

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge to their State's Standards for Reading

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Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Abstract

This study compared elementary and special education teachers' knowledge of when K-3 students develop key reading competencies, their knowledge of who is responsible for teaching K-3 students key reading competencies, and teachers' perceptions of their own instructionally-relevant competencies to those standards articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement. Results reveal a disconnect between teacher-held beliefs and state-articulated grade level student literacy competencies. Results also suggest that teacher preparation programs are not preparing candidates to achieve mastery of essential teacher competencies articulated within their state's reading blueprint. Strengthening the accountability of teacher preparation practices to states' reading blueprint standards is recommended.

Research has yielded a growing body of empirical evidence to support a direct relationship between teachers' knowledge and skills about essential components of effective literacy instruction and student literacy outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; McCutcheon & Berninger, 1999). While teachers' literacy related knowledge and skills have been widely documented within the literature as inadequate to support effective service delivery to students (see for example: Moats, 1994), investigators have also documented that given targeted training and supports, teachers' knowledge and skills *do* improve in line with best practice, and these improvements in turn, have a positive impact upon student learning outcomes (McCutchen & Berninger, 1999).

Two contributing factors associated with this documented range of teachers' literacy related knowledge and skills include a lack of national certification standards that promote the acquisition of core teacher competencies and also, the variability that exists within states themselves concerning how state-level requirements may be met (Nolen, McCutchen, & Berninger, 1990). The reluctance of states to establish course content requirements for literacy courses required of teacher certification candidates has further complicated matters in that some pre-service teachers complete literacy courses which lack a firm, comprehensive research base (Moats & Lyon, 1996; National Council on Teacher Quality, 2006).

In light of such practices, several nationally recognized agencies invested in high quality teacher preparation and student literacy acquisition have issued position statements calling for substantive teacher preparation reform with the end goal of improving student literacy outcomes (American Federation of Teachers, 1999; Brady & Moats, 1997). In addition, teacher preparation reform advocates have strongly encouraged states to look to the empirical research to guide policy reform concerning for example, the alignment of teacher preparation curricula, candidate

competency standards and licensing requirements. States have also been encouraged to examine and if necessary, reframe their literacy-related curriculum standards and grade-level student expectations to reflect conclusions drawn from the empirical research (Moats, 2000; Nolen, McCutchen & Berninger, 1999).

The impetus for states to move toward adopting informed, systematic teacher preparation policies has been further bolstered by empirically-based findings which have demonstrated that even *after* controlling for socio-economic and linguistic factors, measures of teacher preparation and certification remain the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This finding, coupled with the publication of the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) and the signing into law of No Child Left Behind, has resulted in states working to bring curriculum standards, teacher preparation policies and classroom screening, assessment, and instructional methodologies in line with best practice. These efforts have spanned the nation from Massachusetts, which has collaborated with the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts at the University of Texas, Austin to develop an empirically-informed Teacher Reading Academy (TRA) to California, which has outlined a Reading/Language Arts framework that articulates empirically-based content standards and instructional practices.

Connecticut's work to reform teacher education and classroom-based instructional practices began to take shape just prior to the release of the National Reading Panel's findings. In 1998, as one requirement of an additional \$20 million in educational funding allocated by the Connecticut General Assembly to support focused early reading interventions in priority school districts, Connecticut formed an Early Reading Success Panel. This panel was charged with identifying the professional development needs of teachers, administrators and K-3 librarians in

urban and priority school districts. Following their assessment of these needs, the Early Reading Success Panel produced a document in 2000 entitled *Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement*, which was intended for “everyone” in the state invested in early reading achievement, including but not limited to for example, school districts as well as schools of education.

The *Blueprint* itself is a comprehensive document which includes a “general overview of basic research findings about reading, including the nature of skilled reading, the competencies important in reading achievement, and the components of comprehensive, high-quality curriculum of reading instruction (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2000, vi).” In addition, this document identifies the specific competencies required for children in K-3 to be successful readers and articulates the specific competencies which *K-3 teachers* must possess in order to effectively support children in learning how to read.

Grade-specific reading-related competencies included in the *Blueprint* were “influenced by a wide variety of sources, including presentations to the panel by many nationally recognized experts; previous state documents (e.g., Connecticut State Board of Education, 1998, 1999b); reports from other states involved in similar efforts, including Indiana, Texas and Alabama, research on typical reading development (e.g., Chall, 1983); an examination of graded text from several basal reading programs; and, especially, the report of the National Research Council, *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success* (1999) (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2000, 47).” For each grade, K-3, competencies which children are expected to develop by the end of the grade are listed beneath each of five areas: word-identification skills, fluent and accurate word identification in context, comprehension, spelling and writing. The *Blueprint* is clear in stating however, that these competencies are not intended

to serve as a checklist against which to rate individual children's literacy profiles, or to represent the complete scope of grade-level language arts curricula. Rather, the competencies listed are intended to guide the focus of language arts instruction at each grade level and to also guide the preparation of primary-level educators.

In an effort to more directly impact the preparation of primary-level educators, the *Blueprint* also includes a section dedicated to articulating essential teacher competences required to support effective primary reading instruction. These competencies are presented within the *Blueprint* as “necessary to teacher candidates, as well as to experienced teachers, in any area of certification that includes kindergarten, first grade, second grade *or* third grade (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2000, 81).” As such, Connecticut educators credentialed in Special Education for example, which is a credential valid for serving students in grades K-12, are also accountable to the standards articulated within the *Blueprint*, as are elementary educators who may not presently be employed in service to K-3 student populations, but are employed under a credential that permits them to serve students in these grades.

