



Marian University's Klipsch Educators College: Integrating Literacy Coursework and Clinical Practice

Marian University's Klipsch Educators College engaged with TPI-US in the fall of 2025 as part of a strategic effort to elevate program quality and align with Indiana's new science of reading requirements. Indiana's revised legislation mandates that educator preparation programs ground reading instruction in evidence-based practices, and Marian took a proactive approach to meet and exceed these expectations.

During an intensive review week, TPI-US reviewers observed classes, analyzed candidate performance data, and conducted interviews with faculty, students, and staff from partner schools. The review confirmed a strong coherence between Marian's literacy coursework and scientifically based reading practices. **In particular, reviewers highlighted Marian's integration of structured literacy content across courses, data-driven decision-making to guide instruction, and faculty calibration processes** using tools such as the Literacy Observation Tool (LOT) and the Edthena video analysis platform.

Working with TPI-US affirmed the college's leadership in advancing Indiana's Science of Reading priorities and in preparing candidates to meet the needs of all readers, including those with dyslexia and other reading challenges. As a result of the review, the program expanded its data dashboards, clarified performance milestones for candidates, and tightened the integration of fieldwork with coursework expectations. This responsive action plan not only addressed the review feedback but also reinforced Marian's leadership role in advancing Indiana's science of reading priorities. By embracing external insights and making evidence-based changes, the college ensured its candidates are even better equipped to meet the needs of all readers, including students with dyslexia and other reading difficulties.

Connecting Coursework and Clinical Practice in Literacy

A hallmark of Marian's approach is a cohesive, practice-oriented system that bridges coursework with clinical experiences to build candidates' expertise in evidence-based literacy instruction. Across its undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs, candidates encounter a curriculum grounded in the science of reading and aligned with the International Dyslexia Association's best practice standards. From day one, coursework emphasizes the key components of reading science (explicit, systematic teaching of phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing). These concepts are continually applied in real classrooms through scaffolded field experiences, ensuring that pre-service teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice.

To reinforce the link between what candidates learn in class and what they put into practice, Marian has implemented several aligned strategies and tools. Below are some of the key program components that connect coursework to clinical practice in Marian's literacy preparation model:

- **Pathway and Gateway Assessments:** Marian uses structured performance checkpoints at pivotal stages of the program, where candidates must demonstrate literacy-teaching competencies before advancing. These assessments serve as "gateways" to ensure aspiring teachers can apply strategies aligned with the science of reading as they progress through the program. Faculty and mentor teachers evaluate lesson plans, teaching demonstrations, and student outcomes at these points, providing clear feedback and remediation if needed.
- **Video Reflections (Edthena):** The program also uses an online video observation and reflection system that enables candidates to record their classroom instruction and reflect on their practice. Using Edthena, candidates upload teaching videos (e.g., delivering a phonics lesson or a guided reading session) and receive targeted feedback from faculty and coaches. Offering another link between theory and practice, this process allows candidates to see themselves in action and connect instructor feedback directly to course concepts and evidence-based techniques.
- **Literacy Observation Tool (LOT):** Program faculty and supervisors use a standardized observation rubric to assess the use of evidence-based literacy practices during teaching. Faculty and supervisors use the LOT when observing candidates in clinical placements, scoring indicators like explicit phonics instruction, the use of formative assessment, and corrective feedback strategies. The LOT guides constructive feedback to candidates and ensures that all faculty and mentor observers are calibrated on what high-quality reading instruction looks like, a precursor for program alignment. Marian conducts regular LOT norming sessions so that everyone evaluating candidates has a shared understanding of effective practice.
- **Data Dashboards (Airtable):** A custom data system in [Airtable](#) tracks each candidate's performance across courses, field experiences, and assessment checkpoints. The program stores key data from Pathway/Gateway assessments, LOT observations, and course-embedded assignments in easily accessible dashboards, enabling faculty teams to spot patterns and address gaps. For instance, if data show several candidates struggling with a particular skill (say, teaching decoding strategies), faculty can respond by revisiting that content in coursework or providing extra coaching. The Airtable dashboards thus create a feedback loop for continuous program improvement, helping to maintain consistency in how candidate progress is measured across the program.

Together, these tools and practices create a tightly knit feedback loop between coursework design and classroom practice. Candidates receive frequent, aligned feedback on their reading instruction, and faculty use real-world performance data to refine coursework. This integrated system ensures Marian graduates enter their own classrooms fully prepared to deliver high-quality, science-backed literacy instruction to all learners.

