity for motivation to achieve personal goals play a key role in the regulatory processes. Bandura further suggested self-efficacy constructs diverse effects through motivational, affective, cognitive, and selection processes (Bandura, 1993). The development of self-directed learning and access to the tools required to enable intrinsic interest to be engaged in education develops a strong sense of self-efficacy, which is essential for success in an online environment (Bandura, 1995). Those who have a high degree of efficacy approach activities differently and are frequently more interested in them, which helps them accomplish more in a variety of ways (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy beliefs, according to Bandura (1989), frequently influence the impact of motivational and information-processing activities on cognitive performance.

While there are various ways to evaluate self-efficacy, Bradley et al. (2017) used the Online Academic Success Indicator Scale (OASIS) to look at the effects of self-efficacy and self-regulation abilities in online courses. The researchers discovered a link between an individual's positive self-efficacy and their ability to self-regulate, allowing them to succeed in an online program.

Practice-Based Learning Framework

Forzani (2014) emphasized the necessity of professional education programs examining "core" or "high leverage" teaching strategies in higher education courses. In order to be successful, the graduate reading program must contain "high leverage" techniques because these practices build the basic abilities that professionals need to be effective in their own classrooms (Author, 2019).

Grossman, Compton, Igra, et al. (2009) established the requirement for all teacher candidates to be instructed on vital components in order to ensure that they are acquiring critical teaching abilities, such as scaffolding while teaching. These skills are developed via authentic experiences that include responding to specific situations that arise in the classroom by reflecting, providing feedback, and learning how to create a productive classroom environment (Grossman, Hammerness, & McDonald, 2009). While such practices were established for initial teacher preparation programs, similar competencies are also essential for inservice teachers in graduate-level endorsement programs.

The Community of Inquiry Framework

The development of distance learning was made possible by ongoing technological innovation and collaborative-constructive ideologies, resulting in the growth and development of online educational programs at higher education institutions (Garrison et al., 2000). The

Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework has led to relevant research into how online learning can support and promote higher-order learning outcomes like critical thinking (Garrison & Akyol, 2013). The CoI framework, which was created as a model of metacognitive awareness in an online context, offers the fundamental characteristics necessary for independent learning, such as self-efficacy (Garrison & Akyol, 2013).

The CoI framework has been one of the most often used and referenced theoretical frameworks in higher education research on online teaching and remote education (Akcaoglu & Akcaoglu, 2022; Bozkurt et al., 2015; Kim & Gurvitch, 2020; Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2020). Because of the advancement and development in the field of distance education, higher education institutions have undergone a transformation (Garrison et al., 1999). Through the process of creating a collaborative learning experience, the CoI framework includes three fundamental qualities: teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence (Garrison et al., 1999). Teaching presence considers how the course is supported by the instructor's leadership as well as course design; how learners build meaning from continuous reflection and how they interpret discourse are both examples of cognitive presence; and social presence includes the engagement of interpersonal interactions (Garrison et al., 2000). Thus, establishing social presence, in particular, through interactivity can be the first step in fostering motivation, a key factor in learner achievement.

Student Engagement

Although the shift to online learning for K-12 students and teachers was sudden, the impact on learning is beginning to surface as an area of study. Learning is enhanced when students are engaged. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), “engaged readers can overcome obstacles to achievement, and they become agents of their own reading growth” (p.

405). Motivation is what connects engagement and achievement (Author, 2015). Consequently, engaging students in the online learning experience has proven to be an important factor (e.g., Authors, in press).This begins with the establishment of social presence, which allows teachers to connect with their students in the virtual world (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016).

Drawing on the early work of Michael Moore (1989), Leslie (2021) adapted a framework for engaging learners in online courses. At the core of this framework are regular and meaningful interactions, which allow learners to construct meaning by exchanging ideas. Such interactions need to come from three sources: 1) interactions with the curriculum; 2) interactions with peers; and, 3) interactions with the instructor. Leslie (2021) refers to engagement in all three areas as the *Trifecta of Student Engagement*. Such engagement includes synchronous sessions with professors and peers, which can provide support for understanding course materials and requirements. When regular and meaningful, this trifecta of interactions can lead to positive self-perceptions. More specifically, learner-to-content engagement focuses on how to motivate learners to engage with content, learner-to-learner engagement focuses on social learning theory and constructivist approaches to assisting learners in interacting with their peers, and learner-to-instructor engagement focuses on how to develop relationships with learners and teachers by using feedback and communication techniques (Leslie, 2021). Leslie's (2021) preliminary findings on this type of engagement indicated a positive effect on student learning, particularly achievement and satisfaction.

