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## Learning to Teach Reading Responsively Through Tutoring

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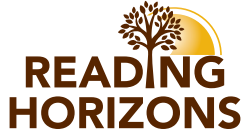
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## Learning to Teach Reading Responsively Through Tutoring

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### Abstract

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This article describes a community service learning collaboration between a teacher education program and a nonprofit literacy society. Seventeen teacher candidates (TCs) tutored young readers weekly for seven months as part of their course-related field experience and completed reflective assignments analyzing their own learning and the learning of their tutees. The study demonstrates how the tutoring experience enhanced the pedagogical competence of TCs (kid-watching, assessment, instruction, responsiveness, professional conversations, and affirmation of impact). These findings align with contemporary research in literacy teacher preparation, which identifies that the combination of coursework and tutoring is effective in promoting the integration of TC knowledge and confidence in supporting student reading.

**Keywords:** *tutoring, reading, teacher education, community service learning, responsive teaching*

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This article describes a community service learning collaboration between a teacher education program and Calgary Reads, a nonprofit literacy society. Teacher candidates (TCs) tutored young readers weekly for seven months as part of their course-related field experience and completed reflective assignments analyzing their own learning and the learning of their tutees. They shared their learning in focus groups at the midpoint and end of the program.

Teaching young children to read is complex. Teachers need to develop a broad repertoire of strategies to support children in developing from the early, tenuous stages of decoding words and sight word recognition to confidently reading text with fluency and comprehension. Research suggests that developing an effective reading program is one of the challenging tasks faced by preservice teachers and that there are perceived gaps in TCs' foundational knowledge about reading processes and methods (Hikida et al., 2019). Further, research identifies the need for robust coursework and fieldwork experiences for effective literacy teacher preparation, especially guided practice of teaching strategies with pupils (Risko et al., 2008). *The Preliminary Report on Teacher Preparation for Literacy Instruction* (International Literacy Association, 2015) recommends that "all preservice

teachers should be required to participate in activities during their practica that develop their ability to design literacy instruction and monitor literacy growth” (p. 8), a recommendation that emerged from its study showing inconsistent preparation for literacy teaching in universities and practica. Tutoring is a promising context for connecting fieldwork and coursework in a way that can prepare TCs to “be successful in enacting complex teaching practices” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 89), beginning with application of course material in a one-to-one context.

This project was aligned with contemporary research in literacy teacher preparation, which identifies that the combination of coursework and tutoring is effective in promoting the integration of TC knowledge and confidence in supporting student reading development (Haverback & Parault, 2008; Hoffman et al., 2016; Hoffman et al., 2019). This research addresses the question: How does a tutoring program contribute to TCs’ understanding of reading instruction?

## **Review of Research on Literacy Teacher Candidates**

### **Tutoring in Teacher Education**

The teacher education research literature calls repeatedly for increasing the amount of practicum experience as well as the variety and quality of these experiences (Clift & Brady, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, these calls are issued with a caution that the experiences must be intentionally designed lest they deepen the common divide between coursework and fieldwork. In his landmark work on reflective practice, Schon (1983) urged teacher educators to place TCs in “field experiences that present uncertain, unique, and conflicting situations where prospective teachers can think and act like teachers” (p. 27), a description that aptly describes the tutoring context.

There is a wealth of research demonstrating how tutoring young readers contributes to the effective preparation of literacy teachers beginning nearly 30 years ago (Juel, 1996; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). A review of tutoring research by Hoffman et al. (2019) identifies an impressive list of factors that influenced TCs’ learning, including the embodied and experiential nature of tutoring, engagement with students’ lives, building relationships with students, TCs’ beliefs and expectations of students, responsive teaching, reflective teaching, connection to academic content, and shaping TC identity and beliefs.

In their review of research on tutoring programs embedded in teacher education courses, Hoffman et al. (2016, 2019) observe that tutoring is frequently used as an opportunity for practice in a fieldwork setting earlier in the sequence of courses and preceding practicum. Murphy Odo (2016) compares this practice to training wheels for TCs, “a scaled-down version of teaching that offers the new teacher the mental space to be more reflective about the teaching and learning process” (p. 54). School observation experiences early in the program may not involve TCs in engaging with readers, and formal student teaching often requires a TC to assess and engage an entire classroom. Conversely, TCs in tutoring must identify a reader’s needs, motivate the reader, and use instructional strategies to support the reader; this creates a unique opportunity for TCs to self-assess the impact of their teaching and to develop self-efficacy (Hoffman et al., 2019).

