

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Struggling Readers and Themselves

Katherine Brodeur
Bowling Green State University

Lisa Ortmann
University of North Dakota

This descriptive case study examines preservice teachers' beliefs about themselves as teachers of reading as they develop identities for teaching through experiences in a Foundations of Literacy course and their tutoring relationships with elementary students during an accompanying practicum. As the preservice teachers learned about foundational literacy development and assessment, they came to understand some students as "struggling readers," although their beliefs were not always grounded in assessment results. Practicum experiences both challenged and reinforced their existing beliefs about struggling readers, as well as their own sense of self-efficacy in responding to struggling readers' needs. Findings suggest that the types of student information preservice teachers attend to shape both productive and inaccurate beliefs about teaching students who struggle.

Introduction

It has long been understood that teachers' beliefs play an instrumental role in how they understand and enact the task of teaching (Pajares, 1992). Experiences in teacher education programs influence not just the content that preservice teachers learn but also their beliefs about literacy, instruction, themselves as teachers, and students who struggle (see Risko et al., 2008 for a review). Though previous research suggests strong teaching efficacy beliefs are supportive of struggling readers, the findings from research with preservice teachers has been mixed (Haverback & Parault, 2008; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teacher preparation has the potential to provide powerful learning experiences which impact preservice teachers' beliefs that they will be successful literacy teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). As teacher educators, we are interested in preparing teachers who feel ready to teach literacy to a wide variety of learners and who take responsibility for student learning. We recognize that preservice teachers' beliefs about literacy, instruction, and struggling readers relate to their beliefs about themselves as effective teachers and their willingness to take responsibility for all learners.

It is not unusual for preservice teachers to enter into early teaching experiences with overly-simplistic beliefs about struggling readers that focus on deficits (Mallette, Kile, Smith, McKinney, & Readance, 2000). Educators' deficit-laden beliefs have been found to contribute to existing inequities in schools, including "high failure and drop out rates, disproportionality in special education, overreferrals to discipline, fewer placements in gifted education and advanced classes, and exclusion of parents in schooling" (Nelson & Guerra, 2014, p. 89). A cycle of deficit thinking in schools has also been reasoned to be partly responsible for the existence of academic achievement gaps (Valencia, 2010). Despite this knowledge, teachers' deficit-beliefs about

linguistically, culturally, and academically diverse students continue to be a prevalent barrier to equitable K-12 education (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Since beliefs become more fixed and difficult to change over time (Pajares, 1992), it is important that preservice teachers begin to identify and challenge their own deficit beliefs as they relate to student academic success.

This study describes what preservice teachers believe about teaching reading, “struggling readers,” and themselves as future teachers of struggling readers. Through a university practicum experience, the 28 preservice teachers in this study were paired with two elementary students (K and 3rd grade) known as “reading buddies” for hour-long, weekly literacy tutoring sessions. This study explores how preservice teachers’ beliefs were shaped by experiences with elementary students and how preservice teachers integrated information from a variety of sources into their developing identities as teachers. Previous research of preservice teacher identity development has highlighted the importance of the negotiation a new teacher must undertake when reconciling the different belief systems present among cooperating teachers, school settings, and university expectations (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004). The current study seeks to examine how the specific literacy teaching experiences preservice teachers have with elementary students contribute to preservice teachers’ identity development. We question the role elementary students play in preservice teachers’ development as they begin to think about themselves as teachers in terms of “who” they teach.

Theoretical Perspectives

Preservice Teacher Self-Efficacy Beliefs

When developing self-efficacy beliefs, preservice teachers use current experiences to make judgments about their effectiveness in future situations (Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2009). There is compelling evidence indicating that well-developed self-efficacy beliefs in practicing teachers undergird dispositions likely to support struggling readers, such as being more persistent with students’ difficulties (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), as well as more inclusive and responsive to students in general (see Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2009 for a review). Research with preservice teachers has had conflicting outcomes, showing that those with high self-efficacy beliefs may be more likely to handle challenges by asserting higher degrees of control over students (e.g. Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Rushton, 2000) and not necessarily reflect greater content knowledge (Haverback & Parault, 2011).

As teacher efficacy beliefs are both domain and context-specific (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), it is important to understand preservice teachers’ evolving beliefs as they teach literacy to young children. Carried into practice, negative beliefs about themselves and their future students may lead teachers to ascribe students’ reading identities as “poor readers” based on what the teachers believe they “cannot” do (Hall, Johnson, Juzwik, Wortham, & Mosley, 2010, p.239). Teachers’ perceptions of what it means to be a “good” or “poor” reader affect the ways they interact with struggling students (Hall, 2009). Beyond the impact on individual students, unexamined deficit beliefs serve to perpetuate a system of inequity (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Scott & Ford, 2008).

Preservice Teacher Identity Construction

Preservice teachers' beliefs and emotions about teaching are multi-faceted; this complexity may be better understood by critically expanding the construct of teacher efficacy beliefs (Labone, 2004) through the broader frame of teacher identity. Hong (2010) suggests efficacy is one of six factors of teachers' professional identities. While the field lacks a firm definition of teacher identity, identity formation is consistently conceptualized as being both contextual and social, among other things (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). A dialogic approach to teacher identity extends this by suggesting that the socio-cultural environment is more than just a contextual factor, but that "teachers implicitly construct and negotiate their identity in relation to the various people they meet" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 314). Specifically, the practicum and course experiences of teacher education students has been found to support and constrain teacher identity development (Flores, 2006). As preservice teachers begin to ground their beliefs about students and their teaching in their emerging practices, it initiates a process of "challenging and revisiting personal assumptions and beliefs with implications for the (trans)formation of their professional identities" (Flores, 2006, p. 2027).

The tension between coursework and fieldwork learning experiences for teacher education students has been called the "two-worlds pitfall" (Fieman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985, as cited in Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia, 1999) because teacher education students walk between the worlds of being a student and being a teacher. Because of this "productive friction" (Horn, Nolen, Ward, & Campbell, 2008), teacher educators must work from frameworks that support teacher identity construction as being built from familiar student identities, while questioning unproductive beliefs or biases held about students. They can accomplish this through structured learning experiences that support preservice teachers in "approximation" of teaching in the early courses (Grossman, 2011). Using identity as a framework for exploring the development of preservice teachers' beliefs allows us to consider the importance of the context for preservice teachers' learning as well as the dialogic manner in which identity develops in conversation with others (Olsen, 2011).

Review of Relevant Literature

Teacher Beliefs about Working with "Struggling Readers"

Teachers and preservice teachers may hold beliefs about working with struggling readers that impact their ability to engage with these students, including negative emotional expectations and even fear prior to teaching experiences (Duffy & Atkinson, 2001). Soodak and Podell (1994) found that when considering the cases of "difficult to teach" students, specifically students who experienced difficulty with reading and self-control in the classroom, teachers were more likely to suggest interventions beyond the scope of their classroom. They were also more likely to deem strategies such as special education evaluation and services to be effective than instructional strategies that they themselves might implement. These beliefs affected the frequency with which they referred students to external resources, increasing the likelihood that the students would be removed from their responsibility. Soodak and Podell (1994) further discovered a correlation of high personal efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) with teachers who suggested teacher-based strategies and believed that these strategies would be effective. They

concluded that in order for teachers to take responsibility for the success of struggling learners, teachers must not only believe the suggested intervention is effective, but also in their own ability to implement the intervention.

