The impact of kindergarten teachers' theoretical orientation to reading on curricular planning and classroom practice in literacy.

Jacquelyn J. Singleton
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THE IMPACT OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ THEORETICAL ORIENTATION
TO READING ON CURRICULAR PLANNING AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN
LITERACY

By

Jacquelyn J. Singleton
B.S., Indiana University Southeast, 2002
M.S., Indiana University Southeast, 2005

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
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for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Teaching and Learning
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2013
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A Dissertation Approved on

October 23, 2013

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children:

Andrew, Aidan, and Sophie

Always reach for your dreams!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family for their patience and support over the past seven years. I would not have survived without the love and support of my husband, Tony, as my chief editor, critic, cheerleader and the only person able to talk me down from my tree limb each time I said, “I quit”. I am thankful my children understand mommy’s need for quiet work time. Special thanks to my family members for serving as a sounding board for my worries and for stepping in to care for my children when I couldn’t: Cindy and Galley Collins, Karen Singleton, Erin and Matt Brogdon, and Memaw. It takes a village.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude (and a huge debt) to my parents, Cindy and Galley Collins, for financing my many years of education. They believed in me many times when I didn’t believe in myself. Thanks to my mom for being role model, inspiration, travel buddy and friend. I’m glad she encouraged me to eat this particular elephant.

I am grateful to my mentor, colleague, and friend, Sheila Noon, my tech support, Earl Whitworth, and the entire faculty and staff at St. Anthony for supporting me as I juggled being both teacher and student. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lori Norton-Meier, and my committee for their time and dedication to my course of study and their patience with me. Thanks also to my research assistant, Linda Atherton, for her time.

Finally, I owe thanks to Bryce Blair. Thank you for reminding me to not take myself so seriously, helping me to believe in myself, giving me time with my family, and reminding me to laugh. When my words failed, your music spoke. You are missed.
ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ THEORETICAL ORIENTATION TO READING ON CURRICULAR PLANNING AND CLASS PRACTICE IN LITERACY

Jacquelyn J. Singleton

October 23, 2013

Using case-study analysis, this dissertation is a qualitative examination of kindergarten teachers’ beliefs, theoretical orientation toward reading, and outside pressures and their impact upon the educators’ classroom practice for literacy instruction. Selected for the study based upon their scores on DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (1985), eight teachers participated in two in-depth interviews and two separate 30-minute classroom observations for which they provided lesson plans. They also completed the Reading Interest-A-Lyzer (Reis, 2005). The results were coded with a coding scheme developed around the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile and Vygotsky’s Activity Theory—the theoretical framework for the current study. Constant comparative data analysis was used to make connections and construct meaning. Data were collected twice before an initial analysis and followed by a third gathering of information before the final analysis. Research questions for this study were examined using the original survey results for the eight case study teachers as well as qualitative data gathered through interviews, observations, and artifact collection. A cross-case
analysis reveals that regardless of educational background and despite differing self-reported theoretical orientations to reading, all eight kindergarten teachers consistently taught from a phonics-based orientation. Building upon Vygotsky’s Activity Systems theory, the concept of interdependent activity systems also emerged within the study and suggests that teachers are constantly balancing multiple activity systems in their daily work. A nexus of practice exists at the center of this new theory of interdependent activity systems - the point at which teachers are making decisions and implementing classroom practice drawn upon experiences from all their activity systems to create authentic learning opportunities for their students. Implications for teacher preparation programs, policymakers, and practitioners are discussed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operationally Defining “Beliefs”</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Teacher Beliefs</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Orientation Clusters</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeFord’s First Theoretical Orientation Cluster: Phonics</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeFord’s Second Theoretical Orientation Cluster: Skills</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeFord’s Third Theoretical Orientation Cluster: Whole Language</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Historical Perspective</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Literature Review</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Settings</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology and Design</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Findings and Implications</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Curricular Findings</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Researchers</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDY DESIGN</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Participants</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Interest-A-Lyzer</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews and Observations</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility and Trustworthiness</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULTS</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods Summary</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Summary</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sixteen Assumptions for Studying Teachers’ Educational Beliefs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Study Characteristics, Methodologies, and Findings</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Participant Characteristics</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Participants’ Personal Reading Experiences</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Data Collection Timeline</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Data Collection Method by Research Question</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Initial Coding Scheme</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Participant Characteristics</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Frequency of Observed Theoretical Orientation Codes</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Activity Systems Theory Model</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Detailed Field Notes Sample</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Final Coding Scheme</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Activity Systems Theory Model</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Interdependent Activity Systems</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Interdependent Activity Systems Nexus of Practice</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Interdependent Activity Systems Nexus of Practice</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Education ultimately depends on what happens in classrooms... between teachers and learners. That is fundamental” (Perkins, 1992).

As illustrated by the quote above, the interaction between teachers and students and the ensuing curricular choices made by teachers as a result of those interactions are fundamental to the purpose of schooling in a democratic society. This study will focus on the beliefs of kindergarten teachers and the impact beliefs have on their daily practice in the classroom, particularly in the area of literacy. Today’s educational climate, with emphasis on teacher efficacy, underlies the importance of examining how teachers’ beliefs and practices play out in the classroom setting. This chapter outlines a brief history of education in America and describes recent educational policy, thus emphasizing the need for the current study.

American education is rooted in private and religious schools, but made the move toward public schooling in the mid-1800s to accommodate increasing numbers of immigrants with differing religious and cultural views (Coulson, 1999; Ornstein & Levine, 1984). By 1980, 99% of American children attended government schools (Ornstein & Levine, 1984). Today, educational stakeholders such as politicians, educators, and parents wish for students in the United States to be the best and the brightest, but there is much disagreement about how schools should accomplish that goal.
In the early days of American public education, individual schools and teachers chose the subject matter and teaching methods for each classroom (Ornstein & Levine, 1984). This afforded no consistency in what was taught from schoolhouse to schoolhouse, much less across the nation (Ornstein & Levine, 1984). In more recent times, educators observed their control over textbook selection erode as school corporations began determining what should be taught at each grade level within their districts and purchasing commercially-produced textbooks for their schools. This created more uniformity across schools in small areas, and stakeholders began to see the advantages of a more homogenous curriculum (Ornstein & Levine, 1984).

