

ABSTRACT

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Title: An Examination of the Perceived Influences on the Practices of Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers

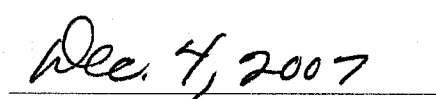
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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCES
ON THE PRACTICES OF BEGINNING
CLASSROOM READING TEACHERS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LITERACY EDUCATION

BY

PATRICIA LYNNE RIEMAN

DEKALB, ILLINOIS

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I would never have dreamed of entering this program were it not for the influence of my mentor, Dr. Pamela Farris. Since 1993, Pam has continually provided inspiration, advice, support, and an occasional well-placed kick to help me pursue this degree. Dr. Norman Stahl, my department chair, has also provided support, appropriate levels of nagging, and unwavering faith in my abilities. Dr. Laurie Elish-Piper and Dr. Susan L'Allier were so very patient and empowering with their willingness to read, and re-read, and read yet again my drafts. Their feedback was invaluable, as was their approachability. All four of these exemplary educators, as well as the rest of the faculty and staff in the Department of Literacy Education, saw me through times of sadness, challenge, and delight and never let me down. I can only hope to provide the same level of excellence to my own students.

DEDICATION

To Mom, who, despite an incessant string of evidence to the contrary, always maintained that I was very smart. I miss you, and I'm sorry I took so long. To Joe, my editor and life partner, whose incredible patience and faith saw us through the times of frustration and exhaustion and who never failed to tell me that I could do this. Thanks for being here. To my step-children and grandchildren, if I can do this, so can you—dream big! And finally, to my students. You bring me joy, inspiration, and the motivation to learn more and more. Remember why you chose this road.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background and Rationale

Learning to teach is not synonymous with teacher education. Teacher educators intervene in a process that begins long before teachers take their first education course and that continues afterward on the job; nor can teachers' formal learning about teaching be confined to professional studies, since teachers learn about their subjects and the teaching and learning of those subjects in other academic contexts, including elementary and secondary school, as well as on the job. (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996, p. 64-65)

The above comments address an issue with which all teacher educators continue to struggle: how do undergraduate preservice candidates evolve into effective classroom teachers? While the body of research focusing on beginning teachers is wide and diverse, one particular aspect of beginning teacher studies that continues to require greater attention is that of novice classroom reading teachers. A strong need exists to explore classroom reading teachers' perceptions of influences on their instruction because while reading itself is a popular area of research with more studies conducted in the past century focusing on reading and reading

instruction than any other academic areas, historically, reading teacher education research has simply been insufficient (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000).

Another reason to examine the perceptions of beginning classroom reading teachers is to determine how they feel about their levels of competence. At least 18% of new teachers leave the teaching profession within three years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). How new teachers feel about their teaching abilities greatly impacts their decisions to stay in or leave the teaching profession (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001) as well as their levels of self-efficacy (Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Gilles, Cramer, & Hwang, 2001; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Guyton, Fox, & Sisk, 1991; International Reading Association, 2003; Knobloch & Whittington, 2002; Martin, Chiodo, & Chang, 2001; San, 1999; Shore, 2004). A major concern seems to be identifying which areas of the new teachers' experiences bear the most influence on their teaching practices. Studies range in scope from novice teachers' perceptions of support (Knobloch & Whittington, 2002) and classroom management practices (Dowhower, 1991) to longitudinal studies of the concerns of beginning teachers (Gilles, Cramer, & Hwang, 2001). In a study of beginning teachers' perceptions of the most pressing challenges they encounter in their first years, Veenman (1984) found that of the 24 problems most frequently perceived by beginning teachers, at least nine of the problems were related to areas of preparation.

In addition to examining the influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers, their self-described practices, and their levels of self-efficacy, there is also a need to examine the perceptions of these teachers. With both

the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its pending reauthorization calling for stronger criteria for providing quality teachers in the classroom (www.whitehouse.gov, retrieved 2-24-07), beginning classroom reading teachers are experiencing greater pressure to begin their careers with working knowledge of the most current theories and practices. Indeed, today's educators face such daunting challenges that it is only natural to focus attention on the best ways to prepare them, as well as where and when such preparation takes place.

Candidates of twenty-first century teacher education programs are expected to demonstrate mastery in areas that were previously left to specialists (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996). In addition to traditional pedagogical theory and methodology, candidates are to complete courses in technology, content-area reading, middle school methods and theories, and assessment. These curricular demands, in combination with governmental and societal expectations, place beginning classroom reading teachers in the unprecedented position of being highly visible in their first years, as well as being more frequently evaluated than ever before. Being cognizant of these pressures naturally leads beginning classroom reading teachers to examine closely the factors that have, or in some instances, have not, helped them to develop their daily teaching practices.

In order to better understand what factors beginning classroom reading teachers perceive to have influenced their practices, this case study was conducted with four participants who were either first- or second-year elementary classroom reading teachers. Each of the four participants underwent a series of interviews

combined with videotaped stimulated recall sessions. These sessions, as well as the methodology as a whole, will be described more specifically in Chapter Three.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study draws upon four main areas of research on the factors influencing the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. The graphic representation of the interconnections of the areas of influence is provided in Chapter Two and indicates several areas of influence: adult learning theories (Ehri & Williams, 1996; Knowles & Associates, 1984; Merriam, 2001), beginning teachers' perceptions of their teacher preparation programs (Cains & Brown, 1998), teacher induction programs and mentor teacher guidance (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Martin, Chiodo, & Chang, 2001; Runyan, 1991), and teacher efficacy studies (Evans & Tribble, 1986; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy 1998).

In an examination of the literature in these areas, the research typically indicated interconnections existing among the perceived influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. For example, self-efficacy studies included examinations of how teachers evaluated their preparation to teach as well as how much support they felt they were receiving in the school setting. This support in the school setting led to issues of professional development, teacher induction programs, and mentor programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences that have led them to use their current reading instructional practices. To determine the influences that most strongly impacted the classroom reading instructional practices of novice teachers, four graduates of a large, midwestern state university's undergraduate elementary education program were asked to participate in a study designed to describe the factors they perceived as most influential on their practices as teachers of reading. For the purposes of this study, the focus was on four elementary classroom reading teachers who completed their bachelor's degrees at one state university and to what factors these reading teachers attributed their knowledge and use of reading methods. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants, the towns and schools in which they taught, and their university, as well as any cooperating teachers, mentor teachers, or university faculty mentioned by the participants.

The Problem

Today's classroom teachers face challenges unlike those experienced by their predecessors. With the enforcement of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, higher expectations from parents, stronger media focus on student performance and teacher accountability, increasingly diverse classrooms, high-stakes testing, and greater demands placed on classroom teachers to complete tasks once left to reading specialists, the field of education is faced with the issue of how to adequately

prepare new teachers to meet these challenges. Colleges and universities provide some, but surely not all, of the necessary skills and information, as well as structured opportunities to apply such skills within clinical settings. What other influences have had the greatest impact in the preparation of effective elementary classroom reading teachers? This study examined four beginning elementary classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences that impacted their daily reading instructional practices.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following 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?

The study used qualitative methodology to conduct an interpretive case study (Merriam, 1998) consisting of semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998),

stimulated recall (Bloom, 1953) with videotaped lessons, and a modified stimulated recall utilizing the participants' lesson plans. Data were analyzed with a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and a constant comparative method of analysis (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). These methods are explained in detail in Chapter Three.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is four-fold. First, this study responds to calls for more research in the area of reading teacher preparation (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000; Block, Oakar, & Hurt, 2002; International Reading Association, 2003). Second, in order to fulfill their roles better in providing necessary guidance and instruction to preservice and novice educators, all of those involved in the process of preparing classroom reading teachers, from university faculty and clinical supervisors to preservice cooperating teachers and first-year mentor teachers, must envision the larger picture of the candidates' learning experiences (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). Third, a study conducted by Clift and Brady (2005) for the American Educational Research Association indicated that preservice teachers should be followed into their first years of teaching to determine how their actual teaching practices compare to, as well as how or if such practices connect to, the teacher education program's recommended practices. Finally, if the case study analyses suggest that the novice teachers have or have not gleaned a significant

portion of their current instructional skills from their coursework, the results of this study may provide implications for teacher education programs.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were used:

Beginning Teacher—an elementary classroom teacher who, as of the beginning of this research, has less than two years of professional experience.

Candidates—undergraduate elementary education students, preservice teachers, or interns.

Classroom Reading Teacher—an elementary classroom teacher in grades one to four who, in the course of the regular daily schedule, teaches reading.

Cooperating Teacher—the inservice classroom teacher to whom the candidate is assigned for the first, second, and third (student teaching) professional experiences.

Coursework—the methods courses at the university specifically geared to teaching reading.

Mentor Teachers—experienced teachers assigned to work with beginning teachers.

Outside Experiences—the participants' experiences that were not of a preservice or inservice nature, for example, volunteering in a classroom, working in a daycare, or substitute teaching.

Perception—“Perception is an active, selective process, influenced by a person's attitude and prior experience. In all forms of communication, perception is the

crucial link between incoming stimuli and a response that is meaningful” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 181).

Preparation—the formal, structured coursework and clinical experiences provided by an elementary education program.

Self-Efficacy—“teachers’ belief in their ability to have a positive effect on student learning” (Ashton, 1984, p. 29).

Semi-structured Interview—an interview guided by a list of questions but that also leaves the interviewer open to opportunities to expand to include the emerging worldview of the participant, respond to a current situation, or embrace the new ideas of the participant (Merriam, 1998).

Stimulated Recall—“a generic term used to identify a variety of interviewing techniques designed to provide access to teachers’ thoughts during interactive teaching. Typically, the process involves mechanically recording (either audio or videotaping) actual classroom activities in situ” (Keith, 1988, p. 3).

Delimitations of This Study

This case study was bounded by several delimitations. First, the participants were confined to graduates of one large, midwestern state university. Second, the participants were confined to those who, as of the beginning of the study, had taught for a length of time less than two school years. Third, the participants were confined to those who were teaching first, second, third, or fourth grades. Finally, because much of the data collected were self-reported by the participants, they were

historical in nature and were therefore subject to inaccuracies due to time lapse and memory.

Chapter Summary

This case study was designed to increase understanding of how novice classroom elementary reading teachers perceive the influences on their pedagogical decision making and methodology. This case study examined the backgrounds of the participants, their descriptions of their university-based experiences, and how they related their current practices back to the influences of their outside experiences, clinical experiences, university coursework, and inservice experiences. The results of the data analysis provided insights into these perceptions and may add to the body of research regarding reading teacher preparation. Chapter Two will review the literature related to the perceptions of influences of novice elementary classroom reading teachers. Chapter Three will describe the methodology of data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will provide descriptions of the participants and their teaching contexts. Chapter Five will delineate the results of the data analysis, and Chapter Six will summarize the conclusions and implications of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences that have impacted their current instructional practices. Following a detailed description of the purpose of this study, an historical background of relevant studies is presented. The body of the literature review is organized to reflect the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual framework of this literature review is based upon four main areas of inquiry into the study of the influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. First, the topics of andragogy, principles of adult learning theory, and teacher preparation are explored. In this context the importance of reflection in the development of skilled educators is also examined. Beginning classroom teachers' perceptions of their preparation to teach is the second area. This section presents research examining both the perceived skills and the possible attrition of beginning classroom teachers. This segment also examines the impact of formal teacher education, informal guidance, and experience on the pedagogical decisions of these teachers. Additionally, the second segment ends with a review of research on the perceived influence of cooperating teachers. The third segment explores

studies of the role of teacher induction approaches such as mentor teachers and professional development and the impact that such programs have on the day-to-day practices of novice educators. Finally, the fourth portion of the review examines classroom teachers' self-efficacy and addresses questions such as, "How do these novices feel about their skills?" and "To what or to whom do they attribute their professional successes and failures?" The area of perceptions of beginning classroom teachers is supported by a wealth of literature; however, research in the specific area of beginning classroom reading teachers is relatively scarce. Thus, beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences on their practices are seen as a subset in each of the four areas of inquiry. Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework of this literature review and study.

While the categories appear to be discrete areas, there are indeed connections found between the categories. Beginning classroom reading teachers juggle the dual roles of teacher and pupil. Professional development, mentor teachers, and the teacher education curriculum may ease this transition. Beginning teachers' self-efficacies were impacted by their perceptions of how well they were prepared to teach. The ways in which beginning teachers were prepared were influenced by the teacher educators' views of andragogy. Finally, mentor teachers have the potential to play valuable roles in the development of novice teachers; however, to do so the mentors must be well trained. This training is connected to the adult learning principles described in the section on andragogy.

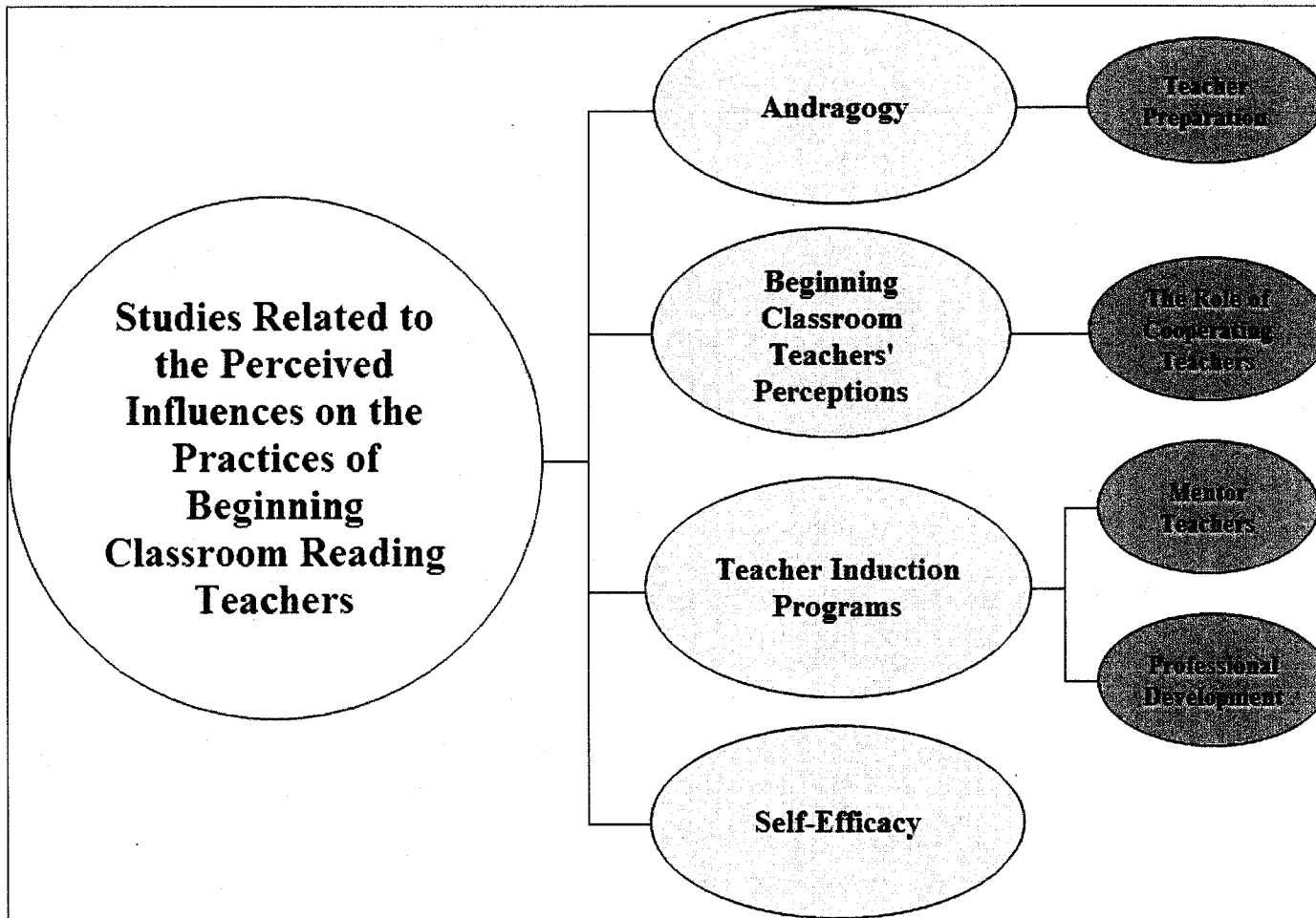


Figure 1: Studies Related to Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers' Perceptions of the Influences on Their Practices

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to add to the existing body of literature by examining beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences that have led them to use their current practices. Inquiries into influences on the practices of beginning teachers have examined a number of areas and include research that spans over a century. Much of this research relates to the conceptual framework of this current study of influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. Research examining the influences on the practices of reading teachers, however, tends to be neither as prevalent nor as historic as the larger focus on classroom teachers in general. In their review of current practices in reading teacher education, Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) note, "We can make few claims from our current research base on what is effective in reading teacher education at the preservice level" (p. 726).

Additionally, in Pearson's (2001) commentary on the status of the knowledge base in reading teacher preparation, he notes,

Most of all, we need research—research that we can use to replace all the informed professional judgment we have had to rely on for all too long. Research on:

1. Relationships between teacher learning and student learning.
2. Longitudinal studies of teacher learning to develop theories of teacher development that are conceptually based or empirically driven.

3. We need a database to answer the question, “What does reading teacher education look like?” (p. 18)

In the same 2001 publication, Strickland called for a “research agenda to select and support promising lines of inquiry to improve existing programs and develop exemplary models” (p. 28).

All of the above calls for research have been made in the interest of identifying how classroom reading teachers have learned to teach. These calls for research all indicate a need for accountability or, in other words, a need for teachers, as well as teacher preparation programs, to have strong, research-based practices whose efficacy is examined with a variety of research methods.

By examining beginning classroom reading teachers’ perceptions of the influences on their current practices, this study responds to such calls for accountability and further research in the area of classroom reading teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996; Duffy, 2005; Grant & Secada, 1990; International Reading Association, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2001; Zeichner, 1989).

Background

As far back as the early 1900s, legendary educator and theorist Dewey commented on the need for understanding the practices and perceptions of beginning and experienced classroom teachers. Dewey (1929) noted that the best way to mine the talents of experienced, gifted educators in order to present their

knowledge to novices is to analyze the experienced teachers' decisions and rationales for such decisions. Dewey's landmark theories blazed the path for later research in the area of teacher preparation, and nearly 80 years later the implications of Dewey's theories remain strong for educational leaders.

The next section of this literature review will describe studies of andragogy, beginning classroom teachers' perceptions of their levels of preparation, teacher induction programs, and self-efficacy.

Studies of Andragogy and Teacher Preparation

Since teachers are also learners, or more specifically, adult learners, andragogy is one possible influence on the teaching practices of beginning elementary reading teachers. "Andragogy" is the term Knowles (1978) chose to use to describe the study of how adults learn and is based on the expression coined by European adult educators to provide a label for the growing body of knowledge concerning adult learning. The European version of andragogy was defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1978, p. 6). Knowles thus adopted the term to describe his framework for understanding adult learning. In his description of the characteristics of andragogy, Knowles noted the implications for preservice teacher education:

Several key assumptions about the way in which the learning of adults can be facilitated may be used to inform the design of student assignments. Foremost

among these is the notion of teaching as learning, the idea that the opportunity to teach others may be a preferred way of facilitating one's own knowing. (p. 14)

In other words, the strongest outcome or implication of Knowles's study was the indication that adults learn best when they are teaching information to others.

Houle (1996), Knowles's mentor, supplemented Knowles's statement by adding,

What is significant is that andragogy has alerted educators to the fact that they should involve learners in as many aspects of their education as possible and in the creation of a climate in which they can most fruitfully learn. (p. 30)

Knowles's theory of adult learning includes four principles, summarized

below:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their jobs or personal lives.
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented. (Knowles, 1984)

In 1997, Kennedy conducted a study of how beginning classroom reading teachers connected theory to practice and whether they believed their skills as teachers of reading would mature as they strengthened those connections. Kennedy found that teachers' prior knowledge from their teacher preparation programs and their own experiences as K-12 students strongly affected how they interpreted current literacy education research, both in how they viewed its validity and how

they determined its value in their everyday practices. Kennedy's study supports the adult learning principle that adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their own jobs or lives.

In her teacher action research examining the effects of teacher education on reading improvement, Rickford (2001) noted the value of modeling, collaborative group projects, in-depth discussions of course readings, examinations of case studies, and the opportunity to actually apply new learning in team-taught units. These characteristics support the presence of andragogy in the conceptual framework for this current study because they reflect two of Knowles's principles: first, that adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, and second, that adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

More than 20 years ago both Bader and Pearce (1983) and Hoover (1985) examined the practices of classroom reading teachers with the goal of identifying how the theories presented in teacher preparation translated into the practices held by these teachers. Hoover's recommendation was to foster closer working relationships between colleges of education and public school systems. Bader and Pearce, on the other hand, suggested that the timing of instruction was key and offered the idea of providing content-area reading instruction before, during, and after student teaching. The studies by Bader and Pearce as well as Hoover connect to the adult learning principle that suggests adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their jobs or personal lives.

In 2003, the International Reading Association (IRA) embarked on a comprehensive study of reading teacher preparation that relates to this study of the perceived influences and practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. In the IRA study, the graduates of programs identified as exemplary were followed in order for researchers to examine their classroom practices and resulting student achievement. As a result of the study, the IRA published eight critical features of excellence in reading teacher preparation programs. One of the critical features that relates to the adult learning principles is the feature known as “Apprenticeship—course-related field experiences with excellent models and mentors” (International Reading Association, 2003, p. 11). This feature connects with the adult learning principle that experiences provide the basis for learning activities.

In addition to the actual examination of andragogy, other researchers have explored the ways that adult learners are prepared to become teachers. Because the students enrolled in its program are for the most part considered adult learners, teacher preparation is included under the umbrella of adult education and thus belongs in a discussion of andragogy. Duffy and Hoffman (1999) published a commentary on the phenomenon of ever-changing recommendations for teacher education and noted three key indications: Teacher education must be seen as an ongoing, not short-term, process. Teachers must be educated to go beyond simple compliance; that is, they must learn to think for themselves with curiosity, a willingness to be risk-takers, and a focus on problem solving. Finally, teacher educators must not focus only on their personal favorite methods and theories, but should instead stress to preservice candidates “the complex nature of classrooms

where no one program or method can be universally effective” (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, p. 14).

Shore (2004) explored adult learning in terms of both multiple intelligences and teacher efficacy. In her conclusion, Shore described the key connections between multiple intelligences and adult learners. One such connection is that the learner-centered environment associated with a multiple-intelligences-framed curriculum fosters a respect for experience and encourages leadership and learning. Preservice teachers who participated in courses focusing on application of multiple intelligence theories valued the theories more when they, themselves, were encouraged to participate in multiple-intelligences-centered activities. The strongest implication for teacher educators is that preservice teachers should be provided opportunities to choose both the ways that they learn and how they present their learning for assessment (Shore, 2004).

Important in any discussion of adult learners is the issue of the need for reflection. As an old adage states, “Hindsight is 20/20,” meaning that when adult learners look back on their decisions and actions they are provided more accurate points of view for future reference. Vogt and Au (1994) explored how teachers’ guided reflection impacts positive program change in the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP). They note that when teachers learn to reflect, they are likely to develop the habit of reflecting when “the unexpected happens in their classrooms” (p. 15).

In a 2002 article on the need to teach preservice teachers the importance of reflection, Risko, Vukelich, Roskos, and Carpenter suggest that when teacher

educators ask students to reflect on what they are learning, there should be explanations of “the function and reasons for the reflection, features or what the task may require of the reflecting person, temporal qualities or focus of the reflection, and structure” (p. 140).

In nearly 40 years of research and commentary, the study of andragogy has been found to have far-reaching implications for teacher preparation programs. The adult learning principles, understanding that learning to teach is a dynamic, ongoing process, and the value of reflection have all enriched and strengthened teacher preparation instruction.

Studies of Beginning Classroom Teachers' Perceptions of Preparation

The review of the literature indicates that myriad studies have investigated beginning teachers' perceptions of how well they were prepared to teach, but few focused specifically on their perceptions related to reading instruction.

Lortie's “apprenticeship of observation” (1975, p. 61) described the idea that all students enrolled in undergraduate teacher education programs bring with them 12 or more years of experience and influence as a result of having been taught by teachers in schools. Thus, one's own K-12 schooling is very likely a strong influence on one's beliefs about how to teach.

Faculty in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky used the Kentucky Education Reform Act, known as “Primary School Programs,” as a framework for their examination of beginning teachers' perceptions of preparation.

The teachers were found to be more likely to agree with, and thus implement, those areas of the Primary School Programs for which they felt most prepared. The areas included utilizing hands-on materials, thematic units, cooperative learning, integrated curriculum, developmentally appropriate practice, and application of concepts (Atwood, Shake, Slaton, & Hales, 1995).

A cross-case analysis of the reflective perceptions of beginning elementary teachers identified four main areas of concern: time management, discipline, parental involvement, and preparation (Britt, 1997). The novice educators indicated that the specificity and responsibilities of a teaching position were more powerful influences than much of the learning gleaned through a general teacher education program and that the most valuable, usable skills are fostered during student teaching (Britt, 1997).

In an examination of the perceived stressors of newly certified teachers, Cains and Brown (1998) discovered a correlation between the level of stress and the new teachers' perceived levels of preparation to deal with students with special needs. In particular, Cains and Brown noted "...those relating to involvement with slow learners and pupils with home difficulties. The latter, it is proposed, is, 'a significant contributor to high stress levels associated with parent/teacher interactions' (p. 104). It would appear that the newly certified teachers needed stronger preparation in classroom management to aid them in dealing with students with social or emotional disorders, better communication skills to deal with parents and other educators, and training in responsive instruction for students with diverse learning needs.