Scharlach (2008) found that preservice teachers commonly attributed students' reading development, or difficulties, to parental involvement, motivation, readiness, access and exposure to print, socioeconomic status, behavior, or reading disability. In a small number of cases, participants noted that they felt responsible for or capable of providing instruction for struggling readers. Subsequently, the preservice teachers who believed they were responsible for addressing the students' needs provided more modeling, wait time, and instructional level text than those who did not see themselves this way. Further, the preservice teachers who did not believe themselves capable of or responsible for teaching struggling readers did not even accept responsibility when the students made significant progress in reading. They attributed the progress to causes intrinsic to the student such as readiness or motivation.

Teacher Beliefs Developed through Field Experiences

Preservice teachers have reported feeling unprepared by their coursework alone to teach struggling readers (Duffy & Atkinson, 2001; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011). When compared to traditional university classroom-based learning or observation of instruction, preservice teachers who experience field-based learning report that it has a stronger influence on the development of their beliefs (Haverback & Parault, 2011; Linek, Nelson, Sampson, Zeek, Mohr, & Hughes, 1999). When this field work includes opportunity for mastery experiences, such as reading tutoring, preservice teachers are more likely to have a higher ability to respond to individual student needs (Maloch, Flint, Eldridge, Harmon, Loven, Fine, ... & Martinez, 2003) and put the theory they learn into practice (Fang & Ashley, 2004). Developing a case study of an individual student has also been shown to contribute to increases in preservice teachers' reading-specific teaching self-efficacy (Haverback & McNary, 2015).

When field experiences are focused on tutoring a *struggling* reader, preservice teachers have moved from expressing beliefs that the causes of students' reading difficulties are unrelated to instruction or school towards taking some responsibility for addressing those reading difficulties (Nierstheimer, Hopkins, Dillon, & Schmitt, 2000). Field experiences, coupled with the development of case study of an individual struggling reader, have allowed preservice teachers to develop more multifaceted understandings of reading difficulties (Mallette et al., 2000). Furthermore, when tasked with tutoring a struggling reader, the preservice teachers in Duffy and Atkinson's (2001) study developed greater confidence in their beliefs to teach students who struggle. As preservice teachers were encouraged to integrate their own knowledge of the content from their coursework and their field experiences, they were able to diminish misunderstandings about literacy and increase their own sense of preparedness to work with struggling readers. After their tutoring experiences, preservice teachers spoke of confidence, willingness to take responsibility, and the belief that they could make a difference in struggling readers' growth. Duffy and Atkinson (2001) clarified that simply possessing efficacy was not a guarantee that they would be effective teachers of struggling readers; however, this prerequisite indicated greater likelihood that they would make the attempt to reach struggling readers in their future classrooms.

Haverback and Parault (2011) found that the majority of preservice teachers who gained field experience in tutoring contexts felt that this experience was largely responsible for their development of efficacy beliefs. By comparison, preservice teachers who merely observed an experienced teacher did not feel that this experience was as important as course learning; however, their self-efficacy beliefs increased as a result of this observation. Despite the widely-acknowledged value of high teacher-efficacy, Haverback and Parault (2011) speculated that moderate self-efficacy beliefs tempered by realistic expectations might actually be more beneficial to teachers in the long run. Further, Haverback and McNary (2015) suggested that gradual growth in preservice teachers' sense of efficacy is more beneficial than rapid growth.

These findings echoed the results of Linek et al.'s (1999) cross-case analysis which suggested that field experiences, particularly those that are well-designed and supervised, make a greater contribution to preservice teachers' beliefs about literacy instruction and themselves as literacy teachers. Following the field experiences, preservice teachers' beliefs were not entirely positive. In the context where preservice teachers were embedded in the field and treated as school staff, Linek et al. (1999) found preservice teachers experienced more forms of dissonance to challenge their developing beliefs. Linek et al. (1999) believed these challenges represented "opportunity to test developing ideas in authentic settings" (p.381).

Research Questions

In order to understand how the experiences of learning about individual elementary students might affect the preservice teachers' beliefs about themselves as teachers of reading we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are preservice teachers' initial and evolving beliefs about teaching reading and themselves as teachers of reading?
2. What are preservice teachers' initial and evolving beliefs about struggling readers?
3. What sources of information about elementary students do preservice teachers draw on as they come to understand "what kind" of readers they are?

In the following case studies we press the question of how preservice teachers' beliefs about readers *whom they perceive to be struggling* affect their own developing identities as teachers in the context of a one-on-one tutoring relationship. Further, this study addresses Risko et al.'s 2008 call for more research into the possibility of changing literacy teachers' beliefs as they are informed by a variety of situated events.

Methods

Labone (2004) emphasized that the highly-contextual nature of self-efficacy should be investigated through qualitative research; teacher identity research also benefits from an interpretive lens or mixed methods approach (Olsen, 2011). This study explored the development of preservice teachers' beliefs and identities through collective case studies (Stake, 1995) that incorporate predominantly qualitative data sources with the support of some quantitative data.

Case study research is a “noninterventive and empathic” research method that is used to explore a single person, group, or program in as authentic a capacity as possible (Stake, 1995, p. 12) through the collection of a variety of data sources. Collective case studies are useful when the goal of the research is to better understand both the uniqueness of a case, and how the characteristics of each case compare with one another, which can in turn help solidify the interpretations made of each case (Stake, 1995, p. 5-7). Additionally, since the cases in our study are focused on the learning experiences individuals, the use of qualitative data allows us to build information-rich cases, while the use of quantitative data offers a basis for comparison across cases. First, the case of the whole class (28 preservice teachers) is described. Then, purposive sampling was used to identify specific cases that were information rich for further analysis (Patton, 2002). Additional data were collected and analyzed for two key informants, selected in order to “maximize what we can learn” (Stake, 1995, p.4) about their beliefs and identity development.

Participants and Setting

This study occurred at a research institution in the upper Midwest where participants were students enrolled in an undergraduate Foundations of Literacy course required for elementary and early childhood licensure and its accompanying practicum. Of the 28 preservice teachers 26 were female, 2 were male. The group was predominantly White and between the ages of 20-25. Five were post-baccalaureate students, pursuing initial teaching licensure after attaining a degree; two of these five were currently enrolled in a master’s program.

Through partnership with a local urban school system, both the course and the practicum were taught at the elementary school site, allowing preservice teachers to learn in the same context as their elementary students. Before the practicum began, preservice teachers were provided with the first names of one kindergarten student and one third grade student with whom they would meet each week for an hour as reading tutors. The participating elementary students in our study were not identified as struggling through any systemic analysis of assessment data. Instead, the participating preservice teachers were given a classroom teacher’s estimate of whether each student was “at,” “below,” or “above” grade level benchmarks in reading, and we did not ask for evidence to confirm these identifications. This follows precedent set by previous research, for example, Scharlach (2008) used multiple case studies to explore how individual preservice teachers’ beliefs about identified struggling readers affected their expectations, instruction, and evaluation of the students, and Mallette et al. (2000) developed case studies to illustrate the idiosyncratic nature of preservice teachers’ beliefs about struggling readers, revealing how preservice teachers framed much of their learning in terms of the supervising teachers whom they observed. In both of these studies, the elementary students were identified as “struggling” through existing school-based systems, and the accuracy of this determination was not called into question.

In this study, elementary classroom teachers, Ms. Patty Allister and Ms. Julie Rowan (all names pseudonyms), kindergarten and third grade respectively, provided their professional estimations of the elementary students’ reading levels. These levels were reported from a combination of assessment and classroom observation and reported generally in terms of below grade level, on grade level, and above grade level. As one of the course objectives for Foundations of Literacy

was for preservice teachers to accurately administer and interpret a variety of literacy assessments, we wanted our preservice teachers to construct their own understandings of students' literacy development. During the course of the practicum, preservice teachers administered a variety of literacy assessments and used other course resources to gain insight about the students' current levels of performance and to plan one-on-one tutoring sessions.