In 1983, a special report titled *A Nation at Risk* was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report described serious problems with the American educational system, citing the need for better curriculum, higher expectations for students, and more qualified, highly-trained teachers (NCEE, 1983). In 1987, the idea of required core subject areas for high schools was proposed as an effort to hold students to higher expectations. Professional organizations like the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics began publishing their own reports cataloguing necessary knowledge and skills for students to master at each grade level (Jones, 2009).

The Clinton Administration reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1994, ensuring that all states had rigorous standards for all subject areas and grade levels. This was followed by the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, which mandated that schools demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP was based primarily on student performance on standardized tests, and if AYP was not shown, the school was considered “failing” (NCLB, 2001). The
standardized tests assessed student proficiency in the areas identified by each state’s academic standards.

In 2009, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was introduced by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in an effort to provide a comprehensive national framework for what students should be learning, with particular emphasis on Language Arts and Mathematics. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released in 2010 and 44 states have currently adopted them with a goal for full implementation in the 2014-2015 school year. Student achievement will be measured using an assessment developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The CCSS are internationally benchmarked with a goal of providing students with the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and careers while also allowing for a more accurate comparison between states’ educational progress (CCSS, 2012).

Indiana’s Department of Education, under the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Tony Bennett, strongly advocated use of the CCSS (Bennett, 2010). With a unanimous vote of the State Board of Education, Indiana became one of the early states to adopt the standards in August of 2010 (IDOE, 2011). Indiana also is a governing state for the PARCC. States considered "governing states," have made the strongest commitment to PARCC and its activities and, therefore, have the most decision-making authority (CCSS, 2012). Indiana began requiring use of the CCSS in kindergarten for the 2011-2012 school year, two years ahead of schedule. Those kindergarten students will be the first group of third graders participating in the new Common Core assessment in 2014-2015.
The Common Core State Standards are not a scripted curriculum, but rather a list of knowledge, skills, and topics to be taught over a given timeline throughout each school year (CCSS, 2012). Under the new Common Core State Standards, teachers will be responsible for connecting their current beliefs and practices with a new set of requirements for teaching and learning.

At this groundbreaking point in academic standards history, it is important to recognize the role of a teacher’s theoretical orientation on curriculum planning and implementation and the subsequent impact on student achievement. With this educational perspective in mind, the current study will examine the beliefs about literacy instruction held by kindergarten teachers on the cusp of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The study will look at the relationship between individual teacher beliefs and the literacy environment, curriculum, and practices in his or her classroom.

The importance of a teacher’s role in the classroom has not been overlooked by policy-makers. In July 2004, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and President Barack Obama announced the $4.35 billion dollar Race to the Top (RTT) initiative to spur innovation and reform in state education. Four specific areas of reform were targeted, including, “recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most.” (RTT, 2009) This initiative places teachers and their classroom decision-making processes directly in the national spotlight.

Nowhere has this battle over curriculum been more prominent than in the area of literacy. School districts spend billions of dollars annually on commercially-available programs professing to turn students into proficient readers (NRRF, 1996). The Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of creating critical, thoughtful readers
As a natural outgrowth of meeting the charge to define college and career readiness, the Standards (CCSS) also lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century.” (CCSS, 2012) Students who are not literate and cannot read, write, use technology or communicate effectively will not succeed in higher education or in the workplace (National Institute for Literacy, 2009).

At its simplest definition, literacy is the ability to read and write. However, educators realize literacy is more complex and involves the use of reading, writing and spelling skills to derive meaning from, interpret, and respond to text using both oral and written language (DeVries, 2008; Miller, 2009; National Institute for Literacy, 2009). In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) published their report identifying what they found to be the most significant components of literacy. Of the areas examined by the NRP, five of the most important skills reported for children learning to read included: (a) phonemic awareness: teaching children to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken syllables and words; (b) phonics: using letter-sound relationships to read or spell words; (c) fluency: reading orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression; (d) vocabulary: the written and oral words students must know to communicate effectively; and (e) comprehension: the ability to understand and construct meaning from what is read (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The findings of the National Reading Panel focus instruction on the very basics of reading. Literacy skills are an essential building block for academic, social and career achievement (National Institute for Literacy, 2009).

Even with the development and adoption of Common Core State Standards, many curricular decisions about how to best teach specific reading skills are still left to the
classroom teacher discretion. Each teacher has his or her own philosophy about how students learn to read, as well as the personal background, training, abilities and experiences that he or she brings to the classroom. Many teachers subscribe to one or more of the more relevant learning theories, guiding their curriculum choices (DeVries, 2008).

When examining teachers’ instructional choices, it is important to consider the theoretical framework from which they are working. Educational theory focusing on child development has been established by academics such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Maslow and their work is often referenced in classrooms. For example, constructivists believe that students make sense of new material by linking what they already know with what they are learning, building on prior knowledge (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Teachers who follow Piaget’s constructivist theory provide hands-on learning experiences for students, helping them to build connections and providing background knowledge for those students who may not have it (DeVries, 2008).

Vygotsky used the phrase “Zone of Proximal Development” to describe the “distance between the (child’s) actual development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers who subscribe to this theory provide scaffolding to their students until they are able to work independently. In a reading classroom, this translates into demonstration that moves to guided practice and culminates in independent learning (DeVries, 2009).
A third theory is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs. Maslow proposed that all humans have five basic human needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1987). He also suggests that unless or until a child’s most basic needs are met, he or she will not be able to make sufficient educational progress. Effective teachers look for ways to increase a student’s self-esteem and sense of belonging and safety in the classroom, knowing that only when these needs are met will the student be ready to learn.