Impact on Student Learning

Case studies have allowed researchers to hone in and examine K-12 student attitudes in relation to reading and its overall impact on learning. In a study by Seitz (2010), findings revealed the importance of student motivation and the notion that student attitudes towards

reading can be attributed to student choice. This allows students to take an active role in their learning through the personal selection of texts and activities that are relevant to their interests. Furthermore, student learning is meaningful when situated in a real-life context and intrinsic motivation can be sustained through student participation to develop their own understanding of authentic materials (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

Pre-pandemic, K-12 educators may have had some exposure to digital media tools but did not have to teach remotely, relying solely on technology, to teach valuable literacy skills. Therefore, prior to the pandemic, some studies examined how students responded to learning using digital tools in a school or clinic, rather than remotely. For example, Ortlieb et al. (2014), examined how various modalities of texts impacted students' reading comprehension. They found that digital texts include various features that effectively encourage engagement, particularly for students experiencing difficulties. Such features integrate auditory and visual cues to enhance absorption of the content. Introducing students to a variety of materials and incorporating an opportunity for students to make connections to deepen comprehension is an important part of literacy development. Evaluating different modalities of teaching reading comprehension in digital-based, print-based, and hybrid reading environments, Ortlieb and colleagues (2014) found that hybrid and print-based groups significantly outperformed the digital-based group. Although the digital-based group did see improvement over the twelve tutoring sessions, the importance of time for readers to physically interact with the texts was indicated. These researchers concluded that digital-based learning can be utilized as an important supplemental component in literacy development. While these studies were not conducted in the online environment, it is important to consider these findings in transitioning to the online environment.

While we know the last decade has brought forth an increased focus on teaching and learning in the online space in general, there is little research on reading-related endorsement programs, specifically. One such study, conducted by Watts-Taffe et al. (2014), examined their reading specialist candidates' perceptions of learning and growth in relation to theory, competencies, and dispositions, in order to drive program improvements. As with us, one of their primary concerns with transitioning to online was whether or not the program maintained quality and integrity. Their findings suggested the program had a meaningful impact on the candidates' profession and the students' perceptions revealed moderate to substantial growth. Consequently, most of the candidates shared that they were able to transfer major components of what they learned into their current roles. This is one example of research related to teachers' self-perceptions within the field of literacy; additional research is needed.

Method

This study was designed to determine whether or not our online candidates were leaving our program with an established sense of preparedness as a result of their practicum experience. Therefore, case study methodology guided our design (Stake, 2008). According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), "The aim of such studies is not to establish relationships between variables (as in experimental studies) but, rather, to see what some phenomenon means as it is socially enacted within a particular case" (p. 10). Our aim was to study the enactment of self-efficacy in the context of this case, which is described in detail below.

Context

This study took place in a Midwestern university, where candidates in the literacy program were required to successfully complete a three-part clinical sequence. This sequence included a diagnosis and assessment course, a literacy interventions course, in which the

candidates prepared for the practicum experience, and a two-part practicum in the literacy clinic. During the two-part practicum, candidates were required to work with an elementary student (grade K through five) for part one and a secondary student (above fifth grade) for part two. These courses were taken concurrently, and immediately after the first two clinical courses.

The university has a nationally recognized reading program. One hallmark of the reading program at this university is its literacy clinic, which coordinates the practicum experience for its candidates. This year marks the clinic's 50th anniversary. Established in 1972, the literacy clinic at this university has a longstanding relationship with the campus communities and is well-renowned for the literacy support it provides every summer for school-age students experiencing reading difficulties. Programming of the literacy clinic includes a summer reading program, which takes place in three onsite clinics in urban and suburban locations. In this program, students are matched with candidates for one-on-one tutoring. In addition to a practicum director who oversees the entire program, each location has a site director and supervisors who generally work with up to eight candidates each per practicum course. The program runs for five weeks each summer, offering 20 hours of intensive literacy support for each student placed in the program.

In offering online options for candidates seeking a reading teacher endorsement, the onsite program was used as a model. Since we wanted the entire endorsement program to have an online option, the practicum was offered during the spring term, and tutoring was conducted in a school-based setting, rather than in the onsite clinics. Candidates created their own tutoring schedule, which allowed for flexibility. However, the online program adheres to the same general principles as the highly successful onsite program. For example, all candidates whether onsite or online, are required to complete 20 hours of intensive literacy support with two students

of different grade ranges. And, both programs are highly supervised and require four 30-minute observations per student. During the onsite program, all observations are done live, in the clinic, and are followed-up with a coaching meeting between the candidate and the supervisor immediately after the tutoring session. The online program requires both live (via video-conferencing) and recorded video observations with follow-up individual coaching meetings between candidates and supervisors immediately after live observations or within 48 hours of recorded observations.

Similar to the structure of the onsite clinic, the online program also has the same practicum director (who oversees all clinical programs), plus supervisors who generally work with up to eight candidates each per practicum course. The main difference between the online model and the traditional program is that candidates are able to complete coursework online and work with students in their own setting, as opposed to going on-campus which, historically, was how literacy clinics functioned. Therefore, the nature of literacy clinics has been expanded to include more contemporary iterations.

Participants

Participants in this study were online graduate students enrolled in a Master's Degree in Education program who were seeking reading teacher endorsement from the state board of education. All participants (for this purpose, referred to as "candidates") were in-service teachers who had previously earned a professional educator's license from the state. There was a total of 13 online candidates in each practicum course. All opted to be included as participants in this study.