Data Sources

For all participants, the Open-Ended Beliefs Survey derived from the work of Nierstheimer, Hopkins, Dillon, and Schmitt (1998) was administered prior to the practicum experience and again at the conclusion of the course. This instrument, composed of nine open-response questions, allowed preservice teachers to respond with several sentences of text regarding their beliefs about typical literacy development.

To supplement this qualitative data we reviewed students' responses on the Teachers' Self-Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011) survey. This survey was administered before and after the course and measured preservice teachers' self-efficacy to execute specific literacy teaching practices. Participants were asked to evaluate their own "current ability, resources, and opportunity to do" various tasks associated with literacy instruction. Scores on the unipolar response scale from 1-9 represented values of "none at all" (1), "very little" (3), "some degree" (5), "quite a lot" (7), and "a great deal" (9). The 22-item instrument was designed for use as a single factor, with a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .96, though the results are moderately correlated with all three subscales of the general Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). From this measure, we identified four focal questions on the TSELI: two that address beliefs about the instructional decisions teachers might feel efficacious to make (items 3 and 22) and two that addressed efficacy beliefs about working with "struggling readers" and students who show "low interest" in reading (items 5 and 21), comparing mean scores of these items to their mean score overall.

Additional data used in the analysis of selected cases included course artifacts of learning collected at multiple points in the semester. These included written reports of student assessment data, post-teaching written reflections, the final reading buddy case study report, and two other writing assignments. The first writing assignment was an in-class exercise where students were asked to reflect in writing before and after reading an article addressing the profiles of struggling readers and how teachers might use instruction to address specific skill deficits (Riddle Buly & Valencia, 2011) and participating in class discussion about the cognitive processes integral to reading and writing (Anderson & Briggs, 2011). Students were asked to write about a time when they experienced difficulty in their own learning pursuits, and these were collected at the end of class.

The second writing assignment occurred at the conclusion of the practicum experience. Preservice teachers completed written reflections (see Appendix A for reflection prompts), asking about their experiences in the practicum. In particular, we asked them to reflect on a conversational interview (see Appendix B for interview guidelines) the preservice teachers conducted with their elementary reading buddies inquiring about the students' motivation to read. These writing assignments were completed outside of class.

Data Analysis

Open-Ended Beliefs Survey. For the Open-Ended Beliefs Survey, we used question by question content analysis strategies (Patton, 2002). First, each of us read through all pre-course or all post-course surveys question by question and documented initial observations about the data that would become sensitizing concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) for further analysis. Following this initial inductive analysis, we met and discussed possible patterns of interest as well as cases that appeared to be outliers. From this we drafted a theoretical memo (Miles & Huberman, 1994) including a list of possible codes. Utilizing these codes, we exchanged data sets and re-read the surveys deductively to match data to established codes and count the frequency of codes amongst respondents. Finally, we reviewed each other's coding, collapsing and expanding codes as needed.

TSELI. Survey results were reviewed individually and for the entire group of participants to understand trends in the larger case. Descriptive statistics were calculated to include mean scores for individual preservice teachers, for individual survey items, and for the whole class for both the pre and post course data sets. Mean scores were compared to determine changes in individual scores, item scores, and group scores. The focal questions that had been determined in advance were then compared with the overall item means in order to determine patterns related to preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs overall.

To answer our first research question, regarding the initial and evolving beliefs about teaching reading, we analyzed pre and post course data sets for the TSELI (whole instrument) and focused on the following questions from the Open-Ended Beliefs Survey: *How do children learn to read?* and *How should I teach children & youth to learn to read?* using strategies described above for all preservice teachers in the class. In order to address our second research question, regarding evident changes to beliefs about struggling readers, we utilized the same analysis strategies with pre-determined focal questions from the the TSELI and focused on the following questions from the Open-Ended Beliefs Survey: *Why do some children & youth experience difficulty learning to read?* and *What can be done to help children & youth who are experiencing difficulty learning to read?* For our third research question, regarding the sources of information that preservice teachers used to understand their students, we used the survey data to select cases for further examination and then analyzed the additional written artifacts (as described below), corroborating this analysis with the two participants' survey data in order to develop rich descriptions of these cases.

Case selection criteria. Purposive sampling led us to select cases that were "rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual" (Patton, 2002, p.234). For example, we chose not to include one preservice teacher who assessed her self-efficacy in a manner that reflected an extreme case in terms of both exceptionally low preliminary scores and dramatic growth, which we determined to be unreliable. In order for the case to be considered, we reviewed collected data and selected preservice teachers who had:

1. Complete data

2. At least one “buddy” reading below grade level (according to teacher’s estimates) OR interpreted at least one “buddy” as performing below level (assessment analyses)
3. TSELI Scores that remained relatively constant or demonstrated average change.

From the 10 preservice teachers who met all three criteria, we chose two cases who reflected patterns of belief about struggling students that were wide-spread in the class.

Other data analysis. Analysis strategies for the other qualitative data for the two focal cases used constant comparative analysis methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which included comparing incident by incident to find conceptual similarities and distinguishing larger themes within each case. When an incident was found to be perplexing, broader theoretical comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) were made to understand the incident and inform the themes within each case. Additionally, across case comparison methods (Stake, 1995) were used to verify themes and patterns of significance. All data were triangulated with their written assignments in order to verify patterns of significance.

Findings

First, we present the survey data and explore findings of two significant patterns that applied across the class—the larger case— to illustrate common beliefs and their frequency. The patterns addressed the preservice teachers’ beliefs on the reasons underlying the readers’ struggles and the beliefs on how to address struggling readers. Then, we present the cases of Marta and Ariel to describe how they both mirrored and diverged from their peers along these patterns.

Results of the TSELI shed some light on how the preservice teachers in the Foundations of Literacy course viewed themselves and their capabilities to teach reading (see Table 1). Before the field experience, preservice teachers assigned themselves values averaging to 6.26, or between “some degree” and “quite a lot.” Following the field experience, the class item mean was 7.31, representing a value larger than “quite a lot.” While five preservice teachers assigned themselves scores that represented negative growth, the class mean growth was slightly more than one point overall.

Throughout the course, preservice teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading became more grounded in research and course content. Beginning with widely varying beliefs about what it meant to teach reading, preservice teachers wrote more about specific literacy skills and used more accurate professional terminology following the course and field experience. Preservice teachers also began to indicate a more active role in developing these skills, shifting from naming instructional materials and general instructional practices to naming specific instructional strategies that could be used. They also indicated with greater frequency the need to know students’ skills and abilities to instruct effectively as Mia stated, to “establish where the learner stands before beginning instruction.” This aligned with the course’s emphasis on administering and utilizing informal assessments as a way of understanding each learner’s unique strengths and challenges.

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT STRUGGLING READERS

Table 1
Mean Score Comparison of Teacher Self-Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI), Overall and to Focal Questions

	Pre-Course		Post-Course		Change
	M	SD	M	SD	
All Items	6.26	0.58	7.31	0.39	1.05
<u>Focal Questions</u>					
To what extent can you adjust reading strategies based on ongoing informal assessments of your students?	5.93	1.68	7.61	1.03	1.68
How much can you do to meet the needs of struggling readers?	6.71	1.76	7.18	0.98	0.46
How much can you motivate students who show low interest in reading?	6.64	1.42	7.11	0.99	0.46
How much can you do to adjust your reading materials to the proper level for individual students?	6.61	1.64	7.75	0.97	1.14

Pattern 1: Preservice teachers believe that readers struggle for a variety of reasons beyond their control.