Teachers bring a vast array of experiences with them to the classroom beyond their formal education. Personal literacy and reading experiences play a role in how a teacher choses to teach reading to his or her students. In her book, The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child, Donalyn Miller (2009) suggests that teachers who are not readers themselves are more likely to take a skills-only approach to teaching reading while teachers who have an aesthetic view of reading have a greater long-term impact on the reading experiences of their students. Gambrell (1996) discovered that “one of the key factors in motivating students to read is a teacher who values reading and is enthusiastic about sharing a love of reading with students”. The key to effective reading instruction has many intertwined facets, including the beliefs and practices of the teacher and the outside influences of other stakeholders in education.

Beyond theories on child development, teachers also have their own ideas about how to best teach a child to read (DeVries, 2008). The majority of these methods can be grouped into one of three major reading models: the part-to-whole approach, the whole-to-part approach, and the comprehensive approach (DeVries, 2008). The part-to-whole model starts with an emphasis on learning letter names and sounds, followed by easily
decodable words before the student reads stories containing those words. This model includes three approaches to reading instruction: a phonics approach, a linguistic approach (using onset/rime patterns), and a sight word approach.

A second model is the whole-to-part approach, where lessons begin with a shared story or book and students become aware of decoding strategies and patterns as they talk about the words in the story (DeVries, 2008). The whole-to-part approach, sometimes called “whole language”, has been criticized in recent years, but research indicates that it does work for many students (DeVries, 2008; Yoo, 2005).

Considering recent federal mandates, many teachers are realizing the benefits of a comprehensive or holistic approach to teaching reading. In this model, phonics and decoding skills are integrated with literature-based reading and writing (DeVries, 2009). Regardless of the preferred educational theory or method of reading instruction chosen, the teacher remains a vital part of teaching a child to read. Duffy and Hoffman (1999) point out, “There is no ‘perfect method’ for teaching reading to all children…the answer is not in the method but in the teacher”.

Despite evidence indicating that the teacher is the deciding factor in a reading classroom, there is a surprising paucity of recent research surrounding this issue. The next chapter will include a review of the current available research on how kindergarten teachers’ theoretical orientation to reading and their personal literacy experiences influence instructional decision-making and classroom practices. Chapter three will include an outline of the current research study, examining the attitudes and beliefs of Indiana kindergarten teachers toward literacy and literacy instruction, while chapters four
This qualitative study centers around three research questions: (a) In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?; (b) How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?; and (c) What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice? The goals of the proposed study are three-fold:

- to examine the interaction between a teacher’s theoretical orientation towards reading and classroom practice;
- to describe the impact of a teacher’s personal reading experiences and theoretical orientation on curricular planning and classroom practice; and
- to contribute to the current body of knowledge on literacy teaching and learning.

This study is not intended to take a deficit view in relation to teachers despite the current climate of unprecedented attacks on teacher training and abilities (Clarken, 2012). Rather, the goal of the study is to inform understanding of teacher learning and curricular decision-making and to engage educational activists and stakeholders in deep conversation about supporting teachers to create optimal literacy learning opportunities for all students.
CHAPTER 2
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Rationale

One’s personal predispositions are not only relevant but, in fact, stand at the core of becoming a teacher.

-Dan Lortie, Schoolteacher

As evidenced in the previous chapter, teacher efficacy is a timely topic in education. Researchers and policy makers alike have realized the importance of providing students a solid foundation, especially in the area of reading abilities (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). However, there is a gap in the research with regards to the role a teacher’s beliefs about literacy and literacy instruction play in his or her curriculum planning and classroom practice. Thus, the purpose of this review is to examine the current available research about the beliefs of primary grade teachers toward literacy and literacy instruction and how those beliefs impact a teacher’s instructional decision-making and practice. First, an operational definition of teacher beliefs will be suggested, followed by a brief review of the historically significant research on teacher beliefs about literacy and literacy instruction. A review of the current research in the subject, including content areas outside of reading, is presented. Finally, a theoretical framework for the proposed study will be shared.
Operationally Defining “Beliefs”

At its most basic level, *Webster’s Dictionary for Students* (2007) defines a belief as “something that one thinks is true”. In the field of education and educational psychology, there are a host of words that might be used interchangeably with the same intent in mind: attitudes, opinions, views, convictions, principles, conclusions, or dispositions. It is understandably hard, then, to pin down a solid construct of the word. Pajares (1992) suggests that researchers have shied away from the topic of teacher beliefs due to “definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures”. In 1992, he attempted to clear up the confusion with his article, “Teachers’ Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messy Construct”. The article compiles the work of prominent researchers in an effort to synthesize findings about the nature of teacher beliefs.

Over thirty years ago, Fenstermacher (1979) predicted that teacher effectiveness research would begin to focus on the study of beliefs (Pajares, 1992). More recently, Pintrich (1990) proposed that the study of teacher beliefs would eventually become the most beneficial psychological construct to teacher education (Pajares, 1992). Pajares (1992) acknowledges that while the study of beliefs as a global construct does not lend itself neatly to empirical investigation, enough research has been undertaken to make the examination of beliefs viable and valuable to the field of education. He suggests, “Subject specific beliefs, such as beliefs about reading, mathematics, or the nature of science, are key to researchers’ attempting to understand the intricacies of how children learn.” (Pajares, 1992) Through his own research and review, Pajares offers sixteen fundamental assumptions, found in Table 1, for undertaking the study of teachers’
educational beliefs. The current study will use these assumptions as a lens and operational definition for examining the beliefs of kindergarten teachers.

