

**Master's of Arts Degree in Curriculum and Instruction
Emphasis in Literacy
Major Code EDCI
Conceptual Framework**

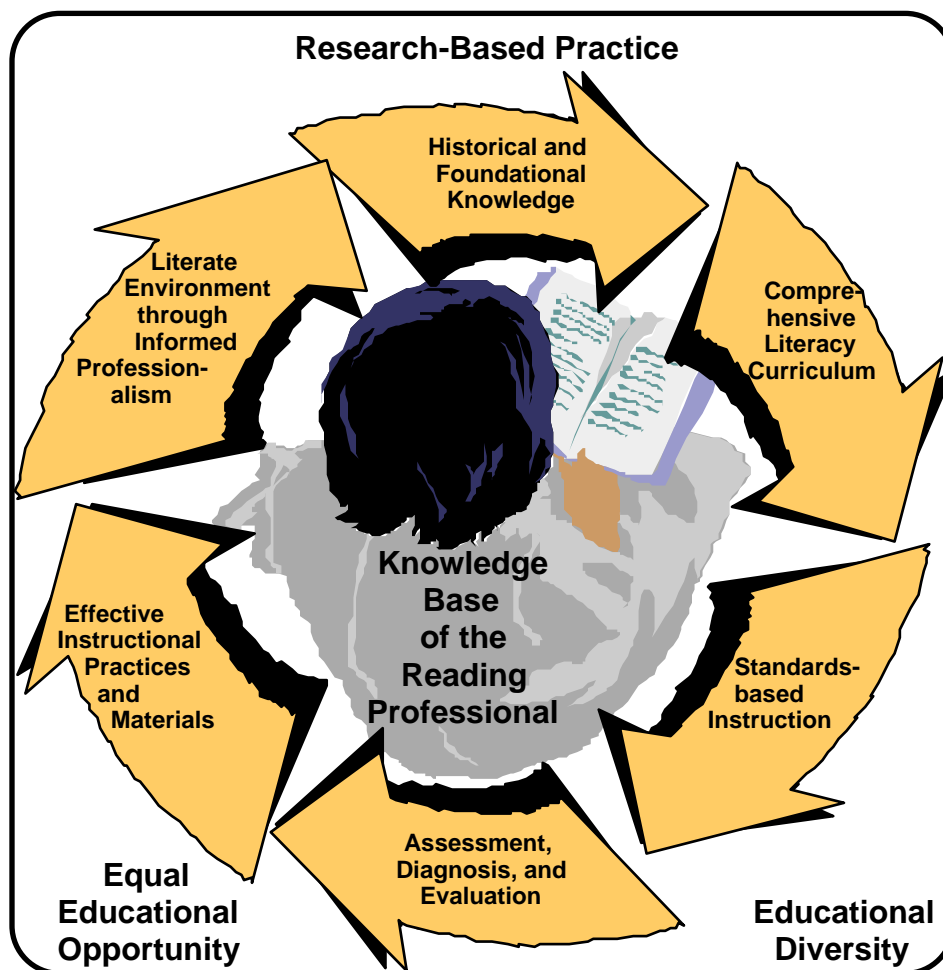
The K-12 Master's in Literacy Program is designed to support teachers who are interested in developing greater understanding and expertise in the teaching and learning of literacy. Students completing this 30 semester-hour program are eligible for a Reading Teacher K-12 endorsement from the State of Colorado. Because the endorsement is an advanced and specialty certification, all candidates for the degree must have a minimum of two years teaching experience and pass the Reading Teacher PLACE Exam before they can receive the endorsement.

The Master's in Literacy Program is committed to developing informed and well-trained literacy educators. The program is based on three critical assumptions. First, we believe that teachers make a difference. A growing body of evidence suggests that teachers can and do affect student achievement growth (e.g., Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Hill, Rowan & Ball, 2005; Pressley & Allington, 1998; Rice, 2003; Ross, Stringfield, Sanders & Wright, 2003; Wenglinsky, 2002). Second, teachers can acquire knowledge of evidence-based best practices in teaching children to learn to read. There is a vast body of research from which prospective and practicing literacy educators learn (e.g., Adams, 1990; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). And finally, excellent reading teachers need more than strong content knowledge; they also need knowledge of research-based pedagogical practices and a deep understanding of how to tailor their content and pedagogical knowledge to the specific needs of their students (Morrow, Tracey, Woo & Pressley, 1999; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001, Gunning, 2006).

To help reading professionals develop the knowledge bases that will enable them to make a difference in children's literate lives, our program draws from three distinct but interrelated sources in defining its specific programmatic foci on national, state, and institutional levels. At the national level, our program aligns with the standards for reading professionals identified by the International Reading Association (IRA, 2003) and addresses the requirements and ramifications of the No Child Left Behind (2001) and IDEA (2004) legislation. At the state level, the program attends to the guidelines presented by the Colorado Reading Directorate (CRD, 2006) in preparing professionals to teach reading. At the institutional level, the Master's in Literacy Program follows the unifying themes identified in the School of Education's conceptual framework.

