

Literacy in Teacher Education

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Overview

Researchers have found that teacher knowledge and beliefs can have a significant positive impact on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goldhaber, 2002; Goldhaber, Brewer, and Anderson, 1999; Wenglinsky, 2002). Since much of teacher knowledge and beliefs are acquired through teacher preparation courses and accompanying field experiences, it is imperative that teacher preparation programs are effective at training teachers. With the advent of No Child Left Behind and subsequent initiatives (e.g., Reading First and Reading Next), increased importance has been placed on pre-service teacher education programming specifically as it relates to literacy. Unfortunately the quality of preparation provided to pre-service teachers in literacy can vary substantially from one initial preparation program to another and very little consistency exists across the country and even within states (Hoffman & Roller, 2001; Maloch, Fine, & Flint, 2002). The purpose of the *Literacy in Teacher Education* project was to examine the extent to which undergraduate initial middle and secondary certification programs in public institutions in the state of Kentucky align with the recommendations made by researchers in the field of teacher education and content literacy for training highly effective pre-service teachers in the area of literacy.

To begin, a review of the literature was conducted to determine researcher findings regarding best practices in preparing content area teachers in the area of literacy. Then, undergraduate initial preparation programs in the area of middle/secondary education across the state were examined. Program sheets and syllabi representing each university's content area program were also evaluated. The research questions used to guide the project included: (1). What components should be included in high quality undergraduate initial certification programs to facilitate literacy learning? (2). How does the content of undergraduate initial certification programs in the state of Kentucky facilitate literacy learning?

Findings of Implications

The review of the literature yielded relatively consistent results. Researchers found that the primary barrier cited by practicing teachers to implementing content literacy was being ill-prepared. Researchers also found that strategies provided pre-service teachers need to be embedded in extended field experiences to result in significant changes in pre-service teacher knowledge and beliefs. Program sheets evaluation revealed that content areas at the secondary level with the exception of English/language arts do not require courses in the area of literacy. Content areas at the middle school level were more likely to require literacy courses. Evaluation of course syllabi revealed that social studies and English/language arts were more likely to incorporate literacy in course objectives, class lectures, course assessments, assignments, and field experiences. Science and mathematics courses were less likely to incorporate literacy in course objectives, class lectures, course assessments, assignments, and field experiences.

The findings of the project do not align with practices recommended in the literature in that only certain content areas include literacy in course components. Project results can be used in considering re-design of middle/secondary teacher preparation programs.