### **Tutoring to Foster TC Knowledge and Efficacy**

In another literature review, Haverback and Parault (2008) identify ways in which tutoring impacts TC efficacy; TCs engaged with tutoring made strong theory-practice connections, felt more prepared to teach reading, were better able to differentiate for student needs, and were committed to professional learning to enhance their reading instruction.

Brannon and Feine (2013) highlighted the value of tutoring over helping a classroom teacher when they compared two groups of TCs: one group helped a teacher in a reading classroom, and the other group participated in a structured field experience based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) model that identifies students requiring support, provides interventions, monitors progress, and adjusts interventions. TCs in the RtI experience worked significantly more often with students and learned more about child development, teaching strategies, and the teacher role.

Other individual studies show similar benefits for TCs through tutoring, including helping them understand

- foundational concepts of reading development (Fang & Ashley, 2004; Murphy Odo, 2016),
- reading assessment (Hill et al., 2010; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016; Massey & Lewis, 2011),
- instructional strategies for differentiation (Brock et al., 2007; Hedrick et al., 2000; Hopkins et al., 2018; Massey & Lewis, 2011),
- the role of motivation in reading (Massey & Lewis, 2011),
- reflective and responsive teaching (Assaf & López, 2012, 2015; Dawkins et al., 2009; Fang & Ashley, 2004; Hoffman et al., 2019; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016).

The findings of these studies confirm that paired coursework and tutoring produce teachers who have a strong understanding of the appropriate pedagogy for reading instruction and who are attuned to the needs of individual students. It is noteworthy that of the 62 tutoring studies reviewed by Hoffman et al. (2019), none seem to have been based in Canada, the location of our study.

### **Tutoring to Support TC Reflection**

In addition to developing teaching skills, tutoring paired with coursework can significantly change TC beliefs and capacity for reflective practice. A large analysis of reading teacher preparation (Risko et al., 2008) showed evidence of changes in TC beliefs and knowledge when they engage in teaching activities and reflect on student data, particularly over an extended period. Their analysis distinguishes between research conducted from five paradigms: positivist (focused on outcomes and teacher effectiveness), cognitive (grounded in learners' prior knowledge and deepening teacher knowledge through reflection), constructivist (constructing meaning by reflecting on classroom experiences), sociocultural (understanding students' and TCs' relations to the social context), and critical theory (focused on promoting social justice). Although the current study attended to student outcomes consistent with a positivist paradigm, the emphasis was on cognitive, constructivist, and sociocultural paradigms as TCs engaged in inquiry and challenging preconceptions to better address the challenges of tutoring.

Several studies aligned with a constructivist view. Hart and King (2007) describe tutors' sense of ownership as they engaged in responsive teaching in an authentic setting and in subsequent problem-solving with instructors and peers who served as a community of practice: "a social context in which learners collaborate on knowledge construction, supporting and learning from one another" (p. 330). Tutoring motivated the TCs to learn course concepts to address authentic teaching challenges. In a tutoring program based on Reading Recovery, Nierstheimer et al. (2000) observed a promising shift in the beliefs of many of the 67 participants: TCs previously assigned others (parents, tutors, readings

specialists) responsibility for students' reading difficulties but subsequently recognized their role in addressing the needs of readers, including specific and efficacious instructional strategies tailored to the needs of the children. Similarly, Mallette et al. (2000) powerfully demonstrated the way that interactions with readers shifted TCs' perspectives from deficit models to pedagogical problem-solving as they sought ways to address children's needs. Linek et al. (2006) echo the recommendation that teacher educators should provide experiences that lead to realizations concerning student learning that challenge personal beliefs in order to encourage reflection and self-directed inquiry that are necessary for professional growth.

The tutoring study by Brock et al. (2007) incorporated Wenger's (1998) communities of practice literature, particularly the notions of *reification* (following the elements of practice required by the tutoring program) and *participation* (adapting practices to promote individual success). "Teachers abide by documented elements of effective practice (reification), but must also modify and adapt effective practices to ensure individual success (participation)" (p. 900). In Brock et al.'s research, one team of TCs was shaped by true participation, recognizing the needs of the children and their responsibilities to those children; the other team spoke in generalities and deficit stereotypes about "those kids." The authors caution that without critical examination, teacher education can contribute to reified beliefs and practices; they encourage instructors to invite genuine participation in Wenger's sense of that term.

### Methods and Context

Research participants were 17 TCs in their second year of a 4-year elementary teacher education program at a Canadian university. All TCs were required to complete 20 half-days of field experience in local elementary schools during their second year as part of two courses, the first on language development and literacy in the fall and the second on assessment in the winter. As part of the literacy course and weekly field experience, all 90 TCs in the degree were required to participate in a read-aloud program called *wee reads* coordinated by Calgary Reads. Seventeen of the 90 TCs opted for a more demanding program called *Read Up* that included 35 tutoring sessions. This required them to tutor a young reader (usually a second grader) at their school placement 15 times throughout the school year in addition to their 20 field experience days until they reached the required 35 tutoring sessions. They typically spent the remainder of their weekly field experience time supporting a mentor teacher in the classroom. This research focuses on those 17 TCs and their tutees.

