



Experiential Learning Provided to Preservice Teachers in Reading Assessment and Instruction

(Received on December 16, 2025 – Accepted on April 29, 2026)

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Abstract

Being literate in reading assessments is critical for teachers because it allows them to identify student needs, make data-based instructional decisions such as designing intervention and tailoring instruction based on need, and continuously monitor progress. Translated to educator preparation programs, it is extremely important that preservice teachers (PSTs) have ample opportunities to engage in this work through experiential learning, a process which can be achieved through strong university-school partnerships. A qualitative case study conducted from 2023-2024 explored 38 PSTs understanding of reading assessments. The data analysis consisted of open and pattern coding. The key themes highlighted the experience of the student being assessed, the process of assessment administration, the influence of the teacher administering the assessment, the value of the assessment for PSTs and for those in the field, and the increased development and content pedagogical knowledge. The main findings of this study indicate that school-university partnerships that provide PSTs with direct experience administering, scoring, and analyzing reading assessments within educator preparation programs are instrumental in developing both assessment literacy and professional confidence. Implications of practice, limitations to the research study, and suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: experiential learning, education preparation programs, preservice teachers, community engagement, reading assessments

Introduction

The need for in-depth teacher content and pedagogical knowledge of language, linguistics, and spelling to support the reading development of students has been long documented (Ehri, 2022; Moats, 2009, 2020). Further, establishing this relationship has frequently revealed that teachers often lack the requisite language and linguistic knowledge to adequately support students' development (Hudson et al., 2021; Pittman et al., 2020). One factor contributing to this phenomenon is a mismatch between the content of literacy methods courses in educator preparation programs (EPPs) and the knowledge and skills needed by classroom teachers (Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012; Bos et al., 2001). In recent years, this issue has moved into the forefront of the public eye as state legislatures, specifically, and society, generally, have learned more about evidence-based practices in reading through advocacy groups such as the International Dyslexia Association and investigative reporting through well-respected news outlets such as American Public Media and the New York Times. At a Loss for Words, (American

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Public Media Reports) (Hanford, 2019), opinion pieces like *Why are We Still Teaching Reading the Wrong Way* (New York Times) (Hanford, 2018), and podcasts like *Sold a Story* (Hanford, 2022-2023) have been integral in bringing reading instruction into public consciousness. The impact of such publications has spurred the development of reading legislation at the state level which has in turn placed responsibilities and requirements on EPPs.

In the United States of America, EPPs are structured programs of study taken by aspiring educators. Traditionally, EPPs are organized through higher education and offer a degree track resulting in teacher certification. Traditional EPPs provide both undergraduate and graduate programs of studies; however, this article focuses on an undergraduate program for preservice teachers (PST)s (i.e., students enrolled in the EPP). At the completion of the four-year program, the PSTs receive their initial certification in teaching upon successful completion of their program of study and teaching licensure exams.

Since 2023, 26 states have enacted laws regarding the use of evidence-based practices in reading instruction (Peak, 2025). These laws are similar in structure and include requirements for EPPs, competency exams focused on reading methods for PSTs, and use of approved curricula (Odegard et al., 2025). The Kentucky Department of Education Senate Bill 9 Guidance document (2025), highlights the purpose of Kentucky's Read to Succeed Act of 2022 (Kentucky General Assembly, 2022), congruent with legislation across the United States, "to support evidence-based early literacy instruction throughout the commonwealth by investing in teachers to increase student success in reading" (para.1). Furthermore, organizations like the National Council of Teacher Quality (NCTQ) have supported these claims of reading malpractice through evaluating reading methods courses in EPPs nationwide through looking at catalog descriptions and syllabi of relevant courses. In the 2023 Teacher Prep Review: Reading Foundations Technical Report, NCTQ estimated that only 28% of EPP programs in the United States effectively addressed all of the 5 necessary components for reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).

While such reports are compelling and make a legitimate call to action, such reports and legislation fail to acknowledge the nature of learning and learner development along with the barriers involved in providing PSTs transferable experiences to their future teaching careers. Given the limited number of hours that PSTs have in literacy courses (between 40-120 hours of seat time depending on the specific program requirements), it is paramount to maximize opportunities which support content development and appropriate application as well as effectively deal with the limiting factor of time.

Specifically, in reading instruction, it is important that PSTs understand content, assessment, and instruction for five major components recognized by the National Reading Panel in 2000. The areas specific to reading include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Each area includes component specific content (e.g., understanding information about phonemes, graphemes, morphemes, phonics patterns, orthography, accuracy, rate, prosody, and metacognitive strategies) as well as applications in assessment and instruction.

This study is the result of a problem of practice that was multifaceted including content density, need for meaningful application opportunities, and limited time. Each class meets weekly in the fall semester of the PSTs junior year for one 2.5-hour session. As part of the junior year, PSTs are also engaged in fieldwork for a full day each week, but there are numerous constraints for cooperating teachers who host PSTs in their classrooms (e.g., curriculum maps, district/school expectations, and scheduling) and variability in schools, grades, use of departmentalization, and individual classrooms means that PSTs have myriad experiences which may or may not intersect with the goals of methods courses.

For this study, we engaged in a methods course collaboration to create efficiencies between courses, maximize student learning, and provide authentic opportunities for content application. Two faculty members who also serve as the primary researchers for this study combined expertise and knowledge in different disciplines (assessment and reading methods). Through collaboration we were able to hone

experiences so students would learn about diagnostic assessments in the context of reading methods, content they were learning at the same time. Realizing an inability to assign PSTs to conduct specific assessments and practice particular instructional strategies, we worked together to develop a different kind of opportunity during our class periods. Recognizing the importance of application in terms of content understanding and transferable skills, we approached a local private Catholic elementary school to see if our PSTs could offer the school help through administering phonemic awareness and phonics assessments to K and 2nd grade students. The collaborative experiences that followed were developed through a lens of community engagement and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Though part of a larger study, this article focuses on one research question: In what ways do PSTs understand and reflect upon how to administer diagnostic assessment, interpret results, and plan relevant instruction?

Terminology

For the purposes of this manuscript, we have intentionally used PSTs to signify candidates in the EPP that participated in this research study. The term students is used when referring to students at the private, Catholic school that was used as the school partner for this research study. Though phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness, both terms are used throughout the article as specific assessment PSTs used referenced phonological awareness. Other times, the more specific term phonemic awareness is used, especially as connected to the National Reading Panel (2000) report.

