Preparing Contemporary Reading/Literacy Specialists: Pairing Research and Standards

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Ask any school-based reading/literacy specialist to describe their daily work, and responses will fluctuate by state, county, district, and even within individual schools. While some PreK-12 reading/literacy specialists are student-focused, others put greater emphasis on teacher-focused engagement, and still, others may concentrate their efforts toward system-focused schoolwide work (Bean, 2020). Some school-based reading/literacy specialists may also distribute their efforts addressing students, teachers, and school needs. For years, researchers have summarized this role as varied, nimble, complex, versatile, and flexible. The role of the reading/literacy specialist is a multifaceted one (Bean, 1979; Bean, 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014), which has shifted in response to educational policy and funding (Dole, 2004; Walpole & Blamey, 2008) and evolved toward informal literacy leadership (Bean, Swan Dagen, Ippolito & Kern, 2018; Lewis & Jay, 2011; ILA, 2015). The roles and responsibilities of reading/literacy specialists vastly differ across settings, with specialists often assuming a chameleon-like ability to adapt to their environment, an indispensable aspect of the position.

The International Literacy Association (ILA) has advocated for reading/literacy specialist preparation and operationalization since its inception to facilitate the field's understanding of this role. . ILA has efficaciously guided the field by developing and modifying preparation standards since the early 1960s, commissioning research, collaborating with literacy-based organizations, and supporting policy on preparation and school implementation. While the ILA standards provide parameters and recommendations, individual states create unique requirements for endorsing reading/literacy specialist certification (Dole, Liang, Watkins & Wiggins, 2006). Further, while ILA supports the profession and states oversee certification requirements, the individual schools' decision-makers operationalize the role to fit their schoolwide literacy program goals and outcomes.

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What does this mean for teacher education program providers who prepare reading/literacy specialists to work across the country in PreK-12 schools with ambiguous and multifaceted job descriptions? This paper presents a detailed account of how we (program faculty) responded to the preparation needs of contemporary PreK-12 reading/literacy specialist candidates and spent nearly five-year reimagining the program based on the shifts in the role as outlined by ILA. Near the end of this process, our graduate program earned ILA's *National Recognition with Distinction* (ILA, 2019a) in the award's inaugural year.

This comprehensive program work included surveying curriculum, synthesizing research, analyzing program features, and contemplating delivery platform options through collaborative faculty work. As the work of envisioning a 21st-century preparation program got underway, we relied on research findings on elementary reading teacher preparation (Anders et al., 2000; Hoffman et al., 2005; Lacina & Block, 2011; Risko et al., 2008;) and by research disseminated by ILA, (formerly, the International Reading Association [IRA]), (IRA, 2003; IRA, 2007; IRA, 2010). As our efforts progressed, a continual release of influential research also guided our work. These pieces included synthesis of research on the role of the reading specialist (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014), a new national study on reading specialists and coaches (Bean et al., 2015), an ILA research brief titled *The Multiple Roles of School-Based Specialized Literacy Professionals* (ILA, 2015) and revised *Standards for the Preparation of Specialized Literacy Professionals* 2017 (ILA, 2018).

To retell this experience, we begin by presenting a brief historical timeline describing shifts in school-based reading/literacy specialists' responsibilities, including the differentiation of titles currently used to clarify the role. We transition and present a brief snapshot of our preparation program and share the theoretical frameworks used to explore programmatic features, curriculum, and outcomes identified

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in *Standards 2017*. The paper concludes with a discussion and recommendations for preparing future reading/literacy specialists.

Role of Reading/Literacy Specialist

Shift in Responsibilities

E.W. Dolch (1940) made one of the earliest recommendations for the evolution of a classroom teacher to a school-based reading specialist. Eighty years ago, he advocated for schools to have "one teacher in each building make a special study of remedial reading and thus develop into somewhat of a specialist in that field" (p.206). Moving forward into the 1960s, the reading specialist's role as an interventionist, especially for those in lower socioeconomic status contexts, was reinforced with the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965). Over the following decades, reading specialists continued to work with students while engaging in other responsibilities (Bean, 1979). Concerns regarding the lack of connection between the classroom teacher's instruction and the reading specialist's small group intervention instruction dubbed the pull-out or in-class models debate emerged (Bean, 2020). In an attempt to remedy this issue, by the mid to late 1990s, reading specialists began a gradual shift toward more collaborative engagement with classroom teachers. This transition led to reading specialists assuming new informal leadership responsibilities at their schools, including curriculum work, mentoring, and professional learning opportunities for teachers (Bean et al., 2002; Bean, Swan & Knaub, 2003; ILA, 2000; Snow et al.,1998).

