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CONTENTS

Message from the Editor	1
Editorial Board	2
ARTICLES	
Simple View, Science, and the State: A Critical Reading of the Ohio Literacy Plan <i>Delane Bender-Slack, Ed.D., Xavier University</i> <i>Teresa Young, Ed.D., Xavier University</i> <i>Angela M. Hargis, Ed.D., University of Cincinnati Blue Ash</i>	4
Connecting Through Critical Conversations: Using Socratic Circles to Link Social Emotional Learning and Literacy Education <i>Rochelle Berndt, Ph.D., Baldwin Wallace University</i>	34
Student Teaching During a Pandemic: Lessons from the Field <i>Tracey K. Hoffman, Ed.D., Miami University</i>	55
Teacher Leadership in a Pandemic: Lessons Learned <i>Wendy L. Strickler, Ed.D., Mount St. Joseph University</i> <i>Megan S. Dinnesen, Ed.D., Mount St. Joseph University</i>	75
Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Perspectives of Teaching Assistants on Active Learning Classrooms, Techniques, and Strategies <i>Samuel Njai, Ph.D., ACCEL Schools, Pansophic Learning</i> <i>Jesse Strycker, Ph.D., Ohio University</i>	97
Publication Guidelines	115
Important Dates of Note	116
Membership	117

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

These are difficult times in teacher education in Ohio. I can remember a time when the university was the seat of the study of pedagogy. We would research and discern effective instructional strategies for teaching certain topics, and then they were seen as *developmentally appropriate practices*. After all, one of our main functions is to uncover *best practices*. These developmentally appropriate practices served as a reservoir of possible strategies that have proven to be effective with some students, in some contexts, in certain times—all the while knowing that the fine tuning and the “dialing in” on what specific students need, was always part of the art and science of teaching. There is no *one way* to teach all children nor one theoretical lens through which to frame research, even if it is called “scientific” in name. I have addressed this faulty thinking before in an article entitled “The Special Education Industrial Complex” (Knestrict, 2016).

More and more the Ohio Department of Education is mandating strategies and ways of teaching. The State’s plan for reading is one of those instances. The *Simple View of Reading* is offered as the only empirically confirmed method of teaching all students how to read. This Simple View is a 40-year-old, recycled method. The team that constructed the State literacy plan consisted of a group predominantly of practitioners, State Support Team members (ODE), and only two members from higher education. The literacy plan for the State is allegedly a cooperatively formed document. However, this “researched based” literacy plan seems to be lacking the all-inclusive research and theoretical voices of higher education. It appears the tail is now wagging the dog. The use of the word “science” in its foundational pedagogical method is critical in understanding the propaganda used by the State. If it is called scientific, it must be true! Our lead article is a critical look at this effort. Bender-Slack, Miller-Hargis, and Young are 30-year veterans in studying reading and reading pedagogy, and they offer a critical lens to analyze this method, its history, and the possible implications of its being mandated.

What we do in teacher education is based on our investigations of best practices, our experiences in teaching in the field, and our observations of children’s learning. The State offers a “Root Cause Analysis” to determine what is needed for each child, but it excludes all contextual implications in that child’s life. Poverty, unequal distribution of resources, and any social and contextual variables are left out of this root cause analysis. Ironically, it is what has been excluded from this analysis that holds the truth of reform and the hopes of students for years to come. The State’s agenda is not limited to the Science of Reading either. PBIS, MTSS, and dual licensure are also on the agenda, and higher education will have to “toe the line” of preparing teacher candidates for that world unless we push back. Higher education needs to mobilize against this. If you are interested in resisting this agenda, let me know by dropping me a line at: OJTE@xavier.edu. *The Ohio Journal of Teacher Education*—and our very existence as intellectuals and critical researchers in higher education—depends on us defending and promoting how we believe teacher candidates should be prepared based upon what is best for students, not on what is politically expedient for the State or the Special Education Industrial Complex.

Thomas Knestrict
Editor
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Simple View, Science, and the State:

A Critical Reading of the Ohio Literacy Plan

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Abstract:

In 2020, the Ohio State Literacy team published *Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement*. The eight-section, 51-page document articulates a state literacy framework, promoting proficiency in reading, writing, and communication from birth to grade 12.

Founded in the Simple View of Reading, the team compels schools to align to the State's plan. We engage in a critical reading of this literacy plan so that we can begin to share ideas about how we might plan instruction in our reading programs to address, negotiate, and resist.

We would like to begin with the agreement that we all want Ohio children to have the skills to be proficient and skilled readers, and we emphasize that our work here is not meant to disrupt children’s learning to read. As teacher educators, our engagement in critique is, in fact, intended to support the fact that we want Ohio children reading. This paper is about power and literacy. One of the common myths about literacy is that literacy customarily results in freedom. In many instances, however, literacy is not liberatory in the way critical pedagogues and other educators might believe it to be. Literacy can be used as a tool to either liberate or oppress.

For that reason, we intend to critically explore the document, *Ohio’s Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement* (2020), which is founded in the Simple View of Reading and endorses a “reading science” perspective of addressing literacy inequities in Ohio schools. The plan, which is in direct opposition to the constructivist and critical literacy perspectives embraced by our teacher colleges, leads us to consider alternative theoretical frameworks and instructional plans needed to confront and remedy this disconnect.

Consequently, in a Freirean attempt to educate to liberate ourselves and others, particularly the teacher candidates and inservice teachers we serve, we are moved to address the recent 51-page state document *Ohio’s Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement*. Over two years of work by an Ohio State Literacy team led to the publication that is now being touted as the primary guideline for all Ohio districts, schools, and early childhood programs. Although it takes a wider view of the social constructs in which literacy development occurs, it is likely becoming the latest literacy “package” to construct or, in this case, reconstruct academic disadvantage (Irvine and Larson, 2007).

Critiquing the state literacy plan is important because literacy can transform lives and power relations: “If humankind produces social reality... then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for humanity” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 51). This is a hopeful and purposeful perspective of literacy, and it is based in action. Torres (1993) writes, “[Freire’s] principle of education as cultural action, his method of ‘conscientization,’ his techniques for literacy teaching have all been adopted

and adapted to fit a thousand projects where the learning situation forms part of a social conflict situation” (p. 119). Critical pedagogy has been adopted and adapted throughout the world and is embraced by our teacher colleges as a significant tool toward transformative education. Therefore, the purpose of this critique is that by being hopeful and purposeful, it will elicit dialogue, decisions, and ultimately action for liberation.

Critical Analysis of the Document

In this section, we will explicate the reasons why *Ohio’s Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement* is problematic. These reasons include the use of one theoretical lens, the use of deficit language, its authoritarian conception of power, the marginalized role of higher education, the neglect of sociocultural theories and perspectives, the rhetorical structure and moves, and the evidentiary issues. Using evidence from the Ohio literacy plan, each section will provide a critical critique.

Limited Theoretical Lens

First, the literacy plan uses a limited theoretical lens. It is based solely on the Simple View of Reading (SVR) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), summarily contextualized in the contested term “science of reading (SoR),” which is defined differently throughout the field. Together the terms, SVR and SoR were used over 40 times throughout the document. The Simple View of Reading originated in 1986 and is based on a simple mathematical formula, explaining that reading equals the product of decoding and linguistic or language comprehension. For children who struggle to “achieve” reading proficiency from these two factors, what follows is a diagnosis of one (or more) of the three types of reading disabilities (dyslexia, hyperlexia, and common or garden variety) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Conversely, the most prevalent reading theories text in the field today, *Lenses on Reading*, provides eight theoretical lenses with over 43 specific theories that are the basis for a wide range of effective pedagogical techniques in literacy classrooms (Tracy & Marrow, 2017). Consequently, it is important to point out that there are, in fact, many other theories that a state-wide and state-mandated literacy plan could or should take into account if one were truly

interested in solving literacy issues. Psychological theories with a neuroscientific lens of learning to read are but one of many theoretical perspectives on which to base classroom instruction and literacy research.

In section 4, “Ohio’s Language and Literacy Vision,” the document states that in order to achieve their vision, they will first do the following: “Using the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) to drive *all literacy content, conversation, development and organization of resources* [our emphasis] necessary to support the state’s comprehensive plan” (p. 18). The use of only one theory to drive all content, conversation, development, and organization of resources is limiting, short-sighted, destructive—and bound to fail—despite the fact that the document appears to indicate that there is but one theory that can lead to the best practices of teaching children to read.

Moreover, in the subsection “The Simple View of Reading,” it states, “The Simple View of Reading is a formula based on the *widely accepted* [our emphasis] view that reading includes two basic components: decoding (word-level reading) and language comprehension. Several research studies have validated this formula” (p. 19). The literacy team who wrote this document makes a misleading claim that the SVR is widely accepted, rather than clearly indicating that it is but one school of thought that has been specifically selected from among several others for their purposes. It also neglects to mention that there is a body of research that does not validate the formula and fails to provide a rationale for why it has been chosen from the many available.

In section 5, “Objectives, Strategies, and Activities,” under objective two, it states that one state activity will be an annual literacy academy: “The Department’s literacy team will conduct an annual literacy academy *that highlights theories of language and literacy development (including brain research)* [our emphasis], effective leadership practices for furthering literacy, content elaboration and best practices for data analysis and planning instruction and intervention” (p. 38). No additional theories are discussed in the document. Again, it is misleading that brain research is

highlighted here and requires us to mention that no other theories are, in fact, stated as being included in this literacy academy.

If one ascribes to the psychological theoretical lens, it means that the reading problem resides in the individual student's head. This is a popular special education approach—to identify and fix “unsuccessful” students—which is evident in the next section having to do with language itself.

Deficit Language

The document itself is full of deficit language, language that is, in fact, common in special education. In section 3, “Why a State Comprehensive Literacy Plan is Needed,” it summarized the Ohio's comprehensive needs assessments. It states, “From birth, many of Ohio's students face challenges to achieving their full educational potential” (p. 11). So the ultimate conclusion is that we will test and fix them using an SoR approach.

Although still popular for whatever reason, (though we suggest it is because it lends credibility to the “science” lens), the medical model of diagnosis and intervention is antiquated and harmful to the teaching-learning context because it suggests something is wrong, ill, or broken. In the subsection “Educator Capacity to Provide Instruction Aligned to the Science of Reading,” it states that *Ohio's Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement* “emphasizes the need for professional learning and resources that deepen educators' understanding of how children learn to read, *diagnose* [our emphasis] why some children struggle to read, and sharpen educators' abilities to implement reading instruction and intervention that is aligned to the science of reading and culturally responsive” (p. 7). This perspective promotes a direct instruction orientation in the classroom and emphasizes the focus on transmission-oriented pedagogy that positions the educator as the more knowledgeable and powerful individual in the teaching-learning continuum. As a result, teachers are encouraged to rely on traditional methods and materials that are designed to elevate the waning skills of the “struggling” or “unsuccessful” student. It also discounts other linguistic resources

students may have—facility with other languages and privileging English. Transmission-oriented pedagogy is, in fact, the antithesis to culturally responsive pedagogy, which teaches to and through the prior knowledge, intellectual abilities, and personal and cultural strengths of students to accept the legitimacy and viability of students’ cultures in improving learning outcomes (Gay, 2018).

In the subsection “Family Partnerships,” the literacy team states that “partnering with families must *support the adult behaviors* that directly support the language and literacy skills development of children” (p. 8). This is surreptitiously alluding to the language and literacy skills development that are honored and respected in the academic setting. It suggests that those home adult behaviors that must be supported are those that represent academic practices, read as White, middle class schooling practices. Again, it is questionable whether such a perspective can lead to culturally responsive teaching, which, by its definition, honors the language and literacy skills that children and their families bring to the reading task.

In that same subsection, it recommends that schools and communities should “incorporate the interests and cultures of children and their families” (p. 8). There are expectations of a predominantly White teaching force that has yet to grapple with their own complicity in the White supremacist system of schooling being able to incorporate the interests and cultures of their BIPOC students.

In the subsection “Community Collaboration,” it states “There must be a shared understanding and mutual reinforcement efforts” (p. 8). While the intention might have been to demonstrate a collaboration, there was no recognition that community members, beyond the few “experts” on the literacy team, were asked to co-create this shared understanding. It is clear that the understanding was designed by the State, and therefore community partners will be involved in reinforcing the State’s understanding of what it means to be literate in any given setting.

Another code phrase is “on track.” For example, in section 3, “Why a State Comprehensive Literacy Plan is Needed,” it makes multiple claims of kindergartners not being on track in 2018,

stating that “more than 40,000 of Ohio’s kindergartners entered school *not on track* [our emphasis] relative to language and literacy skills, therefore, beginning a foundational year of learning already behind in language and literacy skills” (p. 12). If, in fact, these students are already behind even though they haven’t even started school, clearly the blame lies in the homes and communities from which they come. Again, we emphasize that such a stance negates culturally responsive pedagogy that the literacy team purports to embrace later in the document (p. 20). It also demonstrates a problematic linear orientation to language learning.

In that same section, the literacy team explains that the term “disadvantaged students” (p.13) is defined as economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, English learners, and those who attend high-need schools. This is all school speak for an inequitable school system. As Gorski (2018) suggests, it is important to teach educators how to “apply an equity lens to every decision we make as educators so that we disintegrate those inequities” (p. 17) by reimagining and reshaping both policy and practice. For example, he suggests the equity can be addressed in the following way:

Our first role as equity literature educators is to identify all the ways this opportunity is not equitably distributed within our spheres of influence. Perhaps your sphere of influence is a classroom. Developing equity literacy will help you identify the equity gaps, the opportunity gaps...by strengthening your ability to recognize them. It also will give you the skills to eliminate ways you might unintentionally perpetuate those gaps in your classroom (p. 26).

Moving toward equity-based educational philosophy and practice is not about creating an appearance of being fair and impartial, but about drawing attention to and removing barriers to opportunity.

Conception of Power

The conception of power in this document is clearly power from the top-down. The locus of power and control resides with the State, and it doles it out in some small ways to the local schools and agencies. All that is to say that it only does so if the schools agree to their demands regarding the adoption and application of appropriate methodology in teaching children to read. The schools

must align with the State. This supports Althusser's (1970) thought that schools function as Ideological State Apparatuses; schools reproduce the means for reproducing the conditions necessary for production, serving to transmit the values of the State, where the ideology interpolates us into understanding our situation: "Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them' (de Beauvoir, 1963, p. 34); for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated: "To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 74).

In the "Introduction," it states that "the Ohio Department of Education strives to encourage and help districts, community schools and early childhood education programs develop local plans *that align to the state's plan* and meet local needs" (p. 5). It is clear that schools have no choice in the matter. Teachers and administrators that have other plans, ascribe to another theoretical framework, thus leading them to different (evidence-based) literacy strategies, are not supported, accepted, or encouraged. In fact, this de-professionalizes teachers. Because the document, from its inception and language, presupposes that the state has the answer to all potential questions, all that is required is compliance and accountability that compliance has occurred.

It should be no surprise that support from the State is tied to money. Grants are dependent on how well a school district aligns with the State and meets the predetermined objectives, accepted methodology, and assessment measures. In section 5 "Objectives, Strategies, and Activities," one of the four objectives to achieve the plan's vision is to "provide financial support for literacy improvement efforts and help identify and implement sustainable practices" (p. 37). Moreover, in that same section, it describes that State Activities will prioritize subgrants: "Evaluate grantees based on *model implementation* [our emphasis] of evidence-based language and literacy practices for each grade band" (p. 40). There is only one model that is acceptable.

In section 7, “Ohio’s Plan for Monitoring Progress,” there is a subsection entitled “Literacy Subgrant Awardees,” which states, “Each Striving Readers subgrantee and Comprehensive Literacy State Development subgrantee is required to submit a local literacy plan aligned to Ohio’s Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement. Ohio monitors Striving Readers subgrantees using implementation rubrics based on three goals: 1. *Fidelity of implementation and plan alignment*. 2. Performance on plan goals and objectives. 3. Fiscal accountability” (p. 44). The term fidelity is problematic and should be resisted by teachers and administrators alike. It is clearly indicative of a top-down approach, where the State knows better than teachers, as well as the faulty and illogical belief in using one approach to resolve complicated issues of reading.

In section 1, “Ohio’s Theory of Action,” under subsection “Shared Leadership,” it uses the terms “shared accountability” and “targeted training and resources” (p. 6). There can be no shared accountability when one entity is coercing another to implement their program without input or collaboration. There can be no targeted training and resources if all schools are expected to abide to the plan without the buy-in and without respect for the expertise of the educators actually doing the work on a daily basis.

In the subsection “Ohio’s Need Drives Ohio’s Vision,” it states:

The data reveals the need for Ohio to build the capacity to support evidence-based language and literacy instruction at the state, regional and local levels to improve outcomes for all learners. The need applies to Ohio’s most disadvantaged learners from birth through grade 12, including students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, homeless students and students who are English learners. Each data point discussed in this section shows a significant lack of literacy achievement from birth through grade 12 (p. 17).

The State has the power to define literacy achievement, set the bar of literacy achievement, measure it, and determine that these disadvantaged learners are the problem. They have shown a “lack of achievement,” revealing the deficit lens.

In section 4, “Ohio’s Language and Literacy Vision,” it states, “Though many Ohio educators have embraced this vision and are implementing reading instruction aligned to the science

of reading, other practices not aligned with this science still are prevalent throughout Ohio’s education system” (p. 19). This implies that there is only one type of reading instruction and that there is something wrong with teachers who do not embrace this vision or the methodology associated with it. Teachers are the problem because they are not aligning their practice to the State’s vision.

In the section “Enhancing Partnerships and Collaboration of All Educators and Stakeholders to Address Inequities in Educational Experiences,” the Integrated Comprehensive Systems offers a weak and vague approach to equity. It states:

They can do so using Integrated Comprehensive Systems as an approach to grow proficiency for all learners. Integrated Comprehensive Systems are centered around four cornerstones: 1. Focusing on equity and best practices. 2. Establishing equitable structures, such as location and arrangement of students and staff. 3. Implementing change by leveraging funding and regulations to deliver service more proactively. 4. Establishing access to high-quality teaching and learning for ALL learners by developing teacher capacity (Frattura & Capper, 2014) (p. 36).

We emphasize that this is the one and only page on which the word “equity” appears in the document, but we believe that equity is the defining issue of education. What is the purpose of education if not for its ability to provide equitable opportunities and lead to personal freedom?

In the section “Ensuring Effectiveness and Improving on Strategies,” it states:

The Department [our emphasis] is investing in the identification and implementation of evidence-based language and literacy practices. Working with regional educational service centers and state support teams, *the Department* [our emphasis] is developing tiered professional learning programs for districts, schools and early childhood education programs. The tiered approach includes activities and intensive supports for districts and schools most at risk. *The Department* [our emphasis] also is enhancing Ohio’s Coaching Model to help districts and schools implement practices. Ohio plans to ensure its effectiveness through professional learning, coaching and networked improvement communities (p. 48).

We draw your attention to how many times “The Department” is used in this brief description.

There is no questioning who has the power in this document. The power belongs to the Department.

Lastly, there is a hashtag heading on each page of the plan, which is #eachchildourfuture.

We suppose the implication is that this plan is individualized to each child, although we think it

better represents the limited theoretical lens of blaming the individual student and not the inequitable systems at work in their lives. It also places the weight of the “future” on each “child,” meaning that the children, not the systems in which they operate, bear the onus of moving toward equity.

Marginalized Role of Higher education

By the demographics of the literacy team, it appears that higher education played a minor role in the creation of this document. Citing past initiatives, the report reads, “In 2017, Ohio convened a State Literacy Team comprised of birth through grade 12 stakeholders involved with birth through grade 12 literacy. The Ohio Department of Education asked its members, who have unique expertise in language and literacy content, assessment instruction, intervention, district and state professional learning design and program evaluation to develop an updated state literacy plan” (p. 4). There is no mention of theoretical expertise. The 45 people from across the state of Ohio that are listed as being part of the 2019 State Literacy included K-12 literacy specialists, preschool directors, speech pathologists, superintendents, a director from the governor’s office, a childcare policy supervisor, a principal, and a chief operating officer from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Of the 45 team members, only 3 are currently affiliated with a university. Expertise clearly leans toward practitioners, excluding a diverse group of theoreticians, researchers, and scholars who are able to provide a big picture perspective of educational systems, policies, and procedures and a more nuanced understanding of teaching and learning.

In ways that are misleading, there were strategically placed claims of partnership throughout the plan. For example, in the section “Education Capacity to Provide Instruction Aligned with the Science of Reading,” the concluding sentence is as follows: “The Department also is partnering with the Ohio Department of Higher Education and colleges and universities to enhance these areas in teacher preparation programs” (p. 7). This implies an established support of the plan, so much so that its elements are expected to be taught in teacher preparation programs. Partnering, of course,

requires the establishment of equal contributions and collaborations. This is obviously absent from the plan.

