

AN EXAMINATION OF HOW EXTENDED FIELD EXPERIENCES, INTEGRATED
COURSEWORK, AND SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS INFLUENCED THE
DEVELOPMENT OF FOUR FIRST YEAR TEACHERS' LITERACY BELIEFS AND
PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multi-case study was to examine how a field based senior year program that integrated field experience, coursework, and school partnerships influenced the development of four first year teachers' literacy beliefs and practice. The teachers involved in this study were hired to teach in elementary primary classrooms in three different public school districts.

The design of this study was four case studies. Data consisted of fieldnotes from classroom observations, informal notes from follow-up conversations, pre and post interviews with the teachers, and classroom artifacts such as lesson plans and daily schedules. Within each case, constant comparative techniques were used to identify categories which were ultimately compared across cases.

Results indicated that university coursework, district commitment to teacher preparation, and mentor support combine to assist first year teachers in making reflective decisions which help them develop effective literacy practices. Combining coursework and field experience extends novice teachers' opportunities for teaching philosophy development. When the field experience includes the support of a strong mentor teacher, and the building sustains a solid literacy program with measures of accountability for teaching literacy in place, teaching development is enhanced. Findings also revealed that

a variety of experiences in different classrooms with different literacy programs may help first year teachers more critically examine literacy programs and practices and engage in reflective planning and decision making. In addition, immersion into a field-based senior year program may allow for quicker progression along the novice to expert teacher continuum.

The implication of this study is that teacher preparation should be embedded in classroom practice. As preservice teachers develop, they need classroom experiences that will allow them to refine their beliefs and practice. These experiences are enhanced when provisions are made for teacher reflection, preferably through sustained cognitive apprenticeships.