What Helps Beginning Special Education Teachers Learn to Teach?

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3 Studies of Beginners

1. Eight first year teachers, test-only route, middle school, across contents

2. Five first year teachers, test-only route, middle school, reading

3. Six pre-service teachers, formal university preparation, reading
Rachel

- English degree
- ESL tutor
- Worked as a paraprofessional in a charter school for students with learning disabilities
- First year, middle school reading and writing instruction
- Currently fifth year teacher, completing masters in special education
Influences on Beginning Teachers’ Practice

Individual

Preparation

Context
Preparation Continuum

Informal
- Prior Work Experiences
- Teach for America

Formal
- 1 to 2 year alternate route
- University teacher preparation
Formal Preparation

Opportunities to situate knowledge in practical settings

- field experiences
- practicum
- internships
Formal Preparation

Varied classroom experiences that utilize a variety of service delivery models and curricula

- Inclusive settings
- Push in/pull out
- District adopted general education curriculum
- Intensive intervention programs
Formal Preparation

Cooperating teachers

- Knowledge of special education
- Knowledge of classroom management
- Knowledge of the specific needs of students with disabilities
- Able to provide specific feedback on instruction
Formal Preparation

Coursework
- Blends practical and theoretical knowledge
- Well organized
- Reasonable amount of content

Course instructors
- Caring
- Experts in content
- Communicate clearly the rationale for learning course content
Formal Preparation

Access to multiple sources of knowledge

- Cooperating teachers
- Field supervisors
- Course instructors

Sources align and promote the same programmatic vision
Informal Preparation

Previous Work Experience in Schools

- Paraprofessionals or substitutes
- Familiarity of routines and schedules
- Basic understanding of instruction
- Opportunity for modeling and knowledge of strategies
Informal Preparation

Previous Work Experience Interacting with Children

- Strategies to
  - Develop positive relationships
  - Manage behavior
Informal Preparation

Previous Work Experiences Related to Content

- Expertise in content area
  - Increases comfort level in instruction
- Rely on knowledge whether connected or disconnected with instruction
School Context

- Curriculum
- Administrative support
- Collegial interactions and Sense of Inclusion
School Context

Curriculum

Three key curricular factors influence beginning teacher practice:

- A mandated, prescribed curriculum, developed specifically for students with disabilities or high-risk learners
- Mentoring
- Modeling
School Context

Collegial Interactions and Sense of Inclusion

Mentors
- experienced
- knowledgeable
- available

Colleagues
- Opportunity to interact
- Personal and professional

Sense of Inclusion
- Opportunities to interact with general education peers
- Fair treatment from administrators
School Context

Administrative Support

- Frequent Contact
- Instructional Feedback
- Overall Concern
Individual Influences

- Personal Attributes
- Family Background
- Motivation for learning and teaching
- Beliefs
Individual Influences

Personal attributes impact instruction

- Positively
  - Examples: reflective, resourceful, relentless

- Negatively
  - Examples: disorganized, timid
Individual Influences

Family background

- Family member with a disability
- Educator in the family
Motivation for learning and teaching

- Extrinsic
- Intrinsic
Individual Influences

Beliefs about

- special education and students with disabilities
- learning
- content
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