Before this course, all preservice teachers had taken at least one required course about special education, providing them with some ideas about why students might experience struggles in school. Both before and after the course, nearly all (20) cited multiple factors that contributed to students' difficulties learning to read. The most common explanations preservice teachers provided were: *limited access to resources or experiences with text outside of school*, *motivation to read*, and *learning disabilities inherent to the reader*, which are similar to previous findings (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Scharlach, 2008). Each of these were cited more frequently after the course.

The most commonly occurring explanation for struggling readers was their *limited access to resources or experiences with text outside of school*, in other words, the students' home experiences and exposure to print (14 pre; 18 post). This suggests that preservice teachers placed a high value on the influence of families and early literacy experiences, but also that they understand the source of learning difficulties as removed from a teacher's scope of influence.

Preservice teachers frequently referred to both physical and social resources that might promote students' early literacy skills or, in their absence might lead to learning difficulties. Kit, one of the post-baccalaureate students with additional background in early childhood education, expressed her beliefs that some students "especially those growing up in poverty, do not have access to the early experiences that support reading. For example, children from low SES do not hear oral language as much; they are not read to as much." For most preservice teachers, this was more simply stated in terms of what their students *lacked* such as books (Keith) and experience

with books (Linda). Responses such as “maybe because they don’t get home support... socioeconomic reasons” (Ellen) suggested that at least some preservice teachers were drawing from assumptions about the relationship between material resources available in the home and social supports for learning to read.

Other preservice teachers specified the kinds of home experiences that, when absent, they understood to be responsible for students’ reading difficulties. According to these preservice teachers, some students “are never read aloud to before they enter school” (Casey) or “don’t experience positive reading models in their home life” (Coral). There were also preservice teachers who expressed the belief that it was not just early literacy experiences but the way families viewed literacy, recognizing the “importance of literacy at home” (Lydia) and “what families value” (Antonia). Overall, preservice teachers’ beliefs about the role of home life and family contexts for reading were strengthened throughout the course. This sociocultural perspective of learning was evidenced through statements attributing children learning to read to “experience & exposure to text & interactions with friends & family” (Jasmine) and “an adult that encourages their learning” (Keith). Implied in these statements is that these essential contexts exist outside of school and specifically, outside the role of the teacher, and are therefore not something they will have ability to influence.

The second most commonly stated reason for students’ reading difficulties was students’ *motivation to read* (9 pre; 13 post). This factor weighed so crucially in some views, that of the eight students who described only one cause of learning difficulties, half attributed the difficulties to lack of motivation. While overall, the number of explanations attributing students’ learning difficulties to motivation increased from the beginning to the end of the course, they also became more nuanced. Initially, most references to students’ motivation to read recognized interest in reading or in specific reading materials as a key element. Following the course, preservice teachers were more likely to note the way that motivational and affective factors could be multifaceted, as Alecia noted: “Sometimes they may consider that reading is just too difficult and that they ‘can’t read.’ Others may think that reading is boring and not want to participate in it.” Other preservice teachers noted the way that motivational factors interacted with skill development, as Coral did: “They are not motivated to practice and become easily frustrated when they don’t get it right the first time.”

As topics of motivation and engagement in literacy learning were woven throughout the course content, it was unsurprising that nearly half of the preservice teachers mentioned disconnects in these areas as sources for learning difficulty. What was somewhat surprising was the strong degree to which some preservice teachers treated this as being beyond their control. Across the class, the TSELI question asking, “How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in reading?” represented one of the smallest amounts of growth (0.46) suggesting that preservice teachers found student motivation to be a fixed characteristic of students. As Pam expressed, “When they experience difficulty or lack of motivation it affects their perception and therefore work ethic & skill. They have to want to learn and get better.” Sentiments such as these suggest that at least some of the preservice teachers in this class did not see teachers as responsible for creating engaging lessons that would motivate young readers.

The third most cited reason for difficulty in learning to read was *learning disabilities inherent to the reader* (8 pre; 12 post). Some preservice teachers understood learning disabilities to be synonymous with “developmental delays” (Antonia). Others specifically named dyslexia which, oddly, was alluded to more than once as a “physical limitation.” Along with confusions such as this one, minimal evidence was cited to explain how learning disabilities actually affected the development of reading skills.

Nina, who was preparing to become a special education teacher, was able to elaborate her belief, “For some children, the usual methods don’t work because they don’t visualize or process the same as other students. Dyslexia is a fairly common condition that affects reading and writing.” Other preservice teachers, without naming learning disabilities or dyslexia specifically, attributed students’ difficulty learning to read with characteristics that they perceived to be intrinsic to students, such as “slower cognitive development” (Brenda) and “psychological reasons” (Ellen).

Though some preservice teachers were able to identify factors that might affect students’ learning, they gave no indication of how these difficulties might be addressed in schools, further removing themselves as future teachers from a position where they might help the students whom they perceive as struggling. This parallels Soodak and Podell’s (1994) findings that teachers may not see their role in addressing students’ struggles.

Pattern 2: Preservice teachers believe instructional settings, skill assessment, and addressing motivation are the most impactful ways to address students’ reading struggles.

The experience of working one-on-one with elementary students afforded preservice teachers the opportunity to obtain great insight about individual learners to see first hand the impact of various approaches to struggling readers, most notably, *individualized settings, skill assessment, and understanding motivation*.

Prior to the practicum experience, an *individualized setting* was the most frequently noted idea for helping children and youth experiencing difficulty learning to read (10); after the practicum, this idea was still popular (7). This suggests that preservice teachers placed a high value on the opportunity to deliver instruction in an individualized manner. It is worth noting that at this point in their programs, many preservice teachers had not yet had experience with teaching in small group or whole class settings.

Despite recognizing the value of an individualized setting for instruction, what that instruction should look like was less clear to the preservice teachers. Initially, the TSELI focal question, “How much can you do to meet the needs of struggling readers?” had one of the higher item means across the class (6.71); however, following the class, it also represented one of the lowest areas of growth (0.46). This suggests preservice teachers entered the class with relatively strong self-efficacy beliefs about teaching struggling readers, but that the class and practicum experiences did not lead to significant increases in these beliefs. Following the course, approximately one fifth of the preservice teachers (6) noted the role of previous instruction in students’ reading difficulties. The same number (6) cited foundational literacy skills that students might lack, without connecting this deficit to inadequate instruction.

A smaller number of preservice teachers (4) specified that they should model literacy practices for students or read to them when teaching reading. Notably, the item on which preservice teachers consistently scored their self-efficacy beliefs the highest both before (7.93) and after (7.96) the practicum experience asked them “To what extent can you model effective reading strategies?” Although modeling was a practice preservice teachers held in high value and believed they could be successful at, they did not appear to attribute the potential success of instructional modeling to preventing or remediating reading difficulties.

As preservice teachers suggested ways that teachers might address reading difficulties, none mentioned the provision of interventions or the development of an individualized education plan, ideas that might align with the background knowledge provided by their special education coursework. In fact, no distinctions were made for how teachers might address learning disabilities differently than other reading difficulties. This is perplexing when juxtaposed with the frequency with which this group of preservice teachers attributed difficulties with reading to learning disabilities.

The beliefs preservice teachers had at the end of the semester about the importance of individualizing instruction for all students aligned with their self-efficacy beliefs for using assessment data to plan instruction for their future students as reflected in TSELI items 3 and 22 (see Table 1). Initially, nearly a third of preservice teachers indicated that students who struggled with reading simply needed practice with basic skills or repeated exposure to texts (9). Following the course and practicum, this idea was less common (4). In its place, the idea that *skill assessment* could be used to target specific areas of challenge had gained prominence (6 pre; 10 post). As Mia indicated, “First, I think whatever is making it difficult needs to be identified. After that, one can take the steps to tailor a process specific for that learner.”