Calgary Reads is a nonprofit literacy society that aims to build a community where all children "read with confidence and joy." *Read Up*, one of its core programs targeted at Grade 1 and 2 readers, draws on principles of Reading Recovery, America Reads (2020), and the local school board's early literacy initiative. In addition to TCs, community volunteers also support these programs in schools. For the present study, Calgary Reads provided the training program to the TCs, the materials in schools, and support to a teacher coordinator at each school.

The children selected for tutoring were typically able to read books ranging from level E to I on the Fountas and Pinnell (2006) leveling system, somewhat lower than expected at their grade level (mostly second grade). Core elements of the program include the following:

- *Warm-up*: The child reads a familiar book to the tutor. (5 minutes)
- *New Read/Focus Read/Familiar Read*: Usually the child reads the same book in three subsequent reading sessions. (18 minutes)
  - *New Read*: The tutor engages the child in a book walk (browsing pictures) and then supports the child in reading the book.
  - *Focus Read*: The second day the child reads the book, and the tutor asks questions to deepen the child's understanding.
  - *Familiar Read*: The child may read only a portion of the book to build fluency and confidence.
- *Read Aloud*: The tutor reads aloud to the child, normally a book that is more difficult than those the child can read independently. (10 minutes)
- *Word Work*: Practice new and mastered Dolch sight words, building sentences with the words or playing word games to develop graphophonic knowledge. (5 minutes)
- *Wrap-up*: Using a reflective sentence frame, the child reflects on the lesson and the tutor also reflects (e.g., "I'm getting better at..."; "I feel ..."). (2 minutes)

The tutor handbook provides specific recommendations for each of these elements. During reading, TCs encourage the children to make predictions and use decoding strategies; general comprehension questions are provided to prompt discussion of the book. The read-aloud portion of each session is intended to foster a love of reading, develop listening skills, and expand vocabulary. Tutors are encouraged to share their observations with the classroom teacher and discuss when the child is ready to progress to more challenging books. TCs in both *wee reads* and *Read Up* submitted a running record assessment assignment and a reflective case study assignment at the end of the fall course (midpoint of tutoring for those in *Read Up*) analyzing the child's growth and their own learning about literacy.

All but one participant was female, and all ranged in age from 20 to 33. Qualitative data were drawn from two focus group meetings: one at the midpoint of the tutoring experience and one at the end. Krueger and Casey (2014) argue that focus groups are an efficient way to gather data from multiple participants. Further, they are social and can contribute to the participants' sense of comfort and cohesion within the group (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Peters, 1993). Participants in this study were members of a cohort and were engaged in a busy term with weekly field experience and academic responsibilities; thus, the focus group met the aims of gathering data efficiently while valuing the participants' time and social connections. The study is a form of teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) and scholarship of teaching and learning (Hutchings et al., 2011) that we used to study our course expectations and ways to better prepare TCs for the complexities of teaching reading to diverse learners.

During the focus groups, TCs were asked to report on their assessment of their tutee's reading level growth and comment on comprehension, attitude, and other observations about the children. They were also asked to assess their own growth, including what they learned about children's reading development, assessment, differentiation, and instructional strategies. Twelve TCs participated in the first two focus groups in January; 16 TCs participated in three focus groups in April. The study was approved by the research ethics board of the university, and all TCs freely consented to participate.

Analysis followed a constant comparative framework of three phases (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). In the first phase, we both freely coded the focus group transcripts and created a combined list of 467 open codes. In the second phase, we met to compare and contrast our codes, which provided us with the opportunity to ask questions about and discuss our understandings of the codes and data (Kolb, 2012). During these second phase meetings, the 467 open codes were collapsed to 40 code families (e.g., decoding, hands-on strategies, relationships) and redundancies were eliminated. In the third phase, the codes were further gathered into five themes; phases two and three followed table-top coding processes (Saldaña, 2009). Themes describing the growth in TCs' professional competence are listed below. The number following each theme indicates the number of codes attached to that theme in order to demonstrate the strength of that theme in the data:

- kidwatching for reading development (124)
- assessment and instruction (54)
- responsive teaching (80)
- teaching conversations (20)
- affirmation of impact (14)

Quotes are referenced with codes (e.g., A3) that refer to the focus group (A) and the page number of the focus group transcripts (3). TT represents quotes from the mid-year “Tutor Tune Up” which also served as focus group meetings. Participants are identified with pseudonyms.