Conversely, there is blame placed on higher education. In subsection “External Evaluation of Ohio’s Early Literacy Pilot,” it states, “After the first year of this two-year training, external evaluators met with participating educators in each pilot school to hear their perspectives on the professional learning program. They found that ‘educators acknowledged the desire to include the [professional learning program’s] content in higher education coursework. Educators mentioned that *they wished they had been taught* [our emphasis] the [professional learning program’s] strategies in their undergraduate education and administrators echoed that sentiment’ (Dariotis et al., 2019)” (p. 17). If only those teacher preparation programs would teach evidenced-based literacy practices in their programs! At least those practices that align with the State.

In the subsection “Regional Literacy Network in Action: Region 15,” it states, “The targeted network audience includes superintendents, principals, literacy coaches, curriculum directors, special education directors, and higher education faculty” (p. 49). It cannot go unnoticed that higher education is mentioned last—and listed as an audience for the plan rather than a co-designer of it. Such verbiage indicates a lack of understanding about equitable processes and procedures at all layers of this plan’s inception, design, dissemination, and implementation.

Lack of Sociocultural Perspectives

The plan is rooted in and propagates literacy myths. For example, it states, “There may be no greater purpose for an education system than to provide all learners with effective evidence-based instruction to build language and literacy knowledge and skills *so they can enjoy full lives of learning and success*” [our emphasis] (p. 8). That literacy invariably results in freedom is one of the common myths about literacy. In fact, there is the erroneous belief that the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to—and invariably results in—economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility. This invests literacy with a predilection toward

social order, an elevated moral sense, and a metaphorical “state of grace.” (Arnové & Graff, 2008).

Equitable systems and structures are more likely to lead to the enjoyment of full lives of learning and success.

Culture and how literacy operates in social groups are integral to a sociocultural perspective. Culturally responsive practices, which do not align with the limited theoretical lens espoused by the plan, were first mentioned on page 7, but they were not included further or even explained until page 20 (and given less than one page in a 51-page plan). The cursory mention of teaching culturally responsive practices is representative of the time and thought given to this part of the plan.

In the subsection “Educator Capacity to Provide Instruction Aligned to the Science of Reading,” it states that the plan “emphasizes the need for professional learning and resources that deepen educators’ understanding of how children learn to read, diagnose why some children struggle to read, and sharpen educators’ abilities to implement reading instruction and intervention that is aligned to the science of reading *and culturally responsive*” [our emphasis] (p. 7). Can you have it both ways? That is to say that if one is busy diagnosing what is wrong with a student, that cannot be done in a de-contextualized culturally neutral space. This indicates a complete lack of understanding of the ways in which literacy works both in and out of academic settings and eliminates the need for understanding the connections between literacy and liberation or oppression

In section 3, “Why a State Comprehensive Literacy Plan is Needed,” it asks the reader to consider the following about Ohio children:

One-fourth of all Ohio children under age 6 live in poverty, and one-half are in families living below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (Ohio Poverty Report, 2017); Young children represent one of the fastest growing segments of Ohio’s homeless population (Ohio Housing Finance Authority, Revisiting the Silent Crisis, 2018); The number of children in the custody of Ohio’s children services agencies has been rising since 2010. More than 15,000 children were in custody in 2018 and 39 percent of those were under the age of 5 (Public Children Services Association of Ohio, 2019).

Issues of poverty and homelessness impact student learning, including learning how to read. In that same section, it then states, “The societal challenges Ohio’s students face can be seen through inequities in educational outcomes and are exacerbated by inequities in access to high-quality education” (p. 11). Not surprisingly, this access to high-quality education (or the lack thereof) is never addressed in the plan. The fact that two types of education exist—high quality and low quality—speaks to the need for a critical understanding of schooling in Ohio as well as a need to act to address it.

The section then introduces more statistics with, “Literacy inequities are visible statewide, but they are felt even more keenly in schools serving students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, referred to as “high-needs schools” (p. 11). The following statistics list the percentages of students in high-needs school, highlighting race and the fact they are English learners. Whether intentional or not, this implies that students, schools, and communities are culpable. “High-needs schools” is later defined in the document, but the root causes (i.e. inequitable school funding, redlining, segregation, and economic exploitation) are never addressed.

Moreover, there are examples of racist/classist/sexist language: “We cannot lower our expectations for any student *regardless of his or her circumstances or attributes*” [our emphasis] (p. 21). Similarly, it states, “Insufficient instruction should not be attributed to an individual educator or group of educators but is the result of a flawed system and may be the result of low expectations for *specific subgroups of learners*” [our emphasis] (p. 34). This comment is especially confusing when the first part points to a flawed system and the latter to expectations of specific groups. Perhaps it is suggesting that it is the flawed system that causes or creates these low expectations of “specific subgroups,” which can only be interpreted as poor, BIPOC students.

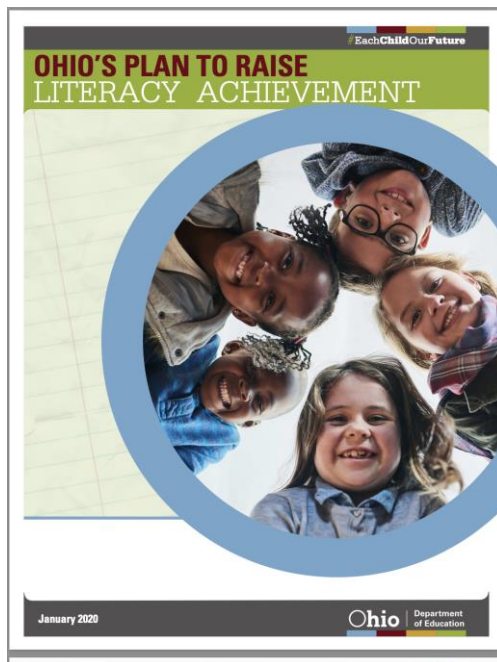
Unexpectedly, on page 23 of this document solely grounded in psychological and neuroscientific theories and practice, the literacy team cites Heath (1982), a leader in sociocultural literacy research. The inclusion does not garner too much attention, however, and her emphasis on

the importance of contextualized understanding of literacy learning and use are eliminated from serious consideration because she and her work are missing from the references. What is more, anyone familiar with the anthropological linguist Shirley Brice Heath would know the value she placed on understanding the nature of language development, the effects of oral language habits on literacy development, and the conflicts that can arise when there is a disconnect between home literacy practices and expectations of schools and workplaces. In fact, it could be said that her scholarly work is in direct opposition to the tenets of both SVR and SoR.

In the subsection “Conventional Language and Literacy,” the dependency on the NRP (p. 26) is problematic. The National Reading Panel (NRP) led a lot of literacy educators to believe that reading could be boiled down to five specific components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. But the NRP Instructional Directives were to solely consider research that was quantitative and empirical, exactly the kind the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health (NICHD) advocated and funded (Coles, 2007, 2003). This is problematic when there was no representation of qualitative research, ethnographic research, critical literacy research, research on influences “external” to the classroom that shape teaching and learning, whole language research, writing, or social process research. Grounding parts of this plan on the flawed NRP directives, and, thus, outcomes, adds to the flaws of the Ohio literacy plan.

Rhetorical Structures/Moves

The plan uses rhetorical structures and moves to manipulate the reader in a variety of ways. It provides color and graphics that imply a reader-friendly approach. The cover shows children of different races and genders looking down into a circle and smiling (Figure 1).

Figure 1*Front Cover of Literacy Plan*

In the “Introduction,” it states, “The plan is not stagnant and is a place to begin exploring dispositions and knowledge. One of the Department’s goals for the plan is to inspire educators to dig deeper, seeking opportunities to grow their knowledge, abilities, and skills *in the science of reading*” [our emphasis] (p. 5). While the beginning of this quote sounded like there was a hopeful flexibility with regard to what could evolve, the latter part showed the unwavering theoretical commitment to one specific theoretical viewpoint and subsequent pedagogical methodology.

The literacy team utilizes a sense of urgency. In section 2, “Alignment of Ohio’s Literacy Improvement Efforts,” it states, “Clear alignment of local literacy plans to other improvement activities and local improvement efforts is critical (p. 8). However, it fails to explain why the work is critical or for whom.

At the same time, the plan mentions sustainability. For example, under the section “Ohio’s State Personnel Development Grant,” one of the current concepts is “a systematic approach to build capacity and increase sustainability beyond the life of the project” (p. 10). One may wonder how the

literacy team knows or can predict that the plan is effective and, therefore, worthy of being sustained.

There are cursory mentions of equity that fail to take any accountability for the design and maintenance of these inequities. For example, in the subsection “Birth Through Kindergarten Entry,” it states, “Children in high-quality rated early childhood education programs perform significantly better on Ohio’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment than their peers, specifically on language and literacy (Compass Evaluation and Research, 2017)” (p. 12). There is no mention of who has access to high-quality rated early childhood education programs or how the State might resolve that issue of access (beyond testing, of course).

In that same section, it states, “More than 380,000 students were not proficient on Ohio’s English language arts tests in grades 3 through 8 and high school, including more than 50,000 (38.9 percent) of Ohio’s third-graders” (p. 12). There is no mention of possible issues with the test itself, like test-bias, nor any mention of who determined the content of that test. It is assumed that one test score is indicative of the failure of the students and schools.

Most problematic was the section on Root Cause Analysis (pp. 13-14), which does not mention poverty, systemic economic injustices, gender/race/class oppressions, and instead blames (in this order) students, schools, teachers, administrators, and families. In fact, the purpose is described as this: “A root cause analysis is a structured, facilitated team process aimed at identifying breakdowns in processes and systems that result in undesirable outcomes, such as low literacy achievement. The purpose of a root cause analysis is to find out what happened, why it happened, and determine what changes need to be made” (p. 13). The blame is centered on a breakdown of processes and systems rather than on inequitable processes and systems themselves.

The document provides quotes, graphically displayed in blocks to the side like in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Quote Sample

#EachChildOurFuture

Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice

“There is intense public interest in questions surrounding how children learn to read and how they can best be taught. Research in psychological science has provided answers to many of these questions but, somewhat surprisingly, this research has been slow to make inroads into educational policy and practice.”

-Castles, 2018

In 2018, the Department made a commitment to use Gough and Tunmer’s (1986) Simple View of Reading and other models supported by cognitive science, neuroscience and education research to promote child literacy statewide. Though many Ohio educators have embraced this vision and are implementing reading instruction aligned to the science of reading, other practices not aligned with this science still are prevalent throughout Ohio’s education system. With State Literacy Team guidance, the Department has enhanced Ohio’s language and literacy vision to provide specific support for districts and schools using evidence-based instruction.

Research indicates there are two chief reasons why the shift to the Simple View of Reading and similar models may be difficult:

1. Often educators misperceive that the science of reading, including the use of the Simple View of Reading as a framework to represent this science, as focused on phonics instruction alone.
2. Educators often are not told why this instruction aligned to the science of reading is so critical for developing a proficient reader’s brain (Castles, et al., 2018).

Another quote by “Dehaene, a Cognitive Neuroscientist,” states, “My firm conviction is that every teacher should have some notion of how reading operates in the child’s brain” (p. 19). These quotes are removed from their larger context and placed next to the text of the plan, being utilized for the purpose of creating visceral, even incendiary, responses from the reader. This purposeful placement can and does detract from the logical evaluation of the information contained within the document itself.

Strategically, there was a fascinating rhetorical move used so that the reader would accept their assumptions. It states:

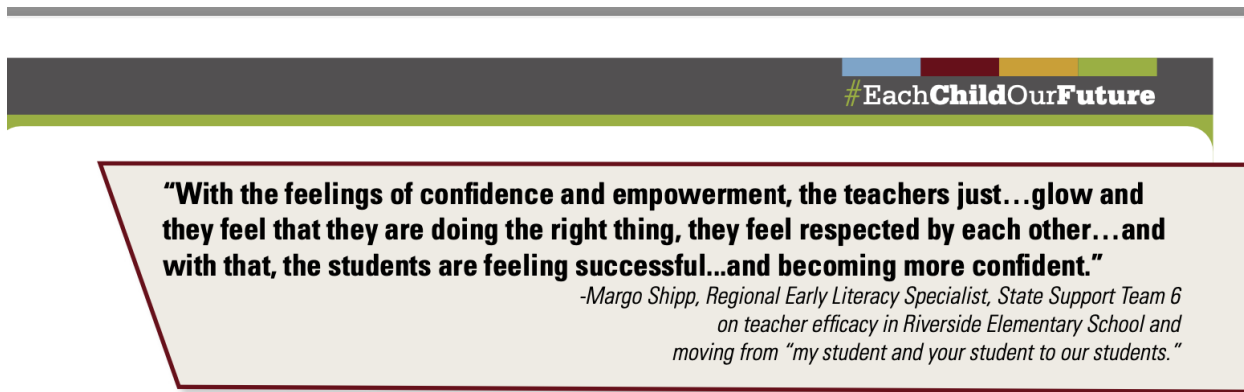
As you read the remaining portions of this section, *please visualize a current learner* [our emphasis]. The age or grade of the learner is not important as learning to read and attaining language and literacy skills is critical at all ages and grade bands. As you read through the following segments, determine possible next steps in meeting the needs of a learner to increase language and literacy achievement” (p. 19).

If the reader just visualizes a learner, then they will see the wisdom of this plan regardless of the nature of that learner, the context in which the learner is learning, and the systems, institutions, and processes in place in the lived experience of the learner.

The literacy team also utilizes testimonials to convince the reader how this plan is already benefitting teachers. One example can be found in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Testimonial Sample



Testimonials, such as teacher voices, are used to lend credibility to their claims made in the literacy plan.

Not unexpectedly, the document also includes anti-teacher rhetoric. For example, it states:

Research indicates there are two chief reasons why the shift to the Simple View of Reading and similar models may be difficult: 1. *Often educators misperceive* [our emphasis] that the science of reading, including the use of the Simple View of Reading as a framework to represent this science, as focused on phonics instruction alone. 2. *Educators often are not told* [our emphasis] why this instruction aligned to the science of reading is so critical for developing a proficient reader’s brain (Castles, et al., 2018) (p. 19).

This implies that teachers haven’t shifted because they just do not understand the “science” behind the SoR, rather than the possibility that teachers are resistant to it as knowing, transformative intellectuals with the agency to disagree. It also implies that educators have to be told why it aligns, rather than trusting in their own knowledge, understanding, experience, and practice. This again de-professionalizes teachers.

Evidentiary Issues

Ironically what counts as evidence is up for question in this document. First, they do not provide a definition of “evidence-based” in the plan until the final pages of the document:

Evidence-based strategies are programs, practices or activities that have been evaluated and proven to improve student outcomes. The term “evidence-based” appeared extensively in the Every Student Succeeds Act. The federal government’s emphasis on using evidence confirms its belief in the importance of making decisions based on rigorous evaluation (p. 45).

The citing of the federal government adds weight to the use in the State plan, adding to the top-down, authoritarian feel of the plan as well as the desire to lend credibility to the team’s decision.

Interestingly, the report distinguishes between evidence-based and research-based. This move differentiates evidence from research, which from a scholarly perspective is problematic.

A program or strategy—especially if it is newly developed—may be research-based but not meet the formal definitions of evidence-based. For a strategy to be considered “evidence-based,” its efficacy must have been evaluated by someone other than just the people or organizations that developed the strategy” (p. 45).

The term “research-based” implies scholarly work completed via qualitative or quantitative science methods; evidence-based implies data (statistics and “numbers”) collected in the field via praxis.

While both work in tandem and cross boundaries, it is important to note that such rhetoric privileges practice over theory, rather than allowing them to naturally intersect. Negating the significance of theory (or focusing on a single one) is yet another way to stifle dissenting views that may actually lend credence to other, possibly conflicting, points of view.

Moreover, in the subsection “Convergence of Evidence for Learning to Read (The Science of Reading),” it states:

Neuroscience now is confirming what educational and psychological research has revealed in the past 20-30 years about how individuals learn to read. Scientists now can explain how the brain works when an individual is reading and what the brain needs to transform itself from a nonreading brain to a reading brain. This information comes from studying functional MRIs of the human brain and confirms the research that supports explicit, systematic instruction in components of reading instruction outlined by the National Reading Panel (2000). Evidence converging from several fields, including psychology, education, linguistics and neuroscience, overwhelmingly aligns. Ohio plans to continue learning from this body of research to help develop and update the resources and support available to Ohio educators to improve the literacy of its children (p. 46).

The long section supporting neuroscience is followed by the quote in Figure 4:

Figure 4

Quote Sample

“It is simply not true that there are hundreds of ways to learn to read... when it comes to reading we all have roughly the same brain that imposes the same constraints and the same learning sequence”

-Dehaene, 2010

This section followed by the quote is misleading. First, the paragraph is introduced with equating Learning to Read with The Science of Reading with little to no evidence of how they are one and the same, or how they interact or overlap. Second, while research has been conducted, the quote indicated here is meant to convince the reader that in 2010, we learned all there was to know about the brain and how it understands written language. Third, the NRP has been justifiably critiqued for decades in its design, implementation, and findings (Coles, 2007, 2003; Yatvin, 2002).

Accountability systems and report cards are cited as the data. Specifically, only test scores count as evidence of student learning. For example, in section 6, “Measuring Success,” the final data sources:

Ohio has developed a standards-aligned system of assessments that measures language and literacy development and outcomes using the following: Early Learning Assessment for preschool-age children; Kindergarten Readiness Assessment for learners entering kindergarten; K-3 reading diagnostic assessments used to screen students in kindergarten-grade 3 for reading difficulties; Ohio’s State Tests in English Language Arts for grades 3-8; and High school end-of-course exams in English language arts (p. 9).

This choice to depend on student test scores not only feeds the beast of high-stakes standardized tests (and monetarily benefits those who design and score them), but it also privileges quantitative

data over qualitative data, thereby providing only a snapshot of student literacy learning. Although the plan claims it is using both qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate its effectiveness, *every* measure of student learning is based on test scores. All of these are test scores which are designed to measure very narrow and specific skills related to the task of reading.

According to Kozol (Keeble, 2001), “All education, unless it is hopelessly boring and irrelevant, is political. People are taught to read and write so that they will vote by uniform stimuli, read orders, and buy in predictable patterns in response to calculated methods of appeal; or else they learn to read and write in order to strive, in one way or another, for an ethical, idealistic, or emancipating goal.” (p. 46). In fact, while literacy education can be used for domestication or liberation, critical pedagogy works to liberate.

Critical Approach

The work of critical pedagogy is founded in hope, which is crucial for today. In fact, Kress and Lake (2013) define radical hope as “a refusal to accept the world, with all its pain and ugliness, as it is. Yet, at the same time, it carries with it a responsibility to act upon our desire for a different future” (p. xiv). Shouldering the responsibility to act upon injustices in order to change the status quo is why critical pedagogy is part of the democratic project. Perhaps nothing is more important in our current political and educational context as encouraging the critical analysis through critical literacies as enveloped by a true critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogues educate to liberate, which means including the voices of those we serve in the conversation and challenging dominant paradigms. We hope to problematize the dominant paradigm of reading science. Reading science, by definition, suggests a prescriptive, “data-based” system of standards and assessments that remains devoid of an understanding of sociocultural relevance, student motivation and interest, and fails to fully address its own “root cause analysis” of “learners who start behind, stay behind.” As Coles (2007) has indicated, “forging facts to ‘prove’ a predetermined ‘scientific’ explanation is an enduring stratagem.” It leads to a skills-heavy

instructional perspective, complete with “rigidly sequential, tightly administered, and moving from small parts of language to larger ones” (p. 29) and suggests that this is the type of teaching that is most effective in the teaching of children, especially for poor, marginalized, or disadvantaged ones. In short, while there are multiple theories of reading that focus on validating students’ experiences and perspectives, the Simple View of Reading is not one of them. Our critique here can point the reader in a different direction. We cannot simply say we disagree and problematize the State literacy plan without offering an alternative way to conceive of learning to read.

Conclusion

Literacy teachers, like their students, should investigate the world and critically think about it in a way that informs how they navigate the world and impact change in the world. We endorse the perspective of Tracey and Morrow (2017) who indicate that “the field of literacy learning seemed to have passed beyond the search for a single theory or model of reading that could comprehensively explain all the phenomena” (p. 11). The suggestion by *Ohio’s Plan to Raise Literacy Achievement* to utilize a reading science orientation and heavy reliance on the Simple View of Reading negates what is embraced by most literacy researchers and teacher educators in the academy. We know that there are instructional decisions that we can make in teacher education so that our preservice and inservice students critically read *Ohio’s Plan* and think about it in a way that informs how they navigate their curriculum, their classrooms, and the field of education, impacting change in the world.

