Reading Specialist Focus Group (Program Completers)  
March 10, 2011

Purpose:

The focus group met via Adobe Connect Pro to discuss the program’s effectiveness in addressing the five standards of the Master Teacher-Reading Specialist Program. Two additional questions were asked to gain general information about current trends and practices and recommendations for enhancing the program.

Process:

The participants included four recent graduates, including two classroom teachers, one district-level literacy coach, and a special education teacher. One professor and a graduate teaching assistant participated in the session. The discussion questions (in bold below) were sent to the participants in advance. During the Adobe Connect Pro session, the professor began the session with an overview of current licensure followed with each question presented on a PowerPoint slide. The time was monitored to allow time for all questions. The focus group met from 4:30 – 5:30 p.m. The question responses were analyzed with tallies for repeated responses. A summary of strengths and needs is located at the end of this report.

Standard 1

_The reading specialist demonstrates knowledge of the foundations of reading and writing processes and instruction._

**Looking back at the graduate program and considering your understanding of reading and writing foundations, what courses and program experiences did you find most helpful and why? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?**

- The reading practicum for both levels was very helpful in applying what we learn in theory.
- The reading Theory and Literacy Practices courses provided a very thorough background.
- The program did an excellent job at building a strong background knowledge of the foundations of reading and writing.
- The coursework was more focused on the foundation of reading than on writing. (3 responses)
- More instruction on writing processes would be helpful. (4 responses)

Standard 2

_The reading specialist demonstrates the use of a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, methods, and curriculum._

**Looking back at the graduate program and considering your understanding of instructional practices, approaches, methods, and reading curriculum, what courses and program experiences did you find the most helpful and why? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?**
• The program did an excellent job of using a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, methods, and curriculum. I have a plethora of different instructional strategies to use.
• The most beneficial book was What Research Has to Say About Reading. I refer back to it. (2 responses)
• ESU’s program provided a good balance of theory and practice.
• Analysis of Research gives the knowledge, research, and tools to analyze and evaluate any program. (2 responses)
• The information provided in courses was current and supported by research; the research was current and effective. (2 responses)
• Some exposure to common core or intervention programs would be helpful.

Standard 3
The reading specialist demonstrates the use of a variety of assessment tools and practices to plan and evaluate effective literacy instruction.

Looking back at the graduate program and considering your understanding of assessments and practices to plan and evaluate effective literacy instruction, what courses and program experiences did you find the most helpful and why? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

• The practicum was helpful in using assessment that informs instruction. (2 responses)
• EL 825 and 827 introduced a variety of assessment tools.
• EL 823 and 825 covered this are well. I have a good background of assessment tools.
• The assessment tools enable me to not only plan for my students and progress monitor their improvement but I have been able to assist other teachers in this area also. (2 responses)
• I refer back to the Johns and Lenski text. (3 responses)
• Would have liked to explore more types of assessments. (2 responses)
• Would like more instruction in assessments to suggest to classroom teachers.
• Would like more instruction about working with small groups and more practice providing instruction for 4-5 students at a time.

Standard 4
The reading specialist demonstrates the use of instructional practices, approaches and methods, curriculum materials, and the assessments to create a literate environment that fosters effective reading and writing instruction.

Looking back at the graduate program and considering your understanding of how to create a literate environment that fosters reading and writing instruction, what courses and program experiences did you find most helpful? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

• I feel well prepared to match programs and interventions to student needs. (3 responses)
• We are prepared to do this, but demands are sometimes placed on this that makes it difficult.
• Sometimes it is what you’re told to do rather than what you would think (and know) would be better for the student.

**Standard 5**

_The reading specialist demonstrates the importance and responsibility of continuing professional development in increasing knowledge required for teaching all students to read and write effectively._

**Looking back at the graduate program and considering your understanding of the importance and responsibility of continuing professional development, what courses and program experiences did you find the most helpful and why? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?**

- 829 directly addresses this standard (4 responses)
- This is a difficult standard to teach because different districts expect different things. (2 responses)
- Would like more information on leadership and group dynamics, relationships with teachers and administrators, and coaching. (3 responses)

**What trends and new practices are you seeing in your job that faculty need to be mindful and observant of when preparing future reading specialists?**

- RTI/MTSS and the reading specialist’s role in the framework (3 responses)
- Lobbying effectively for students and for effective practices (2 responses)
- Working with small groups with varying needs
- Literacy coaching
- Transition to the Common Core standards (3 responses)
- The impact of testing on the role of the reading specialist (2 responses)
- Determining which students should receive accommodations
- The current atmosphere and focus on testing and how to meet students’ needs with less dedicated time (2 responses)

**What additional recommendations do you have for the faculty to continue preparing outstanding reading specialists?**

- Continue your connection with Western Kansas.
- The faculty are interested in students and supportive. (2 responses)
- The faculty are good at responding and providing feedback.
- The faculty have high expectations.
- The coursework is challenging.
- It would be hard to understand (and teach) running records online. I think they should have kept it in the other format.
- I think the online aspect is going to continue to be a struggle for teachers and students.
- I liked working with both elementary and secondary students.
- More small group instruction would be helpful, especially with the MTSS 1-3 or 4-5 student groups. (3 responses)
Summary of Main Points

Strengths:

The introductory courses provide a good foundation in reading followed by application in practicum.

The content on instructional practices, approaches, methods and curriculum is current and research based.

The research class provides the background to analyze and evaluate programs and materials.

The reading specialist leaves the program with knowledge of a variety of assessment tools.

The program prepares the reading specialist to match programs and interventions to student needs.

Needs:

The program needs more instruction on the writing process.

The program needs to cover more types of assessments, including assessments to recommend to classroom teachers.

The program needs to include more instruction on working with small groups and providing instruction for groups of varying numbers of students.

The program needs to include more information on leadership and group dynamics, building working relationships with teachers and administrators, coaching, and student advocacy.