In a study of the challenges perceived by 110 first- and second-year teachers, Roehrig, Pressley, and Talotta (2002) identified three themes relating to the teachers' perceptions of preparation: the teachers indicated that they sometimes encountered situations for which their teacher preparation should have prepared them but did not; they had doubts about their abilities as trained educators; and they felt limited in their abilities to meet both individual and whole-class demands of students.

In a related study, Keehn, Martinez, Harmon, Hedrick, Steinmetz, and Perez (2003) completed research with five participants who were faculty members at one of the IRA's eight Sites of Excellence in Reading Teacher Education all of whom were part of the National Commission for Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading, to attempt to answer the following research questions: "What changes occurred in the teacher preparation program in reading?" and "What experiences and factors did participating faculty members identify as impacting those program changes?" (p. 231).

Researchers examined pre-and post-National Commission participation syllabi, gathered notes at committee meetings geared to restructure teacher preparation programs, and investigated pre-and post-National Commission participation teacher preparation program descriptions. One of the strongest factors identified as integral to the changes in programming was a series of interviews participants conducted with program graduates. The information that the participants gleaned from their program graduates was both enlightening and, at times, surprising. For example, faculty participants were surprised to learn that

many of their program graduates felt unprepared to discuss how they were teaching diverse learners in their classrooms (Keehn et al., 2003). Like Roehrig, Pressley, and Talotta's study, the participants in the Keehn et al. study found that their research indicated the teacher preparation programs were indeed perceived to be integral influences on the practices of the teachers who graduated from their programs.

Beginning teachers who taught beginning readers were the topic of a study by Bolander (2002). Bolander interviewed and observed six first-year, first-grade teachers. In the conclusion of this study, Bolander noted that the participating beginning reading teachers found the most success when using a trial-and-error method of teaching; that is, they introduced and modeled reading strategies to increase proficiency in the identified areas of deficit. In her conclusion, Bolander pointed out three key ideas:

1. Beginning teachers indicated that their courses provided theoretical background but not always practical application.
2. Student teaching experiences often did not provide student teachers opportunities to work within a specific context.
3. Thus, "beginning teachers enter their first years of teaching with sound theoretical knowledge, but little practical skill." (p. 20)

Longitudinal studies have added to our understanding of the perceptions of beginning classroom teachers. In 2001, Martin, Chiodo, and Chang released a report involving a long-term study of first-year teachers. The researchers followed first-year teachers for three years. The research involved three years of observations, informal interviews, and student interviews to determine how teachers develop as well as whether teachers' perceptions of challenges change over time. In all three

years of the study, participants expressed their concerns about being prepared to handle classroom management, personalizing their students' learning with an engaging curriculum, and meeting students' needs. The researchers' findings indicated that despite the participants' desire for a "cook book approach" (p. 60) to teaching, teacher preparation programs must focus instead on the more responsive and reflective skills of problem solving and decision making.

The most recent longitudinal study investigating the perceptions of beginning classroom teachers focused on the experiences and practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. In a study by Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, Sailors, Duffy, and Beretvas (2005), the researchers collected data across three years from 101 graduates of eight exemplary reading teacher education programs and compared their transitions, effectiveness, and practices to those of other teachers in their school buildings who had more experience or the same level of experience but graduated from different programs. While the purpose of the study was to identify characteristics of effective teacher preparation, researchers also collected data on participants' perceptions of how well their teacher preparation programs served them. In the first year of the study, participants often spoke of valuing their teacher preparation, and the practices they identified as having learned in their teacher preparation continued through the following two years of the study. The consistency in maintaining the practices they learned as preservice educators indicates that the novice inservice educators from exemplary reading teacher education programs had internalized the value of such practices and found ways to retain them as their perceptions of their roles and abilities matured with experience.

The Role of the Cooperating Teacher

A key issue in beginning classroom teachers' perceptions of their preparation is their preservice clinical experiences and their cooperating teachers. A 1985 study by Hoffman and Roper of the perceptions of beginning teachers identified eight sources of teaching competence and examined where the graduates of one teaching program believe that they learned each of their teaching competencies. One of the preservice sources of competency was the student teaching experience. Of the graduates' total responses, 25% indicated that the student teaching experience was a significant source of competency, followed by the education coursework, which garnered 23.8% of the total responses, and academic coursework outside of education, which received 18% of the total responses.

Strickland (1990) studied the factors causing changes in student teachers' philosophies concerning the teaching of reading and found that while the student teachers attributed much of their learning to the influence of their cooperating teachers, the cooperating teachers' influence on the student teachers' philosophies was limited and varied. For example, one of the participants in the study described the value of her cooperating teacher's expertise in classroom management yet also tenaciously implemented whole language practices in her cooperating teacher's phonics-based classroom.

The above studies investigated beginning teachers' perceptions of the value of their preparation programs. The perceptions varied from heavy reliance of novice educators on the practices they learned in their preservice years or the influence of

their cooperating teachers, to frustration with perceived lack of preparation in key areas of teaching, to acceptance of the principles and theories learned in their preservice years with a wish for more modeling and guided practice of the practical applications of such ideas. It would appear that the perceived impact of the influences were as varied as the types of preparation programs and clinical experiences represented by the participants.

Studies of Teacher Induction Programs

Any review of literature regarding the perceptions of beginning classroom reading teachers would be incomplete without examining studies of the importance of the support provided by the beginning teachers' new school systems. Scherer (1999) defines support:

Paired with assistance, the term *support* represents the dominant orientation and focus of most induction programs. Support connotes a responsive stance toward beginning teachers whose problems, needs, and concerns justify the existence of mentor teachers and other support providers. Support is the omnibus term used to describe the materials, resources, advice, and hand-holding that mentors offer new teachers.
(p. 4)

The most common types of support are those of mentor teacher programs and professional development, and there is much current research available in these areas.

In an examination of the concept of empowerment through developmental induction, Runyan (1991) found when induction programs empower beginning teachers, they do so by providing “developmental, situationally supportive programs that identify and meet the beginning teachers’ instructional and non-instructional needs” (p. 10). In other words, the beginning teachers receive support appropriate to each of their individual circumstances, for example, levels of development and self-efficacy.

A number of studies of elementary teachers’ perspectives and decisions have been published by the University of Alberta and the Alberta Department of Education. One such study in 1992 examined novice elementary teachers’ perceptions of the impact of inservice training, otherwise known as professional development. The novice teachers indicated that they found the inservice training to be most helpful because it could immediately be utilized (Blakey, 1992).

The impact of mentors on the development of beginning classroom teachers has been examined with differing results by Dollase (1992), Scherer (1999), and Villani (2002). According to Dollase, mentors are responsible for strengthening the authoritative skills of the new teacher by emphasizing such areas as classroom authority, working with at-risk adolescents, and fast-thinking, “on-the-run teaching” (p. 147). Scherer, however, focuses more on the role of mentor as guide and advocate, commenting, “[Their] ability to be supportive is central to the induction program” (p. 207). Finally, Villani addresses Scherer’s concept of mentor as guide and Dollase’s view of mentor as coach and then adds another skill to the mix:

cultural proficiency and the need for the mentor to coach the mentee in the cultural norms of the school community (p. 9).

In a study of the role of mentor teachers, Feiman-Nemser, Parker, and Zeichner (1992) found that the mentors under study appeared to be focusing more on following a specified program of mentorship than they did actually engaging personally with their new teachers. For example, the mentors did not model their own values and reasoning in terms of analyzing the value of the lessons taught by the new teachers. Feiman-Nemser, Parker, and Zeichner's study indicates that a need exists for stronger connections between the support provided by mentors and the principles underlying the analysis of the quality of the new teachers' teaching performances.

Another examination of mentor teachers that Feiman-Nemser carried out with Parker in 1992 indicated that the participating mentors tended to serve as "local guides who helped novices acclimate to their new professional setting; educational companions, role models, and sounding boards; and agents of cultural change who facilitate networks to counteract the isolation typically experienced by first-year teachers" (p. 16-17).

In his study of beginning teacher and mentor relationships, Gratch (1998) noted the need for clarification of the role of the mentor teacher as well as the need to dispel the common misconception held by novice teachers that they should not ask for help.

In the findings of their investigation of the impact of mentoring on beginning teachers, Freiberg, Zbikowski, and Ganser (1994) found that mentoring appeared to

provide such supports as encouragement, resources, modeling, and information. In 2002, Giebelhaus and Bowman questioned whether mentor teacher programs are worth the effort in terms of the cost and resources required. Their findings suggest the effort is worthwhile because mentor teachers who are trained in mentoring have a more positive influence on preservice and beginning teachers than mentors who have had no training.

Studies of teacher induction programs have indicated that one of the most prevalent forms of induction is the mentor teacher program. The type of mentoring varies from supporting the efforts of the novice teacher with informal consultations, assistance with classroom management and teaching, modeling, and observations by the mentor teacher to highly structured mentoring involving training programs for the mentors and specific guidelines for evaluation and intervention. Other professional development programs are perceived by the novices to be the most useful when the programs are geared to their specific needs and provide training that can immediately be utilized in their classrooms.

Studies of the Self-Efficacy of Beginning Classroom Teachers

Along with beginning teachers' perceptions of the value of their preparation programs, another relevant area of study is the self-efficacy of novice teachers. The final portion of this literature review addresses such studies. According to Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998):

Self-efficacy has to do with self-perception of competence rather than actual level of competence. This is an important distinction, because people regularly overestimate or underestimate their actual abilities, and these estimations may have consequences for the courses of action they choose to pursue or the effort they exert in those pursuits. (1998, p. 218)

The 1980s were a time of exploration of the issues influencing, and influenced by, teacher self-efficacy. In 1983, Ashton et al. reported school conditions and school structure strongly influenced the levels of self-efficacy expressed by teachers. In their description of the nature and effects of teachers' sense of efficacy, Dembo and Gibson (1985) found teachers' self-efficacy was positively related to issues of school improvement. More than ten years later, Chester and Beaudin (1996) examined efficacy beliefs of beginning teachers in urban schools and found that while beginning teachers' self-efficacy tended to decline over the first year, the decline was lessened due to the teacher's age, the teacher's prior experience, and school-based support systems and induction programs. Also in 1986, Evans and Tribble compared the perceptions of self-efficacy of elementary and secondary preservice teachers to those of inservice elementary and secondary teachers. In their discussion of this study, the researchers suggest that teaching-efficacy beliefs are not significantly related to the preservice teachers' anticipated problems; however, they also note that their research tool, the *Teacher Efficacy Scale*, may not have been an effective measure of such correlations, or lack thereof. For example, novice educators placed greater emphasis on such skills as assessing students' work and communicating effectively with

parents while more experienced educators would hold greater value for motivating students and addressing the individual needs of students. Additionally, Evans and Tribble explained that many of the differences were due to the level of teacher development; that is, those in a “survival stage” (Fuller, 1969) who are simply struggling to fulfill their duties on a daily basis will have different priorities than those who have matured into more content-centered and student-centered concerns.

The 1990s brought new ideas about teacher efficacy, with examinations of measures of self-efficacy as well as new attempts to define it. In the Guyton, Fox, and Sisk study (1991), another element the researchers compared across grade levels and types of preparation was teacher self-efficacy. The comparison of alternatively certified teachers and regularly certified teachers indicated no significant differences in their self-efficacy. A decade later, however, Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) came up with contradictory findings in their comparison of the self-efficacy of teachers who gained certification in different types of programs. Those who completed regular teacher education programs appeared to be much more confident in their level of preparation and self-efficacy than those who either followed an alternative program or entered teaching with no preparation.

In a study of construct dimensions of teacher efficacy with a focus on internal versus external distinctions, Guskey and Passaro (1994) suggest that perceptions of efficacy are not issues of personal or self-efficacy in which the phrase “I can” is used versus teaching efficacy in which the phrase “teachers can” is used (p. 630). Rather, the researchers found that perceptions of efficacy were related to internal control in which teachers felt the self-efficacy was based upon their own

abilities, or teachers' abilities in general, versus external control, in which the efficacy was based upon such outside factors as the presence of difficult students. This means that teachers with internal self-efficacy believed that their ability to teach is a skill that can be learned or improved.

The research questions for Ghaith and Shaaban's 1999 examination of the relationships between perceptions of teacher concerns, teacher characteristics, and teacher self-efficacy asked:

To what extent are the variables of gender, grade level taught, experience, personal and general teaching efficacy and the perceptions of teaching concerns internally related? Are there significant differences in the perception of teaching concerns across gender, grade level taught, experience, and levels of personal and general efficacy of teachers? (p. 490)

In the discussion portion of their research, Ghaith and Shaaban (1999) suggested that teachers' personal efficacy, or self-efficacy, was related to their perceptions of the greatest challenges they met in their profession, but general efficacy, defined as what teachers in general can do, was not related. Ghaith and Shaaban also commented on a trend that emerged in their study, noting "...teachers who believed in their personal ability to provide effective teaching that would bring about student learning are less concerned about their self-survival as teachers and about the demands of the teaching task than their less efficacious counterparts" (p. 494). This supports findings in studies completed earlier by Dembo and Gibson (1985) and Parkay, Greenwood, Olejnik, and Proller (1988), both of which indicated

that, rather than take responsibility for all of their students' progress, teachers with low senses of general efficacy tend to project the classroom failures back onto their students.

A multiple regression study of the teacher efficacy of 110 student teachers and novice teachers by Knobloch and Whittington (2002) indicated that the novice teachers had better self-efficacy when they felt a sense of belonging to a group of teachers who shared collective efficacy. Knobloch and Whittington defined collective efficacy as "a group of teachers' shared belief in its collaborative capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce student success" (p. 337). In other words, the novices experienced stronger self-efficacy when they were part of a group of teachers who believed that they were more effective when they worked together.

In this review of more than 25 years of research regarding teacher self-efficacy, there are clear ties between how novice teachers perceive the quality of their preservice training and the level of self-efficacy they later describe during their first inservice years. Commonalities have appeared in the impact that collegiality and school improvement have upon individual novice teachers' views of their own effectiveness as well as the impact that such variables have on the novices' perceptions of how much control, or general efficacy, teachers have over the learning of their students.

Chapter Summary

In their thesis statement concerning preservice teacher education in reading, Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) noted,

Preservice teacher education has not been a high priority within the reading research community... We have continued to struggle with conceptions of teacher knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and habits—how they are formed, how they are affected by programs, and how they impact development over time. (p. 725-726)

Such statements as these are the driving forces of this current study: what are the teaching practices of beginning classroom reading teachers, and why have they chosen them?

The purpose of this chapter was to examine and describe extant literature related to beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences that have led them to their current reading instruction practices. The review was comprised of four main areas: the study of andragogy and its implications for how teachers develop their pedagogy, beginning classroom teachers' perceptions of the influences on their teaching practices, the role of teacher induction programs and mentor teachers in the practices of first-year teachers, and new teachers' self-efficacy. Chapter Three describes the methodology utilized to collect and examine the data for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology for this study of how beginning classroom reading teachers perceive the influences that have led them to their current practices in teaching reading. Qualitative research is the design of choice when researchers wish to explore intricate concepts with richly descriptive data. “A main task [of qualitative research] is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.7). Case studies are appropriate if the goal is to understand the thoughts and actions of a specific individual or group of individuals. Merriam (1998) describes a qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). Because the goal of this study was to investigate the characteristics of a particular phenomenon and the reasons this phenomenon occurs, a case study research design was chosen. According to Merriam (1998), the case study is an appropriate research design when the goal is to focus attention on the way a particular group of people solve a problem. In this case study, the particular group is

the sample of beginning classroom reading teachers, and the problem they are solving is how to teach reading.

Another reason to utilize a case study design is in order to obtain rich, descriptive data (Merriam, 1998). This case study was enriched by the nature of its documentation; specifically, the semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall utilizing teacher-chosen videotaped lessons, and modified stimulated recall focusing on randomly chosen written lesson plans. Finally, this case study is heuristic in that it will “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). In other words, by studying this report the reader will better understand the beginning classroom reading teachers’ perceptions of who or what influenced them to utilize their current practices in teaching reading. This chapter includes the methods and processes of data collection, the different types of data collected, and the procedures for data analysis. The final portion of this chapter addresses issues of validity and reliability.

Research Description

This study used a case study design (Smith, 1978) to investigate and thus better understand the influences that led beginning elementary classroom reading teachers to choose their current teaching methods. “A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

In any discussion of qualitative case studies, an important issue to consider is that of bounded cases. A bounded case may be identified by whether there is a limit to the number of people who could be interviewed or a finite amount of time for observations (Merriam, 1998). Case studies are also bounded by what is *not* being studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study is delimited to the investigation of the perceived influences and practices of four participants in one specific region of the country, all of whom graduated from the same university and who have been teaching for approximately the same amount of time.

The research questions for the study are as follows:

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?

Sampling: The Selection of Participants

Reputational sampling, a type of purposive sampling (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), was initially used in this study. First, the researcher solicited suggestions from university undergraduate advisors, clinical supervisors, literacy education faculty, and graduates of the program for names of former students whom they would identify as meeting the criteria for selection. The first two participants, Lynette and Mary, were selected in this manner. When the researcher was unable to find enough participants by way of reputational sampling, she enlisted the assistance of Dr. Long (pseudonym), the head of the university's career planning center. Dr. Long sent out an informational e-mail about the study to a list of graduates who had stayed in touch with the center. As a result of this modification of sampling, two more participants were obtained who also met the criteria. The four participating university graduates had worked with a variety of literacy education faculty members, undergraduate advisors, and elementary education clinical supervisors.

Criteria for selecting participants in this case study were:

1. They graduated with bachelor's degrees in elementary education within three years of the beginning of this study, or between May 2002 and May 2005.
2. They had not taken any graduate courses in literacy education.
3. They did not have more than one 3-hour course with the researcher as their instructor.
4. They were employed as elementary classroom teachers and taught in grades one, two, three, or four.

5. As of the beginning of the study, they had been employed for less than two school years.
6. They taught reading within their daily classroom schedule.

The researcher contacted each of the potential participants by phone to briefly describe the study and set appointments to meet in person. The purpose of the first appointment was to have the participant sign the informed consent form and, if time permitted, to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Participants

All four of the participants in this study are women who earned their bachelor's degrees in elementary education between the years 2003 and 2005 from Middlewestern State University. While the original intention was to utilize reputational sampling to select participants, the sampling turned out to be that of voluntary convenience. One of the participants, Lynette, heard from a friend about the study and e-mailed the researcher. A second participant, Mary, volunteered while chatting with the researcher at a professional conference in 2004. The final two, Delilah and Veronica, each e-mailed the researcher after the director of Career Services at Middlewestern State University notified approximately three hundred recent graduates of the search for participants. All four participants met the criteria.

Prior to this study the first participant, Lynette, was unknown to the researcher; however, she was good friends with one of the researcher's former

students. This common acquaintance suggested that Lynette should volunteer for the study. Lynette and the researcher e-mailed back and forth several times in the months before they actually met to begin the study.

Mary and the researcher were loosely acquainted with one another, but never as instructor/student. As an undergraduate, Mary attended a one-hour session presented by the researcher at a regional reading association's annual conference, and they remembered each other from that encounter. They met again later that semester when the researcher substituted for a colleague in one of Mary's classes. When the researcher and Mary met again two years later at the same conference, the researcher told Mary about the study. Mary shared her contact information and expressed her willingness to meet for the purposes of this investigation.

The researcher taught Delilah one semester at Middlewestern State University in a reading methods course during her second professional semester. Delilah and the researcher have stayed in touch since then because Delilah contributed to the researcher's book on teaching portfolios. When Delilah received Dr. Long's e-mail about the search for participants and realized that she met the criteria, she immediately contacted the researcher. Delilah hoped the interviews would help her gain insight into her teaching practices and that the researcher might be able to give her advice once the research project had ended.

Veronica, the fourth participant, was also one of the researcher's students in a reading methods course. Like Delilah, Veronica contacted the researcher when she received Dr. Long's e-mail. Veronica was eager to reflect on what she taught and her reasons for doing so and also hoped to strengthen her reading instruction skills.

Data Collection

Phase 1: Institutional Review Board Approval

This study was reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board before data collection began. In the first contact with potential participants, the researcher discussed the nature of the study and the length of time and number of sessions in which the participants would be involved. Upon verbal agreement to participate in the study, each participant was given a written informed consent form to sign (see Appendix A).

Phase 2: Interviewing the Participants

Data were gathered in three ways across several sessions. The schedule of data collection is found in Appendix C. In the first session, the participants were each interviewed with a semi-structured interview. Interviewing is, according to Merriam (1998), "necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 72). In semi-structured interviews, the interview is guided by a list of questions but is also open to opportunities to expand to include the emerging worldview of the participant, respond to a current situation, or embrace the new ideas of the participant (Merriam, 1998). The semi-structured interviews were the longest types of sessions, with each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were transcribed for later analysis. The interview protocol is found in Appendix B.

Phase 3: Stimulated Recall with Participant-Chosen Videotaped Lessons

The second and third sessions of data gathering involved a specialized type of interviewing identified by Bloom (1953) as stimulated recall. While the original form of stimulated recall instituted by Bloom involved the reports of students who were recalling what they had observed in a classroom, more recent forms of stimulated recall instead involved reports of the actual actors in the stimuli (Keith, 1988). Although the format was changed, Bloom's original purpose still applied; that is, the "basic idea underlying the method of stimulated recall is that a subject may be enabled to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy if he is presented with a large number of cues or stimuli which occurred during the original situation" (Bloom, 1953, p. 161).

Each of the stimulated recall interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes and was scheduled to follow each of the three videotaped lessons. These sessions also provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask any questions that arose while transcribing the sessions or during data analysis, clarify interpretations from earlier interviews, or continue discussion of any previously broached topics.

In the stimulated recall sessions, the participants each chose three thirty-minute lessons to be videotaped in situ. While the researcher videotaped the sessions, she took handwritten field notes about the lessons both to remember questions that she thought of and to keep track, via the tape's counter, of the points in the video at which she wished to stop the tape to ask questions during the stimulated recall session. The researcher chose the stopping points based upon the

participant's activities, for example, whenever the participant appeared to be utilizing a specific method or making a pedagogical decision, so that she could later ask the participant what she was doing at that point and, more importantly, where or from whom she learned to do so. Within 24 to 48 hours of each of the videotaping sessions, the participant and researcher met to view the videotape together. This study's form of stimulated recall was based upon the description of Keith (1988); during the audiotape-recorded session of viewing the video, the researcher paused the video at predetermined specific points to ask questions about decisions made, to clarify earlier comments made by the participants, or to ask for more information about what was happening. Both the field notes taken by the researcher during the videotaping and the transcriptions of the stimulated recall sessions were data that were later coded and analyzed.

Phase 4: Modified Stimulated Recall with Document Analysis of Lesson Plans

The third type of session was a modified stimulated recall interview in which each of the participants and the researcher randomly chose three lesson plans from the participants' lesson plan books. Then in audio-taped sessions, the researcher asked the participant to discuss why she chose to implement those specific lessons in those instances. The purpose of both types of stimulated recall was to investigate the actual methodology used by the participants as well as their reasoning for using such methods.

Data Analysis

In case studies, the most important goal is to convey an understanding of the case. Therefore, case study data are analyzed to foster understanding of “behavior, issues, and contexts with regard to a particular case” (Stake, 1995, p. 78). Data were analyzed with cross-case analysis and the constant comparative method. Cross-case analysis is appropriate when the researcher wishes to compare data gathered in a consistent manner, in this instance via the semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions, and modified stimulated recall sessions, across cases, settings or participants. Cross-case analysis may increase the likelihood that the relevance of the findings of the study can translate to or inform similar studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the constant comparative method, the researcher compares one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences (Merriam, 1998). The compared data were gathered in the three types of sessions across the four participants and also were compared within each participant’s individual responses.

Like the semi-structured interviews, the stimulated recall and modified stimulated recall sessions were transcribed for later analysis. The researcher read through every page of transcription and, using note cards, coded the data by making note of specific comments that participants made regarding their perceptions of influences on their practices. The cards were color-coded by participant to enable the researcher to complete the checklist matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994), a sample of which is found in Table 1. The purpose of the matrix is to enable the researcher to

display the coded data associated with each category. Table 1 displays the preliminary categories set up by the researcher. To identify the preliminary categories, the researcher first examined the course catalog of the elementary education program at Middlewestern State University. The catalog indicated that prior to the student teaching semester students in the elementary education program undergo two professional semesters of coursework and clinical experiences. Thus, the researcher placed in the matrix university coursework, first professional semester clinical experience, second professional semester clinical experience, and student teaching experience. Next, the researcher called upon her own experiences as a second professional semester clinical supervisor and referred to the research of Hoffman and Roper (1985) and Strickland (1990) to note that in addition to the experiences themselves, cooperating teachers could be considered an area of influence. Additionally, in keeping with Lortie's "apprenticeship of observation" (1975, p. 61) the researcher hypothesized that all of the participants had, in one way or another, come to college with prior knowledge about teaching. To indicate that this knowledge of teaching occurred independent of the preservice or inservice experiences, the researcher labeled this prior knowledge about teaching "outside experiences." To describe the nature of the experiences the participants may have encountered in their first and second years as inservice teachers, the researcher drew upon years of feedback she had received as a university instructor and clinical supervisor. These inservice experiences were described as the teacher induction programs, including mentor teachers; the inservice experience itself; and inservice professional development. Finally, to acknowledge that there were likely to be

unanticipated categories of information, the researcher included a category simply labeled “other.”