Positionality of the Researchers

The researchers in this study were the clinical director (first author), who has over 10 years of experience in the clinical setting, and one supervisor (second author) who has worked in the online practicum since the program's inception in 2018. Both researchers had worked with this group of candidates during the two prior clinical courses. Therefore, developing professor-candidate relationships existed, and the researchers had some familiarity with candidates' backgrounds, as well as a thorough understanding of the program. Since researchers taught the two-part practicum course and would be evaluating candidates on one of the data sets, the researchers' roles were varied. During observations, both researchers took on the role of observer. However, since the practicum experience was also part of the required coursework for the endorsement, there was also an evaluative role involved. These varied roles naturally created the potential for social persuasion, which is discussed as a limitation below.

Data Collection

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the constructs we were studying, data was collected using multiple qualitative data collection methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the case (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Data was obtained through a post-practicum survey, a written reflection at the end of the practicum experience, and scores on key assessments from the 2-part practicum, for the purpose of triangulation.

Post-Practicum Surveys

At the end of the practicum experience, candidates were asked to complete a survey on their perceived level of preparedness for effectively planning, designing, and implementing literacy instruction for each of their practicum students. Candidates completed a survey for each of the two practicum courses to measure self-perceptions in their work with a younger student and with an older student. The survey was similar to a structured questionnaire, which allowed

the researchers to gauge candidates' self-perceptions in a clear, structured, and focused way. Survey responses were collected using a 5-point scale with the following categories: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree. The survey consisted of 20 questions relating to the first two research questions (see Table 1).

Written Reflections

In order to gain deeper insights into candidates' self-perceived preparedness, and to complement the post-practicum survey, they were asked to complete an open-ended, structured written reflection using the protocol found in Figure 1. At the end of the practicum experience, candidates composed a written reflection detailing their thoughts on the tutoring experience and their perceived impact on student learning for each of their practicum students. One reflection was collected for the two-part practicum.

Key Assessment Data

The International Literacy Association (ILA) Standards for Literacy Professionals (2018) were developed by literacy experts from around the country and emphasize the most recent research and evidence-based practices (2018). The program's key assessment was developed as a means to evaluate candidates' active participation in field experiences and align with elements of the seven overarching ILA Standards: 1. Foundational Knowledge; 2. Curriculum and Instruction; 3. Assessment and Evaluation; 4. Diversity and Equity; 5. Learners and the Literacy Environment; 6. Professional Learning and Leadership; and, 7. Practicum/Clinical Experiences.

The key assessment measured each candidate's teaching abilities based on the practicum supervisor's observations over the entire term. Four 30-minute observations are required for each practicum course. The key assessment is the summative evaluation completed by the supervisor

for each candidate. Therefore, each candidate is assessed summatively based on their work with their younger student and separately based on their work with their older student. The eight objectives measured as part of this assessment (see Table 2) are core competencies for diagnostic teaching that are aligned to the International Literacy Association (ILA) Standards for Literacy Professionals (2018). Each competency is scored on a three-point scale, with 3 representing proficiency in application during practicum, 2 representing a basic understanding of application during practicum, and 1 representing unsatisfactory application during practicum. This measure was developed by faculty, has undergone content validity analysis by university stakeholders, and has been used as a primary assessment of teaching competencies in our clinics for many years.

In addition to the summative data provided by the key assessment form, observational data is also used as the focus of coaching meetings that occur immediately after the observations. This allows for interaction between the supervisor and candidate and provides an opportunity for candidates to receive qualitative feedback from the supervisor.

We used the key assessment data collected during the two-part practicum as a means of triangulation, which adds the perceptions of the supervisor, thereby also adding depth and meaning to the other data sets. This data is collected as part of the normal evaluation and reporting system established within the program.

Data Analysis

Surveys

In addressing our two research questions, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data derived from the post-practicum surveys. The survey method is commonly used as a tool for capturing candidates' perceptions in descriptive research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). We

entered the survey data into an Excel spreadsheet. We were then able to generate a mean and standard deviation for each item on the survey (see Table 3). In addition, we generated the total percentage of ratings for each of the five survey categories (Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; and, Strongly Disagree; see Figure 2). Using this type of analysis initially helped us discover patterns related to specific components of the candidates' clinical coursework.

Written Reflections

The patterns found in the survey responses were examined more deeply in our qualitative analysis of the written reflections. Using qualitative content analysis and multiple phases of coding, the written reflections were examined to create descriptive (e.g., "strategies", "gains made") and in vivo codes (e.g., "student gained confidence", "feel extremely prepared") (Saldaña, 2012) related to self-perceived preparedness in planning, designing, and implementing instruction with each level of learner, as well as perceived impact on student learning. Six codes were generated for preparedness; eight codes were generated for impact on student learning. To begin, we sorted the candidates' responses by cutting and pasting by prompt. Each researcher then independently coded candidates' responses. Next, researchers met to discuss discrepancies and come to a consensus. We then cut and pasted responses by code into a matrix. In the final phase of coding, we analyzed the matrix and categorized the codes into overall themes that related to our first two research questions.