Within the *Blueprint*, it is noted that a diverse range of sources also influenced the selection of teacher competencies, including for example, the report of the National Research Council: *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success* (1999) and the *IRA Standards for Reading Professionals* (IRA, 1998). The teacher competencies selected for inclusion within the *Blueprint* are organized into five broad areas: the knowledge base needed by teachers; instructional skills needed by teachers, including not only the ability to teach specific reading and reading-related skills, but also classroom management and the use of technology; competencies involved in assessment; competencies involved in motivating children; and, competencies involved in working effectively with other professionals and with parents. The

variability that exists among children's language and literacy skills is explicitly acknowledged within the *Blueprint* and this acknowledgement supports the assertion that "a teacher at any particular grade level must be able to address instructional needs at a variety of grade levels (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2000, 70)." As such, the teacher competencies listed within the *Blueprint* are justifiably *not* broken down further by grade level.

Since its release, there has been no effort to identify the impact of the *Blueprint* on pre- or in-service teacher training practices or on actual teacher competencies, beliefs, or perceptions held regarding literacy acquisition and instruction. The present study was designed to pilot an instrument developed to: (a) compare teachers' knowledge concerning the grade level at which students develop key reading competencies to that which is articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement; (b) compare teachers' knowledge of who is primarily responsible for teaching K-3 students to develop key reading competencies to that which is articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement; and, (c) to compare teachers' perceptions of whether or not they possess key competencies related to the teaching of reading to those competencies which are articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement as "essential" to educators credentialed to serve K-3 student populations. In addition, this study explored teachers' perceptions concerning their preparedness to teach reading to all K-3 students, their perceptions of their preparedness to assess the reading profiles of students, and the degree to which they agreed that their district required them to read the their state's blueprint for reading achievement.

Method

Participants

This pilot involved 65 teachers credentialed/certified to serve Connecticut's K-3 student populations: special educators (n=30) and elementary educators (n=35). Participants agreed to fill out an anonymous survey regarding their beliefs and attitudes about K-3 educational practice. All participants were graduate students at a state university.

Teacher characteristics are displayed in Table 1. The majority of teachers had been teaching continuously for less than ten years, with the greatest percentage of teachers reporting that they had been teaching between five and nine years (92.6%). Most teachers' highest college degree was a BA/BS (52%), which was followed by a MA/MS (38%). Over one-half (52%) of the teachers obtained their highest degree at one of the universities in the state university system, with the next greatest percentage (26%) obtaining their highest degree from an out-of-state university.

(Insert Table 1)

As shown in the top portion of Table 2, the number of required courses which teachers completed as part of their credential/certification program ranged from none (16.7%) to over three (17.1%), with the greatest frequency being two courses (36%). The middle of Table 2 shows that the majority (60%) of courses the teachers completed did not require any clinical supervision. This did not differ between elementary and special education teachers ($\chi^2=0.47$, $p=.98$). Moreover, the number of courses which teachers completed that specifically addressed how to assess the reading profiles of K-3 students was most frequently none (46%) or just one (35%).

(Insert Table 2)

Materials and Procedures:

Data was collected using a comprehensive survey that was developed using the *Connecticut Blueprint for Reading Achievement* as a guide. Part I of the survey gathered pre-service preparation information from respondents, including for example, information pertaining to the number of reading courses that included a supervised clinical component.

Part II of the survey listed twenty key reading competencies, which students in grades K-3 are to develop, as extracted (verbatim) from the *Blueprint*, which lists them beneath the grade in which students are to develop them. These competencies were randomized by grade in the survey presentation. Respondents were asked to identify in which grade students were to develop stated competencies by checking off one of five categories: grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, other grade, and don't know. Key reading competencies included in Part II of the survey, along with an indicator of the grade beneath which they appear in the *Blueprint*, can be found in Table four.

Part III of the survey listed twenty-two key reading competencies, twenty of which were extracted verbatim from the *Blueprint*, which are identified as being the instructional responsibility of the K-3 classroom teacher. Two reading competencies that refer to specialized interventions characteristically provided by special educators were included in the list in order to discourage a response set: these competencies are not listed in the *Blueprint*. Respondents were asked to identify which service delivery provider was responsible for helping K-3 students to develop stated competencies by checking off one of four categories: K-3 classroom teacher, special educator, reading/language arts specialist, or other personnel. Key reading competencies included in Part III of the survey, along with an indicator of whom the *Blueprint* regards as

instructionally responsible (with the exception of the two aforementioned specialized interventions), can be found in Table 5.

Part IV of the survey listed twenty-two essential teacher competencies, which were extracted from a more comprehensive selection included within the *Blueprint*. These teacher competencies are identified within the *Blueprint* as competencies which all teachers endorsed to serve K-3 student populations must possess in order to effectively address students' unique instructional needs across grade levels. Teacher competencies were written in the first person (e.g. "I know the stages and processes of children's reading development."), and respondents were asked to read each statement and check off one of three responses: disagree, agree, uncertain. The essential teacher competencies included in Part IV of the survey can be found in Table 6.

Part V of the survey consisted of twenty statements which were developed independent of the *Blueprint*. Part V of the survey sought to ascertain teachers' perceptions concerning their preparedness to teach reading to all K-3 students, their perceptions of their preparedness to assess the reading profiles of students, and their perceptions of their district's/school's vision concerning reading instruction. Respondents were asked to read each of the statements listed and check off one of four responses: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Statements included in Part V of the survey can be found in Table 7.

Participants were administered the survey under the supervision of the primary investigator. Collaboration between participants was not permitted. Approximately forty minutes was required for participants to complete the survey. Participants were permitted to ask questions of the investigator as they completed the surveys, however no questions were raised. Responses were entered into an SPSS database to support analysis. Descriptive statistics were

run, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted in order to determine if teachers credentialed in special education differed from those credentialed in elementary education on the mean scores calculated for each section of the survey.