Table 1. Perceived Influences on the Practices of Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers: Checklist Matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

	Semi-structured Interview	Stimulated Recall	Modified Stimulated Recall
University coursework			
Cooperating teachers			
First clinical experience			
Second clinical experience			
Student teaching experience			
Teacher induction programs and mentor teachers			
Inservice experience			
Inservice professional development			
Outside experiences			
Other			

The researcher implemented a cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to compare across participants the data gathered in the semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions, and modified stimulated recall sessions. By comparing the data in this manner, the researcher was able to reduce the volume of data and synthesize the categories to identify patterns occurring across the participants’ perceptions of the influences on their current practices. In completing the cross-case analysis, the researcher first identified key ideas from each participant’s responses within a certain category of data and then synthesized the responses into subcategories. For example, after synthesizing the participants’

responses in the category of Outside Experiences, the researcher concluded that there were three areas of experiences shared by the participants: nurturing role models, personal experiences, and long-term commitment to becoming a teacher.

After completing a cross-case analysis with the constant comparative method, the researcher then revised and completed the partially ordered meta-matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994) displayed in Appendix D. As the data of each participant were analyzed, they were categorized by emerging themes and organized in the matrix. To create the categories, the researcher followed the guidelines for categorizing data with the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). First, the researcher determined the purpose of the research, which was to examine how beginning elementary classroom reading teachers perceived the influences that had led them to their current practices in teaching reading. Second, the researcher made sure that the categories exhausted all possibilities and that all of the important or relevant data could fit in a category or subcategory. Third, the researcher ensured that the categories were mutually exclusive, meaning that no data could easily fit into more than one category. Finally, the researcher strove to make the categories both sensitizing and conceptually congruent; that is, the names of the categories were as specific as possible and described in the same level of abstraction (Merriam, 1998, p. 183-184). The resulting themes were used to describe the answers to the research questions. Appendix D displays the identified themes with a cross-reference of each participant's perceptions of the influences that either positively or negatively impacted their efforts in learning and teaching.

Methods of Verification

In an attempt to ensure that the data gathered provided an accurate portrayal of the perceived influences and practices of the participants, the researcher implemented several methods of validation. First, in order to provide the reader with insights into the participants' perceptions, this case study presents a holistic account of the participants' perceptions (Merriam, 1998). The case study was designed to collect rich, descriptive data with detailed information about the participants' personalities, backgrounds, teaching contexts, and explanations of their practices so that the portrayal of the participants' behaviors, interviews, and perceptions was clear and without ambiguity. Second, the researcher implemented both the constant comparative method and a cross-case analysis to analyze the data. Finally, a triangulation of methods (Merriam, 1998) was implemented in the form of multiple methods of data collection, the use of member checks, and peer review of the categories, coding, and emerging themes. For the data collection, the researcher utilized interviews, stimulated recall of thought processes during actual teaching situations, and a modified stimulated recall with participants' recollections of their reasons for choosing the methods described in their lesson plans. The member checks (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998) involved having the participants receive descriptions of the data analyses, and then they were asked either to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations or to correct the interpretations. In each of these member checks, the participants concurred with the researcher's interpretations. In the peer review, the researcher's colleague was a fellow instructor and doctoral

candidate in the College of Education who, like the researcher, had completed all of her doctoral coursework, passed her written exams, and successfully completed the Institutional Review Board's online training. The colleague was provided with the individual pieces of data, approximately 25% of the data gathered, on note cards with all identifying factors removed. The colleague then sorted the data into coding categories provided by the researcher. With the exception of one piece of data, the colleague's analysis of the data concurred with the researcher's analysis. When the researcher and her colleague discussed the single discrepancy, the researcher explained the context of the comment that was coded and the colleague then agreed with the researcher's interpretation.

Because case studies by nature involve the participation of human subjects in dynamic conditions, it is difficult to assure reliability in the form of replication of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that a better term to use is "dependability" or "consistency" (p. 288). To ensure consistency, the researcher explained the assumptions and theory behind the study, described the conceptual framework of the study, utilized a cross-case analysis, emphasized the triangulation of data collection methods, and provided an "audit trail" (Merriam, 1998, p. 207) that described in specific detail every step of the sampling, data collection, and methods of analysis.

Researcher Perspective

As stated in Chapter Two, this study was influenced by research in the areas of beginning teachers' classroom teaching experiences, mentor teacher guidance, adult learning theories, self-efficacy, and the effects of preservice reading teacher preparation. The initial purpose of this study was to gain as much information as possible about the beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the most effective ways that they learn to teach. Even the best of researchers are never fully objective (Denzin, 1997); therefore, as an instructor in literacy education, the researcher approached this study with certain biases. For example, the researcher hoped to hear that her department's influence was positive and strong and that the university had maintained a good reputation with each participant. With the above goal and possible biases in mind, every effort was made to collect and analyze data in an objective fashion.

In addition to the audit trail and triangulation of data, the researcher maintained a reflective log and participated in an ongoing conversation about the study with her study partner, another doctoral candidate. The two candidates met bi-weekly to read and discuss one another's drafts. During the sessions, the candidates discussed their interpretations and possible biases and double-checked one another's analyses. Although these measures were undertaken in an attempt to ensure an unbiased report, the researcher acknowledges the possibility of subconsciously held biases and that she may not have been able to report the impact of those unknown biases in this study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how beginning classroom reading teachers perceive the influences that have led them to their current practices in teaching reading. Four beginning elementary classroom reading teachers participated in this study. Implementing a case study approach, this study utilized interviews, stimulated recall sessions with videotaped material, and modified stimulated recall sessions with an examination of randomly chosen written lesson plans to explore the perceived influences on the practices of four beginning classroom reading teachers. The researcher also maintained a reflective log, received ongoing colleague feedback, and enacted member checks and peer review to strengthen verification and dependability. Data were analyzed with a cross-case analysis and the constant comparative method and were displayed in both table and written format. In order to provide the reader with a better understanding of the nature of this study, Chapter Four will offer a more deeply detailed description of the participants and their classroom settings.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANTS AND TEACHING CONTEXTS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide richly descriptive data that accurately portrays the four participants in the study. Case studies have been described by Merriam (1998) as the means by which researchers can present an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). The main areas of examination in this chapter are the participants’ teaching contexts, the nature of their induction as new teachers, professional development, outside experiences with children and schools, and their clinical experiences, including the first and second professional semester clinicals and student teaching. Merriam also notes that heuristic case studies “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). These descriptions are provided in order to illuminate the unique characteristics of each participant. As the researcher was a participant in the study, the results will be related in first person.

All of the participants are female and are introduced in the order in which they were first interviewed. I met with each participant in her own classroom. There were at least five sessions with each participant to conduct the interviews, and I also

sat in on at least three reading instruction lessons per participant. As I observed these lessons, I videotaped them so that I could later stimulate the participants' memories of the events I referred to in the follow-up interviews. A more detailed description of the semi-structured interviews and the stimulated recall process is found in Chapter Three. The results of the three types of sessions will be described in Chapter Five.

Table 2 displays the participants' placements for their first and second professional semester clinical experiences, their student teaching experiences, and their assignments for their first inservice year of teaching. In this chapter, each participant is presented separately. For each participant, there are descriptions of her age, race, when she graduated from college, and her teaching position. These demographics are followed by in-depth descriptions of the participant's teaching context, along with the nature of the new teacher induction process and professional development opportunities. Each teaching context includes background information on the school and district as well as student and teacher demographics. Additional information is provided regarding the participant's outside experiences with children and schools, first and second professional clinical experiences, and student teaching.

Table 2. Participants' Preservice and Inservice Teaching Experiences

	1st professional semester clinical experience	2 nd professional semester clinical experience	Student teaching experience	Teaching assignment in 1 st years of inservice
Lynette	Middle school 6-8 grades, suburban, health class	5 th grade, suburban, bilingual class	3 rd grade, urban	Year 1: 1 st and 3 rd grades, urban, Title I reading Year 2: 2 nd grade, same school
Mary	2 nd grade, suburban	2 nd grade, suburban	2 nd grade, suburban (same site & cooperating teacher as second professional semester experience)	Years 1 and 2: 1 st grade, suburban (same site as 1st professional semester experience)
Delilah	4 th grade, suburban	8 th grade, language arts, suburban	5 th grade, suburban	Year 1: 4 th grade, suburban; Year 2: 4 th grade, same district but different building
Veronica	3 rd grade, suburban	6 th grade (in an elementary school), suburban	2 nd grade, suburban	Years 1 & 2: 2 nd grade, suburban (same site as student teaching)

Lynette

Lynette was the first of the four participants to be interviewed. Lynette is a single African-American woman in her early twenties who began teaching at Jones Elementary in fall of 2004. I interviewed and observed Lynette in April and May of

2005, seven or eight months into her first year of teaching. Additionally, a follow-up interview was completed in March of 2006.

The Teaching Context

Jones Elementary is set in a 1950s-style two-story red-brick building. Jones is considered a medium-sized elementary school located “on the urban fringe of a large city.” The students are required to wear uniforms and wear photo identification on lanyards around their necks. According to the most recent state school report card, the student population at Jones is made up of approximately 68.3% African-American students, 25.4% Hispanic students, 6.2% Caucasian students, and 0.1% Asian students. There are 971 students and 53 teachers at Jones Elementary. In this school, 86.8% of the teachers are Caucasian, 9.4% are African-American, 1.9% are Hispanic, and 1.9% are Asian. Male teachers comprise 20.8% of the teachers, and 79.2% of the teachers are female. Master’s or higher degrees are held by 28% of the teachers.

Approximately 80% of the students at Jones are identified as being in the low-income bracket. According to the 2005 state school report card, 53.1% of the students met or exceeded the standards as determined by standardized tests, and Jones had demonstrated adequate yearly progress.

Lynette was in an unusual teaching situation. Her administrators knew that they would need her to fill a regular classroom teaching position in 2005 and arranged to keep her in the district the year before by hiring her as a Title I reading

teacher for the 2004-2005 school year. Although generally Title I reading teachers hold master's degrees in reading, there are occasions when districts hire less well-trained teachers to fill these positions. Despite this special title, Lynette's qualifications still fell within the parameters of this study. Lynette never received any special training in reading; rather, she worked closely with the school's reading specialist. Lynette worked with two groups of students each day: first graders for two hours in the morning and third graders for two hours in the afternoon.

Lynette's classroom was a small and crowded, yet well-organized space encompassing 15 children's desks, a table in the center with five chairs around it, and three walls covered with student work and teacher-made posters. There were two word walls, one for the third grade and one for first grade. Lynette also had a small blackboard and an easel as well as two pocket charts. The limited shelf space was filled with plastic baskets of books organized by genres and several stacks of professional resources. Whenever I observed Lynette in her classroom, she was always in motion reinforcing, redirecting, or reassuring her students. The smile on her face and the joy in her voice, as well as the celebratory "out of sight" dance she and her students performed whenever they achieved a particularly tough goal, all indicated that Lynette and her students enjoyed a positive, supportive learning environment.

New Teacher Induction

Lynette explained that because she was the only new teacher in the district during her first year, she was not provided with the support of a formal new teacher induction program. Lynette was not formally assigned a mentor teacher; however, she managed to acquire more than one mentor teacher when she enlisted the aid of the third-grade team.

Professional Development

During her first nine months as an inservice educator, Lynette attended every seminar, workshop, or conference that was offered and saved all of the handouts and materials she received. The majority of her professional development came from her participation in the Reading First Academy (http://www.isbe.net/ils/ela/reading/html/read_first.htm). Because Jones Elementary is a Reading First school, all teachers of kindergarten through third grade are required to attend the Academy. While attending the Academy, participants meet once a month in the evening for five months. Each month, a different area of reading is addressed; for example, Lynette's first session was about phonemic awareness, and the second session was about phonics.

Another area of professional development for Lynette was training in how to utilize the district-adopted phonemic awareness program created by Heggerty (2003). Lynette and her colleagues spent approximately ten minutes per day engaging their primary students in Heggerty's activities.

Outside Experiences

Even before Lynette began her elementary education coursework at Middlewestern State University, she had numerous experiences with children. Lynette served in such child-related positions as summer camp counselor, daycare student teacher through her class in high school, nanny, and babysitter. Her mother, grandmother, and aunt are all educators. Lynette noted with a chuckle that she had written her first lesson plan back in eighth grade when she was helping in her mother's classroom.

Clinical Experiences

Lynette's first professional semester clinical experience took place in a middle school health class. As was the case for Delilah and Veronica as well, Lynette's first clinical experience involved two full days of observation per week for six consecutive weeks. Lynette spent most of the time observing and did not have many opportunities to teach the whole class during her first clinical experience.

For her second professional semester clinical experience, Lynette was assigned to a fifth-grade bilingual classroom. The second clinical experience was comprised of six advance days of one full school day per week and then three full consecutive weeks on site. After three of the advance day visits, Lynette's cooperating teacher allowed her to begin teaching and continued to do so all day every day throughout the clinical experience period.

Lynette student taught in a third-grade classroom. Her semester-long student teaching experience took place in an elementary school whose student population was comprised of, in Lynette's estimation, approximately 90% Hispanic students. The school was located on the west side of a large city approximately 45 miles from Middlewestern State University. Lynette did not describe herself as fluent in Spanish; rather, she noted that she had taken some Spanish in high school and could hear and understand some. Lynette's cooperating teacher had a total of 15 years of experience but had taken off the four previous years and was thus relearning much of her everyday routine.

Mary

The second participant, Mary, was 46 years of age at the time of our first interview. Mary is a Caucasian female who attended college for more than 11 years to achieve her dream of becoming a teacher. Mary is married and has three children, the youngest of whom also attended Mary's school, Littleton Elementary, during the time of our interviews. When we began the interviews, Mary was in the ninth month of her second year of teaching first grade. Mary's employment at Littleton Elementary was the result of many rich volunteer experiences as a parent of children enrolled in the school, ongoing communication with teachers and the building principal, and her successful completion of the elementary education program at Middlewestern State University.

The Teaching Context

Littletown Elementary is a relatively new building, built in the 1990s as part of a district campus comprised of an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. In 2005, Littletown had a student enrollment of 661 and was described as being located “on the urban fringe of a large city.” According to the 2005 district school report card, the student population at Littletown is made up of approximately 70.3% Caucasian students, 18.9% Hispanic students, 4.2% African-American students, and 1.7% Asian students. There are approximately 33 teachers employed at Littletown Elementary, 95.2% of whom are Caucasian, 3.8% are Hispanic, and 1% are Asian. In 2005, there were no African-American teachers at Littletown Elementary. In this school, 24.3% of the teachers are male, and 75.7% of the teachers are female. Master’s or higher degrees are held by 48% of the teachers. Of the students at Littletown, 21% are identified as being in the low-income bracket. The 2005 district school report card noted that 81% of the students met or exceeded the state standards as determined by standardized tests and that Littletown had demonstrated adequate yearly progress.

In Mary’s classroom, the children were encouraged to interact with one another and with Mary. The evidence of a supportive learning environment permeated the room in the displays of student work, the student-centered activities, and Mary’s frequent celebratory exclamation, “Oh, that’s wonderful! Kiss your brain!” (Personal contact, 04/28/05). Mary conducted her guided reading sessions from a rocking chair in the reading corner while her groups sat on the rug in front of

her. During guided reading, the other students worked in predetermined literacy center groups around the room.

New Teacher Induction

Mary participated in the district's new teacher induction program, which included Mary's having a mentor teacher assigned to her. As it happened, Mary's mentor teacher was Clarissa, a teacher with whom Mary had developed a friendship during her time volunteering as a room mother. Clarissa's classroom was right across the hall from Mary's.

Professional Development

Mary constantly looked for new ideas, attended district inservice programs, and often read several books at once. In her first two years of teaching, Mary attended six different seminars.

Like Lynette, Mary also participated in the Heggerty inservice training and utilized the phonemic awareness activities created by Heggerty (2003). Heggerty's *Phonemic Awareness: The Skills That They Need to Help Them Succeed!* is used by primary teachers to aid in developing their students' phonemic awareness and was a mainstay in the Littletown primary curriculum.

Outside Experiences

In addition to being a mother, Mary had many other experiences with children outside of the classroom context. She volunteered as a room mother at Littletown Elementary, led a Brownie troop, ran a licensed home daycare, and taught CCD classes at her church.

Clinical Experiences

Because Mary transferred into the Middlewestern State program from a local junior college, she completed her first clinical experience before enrolling in the teacher preparation program. For this first clinical experience, Mary was placed at Littletown Elementary. Mary had very little opportunity to teach during this first clinical.

Mary's second professional clinical experience took place in a second-grade classroom in a suburban school district located about 20 miles northeast of Littletown Elementary and 45 miles northeast of Middlewestern State's main campus. This particular district worked intensively with Middlewestern State in a partnership program. The undergraduates in the partnership program underwent extra hours of clinical experience and completed extra projects while the Middlewestern State faculty and the district faculty worked together to coordinate the undergraduates' experiences.

One benefit of the partnership is that after completing the second professional semester, undergraduates were often invited to continue at the same

building as student teachers. Mary received such an invitation and completed her student teaching with the same cooperating teacher.

Delilah

Delilah, the third participant, is a Caucasian female in her mid-forties. Delilah is a single mother with one teenage son and two daughters. During our sessions, it was Delilah's first year teaching at Cross Creek Elementary; in fact, she was not hired until October when, to make the class sizes more manageable, the district decided to add another fourth-grade teacher. When the interviews began, Delilah was beginning her fourth month of teaching fourth grade.

The Teaching Context

Cross Creek Elementary is part of a K-8 district all contained within one building. According to the online state school report card, in 2005 the district had an enrollment of 17,811 students and was described as being located "on the urban fringe of a large city." The report card also described the demographics of the student population in the Cross Creek district; the K-8 school is made up of approximately 84.2% Caucasian students, 5% Hispanic students, 7.6% Asian students, 2% African-American students, and 0.6% Native American students. Of the 923 teachers in the district, 93.2% are Caucasian, 5.9% are Hispanic, 0.3% are Asian, 0.3% are Native American, and 0.2% are African-American. The teaching population is comprised of 23.6% males and 76.4% females. Of these teachers,

48% hold master's degrees or higher. In the student demographics, 7% of the students at Cross Creek are identified as being in the low-income bracket. The 2005 state school report card noted that 78.3% of the students met or exceeded the state standards as determined by standardized tests and that Cross Creek School District had demonstrated adequate yearly progress.

Delilah's classroom was bright with many learning enhancement and motivational posters. Student projects hung by strings from the lights, and there was a special reading corner decorated with a rug, cushions, and a bookshelf. Delilah often referred to her students by name and affectionately pointed out students' idiosyncrasies. She frequently expressed concerns about meeting her students' needs and described in detail the levels of ability of many of her students.

New Teacher Induction

Delilah explained to me that because she was hired months after the beginning of the school year, she was not given the opportunity to participate in any new teacher induction programs and was not provided with a mentor. She did have opportunities to visit during lunch hour with the other members of the fourth-grade team.

Professional Development

Delilah had experienced limited access to opportunities for professional development, so she often searched the Internet for information and ideas and made

it a point to read professional journals and other teacher resources. The two inservice workshops that Delilah attended dealt with such topics as working with adopted children and children with attention deficit disorder.

Outside Experiences

In addition to her experiences as a mother and an avid reader and life-long learner, Delilah did volunteer work in her daughter's language arts classroom. In this accelerated eighth-grade class, Delilah had the chance to observe the teacher and work one-on-one with students. Upon graduation, Delilah worked for several months as a substitute teacher at the middle-school level.

Clinical Experiences

Delilah completed her first professional semester clinical experience in a fourth-grade class over the course of six weeks, with two full days spent in the classroom each week. Her second professional semester clinical experience was comprised of three consecutive full weeks in an eighth-grade language arts class. This site was actually Delilah's second placement during her second professional semester; the cooperating teacher in the first site failed to provide Delilah the teaching opportunities Delilah needed in order to complete her course assignments.

Delilah's 16-week student teaching experience took place in an urban fifth-grade class. Her cooperating teacher never left the room, and Delilah was never allowed to teach a full school day.

Veronica

Veronica, the fourth participant, is a single African-American female in her mid-twenties. She began teaching at Paine Elementary in fall of 2005. When our interviews began, Veronica was in her fifth month of teaching second grade.

The Teaching Context

Paine Elementary is a pre-K-5 grade school located just a mile from the campus of Middlewestern State University. According to the 2005 online state school report card, in 2005 Paine Elementary had a student enrollment of 365, and like the other three districts in this study, was described as being located “on the urban fringe of a large city.” The online report card also described the 2005 student population at Paine Elementary as being made up of approximately 62.7% Caucasian students, 18.4% African-American students, 14.2% Hispanic students, and 3.3% Asian students. There are 27 teachers at Paine Elementary, 96.2% of whom are Caucasian, 2.4% are African-American, 0.9% are Hispanic, and 0.6% are Asian. In this school, 22.2% of the teachers are male, 77.8% of the teachers are female, and 55% hold master’s degrees or higher. Students considered to be in the low-income bracket make up 39% of the students at Paine. The 2005 state school report card noted that 69.4% of the students met or exceeded the state standards as determined by standardized tests and that Paine Elementary had demonstrated adequate yearly progress.

Veronica's classroom is a large room comprised of a wall of bulletin boards bordered by a shelf of cupboards and a sink, a wall of windows, and a wall of white board. Veronica has made use of the inconvenient wall and storage space by putting her word wall, calendar, and posters on extra white board space as well as displaying student work on the windows. Veronica changes her seating arrangements regularly, sometimes arranging the desks in groups of four and other times arranging the desks in traditional rows of four or five students. During guided reading Veronica and the Title I teacher each work with groups in the back of the room while the other students work in their choice of centers. Veronica had a variety of piles of student work and materials on the back shelf in the room, and while I had a little trouble knowing what went where, she and her students seemed to understand the categories of piles. Veronica's room was a somewhat noisy, very friendly environment in which students felt comfortable about greeting me whenever I visited. Veronica's students enjoyed talking to one another, and Veronica often encouraged them to participate in whole-group discussions.

New Teacher Induction

Veronica participated in the district's teacher induction program, and her assigned mentor happened to be her cooperating teacher from her student teaching experience. At the time of our interviews, Veronica's mentor taught right next door to her and they spoke often. Veronica and her mentor participated in a mentor/mentee book club that met monthly.

Professional Development

Veronica had attended staff development seminars provided by her school district as well as one sponsored by her state professional education association. The district-provided seminars included one on working with diverse students and another on teaching with four-square writing. The state association's workshop provided beginning educators with classroom management tools and tips on managing the first days of school.

Outside Influences

Veronica's desire to teach began at an early age when she was in first grade. She enjoyed playing school with her friends and often emulated her first-grade teacher. Veronica also enjoyed several structured experiences via her involvement with the Golden Apple Scholar Program (<http://www.goldenapple.org/scholars.htm>). Following her graduation from high school, Veronica was a Golden Apple Scholar.

In addition to the Golden Apple program, Veronica also enjoyed volunteering at her cousins' grade school. In her cousins' kindergarten and first grade classrooms, Veronica helped with holiday projects, graded folders, went on field trips, and worked one-on-one with students. Additionally, Veronica worked as a daycare teacher during the months between her December graduation and her new position at Paine.

Clinical Experiences

Veronica's first professional semester clinical experience was in a third-grade classroom with a highly experienced veteran teacher and 31 students. For her second professional semester clinical experience, Veronica was placed in an elementary sixth-grade classroom. Because the second clinical experience ran for three consecutive weeks, Veronica had many more opportunities in the second experience to actually teach the class.

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. Veronica student taught in a second-grade classroom with a veteran teacher who later became her mentor teacher.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a description of the four beginning elementary classroom reading teachers participating in this study. While the teachers were all of the same gender and happened to represent just two age ranges and races, they came from a variety of backgrounds and, although the state report card simply described all of their sites all as "on the urban fringe of a large city," taught in four very different contexts: a small but developing older town, an upper class suburb, a small town with a big university, and an urban neighborhood. The analysis of their perceptions of the events leading to these teaching positions and the influences that have impacted their everyday teaching practices will be addressed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how beginning elementary classroom reading teachers perceived the influences that had led them to their current practices in teaching reading. In order to obtain rich, descriptive data, the study was conducted through a series of semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions utilizing teacher-chosen videotaped lessons, and modified stimulated recall sessions focusing on randomly chosen written lesson plans. All interviews and sessions were audio-taped and transcribed for data coding and analysis using the constant comparative method and cross-case analysis.

After the data were analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method and cross-case analysis, the emerging themes indicated a range of factors perceived by each participant that either positively or negatively impacted their efforts in learning and teaching. The emerging themes are displayed in Figure 2.