Key Assessment Data

To add depth to the data collected from our teachers, we used the data collected from our key assessment. This allowed for triangulation by adding the supervisors' perceptions. For this data set, our goal was to ascertain whether or not the supervisors' perceptions of the candidates in this case demonstrated proficiency, as a whole. For the purpose of this case study, it was not

our intent to analyze individual student key assessment data. Therefore, we used descriptive statistics. Since our key assessment data for the two-part practicum courses contains 8 core objectives, we averaged the candidates' scores by core objective (see Table 2). This allowed us to make determinations about whether or not candidates were successful as a whole in meeting each objective, and which objectives presented as weaker areas. This analysis would be used to inform our own teaching.

Results and Findings

Our first overarching research question was: *What are candidates' self-perceptions of their efficacy in planning, designing, and implementing effective literacy instruction, as a result of the online practicum experience?* In addition, we developed one sub-question to help us better understand candidates' perceptions. The sub-question was: *What are candidates' self-perceptions of impact on their students' learning as a result of the practicum experience?* The second research question was: *Do the supervisors' perceptions align with the candidates' self-perceptions of core competencies?* Our results and findings from each data collection method are described below.

Surveys

The results of the survey were grouped into ten categories (see Table 1). Each category consisted of 1 to 4 survey questions. All survey questions began with the statement, "As a result of the clinical sequence and practicum…". In our analysis, we combined the survey data resulting from candidates' work with a younger student and survey data resulting from their work with an older student, in order to ascertain an overall understanding of self-perceptions. Since each candidate completed a self-perceptions survey for each of the two students they worked with, N=26.

Self-Efficacy in Planning, Designing, and Implementing Effective Literacy Instruction

Results from the surveys revealed that almost all candidates were confident in their abilities. Self-efficacy was the strongest for finding appropriate materials ($\bar{x}$ = 4.62-4.65/5), meeting student needs ($\bar{x}$ = 4.54-4.65/5), diagnostic teaching ($\bar{x}$ = 4.50-4.77/5), and overall preparedness ($\bar{x}$ = 4.50/5). Self-efficacy was the weakest for planning interventions ($\bar{x}$ = 4.31/5), motivation and engagement ($\bar{x}$ = 4.38/5), and communicating ($\bar{x}$ = 4.35-4.40/5). These results indicate that, while some categories resulted in lower means, candidates' perceived self-efficacy was relatively strong across all categories of planning, designing, and implementing effective literacy instruction.

Perceived Impact on Student Learning

This category comprised three key areas: perceived growth in reading, perceived growth in writing, and, increased confidence in reading and writing. Survey results revealed that, overall, candidates felt that their students experienced growth as a result of the program ($\bar{x}$ = 4.50-4.77/5). Interestingly, this category had the highest percentage of "Strongly Agree" ratings (72%) on the entire survey. Results also revealed that, while perceived growth in writing had the lowest mean in the category (M=4.50/5), which is still relatively high, this survey question also resulted in the highest standard deviation of the entire survey (SD=.76). This indicates candidates felt instruction positively impacted student learning.

Written Reflections

Our analysis of written reflection data led to several preliminary categories common across candidates' responses (N=13). Since we wanted to use this data to strengthen our survey data and deepen our understanding of candidate perceptions, we grouped the results based on our two major themes.

Self-Efficacy in Planning, Designing, and Implementing Effective Literacy Instruction

Candidates' responses revealed many components that captured the essence of their self-efficacy. These responses were grouped into two main categories: 1) Gained confidence in ability to plan, design, and implement effective literacy instruction as a result of the practicum experience; and, 2) Increased preparedness to work with students in various grade ranges.

Gained confidence in ability to plan, design, and implement effective literacy instruction. In responding to this prompt all candidates cited an increase in their confidence and/or ability resulting from the practicum experience. Some of the underlying factors noted which facilitated these gains were: 1) feedback from supervisors; 2) mindfulness of student interest and need to guide in the selection of texts and materials; 3) prior coursework that resulted in development of a deeper understanding of literacy processes and development; and, 4) adjustments in pacing and time management as a routine was established. Overall, seven candidates felt equally prepared to plan, design, and implement effective interventions. Six candidates reported that they felt planning and designing instruction was easier, while implementation was much more challenging. For example, one candidate wrote:

> Reflecting on my practicum, I would have to say that implementation of the lessons was the most challenging, for I had to track each student's progress and plan instruction in response to student growth. The first two weeks of designing and implementing lessons stretched me to think outside of the box and to come up with a way to make learning meaningful and engaging. Though I had specific end goals in mind, it was hard not to focus on each day's instructional goals. Indeed, each day's goals led to my learning goals for my students, but I was so caught up on what they accomplished or did not accomplish that I often forgot to keep my students engaged metacognitively. Though I knew how

important it was in student learning and success in my head, it was more difficult to put into actual practice than said.