Table 1

*Sixteen Assumptions for Studying Teachers’ Educational Beliefs (Pajares, 1992)*

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<th>Supporting Research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2. Individuals develop a belief system that houses all the beliefs acquired through the process of cultural transmission.</td>
<td>Abelson, 1979; Brown &amp; Cooney, 1982; Eisenhart et al.,1988; Nisbett &amp; Ross, 1980; Peterman, 1991; Posner, Strike, Hewson, &amp; Gertzog,1982; Rokeach, 1968; Van Fleet, 1979</td>
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<td>3. The belief system has an adaptive function in helping individuals define and understand the world and themselves.</td>
<td>Abelson, 1979; Lewis, 1990; Nisbett &amp; Ross, 1980; Rokeach, 1968; Schutz, 1970</td>
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<td>4. Knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined, but the potent affective, evaluative, and episodic nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted.</td>
<td>Abelson, 1979; Calderhead &amp; Robson, 1991; Eraut, 1985; Goodman, 1988; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett &amp; Ross, 1980; Posner, Strike, Hewson, &amp; Gertzog,1982; Schommer, 1990</td>
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<td>5. Thought processes may well be precursors to and creators of belief, but the filtering effect of belief structures ultimately screens, redefines, distorts, or reshapes subsequent thinking and information processing.</td>
<td>Abelson, 1979; Calderhead &amp; Robson, 1991; Goodman, 1988; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett &amp; Ross, 1980; Posner, Strike, Hewson, &amp; Gertzog,1982; Rokeach, 1968; Schommer, 1990</td>
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6. Epistemological beliefs play a key role in knowledge interpretation and cognitive monitoring. 


7. Beliefs are prioritized according to their connection or relationship to other beliefs or other cognitive and affective structures. Apparent inconsistencies may be explained by exploring the functional connections and centrality of the beliefs.

Kitchener, 1986; Nespor, 1987; Peterman, 1991; Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982; Rokeach, 1968; Schutz, 1970

8. Belief substructures, such as educational beliefs, must be understood in terms of their connections not only to each other, but also to other, perhaps more central, beliefs in the system. Psychologists usually refer to these substructures as attitudes and values.

Kitchener, 1986; Peterman, 1991; Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982; Rokeach, 1968

9. By their very nature and origin, some beliefs are more incontrovertible than others.

Abelson, 1979; Bandura, 1986; Clark, 1988; Lewis, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Rokeach, 1968

10. The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter. Newly acquired beliefs are most vulnerable to change.

Abelson, 1979; Clark, 1988; Lewis, 1990; Munby, 1982; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982; Rokeach, 1968

11. Belief change during adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon, the most common cause being a conversion from one authority to another or a gestalt shift. Individuals tend to hold on to beliefs based on incorrect or incomplete knowledge, even after scientifically correct explanations are presented to them.


12. Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tolls with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence, they play a critical role in defining behavior and organizing knowledge and information.

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<thead>
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<th>Beliefs strongly influence perception, but they can be an unreliable guide to the nature of reality.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abelson, 1979; Bandura, 1986; Buchmann &amp; Schwille, 1983; Lewis, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett &amp; Ross, 1980; Rokeach, 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Individuals’ beliefs strongly affect their behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Beliefs must be inferred, and this inference must take into account the congruence among individuals’ belief statements, the intentionality to behave in a predisposed manner, and the behavior related to the belief in question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Beliefs about teaching are well established by the time a student gets to college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pajares (1992) provides the operational definition for teacher beliefs needed as a framework for the current study examining three theoretical orientations to literacy outlined by Diane DeFord (1985). Taking a qualitative approach to the study of teacher beliefs is both relevant and appropriate, and the use of case study methodology will provide deeper insight into the topic (Pajares, 1992).

**Measuring Teacher Beliefs**

The importance of a teacher’s role in the classroom has been long recognized and little disputed throughout history (DeVries, 2088; Ornstein & Levine, 1984). However,
supporting research and instrumentation were not always available. In 1985, DeFord developed and validated an instrument to determine a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading instruction. Referred to as the DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), the instrument uses a Likert scale response to measure the beliefs teachers hold with regards to particular practices in reading instruction. A copy of the TORP appears in Appendix A. DeFord developed the TORP from a constructivist perspective, which holds that the knowledge one possesses has an impact on how one interprets others’ behavior, and thus also has an influence on one’s own actions (Magoon, 1977). The TORP was created to be a measure and means of differentiation between teachers’ theoretical orientations for the purposes of research.

In validating the TORP, DeFord (1985) designed a pilot study to evaluate the strength of the instrument. The instrument was first administered to forty-seven educators with a known theoretical orientation towards reading, with the results of the pilot study garnering an 80% reliability rate. A sample of ninety teachers of known theoretical orientation, thirty of each of the three orientations, were then administered the TORP. Trained judges and observers assisted with correlation of the data. DeFord concluded, “Teachers of known theoretical orientation responded in consistent, predictable patterns to statements about practices in reading instruction.” (DeFord, 1985). Judges agreed about the pattern of responses for each reading model and observers were able to predict a teacher’s orientation after observing his or her teaching.

Theoretical orientation as it pertains to reading is defined as a teacher’s particular knowledge and belief system about reading and reading instruction, including those principles which guide teachers as they make instructional decisions (Harste & Burke,
DeFord hypothesized that teachers fell into three clusters of theoretical orientations towards the teaching of reading: phonics, skills, and whole language, but recognized that most published instructional reading programs share common characteristics and fall along a continuum of these three. DeFord’s hypothesis is supported by her own prior research in 1981, as well as that of Andrews (1976), Barr (1974-1975), and DeLawter (1975).