Results

Teachers' Knowledge of When K-3 Students Develop Key Reading Competencies

A Reading Competency Total Score was calculated based upon teachers' responses to Part II of the survey, which asked them to identify the grade in which students were expected to develop various key reading competencies. Respondents' scores could range from 0 (none correct) to 20 (all correct) and the subscale demonstrated good internal consistency, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$. As seen in the second row of Table 3, the mean score secured by all teachers was 8.8 (SD=2.6), illustrating that on average teachers were more likely to indicate that students were expected to develop key reading competencies in grade levels different from those articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement. This did not differ between elementary and special education teachers ($t=0.00$, $p=.99$). The highest score earned on this measure was 13 (65% correct) and over half of the teachers surveyed incorrectly identified the grade in which students were expected to develop key reading competencies for the majority of competencies listed.

Insert Table 3

More than 50% of elementary and special education teachers failed to identify, per the standards articulated within their state's reading blueprint, when children are expected to:

- Distinguish between fiction and nonfiction texts;

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- Accurately decode orthographically regular multi-syllable words by using knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle;
- Have well developed and generally accurate and increasingly automatic word-identification skills;
- Read with increasing fluency and expression;
- Represent all sounds in a word when spelling independently;
- Use their knowledge about morphology and structural analysis as an aid to spelling words.

In addition, at least 75% of elementary and special educators failed to correctly identify, per their state's reading blueprint standards, when K-3 children are expected to: recognize that printed words are separated by spaces and that print is read left to right and top to bottom; identify spoken words with similar initial sounds and ending sounds; blend orally presented phonemes into a correct (one syllable) word; and, demonstrate letter-sound correspondence for all single consonants. It is possible however, that the format of the survey contributed to this dramatic finding, given that the survey did not include K as a response option, but instead included the category *Other Grade*. Further complicating this section of the survey was the fact that the category *Other Grade* did not precede Grade 1 as a response option but rather, followed Grade 3. This may have caused respondents to assume that *Other Grade* meant any grade higher than Grade 3. Findings indicate that the majority of both elementary and special education teachers selected Grade 1 versus *Other Grade* for these particular student competencies (see Table 4).

More than 50% of elementary education teachers specifically, failed to identify per the standards articulated within their state's reading blueprint, when K-3 children are expected to:

- Know sounds for common vowel-r patterns;
- Know sounds for a wide range of suffixes and prefixes;
- Spell words involving previously studied generalizations;
- Read longer, more complex text and chapter books independently and silently;
and,
- Monitor comprehension and accuracy while reading in context and self-correct errors.

More than 50% of special educators specifically, failed to identify per the standards articulated within their state's reading blueprint, when K-3 children are expected to:

- Know sounds for long and short vowels and for common letter patterns;
- Accurately decode words with common inflectional endings.

(Insert Table 4)

Teachers' Knowledge of Person Responsible for Teaching K-3 Students Key Reading Competencies

A Teacher Responsibility Knowledge score was tabulated for each respondent based upon their responses to Part III of the survey, which asked teachers to identify the service delivery provider that was primarily responsible for teaching students selected key reading competencies. The number of correct responses (Teacher Responsibility Knowledge score) ranged from 0 (none correct) to 22 (all correct). This subscale evidenced excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha = .96. As displayed in the third row of Table 3, the average Teacher Responsibility Knowledge score was 18.2 (SD=3.3), which did not significantly differ between elementary and secondary teachers ($t=1.67$, $p=.10$). Fifty-nine teachers (84%) were able to identify the correct service delivery provider for at least 70% of the items.

More than 30% of elementary educators surveyed believed that someone other than the K-3 classroom teacher was responsible for teaching K-3 students to use strategies for syllabifying long vowels as an aid to decoding. As outlined within Table 5, special educators were less able to accurately identify the K-3 classroom teacher as primarily responsible for teaching K-3 children a range of key reading competencies. Interestingly, at least 70% of special educators did not identify that *they* would be primarily responsible for teaching children to use symbol imagery to develop phonemic awareness or for teaching children to use a multi-sensory tracing technique, such as Fernald, to learn irregular words.

(Insert Table 5)

Teachers' Perceptions

A Perception of Knowledge and Skills score was created from teachers' responses to Part IV of the survey, which assessed teachers' perceptions of their literacy-related knowledge and skill competencies. Again, these target competencies were culled from their state's blueprint for reading achievement. The Perception of Knowledge and Skills score could range from 0 ("disagree" recorded for all items) to 44 ("agree" recorded for all items) by coding responses as "disagree" = 0, "uncertain" = 1, and "agree" = 2. As shown in the last portion of Table 3, the mean Perception of Knowledge and Skills score was 34.8 (SD=10). This is fairly close to the possible maximum and suggests that teachers generally feel confident in their knowledge and skills related to teaching reading.

Worth noting, at least 30% of both elementary and special educators responded that they either disagreed or were uncertain if they agreed with the following statements (did not respond "Agree"):

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- I understand the basis for speech-sound confusions that may affect reading and spelling;
- I know the stages/processes of children's oral language development;
- I understand the role of morphology in written English;
- I understand the impact of limited knowledge of spoken English and dialect differences on literacy acquisition;
- I know how to draw children's attention to morphological and structural relationships among words;
- I know how to administer and interpret screening and diagnostic measures designed to identify children at risk for reading difficulties;
- I know how to use the results of assessment to improve instruction for a given child or group of children.

Concerning elementary educators specifically, 40% either did not agree with or were uncertain if they agreed with the statement (did not respond "Agree"), "I know the common characteristics of children who experience reading difficulties and specific indicators for teacher intervention."

At least 30% of special educators specifically, responded that they either disagreed or were uncertain if they agreed with the following statements:

- I know the stages and processes of children's reading development;
- I know the stages and processes of children's spelling development;
- I know the stages and processes of children's writing development;
- I understand how to do structural analysis of words;
- I know how to develop children's reading fluency;

- I know how to administer and interpret measures of literacy routinely used with all children, such as informal reading inventories, graded word lists, running records, portfolios of children's work and standardized tests.

