An examination of the perceived influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers
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Abstract

This case study was conducted to develop an understanding of beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences on their current practices, the positive or negative nature of such influences, and the implications of their perceptions for teacher preparation programs. The participants were four elementary teachers who had taught less than two years and taught reading as part of their daily classroom routines. Data were gathered with semi-structured interviews and stimulated recall sessions.

Through cross-case analysis and application of the constant comparative method, several conclusions were drawn about the perceived influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. University coursework was perceived as a positive influence. When the participants were asked where they learned to use the observed reading methods, they connected at least two of their methods to their courses. Additionally, the university coursework aided the participants in developing their understanding and implementation of theories and principles of effective literacy instruction.

The participants' perceptions of the value of their clinical experiences varied according to the level of supportive training each perceived that she had received in reading instructional practices. The perceptions indicated that student teaching experiences tended to provide the participants with valuable training in classroom reading instruction, and such experiences were strongly influenced by their relationships with their cooperating teachers.

Professional classroom experiences were perceived as positive influences on the participants' practices. Each participant attributed at least part of her current practices and her level of comfort with such practices to the value of having time in her classroom with her students.

The following recommendations were provided. First, teacher preparation programs should regard the first and second professional semester clinical experiences as quality time in which optimal learning can take place. Second, preservice student teachers must be placed with cooperating teachers who will provide them with the requisite opportunities for observation of and experience in utilizing best practice literacy instruction and the relationship between student teachers and their cooperating teachers must be healthy. Finally, teacher induction programs must address the value of beginning classroom reading teachers' first years of experience and their abilities as problem-solvers.