Beyond simply classifying students as “good” or “struggling” readers, preservice teachers learned from assessing a variety of literacy skills that each student has strengths that can serve as the foundation for future instruction. Ariel suggested that to teach literacy, it was essential to “Perform assessments to find where a student is at instructionally. Then use the assessment information to drive instruction. Focusing on student strengths is a great place to start.” Throughout this course, preservice teachers like Ariel came to understand skill assessment as a part of instruction for all students.

Preservice teachers also listened to their elementary buddies to understand their interests and personal motivations for reading and writing as they planned weekly lessons. While *understanding motivation* was an area that preservice teachers did not consistently express confidence in, over the semester, the number who felt this was an important way to address students’ reading difficulties doubled (4 pre; 9 post). Some preservice teachers even began to explore ways that teachers might support students’ developing motivation such as “Building confidence!” (Antonia), “Investigat[ing] interests of the student” (Linda), and “Giving specific & positive feedback on their progress” (Kit).

Although preservice teachers cited strong beliefs in the role of motivation in students’ success as readers, their self-efficacy to support students who have “low motivation” as measured on item 21 showed one of the lowest post-course mean scores overall (7.11) and a low mean change from

pre to post measure (0.46). These scores lead us to conclude that preservice teachers developed more positive beliefs about the effect teachers can have on student motivation in general than they did about themselves as teachers of students with “low motivation.” Although the mean score of this item on the TSELI did increase, we expected a more dramatic increase considering the amount of time spent on the role of motivation in our course. In addition to other in and out of class readings and assignments, students were assigned a research paper in which they wrote a 5-7 page synthesis of the research on motivation and literacy education. It is not clear from our analysis what led to the development of preservice teachers’ beliefs about the importance of motivation and the contrasting self-efficacy beliefs about their ability to impact student motivation, though we expect it may be attributed to a combination of course instruction, existing beliefs about motivation, and experiences they each had with their individual elementary reading buddies.

Selected Cases

The following two case descriptions provide an in-depth view of the patterns of significance and how those patterns played out across data sources for two preservice teachers. Marta was a traditional undergraduate student who described her kindergarten reading buddy as “below” or “behind” and having behavior challenges, despite the teacher’s identification of this kindergarten student as “on grade level.” Marta’s post TSELI mean (8.64) was higher than the class mean, but reflected only a small increase (0.18) from the precourse mean (see Table 2). Ariel was a post-baccalaureate Master’s student who initially described her kindergarten reading buddy, identified as “below grade level,” in very optimistic terms, eventually grounding these beliefs in observations and assessment data. Ariel’s post TSELI mean (7.09) was slightly below the class mean but reflected a more typical increase (1.18, compared to the average change for all participants, 1.05), and a much larger change than Marta (0.18). Both preservice teachers represented “typical” cases in some respects (both middle-class, white, females in their early twenties) and “cases of interest” (differences in kindergarten student experiences, differing perceptions of their teaching experiences, and variation in their TSELI scores). After the presentation of the case, we offer our interpretation and connections to the larger themes reported in the previous sections.

Table 2
Mean Score Comparison of Teacher Self-Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI) by Case

	Pre-Course		Post-Course		Change
	M	SD	M	SD	
All Students	6.26	0.58	7.31	0.39	1.05
Marta	8.45	0.80	8.64	0.73	0.18
Ariel	5.91	1.27	7.09	1.19	1.18

Marta

Upon entry into our course, Marta was a dual major studying Elementary Education and Spanish, who hoped to teach 1st or 2nd grade at a Spanish immersion school. Previously, she spent time abroad in South America and taught at a local Spanish immersion school. Her interests and

experiences as a second language learner constituted a significant part of her developing teaching identity. When reflecting on a struggle she experienced as a learner, she recalled writing her research thesis for her Spanish major. She explained that this experience was daunting for several reasons, mostly because her professor “scared the living daylight out of me” and his “brutally honest critiques made me tear up on several occasions.” Upon reflection on this experience, she noted that she was happy she finished the Spanish major, although she felt strongly that there was a better way to teach research writing; “This will play a role in my life as a teacher because many times I will need to provide specific feedback to each reader. Every writer struggles with different things, so I need to give each student individual support.” Her comparison between language and literacy learning continued throughout her work with Kendra, the kindergarten student she tutored.

Marta’s understanding of Kendra. Ms. Allister, Kendra’s classroom teacher, identified Kendra as an “at grade level reader” for the winter of kindergarten. Despite being provided this information, Marta perceived Kendra’s abilities to be low due to the initial data she collected on the Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey (ERAS; McKenna & Kear, 1990). Marta reported that Kendra “answered the questions unfavorably” only earning a 44% score overall. Although this was an assessment of attitudes toward reading, Marta made some interpretations of Kendra’s *abilities* as a reader, stating that, “When we tried to read a story... she claimed she could not read any of the words, but was able to follow along with her finger when I read.” Her instructional actions following this assessment included a few actions related to the affective factors of reading, but she also decided she would focus on reading books “with fewer words per page that are written in larger font” and writing skills of “writing more than just her name.”

It occurred to Marta later in the semester that her initial impressions of Kendra may not have been accurate. In her written reflection, she wrote: “Kendra was capable of much more than she let on in the beginning, so I was giving her simpler and simpler tasks until I finally realized that all she needed was more incentives to do her best.” After administering the Primary Spelling Inventory (PSI; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2012), she discovered that Kendra was a beginning reader at the Letter Name-Alphabetic stage of literacy development, and not an emergent reader as she had thought. However, by the time Marta began to develop a more accurate understanding of Kendra’s abilities, her beliefs about Kendra being “difficult” were well established. Marta continued to address what she perceived as behavior difficulty rather than revisit her own instructional choices. The use of “incentives” became a recurring theme in her efforts to teach Kendra. She used interactive activities like gallery walks as “breaks” in between instructional activities and used coloring as a “reward for completing assignments.” In a final reflection, Marta again wrote about the many “incentives” she used to motivate Kendra to complete the literacy learning tasks she had planned for her. She named a few of her motivational strategies, particularly, opportunities to take breaks, high-fives, checklists, and playing games were used to prevent Kendra’s “tantrums” during tutoring sessions.

Marta’s developing beliefs about struggling readers in general. Her initial (although inaccurate) beliefs about Kendra as a “struggling reader” influenced the instruction she planned and delivered each week and ultimately contributed to more lasting beliefs about struggling readers in general. Her responses to the questions about students who have difficulty learning to read on the Open-Ended Beliefs Survey indicated little change from the pre to post measure.

Although she cited the same causes for why some students struggle, she did become more aware of the importance of foundational skills, like phonemic awareness, in a student's literacy development. She added to her ideas for instructional approaches for students who experience difficulty with "motivating and engaging interactive activities" and the use of "positive reinforcement and incentives." We see these statements as indicative of her overly generalized beliefs about the role of student motivation in literacy learning and a strikingly simplistic belief about the use of rewards to persuade students into compliance. Notably absent from her responses were aspects of motivation emphasized in class such as engaging students with material they find interesting yet challenging and addressing their attributions for success.

Marta's score on the TSELI did not show much change in her self-efficacy beliefs over the course of the semester. She continued to score herself very high on most items and on the focal items she scored herself the highest score of 9 "a great deal" on all except on one question. Her response to the question "How much can you motivate students who show low interest in reading?" was a 7, "quite a bit," a one-point drop from the pre-course survey. We find this to be consistent with her perceived challenges to motivate and engage Kendra in her planned activities. It seems that her experience as Kendra's tutor was an important factor in her development of lasting beliefs about students in general.