(Insert Table 6)

Items from Part V of the survey, which assessed teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach reading to all K-3 students, their perceptions of their preparedness to assess the reading profiles of all K-3 students, and their perceptions of whether or not their district embodied a "shared vision" regarding teaching K-3 students how to read were collapsed into three groups: Preparedness to Teach Reading, Preparedness to Assess Reading, and Shared District/School Vision. Reliability was lower for this subsection compared to the others, Cronbach's alpha = .64. As displayed near the middle section of Table 3, the mean score for Preparedness to Teach Reading was 22.7 (SD=5) out of a possible high score of 40. The average teacher response fell somewhere between "disagree" and "agree", with a slight favor towards "agree".

As reported in Table 7, the majority of elementary and special education teachers indicated that their certification program had not adequately prepared them to teach all K-3 students how to read, that the district in which they taught had not provided them with in-service training regarding the findings of the National Reading Panel, that the district in which they taught had not required them to read their state's reading blueprint, and that the district in which they taught had not provided them with in-service training regarding their state's reading blueprint. More than 30% of both elementary and special education teachers indicated that it was difficult for them to meet the instructional needs of the lower level students in the regular classroom and 40-70% of elementary and special education teachers indicated that they needed

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to learn more about how best to teach children to read, that they would like to learn how to select and administer informal reading assessments to identify the specific skills that their K-3 students should be working on developing and/or improving, and that they didn't have enough time to assess their students beyond what is required. More than 60% of elementary and special educators indicated that they were responsible for deciding how to teach children in their classroom to read and at least 40% indicated that they did not agree that K-3 teachers in their school have a shared vision regarding how best to teach children to read.

(Insert Table 7)

The relationship between whether or not teachers were required by their district to read their state's blueprint for reading achievement (strongly disagree to strongly agree) and their Teacher Responsibility Knowledge score was explored and results indicated a positive ($r_{(n=75)}=.22$) and nearly significant relationship ($p = .058$). This finding suggests that the more teachers agreed that their state's blueprint for reading achievement was required reading in their district, the better able they were to identify who was responsible for teaching key reading competencies to K-3 students.

As mentioned previously, the sample included 35 teachers employed under an elementary education credential/certification and 30 teachers employed under a special education credential/certification. As seen in Table 3, there were statistically significant differences between these two groups of teachers on the Perceptions: Preparedness to Teach Reading ($t_{(63)} = 2.60, p=.01$) and the Perceptions: Preparedness to Assess Reading ($t_{(63)} = 3.19, p=.002$), groupings and a trend toward significance on the Perception: Shared District/School Vision ($t_{(63)} = 1.82, p=.07$) groupings, with teachers employed under an elementary education

credential/certification earning higher mean scores than those employed under a special education credential/certification.

Although not statistically significant ($p=0.16$), it is interesting that teachers with less years of consecutive teaching experience tended to be *less likely* to be able to identify when K-3 students were to develop key reading competencies, as articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement. The mean reading competency score by years of consecutive teaching were 7.7, 8.8, 9.1, and 9.5 for less than one year, 1-4 years, 5-9 years, and 10 or more years respectively.

Discussion

All of the teachers who participated in this study were, given the nature of their respective endorsements, regarded by their state as accountable to those standards articulated within the state's blueprint for reading achievement. The results of this inquiry revealed however, that the majority of teachers surveyed did not share their state's perspective concerning for example, the grades in which K-3 students are to develop several key reading competencies related to word identification, fluency and encoding. This disconnect raises questions about if and when these literacy skills are actually taught and supported within K-3 classrooms and also raises concerns about the potential negative effects this disconnect may have on student literacy outcomes. For example, more than 40% of elementary teachers surveyed indicated that children were to develop the ability to accurately decode words with common inflectional endings in grades *later* than that which is indicated within their state's reading blueprint. It is possible therefore, that some children are not taught this skill at all if teachers do not approach literacy instruction from a shared perspective (e.g. the Grade 1 teacher could assume the Grade 2 teacher

addresses the skill, the Grade 2 teacher could then assume that the skill was either taught in Grade 1 or will be taught in Grade 3 and so on).

Further complicating matters is the finding that approximately 16% of elementary teachers did not perceive elementary classroom teachers as responsible for teaching students various essential decoding and encoding skills, such as teaching students how to use their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle to decode orthographically regular one syllable words and nonsense words presented out of context. This finding is particularly concerning, given that student's early decoding skills largely predict the growth of their reading skill trajectory and given the role of decoding in supporting text comprehension (Beck & Juel, 1992; Stanovich, 1986). Further, if teachers holding elementary education credentials/certificates assume that decoding and encoding instruction is "somebody else's" responsibility, the question which remains is whether or not various essential decoding skills are taught *at all* to some K-3 students. These results introduce the possibility for some children to miss out entirely on key components of literacy instruction, a possibility which is further endorsed when one considers that more than 70% of the elementary teachers surveyed reported that they are responsible for deciding how to teach children in their classroom how to read and when one considers that more than 50% of the elementary teachers surveyed indicated that K-3 teachers in their school *did not* have a shared vision regarding how best to teach children to read.

It is concerning that the majority of both the elementary and special education teachers surveyed did not agree with their state's blueprint for reading achievement regarding when students should be expected to develop automatic word identification skills and when they should be expected to read with increasing fluency. Coupled with the fact that nearly one-third

of both elementary and special education teachers surveyed indicated for example, that they did not understand or were uncertain if they understood the basis for speech-sound confusions that may affect reading and spelling, that they did not know or were uncertain if they knew the stages/processes of children's reading development, and that they did not know or were uncertain if they knew the common characteristics of children who experience reading difficulties and specific indicators for teacher intervention, this finding raises questions about whether or not elementary teachers in particular, who are credentialed/certified to teach K-3 student populations to read, sufficiently appreciate the literacy acquisition continuum, a concern legitimized elsewhere (Moats & Foorman, 2003; Spear-Swerling & Brucker, 2003). In addition, these findings raise concerns about whether or not special education interventionists are themselves in a position to intervene on behalf of struggling or disabled readers.