If education is an opportunity to empower students with different backgrounds, then we must move beyond the “one size fits all” mentality of state legislators who create such plans and appear to ignore the fact that “good practice can be grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks” (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 13) and that, as Gee suggests, the idea that there is a prescriptive solution to reading difficulties ignores the fact that “almost all children—including poor children—have impressive language abilities (Gee, 2007, p. 15) that can, and should, be tapped into through

larger language development processes, and not just reading instruction designed as “remediation.” Equipping educators with a tool kit that embraces a wide range of theoretical lenses and corresponding pedagogical methods empowers them to make decisions like the professionals they are trained to be. What is more, it allows educators to embrace the funds of knowledge that their students bring to every literacy task, thereby privileging not only the dominant way of knowing, doing, reading, writing, speaking, and thinking, but promoting equitable access to literacy production and consumption for all children.

The potential to change the world lies in education, and it fits nicely in ELA classrooms. “[T]he language arts classroom perhaps takes pride of place among those educational spaces that can best potentially foreground the relationship of language to power and recognize the importance of a critical consciousness toward language” (Hull, 2010, pp. xi). The classroom is a place to demonstrate the relationship between power and literacy as well as the power of literacy itself. How, when, and why the state chooses to impact classrooms, requires constant awareness and a critical lens.

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Appendix A
*Articles Reviewed **

Article	Authors	Purpose	Support	Critique
<p>“The Science of Reading Progresses: Communicating Advances Beyond the Simple View of Reading”</p>	<p>Nell Duke and Kelly Cartwright</p>	<p>Synthesis of research on three advances since SVR. (1) Reading difficulties have a number of causes, not all of which fall under decoding and/or listening comprehension as posited in the simple view; (2) rather than influencing reading solely independently, as conceived in the simple view, decoding and listening comprehension overlap in important ways; and (3) there are many contributors to reading not named in the simple view, such as active, self-regulatory processes, that play a substantial role in reading.</p>	<p>The authors utilize SVR as a point of understanding advances since the development of the theory. In effect, it contradicts some aspects and offers additional understandings, but does not refute the theory as a whole, concurrently utilizing the “science of reading” moniker.</p>	<p>The critique suggests that decoding and language comprehension are not separate, but overlap in several important ways. There are other aspects of reading “functioning” that should be included in the SVR, which include reading fluency, vocabulary, morphological awareness, and several aspects of executive functioning. Offers the Active View of Reading model. SVR is limited – texts, tasks and sociocultural context impact.</p>
<p>“The Science of Reading: Supports, Critiques, and Questions”</p>	<p>Amanda Goodwin and Robert T. Jimenez</p>	<p>The article outlines a definition of SOR and how it is interpreted narrowly and broadly</p>	<p>A list of research articles is provided that outline a more comprehensive view of reading with critiques</p>	<p>The authors make the point that their project was never to decide the “right” side of the debate about SVR but to</p>

		<p>throughout the literacy community. It is an attempt to clarify what is meant by the “science of reading.” It is a compilation of the information gathered for the special issue of <i>RRQ</i>. It indicates its goal is neither to support nor criticize, but to help define it.</p>	<p>and support of SOR. Multiple studies focus on deepening our understanding of what typically is seen as the core of the SoR: phonics instruction.</p>	<p>offer information so consumers can make up their own minds. The articles selected in the appendix aim to examine SOR and the authors suggest that the lenses related to equity and social justice should be central when investigating and considering SoR. The articles add critical perspective to the conversation, which can lead to next steps in the field (p. 57).</p>
<p>“The Simple View of Reading: Three Assessments of Its Adequacy”</p>	<p>Wesley Hoover and William E. Tunmer</p>	<p>This article provides an overview of SVR as a conceptual model for reading as well as what it is not. Three additional studies addressing assessments of the adequacy of SVR are reviewed as well as educational implications.</p>	<p>The Simple View of Reading states that reading comprehension is determined by decoding and language comprehension. Three studies with different models are used in comparison to the SVR model.</p>	<p>Three studies used the same variables to assess the efficacy of SVR at Pre-K and through fifth grade. The authors conclude with several supports of SVR but that there is much more to understand about reading than what is represented in the SVR and we need to look at more models.</p>
<p>“Critical Issues in the Science of Reading: Striving for a Wide-Angle View in Research:</p>	<p>James Hoffman Sonia Q. Cabell Sandra Barrueco Etta R. Hollins P. David Pearson</p>	<p>The report reflects a panel discussion at the 2020 Literacy Research Conference on</p>	<p>The panel recognizes that over the last several years the rise of the science of</p>	<p>The five panelists explain in detail why a broader perspective is needed to fully understand the</p>

Prepublication Draft, 2021 LRA Yearbook”		the Science of Reading. The presenters take a critical stance on expanding the lens for understanding the science of reading and its implications. Attempts to define more closely the “scientific” aspects of SoR.	reading has caused confusion in the field of reading research and practices. A narrow view of reading is challenged in the discussions. It does not directly offer support but considers SoR as one of many tools for understanding the mechanisms of reading for the purpose of instruction.	complexities of reading. Simplifying reading to a formula of reading equals decoding X linguistic comprehension ignores the many other factors that contribute to reading. It looks at the dehumanizing effects of SoR definitions and practices and advocates for the inclusion of listening comprehension, increase in content and background knowledge, funds of knowledge brought to literacy tasks by students, awareness of diverse learners, consideration of the narrow interpretations used in teacher preparation programs, and disparities in learning outcomes for underserved groups.
“Decoding, Reading, and Reading Disability”	Philip Gough and William Tunmer	The article clarifies the role of decoding and linguistic comprehension and three	Provides brief examples that support the SVR model	The article is limited in scope and review of other factors that contribute to reading.

		implications for reading disability: dyslexia, hyperplexia, and garden variety reading disability		They limited the support of SVR to three areas of reading disability – dyslexia, hyperplexia and garden variety. This notes how this narrow view ignores other factors.
“Resisting Positionings of Struggle in ‘Science of Teaching Reading’ Discourse: Counterstories of Teachers and Teacher Education”	Melissa Wetzel Allison Skerrett Beth Maloch Tracey Flores Myra Infante-Sheridan Jessica Murdter-Atkinson Vickie Charlene-Godfrey Allie Duffy	The authors provide an overview of how teachers in Texas are exceeding expectations through a social justice focused perspective on readers and reading and provide insights on the narrow view of the Science of Teaching Reading (STR). The overview of the narratives drawn on to position teachers and teacher educators to argue for the inclusion of professionals using anti-oppressive and contextualized professional knowledge and practices, in direct contradiction to the Pearson Education draft of the Science of Teaching Reading	Texas mandated training in the science of reading for teachers and teacher preparation programs. This article does not offer support.	During the teacher training many participants challenged direct instruction and the deficit views of language and culture and sought to discuss the content of the program. They present counter narratives to represent alternative positionings to teacher struggle in narratives connected to and silenced by the STR. These include building tool kits, not programs; providing alternative spaces for teacher learning; and curriculum redesign.

		Examination Framework for Texas.		
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* The articles were selected and reviewed because they are relevant to the critique of Ohio's Literacy Plan. They provide an overview of the Simple View of Reading as well as alternative possibilities for fully understanding the complexities of reading.

Connecting Through Critical Conversations: Using Socratic Circles to Link Social Emotional Learning and Literacy Education

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of the implementation process that was used to engage teacher candidates in a five-week Socratic Circle discussion of a common read focused on literacy education in the 21st century classroom. Excerpts from the teacher candidates' weekly written reflections are shared, as well as the links that were made between literacy education practices and the core tenets of the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development's "Whole Child Approach." Additionally, outcomes from this authentic experience within an adolescent literacy course are discussed, including how the pedagogical structuring of course assignments in a literacy methods course has the potential to contribute positively to the balancing of the cognitive and social emotional learning domains in teacher candidates' future classrooms.

During the Fall 2020 and 2021 semesters, an action research study was conducted in a pedagogically restructured literacy methods course that sought to link social emotional learning and literacy through critical conversations. The participants in the course were teacher candidates pursuing Middle Childhood Education and Adolescent/Young Adult Education-Integrated Language Arts teaching fields, enrolled in a teacher education program at a private, liberal arts university in the Midwest. Through the restructuring of the course, which included dialogic engagement of the teacher candidates in the practice of Socratic Circles, connections were made regarding the teaching and learning of the cognitive and social emotional learning domains in literacy education.

Throughout the history of education, cognitive and social emotional learning have been viewed as a dichotomy, in which the emphasis of one learning domain took precedence over the other. Typically, the cognitive learning domain, which centers on the knowledge and skills needed by students to successfully understand content, has been emphasized in K-12 classrooms across the nation. Thus, the focus on content and pedagogical knowledge has been at the forefront of the conceptual frameworks of most undergraduate teacher education programs (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005). However, teacher candidates' attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are the hallmarks of the affective learning domain are equally important in the "whole child" pedagogy movement, which is pervading today's classrooms and curriculum due to an increased focus on social emotional learning. Therefore, "cognitive and social-emotional learning are actually two parts of a whole that cannot be separated from each other" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 5).

Social emotional learning (SEL) is defined as follows:

The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Although this definition is often geared towards the K-12 students, it is indeed a call for adults, as well, who will educate our children. (CASAL, 2017).

Therefore, the charge for teachers to be knowledgeable of SEL practices must now begin in teacher education programs. Moreover, it is imperative that teacher candidates not only understand the importance of the affective learning domain, but also are provided with opportunities within the university classroom to engage in authentic experiences that explore the core tenets of SEL within a content area.

The adoption of Social Emotional Learning Standards by the state of Ohio in June 2019 identified social emotional learning as one of four “learning domains” that now guide the curriculum in classrooms across the state and in states across the country who have adopted similar standards (O’Donnell, 2019). These standards are based upon the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development’s (ASCD) “Whole Child Approach,” which is “an effort to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children” (ASCD, 2019). ASCD has identified five core tenets that must guide SEL learning: health, safety, engagement, support, and challenge.

Methods

Socratic Circles

Socratic Circle discussions within a literacy methods course during the Fall 2020 and 2021 semesters was used to gauge its contributions to teacher candidates’ cognitive and social emotional learning. The use of Socratic Circles within the classroom has traditionally been associated with critical thinking. Based upon the work of the Greek philosopher, Socrates, Socratic Circles involve the practice of questioning, discussion, and ultimately discovery (Copeland, 2005). Most often, students are engaged in the discussion of a topic and/or text and participate in some or all six types of Socratic questions: clarifying thinking and understanding, challenging assumptions, examining evidence and rationale, considering alternative perspectives, considering implications and consequences, and meta questioning. However, after using Socratic Circles in previous semesters and seeing positive social emotional parallels, the instructor sought to determine if this strategy

could actually serve a dual role in the university classroom and contribute to benefits in both cognitive and social emotional learning.

Social emotional learning is most effective when it is integrated within an academic content area. Through effective planning, SEL tenets can be embedded within the curriculum, in which both cognitive and SEL objectives are met within an educational experience. By embedding SEL and literacy objectives within the Socratic Circle discussions, the instructor sought to foster an academic mindset in her teacher candidates, increase interactive learning in the university classroom, and promote the teacher candidates' voices through dialogic engagement (Schlund, 2019).

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

- What is the effect of Socratic Circle discussions on teacher candidates' cognitive learning in a literacy methods course?
- What is the effect of Socratic Circle discussions on teacher candidates' social emotional learning in a literacy methods course?

Course

Literacy Instruction with Adolescents is a required methods course taken by teacher candidates in Middle Childhood Education pursuing two of the following teaching fields (language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies) and Adolescent Young Adult-Integrated Language Arts majors. The majority of the teacher candidates enrolled in the fall courses were juniors in their teacher education programs and had varied backgrounds and beliefs regarding literacy as expressed through literacy narratives completed at the beginning of the semester. In addition to attending class on campus, the teacher candidates were required to complete a 25-hour field experience in a middle or high school language arts classroom throughout the semester.

Data was collected from 22 teacher candidates who completed the course in the Fall 2020 or 2021 semesters and participated in the five-week Socratic Circle strategy. Table 1 indicates the teacher candidates' teaching fields each semester.

Table 1: *Teacher Candidates' Teaching Fields*

Teaching Fields	Fall 2020 N=14	Fall 2021 N=8
MCE: Language Arts/ Social Studies	1	0
MCE: Language Arts/ Mathematics	2	1
MCE: Language Arts/ Science	0	1
MCE: Mathematics/Social Studies	0	1
MCE: Mathematics/Science	6	0
MCE: Science/Social Studies	2	0
AYA: Integrated Language Arts	3	5

The teacher candidates were introduced to the concept of Socratic Circles during the fourth week of the Fall 2020 and 2021 semesters. The discussion strategy was defined for the teacher candidates and an overview was provided regarding the process of participating in the Inner and Outer Circle configurations. The Socratic Circle strategy was rather new to each semester of teacher candidates. In the Fall 2020 class, only one teacher candidate had participated in this discussion strategy in high school. In the Fall 2021 class, three teacher candidates had participated in a Socratic Circle discussion in either high school or at the university level.

The class was also introduced to Kelly Gallagher's (2009) *Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You can Do About It*, which was selected by the instructor as a common read. The teacher candidates were encouraged to read and prepare for the Socratic Circle discussions in any manner they chose. Some common preparation methods included highlighting, annotating, and notetaking. Teacher candidates were able to have their books and notes available to them throughout the Socratic Circle discussions.

Readicide is a professional text written by Kelly Gallagher, a high school English teacher, consultant, and author. Gallagher coined the term “readicide” and defined it as “the systematic killing of the love of reading often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 2). Throughout the five-chapter text, Gallagher shares his thoughts on standardized testing, overteaching and underteaching texts, and attempting to find the “sweet spot” of instruction.

Meeting Structure

The Socratic Circles took place within the university classroom during weeks 5-9 of the semester based on the weekly discussion of one chapter of the text. Each week, the teacher candidates were randomly divided into members of the Inner and Outer Circles. The members of the Inner Circle arranged the classroom furniture to form a circle, while those in the Outer Circle sat around the perimeter of the classroom. The Inner Circle members were given a prompt by the instructor to start the conversation. The prompts used to initiate the dialogue by the instructor are listed in Table 2. The conversation was free to flow in any direction the members saw fit. The members of the Outer Circle were silent observers who completed a Socratic Circle Feedback Form based upon their observations of the Inner Circle conversations.

After fifteen minutes of discussion, timed by the instructor, the Outer Circle members provided feedback to the Inner Circle. They noted interesting conversations, key takeaways, and suggestions using their Socratic Circle Feedback Form as a guide. Then, the groups switched with the Inner Circle becoming the new Outer Circle and vice versa. The new Inner Circle was presented with a different prompt to spark conversation of the text again. The format continued in the same manner for each of the five weekly sessions.

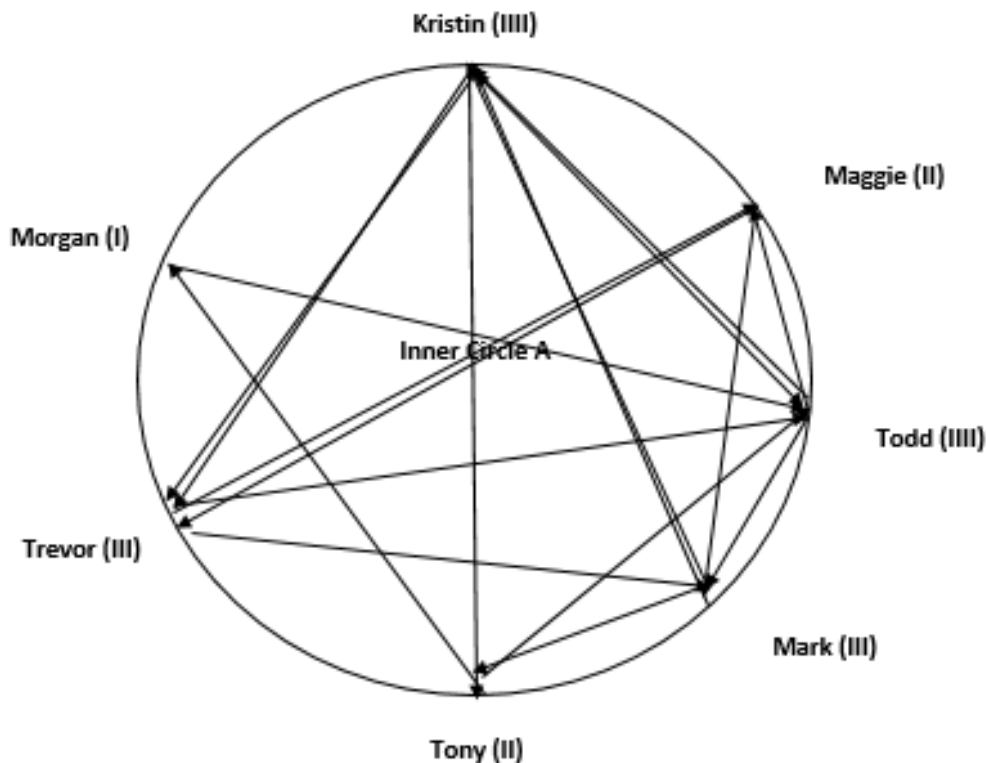
Table 2: *Weekly Socratic Circle Prompts*

Week	<i>Readicide</i> Chapter	Prompt
1	1: “The Elephant in the Room”	A: According to Gallagher’s definition of “readicide,” “the systematic killing of the love of reading often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools,” do you think this is really a problem in today’s classrooms? Explain.
		B: What does it mean when a school says it values reading? How do the school’s practices promote its value?
2	2: “Endangered Minds”	A: What steps need to be taken by teachers and schools to broaden students’ “reading windows”?
		B: How can teachers realistically immerse their students in a “book flood” of high interest reading materials?
3	3: “Avoiding the Tsunami”	A: Gallagher states, “Young readers are drowning in a sea of sticky notes, marginalia, and double-entry journals, and as a result, their love of reading is being killed in the one place where the nourishment of a reading habit should be occurring in school” (p. 9). Do you agree or disagree with Gallagher’s thoughts on overteaching texts? Why?
		B: How can teachers hold students accountable for recreational reading? Should recreational reading be a part of the curriculum?
4	4: “Finding the ‘Sweet Spot’ of Instruction”	A: What is the “sweet spot” of instruction? How can teachers help students find it?
		B: How does “underteaching” a book lead to readicide?
5	5: “Ending Readicide”	A: What will you personally do as a future teacher to “take students off the road to readicide”?
		B: What are some of your main takeaways from the text?

Instructor's Role

The instructor served as the facilitator throughout each round of the Socratic Circle discussions. After providing the prompt to each Inner Circle, the instructor remained silent and tracked the conversation of each group. The conversation tracking occurred by using a combination of a “mapmaker” and “scorekeeper” tally sheet, as indicated in Figure 1. The mapmaker component tracked the flow of conversation in each Inner Circle. The scorekeeper component tallied the number of responses that were made by each member during the Socratic Circle discussion (Copeland, 2005). The teacher candidates were encouraged to participate at least once during each Inner and Outer Circle discussion. Additionally, key comments and takeaways were noted that were then categorized into the six types of Socratic Circle questions.

Figure 1: *Conversation Tracker*



Teacher Candidates' Reflections

After each round of Socratic Circles, the teacher candidates were required to submit a Socratic Circle Performance Reflection Form. The form asked the teacher candidates to reflect on their individual and collective participation in the weekly experience. The forms were collected and read by the instructor, who then shared an overview of the feedback with the class in order to encourage deeper and more meaningful conversations for each subsequent chapter. Table 3 represents the feedback that was shared in the Fall 2020 semester after the first week of implementing Socratic Circles.

Table 3: *Week 1 Instructor Feedback*

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared with reading and notes • Strong participation in Inner Circles • Followed guidelines of Socratic Circle Discussion (active participants, engaged observers, respectful of speakers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase participation of all group members • Make greater connections to text (cite textual evidence to support text-to-self connections) • Pose new questions and/or share quotes from the text to keep the conversation flowing.