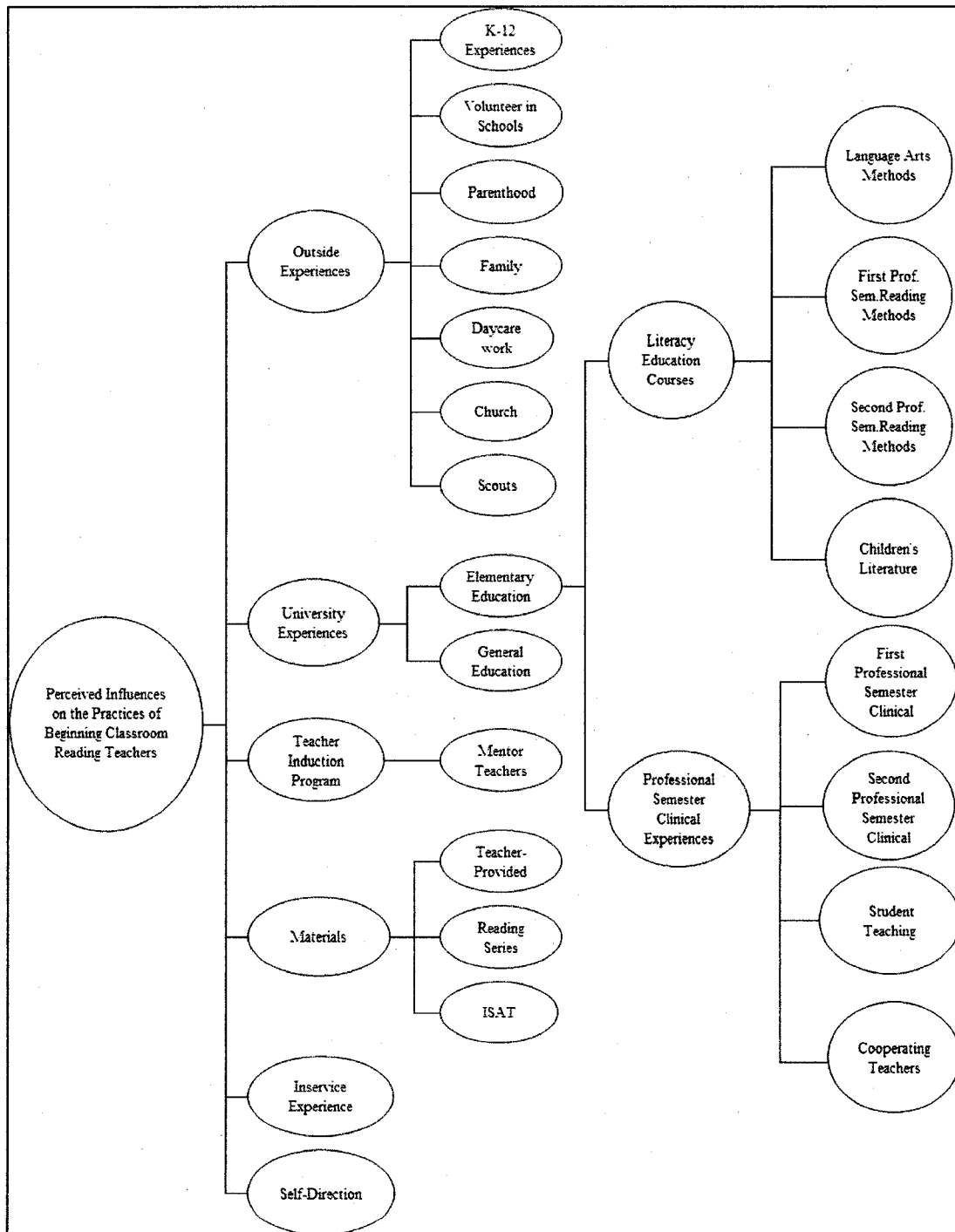


Figure 2: Perceived Influences on the Practices of Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers

With the exception of the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test*, which was named as an influence by three of the four participants, all of the themes displayed in Figure 2 were perceived to be influential by all four participants.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In creating the semi-structured interview protocol, I generated questions based upon the preliminary categories described in Chapter Three and derived from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Briefly, those categories were:

1. University coursework
2. Cooperating teachers
3. First professional semester clinical experience
4. Second professional semester clinical experience
5. Student teaching experience
6. Teacher induction programs and mentor teachers
7. Inservice experience
8. Inservice professional development
9. Outside experience
10. Other

Stimulated Recall Sessions

On three separate occasions, each participant was videotaped teaching the reading lessons of her choice. Shortly after each taping session, the participant and I met to view the video together and to discuss the methods used. Typically, the questions included queries about the nature of the lesson, where the participant learned to use that particular method or activity, and how she felt the lesson went. When necessary, I often probed the participants to follow the trail of learning back as far as possible so that the real influences were clearly stated. With their personalized, situation-specific nature, these stimulated recall sessions (Bloom, 1953) served as another form of detailed, rich data collection.

Modified Stimulated Recall Sessions

In one of the last interviews with each participant, we leafed through her lesson plan book and randomly chose three different reading lessons to discuss. Because these interviews involved the participant's own prewritten plans and not a video- or audio-taped session, I refer to these sessions as "modified stimulated recall." These modified stimulated recall sessions served as tools for triangulation of data analysis; that is, these sessions provided further information on the participants' perceptions of the reading lessons they taught and where they learned to teach such lessons.

The next portion of this chapter will describe each of the participants' perceptions of the influences on their teaching practices as determined by the semi-

structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions, and modified stimulated recall sessions. Because the individual participants' responses were so integral to this investigation, the descriptions of their perceptions are presented by participant, not by category.

Lynette

Influence of Outside Experiences

Prior to entering the elementary education program at Middlewestern State University, Lynette had a rich background of experiences with children. In addition to growing up with a mother who was a teacher, Lynette also found a variety of ways to work with children; in particular, she was a nanny and worked at the campus daycare center. Lynette described her experiences as nanny and daycare student teacher as the means by which she now understands children. Lynette explained that she has a "better understanding of why kids do what they do" (Interview, 04/19/05). Additionally, these types of experiences helped Lynette to understand her students' social skills because she has experienced how these children behave outside of the classroom when they are interacting with their friends.

Although Lynette did not specifically attribute any of her teaching behaviors to her mother's influence, she still cited her mother as the source in several instances of ways that she knew about teaching issues. For example, Lynette's mother provided her with many supplementary classroom reading materials that

Lynette keeps on her shelf for future use. Lynette also stated that even though she and her mother never planned together, at times when Lynette worked with her mother at the preschool their plans might look exactly the same. Lynette also attributed to her mother her love of learning, explaining,

...because at home over the summer, we learned all summer long when I was younger. It wasn't like school, you learned all the time. I learned from her to incorporate learning, not from a book, but we're learning all the time—everything you do is learning, I don't know. Because, she's inside of me, it's weird.
(Interview 04/19/05)

Lortie (1975) described the phenomenon of adults seeing themselves as experts in their knowledge about teaching as a result of having participated in school for twelve or more years as an “apprenticeship of observation” (p. 61). In her apprenticeship of observation during her experiences as an elementary student, Lynette learned some important lessons about teaching; however, she learned by negative example. While we were discussing how responsive and positive Lynette is with her students, Lynette shared with me that in third grade she felt “torn apart” and “not good enough” because of her teacher’s comments and thus worked to ensure that her own students felt supported and competent.

I've seen kids torn down and their spirits broken by teachers, and I experienced that as a student, a teacher just ripped me to shreds. She made me feel just horrible about how smart I was and I wasn't good

enough, and I knew I didn't want to be that teacher.
(Interview, 03/01/06)

Influence of Coursework

Lynette spoke positively about her first and second professional semesters in the elementary education program at Middlewestern State University. She described the value of the individual courses and specifically noted one instructor who greatly enhanced her learning. Lynette had the same instructor, Mrs. Abbott, for both a reading methods course and a children's literature course.

Lynette: Yeah, she's just awesome.

Researcher: I hope you tell her that!

Lynette: I did, in fact, I need to call her.

Researcher: So the children's literature course, you really benefited?

Lynette: Yes.

Researcher: Methods?

Lynette: Methods, yes, I don't remember which ones she taught, but it was a lot of the same sort of stuff—how to get kids, get the ideas across, I still have my binder from her class. And you know what I've done, actually? I've made this file right here, I'm such a nerd...comprehension, fluency, all different strategies from her class, I've saved everything. If I run out of ideas, I go here, pull stuff out, and start making copies! This is my what I learned box. Someone gave me more stuff today! (Interview, 04/19/05)

Because Lynette had attended an elementary school that followed a whole language approach to reading instruction, when she took her literacy education courses in college, she felt she knew very little about phonics and phonics instruction. She found the idea of phonics strategies enlightening and in particular enjoyed learning the skills promoted by Cunningham in *Phonics They Use* (2000).

So when I came here, I knew something—actually I learned a whole lot at school. What was that stuff, that last semester, we learned a whole lot about phonics and I was like, ‘oh my gosh, are you serious? Wow, you mean you can make words by,...’ you know, it just blew my mind (laughs)...And like all the rules, like i before e, I didn’t know any of that stuff, ‘what are you talking about, you know? You look in a book and there’s the word. (Interview, 05/17/05)

Lynette lamented her lack of understanding the developmental phases and benchmarks of children learning to read and write, noting that perhaps the developmental courses are given too early in the coursework. Now in her first year of teaching, she found that she had a clear idea of what she wanted to know about how children’s skills develop.

...when I came here, I went to see so I knew where the kids should be—because I had no idea what a first grader should be reading. I didn’t know. So I had to go around and look at what other people were doing in their classes. As far as third grade, I had no idea—I had to go on the Internet, and I found all kinds of stuff. I’m such a go-getter girl! I had the benchmarks samples, stuff I should be trying to get them to do. (Interview, 05/17/05)

Lynette's second professional course in reading methods included a component on literacy assessment. Lynette noted the value of knowing how to assess reading skills and commented that her district utilized the *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 2005), which Lynette learned to administer in her second reading methods course.

A popular literacy instruction tool is the word wall (Cunningham, 2000). Lynette had two word walls in her classroom, one for first grade and one for third grade. She attributes her understanding of how to create and utilize word walls to her second professional reading methods course and, in particular, to Cunningham's *Phonics They Use* (2000).

Researcher: Where/ how did you learn to use word walls? When did you learn to use those?

Lynette: I learned in the first professional, had never heard of it—never seen in Chicago Public Schools or visiting Mom. I went wow, okay, that's a word wall.

Researcher: That was during the first reading methods course, did you learn more about them in the second course?

Lynette: Oh absolutely—actually how to put them to use, more introduced to the concept of word wall and why you should have one, and then we put them to use.

Researcher: And I'm thinking you told me you read *Phonics They Use* in your second reading methods class?

Lynette: Oh yes, I still have that book in my classroom! (Interview, 03/01/06)

Yet another significant tool in Lynette's teaching repertoire came from her children's literature course. She often referred to her knowledge of, and passion for, children's literature and described how she applied her knowledge of genres in her classroom. For example, Lynette organizes her classroom library books by genres and often guides her students in genre studies or author studies. In particular, Lynette noted that she wanted to get her students to stop thinking of all books as "*Accelerated Reader*" books and instead understand that there are real books to be enjoyed and explored.

Yeah, I try to, I really try to because they'll ask me...that book we read, what level was it? I'll say, I don't know! It's a good book! Read it because it's a good book—who cares how many points you get or what level it is? It's a good book! (Interview, 05/16/05)

Lynette made it a point to celebrate learning with her students. When they successfully completed a challenging phonics lesson, for example, Lynette led the class in a special "out of sight" dance, created just for them. As we discussed brain-based learning theories (Caine & Caine, 1997) about the connection between emotions and learning, Lynette stated, "I just remember a professor or a teacher talking about how important it is for a kid to be excited about learning. I read

somewhere that when kids are laughing and doing the stuff, they learn more information.” (Interview, 03/01/06)

Influence of Clinical Experiences and Student Teaching

Lynette’s first professional semester clinical experience in a middle school health class provided her with an opportunity to learn the managerial aspects of teaching. In twelve visits over the course of six weeks, Lynette’s cooperating teacher focused on teaching Lynette how the school worked, for instance, how to take attendance and how to grade papers. Lynette did not have many opportunities to teach the whole class during her first clinical experience.

For her second professional semester clinical experience, Lynette worked with a fifth-grade bilingual classroom teacher. The second clinical experience was comprised of six advance days of one full school day per week and then three full consecutive weeks on site. After three of the advance day visits, Lynette’s cooperating teacher allowed her to begin teaching, and she continued to do so all day every day throughout the clinical 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 (Interview, 04/19/05). This time in the classroom helped Lynette to develop both her confidence with and understanding of diverse learners, traits that were later valuable to Lynette in her role as a Title I reading teacher.

Lynette's semester-long student teaching experience in third grade was a positive, productive time for her. One source of frustration for Lynette, though, was the lack of diversity in this school. Lynette noted that in this predominantly Hispanic school, there were only two African-American students in her class. This differed greatly from her current teaching position, in which approximately 90% of her students are African-American.

Lynette: I only had two African-American students, and no diversity at all—it was very different for me. It was a very unique experience.

Researcher: Diverse in terms of a different race than you?

Lynette: Yeah, a different race than anybody.

Researcher: So there was not a mix?

Lynette: Yeah—everybody was the same! (Interview, 04/19/05)

It was in this student teaching experience that Lynette gained much of her knowledge in classroom management and where she first used the basal reading series, *Trophies*, published by Harcourt School Publishers (2005). 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 [*Trophies*] like glue” (Interview, 04/19/05).

Influence of New Teacher Induction and Mentor Teachers

School districts normally utilize some form of structured teacher induction program to help their new teachers become acclimated. One feature of teacher induction programs tends to be the assignment of an experienced teacher to mentor a new teacher. In her first year Lynette was the only new teacher to join the district, so there was not an active induction program and she did not have the benefit of being assigned a mentor teacher. Despite this, however, on her own Lynette found one, or rather several mentor teachers, on the third-grade team. According to Lynette, the third-grade teachers were invaluable resources. Lynette stated, "...the third-grade people in my wing over here, they have been just the world to me! They helped me find books and what to order and just everything!" (Interview, 04/19/05). Lynette had gotten to know the team members well enough to realize that each member could offer insights on different matters, explaining,

Lynette: ... it depends on what I'm asking for. Discipline kind of stuff I go to Mrs. X because she used to be a principal. Fun ideas to Mrs. Y because she went to Middlewestern State University, she graduated four years before me, she has all the fun ideas.

Researcher: So you know who to go to...?

Lynette: Yeah, I've got my resources—I know who to go to. (Interview, 04/19/05)

Influence of Professional Development

Lynette gleaned much valuable information during her first nine months of teaching. She attended every possible seminar, workshop, or conference, and saved everything. Along with the mandatory Reading First Academy, Lynette also attended workshops and conferences whenever possible.

I'm constantly going to conferences; anytime we have a speaker here, I'm there! I'm probably the only one there learning. I take anything anybody hands me I'm copying it, I'm saving it all. Because I feel like I'm doing what I need to do now, but I could make it stick so much better—I could do so much better.”
(Interview, 04/19/05)

While she believed that she was already an effective teacher, Lynette also realized that she had much to learn. Attending the Academy, workshops, and conferences helped to increase her knowledge and repertoire of skills.

According to Lynette, the most valuable professional development came from the Reading First Academy; specifically, Lynette cited Reading First as her source for how to utilize echo reading (Interview, 02/28/06). Another strong influence on Lynette's daily routine was the school's adoption of Heggerty's (2003) handbook of phonemic awareness activities. Heggerty, an assistant superintendent in a nearby school district, wrote this handbook and visits school districts to provide inservice training in how to use the handbook effectively to foster the phonemic awareness of primary-grade students. Lynette utilized Heggerty's activities as part

of her daily routine with her first graders and discussed this after implementing a Heggerty activity during the third stimulated recall session. Lynette had not learned about Heggerty's phonemic awareness program until she underwent the training.

In addition to formal training opportunities, Lynette also benefited from the leadership of a principal who supported her in her endeavors. The second part of the third stimulated recall session that Lynette and I held focused on a guided reading lesson. Because Lynette had never been trained in guided reading, her principal gave her release time to go and observe other teachers who were utilizing guided reading.

Influence of Materials

Basal Series

According to Lynette's perceptions of the influences on her teaching practices, her reliance on published reading materials was strong. Both the basal series and Heggerty's phonemic awareness lessons were the sorts of structured, sequential, scripted lessons that Lynette used daily. Lynette first learned how to use a basal reading series during her student teaching experience. She felt very comfortable using the series.

When I student taught we used the exact same reading book. That's how I was so confident when I came here, I'd used it before and I'm a stickler. It's *Trophies*. [by Harcourt Brace?] Yeah (walks to her shelf and pulls out a teacher's edition). I love this

book! It has everything I need (laughs). (Interview, 04/19/05)

Lynette often went beyond simply following the typical lesson format of the series by applying other valuable information found within. For example, Lynette found in the teacher's manual a list of what good readers do and made it into a classroom visual aid. She also found a list of third-grade focus skills on the series' website and often refers to the list when she is planning her lessons. Lynette explained,

Lynette: Like, I actually have a list of skills I want them to learn by third grade. This is from the reading series, and I make sure we do this, at least every one of these—we go through them in rotation—I go through them all.

Researcher: So these third-grade focus skills, you got these out of the Harcourt series?

Lynette: Yes, I think it was on their website—they had what the book focuses on. We've done everything on here (gestures to list). And we keep doing them over and over.

Researcher: So you go back and review? Do you feel like there's any scope and sequence there—were there any that had to come before others?

Lynette: Yeah, um, knowing the elements of a story, that was one of the first ones we had to do. We had to get through that first—we had to get through narrative stuff that's more familiar—get through what a story has, beginning, middle, end and that kind of stuff, and then get into more of the sequence, summarizing, cause and effect, that stuff had to come later. They had to understand, you know. (Interview, 04/19/05)

During the stimulated recall sessions, Lynette identified two of the three lessons that she taught as having originated in the basal reading series. Lynette's three sessions took place in her first- and third-grade Title I classroom in the last month of her first year of teaching. In the first stimulated recall session, I videotaped and later discussed with Lynette a lesson teaching her third-grade students how to utilize an H Chart to compare and contrast. Prior to this lesson, Lynette had not experienced H Charts and taught them because they were part of the reading series lessons for that unit; therefore, she simply followed the instructions in the teacher's manual to teach the lesson.

In the second session, Lynette taught her third-grade students how to identify figurative language in poetry. While she had to locate some poetry books on her own, the rest of the lesson was based solely on the instructions in the reading series' teacher's manual. Prior to this lesson, Lynette had not learned how to teach students about figurative language.

Like the stimulated recall sessions, the modified stimulated recall sessions also reflected Lynette's reliance on materials. Lynette's lesson plans demonstrated her reliance on the basal reading series. All three of the lessons, story maps, signal words for sequencing, and a phonics lesson, were lessons straight out of the basal series. On another occasion, without searching for other possible choices to teach students about signal words, Lynette chose a certain book about butterflies because the book is one specified in the series: "It's what they said we should use, it was there..." (Interview, 05/16/05). While Lynette did express her familiarity with Cunningham's *Phonics They Use*, she still attributed her decisions about the phonics

lesson to the influence of the basal reading series. “I had, I had read all that, but I really base it off of that textbook—we have an awesome book. This is Harcourt *Trophies*” (Interview, 05/16/05).

A March 2005 lesson on problem and solution with a story map was the only lesson she described as having “tweaked” to make more accessible for her students. Since this lesson occurred three months after the previous two, this modification could be indicative of Lynette’s growing awareness of her students’ needs, as well as an increasing confidence in her own teaching skills.

Accelerated Reader

One exception to Lynette’s strong commitment to the use of existing materials is her intense dislike for another reading program, *Accelerated Reader* (<http://www.renlearn.com/ar/>). *Accelerated Reader* is a software program that assigns grade levels to trade books and provides assessments for students to complete on the computer after they have read the books. On several occasions Lynette expressed her dismay about the school’s mandatory policy of all students participating in *Accelerated Reader*:

Lynette: I learned about it when I got my reading class and they said, yes, every week they’ll take an *AR* test. And I remember when I was in fourth grade I took *AR* tests and I hated them. I don’t like doing it either here, but we have to do it.

Researcher: Did you learn any research about it?

Lynette: No. See, we don't talk about it very much and I think maybe because it's so political. I hate it. How do you tell students it's something they're going to have to go out and do it?

Researcher: Why do you hate it?

Lynette: Well, for the main reason with my first-grade class, almost every other test they take the right answer is not a choice. I read the book with them. There's about a 50% error in first grade because the books are just like, there may be 20 words in a book. Yeah! There's like a, there's no way—they're these hard questions like, what color, or why do you think? And these kids can't read—I have to read every *AR* test to them! I hate it! And the kids, then they read just to get a 100 on the *AR* test. They have no idea, they don't comprehend.

Researcher: They have to get 100?

Lynette: They want to—it's a competition, you know, in the class. And they get prizes in the end of the year whoever has the best score or reads the most books. And it's not about that—it makes me so crazy! It is—it makes me crazy—I want them to read for fun. And our library is nothing but *AR* books. It kills me—every book in there is an *AR* book. We have no card catalog. There's one in there but you can't find a book because they're all by level. (in a stronger voice) It *kills* me. I used to go look up whatever I wanted to find out-- I'd look up a book...it makes me sick, I hate *AR*!
(Interview, 05/16/05)

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)

As Lynette progressed through her first year of teaching, anxieties about how her students would perform on the upcoming *Illinois Standards Achievement*

Test were always in the back of her mind. When the test time finally arrived and Lynette saw the contents of the test, she panicked.

Lynette: When I see these kids, I think, ‘Oh, I could have done that ! Oh!’ The ISAT was a big wake-up call—I didn’t do that, oh no! (laughs)

Researcher: But how are you supposed to know things?

Lynette: I know. Oh, we did so many pretests. We test these kids to death at our school. We’re very big on assessment. We have an X performance test we give them, and then we had like this ISAT fun with a pretest, could win a prize for highest improvement, there was all kinds of stuff for ISAT and, oh, it killed me and it killed them but they did well.

Researcher: When will you find out?

Lynette: Not till next year! It’s the worst! I mean, it’s too late then, you know, to modify stuff for them, and then next year I’m going to have new ones...it’s just, oh! (Interview, 04/19/05)

While Lynette had many concerns about the impact of the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test* on her students and her teaching, she was the only participant to positively comment on the ISAT. When she showed me the basal reading series she used, Lynette commented, “I love it, and they’re writing the ISAT next year—we’re so happy! We’re so happy” (Interview, 05/16/05). As Lynette’s comments suggest, the materials she had available and was required to use strongly influenced the decisions she made about teaching.

Influence of Inservice Experience

Finally, a strong source of influence for Lynette during her first year of teaching was the actual experience itself. Lynette found the first year to be a time of overwhelmingly fast-paced growth in her skills and knowledge.

Researcher: Since the first time I've met you, you've had probably 12% more experience.

Lynette: Yes (laughs).

Researcher: Isn't that amazing, to think that each month of your first year is just exponential?

Lynette: I know, I did so much this year I can't believe it's almost over. You know what I mean? I learned so much. I banged my head on the wall and ran into problems, and now I'm just like, wow...I did all that this year? And it's almost over! And I learned so much about dealing with the kids and just, oh, classroom management, and how to teach certain skills in reading, and my brain is like, it's crazy! (Interview, 05/16/05)

Lynette noted that the lack of time to reflect on the events of each day and the ramifications of such events was a frustrating impediment.

Lynette: That's why I'm having these issues because my brain is processing so much information—and more, and I'm processing it, and whoo!

Researcher: Yes, you need time for reflection.

Lynette: I do, that's what summer breaks are for. I need to sit down and reflect, I really do. I'm getting a journal, I got it yesterday. I'm going to start writing

down all this stuff. That should help. (Interview, 05/16/05)

Self-Directed Learning

Lynette was a self-directed learner. Any time she needed more information about something, Lynette found it by going to her colleagues, reading current research, or searching online. For example, instead of asking others in the building when she needed to know the benchmarks and prerequisite skills for her third-grade students, Lynette went online to find the information herself. Lynette scaffolded for her students before she knew the term “scaffolding,” simply because instinctively she knew to ensure success for her students. Lynette and I determined that the word “instinctual” best described many of the ways that she approaches decisions and plans for her students’ optimal learning (Interview, 02/28/06).

Perceptions of Teaching Abilities

Lynette had an understanding of her students and their needs. She believed that one of her strong suits was her ability to help her students learn, and master, specific skills. For example, Lynette incorporated a routine of reviewing, repeating, and applying skills on a regular basis.

We’re constantly repeating skills. We summarize every week, constant repetition, and we do it in different ways. The story in the book we might do one skill with and then do it with another book we’re reading in the library—I just incorporate it in everything. Like I actually have a list of skills I want

them to learn by third grade. This is from the reading series, and I make sure we do this, at least every one of these—we go through them in rotation—I go through them all. (Interview, 4/19/05)

While Lynette acknowledged that she was developing her teaching skills, she also recognized that she had much to learn about teaching. Lynette felt she was doing an adequate job; however, she also knew that there were more skills to acquire and hone.

...because I feel like I'm doing what I need to do now, but I could make it stick so much better—I could do so much better. When I see these kids, I think, 'Oh, I could have done that! Oh!' The ISAT was a big wake-up call—I didn't do that, oh no! (laughs). (Interview, 04/19/05)

Summary

Lynette clearly enjoyed the rapport she shared with her students. Throughout the interviews and taping sessions, Lynette's enthusiasm for reaching and teaching her students was obvious. Her tone and demeanor were bright, and her responses to her students were swift, genuine, and validating. Lynette's first year of teaching was a time of professional growth, exasperation, and feelings careening back and forth between fears of incompetence and the joys of watching students celebrate learning. The lessons that were discussed in stimulated recall and modified stimulated recall sessions represented how strongly Lynette perceived her teaching practices to be influenced by the materials on hand.

Mary

Influence of Outside Experiences

As stated earlier, Mary is married and the mother of three children, the youngest of whom attends Littleton Elementary. Prior to her pursuit of her lifelong dream of becoming a teacher, Mary enjoyed finding ways to be with children. Mary had a passion to learn all she could about teaching. In addition to leading a Brownie troop, running her own at-home childcare, and teaching the children at her church, Mary also volunteered as a room mother at Littleton. Mary often chatted with teachers after school. She liked to pick their brains and even videotaped one teacher's guided reading sessions so that she could learn more. These experiences, along with being a mother, helped Mary to understand the importance of fostering a safe, positive, supportive learning environment, an element Mary considered integral to the kind of reading teacher she has become.