Increased preparedness to work with students in various grade ranges. Several candidates reported experiencing some level of trepidation in beginning their work with either an older or younger student, based on their teaching experience and current teaching assignment. Six candidates noted feeling equally prepared to work with younger and older students. Two candidates stated that working with a younger student was more difficult, while four felt that working with an older student was more difficult. This information implies that many candidates required time and practice working with various age groups, which was afforded to them during this experience. One candidate wrote:

> At the start of our tutoring sessions, planning, designing, and implementing lesson components was more challenging for my younger student. To prepare I reviewed resources from previous courses and I reached out to a reading specialist in my school. As I prepared lessons one at a time, I became more comfortable and confident in my ability to design and implement lessons. Creating a sight word routine was beneficial for my younger students. After the first few weeks of tutoring, I felt prepared to implement lessons.

Another candidate shared the following:

> Before starting to work with my older student, I was going in with a sense of worry. I had experience working with younger students and none with older students, so that made me nervous. At the beginning, it was difficult planning, designing and implementing lessons for my older student. Even though I had all the knowledge that I had learned in previous courses, it was still hard. Compared to my younger student, it took me much longer to

> become comfortable and get the sense that this was becoming easier. I started to feel comfortable probably around the halfway point. At that point, I was understanding what my older student enjoyed, what she did well and where she still needed more support. I was able to find resources that piqued her interest and helped keep her focused and engaged. My professor also provided guidance in how I could push my older student by teaching strategies for higher order thinking. Just like my younger student, at the end of tutoring, I was surprised to see how much my older student and I accomplished, and how much progress she made within those twenty sessions.

Perceived Impact on Student Learning

Candidate responses revealed that 100% of them felt the program had a positive impact on student learning. This was attributed to the following factors: 1) using materials based on interest and need; 2) use of appropriate strategies; and, 3) goal setting.

Using materials based on interest and need. Candidates reported that their students benefited from their growing confidence and ability to choose high-interest texts and materials based on student need. For example, one candidate wrote:

> I felt that I struggled in the beginning trying to find reading material that I thought my student would be engaged in. A few sessions in, I realized that the most effective way to acquire the appropriate materials to plan and design my lessons was to spend the extra time getting to know her as a student and a person. I paid close attention to her interests and used that information to help plan the lessons. This made it much easier to implement and work towards the established goals.

Use of appropriate strategies. Many candidates cited specific strategies that worked with their students. In addition, candidates also pointed out the following factors related to

strategy use: 1) this was viewed as an opportunity to learn and try teaching new strategies; 2) students benefited from learning several new strategies; 3) they saw a clear path between strategy use in this setting and transfer to the classroom; and 4) strategy use leading to independence. For example, one candidate noted:

> My students were able to use a variety of strategies when struggling with reading or just beginning to read. By using these strategies, my students started to grow in their reading abilities. These students started to take control of their own learning.

Goal setting. Setting explicit goals for student learning was identified as a major factor impacting overall learning. Candidates noted that they used goal setting in instructional planning, to guide teaching, and to help students track their progress. As one candidate noted:

> During my last session with each of my students, I had them look back over their goals that they wrote on day one. I asked them if they thought that they achieved their goals and which goal they felt they were most successful with. Both of my students said they liked reading better and felt that they were better readers.

Key Assessment Data

Teaching and Learning Outcomes

While the key assessment data set revealed high means across all competencies, a few areas of weakness were also discovered. As seen in Table 2, results indicated that supervisors scored the candidates slightly lower in 3 areas: Content, Scaffolds, and Metacognition. Although scores were relatively high across all 8 competencies, this analysis would allow us to adjust our teaching in these areas with future groups of students.

Discussion

SELF-PERCEPTIONS ON EFFICACY IN READING TEACHER EDUCATION

By nature, literacy clinics are designed to provide pre-service or in-service teachers with an opportunity to design and implement literacy interventions in a supervised environment. Because such settings are intensive and rigorous, they provide a perfect opportunity to study how such interventions are taught and learned. As Ortlieb and colleagues (2012) described, their structured design allows us to support teachers in their development, while also supporting K-12 students in their development of critical literacy skills. If literacy clinics make the shift to online, it is essential that this structured nature remains intact.

Our first research question was *what are candidates' self-perceptions of their efficacy in planning, designing, and implementing effective literacy instruction as a result of the online practicum experience?* Survey data helped us answer this question. The results of this study indicated that all online candidates felt prepared to plan, design, and implement effective literacy instruction upon program completion. One area in which candidates felt the strongest was diagnostic teaching. This category included questions related to their perceived ability to make in-the-moment decisions, their perception as to the effectiveness of the diagnostic teaching model, and their understanding and use of formative assessment to drive instruction. This is important because these areas can be considered cornerstones of effective literacy instruction. Similar to practice-based teaching, as described by Forzani (2014), practices such as effective decision-making and use of formative assessment, are high-leverage and can be transferred to candidates' own classroom or teaching situation once they leave the program. Furthermore, because candidates had to make daily decisions about instruction and assessment through the tutoring experience, it provided a level of authenticity which can be essential in acquiring critical teaching abilities, as described by Grossman, Hammerness, and McDonald (2009).

