

The Effect of Early Steps Training on First-Grade
Teachers' Beliefs about the Classroom Teaching of Reading

A Dissertation

by

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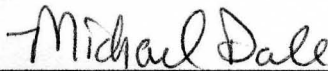
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ABSTRACT

In the present study the effects of an inservice practicum (Early Steps) on four first-grade teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the teaching of reading were studied. The practicum training provided an opportunity for the classroom teachers to tutor a child in the presence of, and under the supervision of, an expert in reading instruction. The teachers had an opportunity to observe the expert as he modeled the "how to" of the tutoring lesson, and they had opportunities to discuss with the trainer the "whys" of specific methods and strategies they were using in the tutoring lessons.

Results indicated that: (1) The Early Steps training model provides first- grade teachers with new insights into content knowledge related to teaching reading; (2) Teachers' increased understanding of content knowledge constructed during Early Steps training affects, in a positive way, their confidence in assisting low readers in their classroom; (3) Teachers vary in the ways they interpret and are affected by a common experience such as Early Steps training. The new insights alluded to in (1) concern aspects of our alphabetic writing system and the developmental course children follow in learning to read. The teachers formed and held the new insights as "stories" about their Early Steps child. The constructed stories served as reasons for their new beliefs and reasons for experimenting with new classroom practices. The variance of the effects cannot be predicted by years of teaching experience.

It was concluded that Early Steps training changes teachers' content knowledge associated with teaching reading, thereby strengthening their professional confidence in their ability to teach low readers in the classroom.