### Findings

Definitions of teaching competence often include content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Shulman, 1986); Johansson et al. (2015) assert that it is the interaction of content knowledge with experience relevant to the grade being taught that contributes most to the development of competence. Findings from this study indicate that in addition to participants developing their knowledge of how children learn to read, they developed a sense of pedagogical competence in their abilities to support their tutees' reading growth.

#### **Kidwatching for Reading Development**

*Kidwatching* is a term advanced by Goodman and Owicki (2002) to describe how teachers who pay close attention to what their students do can better understand students' thinking and use these observations to inform their instruction. Participation in the *Read Up* tutoring helped TCs closely observe the tutees and document these observations through weekly field notes, identify ways to improve tutees' reading skills, increase tutees' motivation and confidence, and deepen their own understanding of reading development firsthand. By observing children's reading development, participants described a newfound ability to focus on student learning, shifting from the question of “what do I need to do?” to “what does my tutee need to grow as a reader?” The TCs spoke knowledgeably about changes observed in their tutees, particularly the development of decoding skills, sight word recognition, and their ability to read more challenging texts. Improvements in fluency and comprehension were also noted by some TCs, though comprehension can be more difficult to discern with simple patterned texts.

Most tutors were able to identify growth in their tutees' decoding skills. Olive described how her tutee initially lacked strategies to decode words and “would look at the corner of the room rather than looking at the book itself.” However, several months later



she used strategies like “finger pointing, pictures, and book walk... I find her seeing a word and trying her best to [read] it on her own” (B1). Similarly, Delaney explained the growth in her tutee’s confidence in decoding:

She didn’t know any of the strategies or why she would use them. So as soon as she figured out how they would help her, she just soared. Now when I read with her, she doesn’t look at me at all. She looks at the page. She doesn’t sound it out loud, but I can tell that she is thinking about it and then she gets the word 90% of the time. (C10)

Several TCs described the value of strategies such as covering part of the word or sentence either with a finger or, for Christy’s tutee, with the use of a popsicle stick. “These are words that she knows but then she [sees] them together [in a sentence] and all of a sudden it is confusing” (Christy, A5) unless the words are isolated. Jillian said she had come to notice her tutee doing this independently: “She’ll take her finger and cover parts of the word, and do that for each section, and then she’ll put it all together” (A5). These TC observations confirm the ways their support helped the children develop greater metacognitive awareness of the decoding strategies they might use and provides evidence that TCs could identify how the children were beginning to internalize and use these strategies more independently.

Growth in sight word recognition provided a concrete way for TCs to gauge progress, and this boosted many children’s confidence. In January, Britney reported that her tutee was so excited to master all of his sight words and took the stack of words home to teach his brother over the holidays. The measurable nature of sight word mastery was especially motivating for this child. Even Shannon’s tutee, who ultimately progressed by only one reading level, experienced more flow in reading when she recognized words and didn’t have to decode as much. Shannon observed:

My tutee hasn’t really improved a lot in the reading level, but a significant amount in high-frequency words. Why she did improve the reading level and is being so successful is because of her memorization of the words... The struggle she has is sounding out words; she gives up fairly easily. With the Dolch words...her reading has a lot more flow. (C1)

Mastering sight words seems to have been a compensatory strategy for this child that helped her experience at least some progress in reading despite her decoding challenges.

In the language and literacy course, TCs were learning about the importance of rhyming words for fostering phonological awareness, and they recognized firsthand the importance of rhyme recognition for early readers. Lorelei’s tutee did not initially understand rhyming but had a lightbulb moment when she exclaimed, “‘Oh, those two sound the same!’... And now when my mentor teacher says, ‘Find something that rhymes,’ she’s on the ball; she knows it right away. She gets it now” (C7). It was gratifying for the TCs to observe the tutees internalize the concept of rhyming and subsequently recognize rhymes independently.

TCs observed that comprehension can be more difficult to discern with low-level patterned texts but became more noticeable as children progressed to more complex texts, including the ability to infer a character’s motives. Kristina said her tutee would observe, “‘Oh, the character is probably mad because she and her friend are fighting,’ or ‘She did this and it wasn’t very fair.’ [She is using] more inference and understanding and analytic skills when she is reading” (C11). For Jillian’s tutee, comprehension was evident in her newfound grasp of and excitement for punctuation:



Before when she started, she was very monotone, like one big, long run-on sentence. But now she loves using character voices. She knows when to start and stop her character voice and end it, because she knows quotation marks now. And same with exclamation marks. She gets excited when she sees it; she says, “Oh, I can talk loudly now!” (A3)

Jillian recognized that this child’s use of character voice is also an indication of fluency because she was now reading expressively. The simple texts these children were reading seldom required the comprehension monitoring necessary for more complex texts, but the TCs were still able to observe progress in their ability to show understanding of the story meaning through simple inferences, fluency, and expressive reading.