Understanding and use of the diagnostic teaching model is one of the intended learning outcomes of the practicum courses. Conversely, though means were still relatively high, candidates felt developing and planning targeted interventions to meet the needs of their students was the most challenging aspect of the practicum experience. This is not surprising since the intensive, individualized nature of the practicum program is a new experience for many. Also noteworthy are the high means that resulted from the survey questions related to the impact on student learning. All but one response indicated growth was made in reading and writing and confidence increased. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), engagement can lead to agency, achievement, and growth. In order for students to be engaged, the first step is choosing high interest materials, strategies, and texts that are at an appropriate level and based on student needs. As the candidates became comfortable with choosing such materials for their interventions, they felt that their students benefitted.

In addition to survey data, the qualitative data gathered from the written reflections proved to be insightful. Through these combined methods, we were able to glean several factors that impacted candidates' feelings of self-efficacy. First, as a result of the program, most candidates felt equally prepared to work with younger and older students. This was not necessarily the case when candidates initially entered the clinical course sequence. Several candidates referenced their initial feelings of reluctance, nervousness, and discomfort in working with a student in a particular grade range. This was highly dependent on the teaching experience they brought with them. In most cases, these initial feelings were resolved once they began working with their students. This is an important finding because it demonstrates the candidates' capacity to adapt teaching and learning as necessary. It also demonstrates the importance of real-life teaching opportunities in promoting meaningful learning and broadening teaching knowledge

(Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). This finding exemplifies the power of authentic experiences in helping teachers adapt to specific situations, as described by Grossman, Compton, Igra, and colleagues (2009).

A second factor was a sense of engagement candidates felt from supervisor interactions. According to Leslie (2021) engagement encompasses student motivation, interactive materials, positive relationships, and applicable feedback. The relationships established between supervisors and candidates left them feeling supported, encouraged, and bolstered their sense of agency. This finding highlights facilitation as having a major role in attaining positive outcomes. Additionally, it reaffirms our beliefs that establishing communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), where reciprocal relationships are built, can be beneficial to teaching and learning. Although social interactions can be difficult to replicate in the online setting, establishing communities in which social presence is evident can help all candidates develop a positive identity, for both teaching and learning. As noted in the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al.,1999), establishing social presence through interactivity can be the first step toward generating motivation, which is a critical component of learner success.

Another important factor stemmed from prior coursework that prepared candidates for the practicum experience. Such coursework not only helped candidates gain foundational literacy knowledge, but it also gave them multiple opportunities to plan, design, and implement literacy instructional strategies related to testing and diagnosis, targeted strategies for intervention, keeping students motivated, and finding appropriate materials. This finding also aligns with the practice-based teaching framework by allowing professionals to engage in authentic experiences with differentiated teaching strategies as part of their teaching development (Grossman, Compton, Igra, et al., 2009). In online teaching environments, it was imperative that coursework

provided opportunities to establish a culture of engaged learning which fostered motivation and focused on student success (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). This allowed candidates to test out and adapt and share strategies before practicum started.

Finally, establishing routines helped candidates with pacing and time management. At the start of the program, candidates approximated the amount of time they would spend on each component of literacy. As they worked with their students early on, they made adjustments until an appropriate routine was established, based on their student's needs and the time needed for each component. Once an effective routine was in place, candidates felt having this type of daily system for each session helped them establish a greater sense of preparedness.

A sub-question to our first research question was *what are candidates' self-perceptions of their students' learning as a result of the practicum experience?* According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy influences learning. Because candidates reported a sense of confidence in meeting their students' needs at the end of the program, and also reported that they felt their students made gains, there would seem to be a possible relationship between development of self-efficacy and student learning.

One of the factors influencing perceived impact on student learning was goal setting. Candidates felt that helping students set goals for learning at the start of the program was beneficial to focused instruction. Candidates typically reviewed goals with students at the start of each session. Goals were used to guide teaching and to check milestones of student progress. This increased student engagement and heightened accountability for learning.

Other factors cited by candidates as having an impact on student learning were using materials and strategies based on interest and need. While candidates found this more difficult at the start of the program, this became easier as they got to know their students. Once candidates

gained an understanding of their student's interests and needs, tailoring materials and strategies specifically for their student allowed them to attain goals. This, in turn, was perceived as a positive influence on student learning.

Our second research question was *do the supervisors' perceptions align with candidates' self-perceptions of core competencies?* To answer this question, we used our key assessment data. The key assessment data revealed three competencies that presented as weaker (content, scaffolds, and metacognition) when comparing the means of all eight. From the key assessment data, the competency of *Content,* examined the lessons and ensured they demonstrated understanding of literacy processes. This is related to the survey category, *Planning Interventions*. When juxtaposing these scores, there is a relationship between candidates' perceptions and supervisors' perceptions in that both categories generated among the lowest scores, revealing consistencies in perceived outcomes. Knowing self-efficacy processes, according to Bandura (1995), plays a vital role in determining the trajectory of intellectual growth and influencing critical cognitive skills. These three competencies (content, scaffolds, and metacognition) are necessary to encourage and foster learning in students.