Teacher candidate Kristin shared her thoughts on her preparation and participation in Week 1 of the experience. Many teacher candidates gave themselves a numerical rating on a 1-10 scale, although that was neither required nor recommended. However, it seemed to provide the teacher candidates with a way to quantify their engagement in the Socratic Circle discussion. Kristin stated:

I would rate my preparation for this Socratic Circle with an eight out of ten because I used notecards as I was reading to take note of significant direct quotations from *Redicide*, summarized sections of the text, and asked further questions about issues Kelly Gallagher presented. I also read the introduction and Chapter 1 over a period of a few days, so I would not feel rushed while reading and have plenty of time to reflect on Gallagher's claims.

I would only rate my contributions to the Inner Circle's conversation to be a four out of ten, since I did not use any of the notes and questions planned in favor of just going along with the rest of the group's personal stories from their middle and high

school years. I did speak on multiple occasions but not up to the quality I had been anticipating. I wanted to talk more about the Page Paradox and ethnic learning gaps but wound up playing it safe by going with the group.

As the teacher candidates became more comfortable with the text and the process, they began to reflect more deeply on Gallagher’s message and their contributions to the dialogue that took place within the circle. The Week 3 reflection shared by teacher candidate Morgan demonstrated her challenges with the concepts discussed in the third chapter of the text, and the role she played in advancing the discussion. Morgan shared:

I was unsure about my understanding of the chapter for the Socratic Circles this past week. Typically, I agree with Gallagher’s commentary and can expound upon his ideas with my own thoughts. However, this chapter challenged my personal beliefs about how to support student reading. In my opinion, quizzes, marginalia, and text annotations are ESSENTIAL to building comprehension and checking for student reading. I had intended to remain in a supporting role for this circle, but I could not hold back my questions and challenges to my peer’s acceptance of Gallagher’s arguments. I unintentionally played devil’s advocate during this circle, but I honestly believed in my thoughts on Gallagher’s criticism of these methods of supporting comprehension. In the Outer Circle, I continued my personal practice of praising others who did well and supported their group. For our next Socratic Circle, I hope to reflect more on my experiences in life and the field to support my text-based assertions.

At the end of the experience, the teacher candidates were asked to complete a final reflection about their thoughts on the Socratic Circle experience, as well as their views on implementing this strategy in future field experiences and classes. Teacher candidate Morgan shared the following reflection:

I was very excited about participating in a Socratic Circle discussion. I thought it was an interesting challenge, and it also presented a text in a fresh way. At the beginning, I was unsure of my role within the circle, but enjoyed watching our discussions evolve. I think we grew as a class and appreciated the opportunity to practice discussion leading skills.

I am definitely planning on using Socratic Circles in my future classroom. While I will obviously use S.C. in my language arts classroom, I am intrigued by its potential in the social studies classroom. It would be an excellent way to explore a current events article without inviting teacher bias.

In addition to the teacher candidates’ reflections on their participation in the Socratic Circle discussions of Gallagher’s *Readicide*, the teacher candidates were also asked to complete a Google

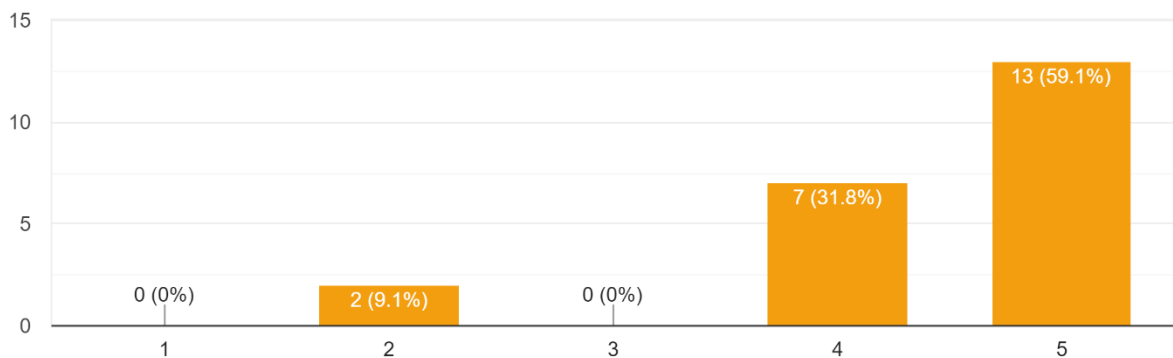
Forms Socratic Circle survey at the end of the five-week experience that was created by the instructor. Using a Likert scale (1=strongly disagree-5=strongly agree), the teacher candidates were asked to respond to ten questions that focused on the cognitive and social emotional learning aspects of the strategy.

The following graphs indicate the questions and responses provided by the teacher candidates from both the Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 semesters.

Question 1

Participating in Socratic Circles challenged me in an appropriate way.

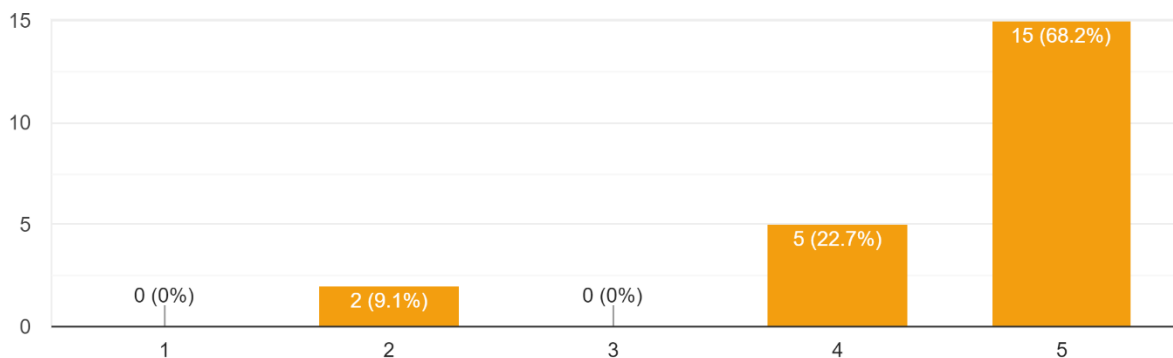
22 responses



Question 2

Participating in Socratic Circles gave me a "voice" in the university classroom.

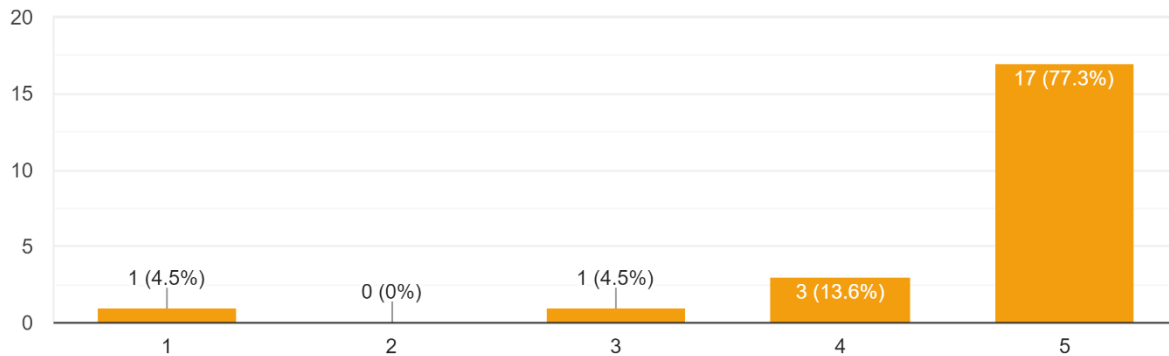
22 responses



Question 3

Socratic Circles contributed to a positive learning community in the university classroom.

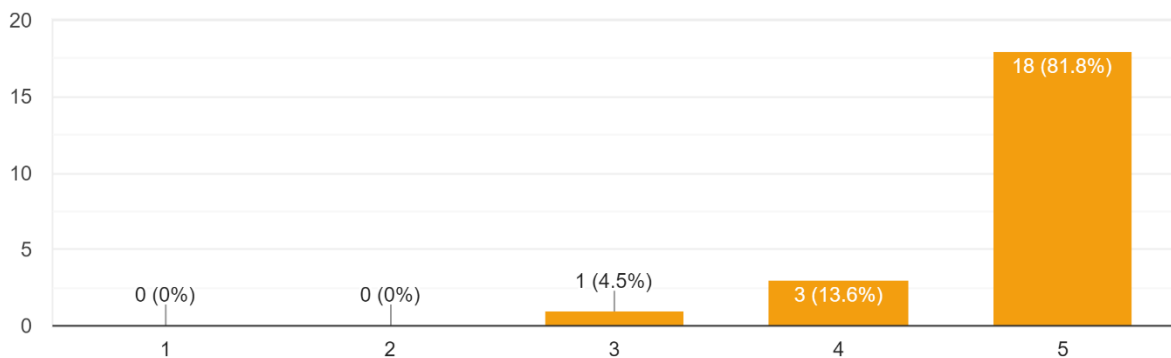
22 responses



Question 4

Socratic Circles were a positive, student-centered approach to teaching and learning.

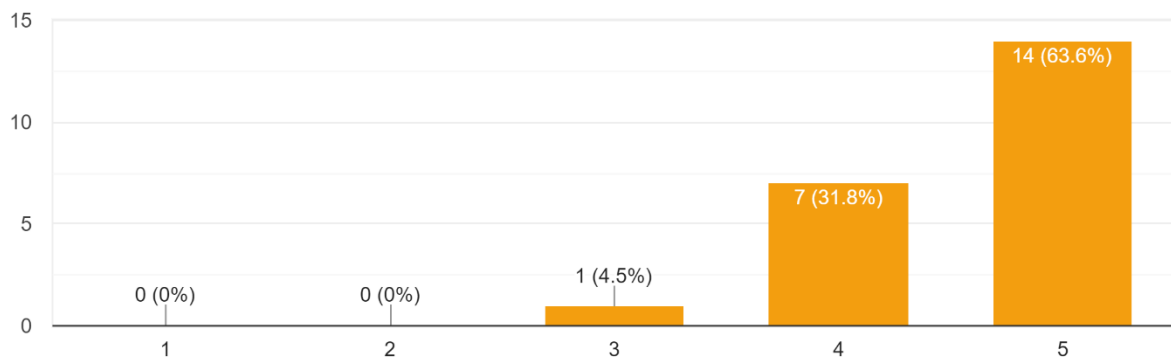
22 responses



Question 5

I felt emotionally safe to share my views with my peers during Socratic Circles.

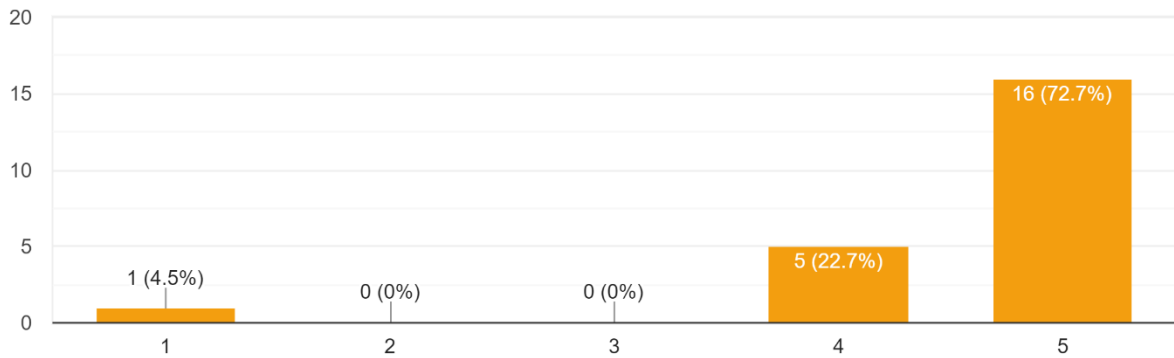
22 responses



Question 6

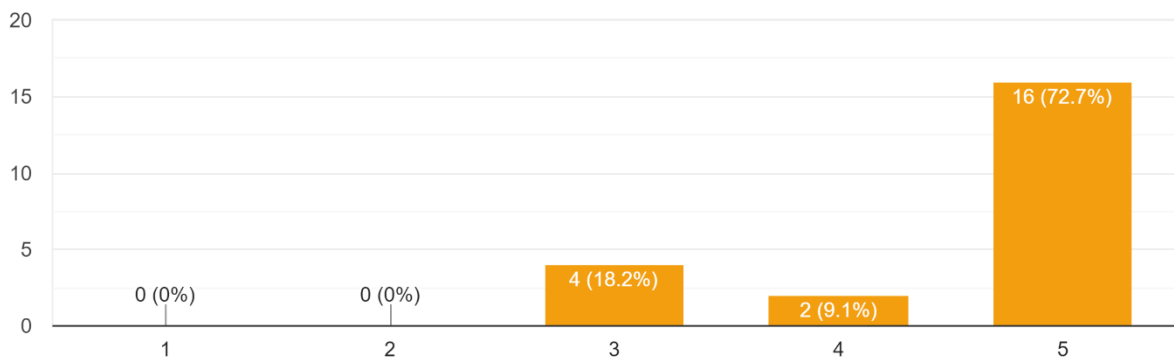
Socratic Circles increased my engagement in the university classroom.

22 responses

**Question 7**

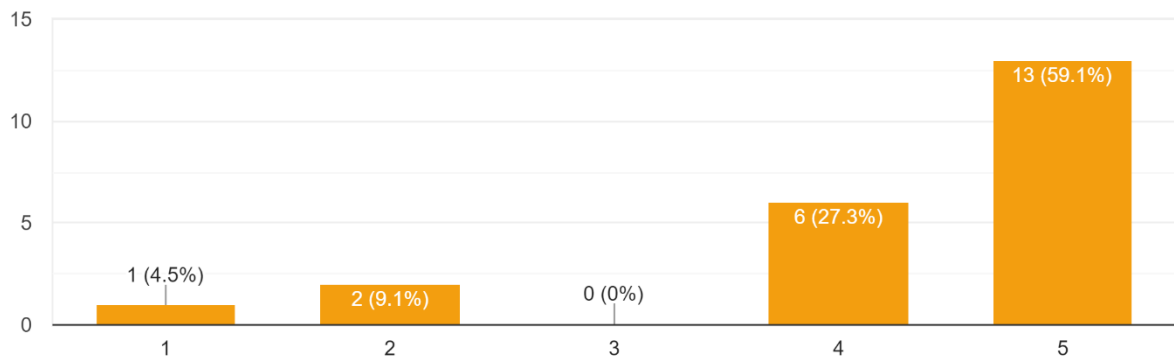
I would like to implement Socratic Circles in my future middle or high school classroom (language arts or other content areas).

22 responses

**Question 8**

Reading and discussing the text, Readicide, provided insight into the reading practices of today's classrooms.

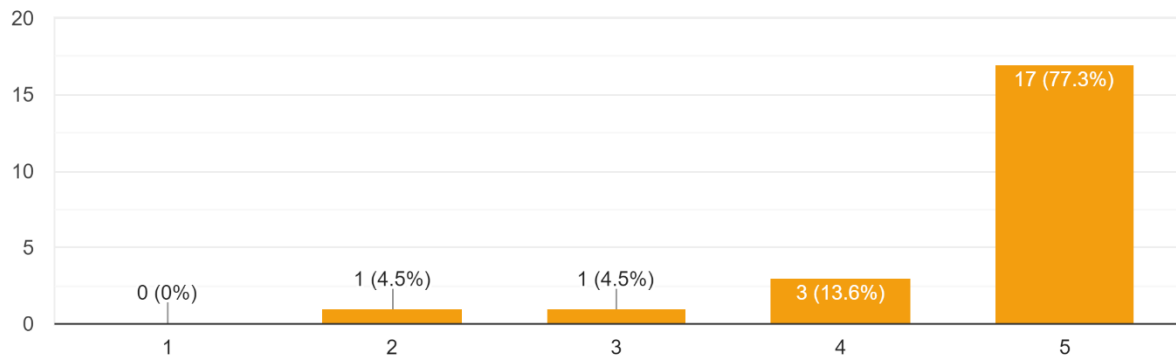
22 responses



Question 9

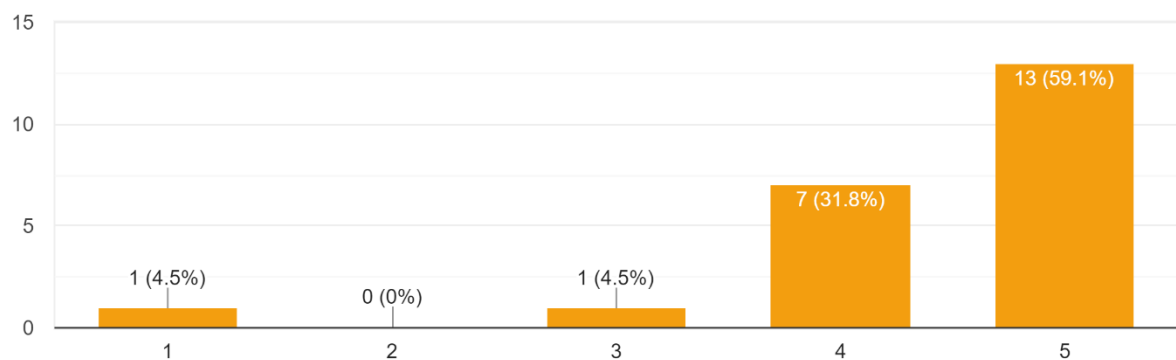
The topics discussed in Readicide (standardized testing, overteaching, underteaching, etc.) were relevant to me as a teacher candidate.

22 responses

**Question 10**

Readicide impacted how I will teach literacy in my future middle or high school classroom.

22 responses

**Results**

Engaging in Socratic Circle discussions positively contributed to the teacher candidates' cognitive and social emotional learning in the literacy methods course. The experience provided a structured dialogic strategy in which the teacher candidates were able to explore, engage, and create a clearer vision of their future literacy teaching within a risk-free environment.

Cognitive Learning Domain

Critical Thinking

The teacher candidates who participated in the Socratic Circle discussions in the Fall 2020 and 2021 semesters became deeper critical thinkers about the literacy practices that are being used in twenty-first century classrooms. The majority of teacher candidates had based their knowledge of teaching and learning literacy strategies through their own “apprenticeships of observation” (Lortie, 1975). However, engaging in a common read led to an increased awareness of the strengths and challenges that exist in teaching adolescents at the middle and/or high school levels. The teacher candidates made many text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections that often raised more questions than answers.

Additionally, many teacher candidates were critical of the claims and suggestions espoused by Gallagher. Some delved deeper into the statistics that Gallagher shared, and began researching topics that were presented in the text including “The Texas Miracle,” “The Page Paradox,” and “Education in Finland.” As the Socratic Circle discussion progressed, the teacher candidates were not afraid to question the author and felt that several of Gallagher’s recommendations were unrealistic and would be enacted more easily by a veteran teacher, as opposed to a novice educator.

The Socratic Circle survey question 8 indicated that 86.7% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (27.6%) or “strongly agreed” (59.1%) that reading and discussing *Readicide* provided insight into the reading practices of today’s classrooms.

Critical Reading

Preparing for the weekly Socratic Circle discussions required the teacher candidates to become more critical readers. The majority of the AYA-Integrated Language Arts teacher candidates had experience with the close reading of a text and the practice of annotation. However, some Middle Childhood Education teacher candidates, especially those without a concentration in language arts, had limited experience in reading a professional text in a critical manner. Some noted

the need to read more deeply and prepare more effectively in light of experiencing the first few rounds of the Socratic Circle experience. Moreover, all teacher candidates gained experience in critically reading a professional expository text by a practitioner in the field of literacy education, which had not taken place in their other education courses.

Additionally, critically reading the common text provided the teacher candidates greater insight into the specific literacy strategies that Gallagher introduced in each chapter, and the negative effects on students that resulted from teaching in a particular manner. The Socratic Circle survey question 9 indicated that 90.9% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (13.6%) or “strongly agreed” (77.3%) that the topics discussed in *Readicide* (standardized testing, overteaching, underteaching, etc.) were relevant to them as teacher candidates.

Critical Reflection

The written reflections the teacher candidates completed showed evidence of increased critical reflection, as well. At the beginning of the experience, many teacher candidates reflected on their involvement as merely the number of times in which they participated in the Inner Circle or shared a reaction in the Outer Circle. However, as the weeks progressed, the teacher candidates began to reflect more deeply on the depth of the conversations and the topics that were raised. They referenced Gallagher in greater depth and often noted their desire for having delved deeper into a concept or moving the dialogue in a new direction.

The Socratic Circle discussions that occurred in the university classroom provided the teacher candidates with the opportunity to explore their individual literacy beliefs in relation to their peers and the author. They learned the power a teacher’s literacy beliefs can have on the teaching and learning that takes place within the classroom. The Socratic Circle survey question 10 indicated that 90.9% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (31.8%) or “strongly agreed” (59.1%) that *Readicide* impacted how they will teach literacy in their future middle or high school classroom.