Almost all the TCs described significant changes in the children’s confidence and motivation for reading during the months they spent together. One tutee “began by telling me he hates reading and running away from me.... Now when we miss a session, he gets mad at me. He comes to my class and says, ‘Where are you?’” (Evan, TT7). Becky’s mentor teacher said that even after a few tutoring sessions her tutee was excited when Becky arrived and returned to the classroom ready to learn. As the tutees learned to read more complex texts, TCs reported that they found the stories more relatable and interesting and became more motivated to read. Alyssa’s tutee explained to her that he read every night before bed during spring break despite having seldom read at home before they began the program. This newfound motivation for reading was gratifying for the TCs because they felt they had a hand in changing the children’s attitudes.

Rona described how her tutee became motivated by recognizing how reading could support his personal interests:

I think he realizes now that reading is something that contributes to his interest, like he wants to read what’s on his Pokémon cards, and the book that he got at the book fair, that’s for Grade 6. He used to do that thing where he would grab two pages instead of one so that [he] would skip over the next two; he doesn’t really do that anymore. He picks the higher level books so that he can learn how to read the ones he wants to read instead of “get it over with, get the program over with.” (A4)

Britney’s tutee became similarly interested in challenging himself, suggesting books three levels higher than his current level:

When we started, he was like, “I am on an E. I only read E books.” Even to get him to try an F was a challenge. Now, every time I go, “Oh, what type of book do you want to try today?” And he is currently working on the level L, and he says, “Maybe we can try an O.” (C9)

Here, Rona and Britney both describe the powerful relationship between their tutees’ positive experience and the increase in their motivation to challenge themselves. Further, Britney describes a shift in her tutee’s identity from someone who “only read[s] E books” to a reader who will confidently try new challenges. This also speaks to the important role of the TC in helping their tutee make reading choices that will support their growth.

Judging when the tutees need support and when they need encouragement to be self-sufficient requires careful discernment. Tasha observed how her tutee’s apparent lack of confidence was a type of learned helplessness, causing her to depend on Tasha for assistance: “Then I started making her rely on herself and know that she has confidence and she can do it. That is the reason why she started to excel, because she knew she could do it”

(A3). Consistent affirmation caused Kristina's tutee to grow "leaps and bounds to improve her reading" but she was concerned that without the one-to-one support, there would be no one to "celebrate her success in that moment" (C5–6). For this child, it is possible that tutoring creates greater dependence, not the independence Kristina hoped to foster.

Shannon's tutee (who made the slimmest progress in reading levels) "compares herself [to others] and she doesn't feel confident in herself...When I can point out, 'that's right' and 'you did a great job, and you are improving so much,' it really helps her believe in herself and be motivated to learn" (C7–8). Shannon incorporated kinesthetic strategies like asking the tutee to run and bring her words hung on the gym walls, "something she knows she's good at" (C14), to foster confidence. It was rewarding for the TCs to observe shifts in the tutees' motivation because it affirmed the impact of their efforts and increased their teacher self-efficacy. However, tutoring also illuminated the complexity of the reading process for TCs like Shannon and Kristina, who continued to worry about their tutees' progress.

### **Assessment and Instruction**

In addition to becoming proficient kidwatchers, TCs commented consistently on their growth in the use of assessment tools and instructional strategies. Sophia described how completing the running records helped her focus on strategies to address errors such as "pointing out words or having him break up the word so he can sound it out a lot easier" (B4). Further, the tutoring experience provided TCs with insight into the fact that reading is not merely the act of sounding out words, but a process leading to comprehension and meaning. For example, Lorelei described the moment of insight when she recognized that, although her tutee was accurately decoding words, she was not comprehending the text:

I actually figured this out when we were doing the running record, with those extra questions on the bottom. I would ask her, "Why do you think they did that?" And she would be, "They did that?" [laughter]. So then I was like, "Wow, she didn't even get it. No clue." That was a huge turning point for me. (C12)

Without the comprehension questions, Lorelei might have mistakenly assumed her tutee was reading *and* understanding the text. The growth in assessment and instructional strategies and recognizing the complexity of children's reading growth through the tutoring experience were important benefits for the TCs.