In addition, findings reported here which indicate for example, that at least one-third of all teachers surveyed reported that they did not know or were uncertain if they knew the stages and processes of children's oral language development and that they did not know or were uncertain if they knew the impact of limited English proficiency and dialect on literacy acquisition, lend support to findings secured by others in the field, which have indicated that teachers are *not* prepared to support the diverse language-based needs of children's literacy deficits (Kavale & Reese, 1991; Moats, 1994).

More than one-third of the teachers surveyed indicated that they did not know how to administer and interpret screening and diagnostic measures designed to identify children at risk for reading disabilities or how to use the results of assessments to improve instruction for a given child or group of children. While deeply concerning, this finding is not at all surprising given that more than 50% of elementary teachers and nearly 37% of special education teachers

responded that they were *not* required to complete as part of their professional preparation, a course dedicated to assessing K-3 students' reading profiles. The majority of teachers surveyed indicated in fact that their certification program had not adequately prepared them to teach all K-3 students how to read and that they needed to learn more about how best to teach children to read. Coupled with the trend for less experienced teachers to be less able to identify when K-3 students were to develop key reading competencies, as articulated within their state's reading blueprint, these findings strongly suggests that the theoretical underpinnings of the state's blueprint for reading achievement are not finding their way into current teacher preparation practices.

The fact that elementary teachers earned significantly stronger scores than special education teachers with regard to their perceptions of their preparedness to teach all K-3 students and to assess students' reading profiles is concerning, given that *both* groups of teachers are responsible to the same teacher competency standards articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement. It is important therefore, to explore what role pre-service and in-service training experiences may play in this finding and to also explore whether or not these differences in perception are meaningfully related to measures of actual knowledge and skill.

Collectively, these results indicate that simply articulating essential teacher competencies (knowledge/skills) within state reading blueprints is inadequate to promote mastery of these competencies across targeted teacher populations. Findings suggest instead, that states which have taken care to articulate essential teacher competencies within their reading blueprints should also ensure that higher education teacher-preparation practices systematically prepare teacher candidates to meet these competency standards so they may begin their careers as educators able to effectively serve the literacy needs of diverse student populations (Ehri &

Williams, 1995). States may also wish to consider for example, revising their teacher licensing exams to include a sufficient number of items which thoroughly assess candidates' mastery of blueprint-endorsed teacher competencies. By doing so, states may encourage more immediate teacher preparation reform, given that teacher preparation programs are motivated to prepare their candidates to meet state licensing standards.

Limitations

All of the educators participating in this study were graduate students at the same institution, and nearly half of them had earned their current highest degree from one of the universities in the state university system. While this inquiry did not explore the role of teacher preparation practices on performance for the measures employed, the results reported here support the need to evaluate whether or not teacher preparation practices at state institutions reflect the content of states' reading blueprints.

Likewise, educators' performance on measures may be reflective of the districts in which they are employed. It may be the case for example, given that respondents attend the same higher education institution, that respondents represent similarly matched school districts, with shared philosophies and practices, from neighboring towns. This was not explored.

This inquiry did not include a measure of teachers' literacy-related knowledge to contrast reported ratings. As such, it may be the case that teachers' reported confidence about their literacy-related knowledge and skills may not accurately reflect their actual knowledge and skill set, which is a disconnect that has been documented elsewhere within the empirical research (Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich & Stanovich, 2004).

The majority of teachers surveyed here reported that the grade in which they were presently teaching was outside of K-3 (see: Table 1). It is important to remember however, that

these teachers were expected to possess the full scope of knowledge and skills articulated within their state's blueprint for reading achievement, given that their credentials/certifications deem them qualified to serve K-3 student populations.

Finally, as referenced previously, Part III of the survey included only two distracter items which likely contributed to a response bias. In addition, Part III of the survey presented Other Grade as an option following the options Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3: this may have caused respondents to assume that Other Grade referred to grades above Grade 3, but not Grade K.

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Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Table 1: Teaching Characteristics

Characteristic	Elementary Frequency	Elementary Percent	SPED Frequency	SPED Percent
Uninterrupted Years of Teaching				
Less than 1	8	22.9%	1	3.3%
1 – 4 years	10	28.6	12	40.0
5 – 9 years	13	37.1	15	50.0
10 or more years	3	8.6	1	3.3
Grade Primarily Teach				
K-3	17	48.8%	1	3.3%
Other	15	42.9	29	96.7
Highest Education Degree Held				
BS/BA	18	51.4%	18	60.0%
MS/MA	15	42.9	8	26.7
6 th year	1	2.9	0	0.0
PhD	0	0.0	0	0.0
Certification Only	0	0.0	4	13.3
Highest Degree: Type of School				
State University System	17	48.6%	19	63.3%
Private State University	5	14.3	3	10.0
Out of State University	11	31.4	7	23.3

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Table 2: Number of Courses Taken

Type of Course	Elementary Frequency	Elementary Percent	SPED Frequency	SPED Percent	Combined Frequency	Combined Percent
Required Courses:						
K-3	6	17.1%	5	16.7%	11	17.1%
Reading Instruction	7	20.0	7	23.3	14	21.9
	14	40.0	11	36.7	25	39.0
0	2	5.7	4	13.3	6	9.4
1	6	17.1	2	6.7	8	12.5
2						
3						
> 3						
Required Courses: Supervised Clinical Experience						
	22	62.9%	17	56.7%	39	60.0%
	7	20.0	8	26.7	15	23.1
0	4	11.4	3	10.0	7	10.8
1	1	2.9	1	3.3	2	3.1
2	1	2.9	1	3.3	2	3.1
3						
> 3						
Required Courses: Assessing Profiles						
K-3	19	54.3%	11	36.7%	30	46.2%
Reading	11	31.4	12	40.0	23	35.4
	4	11.4	7	23.3	11	16.9
0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
1	1	2.9	0	0.0	1	1.5
2						
3						
> 3						