It's incredibly important—when I teach I feel that I am providing a comfortable, safe environment in here—I want every one of these 25 characters, as different as they are, to be able to take a risk in this classroom and have no fear that they will be laughed at, judged, that they will make a mistake we can't all learn from. And I think that's more maternal than academic. I think a lot of being a mom and a caregiver, so to speak, because I know great teachers who don't have children. I think there's another piece to that puzzle; that means you still care, you're not just spouting the learning. I think hopefully I'm touching them somehow to make them feel they can. Nobody makes more mistakes than I do in this

classroom. I have a very lighthearted, hopeful atmosphere. (Interview, 04/28/05)

Influence of Coursework

Mary also attributed many of her skills to Middlewestern State University's coursework, her professors, and the structured clinical experiences. Several times during the course of our meetings, Mary referred affectionately to two particular professors: Dr. Jung, her children's literature professor, and Dr. Richards, her language arts methods professor. Mary described the impact of these two faculty members:

Mary: ...it's a gift of being at Middlewestern State and practicing, and I'll tell you, my biggest influence was Professor Jung and Professor Richards, my two heroes. I've always adored Professor Richards because she knew soccer moms and she was reality to me. And I thought, you make me feel like I can do this, at my age, with my crazy life. And Dr. Jung, man, I loved that man!

Researcher: Passionate about literature, wasn't he? I miss him.

Mary: Oh, I adored that man! And what a sense of humor. And terrified people half my age. And that was the beauty of him. (Interview, 04/28/05)

In her classroom, Mary often applied skills she gained from her courses with Jung and Richards. Both the stimulated recall sessions and modified stimulated recall sessions included many instances of Mary citing her coursework as the influence on a particular practice. For example, Mary cited Richards as the source of

her initial awareness of guided reading (Interview, 05/12/05). Mary's third stimulated recall session focused on a videotaped lesson about nonfiction reading that included both a KWL chart and a 4-Square (clarified writing) method, and her second modified stimulated recall session included a discussion of a journal writing lesson. Mary stated that she learned of both KWL charts and 4-Square writing methods from Dr. Richards, stating, "Dr. Richards, Dr. Richards, Dr. Richards. All my guided reading, all my strategies, all my everything is all Dr. Richards," later adding, "She is my hero" (Interview, 04/06/06). Mary attributed her use of journal writing to several influences, including Dr. Richards and Dr. Davis, both of whom had emphasized the reading/writing connection in their courses.

An additional component of the third stimulated recall lesson was buddy reading. Buddy reading itself was not a main focus in Mary's classes; however, Mary noted that the benefits of flexible grouping were emphasized in her language arts coursework with Dr. Richards.

Influence of Clinical Experiences and Student Teaching

Mary had established a strong rapport with the teachers and administrators at Littletown Elementary long before she was hired to teach there. In addition to completing her first clinical experience at Littletown Elementary, Mary also volunteered as a room mother at Littletown each year. These experiences helped Mary to know the teachers and learn how the school worked.

Mary's second professional clinical experience and her semester of student teaching were held in the same setting, a classroom in one of the districts with which Middlewestern State had established a partnership program. As part of this partnership, during her second clinical Mary underwent extra hours of clinical experience and completed extra projects. Mary enjoyed experiencing the partnership and described the benefits of the partnership program:

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. (Interview, 04/28/05)

It appears that Mary perceived that the power of learning how to teach, as well as having an opportunity to apply that knowledge, was a positive influence on her first year of teaching.

Mary's student teaching experience was positive and productive. She had the chance to complete her student teaching semester with her second professional semester cooperating teacher. Two of the strongest aspects of this experience were Mary's relationship with her cooperating teacher and, because she was there two semesters in a row, the opportunity "to spend a full day in a classroom, an entire full day to see how a classroom runs" (Interview, 04/23/05). Over the course of our interviews, Mary often held up Mrs. Majors, her cooperating teacher during her

second professional clinical experience and her student teaching experience, as an exemplary role model.

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. (Interview, 04/23/05)

The influence of her student teaching experience could be seen during two of Mary's three stimulated recall sessions, which took place in her first-grade classroom during the last month of her second year of teaching. In the first videotaped lesson, Mary conducted a picture walk. Mary learned about picture walks from her cooperating teacher during her student teaching experience and later read more about picture walks on her own. In the second lesson, Mary held a guided reading session while the rest of her students worked in literacy centers. Mary explained that she observed and practiced guided reading while she was student teaching. As a result, Mary used guided reading every day and coordinated her lessons with the school's Title I teacher.

Of the four participants, Mary was the only one to be in her second year of teaching during our sessions. The first two lessons that Mary and I discussed during modified stimulated recall were from the first semester of her first year of teaching, and the third lesson was from the second semester of her second year of teaching. Mary's lessons were often multifaceted, with two or more different skills pinpointed in the same lesson; for example, the first lesson included an introduction of new vocabulary and a picture walk, followed by a lesson on sequencing and a guided reading session. During the modified stimulated recall sessions, Mary confirmed her earlier explanation that she had learned to do the picture walk and guided reading during student teaching.

Influence of New Teacher Induction and Mentor Teachers

When Mary was hired to teach at Littleton, the district assigned a good friend of Mary's, Clarissa, to be Mary's mentor. Mary's relationship with Clarissa was invaluable. In addition to providing friendship and support, Clarissa taught Mary many of the small things about teaching, the things one must know in order for the school day and school year to run smoothly.

It was all the little things I didn't know. The details—the details you don't learn in student teaching because you don't have ownership of the classroom. The details like before conferences, you might want to set this up and have files ready. And details like, with the holidays coming, you might want to prepare this. Things like how to have parent helpers—the little tiny mechanics that make things hum along in the

machinery, you know? The details that you don't learn in a clinical, you don't learn in a classroom, you really don't even learn in student teaching because it's not yours. The details that keep you from falling apart because you have no back up—that kind of stuff. Because you know that she can do with her eyes closed...But she and I had a year, side by side, things from how to run the copy machine to how to send home parent notes for parent/teacher conferences. (Interview, 04/23/05)

Influence of Professional Development

Mary was a firm believer in seizing every opportunity to improve her teaching skills. She constantly looked for new ideas, enjoyed attending district inservice programs, and often read several books at once. In her first two years of teaching, Mary attended six different seminars. One of her favorite inservice experiences was with guest speaker Debbie Miller, author of *Reading With Meaning* (2002). Miller's presentation inspired Mary to look at herself as a reader, and reinforced Mary's belief that we must work harder to foster young children's love of reading (Interview, 04/23/05; Interview, 04/06/06).

Influence of Materials

Mary utilized the district-adopted basal reading series and supplemented it with a wide variety of trade books. In her first year of teaching, Mary viewed the reading series as a handy tool to guide her in the introduction of vocabulary and word wall words. As her confidence in her own skills and judgment developed over time, however, Mary soon realized that she felt limited by the district's mandated

use of the series and its unit assessments, so she learned to do whatever she could to enhance the lessons and stories available in the series. In addition to the series' prepared overhead transparencies to supplement each lesson, Mary created her own word family magnetic strips and word wall words. One positive aspect of the reading series for Mary was the convenience of having a resource room in her school filled with leveled books that she and the other teachers used in their guided reading sessions.

Another source for scripted lessons was Heggerty's *Phonemic Awareness: The Skills That They Need to Help Them Succeed!* (2003). Like Lynette, Mary incorporated Heggerty's mini-lessons, chants, and drills into her daily routines.

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)

As Mary taught her first graders how to read, she kept in mind their future assessments. In third grade, her students would take the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test* reading assessment, and this, almost eighteen months in advance, worried Mary. Mary read aloud to her students twice a day. These read-alouds served as rich text experiences that helped to build the students' comprehension skills that Mary hoped would prepare her students for the ISAT. Mary explained the value of reading aloud to her students: because it helped them to understand that the purpose of reading is to understand, not just to be able to sound out words.

But this is for them, this is for their benefit because they're really only a year and a half away from an

ISAT test where they're going to have to learn how to read and comprehend. And I don't want them to think that reading is only so you know what that word means. (Interview, 05/09/05)

During one of the stimulated recall sessions, Mary taught a lesson on non-fiction writing and noted that her choice of these methods was in response to the demands of the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test* and that she wanted her students to be prepared.

Another way that Mary's awareness of the ISAT requirements had influenced her teaching was evident in her focus on nonfiction literature and resources in both her lessons and her learning centers. Mary often took time to reinforce her students' understanding of how to determine which words, such as words in bold, for example, are important in a text. Mary also created a learning center dedicated to dictionary skills. Students working in the dictionary skills center might be locating guidewords, identifying definitions, or reading how the spelling words are used in sentences in the dictionary.

Influence of Inservice Experience

While Mary valued her skills as a reading teacher, she was also aware that she was "constantly improving"; that is, she was always willing to try a new method or lesson. On many occasions, Mary's response to questions about where or how she learned to use a specific strategy or why she made a particular decision came in the form of a reference to the ongoing education she received as a classroom

teacher. Regardless of whether the question was about scaffolding instruction, helping students visualize to make connections, or allowing sufficient wait time, the theme of Mary's response was often the same: she learned it from "the kids" or working with "the kids" or knowing her students as "25 little individuals" (Interview, 04/06/06).

Self-Directed Learning

Mary took time at the end of each day to reflect on the day's events. She maintained anecdotal records at the bottom of her daily lessons (as noted during the modified stimulated recall) and made comments to remind herself what did and did not work in her lessons. While Mary first learned the value of such reflection at Middlewestern State, she took the concept of reflection and made it her own pedagogical tool.

I have anecdotal records that I keep at home in my office, which is the only time I get to it. I don't do it here. I'll actually sit in my office at the end of every day and I'll double-check my web site and all these things and I will make notes on everything. I make notes on my students...I will make notes, refer to this, and I will put it in at the end of the week with my lesson plan for the whole. There were things that didn't go well and I don't ever want to go back to and there were things that were fabulous and there were also things that were the biggest surprise. I know I won't recall all of that. That's what I do every day – sit at home and go over what I did and what I'll do tomorrow. (Interview, 05/09/05)

The third lesson that Mary and I discussed during modified stimulated recall came from her second year of teaching and was a phonics lesson on word families. While the vocabulary was dictated by the reading series, Mary created her own phonics activities utilizing magnetic strips and visual aids. She explained that it was also her idea to take time to loop back to the concept of sequencing again on this date and that the reading series did not tend to spiral or loop back to revisit skills.

As Mary worked both in school and on her own to develop her teaching skills, she often went out of her way to observe exemplary educators, work with children, and learn more about teaching; in fact, Mary even gained permission to videotape the teacher for whom she was a room mother. When she wished to utilize word walls in her classroom, Mary learned on her own how to introduce and practice the word wall words.

Perceptions of Teaching Abilities

Mary estimated that some of her strongest teaching skills are in the area of reading instruction. She attributed these skills to both her insights and her strong repertoire, or “toolbox,” of teaching strategies.

Teaching reading, maybe because I think with reading you have so many choices, you have so many different ways. You have so many options. I can reinforce the same idea over and over in about ten different ways. You can use different strategies. I can take my higher level learners and I can let them go a little on their own and they can turn a simple book into a research project. I can take these guided

reading books and put a couple of them together and have them do a literature discussion. Each one will be affected differently by that. (Interview, 04/28/05)

Summary

Mary's commitment to her students was evident in all of her comments, teaching practices, and time invested outside of the actual school day. Her classroom was structured to immerse her students in literacy and to support them with a positive, productive, and safe learning environment. Mary's perceptions indicated that her university coursework, student teaching experience, and self-directed learning were the strongest influences on her practices.

Delilah

Influence of Outside Experiences

Delilah cited a variety of reasons for entering the field of education. She had a lifelong love of learning and always had the desire to share her learning with others. Delilah explained that the best way to share her learning was with children. She was not sure just when her vision of becoming a teacher became clear; however, she recognized that teaching was simply something that came naturally to her. Delilah also recognized the value of her maturity and explained her desire to share her knowledge in terms of Erikson's (1964) stages of development:

I think at my age, I'm at that Erikson age where I want to give back to the community... You get to that stage in life where you want to give back to the community and you want to do something for the community, you want to be something. You don't want to just take anymore. (Interview, 01/09/06)

Another influential experience was the time Delilah spent volunteering for her daughter's language arts teacher. In this accelerated eighth-grade class, Delilah had the chance to observe the teacher and work one-on-one with students. I asked Delilah to describe the value of working with this teacher.

Delilah: Everything, she's just a really great teacher, she has a great persona with the students, and she's receptive...my daughter could probably be exempt from college freshman and sophomore classes. She was respectful to me in that she thought I could handle it.

Researcher: So she empowered you?

Delilah: Yeah.

Researcher: And she's a role model, would you say?

Delilah: Yeah, oh, that's what I mean. Her emphasis is not on the test but on actual work, portfolio style.

Researcher: Process, not just product?

Delilah: Yes, but she produces. So I have a lot of respect for her.

Researcher: Do you still see her?

Delilah: I do, but not as much because I'm busy.
(Interview, 01/09/06)

Delilah understood that her age and life experiences have contributed to her perceptions of herself as a teacher. Additionally, she tended to utilize the myriad pedagogical best practices she saw modeled by her daughter's teacher.

Influence of Coursework

Delilah did not hesitate to credit many of her instructors at Middlewestern State as a large part of how she had become the reading teacher she is today. In particular, Delilah cited Dr. James, her first professional semester reading methods professor; myself, her second professional semester reading methods professor; Dr. Royals, her science methods professor; Dr. Roberts, her language arts methods professor; Dr. Rivers, her physical education methods professor; and Dr. August, her clinical supervisor. Dr. James provided Delilah with an understanding of the foundations of reading instruction and created opportunities for Delilah to apply such knowledge. For example, even though she was now teaching fourth graders Delilah still described the value of completing a language experience approach activity that involved working one-on-one with a primary-grade student to create a book written in the student's own words. This language experience activity provided Delilah with the opportunity to recognize how powerful it is for students to see their own words in print and to more fully understand the reading and writing connection.

Because she was not hired until October 2005 and her students had all begun their fourth-grade school years with other teachers, in January 2006 Delilah and the

students had only been together for four months. Delilah's stimulated recall sessions took place in her fourth-grade classroom in the fourth month of her first year of teaching.

Delilah's first videotaped lesson was an introduction to the fantasy genre. Delilah utilized a quick write as her anticipatory set, followed by a series of questions designed to lead her students to think inductively to figure out the nature of the genre. Delilah explained that she learned the value of anticipatory sets in her elementary education coursework and described her questioning techniques as part of an attempt to foster learning by shaking up the students' equilibrium, a concept she learned in her educational psychology course.

The second stimulated recall lesson involved a lesson using an extended anticipatory set, a concept Delilah said that she learned during her methods courses. In this lesson, Delilah gave several book talks on books about New York City and then allowed her students time to move about the room to experience the stations she had set up utilizing these books. The whole point of the lesson was to pique the students' excitement about the upcoming novel unit on *A Cricket in Times Square* (Selden, 1960). Delilah learned how to do book talks in her children's literature course.

During the third modified stimulated recall lesson, the discussion revolved around a word sort lesson. Delilah explained that in my reading course, she had learned all about using word sorts to enhance comprehension and had used this knowledge to implement a word sort to introduce students to the vocabulary in a nonfiction piece about Komodo dragons.

Influence of Clinical Experiences and Student Teaching

Delilah completed her first professional semester clinical experience in a fourth-grade class, her second clinical experience in an eighth-grade language arts class, and her student teaching experience in a fifth-grade class. The sum of these experiences garnered mixed reviews from Delilah. Delilah commented that the cooperating teacher in her first experience gave her the best support and opportunities to teach and learn. The most valuable aspects of that experience were learning about management of the classroom and interaction between teacher and students, especially how the teacher treated the students and how they reacted.

The second clinical experience in the eighth-grade language arts class was a source of frustration for Delilah. This site was actually her second placement during her second professional semester; the cooperating teacher in the first site did not allow Delilah to do what she needed to do to complete her course assignments. While the eighth-grade teacher was more willing to allow Delilah to complete her assignments, he also seemed to Delilah to be unwilling to allow her to take responsibility in the classroom. Delilah explained,

Delilah: 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.

Researcher: Did you grade papers or anything?

Delilah: No, no! 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. I know he gave the students jobs so he wanted them to pass out the papers, but I wanted to pass them out! I'm an overachiever! This does not help me by putting me to sit somewhere. When I was not teaching, I was sitting. Then when I had an opportunity, I would try to go out and do a lesson in another room or with another teacher. (Interview, 01/06/06)

Delilah's 16-week student teaching experience took place in an urban fifth-grade class. While Delilah acknowledged some value in the experience because she learned about classroom management, monitoring student learning, and a pre-reading teaching strategy involving a plot graphic organizer, overall she was unable to attribute very much positive learning to this experience. Her cooperating teacher never left the room, and Delilah was never allowed to teach a full school day.

Additionally, Delilah was uncomfortable with her cooperating teacher's style of communication.

Delilah: 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.

Researcher: Things that we [university instructors] had identified as best practice, when you got there she didn't like the idea?

Delilah: I don't know if she didn't like it or if she just had that facial expression and then I took it and got all

upset about it and the literacy teacher would come in and do exactly the same lesson – or type of lesson. And I would be like, what’s wrong? ...The relationship I had with her was tainted so anything that she said to me came across, because she was always making that face, ‘what did you do that for?’ and she would like curl up her nose and kind of crook her mouth and get that curved expression of her head and it would make me feel like I was doing things that were stupid. (Interview, 01-09-06)

While the majority of her recollections about student teaching were in this same negative vein, Delilah did describe one or two positive outcomes of the experience. Delilah noted that she began to learn about children and movement from her student teaching cooperating teacher and that later in the semester she planned to attend a related workshop on the value of kinesthetic learning for diverse learners. Additionally, in the third stimulated recall session Delilah taught a lesson on summarization by using what I recognized as a plot /concept relationships chart (Johns & Berglund, 2002). This chart served as a graphic organizer to assist students in summarizing with four columns: “Somebody... wanted...but...so...” Delilah did not recognize the term I used for the chart, but explained that she learned about this chart from her cooperating teacher during her student teaching experience.

Influence of New Teacher Induction and Mentor Teachers

Like Lynette, Delilah did not have a mentor teacher assigned to her by the school district. Although Delilah sorely felt she needed the guidance of a mentor

teacher during her abrupt, late entry to her first year of teaching at Cross Creek Elementary, she had none.

I do not have a mentor and the reason why is because I'm a late hire. In order to be in the mentor program, you have to start when the school year starts. How's that? ...but we give all the people who start at the beginning of the year assistance. It's the craziest thing to do. I would be the one that would need the mentor the most because I started late. And all my students come from different classrooms. They were pulled seven from one, seven from one, so they were all at different levels and all the parents – it was just like, yeah. I have so many opinions on that and I'm just biting my tongue... (Interview, 01/10/06)

While Delilah's classroom was on the first floor, the other fourth-grade teachers at Cross Creek were located on the second floor. Although she felt somewhat isolated, Delilah still managed to eat lunch and chat with her grade team each day. Additionally, during one of my visits, a fourth-grade teacher stopped by to inform Delilah of an upcoming event for which she knew Delilah would need to be ready. Later in the interview during our discussion of what has helped her to become the reading teacher she is today, Delilah noted that her fourth-grade team was "wonderful," and that, unlike the detached nature of the district as a whole, she could go to them for anything (Interview, 01-09-06).

Influence of Professional Development

In addition to missing the support of an assigned mentor, Delilah also had few opportunities for inservice training. Delilah attended some mandatory workshops; however, the content of the workshops did not meet Delilah's needs.

Delilah: We did an adoption one, for children that were adopted, it was an inservice day. We had a guest speaker for ADD and ADHD. Those are the only two things we've done. I would sum that [first workshop] up with, are you aware that if you use the word *adopt*, you might strike a few chords? You could have sent a memo...It was a waste of my time.

Researcher: How about the ADD/ADHD workshop or both in terms of how it was presented?

Delilah: It was a power point and the bottom of the power point was cut off. And all she did was stand there and read the power point. We're all teachers going, where's the interaction here? Do you have a copy of this to read along with? No, I don't have any copies. What? How can you not give somebody a handout? You've got to give somebody something. (Interview, 01/10/06)

Influence of Materials

Delilah did not rely on the structured scope and sequence of published school reading series; rather, she was more comfortable with her ability to choose the sorts of texts and lessons to incorporate into her reading and language arts curriculum. While the district did utilize a specific reading series, this series did not appear to be a strong influence on any of Delilah's pedagogical decisions. The only time Delilah spoke of the reading series was to explain to me why she had chosen a

certain story to read with her students. Once she described the story, however, Delilah went on to explain to me how she made subsequent decisions after she realized the skills students would need to have in order to understand that story. So in essence, Delilah worked around the series, not with it. For example, Delilah saw that folk tales were coming up next in the reading series, so she took the opportunity to add lessons on the characteristics of folk tales and tall tales, as well as refreshing her students' understanding of the main genres in literature. Delilah's level of self-direction will be revisited later in this chapter.

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)

As was the case with both Lynette and Mary, Delilah also stated that her greatest concern as a new teacher was her worry about whether her students would pass the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test* the following year. She was troubled that the content of the ISAT did not reflect the way the curriculum is set up; for example, when her students took the assessment in fifth grade, their ISAT scores would reflect on her, their fourth-grade teacher.

I worry about that every day, and I want them to do well on their ISATs. I want them to reflect well on me. These kids are going to be really confused—the stuff they're going to be tested on is stuff they learned in fourth grade. (Interview, 01/10/06)

Delilah sometimes based her instructional decisions on what she believed her students would need to know for the ISATs. For example, she made a concerted effort to teach and review genres of literature because she felt her students would need to know the concept and definitions.

Influence of Inservice Experience

Following a rather unhappy student teaching experience and then graduation from Middlewestern State University, Delilah worked as a substitute teacher. Delilah attributed her experiences as a substitute teacher as the saving grace that helped her to regain her confidence after student teaching and explained that she enjoyed being wanted and respected by teachers and felt comfortable running others' classrooms.

I was very sought after—regular teachers would call me up and ask me if I would sub. Great feeling after student teaching and feeling like a complete failure...I was blind-sided by it, I didn't expect it. It was a huge shock for me, hard on my little ego...Subbing gave me back all that confidence, I subbed a lot in the middle school. Discipline, the students were always respectful to me. They really enjoyed having me in the classroom and I had a lot of fun with the material. Some of the subs would allow me to just do my own lesson in there. (Interview, 01/09/06)

The time spent substitute teaching was a time of healing and growth for Delilah. Once she experienced a supportive working environment and was given the

chance to utilize her skills, her sense of self-efficacy was enhanced and reinforced.

Delilah placed great value in her professional experiences. Along with the skills she acquired and honed during her undergraduate experiences, volunteering, and substitute teaching, Delilah noticed that her skills had increased by “leaps and bounds” during her first four months as a classroom teacher. Delilah also developed many classroom organization techniques from her experiences with her students; for example, she rehearsed instructions with her students.

Delilah: I learned to do that from the students; they taught me that.

Researcher: How so?

Delilah: Because they don't put names on their papers.

Researcher: So it was out of necessity?

Delilah: Out of necessity, so then, instead of getting a bunch of papers that don't have their names on them, I have to say, it was the same thing with the star, I think we did the star. Were you here when I had them switch papers with your neighbor and if there's a name on it, put a star on it? It's the same kind of thing where I have to try to monitor them and make sure that they're doing what they're supposed to do because a lot of them are real bright, they're a real bright group, but a lot of them need to have everything handed to them. Step-by-step, giving them directions. (Interview, 02/01/06)

Self-Directed Learning

In addition to her coursework-based learning, Delilah also made it a point to research on her own whenever she wished to know more about a topic.

I would say that my education at Middlewestern State is definitely not lacking. And anything that I didn't feel like I was learning, in addition to that, like I said, I'm a research-crazy person. I wanted to know everything that I could. Obviously there's journals, like the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. And I'm constantly reading that and going on the Internet trying to find ways to teach for kids.
(Interview, 01/06/06)

Like Mary and Lynette, Delilah took it upon herself to supplement and complement her education with personal reflection and additional resources. Delilah called herself a "research-crazy person." She subscribed to professional educational journals, intentionally learned from her students about such methods as checking for comprehension, and researched online when she needed to know more about such subjects as subgenres. Delilah believed it was best to have as many tools in her repertoire as possible and did all she could to keep her toolbox current. In the second stimulated recall session, Delilah taught a mini-lesson on the possible strategies one may use when encountering an unknown word titled, "Help! I am stuck on a word and I'm afraid to move on, what should I do?" Delilah's poster named and described several problem-solving techniques the students could use. While I called these techniques *strategies*, Delilah did not. She created this poster in

response to the myriad decoding and comprehension problems her students were coming upon in their reading. Delilah did not attribute any of the poster ideas to any resource other than her own ideas.

Regardless of the outside influence, Delilah always added an extra step to make whatever tool she was using more appropriate for her students. Many of Delilah's lessons embodied the level of self-direction and competence in understanding the needs of her students that I observed throughout our sessions. Although she had learned of the mystery genre in her children's literature course and knew from student teaching the importance of introducing vocabulary, Delilah's first videotaped lesson, an introduction to the vocabulary found in the mystery genre, was centered on a chart that she created.

Perceptions of Teaching Abilities

Delilah understood that her level of awareness of her teaching abilities was developing at the same rate as the abilities themselves. Because of this, she noted that in early fall she may have expressed a level of confidence similar to the one she expressed four months later.

Although I felt like I was a good teacher, if you would have asked me in September, do you think you are a good teacher, I would say yes. Are your lessons good? Yes, my lessons are great, come in and watch my lessons. I'm more than happy to have you do it. But for that level of awareness that I had to my ability, I thought I was doing a good job. But now, my

awareness to my ability is more now, but I couldn't see that then. (Interview, 02/01/06)

Delilah's perceptions of her teaching skills were influenced by her growing awareness of the task at hand. As her experiences increased her skill level and repertoire, so too did they increase her expectations and understanding of just what was required.