In the early to mid-2000s, the literacy/reading coach's role emerged, predominately in elementary and secondary schools, which received Reading First funding. Literacy/reading coaches worked directly with individuals and groups of teachers in a non-supervisory manner, focusing their work on the five dimensions of reading identified in the legislation. Beyond Reading First, literacy/reading coaching roles were also uniquely defined across various school settings, with some

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coaches working as mentors (with teachers) and others as directors of school reading programs (Walpole & Blamey, 2008). The momentum created through collaborative coaching and informal leadership responsibilities continues in today's schools for some reading/literacy specialists.

In the 2015 national survey, Bean et al. used the term specialized literacy professionals to categorize the survey respondents: reading specialists, literacy coaches, instructional coaches, and interventionists. In 2015, seeking to clarify and verify reading professionals' responsibilities, ILA defined three roles, categorized under the umbrella term *specialized literacy professional* (SLP), including reading/literacy specialist, literacy coach, and literacy coordinator (ILA, 2015). In *Standards 2017* (2018), these three SLP roles are presented individually, with each role having a distinct set of professional standards. In some school settings, three individual professionals may fulfill these three different roles. In contrast, in other schools, a single literacy professional may assume all three roles' responsibilities.

While it has been 80 years since Dolch's recommendations for "remedial reading" teachers, many of today's reading /literacy specialists still focus on their work with struggling readers (Bean, Swan Dagen, Ippolito & Kern, 2018; Bean, 2020; Helf & Cooke, 2011; ILA, 2018; Galloway & Lesaux 2014) with some exclusively engaging with students. As outlined in *The Multiple Roles of School-Based Specialized Literacy Professionals,* ILA defines the "reading/literacy specialist" as:

The reading/literacy specialist's primary role is an instructional one, predominantly working with students who are experiencing difficulties with reading and writing. At the same time, to fulfill their instructional role effectively, these specialized literacy professionals must have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to effectively and collaboratively work with teachers to improve general classroom literacy instruction. (2015, p.7)

As the reading/literacy specialist role evolves in PreK-12 schools, programs must continue to adjust to meet candidates' changing needs. Today, this includes preparing candidates who can distribute their efforts to meet the instructional demands of PreK-12 students, especially those who struggle with

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literacy, and to work with teachers informally through coaching, and for some, to assume some level of informal leadership of aspects of schoolwide literacy (Swan Dagen & Bean, 2020). Presently, advanced programs are guided most centrally by research-based curriculum recommendations presented in the ILA *Standards 2017* (ILA, 2018). Below we describe our approach to revising the graduate program for reading/literacy specialists by outlining the two theoretical frameworks to guide this work.

University Literacy Education Program

Literacy Education Program Context

The Literacy Education (LE) graduate program at West Virginia University prepares candidates for reading/literacy specialist advanced certification and is available to professionals with valid teaching credentials. The majority of program candidates come from traditional teacher preparation areas of elementary education, secondary education, English and language arts, and special education. Most candidates are in-state teachers who work in rural schools. Since the program is 100% online, a small percentage of the program candidates (less than 10%) come from bordering states and beyond. Currently, key LE program stakeholders include two tenured faculty, one adjunct professor, two graduate assistants, and an advisory board of practicing reading specialists and classroom teachers. Our 100% online preparation program consists of 30 credits of intense 8-week content courses and two 16-week field experiences, one focusing on PreK-12 students and the other PreK-12 educators and schoolwide literacy programs. Coursework includes a combination of synchronous and asynchronous engagement units with a collaborative community of learner's focus. Candidates who successfully pass the ETS Praxis 5301are recommended for reading specialist certification.

While the role of the student-focused (Bean, 2020) reading/literacy specialist, working with students experiencing difficulties in reading and writing, is at the heart of our advanced certification, we also recognized the importance of preparing candidates for teacher-focused and systems-focused work.

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For the years leading up to the program revision, the LE program was guided by ILA *Standards 2010* (2010) and had already successfully shifted some of the candidates' coursework (e.g., elective course in literacy coaching) and experiences to include more coaching activities in an attempt to be more intentional and explicit about the collaborative work of the reading/literacy specialist. However with an increased focus on multiple roles, the extensive revisions have empowered a mindset shift where our candidates and encouraged to strive to grow as literacy leaders.