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Table 3: Mean (SD) Scores of Various Measures

Type of Score	Elementary	SPED	Combined	t-statistic	p-value
Reading Competency Scores	8.8 (2.4)	8.8 (2.9)	8.8 (2.6)	0.01	.994
Responsibility Knowledge Scores	18.8 (2.7)	17.4 (3.8)	18.2 (3.3)	1.67	.100
Perceptions					
Preparedness to Teach	23.7 (5.1)	20.6 (4.2)	22.3 (4.9)	2.60	.011
Reading					
Preparedness to Assess	13.4 (2.8)	11.4 (2.3)	12.5 (2.7)	3.19	.002
Reading					
Shared Vision of District/School	13.3 (3.0)	12.0 (2.6)	12.6 (2.9)	1.82	.074
Perception of Knowledge & Skills	35.0 (9.4)	33.2 (10.1)	34.2 (9.7)	0.76	.451

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Table 4: Performance on Part II of Survey¹

Key Reading Competencies Organized by Grade	Elementary (n=35)					Special Education (n=30)				
	Other Grade Competencies	G1	G2	G3	Other	I Don't Know	G1	G2	G3	Other
Recognizes that printed words are separated by spaces and that print is read left to right and top to bottom	27 77.1%	1 2.9%	0 0%	7 20%	0 0%	24 80%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%
Identifies spoken words with similar initial sounds and ending sounds	25 71.4%	4 11.4%	1 2.9%	5 14.3%	0 0%	18 60%	7 23.3%	2 6.7%	2 6.7%	1 3.3%
Blends orally presented phonemes into a correct (one syllable) word	24 68.6%	2 5.7%	1 2.9%	8 22.9%	0 0%	20 66.7%	6 20%	0 0%	1 3.3%	2 6.7%
Demonstrates letter-sound correspondence for all single consonants	27 77.1%	2 5.7%	0 0%	6 17.1%	0 0%	20 66.7%	6 20%	1 3.3%	0 0%	2 6.7%
Grade 1 Competencies	G1	G2	G3	Other	I Don't Know	G1	G2	G3	Other	I Don't Know
Accurately decodes words with common inflectional endings (e.g. -s, -es, -ed, -ing)	18 51.4%	11 31.4%	4 11.4%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	10 33.3%	15 50.0%	2 6.7%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%
Knows sounds for long and short vowels and for common letter patterns such as: sh, th, ch; oo, ee, igh; ing, ed	23 65.7%	11 31.4%	0 0.0%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	12 40.0%	16 53.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%
Spells correctly three and four letter short vowel words (e.g. ship, man, sled)	28 80.0%	5 14.3%	0 0.0%	2 5.7%	0 0.0%	23 76.7%	5 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%
Segments one-syllable spoken words into phonemes	26 74.3%	1 2.9%	1 2.9%	5 14.3%	0 0.0%	18 60.0%	5 16.7%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	3 10.0%

¹ Note: In the actual survey, competencies were presented in randomized order. We have resorted them back into grade level sequence here for clarity of interpretation.

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Key Reading Competencies Organized by Grade	Elementary (n=35)					Special Education (n=30)				
Generates new words based on common letter patterns (e.g. -at, -it)	28 80.0%	1 2.9%	1 2.9%	5 14.3%	0 0.0%	17 56.7%	10 33.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%
Blends orally presented phonemes into a correct (one-syllable) word	24 68.6%	2 5.7%	1 2.9%	8 22.9%	0 0.0%	20 66.7%	6 20.0%	1 3.3%	0 0.0%	2 6.7%
Distinguishes between fiction and nonfiction (informational) texts	14 40.0%	11 31.4%	6 17.1%	4 11.4%	0 0.0%	5 16.7%	11 36.7%	10 33.3%	1 3.3%	2 6.7%
Grade 2 Competencies	G1	G2	G3	Other	I Don't Know	G1	G2	G3	Other	I Don't Know
Reads with increasing fluency and expression	9 25.7%	16 45.7%	9 25.7%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	14 46.7%	14 46.7%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%
Accurately decodes orthographically regular multisyllable words by using knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle	10 28.6%	13 37.1%	8 22.9%	1 2.9%	2 5.7%	7 23.3%	13 43.3%	5 16.7%	0 0.0%	4 13.3%
Knows sounds for common vowel-r patterns (e.g. ar, er, ir, or, ur)	18 51.4%	11 31.4%	5 14.3%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	7 23.3%	17 56.7%	3 10.0%	0 0.0%	2 6.7%
Represents all sounds in a word when spelling independently	17 48.6%	12 34.3%	4 11.4%	2 5.7%	0 0.0%	9 30.0%	12 40.0%	7 23.0%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%
Spells words involving previously studied generalizations (e.g. dropping silent e before adding -ing) and word patterns correctly	6 17.1%	17 48.6%	11 31.4%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	2 6.7%	17 56.7%	8 26.7%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Key Reading Competencies Organized by Grade	Elementary (n=35)					Special Education (n=30)				
	G1	G2	G3	Other	I Don't Know	G1	G2	G3	Other	I Don't Know
Grade 3 Competencies	6 17.1%	17 48.6%	11 31.4%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	2 6.7%	17 56.7%	8 26.7%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%
Knows sounds for a wide range of suffixes and prefixes (e.g. -able, -tion, -ment; and ex-, re-)	8 22.9%	13 37.1%	11 31.4%	2 5.7%	1 2.9%	3 10.0%	10 33.3%	15 50.0%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%
Reads longer, more complex text and chapter books independently and silently.	2 5.7%	14 40.0%	15 42.9%	4 11.4%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%	4 13.3%	19 63.3%	4 13.3%	1 3.3%
Has well developed, generally accurate and increasingly automatic word-identification skills	11 31.4%	15 42.9%	8 22.9%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	5 16.7%	7 23.3%	14 46.7%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%
Uses knowledge about morphology and structural analysis as an aid to spelling words	3 8.6%	10 28.6%	16 45.7%	3 8.6%	3 8.6%	3 10.0%	8 26.7%	13 43.3%	1 3.3%	3 10.0%
Monitors comprehension and accuracy while reading in context and self-corrects errors.	11 31.4%	13 37.1%	10 28.6%	1 2.9%	0 0.0%	3 10.0%	4 13.3%	16 53.3%	2 6.7%	3 10.0%