**Theoretical Orientation Clusters**

DeFord (1985) developed the pilot version of the TORP with the idea that teachers of the same theoretical orientation would exhibit similar traits and behaviors during classroom instruction. In doing so, she examined published reading programs used in classrooms and categorized them according to the basic distinctions in theoretical orientation that were most prevalent in each program (DeFord, 1985). From this examination three clusters of theoretical orientations emerged: phonics, skills, and whole language. The following paragraphs will share DeFord’s criteria for the clusters as well as offering supporting research for each of the three theoretical orientations measured by the TORP.

*DeFord’s First Theoretical Orientation Cluster: Phonics*

In examining the instructional reading programs grouped by similar features, DeFord (1985) noted that one group emphasized learning small language units with gradual movement toward whole word reading and reading comprehension. The teacher’s manuals accompanying this cluster of programs allotted large amounts of time for decoding of isolated phonemes and letter patterns while the student texts introduced
consonant-vowel combinations systematically (DeFord, 1985). Sight word instruction
was only used for words not conforming to standard spelling rules, and fluency and text
comprehension were introduced after a foundation in letter/sound correspondence was
built. DeFord labeled this cluster of reading programs “phonics”.

The roots of phonics-based instruction can be traced as far back as the The New
England Primer, which was published in England in 1683 and taught children first the
letters, syllables, and spelling of sounds before reading the text (Starrett, 2007). The term
“phonics” describes the relationship of spelling patterns to sound patterns within the
orthographic code of a language as well as referring to a system of teaching learners
about these relationships and how to use the system to recognize words (Mesmer &

When released in 1995, the National Reading Panel Report found that phonics
was one of the five critical areas of reading instruction (NRP, 2000; Starrett, 2007). The
National Reading Panel concluded that explicit, systemic phonics instruction is an
essential part of any reading program (NRP, 2000; Starrett, 2007). While methods have
varied over the years, more recent researchers have agreed upon seven vital components
of quality phonics instruction. Good phonics instruction should: (a) develop the
alphabetic principle; (b) develop phonological awareness; (c) provide a thorough
grounding in letters; (d) not teach rules; (e) provide sufficient practice in reading words;
(f) lead to automatic word recognition; and (g) be only one part of reading instruction
(Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Dougherty, 1998; Stahl, 1992; Starrett, 2007). Although DeFord
classified the instructional reading programs meeting these criteria as “phonics”, the
teaching of phonics also can occur in a variety of classroom settings, including being
embedded within whole language lessons (Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Dougherty, 1998).

**Deford’s Second Theoretical Orientation Cluster: Skills**

The second group of instructional reading programs categorized by DeFord (1985) placed an emphasis on children’s sight word vocabulary. Vocabulary words were introduced in context and then used within texts for practice. Word attack skills such as affixes, suffixes, root words, compound words and use of context clues were taught as a means of approaching unknown words. What DeFord labeled as the “skills” cluster might also be described today as teaching reading strategies or balanced literacy instruction. Although each label has a different technical definition, they are often used interchangeably to illustrate similar instruction to DeFord’s second theoretical orientation cluster.

The skills movement occurred throughout the 1950s and 1960s, reaching its peak in the 1970s and remaining almost unchallenged in basal readers until the late 1980s when it was surpassed in popularity by the whole language movement (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). With the emergence of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 and the National Reading Panel Report (2000), a strong emphasis on standards and tests brought strategy instruction and balanced literacy back into the spotlight (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008; Pressley, Rochrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002).

Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) differentiate between skills and strategies by saying, “Reading skills are automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency and fluency.” Reading strategies, on the other hand, are deliberate, goal-directed attempts to decode and construct meaning within text

DeFord’s skills cluster bears a resemblance to balanced literacy instruction made popular by Michael Pressley’s 1998 book, *Reading Instruction That Works: The Case for Balanced Teaching*. A balanced literacy program includes effective skills and strategy instruction as well as the teaching of holistic reading and writing, tailored to the needs of individual students (Pressley, Rochrig, Bogner, Raphael, & Dolezal, 2002). Thus, the skills cluster could be viewed as representing the middle of DeFord’s continuum, between total phonics instruction and whole language teaching.

**DeFord’s Third Theoretical Orientation Cluster: Whole Language**

The last of DeFord’s three theoretical orientations clusters is “whole language”. Instructional reading programs falling into this category provided readers with literature from the very beginning of instruction, emphasizing story and text structure as a framework for dealing with smaller language units. The reading experience integrated activities focusing on words or letters within the reading of the text. An integral part of programs in the whole language cluster was shared reading and writing experiences (DeFord, 1985).

A simple definition of whole language is not easily determined. Dr. Steven Krashen writes, “The term “whole language” does not refer only to providing interesting comprehensible texts and helping children understand less comprehensible texts. It involves instilling a love of literature, problem-solving and critical thinking, collaboration, authenticity, personalized learning, and much more.” (Krashen, 2002)
Proponents of this approach purport students in a whole language classroom initiate learning, generate the curriculum, direct their own behavior, and evaluate the outcomes when given real opportunities for reading and writing in a natural environment (Daniels, Zemelman, & Bizar, 1999; Goodman, 1989; Goodman, 1992; Watson, 1989). Often researchers find it useful to explain practices which do not characterize whole language. Kenneth Goodman (1992), a well-known educator and advocate of whole language, suggests that for all the ideas whole language includes, there are also very definite exclusions to its definition. Whole language is not: (a) outcome-based education; (b) phonics-only reading programs; (c) direct instruction; (d) a single program, set of materials, or technique (Goodman, 1992; Watson, 1989).

