



*“... to dedicate itself to the success of all students through its excellent teaching and to prepare competent and effective P-12 teachers and other school professionals, including school administrators and counselors, to function in highly complex and diverse settings and to promote academic excellence and student success in order to build a better future for individuals in the territory and the Caribbean.”*

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TESTIMONY on Pedagogical Foundations in Literacy Education before the  
Committee on Education and Workforce Development  
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Good Day, Honorable Senator Marise C. James, Esquire, Chair of the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development, distinguished members of this Committee, and the listening audience. I am Dr. Karen Harris Brown, Dean and Professor, UVI School of Education. I am also a licensed and nationally certified speech-language pathologist with 31 years of experience. Dr. Magdalene Tobias, Chair and Associate Professor, School of Education, is present in St. Croix in a supporting role. She has a Master of Arts in Education with a concentration in Elementary Education: Reading K-12. Dr. Tobias serves as my coauthor of this testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. The focus is on the pedagogical foundations in literacy education offered through the UVI School of Education.

### **Importance of Literacy Training in Teacher Preparation**

Simply knowing how to read does not automatically qualify a person to teach reading well. Research supports the importance of literacy training in teacher preparation. Teacher preparation programs that offer substantial literacy training can enhance teachers' foundational literacy skills and improve student reading outcomes. Teacher training/preparation/education is essential for effective literacy instruction in the classroom setting. The most excellent teachers demonstrate care for their students *and* possess the requisite skills to impart this knowledge to their students. We all know that reading is a critical conduit to learning and future achievement. It is imperative for students to be taught foundational reading to successfully develop literacy skills. Teachers who are effectively trained in the science of reading are the most efficient reading instructors and can provide their students with these lifelong skills.

### **Pedagogical Offerings at the UVI School of Education**

The UVI school of Education offers courses in literacy instruction for early care and education providers, preservice teachers, and in-service teachers. Two required courses in the Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) program prepares education majors for the teaching of reading in early childhood settings. EDU 219 PROMOTING LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD is intended for early care and education providers and teachers who plan to work in early childhood settings. It cannot be overemphasized that learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life. The early childhood years constitute a critical period for language and literacy development. It is therefore essential for early childhood educators to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide instruction that would serve to promote language and literacy development. This course provides students with a foundation of knowledge they will need to develop learning environments where children's language development will be enhanced. They will be exposed to the theory and research as well as guidelines and activities for enhancing language development in early childhood settings.

This course aligns with the VI state literacy plan in the following ways. The course includes the content to be taught to infants and toddlers and preschoolers that lays the foundation for the VI Standards of Achievement (VISA) specified in the VI literacy curriculum for Kindergarten to high school. Students are oriented to the VI Literacy Curriculum for K-3. Students are engaged in learning about the 5 main aspects of language development (phonological, semantic, syntactic, morphemic, and pragmatic). Students learn practical strategies for developing each of these aspects in pre-school to the elementary years. This includes patterns of interaction with young children in which they learn the importance of eye contact, child-directed speech, questioning, linguistic scaffolding, etc. They view videos that show children in settings where they are developing phonological, semantic, syntactic, morphemic, and pragmatic knowledge. They also examine programs for second language learners. They engage in a hands-on activity in which they select a child and assess and analyze that child's language development regarding each of these aspects. They then make recommendations based on the data analyzed. Students engage families through the development of a newsletter that includes recommendations of books they could share with their children. Students learn about guidelines for conducting parent conferences, interacting with parents/guardians, and how to encourage parents/guardians to support language development at home.

Learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life. The early childhood years, from birth to eight years constitute the most critical period for literacy development. It is therefore essential for early childhood educators to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide instruction that would serve to help students learn to read and write by Grade 3. EDU 304 TEACHING READING AND LITERACY IN INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION is designed to provide inclusive early childhood majors with an understanding of the reading process, as well as a detailed view of research-based principles of effective literacy instruction from kindergarten to third grade for all children, including children with disabilities. This course exposes preservice teachers to principles and practices of early reading instruction which will assist them in providing young children with a sound foundation in reading and writing. Students do not wait until the end of their program to obtain hands-on experience. This course has a field experience component that requires students to spend a

minimum of 2 hours weekly for 12 weeks, totaling 24 hours in a K-3 classroom setting for language arts instruction. Students observe several language arts lessons taught in live classrooms as well as in virtual classrooms via videos. They complete weekly journals based on their observations of language arts lessons. They are taught to develop a language arts lesson plan using a template that includes the essential elements of a lesson plan. They administer several informal measures of literacy assessment that include Child Interviews, Letter Recognition, Phonological Awareness test, Phonics Test, Checklist for Assessing Concepts about Books and Comprehension of Text, Checklist for Assessing Writing Development, and a Parent Interview, which essentially is a Checklist for Promoting Early Literacy at Home. Students are required to engage in a parent conference or parent interview. The above-mentioned assessments are required artifacts to be included in an e-Portfolio that showcases several artifacts from the students' professional preparation for teaching literacy. Sections of the e-portfolio include The Professional as a Leader, in which they select artifacts that show initiative and self-motivation, cooperative partnerships with school, colleagues, parents, and the community.