Table 5: Student Reading Competencies/Responsible Party

Responsible Party →	Elementary (n=35)				Special Education (n=30)			
	K-3 Classroom Teacher	Special Educator	Reading/LA Specialist	Other Personnel	K-3 Classroom Teacher	Special Educator	Reading/LA Specialist	Other Personnel
K-3 Classroom Teacher								
To blend orally presented phonemes into a correct one-syllable word.	35 100.0%	-	-	-	28 93.3%	-	-	1 3.3%
To rhyme spoken words, identify spoken words with similar initial/ending sounds, blend up to three or four orally presented phonemes into a correct word.	35 100.0%	-	-	-	26 86.7%	2 6.7%	-	1 3.3%
Sounds for a wide range of suffixes and prefixes	34 97.1%	1 2.9%	-	-	27 90%	-	-	1 3.3%
To use letter-sound correspondence and structural analysis to decode multi-syllable words.	34 97.1%	-	-	-	22 73.3%	2 6.7%	3 10.0%	1 3.3%
To segment one syllable spoken words into phonemes.	32 91.4%	-	3 8.6%	-	19 63.3%	4 13.3%	4 13.3%	2 6.7%
The sounds for long and short vowels and for common letter patterns such as: sh, th, ch, oo, ee, igh, ing, ed	35 100.0%	-	-	-	25 83.3%	2 6.7%	-	2 6.7%
To decode by analogy, words with common letter patterns	32 91.4%	3 8.6%	-	-	22 73.3%	3 10.0%	3 10.0%	1 3.3%
To use context to read accurately words with more than one pronunciation (e.g. an <u>object</u> vs. to <u>object</u>)	34 97.1%	-	-	-	20 66.7%	5 16.7%	2 6.7%	1 3.3%
To use knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle to decode orthographically regular one syllable words AND nonsense words presented out of context.	28 80.0%	2 5.7%	4 11.4%	-	21 70.0%	2 6.7%	4 13.3%	1 3.3%
To accurately decode words with common inflectional endings	34 97.1%	1 2.9%	-	-	24 80.0%	2 6.7%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%
To attend to punctuation during oral reading (e.g. pauses at commas and periods)	33 94.3%	1 2.9%	1 2.9%	-	27 90.0%	-	-	1 3.3%

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Responsible Party →	Elementary (n=35)				Special Education (n=30)			
	K-3 Classroom Teacher	Special Educator	Reading/LA Specialist	Other Personnel	K-3 Classroom Teacher	Special Educator	Reading/LA Specialist	Other Personnel
To represent initial and final phonemes of many words correctly when attempting to spell phonetically regular words.	34 97.1%	-	1 2.9%	-	26 86.7%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%
To recognize pronoun referents in a text.	33 94.3%	1 2.9%	1 2.9%	-	25 83.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%
Sounds for common vowel-r patterns and for some letter patterns found in long words (such as very common prefixes and suffixes)	33 94.3%	1 2.9%	-	-	25 83.3%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	2 6.7%
To use strategies for syllabifying long vowels as an aid to decoding	22 62.9%	5 14.3%	7 20.0%	-	17 56.7%	5 16.7%	6 20.0%	1 3.3%
To use knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and the alphabetic principle to accurately decode orthographically regular multisyllable words and two-syllable nonsense words presented out of context.	29 82.9%	2 5.7%	4 11.4%	-	20 66.7%	2 6.7%	5 16.7%	2 6.7%
To accurately read many irregularly spelled words	30 85.7%	2 5.7%	3 8.6%	-	24 80.0%	1 3.3%	3 10.0%	1 3.3%
To read with increasing fluency and expression.	31 88.6%	1 2.9%	3 8.6%	-	27 90.0%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	-
To generate new words based on common letter patterns	33 94.3%	1 2.9%	1 2.9%	-	25 83.3%	1 3.3%	2 6.7%	1 3.3%
To use knowledge about morphology and structural analysis as an aid to spelling words.	27 77.1%	4 11.4%	3 8.6%	-	23 76.7%	2 6.7%	3 10.0%	1 3.3%
Special Educator								
To use symbol imagery to develop phonemic awareness.	29 82.9%	3 8.6%	2 5.7%	-	20 66.7%	6 20.0%	1 3.3%	2 6.7%
To use a multi-sensory tracing technique, such as Fernald, to learn irregular words.	12 34.3%	17 48.6%	5 14.3%	-	13 43.3%	9 30.0%	4 13.3%	2 6.7%

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Table 6: Responses to Part IV of Survey