Summary

On more than one occasion, Delilah commented that she wanted to teach middle school; however, she also told me that she felt comfortable teaching a self-contained fourth-grade class and enjoyed teaching the span of subject areas. Delilah described her level of compassion as her strongest teaching trait. She noted that she really cared about all her students' "little psyches," described herself as student-centered, and knew her students well. This student-centered compassion was apparent during each of my visits to the classroom as well as during the course of our interviews. Often referring to her students by name, Delilah affectionately pointed out students' idiosyncrasies. She frequently expressed concerns about meeting her students' needs and described in detail the levels of ability of many of her students.

Delilah had access to a variety of resources that influenced her daily classroom reading methods and decisions. Her influences included elementary education coursework, the ideas of her cooperating teacher, and her self-direction.

Veronica

Influence of Outside Experiences

Veronica's desire to teach began at an early age. One of the most powerful influences on this desire was that of Veronica's first-grade, and favorite, teacher.

Veronica described the nature of this impact:

She always pushed me to do things; like when we had different things, poetry contests, she always wanted me to enter them. It wasn't that I had a choice, I always had to. When I went to second grade I would always come to her room after school and she would have me help her grade papers and she gave me a stack of work to do over the summer – actual work in worksheets – and she said if you want to do this, because I just always wanted to be a teacher and I would always make my friends do the worksheets as a student. (Interview, 01/05/06)

In addition to the impact of her first-grade teacher, Veronica also enjoyed several influential, structured experiences via her involvement with the Golden Apple Scholar Program (<http://www.goldenapple.org/scholars.htm>). Following her graduation from high school, Veronica was a Golden Apple Scholar. Normally rather reserved in her answers, Veronica spoke enthusiastically as she explained the importance of the Golden Apple program. In her first four summers following high school graduation, Veronica attended the Golden Apple program. Each summer held a different focus. The students were required to work in residential summer camps. They lived on nearby university campuses, attended seminars on campus, and had

the opportunity to observe and work in elementary and secondary public school summer programs. These experiences enabled Veronica to work closely with students of all ages and enhance her college experiences. Veronica noted that for her the most useful parts of the program were learning what she did not want to teach (kindergarten) and having to actually stand in front of the class and teach a lesson.

...it was the first time of getting up there and doing a lesson and doing a lesson plan, and in this district their lesson plans are really...all the standards, plans you have to do. When she showed me that with my first lesson, I was really nervous. My lesson plan, I thought it was going to last like thirty minutes, it only lasted like ten minutes! And so I was up there and I was teaching and I was just really nervous. The next one I taught was better, so it kind of got me ready. I knew I didn't want to do that, I didn't want to teach high school; it got me out there in front of the classroom actually teaching. (Interview, 01/05/06)

These Golden Apple experiences provided Veronica with important background knowledge that enhanced her desire to become a teacher and helped her to recognize her teaching preferences.

In addition to the Golden Apple program, Veronica also enjoyed volunteering for her cousins' grade school. In her cousins' kindergarten and first-grade classrooms, Veronica helped with holiday projects, graded folders, went on field trips, and worked one-on-one with students. As with the Golden Apple experiences, these volunteering episodes afforded Veronica glimpses of how classrooms work and the myriad student personalities she would be dealing with.

...it [the volunteering experiences] helped me see the atmosphere of the student, the different students I would have to deal with, well, the challenging students I knew I would eventually have to deal with, seeing teachers work with that. (Interview, 04/19/06)

Finally, during the months between her December graduation and her new position at Paine, Veronica worked as a daycare teacher. Veronica contrasted the value of this outside experience with that of the Golden Apple Program:

With the Golden Apple, just being in the classroom before I even had any college courses, kind of gave me an idea of what it's going to be like as a teacher. Do I really want to do this? Is this what I really want to do? I think that's why they do it to see if this is what you really want to do. And also what they do, the first summer they let you get your first choice, the second summer, you get, if you had elementary, you get high school. That way you can decide, do I really want to teach elementary or do I want to teach high school? It kind of gave me a chance to look at it from both sides of the fields of education. Working at the daycare, it let me see when I go back, do I want to go back for an early childhood degree or do I want to continue on with elementary ed? I liked the setting of the daycare, but to me it wasn't structured enough, especially being in a classroom. I felt more like a babysitter, rather than being a teacher. So I just like having my own classroom and the structure. And the daycare, it was fine, but it just wasn't structured enough. (Interview, 01/05/06)

Just as the Golden Apple experiences helped Veronica to understand her preferences, the daycare position helped her recognize that she desired more fulfillment as an educator than she experienced teaching at the daycare.

Like with Lynette, Lortie's concept of "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) was evident when I asked Veronica of whom her teaching practices reminded her. Unlike Lynette, however, Veronica has positive memories of her childhood experiences and often found herself replicating those experiences in her own teaching practices.

It reminds me a little bit – well, not anyone that I know, but just how we do it, it kind of reminds me a little bit when I was younger and we had guided reading. We would get with our group and read a story and you kind of do that, I guess it's called the round robin reading where each person takes a turn... I kind of still do the round robin in a sense, but in class we kind of talked about it... To me it seems like I talk about it a little more than what I remember talking about it when I was younger. (Interview, 01/05/06)

By adding the element of discussion to her classroom routine, Veronica took the memories of how she was taught and expanded them to reflect what she had learned in her university coursework.

Influence of Coursework

Unlike the other three participants, Veronica rarely referred to her Middlewestern State University coursework during our interviews. In fact, one of the few times the topic came up was in response to my request for Veronica's advice for undergraduates.

When they're in their reading classes, they need to actually try to learn and listen, don't do it just for that grade. I think that was my mistake. I was such a good student! I came to class and everything and I listened, but to me it was just like, when I was in college, I can wait till I graduate and just get my own classroom. And with reading, I like to read to students and I thought it was most about just being able to read and the whole round robin thing. I didn't even think about learning centers... so, just for them to listen and try to learn and bring as much as they can from class until they get into the classroom... And it was just like you knew it then and if you're just trying to learn it just for the class and then later on you do another class the next semester you may forget it, but try to read up on it and really try to learn for reading. Reading is down with kids, so that's something you really need to focus on. (Interview, 01/05/06)

One of the books Veronica remembered as valuable from her coursework and recommended that undergraduates hold on to is Cunningham's *Phonics They Use* (2000).

Those books have a lot of different word wall things we used to do. And I do have a word wall in my classroom. I didn't think I was going to have a word

wall, but from those books, they are very helpful. So I would say, keep the books, don't try to get your money back, because later on sometimes you end up buying the book back once you become a teacher to find the different things that you can do with the kids with reading. (Interview, 01/05/06)

In addition to using word walls, other techniques or knowledge that Veronica attributed to her university coursework included encouraging students to predict before reading and the value of seizing teachable moments.

Influence of Clinical Experiences and Student Teaching

Veronica's first and second professional semester clinical experiences both were positive, valuable contributions to her growth as an educator. The best part of the first experience for Veronica was seeing how well the cooperating teacher dealt with such a large class, especially since it was in third grade, a grade level that Veronica preferred.

There were 31 kids in the class but the teacher handled it well. I think it was good for me to see that some classrooms are bigger than others and just having that many kids in a classroom, I didn't feel overwhelmed. She never seemed to be overwhelmed with it. So if I ever have to be in a classroom that size, I don't think it will be too overwhelming for me, I'll have a little experience with it. (Interview, 01/05/06)

For her second professional experience, Veronica was placed in a sixth-grade classroom in an elementary school. While she had some concerns about

having to teach such an older group, Veronica still found the experience worthwhile. Unlike the twice-weekly, six-week format of the first experience, the second clinical experience ran for three consecutive weeks. Veronica perceived that she had many more opportunities in the second experience to actually teach the class. She also enjoyed having a chance to teach her favorite subject, math.

I have a minor in math and that's like my favorite subject to teach, so for me it 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. (Interview, 01/05/06)

The opportunity to teach math was what made Veronica's second experience her favorite of the two.

I think with the second clinical, because I had to do more, I had to see exactly what I wanted to do because I do like math and I do have an endorsement in math and social science and language arts. I always said I liked to teach math, but I never really had a chance to ever teach math in a classroom so that was my first time really getting a chance to teach and only teaching math. And it showed me if I ever went to middle school, that's what I'll want to teach, teach math. (Interview, 01/05/06)

In her second experience, Veronica discovered that her preference for math held true in the face of the rigors of middle-school instruction. Despite the change in age level, she still maintained that math was her favorite subject to teach.

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:

Veronica: 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 overwhelming because I had done it before.

Researcher: That's right, because you had two falls?

Veronica: I think that's the best semester to student teach because you come in with the kids, the kids know you as their teacher as well as the teacher in the classroom, so you're not being just a student teacher and you don't really have to feel like you're coming into someone else's classroom. (Interview, 01/05/06)

During her sixteen weeks of student teaching, Veronica benefited from the guidance and support of a cooperating teacher who understood her need for a gradual transfer of responsibility. This teacher was a role model who believed in scaffolding to help Veronica become acclimated to her classroom.

I liked the way she did it because usually teachers – when you student teach, I hear about teachers saying, 'Okay, here's the lesson plan book, here's the books, there you go.' But with her, she showed me how she taught everything...she would say, "What do you want to teach? I'm going to give you a subject and you teach this every day and then I'm going to slowly move you on into other subjects." So I told her math and after two or three weeks I was teaching math and

then I started teaching writing and then language arts and guided reading and social studies until I was pretty much teaching all the subjects. She just slowly pushes you in where you get more and more comfortable with teaching rather than just being up there, halfway knowing what you're doing, constantly having to check with her, is this right or what do I need to teach? So that really helped me. (Interview, 01/05/06)

Additionally, Veronica learned from her student teaching experience methods related to guided reading, questioning, and vocabulary instruction, all of which she later utilized in her own classroom.

Veronica's comments regarding guided reading occurred during the first stimulated recall session. Veronica and Amy, the Title I reading teacher, were leading guided reading sessions. Veronica and Amy each met with a group of five or six students while the rest of the class worked either in centers or quietly at their desks. Veronica remembered participating in guided reading when she herself was in elementary school but said she did not learn any more about guided reading until she experienced it with her cooperating teacher while student teaching.

In the second stimulated recall session, Veronica led the students in a story retelling activity that utilized a large chart drawn on whiteboard and put up with magnets on the front board. Veronica explained that she first learned to utilize this sort of chart during her student teaching and that the following year all of the reading teachers in the school worked on story retelling in this manner.

Influence of New Teacher Induction and Mentor Teachers

Veronica began teaching at Paine Elementary in August 2005. With her prior experience in student teaching at Paine preparing her for how the school year began and with her former cooperating teacher right next door, Veronica felt that she was in a very good place. Having her cooperating teacher continue on as her mentor was, to Veronica, a supportive situation.

We still plan with each other. I still go next door to her for advice. She may come and ask me for things, do you have this? We have a meeting a month, each month, and there's really no duties. I think we just have to go to each other for advice and most of the mentors in the district is someone from your school, so you know, just for advice. And then we have different things like a book we have to read and we go and meet each month and talk to each other about what's going on. (Interview, 01/05/06)

In a later discussion of the above-mentioned book, Veronica admitted with a smile that she and her mentor were not actually reading and discussing the book together because her mentor had already read it the previous year, and Veronica had not had time. She noted, however, that after hearing the book's author, Charlotte Danielson, lecture on the topic of frameworks (Danielson, 1996) she would like to know more.

Veronica: It has been [useful] when we read with our mentoring group and actually crack the book open. She [mentor] actually did a mentoring before and had

already read the book. And so with this we haven't been reading this as much as we should have.

Researcher: Did you get any ideas from it?

Veronica: She [Charlotte Daniels] came and did a seminar on it and we looked at the book then. After hearing her presentation, it made me want to read the book and gave me different frameworks of what effective classrooms look like, what effective teaching looks like. Ways that you can move towards that. So if I read the book it would be helpful. (Interview 01/05/06; Interview, 04/19/06)

Influence of Professional Development

Veronica learned new ideas from her mentor teacher, Title I teacher, other colleagues, and guest speakers who attended their staff meetings. Two such ideas that Veronica gained from these encounters were using spelling boxes and introducing vocabulary before students read new passages.

In addition to the mentor/mentee book club Veronica participated in, she also attended staff development seminars provided by the district and her state professional association. Veronica noted in particular the value of the Illinois Education Association's seminar, titled, "I Can Do It" (Illinois Education Association, 2004). This seminar provided educators with classroom management tools and advice for those stressful first days of school. Other workshops Veronica attended included one on working with diverse students and one on 4-square writing. Both of these topics were important to Veronica; she had two students in her classroom who had recently moved to her town from other countries, and both

were English language learners. The 4-square writing seminar motivated Veronica to make more time for quality writing instruction.

Influence of Materials

Like many teachers with the same level of experience, Veronica relied heavily on the materials available in her school. She used the school's adopted reading series to teach reading and language arts and chose her leveled books for guided reading from the school's storeroom of leveled books. These leveled books also came with suggested questions for Veronica to ask. While she often went with those prepared questions, she was also likely to create her own higher level questions as well.

Veronica: Sometimes because you can go further, but a lot of the books don't have the questions that go with it, or they're just the basic questions.

Researcher: They don't do higher level stuff?

Veronica: Mmhmm, so if I do it that way, I can see how much they really understand the book and make them think a little more about it, and I usually get a lot more than I expect when I ask those questions.
(Interview, 04/19/06)

Veronica's descriptions of the sources for her lessons also indicated that she relied heavily on the materials already present in her classroom. The guided reading sessions were scripted, and Veronica utilized the leveled books found in the school's resource room. In the first modified stimulated recall session, Veronica

explained that the story retelling chart she used was a hand-me-down to her from another second-grade teacher. The second modified stimulated recall focused on a working-with-words lesson that came from the reading series.

Veronica's third stimulated recall session, which focused on a lesson involving alphabetizing, showed Veronica's reliance on published materials. Veronica taught this lesson in a very structured style with introductions, explanations, modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. The details of the lesson were described in the language arts portion of Veronica's reading series; however, she modified the lesson when she realized that the students would need more time and more scaffolding. The last modified stimulated recall session was on fact versus opinion and turned out to be a combination of what the teacher's manual suggested and what Veronica knew needed to be done to make the learning more attainable for her students. Veronica restructured the suggested lesson with more detailed explanations and modeling.

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)

As we were discussing the various workshops and seminars Veronica attended, she told me about another workshop she planned to attend that afternoon. This workshop addressed how to prepare students for the extended writing portion of the ISAT (Interview, 01/05/06). Other than this comment, Veronica never brought up the ISAT or any issues about preparing students for it. She did express

concerns about “relaying information” to her students, but never in the context of ISAT preparation.

Influence of Inservice Experience

Veronica worked closely with the Title I teacher, Amy. Amy came daily to Veronica’s class to hold guided reading sessions with some of Veronica’s students. Amy was influential in Veronica’s decision-making process and in her understanding of how to “do” guided reading. For example, Amy encouraged Veronica to follow her instincts but was also willing to offer suggestions. Also, Amy and Veronica assessed students together and worked together to set up learning centers in Veronica’s classroom.

Throughout our interviews, Veronica and I kept coming back to one specific skill that she had developed over the course of her first six months of teaching: knowing her students. In many instances when I asked Veronica how she knew or where she learned to use a certain technique or to respond to students in a certain way, her answer indicated that it was something she had figured out on her own by watching and listening to her students. For example, Veronica learned that her students had strong opinions about the physical arrangement of the room and after that made it a point to include them in her classroom design decisions. In another instance, Veronica allowed her students to digress from a retelling lesson so that they could debate with her about one of the character’s emotions. Veronica told me

that there had been a spontaneous debate earlier in the day as well when they were analyzing the quality of an expository essay:

Veronica: There's a point where they can argue with me about something.

Researcher: What did your other cooperative teachers think about arguing or talking with the students so much?

Veronica: My previous cooperating teacher, she would have just shut her down right there. She would tell her, 'I am not going to argue with you about this.' She would have said something like it's being disrespectful. So she would have shut her down. But I kind of give kids their options to talk a little more. Sometimes it gets to the point where I have to get on them about it, but I do give them the option to express their opinion or tell me how they feel about something. (Interview, 01/19/06)

This willingness to engage her students in constructive debates was a departure from the influences of Veronica's mentor teacher and indicated her growing self-efficacy.

Self-Directed Learning

Veronica held a practical view of teacher preparation and what she should know how to do. She indicated that any lack of knowledge she had was her responsibility to correct. One of the reasons that Veronica did not see any impediments in her university coursework and structured experiences was that she simply took the initiative to observe others when she did not know how to teach a

certain subject or a certain way. For example, when Veronica learned from Amy and other teachers that picture walks were helpful, she observed Amy to learn how to do them.

Perceptions of Teaching Abilities

As described earlier in this chapter, Veronica's favorite subject as both student and teacher was math. She completed a minor in math and enjoyed teaching math during her second professional semester clinical experience. While she felt competent to teach math across grade levels, she did not feel that same competence in teaching reading. Veronica's strongest concern about her teaching abilities was that she might not be able to "relay information" to her students, specifically information related to reading comprehension. Even if she felt sufficiently knowledgeable about the information she wished to impart, she worried that she would not have the skills to help the children understand that information.

Not being able to relay something to the students where I'm teaching what I know, but they don't know it. Not being able to reach them. Not just up there teaching and talking and basically sounding like the teacher, 'Waaa, waaa, waaa' (making the muted trumpet noise we hear in *Peanuts* cartoons) on Charlie Brown. (Interview, 01/05/06)

Veronica did not see this lack of pedagogical skill as an overwhelming, static situation; rather, she had taken many steps to rectify her perceived deficits. In

addition to working with her mentor teacher and the Title I teacher and attending relevant professional development seminars, Veronica also asked me to help her. We agreed that once my study was completed, I would work with her to help her increase the effectiveness of her guided reading sessions and to make her learning centers more manageable and more engaging for her students.

Summary

Despite her concerns about weak areas of instruction, Veronica still tended to follow her instincts the majority of the time she was teaching. For example, Veronica described the proportion of decisions based on the materials and lessons provided in the published reading series, compared to decisions she made to modify those materials or lessons, as a 40:60 ratio (Interview, 01/24/06). Despite this estimated proportion of reliance, however, Veronica's explanations of her lesson plans suggested a heavier reliance on the materials she had on hand. Veronica also demonstrated a tendency to modify the lessons and materials to help her students better understand the concepts and master the skills. The fact that she so often trusted her own judgment indicated that Veronica had begun to rely less on the published materials themselves and more on her understanding of ways to incorporate methods from her own repertoire while using the published materials.

Cross-Case Analysis

A cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was implemented to compare across participants the data gathered in the semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions, and modified stimulated recall sessions. This data was displayed in a partially ordered meta-matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994), shown in Appendix D. By comparing the data in this manner, the researcher was able to reduce the volume of data and synthesize the categories to identify patterns occurring across the participants' perceptions of the influences on their current reading instruction practices. Table 3 displays a summary of the results of the cross-case analysis.

Outside Experiences

Nurturing Role Models

Each of the participants credited a nurturing role model with positively influencing her development as a beginning classroom reading teacher. For two of the participants, the nurturing role model attributed with such influence was actually the participant herself in various care-taking contexts that involved children, both her own and others. The other two participants were mentored by nurturing role models, the participant's own mother in one case and the participant's first-grade teacher in the other. These role models provided the participants with a vision of a caring, effective, child-centered teacher they sought to emulate as they entered the

Table 3: Cross-Case Analysis of Perceptions of the Influences on the Practices of Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers: Clustered Summary Table (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Influence	Characteristics	Did Participants Perceive as Positive Influence (+) or as Impediment (-)?
Outside Experiences	a. Nurturing Role Models b. Personal Experiences c. Long-Term Commitment to Becoming a Teacher	a. All + b. All +; L - c. All +
University Coursework	a. Practical Ideas b. Specific Professors c. Theoretical Connections	a. All +; All - (guided reading) b. M, D, & V + c. All +
First and Second Professional Semester Clinical Experiences	a. How Schools Work b. Opportunities to Teach	a. All+; L, M, & D - b. All+; L, M, & D -
Student Teaching Experience	a. Strong Relationship with Cooperating Teacher b. How to Teach Reading c. Opportunity to Teach	a. L, M, & V +; D - b. All + c. L, M, & V+; D -
Mentor Teachers	a. Approachable Resources	a. All +
Inservice Experiences	a. Working with Students b. Administrative and Collegial Support	a. All + b. All +
Professional Development	a. Daily Practices	a. L, M, & V + L & D -
<i>Illinois Standards Achievement Test</i>	a. Influence on Instruction	a. L +; All -

Note: L=Lynette; M=Mary; D=Delilah; V=Veronica

teaching profession. The common thread that was present across all four participants was the positive impact of nurturing role models outside of the teacher preparation program.

For Mary and Delilah, they were their own nurturing role models. They were able to apply much of what they learned from their experiences as mothers of school-aged children to how they later understood and taught their own students. Because Lynette enjoys a close relationship with her mother, who is a teacher, Lynette has experienced a lifetime of support and an environment full of teachable moments that celebrated the joys of learning. For Veronica, her first-grade teacher played an integral role in her decision to become a teacher, first by pushing her to achieve at a young age and then later by serving as a mentor and role model.

The only impediment related to nurturing role models that was noted by any of the participants came from Lynette and may in fact have turned out to be a positive influence because of how Lynette responded to the experience. Lynette's third-grade teacher was verbally abusive to her and Lynette vowed never to be like her, stating, "She made me feel just horrible about how smart I was and I wasn't good enough, and I knew I didn't want to be that teacher" (Interview, 03/01/06).

Personal Experiences

Each of the participants described a number of personal experiences with children that extended beyond the structured preservice or inservice boundaries of traditional teacher preparation. Whether room mother or Confraternity of Christian

Doctrine (CCD) teacher, licensed home daycare provider or nanny, the participants' stories varied and yet all had a common thread; these experiences were all positive influences that helped the participants understand the needs of children.

Lynette worked as a nanny and in a childcare facility and volunteered in her mother's classroom. Mary attributed her ability to provide a supportive, positive learning environment to her experiences as a Brownie leader, CCD teacher, and daycare provider. While volunteering for her daughter's language arts teacher, Delilah observed methods of teaching and assessment that she would later use in her own classroom. Veronica remembered methods such as journaling and guided reading that she now uses in her classroom as ones that she first experienced as a student during her own primary school years. She also described the value of volunteering in her cousins' elementary school classrooms.

Long-Term Commitment to Becoming a Teacher

The self-direction displayed by each of the participants began early in their lives and manifested their commitment to becoming classroom teachers. For some it was a lifelong journey of learning and the desire to share what they had learned; for others, it was the influence of role models and special academic programs that led them to embark on an early entry into the field of education.

Lynette wrote her first lesson plan when she herself was only in eighth grade while volunteering in her mother's classroom. Mary sought out opportunities to work with children and teachers before she enrolled in the elementary education

program and always took special note of ways that she might use all that she learned later in her own classroom. Delilah described herself as a lifelong learner and loved to share her joy of learning with her family. As soon as she graduated from high school, Veronica began participating in the Golden Apple program and dedicated each of her college summers to the program because she wanted to get an early start on her teacher preparation.

Coursework

Practical Ideas

The participants each spoke of methods that they learned during their elementary education coursework at Middlewestern State University and explained the importance of such methods in their development as beginning classroom reading teachers. Each participant described specific practical ideas that became part of her daily reading instruction practices. The methods tended to be ones that were part of the participants' daily practices, for example, word walls, picture walks, and word sorts.

Lynette's use of word walls with her first- and third-grade students was influenced by her exposure to them during her reading methods courses, and she also noted that part of her literature-based instruction practice, specifically genre studies, was something she learned during the same courses. Mary often utilized flexible grouping with her students, made time to keep daily anecdotal records, and implemented picture walks when she introduced her students to new books, and she

attributed her use of these skills to the influence of her literacy education coursework. Delilah presented new vocabulary on Komodo dragons to her students with a word sort and often employed such teaching techniques as anticipatory sets and transitions in her lessons. Delilah explained that she learned in her second professional semester reading methods course to teach with word sorts and to utilize anticipatory sets and transitions in her lesson presentations. Veronica used a word wall in her daily reading instruction practices, utilized cooperative learning methods involving group work, and encouraged her guided reading groups to enhance their comprehension by making predictions before reading a story. In her literacy methods courses, Veronica learned about word walls and the value of predicting when reading. Additionally, Veronica learned during her coursework how to teach students to work in groups.

Specific Professors

Three of the four participants specifically attributed positive influences to certain university faculty. The faculty whom the participants described shared characteristics such as passion for teaching, strong content knowledge of theory and practice, and both the ability and desire to reach and motivate their students.

Lynette enjoyed her two courses with Mrs. Abbott so much that she made it a point to stay in touch with her after graduation. From Mrs. Abbott, Lynette learned the value of children's literature and still follows Abbott's example when she organizes her classroom library by genres. Over the course of the interviews in this

study Mary referred several times to Dr. Richards, her language arts professor, and commented on how much she valued Dr. Richards's knowledge, experience, and ability to connect with her. In particular, Dr. Richards introduced Mary to guided reading and anecdotal record keeping. Delilah often attributed methods she was using or knowledge she applied to the influence of Dr. James, Dr. Royals, Dr. Waters, and the researcher of this study. In particular, Delilah referred to her ability to transition smoothly from one subject to the next, her inclination to use word sorts, and her understanding of strategies for comprehending nonfiction texts as things she learned from these individuals. Unlike the other three participants, Veronica did not link any of her current practices to the influence of specific university faculty.