The second key assessment competency, *Scaffolds*, evaluates how the candidate provides appropriate supports, using gradual release of responsibility. While it doesn't perfectly align with what was measured on the survey, there is a relationship between this competency and the survey subcategories of *confidence in meeting students' needs* and *making in-the-moment decisions.* Candidates' perceptions in both of these subcategories were relatively high; whereas, supervisors deemed this to be a weaker area. This indicates a potential disconnect between supervisors' interpretation of providing supports and adapting instructional moves to meet students' needs. To

close this gap, it is necessary to further investigate "core" or "high leverage" teaching approaches (Forzani, 2014).

The final low key assessment competency of *Metacognition* measured whether or not the K-12 student understood what they were doing and why, and an awareness of the metacognitive process. Since this competency did not align with any of the survey categories, a potential limitation was revealed. This competency is important because, according to Garrison et al., (1999) an understanding of the critical thinking and inquiry dynamic is a vital metacognitive talent that allows students to approach an issue strategically and actively seek out sources of knowledge, recognize biases, filter through the vast amounts of materials, and construct as well as establish their own intellectual perspectives. This process should be carried out in an environment that encourages social presence (Garrison et al., 1999).

Overall, though there were discrepancies between candidates' and supervisors' perceptions, triangulation revealed several consistencies in candidates' ability to attain intended outcomes. In addition, juxtaposing the data in this way, revealed limitations, which will guide future program adjustments. An additional consideration is whether or not there was the possibility of social persuasion resulting from the supervisor's observations. As with any observations, candidates' actions could have been intentionally influenced during the lessons that were observed. Knowing whether or not observed teaching behaviors existed consistently across lessons would require additional data.

Limitations

The results of this study helped us elucidate our understanding of online clinical coursework and the impact it can have on student learning. However, our results were limited by small sample sizes. Because we chose to study the practicum program holistically, as one case, it

is likely that the results are not generalizable. Additionally, though we were studying the perceived effects of the program upon completion, it would have been helpful to measure our participants' perceptions before the practicum experience began, to better gauge self-perceptions prior to beginning the practicum program.

In considering the survey results, it should be noted that the survey contained a "neutral" response, allowing candidates to neither agree nor disagree with the statement. While this response was only utilized minimally, it was not helpful in gaining insights about self-perceptions. Thus, we concluded that it would be beneficial to eliminate this option in related future research. Additionally, the purpose of the survey in this study was to function more as a questionnaire on which they could rate their experiences. Therefore, no tests of reliability or validity were performed on this instruction prior to its use in this study.

Furthermore, key assessment competencies and survey questions were not perfectly aligned. It potentially could have been more helpful to measure candidate self-perceptions and supervisor perceptions using the same core competencies. For example, the survey measured self-perceptions of student motivation and engagement. However, this important area was not measured on the key assessment, and, thus, supervisors' perceptions of motivation and engagement were not determined. This limitation will help us further examine the key assessments and the importance of this category being embedded as a future competency area. Further instruction for teachers on how to motivate and engage students may be necessary, especially post-pandemic. This is an area we intend to investigate further and use to inform program revisions.

Finally, as noted above, the possibility of social persuasion existed for the observed lessons. This could potentially influence teacher practices during observations, thus, limiting the effect this data set to some degree. Future research would need to include this consideration.

Conclusion and Implications

As a result of the pandemic, universities around the world were forced to consider how they might transform traditional high-quality teaching and learning to accommodate a world that had suddenly gone virtual. The transition to online instruction was induced because of Covid's disruption (García-Morales et al., 2021). Therefore, a quick transition in pedagogy from face-to-face instruction to online courses was required (Mishra et al., 2020).

While this study was implemented during a time in which school-based tutoring was possible, its outcomes are certainly relevant as our current educational landscape continues to change shape. The main goal of this study was to explore whether or not a sense of preparedness and student achievement could be acquired through online clinical coursework. Because there is limited research available on this topic in the field of literacy specifically, findings were highly beneficial.

Data from the study revealed that candidates gained self-efficacy and positive self-perceptions from planning, designing and implementing lesson plans to meet the unique needs of each of their students during the practicum experience. While this study focused on online clinical coursework in literacy, the results were consistent with previous research and expanded on the notion that highly positive self-perceptions and feelings of self-efficacy can result from well-developed online coursework.

Although this study did not include an extensive review of best practices in online clinical coursework development, several factors which led to positive outcomes were gleaned

from the data collected. For example, during coaching meetings, providing supervisor feedback that was supportive and encouraging made a difference in gaining confidence for several candidates. Additionally, candidates expressed that mindfulness of their students' individual interests in their text selection was also beneficial. Candidates also expressed that being able to select appropriate strategies, that were aligned to their student's needs, was valuable.

Reaching the practicum experience, in many programs, is the culmination of the endorsement program. As such, it is essential that candidates enter the experience with foundational knowledge of literacy development and an understanding of literacy processes. In our case, this occurred in prior coursework and was a key factor identified by our candidates as influencing their preparedness. Furthermore, our candidates found that establishing routines for pacing and time management in working with their students was helpful. While all candidates were not initially comfortable with both age ranges and shared some hesitation at the beginning of the practicum experience, they gained comfort as time went on. Therefore, exposure to working with students of various age ranges is important. Finally, our candidates found that setting attainable goals for student learning was highly effective for instructional planning, to guide teaching, and to help track student progress. We highly recommend consideration of all of these factors in planning for future online clinics.