Drawing from these distinct but related sources, the Master's in Literacy Program identifies the following bases of knowledge as critical to an informed reading professional (see Figure 1).

- Historical and Foundational Knowledge
- Comprehensive Literacy Curriculum
- Standards-based Instruction
- Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation
- Effective Instructional Practices and Materials
- Literate Environment through Informed Professionalism



[Figure 1. Knowledge Base of The Reading Professional]

These components are not sequential in nature, nor is one component more important than another. Instead, they are equally critical to a child's growing literacy competence. A brief explanation of each component follows.

Historical and Foundational Knowledge

Why do we teach children to read and write in a particular way versus another? Why do we teach (or not) teach children to read and write in the way in which we ourselves, or our parents, or our grandparents were taught? To understand the present, we need a deep understanding of our history as a field. The field of literacy instruction, and reading in particular, has been a very divisive one, marked by ongoing "wars" (Chall, 1967; 1983). To learn from this history is critical to being a well-informed contemporary reading professional. In addition to understanding the history, it's equally important to have a solid understanding of the foundational theories of our field, related to language development, the psychological, sociological, and linguistic foundations of reading, and the like (Gunning, 2006; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

Comprehensive Literacy Curriculum

Even as it is important to understand the history and foundational theories of literacy, it is equally important to be cognizant of contemporary trends in reading research, which include a solid understanding of the components of a comprehensive literacy curriculum (*National Reading Panel Report*, 2000). Yet, how does this vision of literacy play out in our program? Key areas of comprehensive literacy development that receive attention in our program include: phonological, linguistic and phonics skills (Adams, 1990; Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider & Mehta, 1998; Torgeson, Waagner & Rashotte, 1994); fluency (Stahl, Heubach & Cramond, 1997; Stahl, 2000); vocabulary (Beck & McKeown, 2005; Nagy & Scott, 2000; Hiebert & Kamil, 2005; Stahl & Nagy, 2006); reading comprehension and the promotion of independent reading skills (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pressley, 2002; Snow, *et al.*, 2005); writing and spelling development (Dyson, 2001; Richgels, 2001; Wilde, 1999; Wiley, 1999; Bear & Templeton, 2007), and the integration of literacy instruction across content areas (Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo, & Wang, 2000).

We ask our master's candidates to be cognizant of the fact that in addition to learning to decipher the black-and-white squiggles on a page, children use literacy in multiple and complex ways in their lives. Therefore, we teach our students to be knowledgeable about how children make use of literacy to learn and to construct a view of the world. In this construction, we respond to and compose texts for aesthetic pleasure as well as for information (Dyson & Freedman, 2003; Marshall, 2000; Rosenblatt, 1994). We think critically about what we read and write, and we talk about our interpretations with others (Beach & Myers, 2001).

Standards-based Instruction

Our program emphasizes the standards-based model in which all aspects of the instruction-curriculum-assessment cycle link to standards. The vision of such a model is to have all students develop the language and literacy skills necessary for success in school and in life. Characteristics of this model include:

- clearly articulated, publicly agreed upon statements regarding what students should know and be able to do (Wixson & Dutro, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997) and determination of essential learning or power standards (Reeves, 2003; Ainsworth, 2003)
- ongoing and multiple assessments that are directly linked to standards and instruction (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Stiggins, 2005; Valencia & Wixson, 2000; Farr, 2000)
- clearly specified expectations and grading schemes that are shared with students in advance of learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)
- assessments that represent multiple perspectives and sources of data (Gunning, 2006; Stiggins, 2005; IRA / NCTE, 1994)
- differentiation of instruction so that all students may meet standards (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2005; Wormeli, 2006)
- learning plans and additional support for students who have not met standards (CBLA, 2004, Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007)

At CU Boulder, candidates experience a standards-based system throughout their program as well as learn to plan, develop, and implement standards-based practices in their schools or practica. Throughout their program, candidates plan units and lessons based on standards and benchmarks as well as create or select assessments that exemplify principles of a standards-based system.

Assessment, Diagnosis and Evaluation

The Literacy Program at CU-Boulder addresses the four domains of assessment as outlined in Snow, 2005:

- Guiding principles of assessment (Gunning, 2006)
- Familiarity of a wide range of assessment tools and practices
- Knowledge of how to use assessment results to inform instruction (Wormeli, 2006)
- Skill in communicating results to stakeholders

In addition, the inclusion of classroom students in this process is a critical attribute of assessment (Stiggins, 2005). Students are actively involved in the goal-setting process and monitoring of progress toward these goals (O'Neill & Conzemius, 2006).

