Practicum Reading Experiences for Urban Institute of Teacher Education Students

Research has consistently demonstrated the critical importance of early field experiences for teacher education (Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Directly working with children allows preservice teachers to translate and apply what they learn in their foundations and methods courses. Preservice teachers report that they benefit most when they directly work with children (Clift & Brady, 2005). The Urban Institute of Teacher Education (UITE) (https://uite.utah.edu) here at the University of Utah applies this research through the placement of preservice teachers in field experiences in reading before they begin student teaching.

The UITE provides preservice teachers with two field experiences in reading instruction. First, the University of Utah Reading Clinic (UURC) (https://uurc.utah.edu) offers preservice teachers experiences learning reading interventions for primary and upper elementary students. With direct support, assistance, and feedback through the UURC, preservice teachers tutor a student twice a week. During the same semester, preservice teachers attend reading methods classes which serves to build, reinforce and strengthen their knowledge, skills, and experiences.

In a second type of field experience, preservice teachers spend two days per week working with small groups in classes at Backman Elementary School (https://backman.slcschools.org) in the Salt Lake City School District. Backman Elementary is a Title I school with an ethnically diverse group of students and a large English learner population. Preservice teachers plan and implement reading lessons for two small groups of students from diverse backgrounds. The reading groups include English learners, providing opportunities for preservice teachers to apply their foundational knowledge about learning English as a second language. During the same semester, they attend a reading methods class where they learn theory and research about teaching reading to diverse learners.

These field experiences bring strength, practical knowledge, and confidence to UITE preservice teachers before they begin student teaching. In addition, the programs benefit the urban Salt Lake community in important ways. The UURC offers dozens of young readers direct one-on-one intervention in reading. The UITE/Backman partnership allows Backman teachers to allocate additional time to their students who need extra support. These early field experiences enable the UITE and the UURC to provide powerful field experiences for preservice teachers as well as beneficial services to the Salt Lake Valley community—thus a win-win for the university and the community at large.