Literature review

According to Goodlad (1991), university-school partnerships are defined as:

a planned effort to establish a formal, mutually beneficial inter-institutional relationship characterized by the following: 1) Sufficient dissimilarity among institutions to warrant the effort of seeking complementarity in the fulfillment of some functions, 2) Sufficient overlap in some functions to make clearly apparent the potential benefits of collaboration, and 3) Sufficient commitment to the effective fulfillment of these overlapping functions to warrant the inevitable loss of some present control and authority on the part of the institution currently claiming dominant interest. (p. 4)

In this way, moving beyond a traditional school-university partnership, both the school and university should be equal partners. In the context of EPPs, there are numerous benefits for PSTs, the in-service teachers at the school and for the university faculty. Burton and Greher (2007) state that at graduation, PSTs are better prepared, have higher levels of confidence, and score higher on effective teaching practices in their first year of teaching when they have been engaged in effective school-university partnerships. This awareness has caused EPPs to incorporate "more and earlier field experiences to help students acquire pedagogical content knowledge" (Nierman et al., 2002, p. 827). According to Brownell et al. (2004), "strong partnerships between preparation programs and schools are essential to successful induction, as these partnerships create coherence between preparation and classroom practice, making it easier for beginning teachers to operationalize the skills they have learned" (p. 57). Goldman and Vander Hart (2023) pinpoint the many different benefits of school-university partnerships, consisting of more valuable experiences for PSTs, greater opportunities to engage in activities, and access to higher education. Effective teacher preparation programs should embody school-university partnerships to enhance experiences for PSTs but need to ensure the partnerships are high-quality. Petrilli et al. (2019) suggest essential components that contribute towards these effective, successful partnerships that consist of fieldwork integration, shared learning or professional development for everyone involved in the partnership, among others. Further, Petrilli et al. put an emphasis on trust-building, active involvement, transparent communication, and coordination/sustained commitment.

The application of transfer in school-university partnerships

Wiggins and McTighe (2011), developers of Understanding by Design suggest that transfer, “is arguably the long-term aim of all education” (p. 14). Transfer is the process of learners, in this case PSTs, taking what is learned in one context and being able to apply it in a new and novel context (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Described by Thorndike and Woodworth in 1951, the function of transfer has long been understood in education; however, creating conditions for transfer proves to be challenging. In the seminal meta-analysis, *How People Learn* (Bransford et al., 1999), the following key contributors are named: the need for significant initial learning (PSTs cannot apply what they have not learned or learned well), the role of active, dynamic processes rather than an acquisition-based experience, that highly-contextualized situations can make transfer difficult, and that new learning is developed on the shoulders of earlier learning that is transferred. For PSTs, this is critical because experiences, even active ones in a college classroom lack the authenticity for PSTs to transfer the learning effectively to their own future classrooms. Providing the opportunity to conduct assessments in a scaffolded way that reflects what classroom teachers do (e.g., testing multiple students, analyzing assessment results with grade level colleagues, and determining instructional next steps) and takes PSTs beyond merely giving an assessment to a peer or having them give an assessment in the field placement classroom without the benefit of instructor support and guidance. This echoes the experiences of practicing teachers which support that extended practice opportunities lead to more valid and reliable administration of literacy assessments (Ozernov-Palchik et al., 2025).

Theoretical framework

ELT was developed by David A. Kolb in 1984. In this foundational text Kolb describes learning as transformative through experience, specifically defining learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). According to Fees et al. (2026) the curriculum of higher education should include experiential learning as a critical component for students that is embedded throughout the curriculum at several points through the program of study not as an isolated or separate program. For example, within the education department, clinical and field experiences are distinct from the courses within the program of study. Experiential learning, embedded in course work, provides students with more engagement opportunities where “knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41).

Since learning is the primary process used to navigate life, people can use this process for all forms of learning, development, and change. Learning occurs in any setting and continues throughout life. The experiential learning process supports performance improvement, learning and development. Kolb & Kolb (2009) described the ideal process of learning in a four-step experiential learning cycle that consists of: Experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Specifically, they stated “This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner “touches all the bases” - experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting” (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 298). The first stage, experiencing (concrete experience), focuses on the learning that begins when a student uses senses and perceptions to engage in what is happening in the now. The second stage, reflecting (reflective observation) happens after the experience, when the student reflects on what happened and connects feelings with ideas about the experience. Thinking or abstract conceptualization is the third stage when the learner engages in thinking to reach conclusions and forms theories, concepts, or general principles that can be tested. Last, the final stage is acting (active experimentation) when the learner tests the theory and applies what was learned to get feedback and create the next experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

The key takeaways are that learning is a cyclical process that involves experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. In the context of this study, literacy assessments were applied to ELT as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Kolb Experiential Learning Theory Applied to Literacy Assessments

Stage	Description of Practice
1 Concrete Experience (Experiencing)	Administering assessments in schools
2 Reflective Observation (Reflecting)	Authentic reflections after administering assessments
3 Abstract Conceptualization (Thinking)	Processing and thinking through experience
4 Active Experimentation (Acting)	Reviewing feedback and actionable items for continuous improvement; instructional recommendations for teachers; PLC

Methodology

Research design

This qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) focused on the experiences of PSTs in junior methods courses in the fall semesters of 2023 and 2024. Though the study occurred with two distinct groups of PSTs, the case was bound by other factors including timing of the course in the program of study, participation in the reading methods and assessment courses taught by the same two professors who were working collaboratively, and participation in the same tasks and assignments with and in response to the community partner. Data was collected in the form of handwritten reflections completed at the closing of each administration experience, work completed by the PSTs in a simulated professional learning community (PLC), and reflection portions of a longer, formal assignment completed after PSTs reviewed the data (from each round of assessment) and analysed it in the structure of a PLC.

Participants and setting

Over two semesters, 38 PSTs participated in this research study. All the participants were PSTs enrolled in a fully accredited School of Education located at a private, liberal arts institution in the Ohio Valley. The institutional full-time student enrolment in Fall 2025 was 2,845 students. Within the Education department, there were 179 Education majors across three programs of study (elementary, middle, and secondary). The EPP at the institution offers a dual certification program for elementary and middle candidates in learning/behaviour disorders (P-12). Requirements of participants for this research study included being enrolled in two Junior level methods courses: education measurements (assessment and evaluation) and foundational reading. Table 2 describes the characteristics of the participants and their programs.

Table 2

Characteristics of participants and their programs

Characteristics	Fall 2023		Fall 2024	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Sex				
Male	1	3.85	1	8.33
Female	25	96.15	11	91.67
Race				
Asian	1	3.85	1	8.33
Black or African American	2	7.70	0	0
Other	1	3.85	1	8.33
White	22	84.62	10	83.33

Characteristics	Fall 2023		Fall 2024	
Type of Program				
Elementary Education & L/BD	25	96.15	9	75
Middle Education & L/BD	1	3.85	3	25
Middle Education Concentration				
English Language Arts	0	0	1	8.33
Mathematics	0	0	1	8.33
Science	0	0	0	0
Social Studies	1	3.85	1	8.33

The school partner for this study is a small, Catholic private school located in the Ohio Valley. The student population of this P-8 school is 320. The school serves a diverse population of students and offers Spanish, art, music, STEM, and PE classes for every grade level. Due to the diverse population the school uses small groups and differentiated instruction to meet student needs. For purposes of this research study, we worked with a total of 4 teachers in kindergarten and 2nd grade over the two semesters.