Applied Theoretical Frameworks

We identified two theoretical frameworks to guide our work during the program revision process, focusing on the literacy curriculum (ILA, 2018) and another on programmatic features (Lacina & Block, 2011). The first theoretical framework was *Standards 2017* (ILA, 2018) (see Table 1). The term specialized literacy professional is used in *Standards 2017*, reflecting contemporary research (Bean et al., 2015). *It* is an umbrella term representing three distinct roles: reading/literacy specialist, literacy coach, and literacy coordinator. *Standards 2017* includes three sets of standards, made up of seven standard categories (titles) with four defining components (per standard) and multiple examples to unpack the supporting component further. It is important here to note that for accreditation and national recognition purposes, a process that ILA now has complete oversight of, preparation programs must demonstrate candidate proficiency only to the reading/literacy specialist set of standards.

Other critical shifts in *Standards 2017* include a widening of the scope from reading to literacy and a content focus on disciplinary literacy, writing, oral language, diversity, equity, and digital literacies. Additionally, new to *Standards 2017* is an explicit focus on learners' developmental and instructional needs. Finally, new to *Standards 2017* is a seventh standard titled Standard 7: Practicum/Clinical Experiences. For a list of resources to unpack the ILA standards, <see Figure 1>.

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The second framework guiding these program revisions at our University was the product of Lacina and Block's (2011) research. Interestingly, this study identified highly regarded programmatic features across teacher education programs that received the IRA's *Certificate of Distinction* award (2008 – 2009). This IRA recognition was open to undergraduate and graduate programs that prepared reading teachers for initial certification. To identify these common valued programmatic features, the research team surveyed literacy faculty members from each of the institutions, referred to as the internal experts, and literacy teacher education researchers referred to as external experts. The IRA's board of directors appointed external experts to evaluate the literacy teacher education programs. Lacina and Block's findings identified fourteen (14) programmatic features that ranked highest of importance for literacy teacher education programs (See Table 2)

Throughout this paper, we unpack the ILA standards' components and the 14 features to highlight connections and implementation into the graduate preparation program.

<Insert Table 1>

<Insert Table 2>

<Insert Figure 1>

West Virginia University's Comprehensive Program Revisions

Summary of Overall Program Configuration Changes

The LE faculty began meeting monthly to discuss, debate, and deconstruct the graduate program's features and content. Below is a summary of substantial, overarching changes we made to the LE graduate program while simultaneously applying the curriculum and features revisions. We share these decisions as they contribute significantly to the context of the preparation program.

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Faculty were in agreement about maintaining the program's identity with that of the professional organization. We submitted a request to the University to change the name of the degree from Reading Education (RDNG) to Literacy Education (LE), following the ILA name change in 2015.

Given our state's certification requirements, we preserved the term "reading specialist" yet wanted to be explicit in how this program exposes candidates to all three SLP roles. This belief was a central principle in our curriculum shift. We have been intentional and precise in our language. We were making connections between the broad SLP term while drilling down to use highlights the reading/literacy specialist, literacy coach, and literacy coordinator role in coursework and assignments.

The program's required credits were reduced from 36 to 30 in response to our state's credit hour requirements for a master's degree. Revising the curriculum while also reducing the degree by six credit hours seemed daunting; however, this move allowed us to examine each course, each learning outcome, and each assignment against the ILA standards in the program's redesign (Swan Dagen & Morewood, 2012).

As a program, we integrated additional explicit coaching opportunities across multiple courses, including the practicum experiences with teachers in field-based contexts using different intensity levels. Currently, we employ the ILA's Coaching Levels of Intensity (ILA, 2015) as a guide to expose candidates to levels of collaborative engagement through coaching.

We adopted *Cultivating Coaching Mindsets* (Bean & Ippolito, 2016) as a literacy leadership framework for multiple courses in the program. We felt this framework applied to all three SLP roles. Using the four mindsets framework [leader, facilitator, designer, and advocate] across multiple courses has allowed a deeper understanding of the collaborative leadership roles specialists play in schoolwide literacy success in PreK-12 schools.

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To meet the state's rural teachers' geographic needs and provide professional learning opportunities within and outside the state, we transitioned from a blended program to 100% online. The program faculty were in complete agreement about this transition, which the University supported. The most significant foci of this change in the platform were the field experiences and candidate practica. Guiding our expectations was a critical caveat included in the ILA research brief *The Multiple Roles of School-Based Specialized Literacy Professionals (2015),* which asserted:

> All programs with online coursework and experiences should maintain the same expectations for literacy practicum and fieldwork as they might in a school-based or campus setting. For example, online experiences should include interactions with families, teaching a diverse range of students (both academically and culturally), and engaging with teaching colleagues on data-informed instructional decision making. Any practicum offered in an online environment should include online simulations, extensive video capture of teaching interactions, and reflections on the content between the graduate student and the instructor/supervision (ILA, 2015, p. 15)

Summary of Curricular and Programmatic Element Changes

As the work progressed, we decided to layer the 14 program elements (below in bold) derived from the research study of IRA distinction award recipients (Lacina & Block, 2011) with the content outlined in the ILA standards, both *Standards 2010* and the draft versions of the *Standards 2017* available on the ILA website. <see Figure 2>. Lacina and Block's work focused on preparation for reading teachers at initial certification; however, we felt confident that this research applied to advanced certification programs given the generalizability of element findings. Below we describe how we addressed, and when appropriate, made revisions to many of the programmatic features while simultaneously incorporating components outlined in *Standards 2017* (in parenthesis).