Often described as a grassroots movement, supporters of whole language trace its roots to the seventeenth century and John Amos Comenius. Although the concepts Comenius taught do not bear close resemblance to the current definition of whole language, important characteristics about children and learning in his model tie seventeenth century educational pedagogy with whole language today (Goodman, 1989). Whole language also has roots within Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, emphasizing the relationship of a student’s individual learning and his or her environment and social context (Goodman, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). Literature-based reading instruction, which encouraged students’ reading of whole children’s literature for discussion and writing, was used as early as the 1930s and is the immediate and somewhat overlapping predecessor to the current whole language movement (Daniels, Zemelman, & Bizar, 1999). Whole language reached peak popularity in the late 1970s and the 1980s with researchers such as Kenneth Goodman, Dorothy Watson, Jerome
An Historical Perspective

Although this literature review only includes research encompassing the past twenty years, from a historical perspective the works of Penny Freppon are both relevant and notable for the current study. The dates of Freppon’s work exclude it from this study’s core literature review, but it is nonetheless pertinent to mention her contribution to the research base.

Freppon studied the literacy learning of early elementary students with regards to the instructional setting of the reading classroom (Freppon, 1991; Freppon & McIntyre, 1999; Dahl & Freppon, 1995; McIntyre & Freppon, 1994; Purcell-Gates, et al., 1995). The research designs chosen by Freppon include use of DeFord’s TORP (1985) to identify the teacher participants’ beliefs about reading instruction. Her seminal pieces focus on early elementary-aged children, most often students in kindergarten and first grade. For example, Freppon (1991) investigated the influence that the type of instruction had on the reading concepts of first graders randomly selected from two skills-based and two literature-based classrooms. She found that while the two groups were similar in phonics and decoding, students from the literature-based classroom had better metacognitive understandings, used more reading strategies, and were more likely to view reading as a meaning-making process (Freppon, 1991).

Similarly, McIntyre and Freppon (1994) examined the development of alphabetic knowledge in kindergarten students in a skills-based classroom compared to
those in a whole-language classroom. They found that both settings provided explicit phonics instruction, although presented in different ways. Both settings also allowed time for students to read self-selected materials and to write. Their findings illustrate that the necessity of these components in a beginning reading curriculum should be examined (McIntyre & Freppon, 1994). Overall, Frepon’s body of work shows differences in achievement of students based upon the literacy instruction provided, thus lending itself to the purposes and aims of the current study.

Core Literature Review

With a well-validated instrument such as the TORP readily available, it would seem there should be an abundance of current literature specifically investigating how teacher beliefs about literacy drive curriculum choices and classroom practice. However, the most recent existing body of research on the topic is surprisingly small, perhaps due to an increased focus on student achievement and teacher efficacy. Additionally, there is no current research investigating teacher beliefs with regards to the Common Core State Standards. This review will summarize the available knowledge and possible applications relevant to the current study. An analysis of the characteristics of the participants, research designs, and major findings across studies is provided, accompanied by discussion of the findings to address strengths, limitations, and implications for future research.

Method

The literature review of research conducted in the area of teachers’ beliefs toward literacy and literacy instruction began with a search of electronic databases and search
engines, including Academic Search Premier, ERIC, EBSCOHOST, Google, and Google Scholar. Various combinations of the following keywords were used: elementary teachers, beliefs, literacy instruction, reading instruction, and literacy. After viewing the retrieved articles, an archival search was conducted. The combination of these searches produced 380 articles in which the keywords were addressed. The following criteria were used for inclusion in this review: (a) the focus of the study was on current or future teachers of students in pre-kindergarten through grade two; (b) the study was published in the last 21 years, since the year 1991; and (c) the main topic of the study was teachers’ attitudes and/or curricular decision-making with regards to literacy instruction.

The original search criteria only included research conducted after 2001, the year No Child Left Behind was enacted. Searches with different keyword combinations using dates from 2001 to the present yielded 273 articles. These 273 articles were not unique, often appearing in each of the three searches and thus implying a circular knowledge base. Although “literacy” and “reading” were used as a search terms, many of the retrieved articles focused primarily on other subject areas and were excluded. Research from outside the area of literacy is addressed later in this chapter. While the collection of articles meeting the inclusion criteria occurred, the reference pages were searched for additional possibilities. Five of the included articles were located through cross-referencing.

After reviewing the results, it was decided to extend the time period ten years prior to NCLB in an effort to discover similarities and differences in research findings before and after the legislation. The keywords “teacher beliefs” and “literacy” were used, having yielded the largest result in the original searches. Changing the dates yielded an
additional 107 articles, nine of which met inclusion criteria. Despite lengthening the time frame, a similar problem arose with search terms yielding articles focusing primarily on subject areas other than literacy.

Studies using current and future teachers of students in preschool through grade two as participants were chosen to closely mirror the participants in the current study. Teacher training, curriculum and best practice vary based on grade level and students’ developmental readiness. Early primary teachers’ experiences with and beliefs about literacy learning and instruction differ from those held by middle school and high school teachers.

After the inclusion criteria were applied to the 380 articles, 18 articles were identified to include in the review. The 18 articles meeting the criteria were reviewed to determine the impact of teacher beliefs toward literacy on curriculum planning and literacy instruction. Particularly, the articles were analyzed to determine the characteristics of the study participants, research setting, research designs, and major findings across studies. This information is also found in Table 2.

Participants

Seventeen of the 18 articles included in this literature review had a population of participants to examine. Cummins, Cheek and Lindsey (2004) authored “The Relationship between Teachers’ Literacy Beliefs and their Instructional Practices: A Brief Review of the Literature for Teacher Educators” and, while included in the overall literature review, the article is not applicable to the current section about participant characteristics. The remaining 17 articles were examined with regards to the grade level taught by participants as well as the research setting. The researchers who conducted two
of the studies (12%) used pre-service teachers exclusively as participants, while three
studies (18%) examined a combination of pre-service and in-service teachers. Twelve
studies (70%) utilized educators currently holding a teaching position. Ten of the 17
studies (59%) reported the sex of participants as predominantly (if not exclusively)
female, while the other seven studies did not report the sex of participants.