Partnership development

The partnership with the Catholic School has developed over several years. It began in the Spring 2023 when the school offered the chance for PSTs enrolled in a writing methods course to conduct writing instruction in K-6 classrooms. From there, it expanded to include the assessment experiences described in this study, as well as a reading buddy program in which sophomores meet with first grade reading buddies once a month, and through the development of an internship opportunity for students interested in education but not majoring in education. Over time, the partnership has expanded to include more grades and students within the Catholic school and with more methods courses in the School of Education.

Data sources

Multiple sources of data were used in understanding PSTs' learning, understanding, and perceptions of each assessment experience. Specifically, there was a written reflection (per PST) following each of the days of assessment administration and there was an extended follow-up assignment including description, analysis and reflection centring each of the two assessment experiences. Additionally, collaborative work artifacts from the simulated PLC following each of the assessment days (2 for each group of PSTs) were reviewed as evidence of PSTs' analysis of the data.

Handwritten reflections

After each reading assessment administration, the PSTs were tasked with answering reflection questions about the experience. The reflection questions were:

- What went well in your administration of the phonemic awareness (or phonics) assessment today? How do you know?
- What challenges did you experience in administering the phonemic awareness (or phonics) assessment today?
- If you would change or adjust anything, what would you change and why?
- What are you learning in this process?

This was one data source that was collected twice throughout the semester, completed immediately after each assessment administration experience.

Formal assignment

A formal written assignment in which students completed a written analysis of one the students they assessed, determined instructional needs, and reflected on the entire process of learning was completed both for phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. These assignments were completed after the PSTs reviewed the data from each round of assessment and analysed in PLCs. The reflection portion of this assignment was used as a means of revealing metacognition, self-awareness, and self-assessment through the learning process. Though the artifact collected following the assessment administration was reflective in nature, this longer, more formal reflection further revealed PSTs' thinking as they had engaged in data analysis and instructional planning in response to assessment data. It allowed the opportunity for PSTs to comment in greater detail and reflect on the whole cycle of the experiential learning opportunity. The reflection questions for this assignment were:

- How was the experience? How do you know?
- What have you learned from the process?
- What will you carry with you into the next experience? (this may be things that went well and areas of growth)
- How has this process helped you think about phonemic awareness or phonics?
- How has your knowledge of phonemic awareness or phonics expanded?
- How might you use this experience in your future classroom?

PLC recommendations

Following each of the assessment administrations, PSTs participated in simulated PLC where they worked with their peers to analyse the assessment data they had collected for a single classroom (a description of the process is included in the procedures section). Each PLC was charged with creating a slide for each of the groups they proposed including information about their strengths and challenges and instructional next steps. We were able to use this work product to see how students were able to analyse the data and what instructional steps they derived from their analysis.

Student literacy assessments

Both years, PSTs administered a phonological awareness screener to kindergarten students and a phonics screener to second graders. Because it can be accessed for free, is readily available, valid, and reliable, both groups were introduced the Phonological Awareness Skills Test (PAST) (Kilpatrick, 2024). The first year the PAST was used for the kindergarten assessment session. The second year of administration, PSTs were able to access the open-source Expeditionary Learning Reading Foundations Skills Block Reference Manual. Whereas, the PAST offers a general guideline of where students are with phonemic awareness, the Phonological Awareness Benchmark Assessment, subdivides skills that allowed PSTs to determine students' specific needs. Therefore, the second year of the study, PSTs administered the EL Phonological Awareness Benchmark Assessment. Both years, the LETRS Phonics Assessment (Moats & Tolman, 2019) was administered to second grade students. Assessment data from these assessments is not reported in the research as this study is focused on the learning process of PSTs.

Procedures and data analysis

Study Procedures

This study received approval from the institution's review board. The research was conducted during the Fall 2023 and 2024 semesters. Though artifacts analysed for the study were a regular part of the PSTs' educational experiences, they had the opportunity to opt out of the study. Information regarding PSTs' decisions was withheld from the researchers until grades for the semester had been submitted. This was accomplished by providing an envelope for PSTs to place their signed consent forms and having one PST seal the envelope with the forms and turn it into an administrative assistant

within the School of Education. The administrative assistant provided the forms to the researchers once grades for the semester were submitted. This process was to assure PSTs that their participation or lack thereof would have no influence on their class grades and evaluations. Although impossible to completely mitigate the power dynamic of professors and students, all reasonable precautions were taken in anticipation of any potential concerns that students might have had.

During both semesters, PSTs went into the partner school twice to administer assessments. The assessment administration dates were 2-3 weeks apart. A phonological awareness assessment was administered to kindergarten students, and a phonics assessment was administered to second grade students. Although assessments were administered to students at the partner school and the results were communicated to their teachers, the data for this research study consisted of PSTs' work artifacts; assessment data from partner school students were referenced only as objects of analysis for the PSTs' work.

After each assessment administration, PSTs participated in a PLC meeting with their peers to analyse and discuss the data they collected from the partner school. Following the PLC, PSTs selected one of the students they assessed to discuss in an analytic essay where they described the assessment administration, identified the student's strengths, challenges, and areas for growth, and reflected on the assessment experience as a developing educator.

PSTs' work was evaluated each semester as a matter of normal course procedure. After the semester concluded, the researchers analysed and coded the data. Specific procedures for planning the experience, teaching assessment administration, conducting assessments at the partner school, engaging in PLCs, and data analysis are discussed in the sections that follow.

Assessment administration experience planning

PSTs in the EPP were enrolled in junior level method courses consisting of teaching reading and education measurements (assessments). As the professors of the courses, we worked collaboratively with the partner school principal to plan two fall dates for the PSTs to administer literacy assessments. During the planning session, we discussed needs with the school and laid out our expectations for student learning. While in the methods courses, our PSTs were learning about reading assessments and had opportunities to practice administering reading assessments with their peers. We planned for PSTs to work in pairs to administer and score assessments with kindergarten and second grade students – estimating each pair of PSTs would be able to assess 4 students on each of the assessment dates.

Teaching assessment administration

We worked together to determine the best means for teaching PSTs about each of the assessments. In reading methods, PSTs were introduced to declarative knowledge around phonological awareness and phonics. PSTs also learned about different assessments, watched videos of assessment administrations and were able to practice conducting assessments with one another. In education measurements, PSTs learned about measurement concepts such as basal, ceiling, and fidelity.

PSTs 'on site procedures for administering literacy assessments

The procedures were given to PSTs the day of the assessment and were included in an assessment folder. The assessment folder consisted of the assessments, scoring instructions, a procedure page, a table with student and teacher names (indicating students they were testing), and two practice assessments. Sample procedures that were given to the PSTs are included in Appendix A. The specific and explicit procedural directions allow greater confidence for PSTs in their first experience of administering assessments. During this time, we walked around and provided support, when needed. After the administration and scoring was finished, we had PSTs reflect on their experience. To protect the students' assessment data, the researchers collected the assessments after the administration and kept

them in a secured, locked location. After administering and scoring assessments on each of the assessment dates, PSTs completed a written reflection about their experience before leaving the school.