<Insert Figure 2>

Program faculty members explored **theoretical orientations** outlined in Risko et al.'s (2008) review of reading teacher education research, including positivist/behavioral, cognitive, constructivist, and social-cultural theory. Using these four theories, the program faculty engaged in an exercise where

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each identified the orientation that aligned most with personal beliefs, which resulted in the subsequent

discussion. Based on our knowledge of the LE program and current students' experiences, we also

identified the theory that we individually felt reflected in the overall program's orientation. This activity

led to multiple conservations breaking down our course learning objectives, expectations, and

candidates' assignments. Our candidates were classroom teachers, most with years of experience who

voluntarily applied for the program. Further, given the online coursework design, collaborative

engagement was non-negotiable in all our course designs. Based on our candidates' intentionality and

participation with program content, we reached a consensus that a social constructivist theoretical

orientation grounded the program.

During this time, the program faculty included four **highly qualified** full-time tenured professors

(two have since left the University), all productive in research, teaching, and service. Along with the

program curricular discussions, we simultaneously grappled with a model to guide our online

pedagogical direction. We decided to align with the Community of Inquiry (CoI) (Garrison, Anderson,

& Archer, 2000) and research principles on effective professional learning opportunities (Desimone,

2009). The elements outlined in the CoI framework: cognitive, teaching, and social presences were

essentials for an online program. By overlaying these three presences with the research-based features of

professional learning opportunities, we noticed that active learning element spanned across all three

presences in the CoI (Morewood, Ankrum & Swan Dagen , 2019) <see Figure 3>. We created and

referred to our online conceptual model as "A-3" to represent active learning in all three presences

[teaching, cognitive, and social].

<Insert Figure 3>

While developing the online conceptual framework, our faculty worked during and between the

monthly meetings toward developing an **integrated, aligned, and spiraling literacy curriculum.**

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Across the multi-year effort, which focused on the curriculum and was guided by *Standards 2017*, we made the following changes to our program curriculum.

- We introduced a new course, *Specialized Literacy Professionals*, foregrounded in the candidates' need to understand the foundational knowledge of the reading specialists' historical and contemporary role (ILA 1.4). In addition to the history of the role, in this course, candidates are introduced to concepts of adult learning theory (ILA 6.2), contemporary coaching frameworks (ILA 6.3), literacy leadership (ILA 6.1), advocacy (ILA component 6.4) and collaboration (ILA 6.2).

- We redesigned and renamed the content area reading course as *Content and Disciplinary Literacy* Instruction to reflect research on disciplinary literacy approaches to teaching subject matter material (ILA 2.2). We also developed this course around digital literacy (ILA 5.2), including the safe and effective use of digital technology (ILA 5.3) and the degrees of integration through the use of the Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition (SAMR) Model (Puentedura, 2013). Candidates learn to use the SAMR Model when designing lessons with technology to determine the degree of integration as either an enhancement (substitution, augmentation) or transformation (modification, redefinition) of student learning.

- We modified a course on reading interests and motivation to create a class with writing instruction (ILA 1.3., 2.2, and 2.3) and motivation as the focal point. In this course field experience, candidates plan and conduct an action research project on students' motivation, focusing on their engagement with writing and particular attention to technology.

- Along with doctoral candidate (Taylor), we developed and added an elective titled *Digital Literacy* (ILA 5.2, 5.3) to our program offerings. The course presented digital literacy concepts and skills in which educators can develop their technology skills, 21st Century Skills, technology

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standards, technology frameworks and tools, and understanding of digital literacy's implications for PreK-12 schools.   A critical caveat guiding this course is simple; digital literacy is literacy.

Another significant shift occurred with candidates' application of knowledge in the field. The LE candidates can participate/collaborate with public school professionals through **consistent, carefully selected, and relevant field experiences** in the revised program.