Effective Instructional Practices and Materials

Just as it is important to know *what* to teach (the different components of literacy instruction), it is equally important to know *how* to teach. Excellent reading teachers have knowledge of content-specific pedagogical techniques, that is, instructional techniques that are particular to the teaching of literacy. An important aspect of effective literacy instruction involves defining an instructional framework that attends to the different components of literacy instruction and to the differing needs of the students in the classroom (Kristo & Bamford, 2004; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Such a framework could include, for example, attention to different levels of guidance and support from the teacher (e.g., modeling, shared literacy, guided/intense intervention, independent work), and could include opportunities for different grouping options (whole class, small group, etc.). In particular, it would involve an understanding of the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). In addition, evidence suggests that literacy instruction be explicit and systematic, not incidental and/or implicit (Snow, et al., 2005; Pressley, 2006; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999). An emphasis on instructional routines provides this explicit, systematic instruction in an efficient and effective manner (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; McLaughlin, 2003; Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Finally, our students are expected to be knowledgeable about a wide variety of instructional materials and texts that could be used to help support literacy instruction. According to the IRA Position Statement on Excellent Reading Teachers (2000): "Excellent reading teachers include a variety of reading materials in their classrooms. Sometimes they rely on one or several reading series as the anchor of their reading program, but they also have supplemental materials and rich classroom libraries that contain at least seven books per child." Learning to select instructional materials appropriately is thus an important aspect of our program (Duke, 2002; Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Hiebert, 1999).

CU Boulder has a long-standing commitment to meeting the needs of a diverse society. In our program, we emphasize an appreciation of the different learning needs brought into the classroom by individual learners as well as preparation of teachers to address those needs by employing a wide range of teaching techniques (Au, 2002; Duffy-Hester, 1999). Prevalence data indicate that 17.5% of elementary and middle school children have difficulties with reading or writing (Shaywitz, 2003; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 1996). Some of these difficulties are developmental in nature (Shaywitz, Pugh, Jenner, Fullbright, Fletcher, Gore, & Shaywitz, 2000), necessitating that teachers be cognizant of the developmental nature of reading and writing (Scarborough, 2001). In developing an instructional framework, candidates address the needs of students who are not proficient. Using the Response to Intervention model (Catts & Kamhi, 2005), they ensure that all students have access to quality literacy instruction and implement an intervention-oriented multi-tiered approach for serving low-performing students. This corrective instruction focuses on prevention and intervention, emphasizing the backward design model and effective principles of interventions (Gentry, 2006; Guskey, 2003; Guskey, 2007; Hiebert & Taylor, 2000).

Other difficulties in learning literacy skills are associated with sociopolitical, cultural, and linguistic factors. Reports published in the last decade confirm that very real achievement gaps continue to exist among children from higher- versus lower-income schools (Herman & Stringfield, 1997; Puma, Karweit, Price, Ricciuti, Thompson, & Vaden-Kiernan, 1997) as well as among children from different racial/ethnic groups (NAEP, 2005), with white and middle-class children performing at higher levels in all cases. Classic studies in literacy and education (e.g., Heath, 1983; Ogbu, 1990) have pointed to the importance of the different kinds of cultural knowledge brought into classrooms by children from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. We expect that master's students at CU Boulder will develop a critical understanding of the sociopolitical, cultural, and developmental reasons contributing to difficulties in school-based literacy learning.

Literate Environment through Informed Professionalism

Learning to read and write best occurs within supportive environments for literacy. Our program helps teachers understand how to foster children's interest and growth in all aspects of literacy, especially integrated literacy instruction (Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo, & Wang, 2000). Specifically, we teach reading professionals to use students' interests, reading abilities, and backgrounds as foundations for the reading and writing program. In addition, we help them understand how to create literacy rich environments within their classrooms, using a large supply of books, technology-based information, and non-print materials that appeal to multiple levels, broad interests, and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Our students learn to model reading and writing enthusiastically as valued lifelong activities, and to motivate learners to become lifelong readers. We also emphasize creating a "community of learners" in their classrooms (Tompkins & Tway, 2003), which makes ample room for children to engage in collaborative talk, as well as in alternative modes of expression. Finally, in keeping with the conceptual framework of our School of Education, we ask that our reading teachers demonstrate that they are able to create literate environments that attend to issues of educational diversity, equal educational opportunity, and research-based school practices.

Finally, in the literacy emphasis at CU Boulder, we value and expect our students to become informed professionals. We want them to be active participants in professional organizations, read widely in professional literature, and advocate for high-quality teachers and teaching (Taylor, Coughlin & Marasco, 1997). We want them to be literacy role models for their students, their peers, and their wider community, avidly engaging in reading and writing for a variety of purposes (Anders, Hoffman & Duffy, 2000). Our students know the value of instilling an internal value for reading in their own students (Block, 2002). We expect them to be life-long learners (Buchanan, 1994), continuing to reach out and learn after they complete our program.