Engaging in professional learning communities

During the class immediately following an assessment administration, PSTs engaged in a PLC to discuss the collective data of the teacher whose students they assessed. The partner school had two classrooms at each grade level, meaning that PSTs operated in two PLC groups. PSTs input students' data (names and subtest scores) into a Google Sheets template and simulated a PLC. Data was color-coded to indicate the skills for which the students' reached mastery, were close to mastery or had not yet obtained mastery. The PLC instructions for interpreting assessment data are included in Appendix B. While the PSTs were tasked with completing this for every student they assessed, for data-protection purposes, only two data records are highlighted in Figure 1 to capture the nature of the PSTs' assignment. Following the logging of data and color-coding of mastery levels, PSTs discussed data, made recommendations for small groups, and suggested next steps for instruction. PSTs' recommendations were shared with the kindergarten and second grade classroom teachers.

Assessment Title: Phonological Awareness Assessment											
PST Name	Student Name	Skill 1: Rhyme Production	Skill 2: Isolate Initial Phoneme	Skill 3: Identify Final Phoneme	Skill 4: Identify Medial Phoneme / Phoneme (a)	Skill 4: Identify Medial Phoneme / Vowel ID (b)	Skill 5: Add Initial Phoneme	Skill 6: Delete Initial Phoneme	Skill 7: Substitute Initial Phoneme	Skill 8: Count & Segment Phonemes	Skill 9: Blend Phonemes
K & S	ElNa	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
K & S	HaNe	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Note. PST and student names/initials were anonymized.

Figure 1. Example of Assessment Spreadsheet for EL Phonemic Awareness (PLC)

The PLC recommendations made for one class by the PSTs included the following and are based on assessment scores for the beginning of the year. The first pair of PSTs (K & S) stated: "They need a focus on deleting initial phonemes, counting/segmenting phonemes, adding initial phonemes, vowel adding. A whole group focus for skills 4-9. A good activity would be word chains where students change the middle sound and identify between long and short vowels (whole group)." Another group of PSTs stated: "They need minimal practice of rhyming and need support in all other skill areas. A good activity would be to use word mapping squares because students can physically remove/count the sounds and segment/bend words." While another group reported in their PLC: "They need support in all skill areas. Intensive small group instruction over all skill areas. They would benefit from using the white board squares because they provide students a visual with each sound within a word."

Data analysis

The data was analysed through processes of open (Creswell, 2013) and pattern coding (Miles et al., 2020). Both authors reviewed handwritten reflections from the assessment experience and generated codes and themes independently. These were discussed and considered collaboratively and yielded the four initial patterns. Coding of the formal assignment (cycle 2 coding) was conducted primarily by author 2, the instructor of record for reading methods. Because these assignments aligned specifically

with EPP guidelines for literacy coursework and the assessment class focused more on the specifics of assessment, literacy work artifacts were analysed for evidence of PSTs' literacy assessment learning.

Analysis began by looking at the collective written responses of PSTs organized by assessment experience. Responses of the two cohorts were combined and separated by whether they reflected the phonological awareness assessment or phonics assessment. Individual responses were collected by the focus area of each question (strengths, challenges, learning) and entered into a Microsoft Word document. Responses were reviewed by question analytically and across questions holistically. Responses were considered of the PSTs collectively rather than by individual PST. Common ideas were determined through a process of open coding in which each code was represented by a different highlight colour. Topics mentioned in PSTs responses were highlighted in unique colours reflecting individual codes. Individual codes included such topics as student engagement, PST self-awareness, PST self-assessment, student content knowledge/skill (letter naming, identification of sound), student motivation, student affect, and student persistence. Using this method, an individual PST's response to a question could be attached to several codes depending on the number of topics addressed in the response. For instance, the comment, "Something that went well was that I was calm and comfortable. I was able to communicate the directions in a simple and clear way and they understood" could be coded thusly:

- "Calm and comfortable" and "communicate direction in a simple clear way" was coded as PST self-assessment
- "They understood" was coded as student experience

These reflections were used for the first cycle of coding as they were reflective of PSTs' immediate reactions regarding the experience and with this immediacy were a gauge of their in-the-moment thinking. Four general themes emerged including: elementary student experience, the process of administration, administrator (teacher) influence, and value of the experience.

These categories were used as pattern coding in the second cycle of coding focused on the two formal assignments completed by PSTs following the PLC meetings analysing the data for each experience. For the analysis, the reflection portion of each assignment was reviewed (1-2 paragraphs per PST) and examined in light of the cycle 1 codes. This was accomplished by creating a chart including the four identified themes in Microsoft Word. PSTs' reflections were reviewed and copied and pasted into the chart. Placement of a PST's written comment was determined by its primary connection. For instance, the comment, "The test was difficult to give to students due to the unfamiliarity and the environment in which the test was administered. Many of the students felt weary of us and worried about getting correct answers ..." was placed in the category elementary student experience.

PSTs' ideas and comments were then analysed for separate components and highlighted based on the nature of the specific comment. For instance, "Students this young really respond to you being vibrant and excited. Giving them smiles and words of encouragement is sometimes all a student needs to give the correct response" was placed in the "elementary student experience" category because the PST's comment pointed students' responses; however, the latter portion of the component "giving smiles and words of encouragement" most closely aligned with the category, "teacher impact."

Through the process of sorting PSTs' formal assignment reflection comments, the pattern "content/pedagogical knowledge" emerged. Because the assignment asked PSTs to make specific connections to phonological awareness and phonics, it makes sense that this emerged in their reflections, as well. Comments such as, "I feel as if my knowledge of phonics and phonemic awareness has expanded." In such an instance, PSTs were not reflecting on their impact on students, the students' experiences, or the process of administering assessment. Although value might be implied, comments such as this one point to PSTs' awareness that their declarative knowledge had increased.

Drawing from a constant comparison process described by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the addition of the new pattern "content/pedagogical knowledge" led to a re-examination of the written reflections used in Cycle 1 coding. Additional review of the handwritten reflections indicated that comments

referencing content were more general and were made in reference to students' performance on the literacy tasks rather than the PSTs' growing understanding of phonological awareness and phonics as rich concepts. One PST noted, "I am learning the importance of giving assessments and what you get out of them. I can see how the data is useful to know where students are in their knowledge." Even though this layer of analysis did not provide the level and degree of content knowledge evidence as the longer more formal reflections, there was a nod to content knowledge as in the aforementioned comment. Furthermore, we agreed that the nature of the formal assignment invited students to think more specifically about their own content knowledge; whereas the handwritten reflections completed immediately after the experience dealt with more immediate questions of how the administration had gone an analysis of their actions and those of the students.

Positionality statements

We approached this study as participant researchers. At the time of the study, we were both assistant professors of education in a School of Education in a small private school with a Catholic identity in the Ohio Valley of the United States.

Author 1: I am an educator, having spent 7 years as a practicing special education teacher in the P-5 setting before moving into higher education. Over the last 7 years as an assistant professor of special education, I have taught undergraduate students in an EPP who are receiving dual certification in general and special education. Within this role I teach primarily about evaluation and assessment including multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), response to intervention (RtI), and the special education process. Embedded within the curriculum for MTSS and RtI, I explicitly teach my students about norm-referenced tests, curriculum-based measurements and other diagnostic assessments. I noticed through my years of teaching that my students needed a richer experience of administering assessments that went beyond practicing or simulating with a peer in class. In collaboration with Author 2, we began to plan richer learning experiences, using Kolb's ELT to guide the process, with a community-partner. As a reflective practitioner and educator, I work with Author 2 and the community partner to continuously improve and better support our PSTs in their development of assessment administration and data-based decision making.

