

THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS' BELIEFS ON CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

One response to educational reform initiatives has been the utilization of professional development programs designed to introduce teachers to new or alternative curricula for implementation in the classroom. As a result, teachers are often exposed to an innovative pedagogic intervention and subsequently expected to implement the intervention with little consideration for their viewpoints or for the operative classroom context. This mixed methods study considers the influence of early childhood education teachers' beliefs on classroom practice, especially in relationship to their willingness to implement a constructivist based curriculum in their classroom. Teachers beliefs (epistemological, sense of teacher efficacy, and expectancy x value) were compared to the level at which they implemented a locally endorsed, constructivist based curriculum in their classroom. There were no significant relationships between teachers' epistemological and/or sense of teacher efficacy beliefs and the level of curriculum implementation. However, teachers' expectancy x value beliefs were related to the level at which participant teachers implemented the curriculum in their classrooms, as measured by observer ratings. Based on quantitative findings, teachers were assigned to groups for subsequent qualitative analysis. Teacher interviews were conducted to explore how participant teachers decide what to do in their classroom, as well as whether or not exposure to the constructivist based curriculum influenced their beliefs about learning and teaching. Participant teachers' mental models were inferred from the participant teachers' descriptions of their classroom decision-making and classroom practice. The mental models of teachers with either less extensive levels of implementation were compared to the mental models of teachers with more extensive levels of implementation. The major differences between the groups were in the participant teachers' meta-assumptions about the role of their interactions with children in the classroom.