In conclusion, we feel the findings from this study provide evidence that an online graduate-level practicum program can provide candidates with authentic learning experiences that mirror the quality and rigor of traditional programs. This research helps us expand our understanding of what works in the online environment, and, more specifically, what factors can help candidates feel more prepared to serve their students and influence learning. Education will

continue to evolve; it is important that our educational settings, including literacy clinics, evolve as well.

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Tables

Table 1 *Survey Statements and Categories*

Category	**Statement** – *As a result of the clinical sequence and practicum…*
Testing & Diagnosis	I am confident in my ability to assess students, and in analyzing and interpreting the results.
	I am confident in my ability to correctly diagnose reading difficulties.
Planning Interventions	Planning targeted strategies for my student's areas of weakness (based on diagnostic testing) was easy.

	Developing literacy interventions that were tailored to my student's needs was easy.
Materials	I was able to find print materials that were appropriate for my student's needs.
	I was able to find online materials that were appropriate for my student's needs.
Motivation & Engagement	It was easy to keep my student motivated and engaging throughout the tutoring program.
Meeting Student Needs	I am confident in my ability to teach students in this grade range who are experiencing literacy difficulties.
	I am confident I fully met the needs of my student.
Diagnostic Teaching	I effectively made in-the-moment decisions about teaching and learning.
	Using a diagnostic teaching model during tutoring was effective.
	I fully understand the role of ongoing formative assessment in the diagnostic teaching model.
	I always used formative assessment to drive my instructional decisions.
Communicating	I am confident in my ability to effectively communicate the results of diagnostic testing with parent, teacher, and students.
	I am confident in my ability to effectively communicate program results and recommendations with parent, teachers, and students.
Transfer	Most of what I learned will easily transfer to my current educational setting.
Overall Preparedness	I feel prepared to plan, design, and implement literacy strategies for students in this grade range experiencing difficulties.
Impact on Student Learning	My student experienced growth in reading as a result of the tutoring program.
	My student experienced growth in writing as a result of the tutoring program.
	My student gained confidence as a reader/writer as a result of the tutoring program.

Table 2 *Key Assessment Data*

Core Objectives	**Online Mean (SD) N = 26**
Content - The content of the lesson demonstrates understanding of literacy processes.	2.76923077 (0.42966892)
Materials - Materials used are appropriate.	3 (0)
Language - Tutor uses appropriate language.	3 (0)
Listens - Tutor listens to the student and responds appropriately.	3 (0)
Scaffolds - Tutor provides appropriate scaffolding, with gradual release of responsibility.	2.80769231 (0.40191848)
Metacognition - Student understands what s/he is doing and why and demonstrates awareness of the metacognitive process.	2.76923077 (0.42966892)
Pacing - The lesson is paced well.	3 (0)
Rapport - Tutor has good rapport with the student.	3 (0)

Table 3 *Survey Data*

Self-Perceptions	Mean (SD)
	N = 26
Testing & Diagnosis	
Assessing, analyzing, & interpreting	4.58 (.50)
Correctly diagnose	4.31 (.51)
Planning Interventions	
Planning targeted strategies	4.31 (.68)
Developing tailored literacy interventions	4.31 (.55)
Materials	
Finding print materials	4.65 (.56)
Finding online materials	4.62 (.50)
Motivation & Engagement	
Easy to motivate and engage	4.38 (.64)
Meeting Student Needs	
Confidence in teaching	4.65 (.49)
Confidence in meeting student's needs	4.54 (.58)
Diagnostic Teaching	
Making in-the-moment decisions	4.77 (.43)
Effectiveness of diagnostic teaching model	4.77 (.43)
Understands the role of formative assessment	4.62 (.50)
Using formative assessment to drive instruction	4.50 (.51)
Communicating	
Effectively communicate test results	4.40 (.50)
Effectively communicate program results	4.35 (.49)
Transfer	
Transfer to educational setting	4.65 (.56)
Overall Preparedness	

Prepared to plan, design, and implement strategies	4.50 (.58)
Impact on Student Learning	
Growth in reading	4.73 (.53)
Growth in writing	4.50 (.76)
Gained confidence	4.77 (.43)

Figures

Figure 1 *Written Reflection Protocol*

- As a result of the online practicum experience, how prepared do you now feel to **plan, design**, and **implement** effective literacy instruction in the classroom?
    - Do you feel equally prepared for all 3 (planning, designing, implementing)?
    - Is there a difference between your perceived preparedness for younger and older students?
- How do you feel your tutoring sessions impacted each of your students' learning?
    - Is there an individual session or point in time (example: after the first week, or after 5 sessions, or at the halfway point) that stands out to you as being particularly effective?
    - How did your tutoring program as a whole impact student learning?
- Anything else you'd like to share?

SELF-PERCEPTIONS ON EFFICACY IN READING TEACHER EDUCATION

Figure 2 *Survey Data - Percentages*