Author 2: I am an educator of thirty years with 20 years' experience in grades K-8 as both a classroom teacher and instructional coach. I have worked in education preparation for 10 years where I teach courses across undergraduate and graduate programs. Most of my classes are focused on literacy methodology, pedagogy, and research. Beginning in the Summer of 2023, I became a member of a literacy cohort associated with my state's department of education. The literacy cohort is composed of literacy teacher educators from across the state and has convened to increase collaboration between schools and ensure alignment with literacy legislation of recent years. As a member of the cohort, I have been an institutional contact for a state-mandated external review of literacy courses within elementary and early childhood preparation programs. This experience caused me to think about increasing and maximizing experiences for PSTs to develop appropriate knowledge and skills for teaching literacy. In addition, in teaching methods courses for ten years at my institution, I recognized that PSTs in their junior methods courses experienced heightened stress and high workloads across courses. In light of this, Author 1 and I worked together to create efficiencies and experiences between our courses that would heighten PSTs' learning while at the same time streamline assignment and work requirements. These requirements and needs were essential design challenges for us in aligning the two courses and developing the community partnership experience. Documenting this process in light of PSTs' development and learning artifacts was essential to this research. As an educator, I am accustomed to engaging reflective processes to support the development and revision of courses. What makes this instance unique is the intention to document and share that process for the benefit of other teacher educators.

Findings

From the cycles of coding, five themes emerged from PSTs' comments and reflections. These themes addressed the experiences of the elementary student being assessed, the process of assessment administration, the influence of the teacher administering the assessment, the value of the assessment for PSTs and for those in the field, and the increased development of content and pedagogical knowledge. The sections elaborate on the topics and categories associated with themes and provide PSTs written reflections, from the site, and from coursework illustrating the themes.

Theme 1: Student experience

"The thing that went well in this assessment would be how willing the students were to participate when they heard the word 'try,' I could tell that their frustration turned to challenge and they wanted to excel."

PSTs had many thoughts about the elementary students they assessed. They were observant of many characteristics including students' strengths, effort, persistence, response to challenge, test anxiety and confidence. The PSTs reflections revealed excitement, insight, and curiosity regarding students' experiences.

One strength of the process revealed students' capabilities in comments such as "The students did really well identifying the letter names as they flew through them and got them all of them right." Many of the PSTs discussed the students' positive attitudes including strong effort, a willingness to try, and interest. Similarly, another PST noted a range of emotions exhibited by one the students they assessed:

I observed his excitement initially, which was a positive aspect of our interaction. However, his anxiety when faced with difficult tasks reminded me of the importance of creating a supportive environment where students feel safe to make mistakes. I could see his determination to do well, which encouraged me to reassure him throughout the process.

From a willingness to engage challenge, to view assessment as a word game, and be intrigued with the process, PSTs reported numerous examples of positive student attitude and engagement.

PSTs' reflections also noted challenges with the process and they pointed out the students' anxiety about doing the assessments with someone they did not know, "The test was difficult to give to students due to the unfamiliarity and the environment in which the test was administered. Many of the students felt weary of us and worried about getting correct answers and got scared when they realized the answer was incorrect." While many PSTs echoed concerns about the challenging environment (mentioned above) and students' reticence to work with them, additional challenge about the process included "keeping students engaged during the assessment" and "that students easily tire when they are being challenged." PSTs range of experiences demonstrated their awareness of the students' experience and also caused them to reflect on the many different attitudes, challenges, and personalities that will be present in their future classrooms.

Theme 2: Process of assessment administration

"I learned a lot about how to actually give an assessment in the school setting. I have seen assessments being completed or assisted in giving them before, but this was my first experience doing one completely on my own."

Administering assessments includes numerous intricacies including understanding directions for administration, managing materials, internalizing the content and parameters of the assessment, knowing how to collect data through the process, determining when to conclude the assessment and reflecting on their experience as an administrator and the experiences of their students. PSTs were thoughtful about these aspects in reflecting on their insights, experiences, and challenges.

Comments about the process of conducting assessments revealed PSTs' awareness of the need for practice and clarity. One PST emphasized, "I learned that being able to administer assessments like the

PAST require extensive practice and experience to be able to [get] results that accurately reflect the knowledge of students.” Another stated the need to “thoroughly read what I am giving. I almost skipped a section but quickly corrected.” Comments such as “My experience giving the PAST assessment went well but could have gone better if I had more experience with the assessment itself” illustrated students’ growing awareness of the value of practice. PSTs also emphasized the value of conducting the assessments with students:

Having practice administering the assessment to children rather than adults gave me a more accurate representation of not only what the process of an assessment might look like but also gave me an accurate representation of phonemic awareness amongst kindergarten students. I didn’t expect a majority of their scores to be low.

The opportunity to engage the process of diagnostic assessment authentically was meaningful to students in terms of preparation, practice, and understanding of assessment processes.

PSTs’ reflections demonstrated awareness of their levels of confidence, competence, and growth in conducting assessments. One was pleased with her administration, “...I was able to communicate the directions in a simple and clear way and they understood” while another noticed growth in competency, “As the test went on, I feel like the questions flowed from me more fluently.” Moments of insight and relief were also evident, “the experience of administering the PAST assessment was easier than I thought it would be... I learned that a lot of my anxiety with giving this assessment [was] because I didn’t have a lot of practice with it.” Comments such as these reflect the impactful role of authentic experience in solidifying PSTs’ practical knowledge and confidence with giving assessment.

In addition to noting their successes, PSTs were honest about their challenges through reflections. One offered a general theme, “I learned that it is a lot harder to give these tests than I thought it would be.” Specifically, they reflected on the challenge of standardized administration in comments such as, “I think explaining the directions was hard. They seemed to struggle with that and I could only say so much” and “Some challenges that I experienced were staying within the script. I found myself wanting to ask better questions for the student to grasp what I was asking.” Another PST shared that an area for growth was “being more confident of knowing when to stop an assessment.” Comments such as these pointed PSTs to their need for ongoing growth while also demystifying the important process of administering assessments.

Theme 3: Teacher influence

“Students thrive when encouraged, whether they come into the assessment confident or nervous.”

Across the four administrations and two cohorts of PSTs, there was common understanding that the teacher influences a student’s assessment experience. Specifically, if teachers are calm students will respond to that energy; likewise, if teachers are anxious or loud, students will align accordingly. This phenomenon is something PSTs affirmed in their reflections as they realized their role in the smooth process of administering and collecting data from the assessment. One noted, “Something that went well was that I was calm and comfortable.”