Evidence of Impact

Marian's focused integration of literacy coursework and clinical practice has yielded **strong positive outcomes** for teacher candidates and the schools they serve. Diverse evidence suggests that the program's enhancements are making a meaningful difference:

- **Candidate Growth on Assessments:** Since Marian aligned its curriculum with the science of reading and implemented the new practice-based supports, candidates have shown marked improvement on key literacy knowledge exams and performance assessments. These developments align with TPI-US's vision for literacy preparation and the established science of how people learn to read most effectively. Students are mastering content, such as phonics and phonemic awareness, at higher rates, and this knowledge translates into more confident teaching during their practicum experiences.
- **Stronger Teaching Skills:** Classroom observation data illustrate that teacher candidates are increasingly effective in delivering explicit, systematic reading instruction. Scores on the LOT rubric have risen over time, demonstrating measurable growth in candidates' ability to execute foundational literacy lessons.
- **Consistent Evaluation and Feedback:** The faculty's efforts at calibration and data use have led to more consistent evaluations of candidate performance. Following the TPI-US review, faculty began using Airtable dashboards and normed observation tools. Marian now has valid and reliable evidence that candidates are meeting proficiency benchmarks at each Pathway and Gateway checkpoint. This consistency provides both the program and the candidates with a clear picture of where they stand and where they need to improve.
- **Positive Partner School Feedback:** School partners that hire Marian graduates report high satisfaction with their initial preparation. Principals and mentor teachers note that Marian-trained beginning teachers enter the classroom ready to teach reading using evidence-based approaches and are equipped to support students with dyslexia and other reading difficulties.
- **Faculty and Program Coherence:** Internally, Marian's faculty have observed greater coherence and shared purpose across the program. Through their collaborative work on curriculum alignment and the use of shared tools like LOT and Edthema, faculty have a unified understanding of what effective literacy teaching entails. This unity has strengthened the overall program, as everyone is pulling in the same direction and modeling the practices they expect candidates to use.

Together, these outcomes show the impact of Marian University's continuous improvement in literacy teacher education. Candidates graduate ready to deliver evidence-based reading instruction, faculty are aligned and using data to drive decisions, and partner schools are seeing the benefits in classrooms.

Ongoing Refinements for Sustained Excellence

Even with a strong model in place, Marian continually **refines its programs** to further strengthen alignment, sustainability, and impact in literacy teacher preparation. The faculty has identified several key areas of ongoing improvement, including:

- **Enhancing Coursework–Clinical Integration:** By expanding the variety and frequency of clinical practice experiences (such as early field experiences and student teaching in diverse classrooms), Marian is working to guarantee that all candidates can adapt evidence-based reading instruction to any context.
- **Refining Performance Assessments:** Faculty are refining rubrics and expectations to ensure that these checkpoints reliably capture candidate growth across both undergraduate and graduate cohorts. This effort includes continued norming of the Literacy Observation Tool and expanding Edthena use for more targeted video-based coaching, ensuring that scoring and feedback are aligned no matter who evaluates the lesson.
- **Deepening Data Integration:** The program is developing more robust ways to visualize and analyze data across courses and clinical experiences, making it easier to pinpoint curricular improvement opportunities. This deeper data integration supports internal continuous improvement and streamlines reporting outcomes for accreditation and state compliance.
- **Expanding Support for Mentor Teachers:** Marian is building a shared understanding with partners around science-of-reading-aligned practices and what to expect from teacher candidates. By bringing mentor teachers into the loop through orientation sessions, co-training on the LOT instrument, and regular communication, Marian ensures that feedback to candidates is consistent and that mentors feel supported in their role.
- **Strengthening Faculty Collaboration:** Faculty across methods courses, special education, and clinical supervision meet regularly to share data and insights. Ongoing professional development and cross-program calibration sessions help faculty stay unified on the vision of evidence-based reading instruction. This collaborative approach means that whether a candidate is in an undergraduate course or a master's seminar, they encounter the same reinforced messages and high expectations for effective literacy teaching.

These refinements reflect Marian’s proactive stance in keeping its literacy preparation evidence-based and effective. By investing in these improvements—and maintaining them—Marian sustains a cycle of innovation that benefits candidates and, ultimately, their future students.

TPI-US is grateful for its partnership with Marian University and for the co-creation of this working paper by Dr. Lee Ann Kwiatkowski, Dean and Vice President of the Klipsch Educators College at Marian University.

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