Moreover, 81.8% of teacher candidates “agreed” (9.1%) or “strongly agreed” (72.7%) that they would like to implement the Socratic Circle strategy in future classes across content areas, as indicated in their responses to the Socratic Circle survey question 7. The teacher candidates believed the strategy could have numerous benefits on their adolescent learners regardless of content area.

Social Emotional Learning

In addition to the cognitive benefits the teacher candidates experienced through their participation in Socratic Circle discussions, the dialogic engagement contributed to their social emotional learning. Connections were made with tenets 2-5 of ASCD’s Whole Child Approach to promote social emotional learning in the classroom.

Whole Child Tenet #2: Safety

ASCD’s (2019) second tenet states, “Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.” The Socratic Circle experience provided the teacher candidates with a risk-free environment to share their thoughts regarding literacy learning and practices (Alsup, 2006). The Socratic Circle survey question 5 indicated that 95.4% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (31.8%) or “strongly agreed” (63.6%) that they felt emotionally safe to share their views with their peers during Socratic Circles.

Whole Child Tenet #3: Engagement

ASCD’s (2019) third tenet focused on engaged learning states, “Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.” The Socratic Circle experience provided a learning opportunity for the teacher candidates to actively engage with their peers through a structured dialogic experience. The teacher candidates were actively engaged in the process of reading, preparing, and discussing the weekly chapters. The Socratic Circle survey question 2 indicated that 90.9% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (22.7%) or “strongly agreed” (68.2%) that participating in Socratic Circles gave them a voice in the university classroom.

Additionally, the Socratic Circle survey question 6 indicated that 95.4% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (22.7%) or “strongly agreed” (72.7%) that Socratic Circles increased their engagement in the university classroom.

Whole Child Tenet #4: Support

ASCD’s (2019) fourth tenet centers on the support students receive in the classroom and school community. The tenet states, “Each student has access to personalized learning and it supported by qualified, caring adults.” Socratic Circles provided the teacher candidates with a unique opportunity to see the course professor as merely a supporter and facilitator in the experience. The strategy promoted a student-led and student-centered approach, in which the teacher candidates increased their responsibility for their learning and supported each other in the process. The Socratic Circle survey question 3 indicated that 90.9% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (22.7%) or “strongly agreed” (68.2%) that Socratic Circles contributed to a positive learning community in the university classroom. Additionally, the Socratic Circle survey-question 4 indicated that 95.4% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (13.6%) or “strongly agreed” (81.8%) that Socratic Circles were a positive, student-centered approach to teaching and learning.

Whole Child Tenet #5: Challenge

The final tent of ASCD’s (2019) Whole Child Approach focused on challenge and states, “Each student has access to challenging, comprehensive curriculum in all content areas.” The Socratic Circle strategy pushed many teacher candidates out of their comfort zone and provided them with an opportunity to active engage in the critical thinking, reading, and reflection of a text. The Socratic Circle survey question 1 indicated that 90.9% of the teacher candidates “agreed” (31.8%) or “strongly agreed” (59.1%) that participating in Socratic Circles challenged them in an appropriate way.

Discussion

Engaging teacher candidates in critical discussions through the use of the Socratic Circle strategy provided a robust dialogic experience in which literacy beliefs were discussed in relation to peers in the university classroom, as well as a practitioner in the field of literacy education through the author's writing (Flowers, 2011). The teacher candidates became active listeners and learned how to respectfully engage in dialogue with peers whose views may have differed from their own.

The five-week experience enabled the teacher candidates to dig deeper into the literacy practices occurring in classrooms across the country that often lead to unmotivated and disengaged readers. Moreover, the strategy went beyond the memorization of literacy facts often found in a traditional textbook, but resulted in the engagement in five of the six types of Socratic Circle questions: clarifying thinking and understanding, challenging assumptions, examining evidence and rationale, considering alternative perspectives, considering implications and consequences.

Reading and discussing the common text *Readicide* enabled teacher candidates to create clearer visions of their role, the role of their future students, and the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. The teacher candidates not only learned more in-depth strategies to teach literacy, but also learned how they could implement a Socratic Circle discussion within their future classes. The teacher candidates often expressed their comments and reflections as forward thinkers in which they pondered, "What would I do as a future educator?"

Conclusion

The implementation of Socratic Circles within a literacy methods course during the Fall 2020 and 2021 semesters increased the teacher candidates' cognitive and social emotional learning through the alignment of cognitive and social emotional learning objectives. While learning more about literacy practices through the critical engagement of the common text, *Readicide*, the teacher candidates were also immersed in an educational strategy that supported their social emotional

needs as preservice teachers, thus indicating the dual role that Socratic Circles can effectively have in a teacher education literacy methods course.

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Student Teaching During a Pandemic: Lessons from the Field

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Abstract:

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine preservice teachers' experiences while student teaching in a preschool or childcare setting during COVID-19. Twelve student teachers were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the unique challenges they faced during their field experiences at a teacher education program in southwest Ohio. The study focuses on a resiliency perspective and the importance of self-perception theory in preservice teachers' ability to overcome challenging situations. The results of the data indicated that the student teachers faced a variety of challenges while student teaching, but the pandemic did not significantly change their views on choosing teaching as a profession. While it is unclear when the pandemic will end, teacher education programs will need to explore innovative ways to ensure that students will have worthwhile field experiences that will prepare them for a changing world.

Keywords: teacher education, pandemic, student teaching, childcare

A worldwide pandemic has brought significant changes to all aspects of life, including our educational system. Education at all age levels, from preschool to higher education, has been affected on a global scale. In higher education, colleges and universities have had to rethink and reinvent the delivery of coursework and field experiences while still preserving the quality of instruction. The pandemic is unique in that it has had widespread impacts on daily life, though there is an uncertain end date. This presents a complex combination of stressors and blocks access to protective factors for many individuals (Gruber et al., 2020). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many colleges and universities into an unanticipated experiment with many forms of nontraditional course delivery (Telles-Langdon, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher education programs have been faced with having to prepare future teachers during unprecedented times, and adaptability has been put to the test. Marcum-Dietrich et al. (2021) argue that teacher education programs will have to adjust quickly to this new reality by expanding opportunities for field experiences that include different modalities to incorporate diverse technology formats.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine preservice teachers' views on the challenges they have faced while student teaching during a pandemic, and how (or if) their views on teaching have changed. The paper begins with a review of the literature, which is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this investigation. The methods used—including participants, setting, data collection, and analysis—are also discussed. Next, the results are presented followed by the discussion and conclusion of the paper. This research seeks to fill a gap in the literature on student teaching in a childcare/preschool setting during a pandemic.

In many cases, student teaching is the culminating experience for teacher education programs. In a study done on teacher education programs, researchers found that field experiences and student teaching were two of the most valued aspects of their college education (Walsh et al., 2005). Studies have also documented that preservice teachers view student teaching as the place they will officially learn to become a teacher; therefore, they hold it in high regard (Featherstone,

1993; McNally et al., 1997). There are several characteristics of field experiences that have been shown to have an effect on preservice teachers: the length of the placement, the relationship between the university and the program/school where the student is placed, and the overall acceptance of the student teacher at the location or placement (Hascher & Kittinger, 2014).

However, the pandemic has affected or disrupted all of these factors. For example, some university field experiences had to be cut short due to safety risks. Student teaching has long been recognized as an exciting but sometimes stressful experience in which students must navigate the expectations of cooperating teachers and university supervisors (Koerner et al., 2002). Studies have also shown that student teachers are not immune to common stressors such as burnout, feelings of low efficacy, and difficulty with decision making (Gold & Roth, 1993). However, COVID-19 has made this culminating experience even more stressful for some.

During the pandemic, some schools and programs have not been able to accommodate having student teachers, which is especially challenging since students are not able to receive the valuable feedback and mentoring from teachers who are out in the field (Papay et al., 2020). Teacher education programs are often dependent on local school districts and private programs to welcome student teachers into their classrooms. As a result, a partnership is often established, which benefits both the teacher education program and the school/private program. Schools and private programs reap the benefits of having a new person with fresh ideas and enthusiasm who is there to learn the intricacies of teaching. On the other hand, teacher education programs benefit due to state and licensing requirements (e.g., required amount of field hours). However, the pandemic has put this partnership in jeopardy. In a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) report related to the impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education (ECE) Higher Education Programs, some programs were implementing different types of activities to replace their field experiences. The majority were using videos and reflections (87%), while almost 50% were teaching lessons (virtually or in-person) with their own children or children they had access to.

Some programs had their student teachers videotape themselves teaching lessons and/or implementing curriculum with or without children (Peyton et al., 2020).

Childcare programs have seen significant changes and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has reduced the availability of teachers and caused closures for many childcare centers, which has negatively impacted those who require consistent childcare (Hashikawa et al., 2020). COVID-19 has also put financial strains on childcare centers, especially smaller or home-based programs who do not receive financial support. Parents who have preschool-age children may need to hire an in-home caregiver or may not be able to afford to send their younger children to preschool or childcare. This could lead to more permanent preschool and childcare closures in areas where schools do not resume in person. Tarrant & Nagasawka (2020), describe the emotional labor involved with caring for children in a childcare setting, which depends on being physically present. However, due to COVID-19, teachers can no longer interact closely with children, which can be stressful for both the children and teachers. As a result, the overall classroom community can also suffer in socially distanced classrooms. Due to COVID-19, many states have required lower limits on group size and larger physical spaces to social distance, which will ultimately increase costs for childcare centers. However, revenue will decrease if more teachers are needed to accommodate the lower ratio and if more space is needed to social distance.

At the beginning of the pandemic, The NAEYC (2020) conducted a survey of over 6,000 childcare providers from all 50 states and found that many childcare programs were very concerned about the future viability of the entire early care and education system. In fact, 50% of childcare programs lost income because families were not able to pay, and another 25% of programs were losing income due to low enrollment. 11% of childcare providers felt confident that they could survive a closure of an indeterminate length without support. 30% of childcare providers responded that they could not survive a closure of over two weeks without significant public investment, and 49% reported losing income due to the inability of families to continue paying for care.

COVID-19 could alter the future of early childhood care and education. In most cases, K-12 schools and universities have the ability to operate exclusively online; however, the majority of preschools and childcares cannot do the same. One of the primary purposes of many preschool and childcare programs is to provide social interaction, hands-on educational instruction, physical supervision, and care (Greszler & Burke, 2020). Since preschool age children typically engage in play-based learning and activities, online learning is much more challenging for younger children compared to students who are older (Huber et al., 2016). In a study focused on technology integration for younger children, Hu et al. (2021) found that preschool teachers felt that since the value of play-based teaching strategies is based on hands-on learning, online preschool teaching is highly unlikely to continue in the future. In addition, real-life experiences are typically superior to online ones, especially since it can be challenging for children under the age of five to use technology without parent support (Barr, 2013). It is unclear how many early childhood programs will survive COVID-19 and which centers will be forced to close their doors. During the pandemic, childcare teachers have displayed remarkable stability and have been the backbone of the country (Hao, 2020).

Theoretical Approach

This paper draws upon a combination of theory, experiences of preservice teachers, and the complexities of higher education to address the significant effects that COVID-19 has had on preservice teachers, childcare centers, and perhaps the entire early care system. Furthermore, the perspectives of preservice teachers on how to navigate teaching young children during such a tumultuous time are discussed. This qualitative study is grounded in a resiliency perspective with a focus on self-perception theory due to the unique circumstances COVID-19 has presented for preservice teachers during their student teaching.

Masten et al. (1990) describe resilience as the process of adaptation despite challenging circumstances. Furthermore, resilience refers to a stable trajectory of mental health despite exposure

to a serious stressor or situation (Bonanno, 2004). Resilient individuals typically achieve positive life outcomes in spite of risk and learn to adapt when facing difficult circumstances (Werner, 1995). Resilience is a crucial skill for preservice teachers because it can heighten teaching effectiveness, improve career satisfaction, and prepare teachers to adjust to ever-changing conditions in a classroom or school environment (Gu & Day, 2007). Many preservice teachers have the ability to create a skill set, which often includes resilience, during times of adversity when beginning their teaching careers (Evans-Palmer, 2016). Some of the adversities that students have faced during the pandemic have been isolation, hazardous conditions in field experiences, and unexpected illness. One important aspect of resilience is the need for flexibility (Cheng et al., 2014), and there are a number of factors that have been shown to promote resilience, such as optimism and social support (Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno, 2014; Mandavia & Bonanno, 2019). Caring and support are consistent factors that support resilience in individuals, especially during times of crisis or stress (Benard, 1997). An example might be having a caring mentor teacher or a supportive university supervisor during a field experience. Teachers and preservice teachers that have displayed some degree of resilience during the pandemic will be better prepared to deal with challenges and adversity in the future.

The self-perception theory cites that people become more aware of their thoughts and behaviors when they evaluate the situation or circumstances around them (Bem, 1972). In other words, self-awareness happens when we observe our own behaviors and then adjust to our surroundings (Chai et al., 2017). Beliefs and attitudes are two major aspects of the self-perception theory since individuals' perceptions help create their own identity. Woolhouse (2012) discovered that preservice teachers tend to view themselves as having unique attributes and motivations that are different than other practicing teachers. As they encounter difficult or unpredictable situations, there can be a change in how they perceive themselves. In other words, they learn to adjust or realign their self-perceptions. Choy et al. (2014) studied preservice teacher perceptions, and found that field

work gave them real-world experiences that helped promote self-assurance and confidence. As a result, preservice teachers were able to reflect and reexamine their beliefs about their teaching practices and philosophy.

In an effort to learn more about the perceptions of preservice teachers during their student teaching during COVID-19, a qualitative survey was created. The survey questions were guided by the following research questions:

1. What specific challenges have preservice teachers faced while student teaching during a pandemic?
2. How have these challenges affected preservice teachers' views on choosing teaching as a career?

Method

Participants and Setting

Participants in this study were preservice teachers from a large regional campus in southwest, Ohio. Participants included those preservice teachers who student taught in the Pre-kindergarten associate degree program during spring semester 2020, fall semester 2020, and spring semester 2021, and were invited to complete a survey only if they had taken their student teaching courses (FSW 293: Field Placement: Infant/Toddler and FSW 294 Field Placement: Preschool) during the semesters mentioned above. Based on these criteria, a total of 26 students were invited to complete the survey. The online survey was completed by 12 of the 26 students using Qualtrics. The investigator purposely chose a small sample of student teachers to get a clearer picture of their viewpoints on student teaching during a pandemic, which allowed for rich survey data to be gathered.

The participants varied in terms of age, marital status, number of children, employment status, and distance from the university. Five of the twelve preservice teachers were between the ages of 18-23 years old, four were between 24-30, two were between 30-40, and one was over 40

years old. Five of the participants were single, three were married, and four were currently divorced. Five of the participants had no children, three had one child, one had two children, and three participants had three or more children. Two of the twelve participants were not employed, three were employed part-time, and seven were employed full time (Table 1). Seven of the twelve participants lived within a ten-mile radius of the regional campuses, and two of the participants lived between 20 and 30 miles from the regional campuses. Two of the participants lived over 100 miles away from the regional campuses.

Each student teacher was placed in either an infant toddler or preschool program, depending on the student teaching course they were taking. The FSW 293: Field Placement: Infant/Toddler course is only offered during the fall semester, and FSW 294 Field Placement: Preschool is only offered during the spring. The childcare centers were located throughout the state of Ohio (Table 2). Three of the participants had been student teaching for a month or less, four of the participants had been in their placement for one and a half to two months, and five had been student teaching at their placement for three or more months. One classroom had twenty or more children, three classrooms had between 10-20 children, and eight classrooms had ten or fewer children. Four of the twelve classrooms contained children who were 3-5 years old (preschool), and eight had children who were birth-3 years old (infant-toddler).

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were asked four survey questions which were all approved by the researchers' Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participation in this study was totally voluntary, and students were allowed to withdraw at any time. The survey questions were developed based on a literature review and the author's professional experiences working with preservice teachers and childcare programs (Table 3). The survey took participants approximately 15–20 minutes to complete (depending on the length of their responses).

When analyzing the survey data, patterns (common themes) were identified in student teachers' responses. The qualitative responses were organized by grouping each participant's responses into narrative units so that tentative themes could be identified. The tentative themes were further analyzed to search for commonalities or similarities between the participants' survey responses. This process continued until the investigator was confident that the themes best represented the data. The data was reviewed multiple times over several weeks to look for consistent themes. Only survey questions three and four were analyzed since questions one and two were more demographic in nature. In addition, survey questions three and four were open-ended, so the responses contained richer data. The following section provides results of this analysis.

Results

For survey question number three which was, "What have been some of the toughest challenges of student teaching this semester, and what impact did COVID-19 have on your student teaching experiences?", three key themes emerged. The themes were: (1) flexibility required to complete student teaching during COVID-19, (2) difficult balance between home and school (while student teaching), (3) difficulty communicating with masks and interactions with children. Each theme is described along with the participant responses that fall under this theme.

Survey Question Three

Theme One: Flexibility Required to Complete Student Teaching during COVID-19

Due to some unforeseen situations, some students were required to complete alternate activities to take the place of their student teaching hours. For example, if a member of the preservice teacher's family was quarantined due to COVID-19 (and they were not able to do some of their assigned hours at the childcare center), the preservice teacher was able to complete a list of alternate activities. Some of the alternate activities to choose from were viewing and reflecting on video clips, conducting a web conference or virtual interview with families and/or childcare teachers or directors, and creating a home-based activity that parents could complete with their

children. Another example of when a preservice teacher might do an alternate activity was if the center had a COVID-19 outbreak. One student stated, “It [COVID-19] really took away all of the in-person learning. The online alternative experiences do not compare at all. It also shortened the semester and put a ton of pressure to get the hours completed in a short amount of time.”

Supervision was also a challenge during the pandemic. Since each childcare center had slightly different COVID-19 protocols, some did not allow any outside visitors (which included our university supervisors). University supervisors were asked to do virtual visits or ask the student teachers to videotape their lessons. One student mentioned, “No supervisor came in (to the center) since supervision had to switch to virtual due to COVID-19.” For some students, face-to face feedback and discussions were more effective, but the pandemic did not leave many in-person meeting options.

Survey Question Three

Theme Two: Challenges Balancing Between Home and School

Since seven of the twelve participants were considered nontraditional (based on the criteria given earlier in the article), they found it difficult to find a balance between home and school. In fact, one student made the following comment:

A tough challenge was going to school full time and going to student teach full time. It was hard to balance. And then once COVID-19 came into play, our student teaching experience looked much different. We had to do online trainings to make up for the in-person teaching experience.

In some extreme cases, students even had to take off of work to get all of their student teaching hours completed. One particular student shared her thoughts about this:

The toughest challenge was trying to get in most of my student teaching hours before the shutdown (due to COVID-19). There were some days I had to take off work just to get my hours in. This was hard to put on my list of priorities since I have a family at home to support, and missing work to complete my hours was difficult.

Survey Question Three

Theme Three: Difficultly Communicating with Masks and Interacting with Children

The pandemic has limited physical and social interactions between teachers and children through social distancing and masking. This can be especially challenging for those individuals who work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. This was a common concern voiced by several of the preservice teachers in the survey. One individual stated, “The toughest challenge has not been connecting with my own class when I see them.” Another preservice teacher felt the same, especially when student teaching in an infant toddler classroom and said, “Babies love interactions, and I have to be distant to see all of their faces. Most want to be held and see your whole face at the same time.” A third preservice teacher went a step further and felt that the young children in her classroom did not fully understand the reasons for wearing a mask and may have been uneasy about why masks were being worn by their teachers. She made the following observation:

It was difficult to follow COVID-19 guidelines with the children since they are so young. They are constantly wanting to hug, touch, and interact with the teachers and other kids. I also know that it was upsetting for the children to see their teachers constantly wearing masks. Since I was new, the children had never seen my face before, so they would want me to take my mask off. I would explain to them that I could not so that I could keep everyone safe and this only confused them more.

Young children often receive cues through facial expressions and tone of voice, so mask wearing can impact the quality of communication between children and teachers. One preservice teacher discussed this particular issue and commented, “The toughest challenge would be wearing a mask all of the time. I feel like it can be hard for children to understand my tone of voice because you can’t see my face.” Furthermore, a second individual mentioned a similar concern and stated:

I believe that wearing masks and teaching preschoolers and toddlers is difficult due to the fact that they can’t see your facial expressions and sounds of the words you are trying to teach them. I understand the reasoning for the mask, but it is difficult.