Along with this they recognized the importance of being self-aware, in terms of responding to students. One shared, “I made sure to keep my body language and expressions the same even if a student got the answer wrong to ensure that they felt comfortable and confident in their answers because this assessment was not meant to evoke anxiety in students but instead to capture their phonemic ability and skill level.” Such reflection reveals that PSTs were conscious not only of what they were doing with assessment, but they were also metacognitive about their actions and administration in the moment.

PSTs’ self-awareness extended to their observations of how they set the tone for the students’ assessment experiences through encouragement, praise, and positive energy. One PST learned, “Students this young really respond to you being vibrant and excited. Giving them smiles and words of encouragement is all a student needs to give the correct response.” The importance of encouragement

was echoed across responses including statement such as, “I think my ability to get to know the students and encourage them through sections they weren’t confident went well” and “I am learning how important encouragement is because as they got frustrated they would pep up a little bit after being encouraged.” PSTs came to realize that their influence on students occurred when exhibiting encouragement and anxiety,

I would also try to encourage the students more and make them feel more comfortable. Since this was my first experience with this assessment, I think my own nerves reflected on the students. I would also allow myself more time so that I could ease the student into the assessment instead of jumping right in. I think this would help ease some of their nerves better.

Furthermore, in recognizing their role in influencing the experience for students, PSTs recognized the ways that they had agency over the energy they brought to the situation, through practice, familiarity with the assessment, and proceeding calmly in the face of errors or mistakes.

Theme 4: Value of assessments and experience

“It was an eye-opening experience that has expanded my thinking.”

PSTs were also descriptive in terms of the understanding of the value of the assessments both for understandings students’ strengths and in their process of professional learning. Rather than conceptualizing assessments as an activity to be completed, PSTs recognized the value of the assessments in revealing students’ needs. Evidence of this awareness is conveyed in comments such as “I am learning the importance of giving assessment and what you get out of them. I can see how the data is useful to know where students are in their knowledge.” PSTs articulated students’ different performance levels. One suggested, “I am able to truly see the students at different levels” while another wrote, “This time I was able to truly see the progression of the level of challenge.” In recognizing students’ differences, PSTs reported on the need for differentiation for students who had gaps in their understanding, suggested in this comment, “I am learning to give assessments and that all students are at different places when it comes to what they know or don’t. Further, I am learning about different strategies to implement to help the lower performing students.” Another student pointed out the need for providing enrichments for students who had well-developed skills:

I struggled with Phillip’s group, which was our “advanced” group and thinking of ways to challenge the students who were ahead of others. I often only thought of students that need intervention and strategies to help them, so this made me think of the opposite and how to challenge students who pick up content faster. This experience changed my view on the purpose of creating small groups of students and that they are not just targeted for students who need small group intervention but also for those who need small group for more rigor.

In addition to differentiation, PSTs noted the value of progress monitoring, “I am learning how to assess students and can track their progress via assessments.”

An extension of their realization of the role of assessments in mapping progress and determining differentiation needs, was the value of PLCs in supporting students’ learning needs and planning for instruction. For some PSTs, the PLC structure was key to the experience’s value, “The thing I enjoyed most about this assessment is being able to score the students and then use it in a PLC. I thought this was very beneficial because we got the chance to collaborate and actually use the data that we gathered.” Others agreed with this idea, “I also really appreciated the PLC groups because that helped me get experience in working as a team to group students and plan intervention and instruction as needed.” The role of the PLC in analysing data was also highlighted, “I have also seen how valuable data is for teachers. The data tells educators what knowledge students have and what interventions are needed. Putting all the data together for the students in the class was eye-opening to see what areas groups needed help in and then creating small groups.” Though PSTs have read about PLCs or observed

them when spending time with cooperating teachers, this experience put them in the role of teachers with the responsibility to make instructional decisions. This process highlighted the value of PLCs in accomplishing this aim.

Beyond the value of the process in developing PSTs' understanding of the role of assessment in differentiation and the power of collaborative PLCs, several noted the value of the experience in solidifying and expanding their own content knowledge and application of learning. One PST offered, *"I feel that now that I've seen the building blocks in action, I understand the gaps that can be created and how a deficit or misunderstanding in one of the levels can lead to a deficit in skills as time goes on."* Similarly, another shared growth in her content knowledge:

It allows me to gain a deep understanding of each student's individual strengths and weaknesses in phonological awareness, which is a fundamental skill for early literacy.

This assessment and class has really opened my eyes to how important learning phonics are for young students. This assessment expanded my view on phonics in many ways. Before giving the students the assessment, I was practicing doing the assessment myself and it was not easy! In some sections I really had to think about what I was doing and saying and I was kind of reteaching myself some of it.

Teacher preparation requires attention to both content and practice. Several PSTs highlighted the value of the assessment administration as an authentic experience. One reported, *"Administering the assessment to the children rather than adults gave me a more accurate idea of what interaction would be like as a future educator."* Another affirmed this notion and shared their appreciation for the experience, *"I was able to apply my knowledge and see it in a real scenario. I learned how to analyse data and create groups that are beneficial for all students."* One student highlighted both content learning and experience as beneficial:

This process has helped me think about phonemic awareness/phonics altogether because I am seeing it firsthand in the field. I am the one giving these assessments and asking students to show and tell me the correct responses. Overall, I would say this was a really good experience. I enjoy learning about this stuff in my college classes but it all makes so much more sense when we actually get to go out in the field and practice skills like this with giving assessments.

Belief that the assessment experience catalyzed content and practice and should be part of all teacher preparation was illustrated in this reflection, *"I learned that it is vital to teach children correct letter pronunciation and that I need to have more practice with this. I also learned that preservice teachers should all have the experience of giving assessments to real students because the experience gives you so much more confidence."*

Theme 5: Development of content and pedagogical knowledge

"This opened my understanding of phonemic awareness exponentially. It is one thing for students to read and write in class, but having this assessment challenged the student and allowed for me to gain more understanding."

Whereas Theme 4 addressed value in terms of why assessments are important and why the experience was important to PSTs learning, Theme 5 highlights their awareness of their growing content knowledge. By and large, within the handwritten reflections that PSTs filled out immediately following the experiences, the development of content and pedagogical knowledge was not mentioned; however, in the larger assignments (which included reflection) that students completed after the PLC meeting during class time, many students noted that the process had helped them learn about phonics and phonemic awareness as well as the process of assessment administration and using data to plan instruction. General statements such as, *"This process has helped me to understand phonemic awareness and phonics much more than before"* and *"I feel as if my knowledge of phonemic awareness and phonics*

has expanded because we got to take what we learned in class (which I was confused about in class) and put it into action” appeared frequently in PSTs’ course assignment.

In addition to acknowledgment of their content learning, some PSTs offered a specific and nuanced description of their learning:

Being able to give the assessments to kindergarteners has taught me a lot. Specifically, I have recognized that even I need a lesson on how to properly pronounce some of the letter sounds such as for the letters, “r” and “b”. As an instructor, how we say the sounds with our students can make a difference with how the students later learn to spell and read. I use to feel nervous about not being able to teach my students how to read, before being introduced to the new vocabulary of phonological and phonemic awareness. I originally only knew about phonics and which I later learned I was confusing it for phonological awareness.