	Elementary (n=35)			Special Education (n=30)		
	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain
I understand the basis for speech-sound confusions that may affect reading and spelling.	9 25.7%	22 62.9%	4 11.4%	5 16.7%	17 56.7%	7 23.3%
I know the stages/ processes of children's oral language development.	7 20.0%	24 68.6%	4 11.4%	7 23.3%	17 56.7%	6 20.0%
I know the stages and process of children's reading development.	3 8.6%	27 77.1%	5 14.3%	5 16.7%	15 50.0%	10 33.3%
I know the stages and processes of children's spelling development.	5 14.3%	26 74.3%	3 8.6%	5 16.7%	14 46.7%	11 36.7%
I know the stages and processes of children's writing development.	3 8.6%	29 82.9%	2 5.7%	6 20.0%	16 53.3%	7 23.3%
I know common letter-sound /spelling-sound relationships in English.	2 5.7%	32 91.4%	1 2.9%	2 6.7%	27 90.0%	1 3.3%
I know the various syllable structures characteristic of written English.	4 11.4%	28 80.0%	3 8.6%	1 3.3%	24 80.0%	4 13.3%
I understand how to do structural analysis of long words.	4 11.4%	27 77.1%	4 11.4%	4 13.3%	18 60.0%	6 20.0%
I understand the role of morphology in written English.	5 14.3%	21 60.0%	8 22.9%	5 16.7%	16 53.3%	8 26.7%
I understand the impact of limited knowledge of spoken English and dialect differences on literacy acquisition.	7 20.0%	23 65.7%	5 14.3%	7 23.3%	18 60.0%	4 13.3%
I know the common characteristics of children who experience reading difficulties and specific indicators for teacher intervention.	10 28.6%	21 60.0%	4 11.4%	4 13.3%	21 70.0%	4 13.3%
I know the difference between phonological and phonemic awareness.	2 5.7%	32 91.4%	1 2.9%	2 6.7%	24 80.0%	3 10.0%
I know how to teach common letter-sound and spelling-sound correspondences, including correspondences for groups of letters.	2 5.7%	32 91.4%	1 2.9%	3 10.0%	22 73.3%	4 13.3%
I know the difference between phonetically regular/irregular words.	3 8.6%	30 85.7%	2 5.7%	3 10.0%	25 83.3%	1 3.3%
I know how to develop children's reading fluency.	2 5.7%	27 77.1%	6 17.1%	6 20.0%	18 60.0%	4 13.3%
I know how to teach vocabulary, including multiple meanings of words, idiomatic expressions and literary language.	5 14.3%	25 71.4%	5 14.3%	4 13.3%	21 70.0%	4 13.3%
I know how to teach the use of comprehension strategies.	5 14.3%	29 82.9%	1 2.9%	2 6.7%	21 70.0%	6 20.0%

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

	Elementary (n=35)			Special Education (n=30)		
	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Agree	Uncertain
I know how to teach common spelling generalizations	5 14.3%	27 77.1%	3 8.6%	1 3.3%	24 80.0%	4 13.3%
I know how to draw children's attention to morphological and structural relationships among words.	7 20.0%	22 62.9%	6 17.1%	4 13.3%	17 56.7%	7 23.3%
I know how to administer and interpret measures of literacy routinely used with all children, such as informal reading inventories, graded word lists, running records, portfolios of children's work and standardized tests.	7 20.0%	26 74.3%	2 5.7%	5 16.7%	16 53.3%	8 26.7%
I know how to administer and interpret screening and diagnostic measures designed to identify children at risk for reading difficulties.	11 31.4%	18 51.4%	6 17.1%	4 13.3%	19 63.3%	6 20.0%
I know how to use the results of assessment to improve instruction for a given child or group of children	8 22.9%	23 65.7%	3 8.6%	5 16.7%	15 50.0%	8 26.7%

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Table 7: Responses to Part V of Survey²

	Elementary (n=35)		Special Education (n=30)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Preparedness to Teach Reading to All K-3 Students				
My certification program has adequately prepared me to teach all K-3 children how to read.	15 42.9%	19 54.3%	10 33.3%	20 66.7%
In the past two years, the in-service training that I have received in my district has enhanced my ability to teach reading effectively to all K-3 children.	22 62.9%	12 34.3%	10 33.3%	20 66.7%
I am confident in my ability to teach K-3 children how to read.	26 74.3%	9 25.7%	16 53.3%	14 46.7%
I understand the developmental stages of reading acquisition.	28 80.0%	7 20.0%	15 50%	13 43.3%
Phonics instruction is best taught implicitly using level texts and authentic literature.	14 40.0%	21 60.0%	12 40%	17 56.6%
It is difficult for me to meet the instructional needs of the lower level students in the regular classroom.	15 42.8%	19 54.3%	11 36.7%	17 56.7%
My district has provided me with in-service training regarding the findings of the National Reading Panel	4 11.4%	31 88.6%	5 16.7%	23 76.6%
My district has required me to read the CT Blueprint for Reading Achievement.	11 31.4%	23 65.7%	3 10%	27 90%
My district has provided me with in-service training regarding Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement.	4 11.4%	31 88.6%	5 16.6%	25 83.3%
I need to learn more about how best to teach children to read.	22 62.8%	12 34.3%	20 66.7%	10 33.4%
Preparedness to Assess Reading Profiles of Students	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
I'm not sure how to use assessment results to plan day to day instruction.	10 28.5%	25 71.5%	12 40%	18 60%
I would like to learn how to select and administer informal reading assessments to identify the specific skills that my K-3 students should be working on developing and/or improving.	22 62.8%	13 37.1%	21 70%	8 26.6%
I don't have enough time to assess my students beyond what is required.	15 42.8%	20 57.2%	20 66.6%	10 33.3%
I use the DRA to tell me what I need to know about a student's reading level.	18 51.4%	16 45.7%	8 26.6%	22 73.3%
I supplement the DRA with other informal tests to help me plan instruction for my students.	26 74.3%	9 25.7%	14 46.6%	15 50.0%

² Response categories have been collapsed into Disagree (survey categories: Strongly Disagree and Disagree) and Agree (survey categories: Strongly Agree and Agree)

Comparing Teachers' Literacy-Related Knowledge

Shared Vision of District/School	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
I have the responsibility of deciding how to teach children in my classroom to read.	25 71.4%	9 25.8%	19 63.3%	11 36.6%
My district and/or administrator decide how I am to teach children in my classroom to read.	18 51.4%	17 48.5%	8 26.6%	21 70.0%
K-3 teachers in my school have a shared vision regarding how best to teach children to read.	15 42.9%	20 57.1%	14 46.7%	12 40.0%
Identifying how best to teach children to read is a high priority in my school.	25 71.4%	10 28.5%	15 50.0%	14 46.7%
My district is clear in stating who is responsible for teaching K-3 children how to read.	18 51.4%	17 48.5%	15 50.0%	15 50.0%