- We added a job shadowing field experience to the *Specialized Literacy Professionals* course. In this field experience, candidates work directly with a reading specialist or school-based literacy coach (ILA 1.4) and receive feedback by the course instructor. This assignment was developed based on a national survey's findings, which recommended "shadowing" opportunities to enhance preparation programs (Bean et al., 2015, p. 95). Throughout this course, candidates can choose from several activities to complete/observe, including completing an interview, exploring resource/book rooms, intervention spaces, attending a family night. The field experience occurs early in the candidates' program of study and allows candidates an opportunity to collaborate (ILA 7.2), in a school-based practicum setting (ILA 7.2) with appropriate university-based supervision (ILA 7.4)

- We have completely revised the program's field experience component working with PreK-12 students, *Literacy Intervention II*, transitioning from a traditional site-based clinic to a 100% online practicum. This experience consists of weekly synchronous meetings, job-embedded learning activities, video recordings of intervention sessions, and small group peer collaboration using a medical model of clinical rounds discussions to provide feedback. Additionally, the LE candidates in the practicum engage in supervised collegial conversations around assigned readings focused on collaborative literacy leadership (ILA 6.2 and 6.3). This model is in place

today and has been successful in ways that have exceeded our expectations based on feedback from course evaluations, personal reflections, conversations, and observations. In this course, candidates are engaged with small groups of students (ILA 7.1), in a school-based practicum setting, (ILA 7.2) with appropriate university-based supervision (ILA 7.4)

- We adjusted the guidelines and feedback model for the program field experience in the *Literacy Leadership* course. In this course, candidates shift their field experience from direct instruction with students toward the responsibilities of a reading/literacy specialist with literacy coach and literacy coordinator responsibilities. The candidates complete a supervised field placement that requires candidates to dive deep into their school's context and are responsible for designing a professional learning opportunity for a small group of teachers (ILA 6.3). They also engage in a coaching cycle, including a videotaped reflection of the post-observation conversations to get an improved understanding of their coaching role. This course provides opportunities to coach peers (ILA t 7.2) in a school-based practicum setting (ILA 7.2) with appropriate university-based supervision (ILA 7.4)

The program also strongly advocated for the role of interventionist and the importance of **teaching and assessing** with an intentional focus on **teaching diverse learners.** We considered the curriculum outlined in the **state and national reading standards** – namely the ILA standards. In our program, candidates understand of how to make instructional decisions based on students' proficiency with the reading and writing processes and consideration for students' diverse ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, languages, and geographies. Further, faculty also understood the necessity of LE candidates translating their new learning – from **theory into practice** – in both coursework and field experiences. This work included ongoing mentoring on being a reflective practitioner and evaluating the impact on student learning so that LE candidates could effectively use and discuss their pedagogical knowledge

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and decision-making processes. As a program, we stress the vitality of preparing knowledgeable and skilled interventionists for all PreK-12 students.

- We improved the course curriculum and included a 12- credit sequence consisting of an introductory course, *Knowledge of Literacy Instruction*, focusing on reading and writing processes, particularly around word study and phonics intervention (ILA 2.3); *Literacy Intervention I*, which includes a field experience with a PreK-12 learner who finds literacy tasks difficult (ILA 2.3, 3.1 and 5.2); *Literacy Assessment* focusing on formal and informal assessment instruments (ILA 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.) and *Literacy Intervention II* culminating 16-week practicum concentrating on small group literacy interventions (described above).

- These four courses allowed us to systematically build the LE candidate's content and pedagogical knowledge of the developmental needs of the pre-12 diverse learners (ILA 4.1. 4.3 and 5.1). Within the sequence, learner development became a focus. For example, LE candidates engage in a student-centered, developmental approach when planning and implementing scaffolded literacy instruction for those who need individual and small group literacy intervention (ILA 2.3). Throughout the four courses, the LE candidates plan meaningful intervention learning experiences for the students they work with including incorporating various strategies and communicating with families (ILA 5.1).

We have become more explicit by teaching and modeling the importance of how student identities, cultures, and background experiences influence instructional decision making. Applying culturally responsive instruction principles (Dalhouse -Walker & Risko, 2020) enables the candidates to hone their instructional decision-making. For example, a high percentage of LE candidates work directly with students from rural communities where opioid addictions are rampant, children raised by grandparents are a norm, and economic factors, such as homelessness, contribute to familial stress.

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Recognizing these factors and how to meet the needs of these students from these diverse backgrounds is crucial to the PreK-12 students learning. As well, knowledge is essential for building relationships with students, their families, and the community. This awareness is critical to student learning. Using a culturally responsive lens, particularly in the field experiences working directly with PreK-12 learners, is a shift in the new curriculum. Our candidates work in states across the country and with students from diverse populations.