Another PST was articulate in connecting content learning and classroom practice:

I have seen a real scenario of how important phonemic awareness is and what it looks like when a child has it or does not. When I first learned about this component of learning to read it was an abstract idea to me. It was unclear to me what it looked like for students to have phonemic awareness. Through talking about it in class and giving the assessments it is now clearer. I understand how phonological awareness is a big umbrella, and phonemic awareness is a specific sector within.

In talking about classroom application, several PSTs made connections regarding development and progression of foundational skills.

This process helped me understand that phonemic awareness is not an age-based skill. Despite these students being very young, most of them in their first year of schooling, their phonics level surprised me as they were able to delete and manipulate sounds in words that would have confused me even at the college level.

Other PSTs pointed out that even though foundational skills are associated with the primary grades, that they are relevant beyond the early elementary years, especially for struggling readers. “This process helped me understand that students will not always follow a stair step model when mastering phonemic awareness. Sometimes students will lack more “low level” concepts or skills but get the hang of “higher level” concepts or skills.” A PST seeking certification in middle school language arts and special education offered this reflection:

I plan to use this in my future classroom because although I will be in middle school I am seeing an increasing need for phonics instruction in my field placement and this assessment allowed me to see the breakdown of phonics instruction and give resources for how to target instruction to best benefit the student.

The development of such understanding, in terms of their own content understanding and the need for such skills beyond early childhood education accentuate the value of the scaffolded experience of providing assessment in the context of methods courses.

Discussion

As indicated through the themes of the case study, the PSTs involved in the experiential learning experiences of administering reading assessments demonstrate more awareness and higher levels of confidence. As Burton and Greher (2007) highlighted that the involvement of school-university partnerships allows for graduates to be better prepared for their first year of teaching, this was seen through this research. One theme that was impactful for EPPs relates to what Wiggins and McTighe (2011) refer to as the application of transfer. Theme 5, the development of content and pedagogical knowledge shows this firsthand. PSTs are not learning about the Big 5 of reading instruction in isolation

within the walls of their university classroom but are able to transfer and deepen that knowledge with the hands-on experience of administering reading assessments.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

The findings of this study align closely with Kolb's (1984) ELT, which posits that knowledge is constructed through a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The school-university partnership described in this study created conditions for PSTs to engage authentically in each stage of this cycle, yielding meaningful professional and pedagogical growth.

The first stage of Kolb's cycle, concrete experience, is most evident in Themes 1 and 2, as PSTs engaged directly with elementary (K and 2nd grade) students during reading assessment administration. Rather than observing cooperating teachers or simulating the process in class with peers, PSTs were situated as the assessors and in doing so, they navigated real student responses, behaviors, and emotional reactions. PSTs' reflections captured the immediate nature of this experience, noting the complexity of assessment practices such as managing materials, following standardized protocols, and responding to students' testing anxiety — dimensions that cannot be fully replicated in university coursework alone.

Reflective observation, the second stage, is reflected in Themes 2 and 3. PSTs demonstrated a high degree of metacognitive awareness by engaging in a critical examination of their own administration practices, body language, and emotional regulation. This authentic field work prompted students to deeply think about their reflections as a hallmark of Kolb's framework and further, engaging with this type of personal reflection is foundational to teacher development.

Themes 4 and 5 reflect the movement into abstract conceptualization, wherein PSTs began connecting their hands-on experiences to broader pedagogical principles. PSTs articulated new understandings of differentiation, data-driven instruction, and the developmental progression of phonemic awareness — concepts they had encountered theoretically in coursework but now understood with greater clarity and application. As one PST noted, content knowledge "makes so much more sense when we actually get to go out in the field." This statement captures precisely what ELT predicts: that meaning-making deepens when theory is tested against lived experience.

Finally, the PLC component of the learning experience introduced active experimentation, the fourth stage of Kolb's cycle, as PSTs used assessment data collaboratively to make instructional decisions. This elevated the experience beyond data collection toward authentic pedagogical decision-making, reinforcing the iterative and applied nature of experiential learning while also explicitly preparing for their future role in PLCs as first-year teachers.

Implications

Positive results and evidence of PSTs' learning suggest the furtherance of this research and the value of community partnerships. Specifically, the results support the cultivation of school-university partnerships to strengthen and increase PSTs field experiences, value in scaffolding in course contained field experiences distinct from junior practicum and the professional semester (student teaching), value and flexibility of private schools in forming partnerships with EPPs, and the development of collaborative and co-teaching structures in methods course as a model for PSTs future practice.

Cultivation of school-university partnerships

The EPP within which the research took place has a reputation for significant field experience and practice for PSTs. Specifically, PSTs have increasingly extensive field experience beginning the year of matriculation and continuing through the professional semester. Experiences the first two years are focused on observation and include limited responsibilities for PSTs. During the junior year (the year of the participants in the study), PSTs are in the field for a whole day each week in the fall semester and a

day and a half in the spring semester. The experiences described in this study occurred within the context of the methods class time; therefore, they were in addition to and beyond other field experiences, furthering PSTs already substantial time in the field. The results suggest the value of methods professors and instructors collaborating with local schools to develop specific learning experiences.

Value in scaffolded field experiences

As mentioned above, PSTs engage in significant field work as a program requirement. This experience was valuable in terms of scaffolding. In the more extensive practicum of the junior year, PSTs have three different placements, each one semester long. Two of the placements are general education (1 fall, 1 spring) and one of the placements is in a special education setting (spring). Cooperating teachers meet state-based requirements and are vetted through the university's field placement coordinator. A challenge of the placements is that PSTs are in different grades, different content areas (some are general placements, others are departmentalized for math, reading, science, and/or social studies), and several different schools. Additionally, the partner schools have district mandated curriculum, and it is imperative that the work PSTs do in the classroom align precisely with curriculum maps and the needs determined by the cooperating teacher. For this reason, it is not feasible for methods professors to direct PSTs in specific activities – conducting particular assignments or assessments. This arrangement worked well as PSTs were able to practice literacy assessments ahead of time and then conduct assessments with several students. The methods professors developed a protocol for the assessment administration which allowed for peer review and collaboration, followed by independent practice, all within range of methods professors who could offer assistance, as needed.

The collection of assessment data has proved useful for the partner schools as well as their staffing resources do not always allow for the administration of individual assessments. The PSTs analysis of data, suggestions of small groups, and instructional goals are shared with the partner school, so that classroom teachers can use the data as needed. In this way, the partnership is of mutual benefit to the university and the community partner.

Flexibility of private schools

In this study, the partner school was a local Catholic K-8 school. Though the school follows standards documents of the archdiocese and has adopted curriculum materials in subject areas, the school has a great deal of autonomy as compared to the local, public school district. As with any practice-based experience, it is crucial to engage activities that support the mission of the school and the learning with the students. Partnering with the principal and the classroom teachers has allowed for flexibility of a unique learning experience for PSTs, while at the same time engaging in a manner that is of benefit to the school.