Research Settings

Effective evidence-based instructional methods can vary greatly depending upon
grade level. Similarly, a teacher’s beliefs about curricular planning and instruction could
differ according to the age of the students in the classroom. Since participants in the
current study are kindergarten teachers, this literature review includes research focusing
on teachers of preschool through grade two for a more accurate comparison of findings.

It was previously reported that two of the 17 studies used pre-service teachers exclusively
as participants. Of the remaining 15 articles, two (13%) used preschool teachers, one
(7%) used kindergarten teachers, one (7%) used first grade teachers and two (13%) used
second grade teachers, while the other nine (60%) used a combination of early childhood
and elementary teachers not specified by grade level.

Researchers in the United States are not alone in seeking a link between teacher
beliefs and practices in literacy instruction. Although 15 of the 17 studies (88%) took
place in the U.S., two (12%) took place outside the country. Li, Wang, and Ming Sin
Wong (2011) conducted research in Shenzhen, China examining teachers’ beliefs and
practices in Chinese literacy teaching after the implementation of two different
educational reforms. Since the 1980s, Chinese educators and policy makers have
attempted to transform China’s early childhood curriculum into a more progressive style
by implementing European programs such as the Montessori Method and the Reggio Emilia approach. These programs focus on intrinsic learning abilities and education of the whole child (Ornstein & Levine, 1984). Li, Wang, and Min Sin Wong’s work indicated a gap between beliefs and practices, as well as between beliefs and policy. Even though teachers reported beliefs in curriculum reform ideas, most were still practicing the traditional Chinese model with one teacher directing in a whole-class setting. The findings suggest policymakers should take the prevailing education system, culture, language, parents, teachers, and available resources into account before making curriculum reforms.

Yoo (2005) conducted research in Seoul and Pusan, cities in South Korea. She examined the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and instructional practices in children’s literacy. Yoo administered a self-designed questionnaire to measure teacher beliefs and followed up by interviewing the five highest and lowest scoring teachers. Results indicated difficulty in changing teachers’ perceptions about learning and teaching language because they teach the way they themselves learned language from a young age through their college years. The researcher writes, “…changing teachers’ beliefs toward language involves teachers thinking reflectively about their teaching and their whole life, and empowers them to have a critical perspective based on this philosophy.” (Yoo, 2005)

Research Methodology and Design

The 17 articles reviewed with regard to the current study vary only slightly in research design and methodology. The broad intent of each is basically the same: to examine how teacher beliefs about literacy impact students and/or classroom practice. Of the 17 studies, nine (53%) incorporated a mixed methods approach to research, coupling
survey or questionnaire data with interviews and observations. Four (23.5%) of the studies were strictly quantitative and four (23.5%) were qualitative. Powers, Zippay and Butler (2006) administered the Literacy Orientation Survey developed and validated by Lenski, Wham and Griffey (1998) in order to measure teacher beliefs about literacy and literacy learning. Shaw, Dvorak and Bates (2007) and Grisham (2000) both employed DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation To Reading Profile (2005), which is administered to participants in the current study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>N*</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Major Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnyak &amp; Paquette (2010)</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>&gt; F</td>
<td>pre-service</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Surveys indicate participants’ beliefs were generally literature based, with some strong beliefs regarding phonics and skills as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broemmel (2006)</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Survey, interview</td>
<td>The consensus was that effective pre-service reading education should include balanced, practical methodologies across a number of reading related courses, supplemented with field experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, Molfese, &amp; Molfese (2008)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire; student achievement scores</td>
<td>Teachers’ beliefs about literacy and mathematics were weakly related to children’s learning outcomes, but added to the variance accounted for beyond teacher education and experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford (2004)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Observation, interview</td>
<td>Commitment to developmentally appropriate practice diminished as pressure to follow a mandated curriculum increases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cummins, Cheek, &amp; Lindsey (2004)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Results reflect findings indicative of a direct and positive relationship between teachers’ beliefs of the reading processes and their instructional practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunningham, Zibulsky, Stanovich, &amp; Stanovich (2009)</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Beliefs survey; measures of phonics and literature knowledge</td>
<td>Teachers’ preferred practices were allotted more time than recommended by current research and policy. Teachers apportioned up to 60% of their time to one particular instructional category, precluding their ability to engage in balanced literacy instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study (Year)</td>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Gomez (2009)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11 F</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Literacy played an important functional role in the lives of all 12 teachers, but there was variability in whether and in what ways teachers shared their personal literacy practices with their students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grisham (2000)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Preservice &amp; in-service</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Findings suggest that students in teacher preparation programs are influenced by the nature of their pre-service program, although the nature of the relationship is neither direct nor simple.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindman &amp; Wasik (2008)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27 F</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>In general, teachers agreed with research-based practices related to oral language and book reading, but more variability was apparent around writing beliefs. Teacher experience was positively linked to agreement with evidence-based beliefs about oral language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li, Wang, &amp; Wong (2011)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Preschool &amp; K</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Results indicate a practice-policy gap as well as a belief-practice gap. The traditional Chinese teaching model was still dominating despite reforms. Findings suggest curriculum reforms should take into consideration the culture, language, teachers, parents, available resources and prevailing education system.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lehman, Freeman &amp; Allen (1994)</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>K-7</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Findings suggest that knowledge relates to beliefs, which influence instructional practice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenski, Wham &amp; Griffey (1999)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>The instrument being validated consistently predicted classroom practice. It is concluded that the instrument can be used as a reliable and valid indicator of teachers’ practices during literacy instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powell-Brown (2004)</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Preservice &amp; in-service</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Teachers who have a passion for reading are role models for students. Teachers should demonstrate their own passion for reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powers, Zippay &amp; Butler (2006)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Findings indicate teacher beliefs and classroom instruction are often inconsistent due to outside pressures. Despite this, teachers still serve as key evaluator of students’ literacy development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw, Dvorak &amp; Bates (2007)</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>47 F M</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>There is a relationship between participants’ pretest scores about their beliefs, their experiences and in-class learning during the semester and their post-test scores. The pre-service teachers’ overall beliefs were impacted and many of their beliefs about specific literacy concepts shifted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2010)</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>&gt; F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>There were significant differences between Reading First and non-Reading First teachers, between teachers who began teaching prior to or after 2002, and between Title 1 and non-Title 1 teachers on survey items, beliefs, and classroom practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas &amp; Barksdale-Ladd (1997)</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>In looking at children’s understanding of literacy in this study, the authors contend that they reflect well their teachers’ beliefs and practices. The children’s definitions of literacy processes and their resultant products mirrored somewhat their teachers’ beliefs of reading, writing, and learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoo (2005)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Early elementary</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>This study found that there is a difference and relationship between some teachers’ characteristics as independent variables and the scores of teachers’ beliefs about literacy in this research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = Number of Participants; NR = not reported; M = male; F = female; NA = not applicable*
As suggested by Yoo (2005), a teacher’s beliefs about literacy begin forming from a very young age, drawing upon personal experiences. Three studies in the literature review examined the beliefs held by pre-service teachers and how those beliefs can be impacted by teacher education programs. Grisham (2000) followed twelve individuals as they completed their teacher certification and master’s degree in teaching. She found the nature of students’ pre-service programs to be influential but did not uncover a direct relationship. Similarly, Shaw, Dvorak and Bates (2007) used the TORP to discover a relationship between pre- and post-test scores and experiences throughout a semester of a teacher training program. Overall, the pre-service teachers’ beliefs and perception were impacted over the course of the semester. Broemmel (2006) asked 200 elementary teachers to compare their own training in reading instruction to that of a student teacher. The general consensus that emerged was that an effective pre-service program would include, “balanced, practical methodologies across a number of reading related courses, supplemented by multiple field experience opportunities.” (Broemmel, 2006)