Practical Connections to Theories and Principles of Literacy Instruction

For three of the four participants, the university coursework was a great influence on their understanding of educational theories and principles of literacy instruction. As they discussed how they applied these theories and principles to their current practices, the participants remembered just where or from whom they first learned of them. At times, a theory or principle was attributed to the influence of a certain course, and at other times, the participants connected them with specific university faculty. According to Leu and Kinzer (2003), there are 12 principles of effective literacy instruction, as listed in Figure 3. Several of these principles were reflected in the daily instructional practices that the participants connected to their coursework.

Mary's practice of promoting the reading-writing connection in her classroom was influenced by her reading methods courses and reflects Leu and Kinzer's fifth principle. Additionally, she noted that in all of her coursework, the need for reflection after teaching was emphasized and modeled. Reflection is integral to Leu and Kinzer's first principle regarding the value of teachers' insights. Mary's understanding that reflection enhances and promotes good teaching was evident in her daily practice of reflecting on each day's lessons. Delilah learned

Figure 3: Twelve Principles of Effective Literacy Instruction

1. Teachers' insights are central to effective instruction.
2. Teach decoding skills.
3. Early literacy and home experiences are important.
4. Use exceptional works of literature and other text types.
5. Integrate reading and writing.
6. Vocabulary knowledge helps comprehension.
7. Teach reading comprehension.
8. Teach reading using different kinds of texts.
9. Good assessment strategies help teachers teach.
10. Meet individual needs, including children with special needs.
11. Organize your classroom to maximize learning.
12. Teach for children's literacy futures (Leu & Kinzer, 2003, p. 4)

about many teaching theories and principles in her coursework that she now applies in her current practices; in particular, she valued the idea of “shaking up” her students’ equilibrium to motivate them to learn, and she often utilizes multilevel or differentiated instruction. Delilah learned these ideas in her educational psychology and literacy education courses, and these practices are reflected in Leu and Kinzer’s first and tenth principles regarding insightful teachers and teaching to meet individual needs. Veronica identified her literacy education coursework as the influence on her understanding of the need to establish cross-curricular connections and to embrace teachable moments, practices that are reflected in Leu and Kinzer’s sixth and eleventh principles regarding increasing vocabulary knowledge and organizing classrooms to maximize learning. Lynette connected to her literacy education coursework her decision to specifically teach decoding skills, described in Leu and Kinzer’s second principle, and to use a variety of quality texts, described in Leu and Kinzer’s fourth and eighth principles.

Impediments

The only impediment of coursework noted by all four participants was the failure of the university coursework to provide them with instruction on how to implement guided reading instruction. Mary did hear of guided reading from Dr. Richards, but she did not learn how to implement it until she student taught. A second impediment was noted by Veronica and was related to her level of involvement with the reading methods courses. Veronica noted that although she

passed the courses without any problems she now knows that she did not pay enough attention or really listen to what was being taught. She advises preservice teachers to learn and listen in those courses and to bring as much effort and enthusiasm as they can to the courses. Lynette, too, noted a second impediment by commenting on the difficulty of retaining the child development theories she learned so early in her coursework. Lynette felt that when she began teaching first graders, she had no idea of what to expect from them in terms of behavior and skills.

First and Second Professional Semester Clinical Experiences

How Schools Work

Each of the participants credited either their first or second professional semester clinical experience, or sometimes both, with contributing to their understanding of how schools work. For some, the positive influence was the actual experience of being in a school setting for a sustained, uninterrupted period of three weeks, while for others the influence came in the form of support and instruction by the participant's clinical cooperating teacher.

Although Lynette's first professional semester clinical experience was in a middle-school health class, she still perceived this placement to be where she learned how schools work from a teaching point of view, as well as all the "little stuff" that she had forgotten about what it is like to be in school. Mary held a similar view of her second professional semester clinical experience, noting that it provided the "building blocks" of how to do teaching. Delilah's strongest impression of her

first professional semester clinical experience was that it was where she learned classroom management and classroom organization strategies. Like Delilah, Veronica learned in her first professional semester clinical experience valuable classroom management tools, and in her second professional semester experience she benefited from a cooperating teacher who served as a coach and role model.

Opportunities to Teach

While the first and second professional semester clinical experiences are not necessarily set up to focus on providing the preservice teachers with large amounts of teaching and planning responsibility, the participants still saw the opportunities they were provided to teach as highly valuable. Each participant made specific comments about the value of being allowed to teach. Lynette was allowed to teach every time after her third visit to her second professional semester clinical placement. Mary noted that in her second professional semester clinical experience she “jumped in with both feet—from week one they got me in” (Interview, 04/28/05). Delilah described how involved she was allowed to be in her first professional semester clinical experience and explained that she currently uses methods she learned there because she is now teaching the same grade. Veronica enjoyed the amount of time she was allowed to teach in her second professional semester clinical experience, approximately four times more than in her first experience.

Impediments

For three of the four participants, the first and second professional semester clinical experiences were not without drawbacks. The nature of the impediments ranged from interpersonal matters of communication and cooperating to pedagogical issues of timing. Lynette's second professional semester clinical experience was in a bilingual classroom, and in addition to feeling ill-prepared to teach bilingual students, Lynette also had little opportunity to teach the whole group because the majority of her time was spent working with individual students. Mary felt that the trouble with the clinical experiences was that they did not provide enough practical experience with low risk of failing. Delilah's second professional semester clinical experience was a series of unfortunate events that involved her first having to change placements because the cooperating teacher would not allow her to complete her course assignments and then being placed with a very nice, but rather vague cooperating teacher who was unwilling to allow her to do anything but observe. Veronica noted no impediments in her first and second professional semester clinical experiences.

Student Teaching

Strong Relationship with Cooperating Teacher

For each of the participants, her relationship with her cooperating teacher during the student teaching semester was a strong influence on her development as a beginning classroom reading teacher. For three of the four, this influence was

viewed as positive, and for one the influence was viewed as negative and a strong impediment to her development.

Lynette's cooperating teacher built a strong rapport with Lynette and taught Lynette many skills in discipline, classroom management, and interacting with students. According to Mary, her cooperating teacher was like a coach to Mary and "knew teaching inside and out." Mary still uses phrases she heard her cooperating teacher use. Veronica's relationship with her cooperating teacher was so positive that when Veronica was hired to teach in the same building, her cooperating teacher became her mentor. Veronica's cooperating teacher scaffolded for her and gradually gave her more and more responsibility.

How to Teach Reading

As beginning classroom reading teachers, each of the participants practiced methods that she learned during the student teaching semester. Lynette learned how to teach from a basal reading series as well as techniques for questioning students during group discussions. Mary learned during her student teaching experience how to utilize picture walks and also cited this experience as the place where she learned to implement guided reading instruction. During her student teaching experience, Delilah learned how to use specific tools for teaching reading, for example, grouping students, creating posters with strategies, and teaching with story frames. Veronica learned in her student teaching experience how to implement guided

reading instruction as well as how to use such tools as retelling charts and basal workbooks.

Opportunity to Teach

The opportunity to teach, or lack thereof, was a common theme across all four participants. According to the participants, being allowed to teach the classes as if they were their own was one of the most powerful aspects of the student teaching experience. Three of the four participants spoke of the value of the scaffolding provided by their cooperating teachers and how helpful it was to be allowed to actually teach the class.

For Mary and Veronica, their cooperating teachers' scaffolding and gradual increase in responsibility were the most positive influences. For Lynette, however, the positive influence lay in the way that her cooperating teacher let her start teaching right away.

Impediments

Three of the four participants perceived situations in their student teaching experiences that they felt impeded their development as beginning classroom reading teachers. The situations varied by participant, with some directly linked to the cooperating teacher and others linked to the nature of the experience itself.

Unlike the other three participants, Delilah was very uncomfortable with her relationship with her cooperating teacher. She found the cooperating teacher to be

“very controlling” and complained that the cooperating teacher never left her alone with the students. Delilah observed that her cooperating teacher made negative comments and annoyed expressions when she attempted to teach or to plan with her and noted that she often felt “blind-sided.” Mary’s main comment about any possible impediments in her student teaching experience was, “It’s not yours,” meaning that she felt no sense of ownership of the classroom. Mary felt that the student teaching experience, like the other clinical experiences, should be more of an apprenticeship with a low risk of failure. Although Lynette spoke enthusiastically about her cooperating teacher and the student teaching experience, she still noted three main impediments to the experience. First, there was no diversity in the student population and Lynette felt limited in her experiences working with diverse students. Second, Lynette did not learn how to teach with guided reading, yet later was expected to implement guided reading during her first year of teaching. Finally, because of the spring schedule for her student teaching experience, Lynette did not ever learn how to “do” the first day of school.

Mentor Teacher

Planning

Although only two of the four participants were assigned mentor teachers during their first years of teaching, all four of them enjoyed mentor-like relationships with more experienced colleagues in their buildings. Each of the participants described their mentors as people they could go to for almost anything.

Lynette was not assigned a mentor, but found the third-grade team extremely helpful in choosing books, solving disciplinary issues, and providing resources. Mary's mentor was an old friend for whom Mary had volunteered as a room mother, and she showed Mary all the "little things" that can often trip up beginning teachers, for example, how and when to send notes to parents, how to use the copy machine, and the idiosyncrasies and nuances of the faculty and staff. Despite the fact that Delilah was not assigned a mentor, she still benefited from a mentoring-like relationship with the other members of her fourth-grade team. The team met often to plan together, and the fourth-grade teachers often checked in with Delilah to prepare or inform her about upcoming events. Veronica felt her mentor teacher related well to her. Because Veronica's mentor teacher taught the same grade right next door to Veronica, the two of them planned together and shared materials.

Impediments

Both Lynette and Delilah were in the unusual situation of not being assigned mentor teachers to support them in their first years of teaching. While they were each able to locate teachers who would serve in mentor-like relationships with them, they still did not benefit from the structured mentor support that is typically part of a district's new teacher induction program.

Inservice Experiences

Working with Students

For all the participants, the actual experience of working with students was a positive influence on their growth as classroom reading teachers. For some, the growth seemed almost exponential, occurring in leaps and bounds. For others, the growth was more subtle and manifested in classroom organization or instructional decisions.

Lynette was the most vocal of the four participants about how much she had grown as an educator in her first year of teaching, noting that often she “read” her students’ behaviors and was motivated by her desire to model and scaffold for them. Mary commented that her students taught her every day and that she listened to them to determine whether they were accepting responsibility for their reading success. When a number of students came individually to Delilah for help with a variety of vocabulary and decoding assistance, she realized that she needed to create a poster for her students on what to do when they were “stuck” on a word. Delilah then taught students a mini-lesson on what to do if they were struggling with a word and taught them how to use the poster. Veronica explained that some of her classroom organization is based upon feedback that her students gave her about how the room should be arranged.

Administrative and Collegial Support

Three of the four participants described the influence of the supportive behaviors of colleagues or administrators on their growth as classroom reading teachers.

One aspect of the influence lay in procedures set forth by district administrators such as classroom management systems and coordinating schedules to enable teachers to plan together. Another area of this influence was the close working relationships with colleagues; for example, Delilah and Lynette both found their colleagues to be supportive, unofficial “mentors” who were willing to guide them, and Veronica worked with the Title I teacher to develop her guided reading programs and literacy centers and often uses materials provided to her by colleagues.

Still another area of this influence was related to the patient support of an understanding principal. When he recognized that she was not prepared to implement guided reading, Lynette’s principal gave her release time to observe guided reading taught by other teachers in the building.

Other than the earlier connection to her mentor’s help with all the “little things,” Mary did not specifically relate her progress in becoming a classroom reading teacher to either her administrators or colleagues.

Professional Development

Daily Practices

Three of the four participants expressed the value of attending professional development seminars to learn more about classroom organization and teaching reading. Sometimes the influence of the seminars was immediately evident, and other times the influence manifested more gradually as the participants became aware of the usefulness of the information. After undergoing professional development training in the program, both Lynette and Mary utilized Heggerty's (2003) phonemic awareness activities daily with their first-grade students. Veronica found less frequent use for the knowledge she gained in professional development, but she did attribute a portion of her classroom management plan to an Illinois Education Association seminar, titled "I Can Do It" (2004), that she attended in Bloomington.

Impediments

Two of the four participants perceived aspects of professional development that impeded their progress in becoming classroom reading teachers. Whether the impediments were related to the relevance (or rather lack thereof) of the topic or to the quality of the presentation, the participants named these particular programs as negative influences. For Lynette, the impediment was due to the nature of the program. Although it was well presented, Lynette found it frustrating to attend the workshop on training for the four-blocks approach to literacy instruction because

she knew that her school's schedule was incompatible with the structure of the program. For Delilah, her frustration developed with both the topics of the programs and the poor quality of the programs; for example, she found a workshop on how to teach students who were adopted to be a waste of time, and she remarked on the irony of how difficult a time someone with ADHD would have had attending to the presenter giving the workshop on teaching students with ADHD.

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)

Influence on Instruction

Each of the participants attributed certain aspects of her teaching practices to the ever-present prospect of her students taking the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT)*. Although they were only in their first or second years of teaching, the participants were already well aware of the importance of students' test scores and felt that this awareness both positively and negatively influenced their current practices.

Lynette's decision to teach her third graders about metacognition was based upon her awareness that they would need it for the ISAT. After learning that students would have to research with reference materials as part of the ISAT, Mary developed one of her literacy centers that focused on dictionary use. Delilah developed a series of lessons on genres in response to learning that genres were addressed on the ISAT. Veronica attended a workshop to help her prepare to teach students how to write extended responses on the ISAT.

Impediments

Three of the four participants noted specific drawbacks regarding testing with or preparing students for the ISAT. Lynette worried about the impact of so much testing on her students and also noted that her student teaching experience mainly focused on preparing students to take the ISAT. Mary's concern was that with so much testing on vocabulary, her students might confuse real reading with merely understanding what words mean. Delilah felt the ISAT scores for her students might be inaccurately and negatively attributed to her because the tests did not follow the school's sequence of instruction. For example, students in her fourth-grade class might be assessed on areas that were supposed to have been addressed in third grade; however, Delilah was concerned that she would be the person responsible for students' scores on the test.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the participants' perceptions of the influences on their current teaching practices. Data from semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions, and modified stimulated recall sessions were analyzed with a constant comparative method to identify emerging themes. The themes were used to categorize in cross-case analysis the perceived influences of the participants. The emerging themes described in this chapter indicate that the participants shared many of the same perceptions of influences on their current teaching practices. In particular, the participants shared perceptions of the influences

of their outside experiences, university coursework, first and second professional semester clinical experiences, student teaching experiences, mentor teachers, inservice experiences, professional development, and the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test*. There were also dissimilarities in terms of the extent of the influence, whether the influences were positive or negative, and how strongly the influences impacted the participants' pedagogical decisions and practices. In Chapter Six these similarities and differences will be delineated in the context of the research questions as well as in terms of new questions that arose as a result of this study.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

During the past two decades, researchers have gradually increased the scope of research on the practices and perceptions of beginning elementary classroom reading teachers. In particular, their research has focused on how the instruction teachers received in their teacher preparation programs translated into the actual practices of these new teachers (Bader & Pearce, 1983; Hoover, 1985).

Additionally, Pearson (2001) called for more research to describe the nature of reading teacher preparation. A 2000 review of current practices in reading teacher education by Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy highlighted the need for more information regarding the efficacy of different aspects of preservice reading teacher education.

While the above studies addressed classroom reading teacher preparation, there is a noticeable lack of research surrounding the influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. Although studies by Bader and Pearce (1983) and Hoover (1985) examined how preservice teacher preparation was represented in later inservice teacher practices, those studies did not examine the actual perceptions of the teachers themselves. Additionally the research by Bader and Pierce as well as Hoover was completed more than 20 years ago, and the nature of both teacher preparation and teacher practices may have changed since then. This research

deficiency is significant in that the picture of classroom reading teacher preparation is incomplete without a current understanding of the perceptions of the teachers themselves concerning how they developed their skills.

Based on this need for further research of how beginning classroom reading teachers have learned to teach reading, the purposes of this study were to develop an understanding of beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences on their current practices, the positive or negative nature of those influences, and the implications of these perceptions for teacher preparation programs. To accomplish this, the researcher employed a case study design and collected data from four beginning classroom reading teachers. The constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) and cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used to analyze the data obtained from semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall sessions, and modified stimulated recall sessions. Results from data analysis, including descriptive data and emerging themes, were presented in Chapters Four and Five. This chapter provides a discussion of conclusions, limitations, implications, and questions for future research.

Conclusions

Over the course of this study, the researcher was able to examine the data thoroughly to develop an understanding of the participants' perceptions of the influences on their teaching practices. After reviewing all of the findings, several

conclusions were drawn that may provide new insights into the influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers.

University Coursework

University coursework was a positive influence on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. When each of the participants was asked where she learned to use the reading methods discussed during the stimulated recall sessions or the modified stimulated recall sessions, she reported hearing about at least two of her methods in her courses. Some of the methods the participants remembered learning about were word walls, guided reading, genre studies, cooperative learning, literature-based instruction, and word sorts. The main way that university coursework influenced the participants was by developing their awareness of methods. Once this awareness was fostered, it was then reinforced and supplemented by the participants' cooperating teachers during student teaching.

A second way that university coursework influenced the participants was by developing their understanding and implementation of theories and principles of effective literacy instruction.

In the participants' descriptions of the skills they learned in their coursework, several of Leu and Kinzer's (2003) principles were evident. The first principle, "Teachers' insights are central to effective instruction," was exemplified in each of the participants' acknowledgment of knowing their students well enough to base instructional decisions on such knowledge. The fifth principle, "Integrate

reading and writing,” was demonstrated in Mary’s use of 4-square writing during a lesson on reading nonfiction and in Delilah’s use of reading response journals. The seventh principle, “Teach reading comprehension,” was put into practice by all four participants as they intentionally taught students specific comprehension skills and strategies during whole-group and small-group instruction. Finally, the tenth principle, “Meet individual needs, including children with special needs,” was evidenced by Lynette, Mary, and Delilah in the ways that they utilized differentiated instruction, guided reading, and cooperative learning.

This conclusion is supported by Knowles and Associates’ (1984) third principle of adult learning, that adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their jobs or personal lives. The university course content that the participants found most useful were the skills they could use in their own classrooms. Additionally, Bader and Pearce (1983), Hoover (1985), and Rickford (2001) all found in their studies that preservice teachers valued the learning experienced in their university coursework when they felt the coursework was relevant and they could apply their learning directly to their student teaching.

First and Second Professional Semester Clinical Experiences

The participants’ perceptions of the value of their clinical experiences varied and were related to the level of supportive training each participant perceived that she had received in reading instructional practices. While all four participants perceived value in their clinical experiences, few of the participants’ descriptions of

such experiences addressed reading methodology. Mary and Delilah each attributed one of their clinical experiences with influencing their current reading instruction practices. Mary's second clinical experience was a source of great learning for her as this was when she learned how to implement guided reading. Delilah's first clinical experience was, to her, the best one. Because her first clinical experience was in a fourth-grade classroom and she now taught fourth grade, Delilah often found herself using some of the methods used by her cooperating teacher; however, none of these methods focused specifically on reading instruction. There were no studies found regarding the influence of early clinical experiences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers; this topic appears to be new to this area of literacy education research.

Student Teaching

Beginning classroom reading teachers' experiences with cooperating teachers during student teaching positively influenced their practices. Student teaching experiences tended to provide preservice teachers with valuable training in classroom reading instruction, and such experiences were strongly influenced by the relationships between the preservice teachers and their cooperating teachers. The participants' experiences with their cooperating teachers during student teaching were very influential on their current practices as beginning classroom reading teachers. Three of the four participants' responses indicated that the strongest influence on their current practices was the student teaching experience and the

leadership of the cooperating teacher in that experience. These three participants spoke glowingly of their cooperating teachers, with comments such as, "...right away she let me in there and started me teaching" (Lynette, Interview, 04/19/05); "...she knew teaching inside and out" (Mary, Interview, 04/28/05); and "...she showed me how she taught everything" (Veronica, Interview, 01/05/06).

These findings are supported by the conclusions of Hoffman and Roper (1985) and Strickland (1990). Hoffman and Roper's survey of beginning teachers examined the novices' perceptions of the sources of their competencies. Of the total responses to the survey, 25% indicated that the student teaching experience was a significant source of competency. In her study of the factors causing changes in student teachers' philosophies concerning the teaching of reading, Strickland found that the student teachers attributed much learning to the influence of their cooperating teachers.

Professional Experience

Professional classroom experiences and experiences with students positively influenced the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. All four of the participants attributed some of their current practices and their level of comfort with such practices to the value of having time in their classrooms with their students. For example, Mary noted that her students taught her every day, and Delilah expressed that she was much more experienced with every day that went by. This conclusion about the need to be a decision maker is supported by research on the

perceptions of beginning teachers that suggests that these novices benefit from the specificity and responsibility of an actual teaching position (Britt, 1997) and the learning experience of trial and error when teaching (Bolander, 2002).

Self-Direction

Beginning classroom reading teachers are, to some extent, self-directed and view part of their work as being decision makers who will attempt on their own to solve problems and fill gaps in their professional preparation. Each of the participants described the ways that she independently sought out more information or solutions. Lynette and Veronica both made time to observe their colleagues when they needed to learn how to teach with a certain method, and Lynette and Delilah both explained their habits of going online to find out more information on topics such as third-grade benchmarks and subgenres. Mary chose to make time at the end of each day to reflect on the day's lessons and write anecdotal notes to remind herself of what worked and what needed to be changed. Identification of this element of self-direction is supported in existing research on teachers' self-efficacy (Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), in which teachers' self-efficacy was viewed as confidence in their own competency and an identification of an internal locus of control. The participants in this study demonstrated and expressed confidence in their own abilities to solve problems. Additionally, this conclusion is supported by Knowles and Associates' (1984) fourth principle of adult learning, that adults learn by solving problems.

Mentor Teachers

Mentor teachers, or lack of them, were perceived as influences by the participants. For the most part, mentor teachers, whether formally assigned or informally found, were helpful to the participants. The strongest mentor support appeared to be more in the areas of planning, organization, and management than in strengthening reading instruction practices. Although Mary and Veronica each described in detail the value of working closely with their mentor teachers, Mary's perception of the value related to developing an understanding of how schools work. Mary did not specifically attribute any of her current practices to the influence of her mentor. When Veronica's cooperating teacher during student teaching became her mentor teacher, they enjoyed planning together and sharing materials. Neither Lynette nor Delilah were assigned mentor teachers, and subsequently they sought out mentors on their own. Lynette worked closely with the school's third-grade team to plan and choose materials, and Delilah met frequently with the school's fourth-grade team to plan and coordinate curriculum. This conclusion about the importance and role of mentor teachers is supported in studies by Dollase (1992), Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1992), Freiberg, Zbikowski, and Ganser (1994), Scherer (1999), and Villani (2002), who identified the value of mentors as supportive guides but not as methodology role models.

Impediments

Each participant experienced impediments; however, those impediments varied with each individual. For example, while each participant described a specific method she felt she should have learned in her teacher preparation program, there was no consistency in the type of method. Three of the participants discussed never having learned in their coursework how to implement guided reading, but two of the three did learn how to do so in their clinical experiences. In addition to methodology, participants also perceived certain materials and assessments to be impediments, as well. One participant perceived her school's use of the *Accelerated Reader* program to be an impediment to the progress of her students, and three of the participants described impediments related to preparing their students for and assessing them with the *Illinois Standards Achievement Test*. Additionally, one participant pointed out that neither her coursework nor her clinical experiences had prepared her to teach students how to infer. The impediments identified in this study were also factors identified in studies of beginning classroom teachers' perceptions of preparation: in particular, Roehrig, Pressley, and Talotta (2002) noted that the participants in their study indicated that they sometimes encountered situations for which their teacher education program did not prepare them.

Limitations

This case study was limited in several areas. First, while the original intent was to utilize reputational sampling to select participants, the sampling turned out to

be a combination of reputational sampling and voluntary convenience. This study was limited to two participants obtained by reputational sampling and two who volunteered without such a recommendation but met the criteria.

Second, there was no congruency in the grade levels taught by the participants; first, second, third, and fourth grades were all represented. It is difficult to compare perceptions of influence on reading instruction practices when the participants do not teach the same or similar grades.

Third, Mary's status as a second-year teacher when the other three participants were first-year teachers may have caused her to be an outlier. When the semi-structured interview, stimulated recall, and modified stimulated recall sessions took place, Mary was nearing the end of her second year of teaching while Delilah, Lynette, and Veronica were all in the middle or near the end of the first year of teaching; therefore, Mary had a year more experience than the others.

Fourth, the demographics of the participants do not represent the overall population of beginning classroom reading teachers. The participants in this study were all female, two of the four were Caucasian mothers in their mid-forties, and the other two were single African-American women in their mid-twenties. This study may have provided more information had the participants represented a broader spectrum of ages, background experiences, and races. It would have been enlightening to have males represented, as well.

Fifth, the outcomes of this study could have been enhanced if the researcher had deliberately chosen the lessons to videotape and discuss in stimulated recall and the lesson plans to examine and discuss in modified stimulated recall. Because the

participants chose the lessons they wished to discuss in stimulated recall and the lesson plans discussed in the modified stimulated recall were randomly chosen, the researcher could not access and target specific reading methods for discussion.

Finally, this study was limited to the ongoing perceptions of beginning classroom reading teachers. Given that the participants' perceptions of their abilities and the influences that had the greatest impact on their daily reading instruction practices will likely change as they become more skilled and develop greater confidence in their abilities, it would be informative to complete a longitudinal study to compare how the participants' perceptions change over time.

