

PROMISING PRACTICE

REVIEW AREA 1: Quality of Literacy Coursework University of Arkansas

This paper is part of a series that TPI-US produced to share successful programs' promising practices and resources with other programs. For other promising practices, see our website: www.tpius.org.

Connecting High-Quality Literacy Coursework to Authentic Practice

Preparing teachers to teach reading effectively requires more than strong coursework. Teacher candidates must have opportunities to apply evidence-based literacy practices with students, receive meaningful feedback, and refine their instructional skills in authentic settings.

The University of Arkansas has developed a literacy preparation model that intentionally connects these elements. Through high-quality Science of Reading coursework, structured clinical experiences, and ongoing collaboration between university faculty and school partners, candidates develop both the knowledge and practical skills needed to support student literacy success.

In spring 2024, the Elementary Education and Special Education programs worked with [Teacher Prep Inspection-US \(TPI-US\)](#) as part of Arkansas's broader efforts to strengthen literacy preparation across educator preparation programs. The review highlighted two notable strengths: the quality of the university's literacy coursework and the intentional connections between coursework and clinical practice.

"As our literacy experts can attest, the University of Arkansas has one of the best structures, quality coursework, and strong connections to practice that we have reviewed. It is a model that should be replicated. The state is supporting the program with training pre-service teachers and having them practice tutoring using HQIM."

High-Quality Literacy Coursework

A defining feature of the University of Arkansas program is its commitment to ensuring that literacy instruction is grounded in evidence-based practices and delivered by faculty with deep expertise.

Candidates begin by building a strong foundation in the Science of Reading through coursework designed to develop both content knowledge and instructional understanding. Faculty members engage in ongoing professional learning at the state and national levels to remain current in literacy research and best practices. This commitment to faculty expertise helps ensure that coursework reflects the latest evidence on how students learn to read.

The university also maintains structures that promote continuous improvement. Faculty who teach literacy courses participate in a monthly Literacy Professional Learning Community (PLC) where they review course alignment, analyze candidate performance, and make data-informed revisions to assignments and clinical experiences. This collaborative approach helps ensure that literacy content is consistently reinforced across the program and aligned with state and national expectations.

“One strength of our program is how we are committed to making sure that our faculty are experts in literacy, as well as having a shared goal of centering clinical practice within coursework.”

Strong Connections to Practice

While strong coursework is essential, the University of Arkansas recognizes that candidates must also learn how to apply literacy practices in real classrooms.

The program’s literacy preparation model is built around a continuum of practice. Candidates first develop foundational knowledge through coursework and Literacy Clinic experiences. They then apply that learning in Professional Development Schools (PDS), where they provide literacy tutoring to elementary students and receive ongoing coaching from university faculty and school-based mentors. Finally, candidates synthesize their learning through a yearlong residency experience that allows them to assume increasing responsibility for instruction. This intentional progression helps candidates connect theory to practice while receiving feedback at every stage of development.

A key strength identified during the TPI-US review was the feedback loop created through university liaisons and school partnerships. Faculty members regularly observe candidates, provide coaching, and work closely with school personnel to ensure that literacy practices introduced in coursework are implemented effectively in classrooms.

The university also uses a Midpoint Assessment to monitor candidate growth. Candidates plan and teach a literacy lesson that is evaluated using the Arkansas Aspiring Teacher Rubric. The resulting data provide valuable feedback for candidates while also informing program improvement efforts.

“One of the highlights that stood out for us during the inspection week was the feedback loop our university liaisons provide when our candidates are in their schools.”

State Support for HQIM Tutoring

An additional strength of the University of Arkansas model is the way state investments and school-university partnerships support candidate learning.

The university's work with TPI-US originated through a grant initiative focused on integrating High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) into literacy coursework. Since then, university and district partners have secured state-funded grants that expand tutoring opportunities within Professional Development Schools.

These grants support teacher candidate stipends, increase access to rural placements, and create opportunities for candidates to practice literacy instruction using HQIM with elementary students. As a result, candidates gain valuable experience implementing high-quality instructional materials before entering the profession, while schools receive additional literacy support for students.

Impact

School partners report positive outcomes from the literacy tutoring model. One rural district partner noted that significantly fewer intervention groups were needed after students received tutoring from University of Arkansas teacher candidates. The university has also observed increased candidate confidence in using HQIM during Professional Development School experiences.

By combining high-quality literacy coursework with meaningful opportunities to apply learning in authentic settings, the University of Arkansas has created a model that prepares teacher candidates to teach reading with confidence and competence.

"Our candidates start with learning about the Science of Reading through their literacy courses. During their participation in the PDS, teacher candidates tutor students using HQIM. Finally, our yearlong residency brings all the practices together."

Why This Practice Matters

The University of Arkansas demonstrates how educator preparation programs can strengthen literacy outcomes by focusing on two essential components: high-quality coursework and strong connections to practice. Through expert faculty, intentional clinical experiences, and strategic state support for HQIM-based tutoring, the university has created a coherent literacy preparation model that helps future teachers develop the knowledge and skills necessary to support all learners.

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