At the Tutor Tune Up meeting held in January, the Calgary Reads facilitator introduced several new activities and materials for the TCs to try. This was an excellent opportunity for them to also share with one another the collection of instructional activities and games they used with their tutees, including letter tiles for word work, Stretchy Snake (sounding out letter by letter), hiding keywords in the book under sticky notes, highlighters to preview sight words, popcorn blending game, and using a magnetic white board to practice concepts such as rhyming words. TCs like Allison noted that it was important to have a variety of options:

I will think, "He will really like this." And then I will bring it to him, and he will say, "No, I don't want to do that." And I am like, "Oh, okay." So, I have to think of something else right on the spot. Having different resources and games on hand to do for him. The student and their interest are going to be different for each student. (C15)

In addition to their own instructional strategies, the TCs helped the tutees adopt reading strategies. Britney (C2) described the importance of previewing a longer text

to find sight words prior to reading so they wouldn't need to stop and sound these out. Lorelei's tutee became excited to see the connection between their word games and the books they were reading and exclaimed: "“Oh my gosh, today in the game we played, do you remember, that was the word we came up with!”" (C6). Delaney said: "Explaining why the strategies are useful; once they made sense to her, she started using them. That is when we saw the improvement" (C3). The children's ability to transfer reading strategies from one text to another demonstrated their growing independence as readers (Fisher et al., 2017).

TCs assessed text reading level and changes in sight word recognition; these are two of the scales used in Clay's (2013) Observation Survey, a commonly used tool to assess children's literacy. Improvements in sight words were not uniformly recorded, but Table 1 provides an indication of improved reading levels according to Fountas and Pinnell's (2006) leveling system, with many children reaching or approaching grade-level reading expectations despite having been significantly behind at the start of tutoring. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to make definitive judgments about the impact of tutoring on the tutees, these results demonstrate the assessment data the TCs were able to collect and learn from.

Table 1  
*Change in Tutee Reading Level*

Tutor pseudonym	Tutee's grade	Tutee's reading level	Level change
Britney	3	E-K/L	7+
Olive	2	E-K	7
Tasha	2	E-J/K	6+
Delaney	1	E/F-K	6
Yasmin	2	D-I	6
Jacqueline	2	D-I	6
Rona	1	E-J	6
Tara	2	D-H	5
Alison	2	E-J	5
Carolyn	2	E-J	5
Christy	2	G-J	4
Lorelei	2	E-H	4
Sophia	1	A-C/D	3+
Becky	2	H/I-J/K	3+
Kristina	3	J-M	3
Shannon	2	D-E	1
Evan	2	Not available	

Note: Average reading level increase = 4.8 levels over 35 tutoring sessions.

## Responsive Teaching

Almost every TC spoke powerfully about the one-to-one relationship and how this helped them recognize the specific needs of their tutees and adapt to those needs, even attentional strategies such as breaking the tutoring program into two separate time blocks or recognizing how the children's body language reflected their anxiety. For example, Olive explained:

I never really paid attention to [her body language] or thought it was important. But she... used to fidget when she doesn't understand the word, so I recognized that. I don't think she was comfortable saying the incorrect word, so she would say nothing and just move her body. So now that she knows the strategies to help her figure the word out, she just calmly does it without moving so much. (B4)

Even by the midpoint in January, TCs were describing ways they were adapting the program when the framework did not fit their tutees' needs. Like Olive, Delaney described how she responded to her tutee's behavioural cues:

I find that my student, by the second time we go through a book, she's sort of flopping down and kind of sighing. Very exasperated. To do it a third time is not effective. So, [instead] I've been doing a new read, pinpointing the words she's having difficulty with, going over those words again, then going back to those in the next session. (TT2)

The individualized nature of tutoring helped many TCs notice and adapt to the signals the children were sending with their body language, signals that might be overlooked in whole-class instruction.

Several TCs commented on how tutoring helped them enact the ideals of personalized learning often espoused in their teacher education courses. Christy observed:

We all say students are unique, but meeting with my student each week, and then talking and meeting with other students [TCs] from my field placement classroom, I have realized how you can't just generalize how to read to all of them because they are all so different. (A7)

Some strategies others found effective did not necessarily suit Christy's tutee, which deepened her understanding of students' unique needs. Britney echoed this in describing the importance of student choice:

Although [personalized learning] is something that we have talked about in all our other classes, I didn't really realize the implications to a student's development until I did this. Today I left it up to the student and asked, "What two cycles do you want to work on?" It made a huge difference in how much he paid attention, how much he got from it. (C15)

Adapting to the needs of students is a critical aspect of effective teaching; tutoring provided a manageable context for the TCs to practice recognizing needs and teaching responsively.