An inaccurate view of a grade level reader. Marta's case exemplifies the types of beliefs and development of a teaching identity that preservice teachers may experience when working with grade level readers who they mistakenly believe to be below grade level. Although Marta's knowledge of reading development increased throughout the semester, she was in the minority of preservice teachers who did not increasingly ground instruction in knowledge of the students' developmental levels and needs. Instead, Marta became fixated on Kendra's behavior, inaccurately attributing her behavior to motivational deficits intrinsic to the student, rather than the inappropriate match of her planned instruction to her student's instructional needs. Marta was unwilling, or unable, to let go of an inaccurate belief of Kendra as a "poor reader" thus leading to deficit beliefs about Kendra that likely contributed Marta's challenges with Kendra. She did, however, fit the pattern that preservice teachers responded to student interests and engagement when planning instruction. Marta's instructional decisions were responsive to Kendra's interests and level of engagement; however, the responses were often punitive rather than supportive.

In terms of Marta's beliefs about the social environment in a student's reading development, Marta did not fit the pattern that we saw for most preservice teachers. Rather than recognizing the positive and essential role the social environment plays on a student's literacy development, she believed the social environment of their tutoring sessions to be distracting and deterring Kendra from focusing on the important literacy tasks that she planned. Additionally, Marta used her authority to grant or deny Kendra access to social activity as a way to reward and punish Kendra's behavior. This exertion of control is consistent with other research that has found preservice teachers reporting high levels of self-efficacy beliefs felt more comfortable when they perceived having control in the classroom (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Rushton, 2000). The use of incentives, like access to social activities, to bribe Kendra into compliance is troubling, particularly when we consider the amount of time spent in our course on learning positive ways to engage students in literacy learning. Marta understood motivation as an intrinsic, unchangeable aspect of Kendra's identity, and was not able (or was unwilling) to recognize her

contributions to Kendra's level of engagement through the planning of her lessons. One possible interpretation of these beliefs could be that Marta was covering for her initial error in judgment of Kendra's ability, in an attempt to maintain an identity of a knowledgeable and successful preservice teacher.

Ariel

Ariel was a post-baccalaureate student who entered our program after two years of teaching at a local Goddard School for Early Childhood Development. The Goddard School's philosophy is centered on the belief that students learn best through play and having fun: "The program is geared at fostering the cognitive and social development of each child, through the delivery of child-appropriate fun and engaging activities, guided by highly trained teachers—providing each and every child a fun learning experience" (Goddard Systems Inc., 2014). After attaining her teaching license, Ariel hoped to teach preschool or kindergarten because of the freedom in planning curriculum she felt that age offered and because her favorite part of teaching was "developing a child's curiosity and love of learning." Ariel wrote about how education was an important cultural value for her, and that the defining aspects of one's culture "makes us who we are, and drives many of our schemas and decisions." Being a learner and a facilitator of learning for others constituted a significant aspect of Ariel's enacted identity. Her experiences as a preschool and kindergarten teacher at The Goddard School were unique to the larger student body in our course, as she came in with an already established teaching identity. However, we saw changes to her identity enactment over time, to which we attribute her experiences teaching a below-grade level reader.

Ariel's understanding of Liberty. Ariel's kindergarten student, Liberty, was identified as a "below grade level reader" by Ms. Allister, information that Ariel had before meeting Liberty. After giving the initial ERAS assessment, Ariel perceived that Liberty was able to complete tasks consistent with emergent readers, but that her main challenge was that "she does not see herself as a 'good' reader and feels embarrassed when asked to read aloud." Initially, Ariel believed that Liberty needed to "change her opinion of reading by motivating her to invest in reading as something of a challenge." She planned to do read-alouds, discuss comprehension questions, and to use Liberty's interests to choose books. She felt confident that by planning fun and motivating games she would be able to shift Liberty's self-concept as a reader, "Liberty sees [reading] as too hard for her, but I believe she can do it!"

This initial optimism shifted throughout the course of the semester. In the written reflection, Ariel focused more on Liberty's experiences as a reader and writer, as well as her foundational skills of phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle, "Working with Liberty taught me the importance of helping children with the basics of literacy... she taught me what it's like to start from the very beginning with a student including helping them develop concepts of print." When citing evidence of success in her sessions with Liberty, Ariel did not mention her original goal to improve Ariel's self-concept as a reader, and instead wrote about how Liberty's specific literacy skills improved. For example, she wrote, "It was great to see her begin to segment words by sounds, pick out rhyming words, and find items associated with letter sounds on her own." Ariel did mention that she was happy to see Liberty start to be motivated to read on her own now, but

this was a less significant indicator of success to her than all of the sight words Liberty had acquired.

Ariel's developing beliefs about struggling readers in general. The experiences Ariel had with Liberty informed her more general beliefs about why students might struggle and what can be done to support them. In the pre-course survey of beliefs, Ariel cited a lack of knowledge of word concepts and structures, and "not being exposed to literacy opportunities" as reasons why students struggle. At the end of the course, her belief widened to include a variety of reasons, and she listed several foundational skills as being lacking. Before, Ariel believed that teachers could take general actions to support struggling readers like, "teach environmental print" and "read to students," while after the course, she cited specific actions that teachers could take including, "perform assessments to find where the student is at instructionally, then use the assessment information to drive an instructional plan." This change in beliefs is also evident in Ariel's TSELI scores, which showed an overall average increase of 1.2 points on the 9 point scale. Particularly of interest is her 3-point gain from a 4 to a 7 on the question, "To what extent can you adjust reading strategies based on ongoing informal assessments of your students?" Ariel's experience working with Liberty, a below-grade level reader, helped her form a more realistic view of the challenges and rewards of teaching struggling readers as well as what Haverback and Parault (2011) might consider more productive self-efficacy beliefs.

An increasingly more realistic view of a below grade level reader. Ariel's case represents the changes in beliefs about struggling readers that preservice teachers may face when they have an initially overly-optimistic view of the impact a teacher can have in a short amount of time. Ariel's case highlights the observed pattern that as preservice teachers learned more about reading development through the content of the course, their perceptions of their students and their instructional approaches became grounded in a more accurate knowledge of reading development. Ariel reported an average level of self-efficacy for teaching reading, compared to her peers (see Table 2), which, unlike in Marta's case, was supported by the development of a strong knowledge base and wide repertoire of appropriate instructional approaches for struggling readers. Ariel grew to understand that although literacy instructors have an important role in supporting and teaching students, she was only one aspect of Liberty's social learning environment. Whenever possible, Ariel would engage Liberty in activities where she could interact socially and with the larger learning environment.

Although Ariel did recognize that students encountered struggles when learning to read for a variety of reasons, she did not fit the pattern of her peers who were likely to name reasons beyond the reach of the teacher's influence. Instead, Ariel targeted her instruction with Liberty on specific foundational literacy skills that were determined by an analysis of data she collected from a variety of assessments. Her beliefs about struggling readers, and about herself as a teacher of struggling readers, developed into a positive and more realistic set of beliefs that stood out from her classmates. Finally, analysis of Ariel's case revealed that she, like her peers, planned instruction in response to students' developmental needs and interests, which she determined by engaging Liberty in assessments, but also in conversations and observations of behavior without punitive action. One interpretation of why it is that Ariel developed such productive and realistic beliefs could be due to her pre-established teacher identity before entrance into this course, as

well as her strong identity as a learner and high regard for education. It is likely this learning stance will serve her well in the continuation of developing her teacher identity.