While it seems obvious that a 100% online program would **infuse technology**, we have done so adhering to our beliefs on preparation, engagement, collaboration, and a social constructivist mindset. Our online program uses several collaborative tools within our learning management system (LMS), eCampus/Blackboard, such as asynchronous discussion boards, VoiceThreads, podcasts, blogs, and journals; and other synchronous meeting tools such as Collaborate, Collaborate Ultra, and Zoom. We believe these technology tools support and align with the constructivist approach. Using the SAMR Model as a framework for candidates' decision-making around technology use in their contexts was an essential addition to preparing reading/literacy specialist candidates. The LE program faculty also continues to **engage in professional learning** around technology, and online pedagogy, specifically by earning additional certifications (e.g., VoiceThread Educator), participating in webinars, learning how to adapt our teaching to an online setting.

Last, during the program's rebuilding, we were cognizant of the importance of ongoing and regular communication as a quality programmatic feature. To **maintain close collaborations among program faculty and public-school professionals**, we created a collaborative advisory board consisting of program graduates, classroom teachers, reading specialists, and literacy coaches. As a group, we have met during **regularly scheduled collaborative meetings** once a month (formally) and informal sessions as needed as a means of communication, our **high expectations** for the program. As a

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group, we decided which **ongoing assessments** of our candidates we would implement throughout the courses. The LE program has continued to collect data on eight "key assessments." Each year, program faculty meet and discuss implications of the data for program revisions.

Finally, while our college and department experienced a fair amount of leadership turnover during this period, the department faculty remained consistently dedicated to preparing teaching professionals to work in the state and beyond. We recognized the importance of **collaborative, cohesive, and dedicated faculty and college leadership** to grow and continue this program. The LE faculty's strategy was to maintain clear and open communication and to schedule meetings with the all-new administrators, armed with one-page tables or summaries of talking points. Additionally, we presented our program shifts formally and informally at larger department faculty meetings so that our colleagues knew about our progress. Further, given our institution's size, we were supported by other units on campus that focused on online teaching and graduate education.

Discussion

While we acknowledge finalizing graduate preparation program's transformation we assert that program work is never truly *complete* as the reading/literacy specialist's role continues to evolve. As the role changes, the guiding professional standards will change, and preparation programs like ours must react. We suggest that recursive reflection and ongoing revision be a part of faculty work creating a course schedule, recruiting new candidates, or analyzing key assessment data. Additionally, contemporary issues emerge, such as social justice education (ILA, 2019b) or the science of reading discussion, which informs preparation practices as we write this piece. These emerging issues like this require attention as well. Our program faculty, graduate assistants, and advisory board currently address themes for ongoing program direction and growth.

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Advanced Endorsements/Certificates

Since many practicing reading/literacy specialists formally and informally carry out coach and coordinator responsibilities, these professionals need ongoing support. These specialists may benefit by engaging in additional academic, professional learning opportunities, coursework in leadership, coaching, adult learning theory, and school reform. For example, in our state, there are nearly 700 educators who, regardless of title, function as reading/literacy specialists, literacy (academic) coaches, and literacy coordinators. We suspect in other states, small and large, there are SLPs who would value an additional endorsement or certificate. Given that ILA has created complete sets of standards for both the coach and coordinator positions, curricular guidance for endorsements and certificates is readily available in *Standards 2017.* (ILA, 2018, p. 15)

Principal Engagement

As mentioned above, most school principals have localized decision-making authority on reading/literacy specialists' staffing and responsibilities. Preparation programs should recognize the essential role schools' administrators, principals, in particular, play in the facilitation of schoolwide literacy programs and supervision of reading/literacy specialists. As the field shifts toward specialists as literacy leaders, we need principals who recognize and respect this role's leadership potential. Further, school principals who identify as lifelong learners also need for increased awareness and knowledge of the foundations of literacy, the instructional application of such knowledge, and contemporary, emerging issues in reading and writing. Providing principals, administrators, and supervisors who evaluate literacy professionals with extensive preparation and understanding of literacy goals, practices, and expectations (ILA, p.17) should be a goal of all educator preparation programs, especially those who prepare reading/literacy specialists.

Diversity and Equity

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In *Standards 2017*, the diversity and equity standard has been significantly revisited and needs to be fully unpacked and authentically integrated into preparation programs. The four components' content can be used as a roadmap for discussion throughout the program so that reading/literacy specialists can fully understand the vital leadership role they have in advocating for diversity and education equity for their students and impacting a change in their schools. Simply, it is not enough to address diversity as a one-dimensional construct or curricular checkbox. The integration of diversity and equity must span every course and assignment in the preparation program. We must all do a better job understanding the foundations and theories of diversity, instructional implications, inclusivity and diversity, and equities impact on every child, educator, parent, and school community.