## Teaching Conversations

TCs benefitted from the opportunity to share experiences with their classmates each week and to confer with mentor teachers about ways to meet their tutees' needs. These conversations were a valuable factor in helping the TCs assess and plan for their weekly sessions with their tutees while also consolidating their professional learning. For example, Allison described her positive relationship with her mentor teacher and the ways

this relationship helped both her learning and that of her tutee:

I have been lucky to have my tutee's teacher. She reassesses him and informs me where he is at with his reading. Having her is supportive. She is friendly and forthcoming with information. She has told me she is grateful for me as a volunteer for *Read Up* and the one-to-one relationship with him because she has seen the difference in him too. (C19)

TCs like Christy consistently affirmed the opportunity to engage in tutoring alongside the course because this resulted in such powerful professional learning.

I think doing this program, along with doing the class, was the best thing.... Calgary Reads set us up pretty well with resources and everything, but the more resources that we got from the class just really helped set me up to succeed in this program. (A9)

Reading development concepts came to life when TCs understood their importance in their tutee's development. When sharing experiences with peers and mentor teachers, they saw themselves as problem-solving professionals with insights to offer. In the Discussion, we explore further ways to enrich these professional discussions, better prepare for tutoring, and invite deeper connections between research-based strategies and tutoring.

### **Affirmation of Impact**

When they compared their experiences with the rest of their classmates who engaged in *wee reads*, Calgary Reads' 10-week read-aloud program, the TCs were insistent that the tutoring experience was more impactful. Jillian said,

I did *wee reads* in my second semester. My mentor teacher asked if I would like to do it. I found *Read Up* more rewarding because of the growth, knowing that you were the reason and you helped them. It is one of the reasons why I became a teacher, so you can see that growth. (A8)

Tasha agreed: "To see the child excel and bring them up to grade level again is... I can't explain it. It's something I never thought was possible" (A9). She continued to describe the powerful impact that the rigorous tutoring experience of *Read Up* had on her growth as a teacher:

I think the *Read Up* program should be mandatory over *wee reads*. From a lot of the *wee reads* students that I have talked with, they did not get the same experiences or strategies. If I were to say, "This is how I applied the program," they have nothing compared to what we did. (Tasha, A8)

One should never diminish the importance of reading aloud to children, as their classmates did in the *wee reads* program. However, guiding children while they are reading as the TCs did in *Read Up* provided unique insight into children's thinking process and required TCs to act on those observations to guide children's reading.

## **Discussion**

### **Affirming Responsive Teaching**

Findings from this study align with the body of research outlined in the literature review, which describes the effectiveness of integrated coursework and tutoring in promoting the development of TCs' knowledge, efficacy, and reflective capacity for teaching reading. As identified in the analysis, TCs in this study learned to carefully observe and assess young readers, reflected on their own professional learning, practiced

new strategies associated with effective reading assessment and instruction, and grew in responsiveness to their tutees' needs. In this way, the tutoring program aligns with Murphy Odo's (2016) notion of pedagogical training wheels for the TCs, in which they were able to engage fully with the learning of one child, undistracted by the complex management inherent with whole-class instruction. The TCs' ability to kidwatch, assess, and adapt to children's needs is one of the most powerful outcomes of this study and demonstrates their growing ability to "know thy impact," a powerful mantra emerging from Hattie's (2009) impressive meta-analysis of learning experiences that have the greatest impact on student achievement.

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) identify that effective teacher professional learning is embedded in practice, is authentic to the challenges faced by the teacher, and is enriched through reflective dialogue with colleagues. Further, Darling-Hammond and Bransford argue that opportunities that compel TCs to think like a teacher through enacting course-based learning in the classroom setting enrich their understanding of children as complex learners, each with unique needs. This tutoring program accelerates the learning experiences typical of preservice teachers to experiences that are more typical of in-service teachers. They began to think like teachers and enriched their practice through professional conversations embedded in the teaching context (all key elements of effective professional learning for in-service teachers) before they even entered the profession. As Schon (1983) has argued, field experiences are rich with uncertainty; learning to deal with this uncertainty underscores for TCs the urgency of thinking like a teacher, responding authentically to their tutees, and developing a strong repertoire of instructional strategies to support children's literacy growth. The very nature of the ongoing, extensive tutoring experience elevated this sense of urgency as distinct from course-based learning and whole-class instruction.

### **Structural Limitations**

Although there were numerous benefits to the tutoring experience, there were also significant structural challenges including scheduling, communication, and multi-institution collaboration. Managing the schedules and expectations of three organizations (i.e., the local school, Calgary Reads, and the teacher education program) was complicated. For example, the university program required 20 field experience half-days, but the tutoring program required 35 tutoring sessions. Thus, TCs needed to liaise individually with classroom teachers to find 15 additional tutoring opportunities. TCs were expected to be in schools one morning each week for field experience and frequently had courses at the university in the afternoons. Other challenges included tutee absenteeism, cancellation of tutoring sessions to accommodate school events, and the fact that teachers in participating classrooms were sometimes reluctant to release the child for tutoring, all issues that made it difficult for TCs to complete the required number of sessions to meet their tutoring obligations. Further, teachers sometimes asked TCs to stay for the afternoon when the schedule required only mornings; this was not feasible because many TCs faced the constraints of attending afternoon courses, often having to travel great distances on public transportation.