Discussion

The cases presented illustrate how the experiences these preservice teachers had tutoring elementary students contributed to their development of a professional teaching identity, including their beliefs about students and themselves as teachers of reading. Specifically, the beliefs preservice teachers held regarding “struggling readers” and themselves as teachers of students who struggle were shaped by a variety of sources of information, which informed preservice teachers’ enacted professional identities in teaching and learning environments. Through a dialogic approach to understanding teacher identity, the findings of this study demonstrate how the socio-cultural environment was more than just a contextual factor, as others have described (e.g., Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), but an *agent* in the shaping of preservice teacher development.

Consistent with the literature on teacher identity development, preservice teachers’ instructional approaches were affected by their beliefs about struggling readers (e.g., Hall, 2009; Olsen, 2011; Scharlach, 2008). In Marta’s case, deficit beliefs about struggling readers were reinforced as she continued to be challenged by her experiences teaching Kendra, which informed a broader system of beliefs in her developing teaching identity. Additionally, her belief that motivation was a fixed characteristic of a student’s identity contributed to broader deficit beliefs, ultimately causing challenges in the teacher-student relationship that could have been avoided had she attended to other, more established, sources of information about Kendra such as the multiple points of literacy assessment data that she collected. Along with her classmates, it appeared that Marta understood the importance of motivation in abstract but did not consistently have experiences that affirmed the development of positive beliefs in their abilities to enact practical strategies.

The results of this study also led us to draw conclusions about the developing self-efficacy beliefs of preservice teachers, and how those beliefs may be a significant factor in preservice teachers’ professional identities. Across all participants in the class, the mean growth demonstrated on the TSELI survey was just over one point; Ariel’s assessment of her beliefs was the closest to this average number. While a small number of preservice teachers (5) assessed much larger growth in their beliefs (2-5 points), nearly a third (9) reflected minimal growth like Marta, or even negative change from the pre to post measure. Analysis of the qualitative data of these two cases shows very different understandings of students’ instructional and social needs. The distinction between the preservice teachers’ reported self-efficacy beliefs and the ways they made sense of data about their elementary students highlights the complexity of observing self-efficacy beliefs (Labone, 2004) and suggests that this single quantitative measure of self-efficacy was not contextualized enough to fully capture the nuances of beliefs as they developed in particular experiences with the elementary students. Furthermore, Hong (2010) suggests efficacy is only one of six factors of teachers’ professional identities, and it is possible that consideration of other factors would help to explain the contribution of self-efficacy beliefs. For example, the emotional factor may have had a stronger influence on Marta’s development of a professional teaching identity, and analysis of the emotions she felt and responded to when she was

challenged by Kendra's behavior may have offered further insight into why she interpreted her experiences with Kendra the way she did. Negative feelings such as frustration have been documented as playing a key role in beginning teachers' identity (re)construction (Flores, 2006).

Finally, changes to preservice teachers' beliefs about the importance of planning responsive instruction for the elementary students conflicted with their beliefs that teachers play a minimal role in students' reading difficulties. Through the cases of Ariel and Marta we saw examples of preservice teachers using literacy assessments to form ideas about what students' needed. In Ariel's case, this was optimal, using multiple data points, along with careful observation of and interaction with the student to tailor highly-specific lessons to the student's instructional level. These sources of information allowed her to develop evolving beliefs about her student and herself that led to successful, engaging lessons and measurable literacy growth. In Marta's case a single, initial data point was used to form her ideas about her student and position herself in response to perceived deficits. Marta, like other preservice teachers (Mallette et al., 2000), made assumptions that a student who did not espouse a positive reading attitude would be a "struggling reader." This inaccurate belief was reinforced as Marta chose less challenging instructional tasks and exerted more control over the student, leading to increased student disengagement. When a spelling assessment finally led Marta to recognize that the student was more capable than she had realized, she was able to adjust her instructional plans accordingly, though she maintained unproductive beliefs about the student's motivation and behavior.

Further consideration of the apparent discrepancies among preservice teachers' beliefs might suggest fluctuation consistent with teaching identities that are just beginning to develop in dialogue with individual elementary students who do not always present themselves consistently. As preservice teachers and their elementary students experience success with reading instructional experiences, both the instructional approaches and the preservice teachers themselves may be understood with a greater sense of efficacy.

Implications

Research with preservice teachers indicates that the social context for learning plays an integral role in the development of self-efficacy beliefs and overall identity formation (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Haverback & Parault, 2011; Olsen, 2011). For student teacher and practicum placements, meaningful contexts might include school setting, cooperating teacher, and perceived collective efficacy of the school (Knoblauch & Woolfolk, 2008). By extending our definition of "context" to incorporate the role of social relationships between preservice teachers and the students with whom they work, we can further our understanding of teachers' identity formation. This consideration provides teacher educators additional incentive to carefully structure practica and closely attend to decisions about student teacher placement. Additionally, providing opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in structured one-on-one work in dialogue with individual students may help to challenge inaccurate beliefs about students as well as to disrupt damaging deficit beliefs. Further, these opportunities may give preservice teachers opportunities to see themselves as successful in a challenging situation, as well as to see the student's success, leading to positive changes to teaching self-efficacy and productive identity development as effective teachers of struggling readers.

Limitations

There are a few known limitations to note when interpreting the results of this study. First, due to the situated nature of case study research in general, and the contextual dependency of our research aim, drawing conclusions regarding a broader population of preservice teachers is not possible. The participants in our study took the course as part of a university program where students typically earn a bachelor's degree in four years and earn initial licensure in a fifth, professional year that includes advanced methods courses and student teaching. In this regard, our participants may or may not be representative of the larger population of preservice teachers who attain licenses in more traditional four-year programs. Another element specific to this context was that both authors shared responsibility for teaching this course and supervising the practicum. We recognize that having a co-taught course may have presented an atypical instructional experience for the preservice teachers but believe, as primarily qualitative researchers, this led us to more trustworthy results as they were established from the collaborative process of verifying our individual points of view with one another. In spite of these limitations, the strength of the case study design rests in its ability to provide an in-depth look at a complex phenomenon, like preservice teacher development, studying how beliefs develop within a single case, and what comparisons can be made across cases. Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data in multi-case design, this study addresses the need for multiple measures of teacher development that are also responsive to the contextual variables of the learning experiences of preservice teachers.

Conclusion

As teacher educators, we wish for our preservice teachers to complete our programs with more nuanced understandings of students than a label of "good" or "struggling" reader might indicate. We also hope that they will interrogate generalizations and biases about students in order to ground their beliefs in multiple kinds of data and authentic teaching experiences. Findings of this study suggest that by inquiring into the experiences and academic needs of individual "struggling readers" through assessment and open-minded inquiry, preservice teachers can develop a better sense that they are both prepared and responsible for providing all students with effective instruction.

Author Notes

Katherine Brodeur is an Assistant Professor in the School of Teaching and Learning at Bowling Green State University.

Lisa Ortmann is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of North Dakota.

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Katherine Brodeur at brodeuk@bgsu.edu.

