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What Really Matters? An Examination of the Influences on the Practices of Beginning Teachers

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What *Really* Matters? An Examination of the Influences on the Practices of Beginning Teachers

Patricia L. Rieman, Ed.D.
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The SoTL Commons
Georgia Southern University
March 9, 2011
Why study beginning classroom reading teachers’ perceptions of the influences on their practices?

- Calls for more research in the area of reading teacher preparation.
- Understanding the “big picture” of preservice teachers’ learning experiences.
- Calls for research following preservice teachers into their first years of teaching.
- Possible implications for teacher education programs.
Research Questions

1. What are the influences that first- and second-year classroom reading teachers describe as having the strongest impact upon their current reading instructional practices?

2. Which influences did the teachers perceive as having enhanced their learning and teaching of their current reading instructional practices, and which did they perceive as having impeded those practices?

3. What do the reading teachers’ responses indicate about the strengths and weaknesses of their formal teacher preparation in the area of reading instruction?
Verification

- Holistic account of participants’ perceptions
- Triangulation of methods with data collection and member checks
- Cross-case analysis, constant comparative method and inter-rater reliability
Reliability

- Dependability or consistency
- Researcher addressed underlying assumptions and theories
- Conceptual framework
- Triangulation of data collection methods
- Cross-case analysis
- Audit trail
## Meet the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Grade(s)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynette: mid-20’s,</td>
<td>1(^{st}) &amp; 3(^{rd})</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1(^{st}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary: mid-40’s,</td>
<td>1(^{st})</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian, married,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah: mid-40’s,</td>
<td>4(^{th})</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>1(^{st}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian, divorced,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica: mid-20’s,</td>
<td>2(^{nd})</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>1(^{st}) year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Participants' Preservice & Inservice Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>1st professional semester clinical experience</th>
<th>2nd professional semester clinical experience</th>
<th>Student teaching experience</th>
<th>Teaching assignment in 1st years of inservice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynette</td>
<td>Middle school 6-8 grade, suburban, health class</td>
<td>5th grade, suburban, bilingual class</td>
<td>3rd grade, urban</td>
<td>Year 1: 1st and 3rd grade, urban, Title I reading Year 2: 2nd grade, same school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>2nd grade, suburban</td>
<td>2nd grade, suburban</td>
<td>2nd grade, suburban (same site &amp; cooperating teacher as second professional semester experience.)</td>
<td>Year 1 and 2: 1st grade, suburban (same site as 1st professional semester experience.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>4th grade, suburban</td>
<td>8th grade, language arts, suburban</td>
<td>5th grade, suburban</td>
<td>Year 1: 4th grade, suburban; Year 2: 4th grade, same district but different building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>3rd grade, suburban</td>
<td>6th grade (in an elementary school), suburban</td>
<td>2nd grade, suburban</td>
<td>Year 1 &amp; 2: 2nd grade, suburban (same site as student teaching.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lynette’s field experience

Lynette enjoyed experiencing uninterrupted time in the classroom, noting that this helped her to feel “in the swing of things,” trusted by her cooperating teacher, and understood by her students.
Lynette’s semester-long student teaching experience in third grade was a positive, productive time for her. It was in this student teaching experience that Lynette gained much of her knowledge in classroom management, & where she first used the basal reading series. Although Lynette’s cooperating teacher had a total of 15 years of experience, she had taken off the four previous years and was thus relearning much of her everyday routine. For example, Lynette noted that both she and the cooperating teacher were “sticking to the book like glue.”
Mary’s field experience

“That was wonderful because it was the indoctrination of getting your feet wet. And it was that great taste that it was like we teach. It was building blocks, it was week 1, week 2. And as you’re going through it, you’re having your classes, you’re understanding more, and you’re learning how to teach more and then you begin to apply it.”
Mary’s student teaching

“I had a fabulous mentor teacher at Anytown Elementary, Mrs. Majors in second grade. She had 31 years of experience when I was there and she also became my friend. I picked her brain and she never got tired of it. And she would say, I’ve tried this, this didn’t work, but you try it. And when I had a student like this, I discovered... and there was nothing she wouldn’t share with me. It was fabulous...The most valuable was her encouragement. She had a very positive outlook. She had a very wonderful manner... She knew teaching inside and out so well that she knew what was going to happen before it happened and always positive, good feedback.”
Delilah’s field experience

“I think he thought he was doing me a favor by not having me help with things. I sat in the back of the room in a chair and observed. “

“Eventually in the second week or something I said, “You know, it would help me learn students’ names if I passed out their papers, could I at least do that?” He said yeah, but he didn’t even have me do that.”
“If I did something, she would ask me why with this really horrible expression on her face. Instead of what was your motivation or what were you hoping the students would learn by that? Instead it was like, I can’t believe you would even think of doing that. And all the things we had learned in school, like questioning the author, writing questions while you’re reading. All these lesson plans I thought were really great.”
Veronica’s field experience

“I have a minor in math and that’s like my favorite subject to teach, so for me it (6th grade math) was like the perfect setting. She taught the first two classes and she would let me teach the third class and then it got to where I was teaching the second and the third class and then teaching other subjects as well.”
Veronica’s student teaching

Veronica had the unique opportunity to teach at Paine Elementary in two consecutive fall semesters, first as a student teacher, and then in her own classroom. It was, Veronica stated, the best time to student teach:

“Just because I’ve taught at this school, the same grade, the last semester was like my second year of being here because I taught the same stuff over. So I think that helps me out as a first year teacher, where it wasn’t so over-whelming because I had done it before.”
Conclusions

1. University coursework
2. First and second professional semester clinical experiences
3. Beginning classroom reading teachers’ experiences with cooperating teachers during student teaching
4. Professional classroom experience and experiences with students
5. Beginning classroom reading teachers and self-direction
6. Mentor teachers
7. Impediments
Implications for Practice

1. The nature of university coursework
2. The quality of early clinical placements
3. The professionalism of cooperating teachers
4. The nature of teacher induction programs
5. The need for mentors
6. Supporting the individual needs and experiences of preservice teachers