The importance of watching mouths move (or lip reading) was also a topic raised by one preservice teacher. She made the following comment, “The biggest challenge was teaching students with a mask on because it muffled your words, and they weren’t able to see your mouth.” Lastly, one preservice teacher simply stated that “communication with masks was the biggest challenge.”

Survey question number four which was, “How have these challenges affected your views on choosing teaching as a career?” had two key themes within the data. The themes were as follows: (1) unchanged views on their teaching career/profession due to COVID-19 and (2) learned to go with the flow. Each theme is described along with the participant responses that fall under this theme.

Survey Question Four

Theme One: Unchanged Views on Choosing Teaching as a Career/Profession due to COVID-19

The pandemic has been stressful for most individuals working with children and families to some degree. For those preservice teachers who were completing field experiences, it was especially challenging. One goal of this study was to determine if the pandemic may have changed their outlook on teaching or questioned their choice of professions. However, most preservice teachers who were surveyed did not change their views on choosing teaching as their career. For example, two students responded that the pandemic had not changed their views on teaching at all, while another student shared a similar sentiment: “It hasn’t affected my views negatively, [I feel] more positive because I realize how much teachers are needed—even in a pandemic.” Several students discussed that the pandemic has made them more passionate about teaching. One student said, “I feel I am more prepared for the challenges I will face as an educator due to the pandemic and adapting to these new ways of living.” Another student said, “These challenges only strengthened my desire to become a teacher. I want to help children learn—even through hard times. It was definitely hard, no doubt, but I learned how to be strong even through unexpected chaos [such as a pandemic].” One student was more neutral as to whether or not her views on teaching had changed. She stated, “I don’t believe it [the pandemic] has swayed me either way.”

Survey Question Four

Theme Two: Learned to go with the Flow

The pandemic has pushed teachers to become even more flexible than they already were. Schedule changes, absences, and quarantines are just a few of the challenges that teachers have had to deal with during the pandemic. Most preservice teachers are not able to learn about flexibility in a textbook; instead, they have to experience it out in the field. One preservice teacher made the following observation while student teaching, “I think it’s opened my eyes to the flexibility you have to have as a teacher at all times.” Another individual looked at the pandemic as a learning opportunity and said, “This challenge has taught me to grow through what you go through.” Optimism is also an important part of teaching young children, especially when faced with all of the stressful changes brought on by COVID-19. A preservice teacher made the following comment, “I do not believe this will last forever, but it definitely has shown that you have to make accommodations and go with the flow of things.”

Discussion

The present study provided the views and opinions of twelve preservice teachers completing their student teaching in an infant/toddler or preschool classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although study participants varied in age, experience, and education, there were consistent themes across the surveys. Flexibility was a key theme that was mentioned throughout the survey data. Since each preservice teacher in this investigation was placed in a different childcare center or preschool, the policies and procedures were not the same. For example, some centers required masks while others did not. Social distancing was also used more strictly in some center while other centers did not practice social distancing at all. The need for preservice teachers to be flexible resonated at each student teaching site in different ways, and the situation often changed day-by-day. Some student teachers had to be quarantined due to family members getting sick, while some centers had to completely shut down because of high numbers of infected children and/or teachers. For example, several student teachers had young children in school, and they would have to adjust their student teaching schedule to accommodate for schools that decided to go virtual during the

pandemic. Many of the student teachers displayed a great deal of resilience during student teaching, and flexibility is one of the crucial elements of resilient people (Cheng et al., 2014). In addition, their self-perception may have been altered to reflect the challenges of the pandemic. Student teachers also had to constantly reevaluate the situation and make decisions based on the ever-changing circumstances at their placement and in their personal lives.

Another key theme was the balance between home and school. The university where this study was conducted serves a large population of nontraditional students. Seven of the twelve participants in this study were considered nontraditional. Nontraditional students are often described as being at least twenty-four years old, having a family to support, or being employed full time (Evelyn, 2002). Being categorized as a nontraditional college student implies that people may be juggling a variety of roles such as employee, parent, and spouse. Some of the more common issues faced by nontraditional students are childcare, financial issues, and time management (Forbus et al., 2011). Several preservice teachers mentioned their need to take time off work to complete their field hours due to the risk of child care centers shutting down during the pandemic. Preservice teachers also stated that during a typical semester, balancing work, family, and school responsibilities can be hard, but the pandemic made it even more challenging. As a result, stress may increase without the proper coping and time management skills. In order to attain a work-life balance, it is crucial for individuals to understand what their core values and beliefs are. This will help identify the resources needed to achieve that balance (Kossek et al., 2014).

Overall, the majority of preservice teachers surveyed in this study had unchanged views on choosing teaching as a profession. In other words, the pandemic did not negatively impact their views on becoming a teacher. In fact, several had the opposite response and felt that they were more prepared and had a strengthened desire to teach children based on their positive student teaching experiences. This is another example of how resilience and a positive self-perception have a strong influence on preservice teachers' beliefs. Mandavia and Bonanno (2019) claim that optimism

promotes resilience in individuals, and the survey responses clearly reflect that several of the preservice teachers were optimistic about their future teaching careers. It was also evident that they truly missed the interactions with the children due to masking and social distancing. Working in a child care or preschool environment requires a great deal of physical interaction (e.g. hugs, hand holding, etc.), and this was not always possible due to the pandemic. This may have created added stress for both the teachers and the children. In addition, several students surveyed brought up the fact that communication was more challenging for them since the children were not able to see their facial expressions or hear their tone of voice.

Possible limitations of this study were the small sample size, which may have limited the generalizability of the results of the study. Although every attempt was made to encourage responses from all 26 students who had student taught during the pandemic, only 12 of those 26 participated in completing the survey. However, the small sample size allowed for more in-depth analyses of the participants' survey responses. The researcher's goal was to learn details from student teachers using a qualitative approach, which could not have been accomplished with a larger sample of participants.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the need to prepare preservice teachers for situations that may impact how they learn the art of teaching. It is a call to re-think how teacher education programs are preparing students to learn how to teach and the skills that they will need to be successful. Exploring different formats of instruction (e.g., alternate activities, virtual course delivery, hybrid experiences, etc.) and supervision may be a necessity rather than a luxury. Interestingly, teacher education programs teach students about adaptability and flexibility, but now programs are required to practice what they preach during the pandemic. Most typical teacher education programs focus on teaching curriculum, pedagogy, and the skills required to manage a classroom. Perhaps there should be more emphasis on learning about resilience and the

70

development of protective factors when facing difficult situations. Teacher education programs have a unique opportunity to reevaluate how we teach our future teachers and prepare students for a changing world.

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Teacher Leadership in a Pandemic: Lessons Learned

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Abstract:

Teacher leaders provide critical support to teachers, students, and families. Investing in the development of teacher leaders promotes effective schools. This study investigated changes in the roles of teacher leaders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of importance for practitioners, administrators, and policymakers, this study used survey methodology to document the experience of teacher leaders during the pandemic and explores areas for further development of teacher leaders. Teacher leaders reported similar but re-conceptualized roles during the pandemic, requiring a continued focus on relationships and increased focus on accessing and implementing relevant research.

Keywords: Teacher Leader, Leadership

Teacher leaders serve in both informal and formal roles in our nation's schools. As practitioners, teacher leaders work beyond their own classroom walls, support professional learning, are involved in policy and decision making, and have ultimate goals of improving student learning and success and working toward systemic improvement and change (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Student outcomes improve when teachers have the opportunity to empower each other, work together, and lead (Harris & Jones, 2019). Even before the upheaval caused by COVID-19, the demands on educational systems were increasing. Educators, administrators, and policymakers have acknowledged the expertise, institutional knowledge, and skills teacher leaders leverage to bring about change in education (Lumpkin, 2014). Teacher leaders are uniquely positioned to engage fellow teachers in improving professional practice, problem-solving, and working collaboratively with colleagues, as well as acting as change agents to affect reform (Margolis, 2020; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). School administrators must foster teachers' leadership potential because developing and utilizing teacher leaders supports the work of administration, teachers, students, and their families (ASCD, 2014; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Levin & Schrum (2017) characterize teacher leader roles into three categories: (1) instructional leadership, including responsibilities such as developing assessments, developing instructional units, or mentoring new teachers; (2) organizational leadership, including responsibilities such as chairing meetings, developing schedules, or organizing special events or curriculum decisions; and (3) professional leadership, including responsibilities such as serving on committees, being a union representative, or presenting on and sharing teaching with others. These varied roles and responsibilities require an array of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (2018) confirmed these roles and responsibilities and defined key knowledge, skills, and dispositions teacher leaders need to successfully support, advocate, and improve their schools and organizations. Characteristics needed for teacher leadership included relationship-building, engendering trust, seeing the big picture to determine organizational

needs, envisioning process needs to manage work and resources, high levels of emotional intelligence, and a firm belief in the evolving framework and system (Lumpkin, 2014; Pounder, 2006; Silva et al., 2000).

The State of Ohio has focused attention on developing teacher leaders. In 2017, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) published the Ohio Teacher Leader Framework, acknowledging the essential roles teacher leaders play in promoting success in Ohio schools (ODE, 2017). The framework outlines the following components of teacher leadership: fostering collaborative culture, advancing instruction and student learning, driving initiatives, practicing equity and ethics, and building relationships and partnerships (ODE, 2017). These standards align with the domains of teacher leadership defined by the National Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (National Education Association, 2020). In addition, ODE developed a toolkit of practical resources for developing teacher leadership and began to offer a teacher leader credential for training completed in Ohio universities.

The field of education has changed as the world has shifted digitally; schools must be able to quickly adapt to a rapidly changing world and provide an education that is more than simply a steppingstone to further schooling or employment opportunities. In 2020, schools, along with every other aspect of global communities, were thrust into unknown territory because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers were called upon to be flexible beyond what was previously imagined and were challenged to develop knowledge and skills in instructional technology to provide a new level of social and emotional support, and to continue to provide evidence-based instruction driven by assessment and planning. As one would expect, the shift toward virtual and hybrid models of schooling impacted all school stakeholders. As pandemic restrictions are lifted, educators at all levels, as well as students and their families, are beginning to explore what lessons we will carry forward. In doing so, it is important to consider the role teacher leaders will play in this transformation. Fullan (2016) defined four drivers that facilitate positive systems change in

education: fostering intrinsic motivation and capacity building, engaging in continuous improvement, inspiring collaboration, and focusing on change that affects all students and educators. These policy drivers align with teacher leader roles, skills, knowledge and dispositions: working within the system, teacher leaders can capitalize on relationships to foster motivation and build capacity for the continuous improvement that benefits students. Teacher leaders are change agents who play a critical role in impacting and sustaining change within schools.

This study sought to explore the ways in which teacher leaders supported administrators, teacher colleagues, and students and families during the pandemic. In addition, by understanding the changes in teacher leaders' roles, the study aimed to investigate what training or support teacher leaders need as schools begin to find a "new normal" in a post-pandemic world.

Specifically, this research sought to explore the following questions:

- 1) How are the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by a teacher leader similar and different before and during a pandemic?
- 2) How are teacher leader roles similar and different before and during a pandemic?
- 3) What training is needed to better prepare teacher leaders for future roles?

Method

Participants

This study sought participants defined as any teacher who self-identified as a teacher leader working within the State of Ohio. ODE defines teacher leaders as teachers who take on additional leadership responsibilities outside of their own classroom to advance the profession and foster student success (ODE, 2017). Respondents included 70 teacher leaders in a variety of formal and informal roles across Ohio. Participants were recruited via email. The survey was anonymous and no identifying information was collected. The survey was distributed via the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Teacher Leader distribution list, which included teachers who had attended the Ohio Teacher Leader Summit and/or had involvement with the ODE Teacher Leader group. In addition, the survey was shared with faculty in the Mount St. Joseph University School of

Education, who distributed it to colleagues in K-12 Ohio schools. Responses were collected between December 2020 and February 2021.

Procedure

Design

Survey methodology was employed in order to capture the voices of teacher leaders directly. The survey consisted of 21 questions total; 14 closed-ended questions and 7 open-ended questions (see Appendix). Questions targeted background information such as descriptors of the teacher leaders' role(s), years of experience, type of district, and school modality (in-person, hybrid, remote, or some combination). In addition, teachers were asked to identify their circle of influence/impact. Finally, teacher leaders selected from a menu of options to define skills, knowledge, and dispositions of teacher leaders prior to August 2020 and during the pandemic. Open-ended questions asked respondents to describe their roles prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic, as well as how they anticipated their role will change moving forward. Finally, respondents were asked to identify and discuss what training would be beneficial in further developing their leadership abilities.

Survey Development

The principal investigator developed the survey. After drafting questions, an expert panel reviewed the survey instrument. The panel of six educators had an average of 16.3 years of teaching experience (range: 9-30 years) and 14.8 years of leadership experience (range: 7-25 years). Three panel members currently serve in teacher leader roles, one as a reading specialist providing coaching and support to teachers; one as a lead teacher, providing instructional coaching, and one as a state-level consultant. The other three panel members are higher education faculty who have previously served in various leadership roles including lead teacher, PLC coordinator, union representative, and principal. The feedback provided was incorporated into the survey and reviewed again with panel members prior to distribution.

Data Analysis

Data cleaning. The data collected from open-ended survey questions were transferred to a spreadsheet. Data were checked for duplicates and three responses were excluded. Two surveys were excluded as duplicate responses and one was excluded as a school administrator outside the study definition of teacher leader (n = 73 surveys; 70 total respondents). Data were organized by question and were prepared for analysis.

Content analysis of open-ended questions. Content analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data provided in the open-ended questions of the survey. Johnson and LaMontagne (1993) outlined steps for conducting content analysis of qualitative data. The process begins with systematically reviewing the qualitative data and identifying themes in responses. Both researchers agreed on themes and worked to establish categories for coding. Once categories were identified, each researcher coded the data independently. Further definition of four categories proved necessary. With categories finalized, the researchers reached consensus; discrepancies were discussed and complete agreement was reached. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data obtained, the work of Guba (1981) and Krefting (1991) was consulted. This research involved documenting and reporting the experience of teacher leaders; both researchers were cognizant of the value of each voice represented.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Seventy teacher leaders throughout the state of Ohio completed the survey. Most participants were in a formal leadership position, such as lead teacher, coach, or team lead (81.4%); the remaining 18.5% indicated an informal leadership role such as coordinator of team meetings or technology support. Respondents ranged from 0-4 years of work to 15 or more years work experience, with the majority (64.3%) having 15 or more years of experience and with 41.4% having 0-4 years of experience. Training provided to the teacher leaders in this sample varied.

Approximately one quarter (22.9%) of respondents reported formal training (e.g., an endorsement or graduate degree) prior to assuming a teacher leader role, while an additional 25.7% pursued formal training while in a teacher leader role. Teacher leaders engaged in training through agencies such as county-level educational service centers, the Ohio Education Association, and the Ohio Department of Education.

Survey respondents represented urban districts (52.9%), suburban districts (34.3%), rural districts (10%), and small towns (2.9%). Participants indicated that they work in public (94.3%), private (2.4%), and charter schools (2.9%). Teaching situations have varied considerably during the pandemic. Participants reported formats as follows: 15.7% fully in person, 27.1% fully remote, 10% hybrid model with students attending part of the week, 7.1% transitioned between fully in person and fully remote and 40% have been in varied combinations of all of the above.

Themes

The survey was structured to examine three key themes: (1) knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for effective teacher leadership prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) roles of teacher leaders before and during the pandemic, and (3) professional development needs of teacher leaders moving forward.

Knowledge, Skills, & Dispositions

Teacher leaders indicated that pre-pandemic, the most critical areas of knowledge were curriculum and content knowledge (60%), research-based teaching practices (45.7%), and how to interpret and make use of assessments (40%). Results during the pandemic shifted; teacher leaders indicated critical knowledge areas as technology (5.7% pre-pandemic; 71.4% during), knowledge of the community (31% pre-pandemic; 51.4% during), and educational equity (12.9% pre-pandemic; 45.7% during; See Figure 1).

Participants identified communication (44.3%), collaboration (41.4%), and listening (28.6%) as the three skills needed most prior to the pandemic. During the pandemic, communication

remained a critical need (64.3%), and problem solving (32.9%) and people skills (32.9%) increased (See Figure 2).

Finally, when considering dispositions, open and approachable (48.6% pre-pandemic; 24.3% during) and supportive (40% pre-pandemic; 48.6% during) remained among the top characteristics. Prior to the pandemic, three other dispositions noted as critically important were being deeply committed to student learning, being consistent and reliable, and having a growth mindset (each selected by 28.6% of respondents as one of the top three dispositions). Other dispositions considered critical during the pandemic included flexibility (60%) and patience (24.3%; See Figure 3).

Roles of Teacher Leaders

Consistent, but with Increased Flexibility. Teacher leaders reported consistency in their roles prior to and during the pandemic, but with an increased need for flexibility. Participants completed three open-ended questions. First, participants described their teacher leader role during the pandemic. Next, participants indicated what aspects of their roles stayed the same. Finally, participants reflected on which aspects of their teacher leader role changed in response to pandemic learning. Teacher leaders reported a shift toward curriculum resource support, in particular technology support, to ensure continued teaching and learning (noted in 59.2% of open-ended responses). Communication, collaboration, and teacher support (noted in 38.0% of open-ended responses) also emerged as key areas of increased responsibility. Other themes included supporting student social-emotional learning (16.9%) and engagement with students, their families, and the broader community (11.3%). Roles indicated less frequently included managerial tasks such as substituting in classrooms and organizing schedules, supporting use of assessments and data, and working on committees.

In terms of differences, 27.1% of respondents indicated increased focus on engaging students and families; 25.7% indicated more focus on collaboration, problem solving, and general

teacher support, and 24.3% indicated increased focus on social emotional support for students and teachers as shifts in their role during the pandemic. These were followed closely by shifting needs in flexibility, technology integration, and leadership (22.9%).

Working on a Greater Scale. In another open-ended question, participants were asked to describe their circle of influence. Over half of the respondents (51.4%) indicated an ability to affect change beyond their school district. Participants communicated power to influence individual teachers, teams of teachers, their school and beyond. Teacher leaders reported impact on quality of teaching practice and student learning (68.5%); school culture and professional climate (63%); and school or team organizational systems (50.7%). Looking ahead, teacher leaders communicated a desire to continue to impact change. One respondent shared, “I hope to continue to work closely with administration and our Board of Education to keep an open line of dialogue; providing more agency and voice for the teachers of my district.” Another teacher leader communicated a commitment to “become more of a transformational leader than a managerial leader” after the lessons of COVID-19. Finally, another teacher leader shared an intention to “become more of an advocate for the type of professional development and growth that this year has shown we need.”

Professional Learning

Teacher leaders in this study were conflicted on what, if any, training would best support them moving forward. Teacher leaders reported feeling overworked, tired, and not interested in anything additional; 18.6% indicated no ideas for further training. Those interested in professional learning opportunities indicated need in the following areas: technology and remote learning (21.4%), curriculum and instruction (18.6%), systems change (11.4%), stress management (11.4%), and instructional coaching (8.6%). Additional interests included equity issues, better understanding research, conflict resolution, assessment and data, social-emotional and trauma support, and formal training opportunities such as pursuing graduate education.

Discussion

Teacher leaders demonstrated the ability to adapt to a radically different educational landscape during the COVID-19 pandemic. While aspects of their roles were similar, teacher leaders reported an increased need for knowledge and training in several new domains including systems change, technology, and strategies for virtual instruction. Support in accessing and interpreting research to continue to adapt in an ever-changing world will continue to be important in teacher leader development. Participants in this study remained deeply committed to supporting their colleagues, their students and families, and the community. Perhaps accelerated by the pandemic, participants saw their influence broaden and expressed desire to work more actively toward systemic change.

Themes

Knowledge, Skills, & Dispositions

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher leaders indicated priority knowledge areas of curriculum, research-based teaching practices, and interpretation of assessment data. During the pandemic, key knowledge needs shifted to technology, knowledge of the community, and educational equity. The pandemic brought better understanding of the community context of learning and how to provide consistent access to quality instruction.

Relationship building as a skill set was key for teacher leaders both before and during the pandemic. Teacher leaders reported communication, collaboration, and listening as the three skills they needed most prior to COVID-19. During the pandemic, the skills they identified as most necessary were communication, problem solving, and people skills.

Teacher leaders identified being approachable, supportive, and deeply committed to student learning as the top dispositions needed prior to the pandemic. During the pandemic, being approachable and supportive remained at the top and became even more important, as well as being flexible and patient.

The knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified by the teacher leaders in the present study align with the Teacher Leader Framework as well as previous research findings. As relationship factors were critical across both pre-pandemic and pandemic learning situations, teacher leaders must be supported in developing relationships to engage with their colleagues to improve professional practice, problem solve, and work collaboratively for change (ASCD, 2014; Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Muijs & Harris, 2003; ODE, 2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Roles

Teacher leader respondents worked in a variety of roles; most commonly reported were supporting curriculum and instruction and communicating and working collaboratively with colleagues. These roles were similar to those teacher leaders filled before the pandemic; however, these roles were re-conceptualized as needs shifted toward implementing remote learning, problem solving during remote teaching, and a more significant focus on emotional support for both teachers and students.

Teacher leaders work from within school systems to build relationships, support their colleagues, engage with students and families, and advocate for change. Reeves (2011) noted that despite the perception of systems change requiring 5-7 years, there are examples of change happening rapidly within a school or classroom when there is a sense of urgency. Teacher leaders in this study reported an increased focus on working for systemic change; 50.7% of participants indicated this as a focus area. In a similar survey of teacher leaders prior to the pandemic (ASCD, 2014), only 9.5% of teacher leaders indicated systemic change as a focus area. The experiences of the pandemic may have served as a catalyst for speeding up changes already happening in the field. Recent research has pointed toward an increased emphasis on teacher leadership for systemic transformation (Harris & Jones, 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

Professional Learning

Teacher leaders need an array of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in order to fulfill their varied roles. The role of teacher leader has always required flexibility; providing teacher leaders with the tools to access, interpret, and apply research enables professional growth and empowers teacher leaders to support teacher and student learning more effectively. Training and development should continue to address relationship building skills and dispositions such as approachability, communication, and collaboration. These were priority areas of need both before and during the pandemic.

Teacher leaders shared their fatigue and frustration; professional learning should include support in stress management as well as resources for teacher leaders who are providing social-emotional and trauma support.

An increased focus on teacher leaders as advocates and change agents pointed to a shift in the field that the challenges of the pandemic accelerated. Teacher leaders communicated a desire to engage in the work of systemic change and need opportunities to be supported in these endeavors.

Limitations & Future Research

This study sought to investigate the experience of Ohio teacher leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this work takes an important first step, further research should include a broader sample of teacher leaders in a larger, more diverse geographical area. Teacher leadership has evolved and will continue to do so; future efforts should document the changing roles of teacher leaders and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed. Professional learning and training opportunities should incorporate the results reported here in current and future planning efforts.

Conclusion

Teacher leaders leverage specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions to fulfill a variety of roles with the ultimate goal of impacting change to improve our educational systems. This

research sought to document and describe the experience of teacher leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, ways in which their roles changed, and opportunities for further development of these critical leaders.

Teacher leaders in this study reported a shift in their roles and an intensified focus on relationship building, problem solving, and accessing and implementing current research. While the skills and dispositions teacher leaders needed were similar prior to and during the pandemic, the knowledge they needed to support teachers and students shifted. In particular, the challenge of accessing research and implementing best practices was more urgent. Teacher leader participants in this study also shared their perceived capacity to affect change at a systems level. Providing opportunities for teacher leaders to engage in training on organizational leadership and systems change could capitalize on this momentum. As schools move forward, the lessons of the pandemic can serve as a catalyst for sustainable change in education; teacher leaders will be at the forefront of this critical work.

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Figure 1

Critical knowledge identified before and during the pandemic

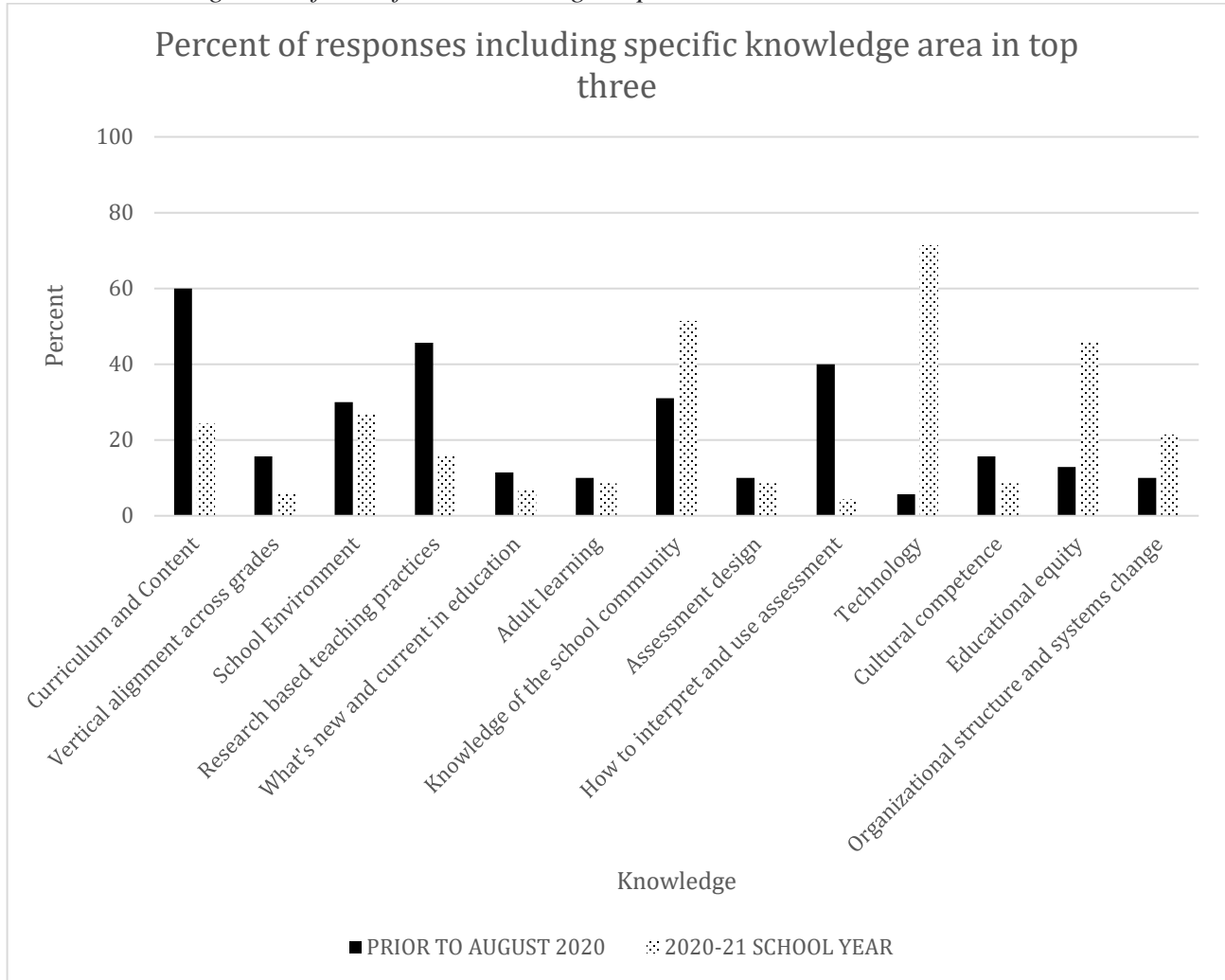


Figure 2
Critical skills identified before and during the pandemic

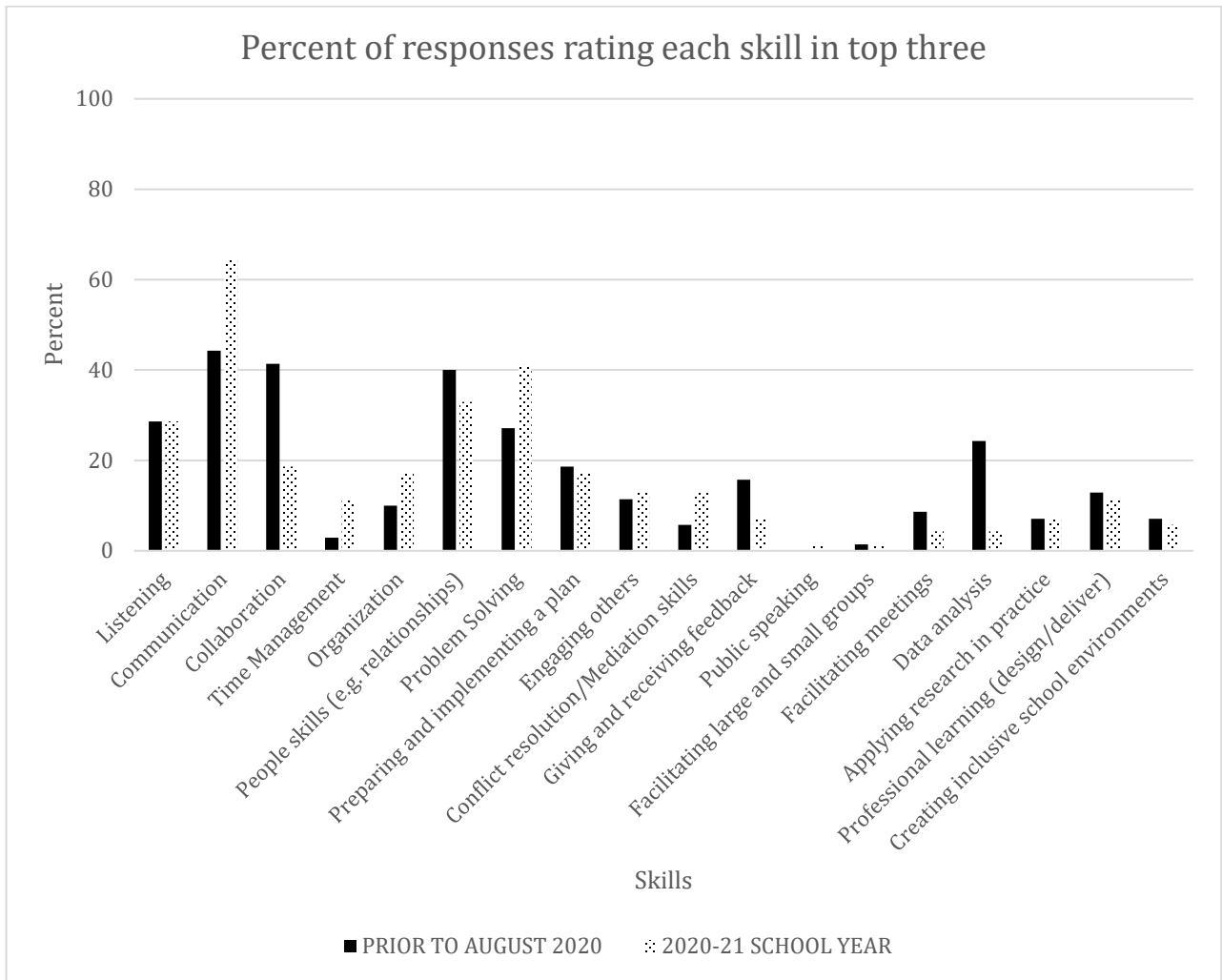
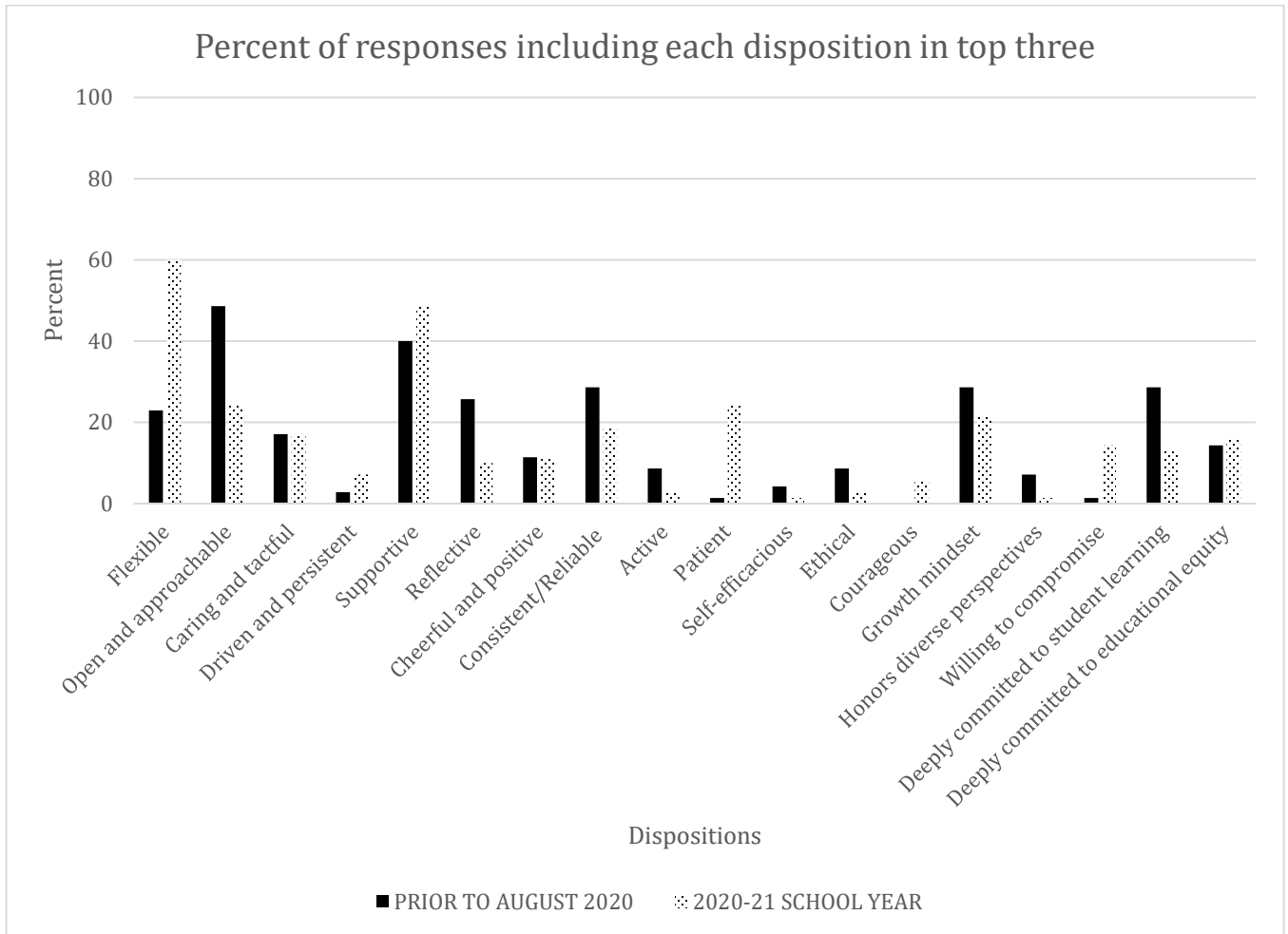


Figure 3

Critical dispositions identified before and during the pandemic



Appendix: Teacher Leader Survey

Teacher Leader Roles during a Pandemic

Teacher leaders in both formal and informal positions serve critical roles in teacher support and improving environments and instructional practices to benefit all students. Recognition of teacher leadership's importance has grown as indicated by the focus of ODE on a Teacher Leader Framework, support tools, and a learning summit.

All educators' roles have changed significantly since the Pandemic, requiring new skill sets and adaptations to teaching and assessment. This research survey is designed to better understand the roles teacher leaders have played to support colleagues during the pandemic. If you are a formal or informal teacher leader, your feedback is needed!

Ohio colleges and universities will hopefully be able to use this information to better understand the needs of teacher leaders. Thank you in advance for taking the time to help provide this critical information to help us continue to support all educators and students!

Participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous. If you participate, that is your consent. There is no penalty or loss of benefits if you refuse to participate or discontinue participation. The survey is expected to take approximately 15 minutes. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Wendy Strickler at Mount St. Joseph University (wendy.strickler@msj.edu).

- 1) Is your teacher leader role formal (title and designation) or informal (authentically-developed based upon need)?
 - I am a teacher leader with a formal leadership position (e.g. title such as lead teacher, coach, etc)
 - I am an informal teacher leader (providing leadership, but without an official title (e.g. coordinating team meetings, providing tech support such as creating Bitmoji classrooms, coordinating data analysis, Building Leadership team participant, etc)

- 2) How many years have you been an educator?
 - 0-4
 - 5-9
 - 10-14
 - 15+

- 3) How many years have you been in a teacher leader role (formal or informal)?
 - 0-4
 - 5-9
 - 10-14
 - 15+

- 4) Which of the following best describes your work environment?
 - Urban
 - Suburban
 - Rural
 - Small Town

- 5) Which of the following best describes your building/district?
 - Public
 - Private
 - Charter

- 6) Since August 2020, which of the following describes your most common school situation?
- Fully in person
 - Fully remote
 - Hybrid model (students attend part of the week and are remote part of the week)
 - Transitioned between fully in person and fully remote
 - Varied combination of all of the above
- 7) What is your teacher leader role's title (if it is an informal role, describe it in a few words)?
- 8) Did you have any formal training in preparation for your teacher leader role? If yes, please describe training.
- 9) Which of the following best describes who you influence in your role (choose top 2)?
- Individuals
 - My team of teachers
 - My school
 - Multiple schools
 - District
 - City/Region
 - Larger than local region
- 10) Which of the following best describes your area of impact outside of your own classroom? (choose the top two)
- Quality of teaching practice and student learning
 - School culture and professional climate
 - School or team organizational systems
 - District or State policy
 - Professional associations and/or networks
 - Other...
- 11) Below is a list of SKILLS commonly attributed to teacher leaders. Mark the 3 you believe were most critical in your teacher leader role PRIOR to August 2020.
- Listening
 - Communication
 - Collaboration
 - Time management
 - Organization
 - People skills (e.g. relationship building)
 - Problem solving
 - Creating and implementing a plan to meet goals
 - Engaging others
 - Conflict resolution/Mediation skills
 - Giving and receiving feedback
 - Public speaking
 - Facilitating large and small groups
 - Facilitating meetings
 - Data analysis
 - Applying research in practice
 - Designing and providing professional learning
 - Creating inclusive school environments

12) Below is the same list of SKILLS commonly attributed to teacher leaders. Mark the 3 you believe have been most critical during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

- Listening
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Time management
- Organization
- People skills (e.g. relationship building)
- Problem solving
- Creating and implementing a plan to meet goals
- Engaging others
- Conflict resolution/Mediation skills
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Public speaking
- Facilitating large and small groups
- Facilitating meetings
- Data analysis
- Applying research in practice
- Designing and providing professional learning
- Creating inclusive school environments

13) Below is a list of content KNOWLEDGE commonly attributed to teacher leaders. Mark the 3 you believe were most critical in your teacher leader role PRIOR to August 2020.

- Curriculum and content
- Vertical alignment across grade levels
- School environment
- Research-based teaching practices
- What's new and current in education
- Knowledge of adult learning
- Knowledge of the school community – parents, staff, and students
- Assessment design
- How to interpret and make use of assessment data
- Technology
- Cultural competence
- Educational equity
- Organizational structure and systems change

14) Below is the same list of content KNOWLEDGE commonly attributed to teacher leaders. Mark the 3 you believe have been most critical during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

- Curriculum and content
- Vertical alignment across grade levels
- School environment
- Research-based teaching practices
- What's new and current in education
- Knowledge of adult learning
- Knowledge of the school community – parents, staff, and students
- Assessment design
- How to interpret and make use of assessment data
- Technology
- Cultural competence
- Educational equity
- Organizational structure and systems change

15) Below is a list of DISPOSITIONS commonly attributed to teacher leaders. Mark the 3 you believe were most critical in your teacher leader role prior to August 2020.

- Flexible
- Open and approachable
- Caring and tactful
- Driven and persistent
- Supportive
- Reflective
- Cheerful and positive
- Consistent/Reliable
- Active
- Patient
- Self-efficacious
- Ethical
- Courageous
- Growth mindset
- Honors diverse perspectives
- Willing to compromise
- Deeply committed to student learning
- Deeply committed to educational equity

16) Below is the same list of DISPOSITIONS commonly attributed to teacher leaders. Mark the 3 you believe have been most critical during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

- Flexible
- Open and approachable
- Caring and tactful
- Driven and persistent
- Supportive
- Reflective
- Cheerful and positive
- Consistent/Reliable
- Active
- Patient
- Self-efficacious
- Ethical
- Courageous
- Growth mindset
- Honors diverse perspectives
- Willing to compromise
- Deeply committed to student learning
- Deeply committed to educational equity

17) Please describe key leadership roles/responsibilities/supports provided during the Pandemic

18) Please describe how your pandemic roles are similar to your prior roles during traditional learning formats?

19) Please describe how your pandemic roles are different from your prior roles during traditional learning formats?

20) Please describe how you anticipate your role changing in a post pandemic setting.

21) What training would support you in fulfilling your current role?

Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Perspectives of Teaching Assistants on Active Learning Classrooms, Techniques, and Strategies

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Abstract:

Active learning classrooms (ALCs) are pedagogical spaces which use approaches that provide opportunities for increased learner engagement and interaction instead of traditional, passive learning. While ALCs continue to gain popularity in higher education, teaching assistants (TAs) are often left on their own to develop the skills necessary to support teaching and learning in ALC settings. This study offered TAs at one Midwestern university a training workshop and examined their use of ALC techniques and strategies. The findings suggest that teaching TAs have developed some AL strategies but could use more support and desire additional opportunities. Recommendations for universities are offered.

Keywords: Active learning, active learning classrooms, higher education, professional development, student engagement, pedagogy, teaching assistant

Introduction

Education all over the world is continuously transforming in relation to content, pedagogy, technology, and how they overlap with each other. One such area of overlap is that of active learning (AL) and active learning classrooms (ALC). First appearing in the 2012 Horizon Report (Johnson et al., 2012), AL has remained present as a key trend or as a fast, mid-range, or long-range trend in all of the Horizon reports through the 2020 report (see Alexander et al., 2019; Becker et al., 2017; Becker et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016). While AL remains a trend, another trend that can derail AL and ALC efforts is the lack of preparation for associate instructors and teaching assistants (collectively referred to as TAs from this point forward).

AL can technically be any pedagogy that involves learners in the doing, thinking, and reflecting components of the learning process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Felder and Brent (2009) more clearly connect AL with student-centeredness by focusing on it being when all students in a classroom are called upon to actively get involved in the learning, instead of being passive recipients. ALCs are physical or virtual locations with multiple, diverse learning programs, and a variety of pedagogies and technologies (Finkelstein et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2020; Roman & Uttamchandani, 2018). These locations encourage learners to develop, construct, and create their own knowledge and understanding of the world in various ways, including discussing, engaging, and reflecting with one another and with the instructor (Felder & Brent, 2009; Harasim, 2017).

The delivery of information is multi-directional, meaning that learning is involved and operates in several directions, including the interactions between learners, instructors, and the learning space. Instructors are tasked to ensure that ALCs are run efficiently and effectively. They are encouraged to make use of various AL techniques and strategies whenever they are teaching. Despite these challenges, in addition to faculty often receiving training to use such strategies and spaces, TAs can be overlooked or have different standards of quality for receiving similar

preparation despite many universities relying heavily on them to teach courses (e.g., Chiu & Corrigan, 2019; Zehnder, 2016). It is important to provide professional development to TAs for them to also be effective in an ALC. This study examines how a professional development workshop impacted a group of TAs at one university.

Literature Review

Despite the last decade's focus on the importance and value of AL, it is not a new concept. Over 100 years ago, Dewey and Dewey (1915) wrote about there being more to learning than a teacher and a book, highlighting the value of experiential learning. While these new developments and greater appreciation of past thinking are encouraging, learning has more often been presented as fixed and passive where the instructor gives instructions and students focus on listening and note-taking (Weimer, 2002). By contrast, in ALCs, learners are given the power and opportunity in the learning process to create their own understanding mutually and interactively with each other (Babu et al., 2017; Baepler et al., 2016; Brooks, 2011; Harasim, 2017). ALCs are based on the theory of constructivism, which asserts that learning is an active and constructive process where learners produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experiences (Piaget, 1936). The theory holds that people learn by constructing their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experience and reflecting upon that experience (Harasim, 2017; Piaget, 1936). Learning cannot occur in a vacuum but is a continuous active process where you learn through experience and by making mistakes and looking for solutions to those mistakes.

Higher education is the forefront of not only designing new learning spaces, but also of redesigning traditional lecture-based classrooms into ALCs. Beyond the continuing focus in the yearly Horizon Reports since 2012 that indicate the emphasis on deep learning approaches, which include AL strategies, ALCs have engaged students in critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and self-directed learning (Becker et al., 2017). On the same note, Baepler et al.

(2016) added that the values of designing and redesigning classes into ALCs is to promote collaboration amongst instructors and learners and develop skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving while fostering student-centered philosophy. Carriot et al. (2013) note that ALCs significantly improve students' academic performance in many courses such as science, engineering, and mathematics, as well as contributing to increased learner retention, understanding of concepts, and applicability beyond the classrooms. Other research has highlighted how ALCs encourage a positive relationship, attitude, and behavior among the students and the instructor, increasing motivation; the space also brings fun to learning and a sense of self-responsibility (Brooks, 2011). Recent research has also found that ALCs promote more conceptual, strategic, and procedural learning with limited focus on textual and rote learning (Wright et al., 2019).

Previous research has shown differences between ALCs and other types of pedagogical approaches in terms of student learning, achievements, and outcomes such as skills, confidence, and engagement. A study conducted at the University of Minnesota found that the AL techniques and strategies of AL design fully promoted twenty-first century skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication, while fostering student-centered learning (Baepler et al., 2016). The study also found that creating spaces for AL improves student performance in subject areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, while giving students the opportunity to create and construct previously unexplored knowledge with their colleagues.

In a study on a flipped classroom approach at Texas Christian University, Brooks (2011) noted relationships between formal learning spaces and their learning outcomes. He noted that spaces that blend AL approaches encourage positive relationships and good behavior between the students and the instructor. He also found that competencies increased, students were motivated, and the spaces created a sense of self-responsibility in the learning process. With findings like these in mind and through the examination of the challenges with engaging today's students in lecture-based classrooms, it has been suggested that it is necessary to have as many ALCs and similar

spaces as possible for educators (Roehl et al., 2013). Their argument was that, if skills including multitasking, collaboration, and social aspects of learning are to be developed within our students, then there should be a sense of urgency in adopting alternative methods of instruction.

Cotner et al. (2013) conducted a study comparing AL classrooms and traditional learning classrooms. The objective of their study was to examine the performance of biology students in traditional classrooms and AL environments. They found that students in the ALC significantly outperformed expectations, whereas those in the traditional classroom did not (Cotner et al., 2013). The study concluded that creating spaces for AL significantly improved learning outcomes despite challenges of commitment of resources. In addition, they found that collaborative possession of knowledge was an important key to the success of creating ALCs.

Group activity as an ALC strategy promotes student interactions, engagement, sharing of ideas, and deeper levels of learning (Brooks, 2011; Felder & Brent, 2009; Patton, 2015). For instance, a study on the use of a classroom response system (clickers) in a classroom, found that such technology encourages students to contribute their individual opinions, which promotes deep levels of learning (Daniel & Tivener, 2016). In addition, the clickers significantly improved students' perception of engagement in the course and with the instructor, as the authors concluded that students believed the clickers prompted them to be more attentive in class, increasing their comfort level of participation and motivation.

In a typical ALC, learners' seats are placed around tables with movable chairs, rather than in rows and columns. These classrooms are provided with technology such as desktop computers or laptops, tablets, flat display panels, large monitors, and/or large interactive whiteboards and other learning accessories (Dori & Belcher, 2005; Painter et al., 2013), as well as wired or wireless internet access. This gives learners access to instructional materials and helps facilitate collaboration within and among groups. The importance of round and movable furniture is to create a flexible and collaborative environment for learning and to facilitate and increase mobility. When

students face each other, they can more easily talk to each other, which fosters a relationship and a community of learners (Baepler et al., 2016). Painter et al. (2013), argue that these learning approaches accommodate different and diverse pedagogies, teaching modes, and engage students in more interactive ways. ALCs are designed to facilitate and increase flexibility for both students and instructors, offering opportunities for a variety of AL techniques and strategies (see Table 1).

Table 1

Active Learning Techniques and Strategies

Techniques and Strategies	Objectives
1. Groupwork	Promotes deep thinking and allows communication and discussions that are aimed at solving problems
2. Games	Motivates and develops skills such as critical thinking and problem solving
3. Quizzes	Motivates students and helps gauge their understanding of the subject matter
4. Taking field trips	Field trips break classroom boredom, motivate learners and promote deep learning
5. Videos	Motivates learners and improves their understanding
6. Concept maps	These are mental connection and collaboration that allow learning by design, construction of ideas, and communication
7. Role playing	The dramatic technique helps learners better understand learning concepts
8. Interactive lecture	Motivate learners and enable high order thinking
9. Paired activities	Promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and exchange of knowledge
10. Problem-based Learning and case studies	Connect learners to real life stories in relation to classroom knowledge

11. Assessment	Multiple forms of assessment, feedback, and demonstration of learning motivate learners and increase their understanding
12. Technology use	Technology as an enabler. Allow learners to work efficiently and effectively at their own pace
13. Journalism	Motivates, promotes problem solving, and creativity

Methodology

This interpretive qualitative research study utilized a survey methodology. It focused on the attendees of a specifically designed professional development workshop. The workshop focus allowed the participants to learn about and offer personal experiences with AL approaches.

Study Setting

The professional development workshop took place within the College of Education (COE) at a large research university in the Midwestern United States. The COE recently underwent a substantial renovation that included every classroom and seminar room being upgraded with moveable furniture (i.e., tables and chairs with wheels) and technology to support AL (e.g., wirelessly accessible panels and projectors). There were also specific ALCs developed which contained multiple small group work areas that could project to their own panel, and which could then be shared on the large class projection system. General instruction on how to use these new technologies and support AL were limited to faculty members and some staff members.

Participants

A total of 10 TAs took part in the professional development workshop. The TAs were drawn from different departments from across the university. Like the COE, other buildings across the campus had already received some level of renovation to support more AL opportunities, and TAs had the potential to teach in some of these spaces. The purpose of the workshop was to understand their perspectives and approaches to AL and ALCs, and to also help improve their teaching using

this approach in such spaces. All 10 participants were graduate students and TAs at the university.

The workshop focused on introducing ALC techniques and strategies, issues faced while using ALC techniques and strategies, how technology can be used to support AL, and future consideration for ALCs.

Data collection

Online Survey

An open-ended online questionnaire was disseminated after the conclusion of the professional development workshop. The questionnaire involved collecting data on participants' perspectives and opinions. The goal of the online questionnaire was to develop a deeper understanding of topics, issues, or problems from workshop participants' perspectives on AL and ALCs. The questionnaire focused on TAs' abilities with AL/ALCs, reactions to different AL strategies, and their perceptions going forward with AL/ALCs after the workshop. All 10 participants completed the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data used systematic inductive thematic analysis. According to Thomas (2003), inductive data analysis is a data driven type of analysis used to develop concepts and themes from the participants' perspectives and opinions. In other words, it does not fixate on fitting the data into any preexisting classification. The data analysis was centered on participants' perceptions, appreciation, and other issues regarding facilitation of AL techniques in their classrooms. Codes and themes were subsequently developed for the purposes of interpretation.

Findings

This study examined the perspectives of TAs on AL and ALC techniques and strategies. During the data analysis, three themes were generated. These included active participation, simplest and hardest techniques, and the concept of interaction and engagement. The study findings are presented using the three themes as organizational headings.

Active Participation

Concerning the theme of active participation, the study posed several questions to the participants. First, it focused on the distinction between ALCs and passive classrooms. Eight out of the 10 participants mentioned the significance of learners' participation and engagement in an ALC. Five of the respondents asserted that they have previously come across AL strategies. The third respondent, a TA in the applied mathematics, further explained their understanding:

Active learning is the instructional process where learners engage in active participation through discussions and classroom activities. Passive learning is the type of instruction where students interact with information they are presented with in the form of lectures and assigned readings.

One of the respondents stated that they had not come across distinctive factors between AL and passive learning classrooms. Three of the respondents were indecisive over the distinction and chose not to affirm or deny their understanding of the differences. The second question posed to the participants similarly focused on the theme of active participation and the use of AL techniques. The participants were asked whether they could integrate and facilitate AL strategies and techniques in their classrooms. Six of the respondents asserted they had the ability to integrate and facilitate AL strategies and techniques in their classrooms. One of the respondents indicated that they could not. Three of the participants offered varied responses that tethered around the resources offered and the type of deliverable required of them as TAs. One of the participants, a TA teaching educational

administration, stated he has been integrating the strategies highlighted in the workshop, and he agreed that AL strategies play a significant role among learners in class.

Simplest and Hardest Techniques

When asked about their reactions and experiences with AL techniques, two techniques were prominent in participant responses: role playing and games. How they were viewed varied by participants. A TA in linguistics argued that role playing was the simplest way to use as it allows learners to be creative and apply whatever they learned in class to real life situations. A TA from business finance and administration also viewed role playing as being the easiest, noting that, “The use of interactive games and discussions is much preferred because it transforms the experience to being learner-centered; it allows learners to be creative and apply whatever they learned in class in real life situations.”

Without similar depths of explanation, other strategies identified as being the simplest to use in their teaching included group work, circular classroom, class presentations, role modeling, simulations, storytelling, and outside classroom activities. The hardest techniques, as quoted by the participants, included silent reading, answering questions, games, role playing (especially with low-level students), and technology use. An African Studies TA gave an explanation that it was particularly challenging to use games in class because “learners are not able to understand the content in the game play and apply it in real life.” The participant further mentioned that it was also “difficult for learners to practice speaking while using that technique.” Another TA mentioned that the idea of whether the technique is simple or hard to use depends on what you are teaching. The participant shared, “I think for me as a language teacher, what I find hard to use is role play especially to my low-level students.” A TA in linguistics mentioned that games require time to learn, sharing that “games are the hardest because they require more time to set up and understand the rules. Game may not be readily achieved. Also, personality type can affect a student’s willingness or openness to participate in the game.”

Interaction and Engagement

This theme addressed both participant reaction to the professional development workshop, reactions to what was learned, and their intent to use the strategies in future teaching. Based on the responses offered, it was evident that the session was successful with one of the participants who stated that they gained additional knowledge on maintaining an interactive classroom environment. Another respondent was intrigued by the engagement and was looking forward to incorporating some of the techniques highlighted in her language classes. The TA, who identified herself as being from the School of Media Arts and Studies, further stated:

I liked the workshop and more so learning about strategies such as videos, games, and paired activities was great because such techniques are not costly to arrange and they have the ability of easing the students' environment, making it easier to learn.

Another TA in teacher education mentioned that the workshop was engaging and that she learned a lot from these new techniques. The participant went on to share that she was looking forward to incorporating some of the techniques highlighted in her linguistics class. Another participant mentioned that “as a person who spends time teaching, the participant always gets motivated while finding out different ways of making education experience engaging, interactive, and worthwhile for the students.”

Based on their interactions and experiences with the workshop, the study participants offered suggestions for future engagements. These suggestions included having training or tutorials showing what active and passive learning strategies are and their pros and cons prior to beginning their teaching, as well as being offered teaching materials to use in classrooms to better support students' understanding. All ten participants shared positive reviews of their experience with attending and participating in the workshop; some even offered to engage with their own teaching colleagues to support their efforts using AL and supporting teaching and learning in ALCs.

Discussion and Recommendations

The active participation of every learner is vital to AL (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Active participation can take many forms such as reading, writing, discussing, and getting engaged in solving problems. Cranton (2012), mentions that when learners are immersed in an AL environment, they engage in meaningful learning when they interact, invent, and reflect on their individual personal learning. In this study, eight out of the ten participants mentioned the significance of learners' participation and engagement in an ALC. In addition, they mentioned that interactions that occur in an ALC are significant to student learning outcomes. From this study, one participant noted that instructional processes where learners engage in active participation through discussions and classroom activities is a full representation of ALC. Active participation can increase student engagement and improve critical and high-level thinking skills. Teachers and instructors are always encouraged to look for innovative ways and strategies of increasing learners' participation and engagement. The reason being that when students participate and engage in a classroom setup, they can improve their comprehension and develop knowledge and skills that will prepare them for the future.

The TAs in this study identified strategies they used and had differing opinions on what constituted the simplest and hardest techniques. Several techniques were highlighted by the participants as frequently used in the classroom, including group work, storytelling, discussions, and outside class activities. Role playing and games were identified as being either the easiest or hardest techniques to use. Some participants indicated that role playing and games were the easiest AL techniques because they are interactive and involve full active participation of learners. Other participants mentioned that role playing is simple to use because classes are sometimes short, and teachers are also dealing with material that students are still trying to conceptualize.

By contrast, it was hardest for some TAs to use role playing as it is difficult for learners to understand the content and apply it to real life. Others pointed out that games were the hardest

because they require more time to set up and explain, and students may be unwilling or not open to participate in the games. Games can also require a careful selection of the elements to use because not everyone in the class will have equal access to them. Despite differing opinions, both games and role playing provided effective educational experience for their students and encouraged them to think critically.

In light of these considerations and based on this study's findings, we recommend that colleges and universities pay particular attention to how they train faculty, staff, and TAs in the use of AL strategies. This may take the form of providing examples with specific scaffolds for newer TAs and more specific modeling by experienced instructors who have a greater comfort level and experience with leveraging role playing and games in their instruction. It should be noted that unlike faculty and staff at the university, the TAs in this study were not offered official training to employ AL strategies or to use the specific technologies deployed in different classrooms across the university. Like many TAs at other universities (Chiu & Corrigan, 2019; Zehnder, 2016), they also did not receive general pedagogical training. Regardless of this, the TAs developed some level of understanding of AL and ALCs on their own. Their positive reactions to the workshop conducted as part of this study demonstrate an interest in learning more about these techniques specifically and about greater pedagogical support in general. We recommend that universities and colleges make an effort to offer the same types of AL and ALC training to TAs that are offered to faculty and staff, or at least provide basic pedagogical guidance and support for TAs. This would limit the need to develop additional training materials when there are already adequate resources available.

Conclusion

ALCs continue to gain popularity in twenty-first century teaching and learning. The focus of ALC techniques and strategies is to engage learners in the learning process where knowledge, skills, and competencies are developed. The findings in this study highlight the interest by TAs to be equipped and skilled with AL and ALC techniques and strategies in their classroom, as well as

supporting previous findings in the literature regarding limited or no pedagogical training for TAs at different universities (Chiu & Corrigan, 2019; Zehnder, 2016). It would be valuable to support pedagogical training for TAs because the techniques and strategies that are used by TAs, especially in ALCs, have a significant impact on student learning.

Findings from past studies have supported that these techniques create an opportunity for deeper learning and motivate learners reflect upon their learning. The findings from this study have shown that the participating TAs, despite a lack of formal training from their college or the university, have developed their own understandings of AL and ALCs. They are trying to incorporate the strategies into their teaching, welcomed the chance to learn more from a workshop, and would like to make use of more AL strategies and ALCs in their future teaching. If this sample is indicative of the interest and needs of TAs at other universities, then this suggests the need for higher education to invest more in professional development training for their TAs in all departments, as well as their instructors, to gain the necessary skill sets to better support teaching and learning in ALCs. Equipping TAs with appropriate AL strategies and techniques to allow students and TAs to more actively interact and engage in the learning process makes sense if universities are going to continue to invest in renovating instructional spaces to be active learning spaces.

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The OHIO Journal of Teacher Education provides a forum for the exchange of information and ideas concerning the improvement of teaching and teacher education. Articles submitted should reflect this mission. Their focus should concern concepts, practices, and/or results of research that have practical dimensions, implications, or applicability for practitioners involved with teacher education. The journal is regional in scope and is sent as a benefit of membership in the Ohio Association of Teacher Education.

Manuscripts are subject to review of the Professional Journal Committee (co-editors and editor consultants). Points of view are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of either Association. Permission to reproduce journal articles must be requested from the editors.

MANUSCRIPT GUIDELINES

Content: Journal issues may be “thematic” or “open.” Currently, all future issues are designated “open.”

Length: Manuscripts, including all references, bibliographies, charts, figures, and tables, generally should not exceed 15 pages.

Style: For writing and editorial style, follow directions in the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Omit the author’s name from the title page. Include an 80-100-word abstract.

Please do not use auto-formatting when preparing the manuscript!

Cover page: Include the following information on a separate sheet attached to the manuscript: title of the article; date of submission; author's name, author's terminal degree; mailing address, e-mail address, business and home phone numbers, institutional affiliation; and short biographical sketch, including background and areas of specialization.

Submission: Submissions must be word processed using Microsoft Office Word (Microsoft Excel tables are permitted). Submit the manuscript as an attachment to an e-mail to OJTE@xavier.edu

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Authors will be notified of the receipt of the manuscript. After an initial review by the editors, those manuscripts which meet specifications will be sent to reviewers. Notification of the status of the manuscript will take place after the deadline date for each issue. The journal editors will make minor editorial changes; major changes will be made by the author prior to publication. Manuscripts, editorial correspondence, and questions can be directed to Dr. Thomas Knestrict at OJTE@xavier.edu.

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