Advanced Certification and Research

Finally, while the study of quality reading teacher preparation, particularly with initial teacher licensure at the elementary level, has been an ongoing area of inquiry for decades (Austin & Morrison, 1962, 1976; Hoffman et al., 2005; IRA, 2007), this has not been the case at the advanced graduate level. Moreover, though initial preparations research has some applicability for the advanced graduate level, understanding the nuanced differences for features of high-quality advanced teacher certification preparation (e.g., reading specialist) is most certainly an area of need in the field. There has been some exciting research on preparation for reading/literacy specialists around professional learning and leadership (Sharp, Piper, & Raymond, 2018; Quatroche & Wepner, 2008; Mongillo et al., 2012). This focus on adult learning theory is promising, and we energized about how *Standards 2017* can be used to anchored research at the advanced graduate level.

Conclusion

The multi-year preparation program revision provided us the opportunity to examine each course, each learning outcome, and each assignment against the *Standards 2017* and be very intentional

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in the redesigning the program, both with curriculum and the research-based program features. As such, we were able to create student, teacher, and systems-focused experiences for our candidate reflecting the contemporary reading/literacy specialist's reality. The interactive, constructivist nature of the online delivery allows us to provide practical, research-based literacy content and experiences to teachers who would not otherwise be able to engage in this type of work. We view this shift as one way to generate more equitable learning opportunities for teachers across our state and beyond.

By engaging in ILA's rigorous accreditation self-study and site visit, we were able to deeply reflect and share the outcomes of reimagining our reading/literacy specialist candidates' preparation needs. Before receiving our program's national recognition with distinction, we felt confident in the LE program candidates received a unique, robust preparation experience addressing the evolving role of the PreK-12 reading/literacy specialists. They are knowledgeable and able to engage in coaching and coordinating responsibilities they may assume as part of their student-focused reading/literacy specialist role. Our programmatic emphasis on adult learning theory and collaborative engagement with peers has positioned our candidates to be active collaborators – literacy leaders – in their schools. This focus, in turn, has significant potential to impact the schoolwide literacy instruction and success in our graduates' classrooms and schools.

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Standard	Description
1: Foundational Knowledge	Candidates demonstrate knowledge of major theoretical, conceptual, historical, and evidence-based foundations of literacy and language, the ways in which they interrelate, and the role of the reading/literacy specialist in schools.
2: Curriculum and Instruction	Candidates use foundational knowledge to design literacy curricula to meet needs of learners, especially those who experience difficulty with literacy; design, implement, and evaluate small-group and individual evidence-based literacy instruction for learners; collaborate with teachers to implement effective literacy practices.
3: Assessment and Evaluation	Candidates understand, select, and use valid, reliable, fair, and appropriate assessment tools to screen, diagnose, and measure student literacy achievement; inform instruction and evaluate interventions; assist teachers in their understanding and use of assessment results; advocate for appropriate literacy practices to relevant stakeholders.
4: Diversity and Equity	Candidates demonstrate knowledge of research, relevant theories, pedagogies, and essential concepts of diversity and equity; demonstrate an understanding of themselves and others as cultural beings; create classrooms and schools that are inclusive and affirming; advocate for equity at school, district, and community levels.
5: Learners and the Literacy Environment	Candidates meet the developmental needs of all learners and collaborate with school personnel to use a variety of print and digital materials to engage and motivate all learners; integrate digital technologies in appropriate, safe, and effective ways; foster a positive climate that supports a literacy-rich learning environment.
6: Professional Learning and Leadership	Candidates demonstrate the ability to be reflective literacy professionals, who apply their knowledge of adult learning to work collaboratively with colleagues; demonstrate their leadership and facilitation skills; advocate on behalf of teachers, students, families, parents and communities.
7: Practicum/Clinical Experiences	Candidates complete supervised, integrated, extended practica/ clinical experiences that include intervention work with students and working with their peers and experienced colleagues; practica include ongoing experiences in school-based setting(s); supervision includes observation and ongoing feedback by qualified supervisors.