EDU 353 and 354 TEACHING THE LANGUAGE ARTS, are designed to instruct learners in the utilization of methods and materials for teaching reading and other language arts. These courses also highlight the interrelatedness of the language arts skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening, study skills), reading in the content areas, grouping for instruction, informal diagnosis in the classroom, programmed reading research and demonstration techniques, developmental and remedial reading techniques, and components of a sound children's literature program. An entire semester is devoted specifically to the teaching of reading. During one semester, concurrent field experiences engage preservice teachers in two hours weekly in a public elementary school with instruction in the language arts.

It is equally important for secondary teachers (junior high and high school) to be knowledgeable of and demonstrate self-efficacy with the reading process. To be clear, this is not to say that secondary teachers (junior high and high school) should teach their students how to decode text or learn Dolch sight words or add more conventional reading and writing assignments to their lesson plans. But teachers need to use literacy strategies that help students understand the academic language of their respective content areas. There is an academic language of mathematics. There is an academic language of science. There are dynamic cognitive processes that comprise each subject. In fall 2022, the School of Education's curriculum committee met to discuss ways to enhance the current secondary teaching certificate program. This program caters to current practicing teachers seeking certification at this level. That discussion resulted in the development of a new course that is undergoing the new course approval process. This course, Teaching Literacy in the Content Area, explores strategies for integrating literacy into secondary content areas, including content-specific vocabulary, and reading comprehension skills. Teachers will be exposed to literacy strategies (listening, speaking, thinking, reading, and writing) as they relate to the content areas. They will learn to create content-specific lessons that integrate differentiated literacy strategies to ensure all learners succeed. It is strongly recommended that all secondary teachers previously certified be required to pursue this course to enhance their pedagogical skills for teaching their content areas. Training teachers to integrate literacy

strategies in content areas will be a step in the right direction to enhance the reading and writing performance of high school students, thus reducing the high school drop-out rate.

The School of Education also prepares school administrators seeking to earn a PhD degree through the education concentration track in UVI's creative leadership for innovation and change (CLIC) doctoral program. Stated previously, literacy is a critical aspect of schooling. It is everyone's concern. As practicing and prospective school administrators or personnel in positions that make decisions impact literacy development, students in CLIC 823 are given the opportunity to select schools to conduct a literacy plan needs assessment. Students then evaluate the strengths and needs of the selected schools based on the needs assessment data collected. They are required to reflect on and discuss their own levels of self-efficacy for the role of administrator and/or supervisor of literacy programs.

From the inception of the Ph.D. CLIC Program, students have been researching the six essential elements of the VI State literacy plan. They have given feedback on the development of the VI State literacy plan, during the draft stage of the plan and just prior to its publication for implementation in 2022. This included interviewing internal and external stakeholders regarding the following essential elements of the VI State literacy plan:

- I. Standards-based curriculum
- II. Assessment systems
- III. Instruction, intervention, and data-based decision making
- IV. Leadership and culture
- V. Professional preparation and learning
- VI. Family and community involvement

The entire CLIC 823 centers on how administrators could support a viable literacy environment.

### **VIDE Partnership**

The School of Education partners with the Virgin Islands Department of Education to develop and offer programs to cohorts. This "grow your own" initiative is a response to the national teacher shortage crisis. Related to our discussion today, the School of Education developed the *Post-Baccalaureate Certificate Program in Literacy Education*. The overarching goal of this certificate program is to give practicing teachers and other school professionals a body of professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are required to teach and work with all students including students with disabilities. This graduate-level program offers current teachers and others with a bachelor's degree minimum, an opportunity to enhance their teaching pedagogy and to acquire new skills in the teaching profession, respectively. Through its coursework and professional learning experiences, this program was designed to model cutting-edge 21<sup>st</sup> Century pedagogy. There is a requirement to complete 6 courses, each worth 3 credits, for a total of 18 credit hours. The program emphasizes and engages adult learners in critical self-reflection, inclusive practices, collaboration with other school professionals and families, specialized instruction of literacy, assessment, relevant literature for children and adolescents, and research trends in reading and writing. A cohort for this program has not yet started. The

School of Education has responded to the territory's need for improvement in reading and writing scores. We have prepared this Certificate in Literacy Education and we are ready for the cohorts of teachers that the VIDE should send for advanced training in literacy education, especially in the light of the dire need for improvement in literacy scores across the territory.

Senator James, thank you for shining a light and engaging us in discussion on this very important topic.

### **References**

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