References

- Akkerman, S. F. & Meijer, P. C. (2011). A dialogical approach to conceptualizing teacher identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(2), 308–319.
- Anderson, N. L. & Briggs, C. (2011). Reciprocity between reading and writing: Strategic processing as common ground. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(7), 546–549.
- Bear, D. R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2012). *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary and spelling*, 5th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Duffy, A.M. & Atkinson, T.S. (2001). Learning to teach struggling (and non-struggling) elementary school readers: an analysis of preservice teachers' knowledges. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 41(1), 83-102.
- Fang, Z. & Ashley, C. (2004). Preservice teachers' interpretations of a field-based reading block. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(1), 39–54.
- Flores, M. A. (2006). Being a novice teacher in two different settings: Struggles, continuities, and discontinuities. *Teachers College Record*, 108(10), 2021-2052.
- Gibson, S. & Dembo, M. H. (1984). Teacher efficacy: A construct validation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 76(4), 569.
- Goddard Systems, Inc. (2014). Philosophy. *Goddardschool.com*. Retrieved November 21, 2014, from <http://www.goddardschool.com/the-goddard-experience/approach-to-learning/about-philosophy>.
- Grossman, P. (2011). Framework for teaching practice: A brief history of an idea. *Teachers College Record*, 113(12), 2836-2843.
- Grossman, P. L., Smagorinsky, P., & Valencia, S. (1999). Appropriating tools for teaching English: A theoretical framework for research on learning to teach. *American Journal of Education*, 108(1), 1-29.
- Hall, L. A. (2009). Struggling reader, struggling teacher: An examination of student-teacher transactions with reading instruction and text in social studies. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 43(3), 286-309.
- Hall, L. A., Johnson, A. S., Juzwik, M. M., Wortham, S. E. F., & Mosley, M. (2010). Teacher identity in the context of literacy teaching: Three explorations of classroom positioning and interaction in secondary schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(2), 234–243.

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT STRUGGLING READERS

- Haverback, H. & McNary, S. (2015). Shedding light on preservice teachers' domain-specific self-efficacy. *Teacher Educator*, 50(4), 272–287.
- Haverback, H. R. & Parault, S. J. (2008). Pre-service reading teacher efficacy and tutoring: A review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 20(3), 237–255.
- Haverback, H. R. & Parault, S. J. (2011). High efficacy and the preservice reading teacher: A comparative study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(4), 703–711.
- Hong, J. Y. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), 1530–1543.
- Horn, I. S., Nolen, S. B., Ward, C., & Campbell, S. S. (2008). Developing practices in multiple worlds: The role of identity in learning to teach. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(3), 61–72.
- Hoy, W. & Woolfolk, A. (1990). Socialization of student teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 27(2), 279–300.
- Knoblauch, D. & Woolfolk, A. (2008). “Maybe I can teach those kids.” The influence of contextual factors on student teachers' efficacy beliefs. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24, 166–179.
- Labone, E. (2004). Teacher efficacy: Maturing the construct through research in alternative paradigms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(4), 341–359.
- Linek, W. M., Nelson, O. G., Sampson, M. B., Zeek, C. K., Mohr, K. A. J., & Hughes, L. (1999). Developing beliefs about literacy instruction: A cross-case analysis of preservice teachers in traditional and field based settings. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 38(4), 371–386.
- Mallette, M. H., Kile, R., Smith, M. M., McKinney, M., & Readence, J. E. (2000). Constructing meaning about literacy difficulties: Preservice teachers beginning to think about pedagogy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(5–6), 593–612.
- Maloch, B., Flint, A. S., Eldridge, D., Harmon, J., Loven, R., Fine, J. C., ... Martinez, M. (2003). Understandings, beliefs, and reported decision making of first-year teachers from different reading teacher preparation programs. *Elementary School Journal*, 103(5), 431–457.
- McKenna, M. C. & Kear, D. J. (1990). Measuring attitude toward reading: A new tool for teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 43(9), 626–639.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT STRUGGLING READERS

- Nelson, S. W. & Guerra, P. L. (2014). Educator beliefs and cultural knowledge: Implications for school improvement efforts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50(1), 67-95.
- Nierstheimer, S., Hopkins, C., Dillon, D. R., & Schmitt, M. (1998, April). *Challenging preservice teachers' beliefs about at-risk literacy learners*. Paper presented at the Annual Convention, American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, April.
- Nierstheimer, S. L., Hopkins, C. J., Dillon, D. R., & Schmitt, M. C. (2000). Preservice teachers' shifting beliefs about struggling literacy learners. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 40(1), 1-16.
- Olsen, B. (2011). "I am large, I contain multitudes." In A.F. Ball & C. A. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (363-384). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307-332.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Riddle Buly, M. & Valencia, S. W. (2002). Below the bar: Profiles of students who fail state assessments. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24(3), 219-239.
- Risko, V. J., Roller, C. M., Cummins, C., Bean, R. M., Block, C. C., Anders, P. L., & Flood, J. (2008). A critical analysis of research on reading teacher education. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 43(3), 252-288.
- Rodgers, C. R. & Scott, K. H. (2008). The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, D. J. McIntyre, & K. E. Demers (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teacher education: Enduring questions in changing contexts*. (pp. 732-755). New York: Routledge.
- Rushton, S. (2000). Student teacher efficacy in inner-city schools. *The Urban Review*, 32(4).
- Scharlach, T. D. (2008). These kids just aren't motivated to read: The influence of preservice teachers' beliefs on their expectations, instruction, and evaluation of struggling readers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 47(3), 158-173.
- Scott, M. T. & Ford, D. Y. (2008). "Preparing teacher education candidates to work with students with disabilities and gifts and talents." In A.F. Ball & C. A. Tyson (Eds.), *Studying diversity in teacher education* (201-218). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT STRUGGLING READERS

- Smagorinsky, P., Cook, L. S., Moore, C., Jackson, A. Y., & Fry, P. G. (2004). Tensions in learning to teach: Accommodation and the development of a teaching identity. *Journal of Teacher Education, 55*(1), 8–24.
- Soodak, L. C. & Podell, D. M. (1994). Teachers' thinking about difficult-to-teach students. *The Journal of Educational Research, 88*(1), 44–51.
- Stake, R.E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(2), 202–248.
- Tschannen-Moran, M. & Johnson, D. (2011). Exploring literacy teachers' self-efficacy beliefs: Potential sources at play. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*(4), 751–761.
- Valencia, R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Washburn, E.K., Joshi, R.M., & Cantrell, E.B. (2011). Are preservice teachers prepared to teach struggling readers? *Annals of Dyslexia, 61*, 21-43.
- Woolfolk Hoy, A., Hoy, W. K., & Davis, H. A. (2009). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. In K.R. Wentzel and A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation at school* (627-653). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zee, M. & Koomen, H. M. Y. (2016). Teacher self-efficacy and its effects on classroom processes, student academic adjustment, and teacher well-being: A synthesis of 40 years of research. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(4), 981–1015.

Appendix A. Written Reflection Protocol

Write out your responses to the following questions about your experiences in buddy sessions this semester. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on your buddy sessions and connect to our coursework from the semester.

1. How would you describe your buddies as learners and as individuals?
2. How did working with these particular students shape what you learned from this experience?

Listen to the recordings (or reread your notes) of the motivation conversations you had with your buddies this week.

3. What new things did you learn about your buddy from this conversation? What previous understandings did this conversation confirm for you?
4. How has your understanding of your buddies' abilities, interests, and motivation changed or grown over the course of the semester?

Appendix B. Guidelines for Student Conversational Interview

Review the Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey/Motivation to Read Profile that you gave during your first buddy session. In what ways do you think your buddies might respond differently now?

Choose 1 or 2 questions to re-ask them. You might introduce this as... “When we started working together you said...”

Think about what you still want to know. Ask a few additional questions like:

- What did you think about the activities that we did together?
- Tell me about any favorite activities we did or books that we read together.
- How were the activities that we did together the same or different from the types of reading and writing you normally do in class?
- What do you think you did well during our sessions?
- Was there anything we did that you thought was hard? How did you feel about those activities?

Audio-record your conversation. You will listen to the recording as you complete your final reflection