Table 1. ILA Standards 2017 (2018)

Consistent, carefully selected, and relevant field experiences

Candidates learn to teach and assess using a variety of instructional strategies

Integrated, aligned, and spiraling literacy curriculum

Faculty are highly qualified and connect theory to practice

Articulated theoretical base

Program emphasis on teaching diverse learners

Rapport and close collaborations among program faculty and school professionals

Collaborative, cohesive, and dedicated faculty and college leadership

Faculty regularly schedule meetings to improve program

Program has an ongoing assessment process that employs multiple instruments

Program holds high expectations

Faculty regularly involve themselves in PD and research

Program adheres to state and national reading standards

Technology is infused throughout the program

Table 2. Quality Programmatic Features, Lacina and Block (2011)

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Figure 1

ILA Standards 2017 Resources

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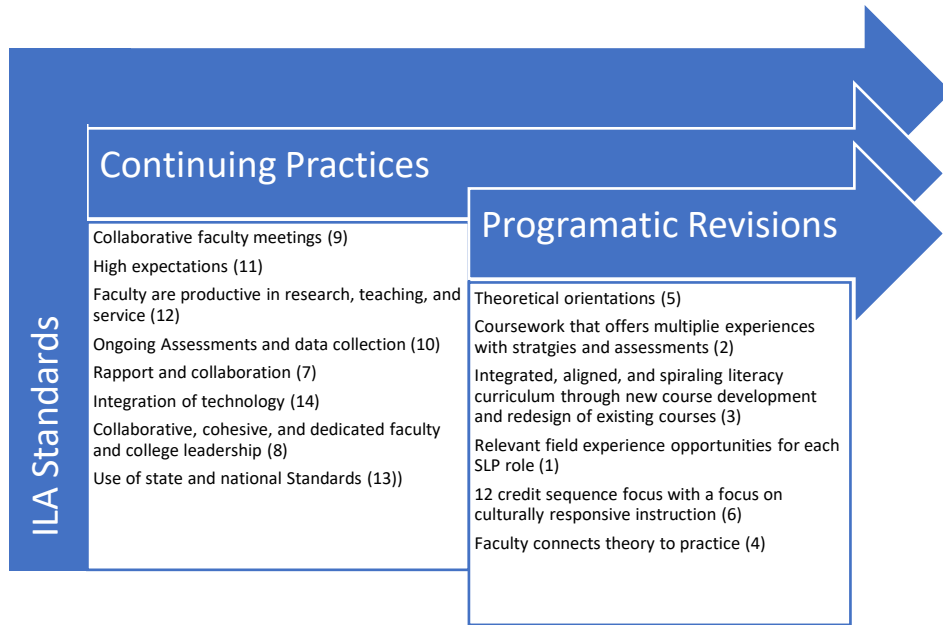
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Figure 2

West Virginia University's Program Revision Framework

Continuing Practices

Collaborative faculty meetings (9)

High expectations (11)

Faculty are productive in research, teaching, and service (12)

Ongoing Assessments and data collection (10)

Rapport and collaboration (7)

Integration of technology (14)

Collaborative, cohesive, and dedicated faculty and college leadership (8)

Use of state and national Standards (13))

ILA Standards

Programatic Revisions

Theoretical orientations (5)

Coursework that offers multiplie experiences with stratgies and assessments (2)

Integrated, aligned, and spiraling literacy curriculum through new course development and redesign of existing courses (3)

Relevant field experience opportunities for each SLP role (1)

12 credit sequence focus with a focus on culturally responsive instruction (6)

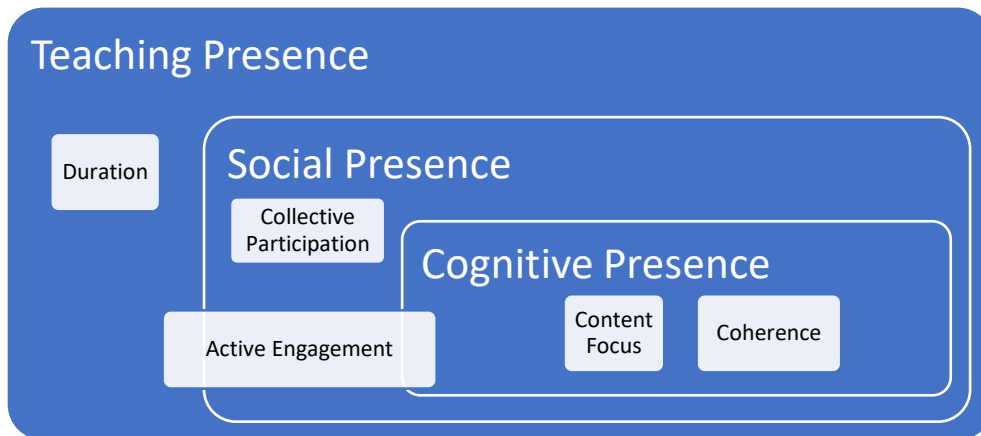Faculty connects theory to practice (4)

Note. Lacina & Block's (2011) programmatic features identified by the numbers in parenthesis

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Figure 3

Online Conceptual Model (Morewood, Ankrum, & Swan Dagen (2019)

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