Development of collaborative and co-teaching partnerships

While autonomy is a hallmark of the university, siloed teaching is not congruent with expectations and values of P-12 schools which value collaboration and cooperative structures such as co-teaching. The basis of this research started as we engaged in grant work with a local school district. Through this experience, we discovered synergies between our classes and developed a plan for aligning experiences in the courses and incorporating the assessment administration. PSTs have valued this collaborative effort and clear connections between the courses. This has caused us to take the collaboration further by structuring the future schedule to teach the classes on the same day – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. This will allow for full days at the partner school and also provide the opportunity to model collaborative practice and co-teaching models for the PSTs. Such experiences provide meaningful models who will be expected to engage collaboratively in their future school communities.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study is limited by a number of factors including the small number of participants, use of personal reflection and self-assessment as means of inquiry, subjectivity of data analysis, and inability to show a relationship between the PSTs experience, level of knowledge, and student learning. Participants were bound by a number of contextual factors including academic major, university, professors of record, and partnership school. All participants were enrolled in two courses within an EPP at a private institution in the Ohio Valley that were taught by the same two professors each semester and although the PSTs consisted of two separate cohorts, the profile of each group of PSTs was similar, primarily white females.

The decision to use candidate reflections both in the moment and after the experience is grounded in the value of reflection in supporting the development of practice and learning. Generally speaking reflection is viewed favorably across professions (Schon, 1992) and more specifically in the field of education as reflected in theorists (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Schmidt, 2010), through professional standards such as the International Literacy Association (ILA, 2017), Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP, 2022), and the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium supported by the Council of Chief State School Officers which advocate for reflection in expectations set forth for ongoing learning and professional responsibility. In spite of alignment of professional organizations on the value of reflections, it is also true that self-assessment and self-reporting can be problematic as studies have shown misalignment between perceived and actual capabilities in areas such as reading instruction (Bos et al., 2001; Hudson et al., 2021; Pittman et. al., 2020). The use of data sources (reflection questions, formal assignment) that were researcher-created and not piloted nor validated before the study are a further limitation. In addition to the informality of the data sources and challenges with self-reporting, subjectivity in analysis through researchers' application of coding. Such factors limit the generalizability of this study. To address these challenges, we worked to provide rich description of different components of the experience including course expectations, settings (university and partner school), positionality, assignment descriptions, and PSTs' responses, so that other teacher educators might use the study as a springboard for their own practice.

Logistically, the partner school was not located near the institution. Therefore, there were some barriers to transportation that PSTs faced and had to be accounted for. The private school setting was chosen based on a close relationship with the principal of the building. Although there were many benefits of with this school partner consisting of a good working relationship and smaller class sizes there were limitations as well. The private school does not face the same challenges including barriers and parameters of the public school system. When administering assessments in a public school system, the class sizes would be larger and more diverse. Although the private school is the most diverse school in terms of English Language Learners in the local Catholic school system, the school is still not as diverse as a typical public school classroom including but not limited to race and students with disabilities.

Possibilities for future research are wide in scope with attention to closer examination of the learning experience on PSTs efficacy in both administering literacy assessments and using data analysis to plan evidence-based reading instruction. Further understanding the specific natures of PSTs' learning through measure of declarative knowledge and applied understanding in developing and facilitating instruction.

Results of this study are based heavily on PSTs' perceptions and reflections suggest the positive value of the experience and warrant consideration of ways to further extend opportunities for developing the partnership in other consent areas and grade levels. Expanding on this, using these experiences in conjunction with other experiential learning opportunities such as virtual mixed reality teaching would be beneficial for the PSTs. For example, practicing administering reading assessments with peers in class, administering assessments with virtual avatar students, and then going into field to administer

with students in school settings would provide PSTs with a gradual release of responsibility regarding assessment administration. Developing means for PSTs to apply assessment information through the application of (not just planning) literacy instruction involving the assessed students would be an additional source for practice and learning.

Another area for future research could focus on models for co-teaching. Due to the collaborative nature of the two methods courses, co-teaching these experiential experiences would be highly beneficial in strengthening the partnership as well in providing a model of effective co-teaching for the PSTs. Possible means of achieving this include using the school partner for more experiences throughout the year for a full day (i.e., coursework taking place at the school and embedded with practice), university faculty planning, teaching, and reflecting together in a true co-teaching model, and allowing PSTs to enter into spaces of co-teaching themselves related to planning, administering and relaying results of reading assessments to the partner school.

In the realm of university-school partnership and community engaged research, a further area of importance and potential is the experience of the community partner. Whether considering EPP/school partnership specifically or university/community partnerships more broadly, the strongest model of partnership is one in which the university and community partner (Burroughs et al., 2019) have equity in benefit and voice. Kim et al. (2025) shared the value of EPP/school partnership in the development and use of evidence-based practices both for practicing and PSTs. Continued work with the partner school to determine their specific needs and synergies with needs of PSTs and studying the nature of the experience both for the partner school and PSTs' learning would provide needed research on innovative and sustainable means of teacher education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, experiences such as administering reading assessments through school-university partnerships are instrumental for PSTs in the context of their EPPs. As the findings in this study demonstrate, PSTs are more knowledgeable about the practice of administering, scoring, and analyzing results from reading assessments. This practical application is essential in building confidence to cultivate more effective teaching during their first year of teaching. The benefits of these experiences are not only fruitful for PSTs but for the school and university EPP as well.

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Appendix A

PSTs Procedures for Administering Literacy Assessments

1. Write the student's name, grade, and room number on the form per student (we will ultimately share these results with the teachers).
2. Introduce yourself and ask the student how they are doing. To help them get comfortable, you may ask them about their favorite part of school, what they like to play, their favorite book, etc.
3. Let them know that you are excited to play some word games with them.
4. Pick up the first student from the classroom (you will have a list of students).
5. Person A tests student one. Begin with the first items on the form – if a student misses two in a row go on to the next level – do not provide corrective feedback – you can say something like “thank you.” Continue through the items and then return student to class, pick up student 2.
6. Person B tests student two; Continue as above.
7. After you have each had the opportunity to test one student, you can pick up your last two students, and the administrations can happen at the same time
8. This assessment is designed so that you do all the parts, and even though skills may be adjacent, students may be able to do a later subtest when they had difficulty with earlier subtest.
9. If you have a fifth student, you and your partner can work out the assessment of the fifth student.
10. If a child is clearly upset or frustrated go ahead and end the assessment – you can say something like “Thank you so much for playing these words games with me today. We are finished and I will walk you back to class.”
11. Once you have completed assessing your students, return to the room where we started our day – will gather there to do some reflection and have some closing conversation.

Appendix B

PSTs Instructions for PLC

1. Check the score for each student.
2. Look at the data from the class as a whole.
3. How might students be placed in groups?
4. Based on what you have learned today, what are the needs of each group?
5. What are instructional practices that could be tried with each group?
6. Create one slide showing no more than 4 instructional groups per class. For each group, create a slide explaining their needs.
7. After reviewing instructional practices for phonemic awareness, make instructional recommendations for each group (what strategies might be used with what concepts/content).