Communication between the three organizations was sometimes challenging. Calgary Reads had a school coordinator in each school—a teacher who would liaise between Calgary Reads and teachers, TCs, and other tutors in the school. However, these school coordinators were usually classroom teachers who were unable to monitor all of the tutor activities. Some teachers misunderstood the expectations of the tutoring program



and urged the TCs to tutor a different child each week so more children could benefit from the TCs' support, failing to recognize that the program required each selected child to experience 35 tutoring sessions. Concentrating more TCs in fewer schools could make it feasible for Calgary Reads staff to visit schools and provide timely support for tutoring.

Finally, TCs faced a number of practical, school-based challenges. Calgary Reads provided each school with a tutoring bin that included a selection of games, manipulatives, and basic stationery materials. Sometimes teachers or tutors borrowed materials and neglected to return them to the tutor bin. The TCs had to become increasingly self-sufficient in bringing their own resources from home.

### Implications and Conclusions

This research has shown that tutoring alongside a literacy teacher education course has tremendous potential to enhance the theoretical understanding and pedagogical competence of TCs. Our findings align with contemporary research in literacy teacher preparation, which identifies the combination of coursework and tutoring as effective in promoting the integration of TC knowledge and confidence in supporting children's reading. In addition to TC learning, this study shows the benefits of tutoring for children's reading growth.

The teacher education program has implemented a modified program requiring 20 tutoring sessions over 7 months during the TCs' regular field experience days. Typically, the *Read Up* program requires 35 tutoring sessions; including 20 tutoring sessions on field experience days was feasible for the study participants, but it was challenging to meet the 15 additional required sessions. This modified expectation addressed TCs' scheduling challenges and made it possible for all TCs in the program to benefit from the tutoring experience.

Further research examining the long-term impact of this program is underway; future research will examine TCs' retention of their knowledge as they transition into their role as beginning teachers. As we consider future teacher education practice, we believe there may be more opportunities to explicitly link the course and the tutoring experience, perhaps through the concept of core practices (Grossman, 2018). In Grossman's (2018) recommended learning cycle, TCs begin by *analyzing* cases such as video examples of a core practice (in this case, guiding children as they read could be considered a core practice), then *planning* and *rehearsing* that practice, then *enacting* the practice in schools, and finally *reflecting* on the experience. Calgary Reads training provided some analyzing, and school-based tutoring surely provides opportunities for enacting, but there may be more opportunity for course instructors to "engage in repeated cycles of observing, analyzing, planning, and enactment" (Janssen et al., 2015, pp. 137–138) and reflection in the literacy coursework to deepen TC learning in intentional ways. As TCs developed confidence in practices that supported their tutees, they were better able to teach responsively and develop "adaptive expertise" (Janssen et al., 2015, p. 139). However, with insufficient confidence in core practices, the necessity to regularly adapt can lead to frustration.

[One] line of research might investigate the best way to sequence the teaching of core practices to encourage adaptive expertise. Do novices develop a greater sense of experimentation when they have first had a chance to master the components of practice with which they are most familiar and then begin to experiment? Or does leading with the familiar simply encourage an emphasis on routine practice and make it less likely that teachers will innovate over time? (Janssen et al., 2015, p. 145)

The notion of core practices is not embedded in a positivist orientation that focuses on what works or simple reified practices (Wenger, 1998); rather, core practices emerge from a sociocultural framework that “incorporates knowledge, judgment, skill, and identity... [to develop] a more theoretical understanding of why and under what circumstances such a core practice might be useful for supporting student learning” (Janssen et al., 2015, p. 138). To ensure that all TCs benefit maximally, course instructors may need to provide more opportunities to plan for and rehearse tutoring experiences in class and subsequently reflect on those experiences in light of research on reading to help TCs deeply understand children’s reading and teachers’ role in supporting reading development.

Despite the structural challenges inherent to the collaboration between three distinct organizations, the learning afforded by TCs’ participation in the Read Up tutoring program was robust. In fact, TCs came away from this experience advocating strongly for the continuation of this one-to-one tutoring program embedded within the language course. Although this study is not generalizable due to its small sample size, findings can serve as a contribution to course development to effectively prepare responsive teachers and support reading instruction in the broader teacher education community.

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