Implications for Practice

University Coursework

The participants' responses indicated a disparity in the nature of the methodology presented by different faculty members teaching the same course. This finding is supported by Levine (2006) who states that a problem with university-based teacher preparation programs is that "the curriculum is often fractured, with a lack of continuity from one course to the next and insufficient integration between course work and field work" (p. 5). It is not clear whether this disparity is due to the varying perceptions of the participants depending upon their interests and background knowledge or due to an actual lack of articulation among university faculty, clinical supervisors, and cooperating teachers; however, certainly a focus on examining and possibly strengthening such articulation is warranted. University

coursework provides preservice teachers with a fundamental awareness of reading methodology, and the university's structured clinical experiences provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to witness such methodology in authentic contexts.

First and Second Professional Semester Clinical Experiences

The early clinical placements must be appropriate settings for preservice teachers to "test the waters," and the cooperating teachers in such placements must be positive role models who utilize best practice literacy instruction and support the efforts of the preservice teachers to do so as well. Each of the participants described the positive or negative influences of their first and second professional semester clinical experiences. While the time actually spent teaching and planning is significantly less than that allotted for student teaching, it still must be treated as quality time in which optimal learning can take place.

Student Teaching

Beginning classroom reading teachers tend to teach in ways similar to their cooperating teachers (Hoffman & Roper, 1985; Strickland, 1990). Teacher preparation programs should use this knowledge to its full advantage by proactively seeking out the best possible cooperating teachers to match with their student teachers and supporting best practice literacy instruction in the elementary classrooms by providing professional development and credit courses related to supervising student teachers to districts where student teachers are placed.

Professional Experience

Although they are indeed novices in the field, beginning classroom reading teachers arrive in their new professions with an awareness of where to seek out information as well as the understanding that with perseverance, time, and support their skills will greatly improve. Teacher induction programs must recognize the value of beginning classroom reading teachers' first years of experience and, in addition to providing opportunities for professional development and the support of mentor teachers, should emphasize to beginning teachers the value of their own experiences and self-efficacy.

Mentor Teachers

All beginning classroom reading teachers should be assigned mentors. While mentors may not directly recommend or model specific reading instructional practices to beginning teachers, they do provide levels of support and guidance that help the beginning teachers become acclimated in their new schools and understand the day-to-day intricacies of how the schools function. With such support, beginning classroom reading teachers are better able to focus on the quality of their teaching.

Impediments

The variety of impediments perceived by the participants indicates that teacher preparation programs must be mindful of the individual needs and experiences of preservice teachers. By offering students more choices about the

types of courses they wish to take and the sequence in which they take them, as well as supplying students with levels of support that vary according to each student's needs, programs may provide students with differentiated support in both the supervision process and course sequence.

Questions for Future Research

The fundamental purpose of the questions asked in this study was to identify beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences on their practices. While the findings of this study did provide several possible influences and the implications of such influences, other areas of research could further conceptualize beginning classroom reading teachers' perceptions of the influences upon their instructional practices.

Longitudinal Studies of Perceptions

A follow-up study with the same four participants could provide insight into the changes in the participants' perceptions over time. In what areas and in what ways are these changes in perceptions manifested? As they hone their skills, do they see more value in elements of their preparation that they earlier found to be less useful, or vice versa? Do they recognize influences that they had not perceived earlier? Second, how are the participants' perceptions linked to their actual practices, and how do such practices impact the standardized test scores of the participants' students?

Replication of Study

Replication of this study could provide researchers with valuable information regarding the influences on the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers. Beginning classroom reading teachers of grades other than the ones in this study, for example, kindergarten and fifth grade, could be studied. A comparison could be done of the perceptions of influence of those prepared in university-based four- or five-year undergraduate programs and those prepared by alternative certification programs. The perceptions of first-year classroom reading teachers could be compared to those of second-year classroom reading teachers. Finally, the perceptions teachers who were considered to be traditional undergraduates because they completed college immediately after high school could be compared to the perceptions of teachers who were nontraditional, returning students. In any of the above research scenarios, more could be learned about the influences on the practices of these teachers.

Impact of Absence of Mentor

In the present study, two of the four participants were not provided with mentor teachers in their first years of teaching. Was this perceived lack of support a permanent detriment? Do these teachers, and others like them, find that the lack of a mentor teacher early on creates a long-lasting impediment to their successes as classroom reading teachers?

Long-Term Impact of Training in Use of Basal Series

Two of the four participants in this study learned from their cooperating teachers to rely heavily on the school-adopted basal reading series and then continued to do so in their own classrooms. What is the lasting impact of this training? Are these teachers and others like them able to acquire and appropriately utilize materials beyond a basal reading series, or does their initial training impede such new usage?

Final Thoughts

Through this study it has become apparent that beginning classroom reading teachers bring to their first years of teaching an abundance of background experiences. Some of the prior experiences come from their teacher preparation programs, and others occur before or after their time in such programs. As this study indicates, the quality of the preparation of classroom reading teachers lies in the hands of everyone involved in the process. Beginning classroom reading teachers benefit from the instruction they receive from university faculty, clinical supervisors, and cooperating teachers, as well as from the rich experiences germane to those first years in one's own classroom. Additionally, beginning classroom reading teachers are aware of such benefits; in particular, they perceive the value of their university coursework, their student teaching experience, and their cooperating teachers and are able to note the problems with each aspect. By regularly monitoring the perceptions of preservice teachers regarding the value of their coursework,

cooperating teachers, and student teaching experiences, all of those involved in classroom reading teacher preparation will have the opportunity to strengthen and enhance the teacher preparation programs.

While all of the above factors do indeed influence the practices of beginning classroom reading teachers, the factor that seems the most worthy of attention is that of the cooperating teachers assigned to the preservice teachers during their first and second professional semester clinical experiences and student teaching. By virtue of their complex roles, cooperating teachers should be experienced, knowledgeable, supportive individuals who are as comfortable in guiding preservice teachers as they are in teaching their own students. The best cooperating teachers stay current in best practice literacy methods and research, communicate regularly with university faculty, and continually advocate both for the profession of teaching and for their students. Unfortunately, the best teachers available may not be fulfilling such roles because they feel overwhelmed, under-compensated, or pressured to focus on preparing their students for high-stakes tests. In both the early clinical experiences and student teaching, the influence of these veteran teachers must be appreciated and taken seriously, as should the responsibilities placed upon such veterans. The role of cooperating teacher is a time-consuming process involving supervision, evaluation, paperwork, and extra meetings, as well as the strain of allowing someone else to teach one's students. In other professions, the demanding role of supervision is acknowledged with work release and monetary compensation; however, some universities do not compensate teachers at all for accepting candidates for clinical placement. In other universities, the compensation comes in

the form of tuition waivers at the university that the teachers may not even use or that the district simply absorbs into a pool of waivers doled out in increments to all teachers.

In addition to the increased responsibility without appropriate compensation, cooperating teachers also face the pressure of preparing their students for high-stakes testing. Cooperating teachers may be unwilling to provide preservice teachers with time to plan and implement lessons that may take away from test preparations. The remedy to these problems of time, compensation, and pressure to perform is complex but imperative. Colleges and universities, school administrators, teachers, legislators, and accrediting institutions must work together to ensure that high-quality teachers feel it is worthwhile to take on the challenge of becoming cooperating teachers.

In closing, Parker Palmer (1998) wrote:

As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require. (p. 11)

The results of this study of the perceived influences of beginning classroom reading teachers indicate that there are a variety of individuals who greatly influenced the participants in their practices as classroom reading teachers. Some of

the individuals influenced the participants' overall attitudes about teaching and their relationships with students; others influenced the participants' self-efficacy; and still others influenced the participants' daily reading instruction practices. In Palmer's commentary, the "fabric" of teaching is a complex woven pattern involving teachers, students, subjects, community, courage, and the capacity to grow. Every one of us involved in the preparation of classroom reading teachers must be committed to enriching, nurturing, and strengthening the hearts and minds of classroom teachers.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

An Examination of the Perceived Influences on the Practices of Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers

Authorization

I, _____ (Participant's Name), hereby consent to participate in a qualitative study which will involve interviews, observations, and document analyses performed by Patricia L. Rieman through Northern Illinois University.

Description

- ❖ The title of the investigation is "An Examination of the Perceived Influences and Practices of Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers"
- ❖ This study involves audio-taped personal interviews, videotaped observations, and lesson plan analyses about current practices as a classroom reading teacher.
- ❖ I will meet with the researcher a total of seven times. Each of the interviews will take approximately 45 minutes of my time; I will choose the videotaping/observation sessions, which will not interrupt my work and will be app. 30 minutes in length. One to three days after each of the three videotaping sessions I will meet with the researcher to view and discuss the video. In our final session the researcher and I will discuss my thought processes in creating three lesson plans randomly chosen by the researcher from my file or lesson plan book.
- ❖ The purpose of this study is to identify the practices, and the factors that impact the practices, of beginning classroom reading teachers.

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 gave the teachers a sense of efficacy, and which influences did they perceive as having impeded successful teaching and learning?
 3. What do the teachers' responses indicate about the strengths and weaknesses of their formal teacher preparation in the area of reading instruction?
- ❖ As a participant, I will be interviewed and asked several questions related to the methods that I use as a classroom reading teacher and the reasons that I choose to use those methods. The interview will be tape-recorded and then transcribed. Although no questions are intended to be sensitive in nature, I may elect not to answer any questions if I so desire. Also, I may terminate the interview at any time with no prejudice or penalty.
 - ❖ Once the cassette tapes are transcribed, the researcher will modify and code the names included in the transcripts to secure anonymity. The cassette tapes and coding sheet will be destroyed within three years after completion of the study.
 - ❖ Once the researcher and I have viewed the videotapes and discussed them thoroughly, they will be destroyed.
 - ❖ There are no experimental procedures involved with this study, and thus no physical risks. There are also no perceived emotional, social, or psychological risks. All data will be kept confidential in that my name will not be divulged in a verbal or written manner. If I request, Patricia Rieman will not include any specified information in a research report.
 - ❖ If I am quoted in any way on a research report, I will be given a pseudonym. The same is true for any other individuals and institutions or organizations that I mention in the interview.

- ❖ If I have any questions about the
- ❖ research study, I can contact:

Patricia L. Rieman
 Dept. of Literacy Education
 Graham 119
 Northern Illinois University
 DeKalb, IL 60115
 815-753-8108;
 mspatty@tbcnet.com
 or
 Dr. Pamela J. Farris, Dissertation
 Advisor
 Dept. of Literacy Education
 Gabel 147
 Northern Illinois University
 DeKalb, IL 60115
 815-753-9076
 pfarris@niu.edu

- ❖ If I have any question about my
 rights as a research participant,
 I can contact:

Office of Research Compliance
 Northern Illinois University
 DeKalb, IL 60115
 (815)753-8588

Benefits

Understanding the influences that lead new classroom reading teachers to use certain methods will help to improve the professional development process and may fill current gaps in the body of research of this area.

- ❖ **Voluntary Participation:** I understand that participation is voluntary and that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the project director, Patricia L. Rieman.

Consent

- ❖ I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. I have received a copy of this form.

Date: _____ Time: _____ (a.m. / p.m.)

Signature of Participant:

I agree to be audio-tape recorded during the seven sessions:

Signature of Participant:

I agree to be videotaped in three different sessions, teaching three lessons of my choosing.

Signature of Participant: _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

An Examination of the Perceived Influences and Practices of Beginning Classroom Reading Teachers

Interview Guide: Semistructured

1. Tell me about your decision to become a teacher—when did you know this is what you wanted to do? Who or what led you to this decision?
2. Thinking back to your first and second professional clinical experiences, what would you say was the most valuable aspect of each of those experiences? (If necessary, probe with specifying setting, grade, subject(s).)
3. How much time did you actually spend teaching during your clinical experiences, and what did you do the rest of the time?
4. Tell me about your student teaching experience: what grade and subjects did you teach? What would you say was the most valuable aspect of your semester of student teaching?
5. Outside of the structured clinical and student teaching experiences, what other experiences have you had working with children?
6. How did those outside experiences help you to become the teacher you are today?
7. When you were hired to teach here, were you assigned a mentor teacher? Tell me about your relationship with your mentor teacher.
8. Since being hired by the district, have you participated in any professional development such as in-service trainings, conferences or workshops? If so, what did you find most valuable, and why?
9. As a brand-new teacher, what worries you the most?
10. In what area of your skills do you have the most confidence?
11. Describe how you have become the reading teacher that you are today.
12. Where did you learn to teach reading in the way that you do today?
13. Do the ways that you teach reading remind you of anyone you know or have had as a teacher?
14. How do you feel about your skills as a classroom reading teacher?
15. What advice would you give elementary education undergraduates about learning to teach reading?

APPENDIX C

SCHEDULE OF DATA COLLECTION

Schedule of Participant Contact and Data Collection

Participant	Lynette	Mary	Delilah	Veronica
First contact regarding study	11-29-04	9-23-04	12-1-05	12-10-05
Interview #1	4-19-05	4-28-05	1-10-06	1-5-06
Videotaping Session #1	4-27-05	5-9-05	1-17-06	1-11-06
Stimulated Recall Interview #1	4-27-05	5-9-05	1-17-06	1-11-06
Videotaping Session #2	5-16-06	5-12-05	1-25-06	1-19-06
Stimulated Recall Interview #2	5-16-05	5-12-05	1-25-06	1-19-06
Videotaping Session #3	5-17-05	5-23-05	1-30-06	1-24-06
Stimulated Recall Interview #3	5-17-05	5-23-05	2-1-06	1-24-06
Lesson Plan Interview	5-16-05	5-23-05	2-1-06	1-24-06
Follow-up Interview/ Member Check	2-28-06	4-6-06, 11-8-06	3-13-06	4-23-06

APPENDIX D

**PARTIALLY ORDERED META-MATRIX OF PERCEIVED INFLUENCES ON
THE PRACTICES OF BEGINNING CLASSROOM READING TEACHERS**

	Lynette Positive Impact	Lynette Impediments	Mary Positive Impact	Mary Impediments	Delilah Positive Impact	Delilah Impediments	Veronica Positive Impact	Veronica Impediments
Self-directed (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Knows to scaffold because does not want kids to fail (did without knowing the term) -Observed other 1st grade teachers to see what 1st graders should be reading -Knowing to model is instinctual -Figured out on own to tie predicting to inference -Found own mentors -“Reads” her kids a lot -Learns by trial and error 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Advice: keep trying—have to be willing to try it -Advice: Want to know everything, but be patient with selves -“It’s just common sense, Patty!” (regarding having students read anything for the sake of reading) -Read <i>Mosaic of Thought</i>, knows self as reader -Second nature—knowing how to use wait time -Learned on own how to introduce and practice word wall words 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learned to check for comprehension from her students - Independent—“I like my own stuff better” 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Probably 60% of how she teaches is her own choice -Uses her own questions for guided reading for higher level students 	

	Lynette Positive Impact	Lynette Impediments	Mary Positive Impact	Mary Impediments	Delilah Positive Impact	Delilah Impediments	Veronica Positive Impact	Veronica Impediments
Self-directed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Advice to undergrads: don't throw anything away! -Advice: stay current on children's interests and how to relate it -Went online to find 3rd grade benchmarks and prereq. skills -Says, "I probably read it somewhere" (about metacognition) -Uses stuff in the book, but also on her own 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reflects on the day's lessons each evening and makes notes in her lesson plan book. -Did anything she could to get her hands on kids & learn more about teaching -"The key is finding the piece to the puzzle—how do I get through this or that?" -Ways of teaching remind of all of them -Always learning—no problem trying anything once -They know I love reading 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Wants to impact children -Found info on sub-genres online -Loves learning -Research-crazy person—journals, Internet -Compassion: really cares about all the little psyches -Best to have as many tools in toolbox as you can -Introducing vocabulary via context -Made own help ad poster (strategies) -Supportive environment 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Observes others when does not know how to use a teaching tool - -Handles student interruptions differently than her mentor -Chose to pique students' interest with open discussions -Her default mode is to skip what the book says and do it her way. 	

	Lynette Positive Impact	Lynette Impediments	Mary Positive Impact	Mary Impediments	Delilah Positive Impact	Delilah Impediments	Veronica Positive Impact	Veronica Impediments
Materials (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Used same series (<i>Trophies</i>) in student teaching; "it has everything I need" -In student teaching she and her coop. tchr. Stuck to the basal like glue -3rd grade word wall kit -Used book basal recommended for lesson on sequencing -Happy that Trophies publishers are writing ISAT next year 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Uses retelling chart exactly the way it was given to her used; uses it because it was already there -Used basal lesson to teach alphabetical order & taught because basal had it 	

	Lynette Positive Impact	Lynette Impediments	Mary Positive Impact	Mary Impediments	Delilah Positive Impact	Delilah Impediments	Veronica Positive Impact	Veronica Impediments
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Although she read <i>Phonics They Use</i>, feels more comfortable teaching phonics from Trophies. -List of what good readers do is from basal -Doesn't like AR, but HAS to do it -Even students have AR mindset -Learned to teach about figurative language from basal 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Has to choose vocabulary words from basal recommendations -Uses overheads from basal -Whole school follows schedule of teaching three stories (a unit) and then giving vocab & skills assessment. 	<p>Feels constricted by the school's adoption of basal, especially the vocabulary and skills test that all teachers must give every three weeks.</p> <p>"If it were up to me at this point, I'd probably chuck that whole reading series in the garbage." (Follow-up interview, 11-8-06)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Uses both basal and novels -Uses reading response journals because students came with them in Oct.; has not done anything to make them her own -Used <i>Cricket in Times Square</i> because it was in the basal 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -80% of her choices are based on the materials present -Read-alouds, use from basal -School has a resource room with leveled books that she uses -Leveled books provide questions for guided reading -Workbooks are part of the basal 	

	Lynette Positive Impact	Lynette Impediments	Mary Positive Impact	Mary Impediments	Delilah Positive Impact	Delilah Impediments	Veronica Positive Impact	Veronica Impediments
ISAT	<p>-Happy that <i>Trophies</i> publishers are writing ISAT next year</p> <p>-Focused 3rd graders on metacognition because they'd need it for ISAT</p>	<p>-So many pretests, we test these kids to death</p> <p>-It killed me, it killed them, but they did well</p> <p>-ISAT's were a big wake up call</p> <p>-Student teaching was all about getting ready for ISAT's</p>	<p>-Instructional decisions: "I'm aware that when they get to ISATs and when they have to research reference material, something as simple as dictionary, bolded word would be most important"</p>	<p>-"They're really only a year and a half away from an ISAT test where they're going to have to learn how to read and comprehend. And I don't want them to think that reading is only so you know what that word means."</p> <p>-</p>	<p>-Instructional decisions— teaching genres because believes on ISAT.</p> <p>-Knowing ISAT's were coming up did not impact her choice of novel</p> <p>- my reinforcement of the genre and what the definition is and how you categorize books into that, is definitely a direct result of the ISAT.</p> <p>-</p>	<p>"It's going to reflect on me. Plus, this district does really goofy things. They're going to be tested, the stuff they're going to be tested on is stuff they learned in third grade, some of it."</p> <p>-May be an inaccurate and negative reflection on her.</p> <p>- Wanted to move on, but felt torn because knew it was on ISAT.</p>	<p>-Attended after school workshop on extended response for the ISAT.</p> <p>-Worries she will not be able to reach students, convey information they need (didn't specifically say ISAT, though)</p>	

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Professional Development	-Reading First workshops: most helpful; echo reading; Madeline Hunter (?); -Guided writing -Constantly going to workshops	-4 blocks training, but can't use ("oh great, something else I can't apply!")	-Learned 4 blocks in p.d. -Heggerty phonemic awareness			-Adoption workshop: waste of time - ADD/ADHD workshop was poorly presented	-Charlotte Daniels & frameworks -4-square writing -Diverse students -I Can Do It classroom mgt. (from IEA) -Vocabulary instruction	

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Inservice Experiences	-Principal gave her time to observe guided reading - I know, I did so much this year I can't believe it's almost over. You know what I mean? I learned so much. I banged my head on the wall and ran into problems, and now I'm just like, wow...I did all that this year?		-Students teach her everyday -Knows when to move students by levels		-Much more experienced every day that goes by -What works for one group may not for another -District flip card system -Bloom's taxonomy questions from district		-Title I: Learned picture walks; how to teach guided rdg; setting up centers; vocabulary instruction -Spelling boxes from colleague -Meets w/ 2 nd grade team weekly; Classroom org came out of trial and error, listening to her students	

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Mentor	-Third grade team: helps her with books, ideas, discipline; resources, who to go to;	None assigned!	-Her mentor is the one she was room mom for: learned idiosyncrasies & nuances; notes to parents; copy machines; all the little things I didn't know	None	-Fourth grade team really wonderful: can go to them with anything	None assigned; October hire	-Same as student teaching coop teacher: plan together; advice & materials; relates well	None acc to her; I wonder about influence of traditional vs trying newer best practice

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Student teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strong relationship with coop. teacher: "right away she let me in there and started me teaching." -Learned how to use basal -Discipline, classroom mgt. skills -Learned from coop. teacher how to incorporate basal into own stuff -Questioning probing, rephrasing methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No guided reading experience -No diversity in student pop. -Never learned how to teach inference -Didn't learn how to do the first day of school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Loved it, -great mentor, -coach, -scaffolding, -like being on therapist's couch -Learned to teach reading -Still uses phrases her coop.teacher used; -She knew teaching inside and out -Learned how to teach with picture walks -Learned how to teach with guided reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -See above comment; "it's not yours." -No word wall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Classroom org. -Learned how to group students -Classroom mgt. -Monitoring learning -Story frame -Posters with mystery words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Very poor relationship w/ coop. tchr: "very controlling; when you're in my classroom you will do it my way;" negative talk & faces; little autonomy— never left room; felt like a complete failure; blind-sided; not allowed to try new vocab methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Great: coop. teacher is now mentor next door; gradually let her teach everything— scaffolded; learned levels of questioning; learned to teach guided reading; retelling chart; using workbooks; really helped to do in fall—knew how start up worked; vocabulary instruction 	None

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Clinical experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2nd clinical best; -1st was health -Both: remembering how it works to be in school; the little stuff -Opened eyes about how schools work -2nd clin: I loved it -Taught every time after third visit -Used QRI assessment with bilingual students in 2nd clin. -Learned to see needs & remediate with reading skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bilingual, lots of 1:1, little whole group teaching -No guided reading experience -Never learned how to teach inference -Didn't learn how to do the first day of school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2nd clinical "jumped in with both feet—from week one they got me in" -2nd clin. Was wonderful indoctrination—building blocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Need more practical experience; really needs to be a time of apprenticeship where it's really your classroom, low-risk of failing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learned classroom mgt. -Later volunteered w/ first clinical teacher -Uses a lot of what she learned in 1st clinical because same grade -Really involved -1st prof. guided reading: emulates -Classroom org. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learned little about content -Short-changed -Had to move: Teachers unwilling to allow her to work on completing lessons assigned; -did not allow her to even hand back papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -1st prof: 31 students, good clsm mgt., reached all students; taught 10% of time -2nd prof: coop. teacher "coached;" gave helpful feedback & shared materials; taught 30-40% 	

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Coursework (continued)	-Genre studies -Phonics -Multiple intelligences				-Language experience activity -Reading & writing connection -Reading response journals -Strategies for comprehending nonfiction -Not correcting miscues -Smooth transitions through subjects -Importance of modeling -Learning theories -Elements of mystery -Immersion in books on topic -The need for review -Word sorts		-Restating student responses -	

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Coursework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reading methods & Children's lit w/ Mrs. Abbott ("she's just awesome) -How to get ideas across -Celebrating students' success -Saved everything from coursework -Loved all the literacy ed. courses she took -Word walls -Tries to incorporate things learned in Mrs. Abbott's reading class -Organizing by genres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Never learned to do guided reading; -Didn't know what to expect of 1st graders -Never learned how to teach inference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Drs. Richards, Jung, Davis, & August all valuable -Referred to Dr. Richards several times ("she is my hero," "she was reality") -Part of learning to teach reading -Flexible grouping -Reflection -Anecdotal records -Picture walks -Importance of reading & writing connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No word wall methods in 350 -Didn't learn about picture walks (contradicts this 11-8-06) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Drs. James, Royals, Waters, August, & I were all valuable; specifically referred to children's lit & reading methods -Importance of anticipatory sets & segues -Main genres -Shaking up equilibrium to motivate learning -Grouping -Multilevel instruction -"I would say my education at MSU was definitely not lacking" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Never learned guided rdg? -No specific instructions in motivating students -Needed time to assimilate after coursework -No classroom org. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Texts, -word sorts, -grouping students -Teachable moments -Value of predicting -Cross-curricular connections -Grouping -Word walls -Teaching how to work in groups -Advises undergrads to learn & listen in reading courses—bring as much as they can -Advises to save text books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Never learned guided rdg.

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Outside Experiences (continued)							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Remembers how she learned to break up words when she was younger -Child care -Learned via guided reading -Ways she teaches reminds her of how she was taught 	

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Outside Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mother, grandmother, aunt, all teachers -From her mother: influence; materials; teachable moments; -Nanny -Childcare -Volunteer @ mom's school -Wrote first lesson plan in 8th gr. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -3rd grade teacher "ripped her to shreds" -hated AR in 4th grade -Learned no phonics in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Age: at 46, have more life experience -Being a mother for 25 yrs.: provides a safe, supportive environment; cares—doesn't just spout learning; importance of reading aloud -CCD -Brownies Volunteering -Licensed home care -Room mother -Reading with own children 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Being a mother -Lifelong learner -Volunteer in fast-paced LA class: learned methods; gained confidence; learned how to use portfolios; -Subbed: good practice, built confidence; modeled her special reading corner after one she saw while subbing 	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -First grade teacher: always pushed her, even after 1st grade -Golden Apple program: writing & implementing a lesson plan; 1st time being in a classroom; observed, tutored, helped w/ kdg.; Scouts camp; helped see if really wanted to do this (teach) -Volunteer in cousins' school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hated journals in 1st gr.