



-A brief description of your EPP;

Mars Hill University is a fully accredited, four-year, private, Liberal Arts University located in the Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina. The University was fully reaffirmed in accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges in December 2022. Madison County—one of the poorest counties in the state with a per capita income of \$27,070 and a poverty rate of 15.3%—is home to the University (U.S. Census). Founded by a small group of pioneer citizens, the University opened in 1856 and was itself a pioneer as the first college in the region to admit African Americans in August 1961 (University Registrar's Office).

The Conceptual Framework of MHU's Teacher Education Program division demonstrates an understanding of the changes in the world, changes in the teaching profession, and changes within the socio-political contexts in which schooling occurs. Further, although continuous reworking of the program is necessary to prepare successful teachers in a changing world, certain sound principles about teaching – and about human curiosity, development and motivation – endure. These constants include both instructional principles and an understanding of teachers' responsibility to teach to the heart and not just the mind.

A significant element in the MHU Teacher Education framework focuses on preparing teachers to be *creative* instructors in face-to-face and online environments. We train teachers who are capable of designing and implementing instruction specific to the needs and interests of their particular students without being dependent on expensive, impersonal, commercially produced "canned" instructional programs. MHU's EPP has three distinct degree programs: Undergraduate (Sp. Ed, El. Ed, and Integrated Ed), an M.Ed. in Integrated Ed, and an M.A.T. for multiple subject areas.

-Where you were at the beginning of the redesign process;

At the beginning of our redesign process, our program's greatest strength was the full implementation of the Reading Research to Classroom Practice in our undergraduate program, and limited implementation in the Master's degree programs. Upon completing a self-study, MHU-EPP identified concepts of print and spelling as two areas of need. A final need that we recognized is for our program to focus more on helping our students know how to assess reading skills, interpret their results, and use the results to

design instruction. Additionally, we recognized that our department was over-reliant on the one faculty member who is a state-approved trainer for Reading Research to Classroom practice.

-What specific changes have been targeted and how they have been/are being completed;

To increase faculty knowledge and fidelity of implementation throughout the program, three faculty members have completed the Science of Reading Training and the remaining full-time faculty, along with one adjunct that teaches an introductory reading course is completing the Science of Reading training now. Additionally, two faculty members have completed level Reading Research to Classroom Practice training and are in the process of completing level 2 training. Using the new knowledge gained from these trainings, the MHU education department worked to redesign courses and improve the reading instruction sequence students in the undergraduate program receive.

To improve the consistency of course content, professors collaborated at the end of the 2022-2023 school year to redesign the five required courses in the undergraduate program that include components of reading instruction: Ed 404, Ed 522, ED 520, and Ed 455 in order to meet NCICU's priority that *"instruction in early literacy intervention strategies and practices to be aligned with the Science of Reading and State of NC ... standards."* The redesign of these courses specifically addressed concepts of print and spelling instruction. Ed 404 has been reorganized into two major sections – early literacy and advanced literacy. Concepts of Print will be developed in the early literacy section of this course. Ed 455 currently includes a spelling component but begins at a later phase than that iterated in SoR. The Ed 455 Spelling section of the course will be more fully developed to clearly address the early stages of spelling. To include a more focused implementation of reading instruction in the Master's program, we have embedded the full Reading Research to Classroom Practice instruction throughout the M.Ed. and M.A.T. with specific modules attached to individual courses. Additionally, Ed 522, a course that focuses on assessment in the M.Ed. program, has been redesigned to focus heavily on reading assessments and interpretation of results to inform classroom instruction.

-What challenges you have faced and how you overcame/are overcoming the challenges; and,

Originally the education faculty faced challenges of implementing the Science of Reading across all reading courses as some faculty had not had the appropriate training. By completing the Science of Reading training as a department and supplementing that training with Reading Research to Classroom Practice, we have been able to strengthen the course content and sequence of instruction in our programs.

First, we recognized the importance of providing continuous professional development for faculty members who had not received training on the Science of Reading and provided this training for all full-time faculty members in our department and adjunct professors who were teaching reading courses. This allowed our instructors to gain a deeper understanding of the principles and methodologies of the Science of Reading and teach those concepts with fidelity throughout the program. Additionally, we deepened the knowledge gained with the Science of Reading training by offering face-to-face Reading Research to Classroom Practice workshops that included EPP faculty and K-5 in-service teachers. This

provided the opportunity for faculty members to ask questions and engage in discussions with teachers, further enhancing their understanding and ability to implement these approaches in their courses.

Next, we examined the sequence of our reading courses to ensure that they were designed to provide a logical progression of skills and strategies for our teacher candidates. We collaboratively reviewed the curriculum and made necessary revisions to ensure that the courses aligned with evidence-based practices and met the needs of future educators. This process involved both theoretical discussions and practical considerations, such as incorporating real-life examples and case studies to enhance the application of knowledge.

Simultaneously, we recognized the need to integrate writing instruction within our reading courses. We acknowledged that effective literacy instruction encompasses both reading and writing skills, and our teacher candidates were not adequately prepared to teach writing. To address this gap, we developed a new module within our reading courses that focused specifically on teaching writing. This module emphasized the connection between reading and writing, strategies for developing writing skills, and ways to provide effective feedback to young writers. We are currently developing a stand-alone writing instruction course to include in the required course sequence to ensure that our teacher candidates receive a more comprehensive and well-rounded education in literacy instruction.

To support the implementation of these changes, we are currently working with K-5 schools to develop a PDS Model with trained mentors for teacher candidates. At our partner schools, we are offering the Reading Research to Classroom Practice training to licensed teachers who have completed the Science of Reading training. Then, these teachers will serve as our core group of cooperating teachers for field placements, ensuring preservice teachers observe high-quality reading instruction that matches the Science of Reading philosophy that has been modeled in the Education Preparation Program at MHU. We are currently working with two PSUs to develop a program fostered to create a collaborative and supportive environment that empowers teacher candidates to enhance their teaching practices and promote student success alongside certified teachers. Our hope is that this will evolve into a formal PDS model with an active and sustainable relationship.

-Where you are now in relation to teaching based in the SoR. Please include any impacts of these changes and how those impacts are being/will be assessed.

Overall, our efforts to address the challenges identified above related to implementing the Science of Reading and teaching writing in our education faculty have been successful. The faculty as a whole have embraced these changes and are working together to create a more effective and comprehensive curriculum. By providing professional development, redesigning courses, revising the course sequence, integrating writing instruction, and implementing a mentoring program, we have ensured that our teacher candidates are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to become effective literacy educators. We have been using the RRtCP pre/post assessment and Licensure tests to monitor student growth. We will continue to use these measures as well as qualitative interviews to measure the outcomes of these efforts.