Barnyak and Paquette (2010) also looked at pre-service teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about reading instruction and whether or not teacher training coursework had an impact on them. The results of pre- and post-tests indicate that participants’ beliefs were generally literature based, although strong beliefs about phonics instruction also surfaced. The teaching methods changed as pre-service teachers began their careers. Cunningham, Zibulsky, Stanovich, and Stanovich (2009) found in-service teachers allotted the largest
part of a two-hour language arts block to teacher-managed reading activities, followed closely by independent reading and writing activities and phonics instruction, adding up to nearly 60% of the block spent on one particular category. This is vastly different from the current policy and research recommendations of the National Reading Panel (2001).

National, state, and local policies as well as other outside pressures often cause a rift between teacher beliefs about literacy and classroom practice (Crawford, 2004; Smith, 2010; Powers, 2006). Crawford (2004) followed her case study, Marla, through her undergraduate experience and into a teaching career. Crawford found that as mandates to use a basal reading program pushed into reading instruction, Marla’s commitment to developmentally-appropriate practice seemed to diminish. Powers (2006) found that although teachers serve as the key evaluator of students’ literacy development, teacher beliefs and classroom instruction are often inconsistent due to the pressure to conform to outside philosophies or mandates. Smith (2010) also reported finding significant differences in beliefs and practices between Reading First and non-Reading First teachers and teachers who began teaching prior to or after 2002. As previously mentioned, Li (2011) suggests that policy makers should take into account current educational practices before enacting reforms.

When teachers are allowed to make their own decisions regarding curriculum and literacy instruction, it often mirrors reported beliefs (Gomez, 2009; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997). Gomez (2009) found that literacy played a prominent role in the lives of all of her participants. The teachers reflected that prominence through their literacy instruction for students. Thomas and Barksdale-Ladd (1997) reported that children’s understanding of literacy reflects the beliefs and practices of their teachers. “The
children’s definitions of literacy processes and their resultant products mirrored somewhat their teachers’ beliefs of reading, writing, and learning.” (Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1997). This is an important implication for future research and helps to pave the way for the current study.

**Cross-Curricular Findings**

Linking teacher beliefs to classroom instruction is not limited to the areas of literacy and reading instruction. In their study of preschool teachers, Brown, Molfese, and Molfese (2008) examined teachers’ beliefs about literacy and mathematics. They found that although beliefs were weakly linked to children’s learning outcomes, teachers’ experience and education were important factors in mathematics learning. Quinn and Wilson (1997) looked at the beliefs and practices of teachers with regard to writing in a mathematics course. Teacher participants across all grade levels completed a questionnaire measuring their beliefs about writing in mathematics classes and rated the frequency with which they used a variety of writing activities when teaching mathematics. The results indicate that teachers had favorable attitudes about writing in mathematics classes, but actually used writing activities less than once a week in their instruction. The most cited reasons included the students’ writing ability and lack of time.

Wilkins (2008) conducted a study of 481 elementary math teachers, seeking connections between their level of content knowledge, attitudes towards mathematics, and beliefs about the effectiveness of inquiry-based instruction. Overall, teacher beliefs had the strongest effect on practice. Teachers with more positive attitudes about inquiry-
based instruction were more likely to use it in their classrooms. Wilkins’ study emphasizes the importance of quality teacher education programs. “Increasing the level of mathematical content knowledge without also helping teachers develop positive beliefs and attitudes related to mathematics within the context of teaching and learning will in the end limit the value of learning the content.” (Wilkins, 2008). Results indicated teacher beliefs and not content knowledge ultimately shape classroom practice.

Research producing links between belief and practice can be found to a lesser degree in science and social studies. A search in these areas yielded six relevant articles. Unsurprisingly, teachers in these content areas also feel the push of reforms such as No Child Left Behind (Milner, et al, 2012; Levitt, 2001). Levitt’s research indicates a relationship between beliefs of teachers and student-centered science instruction. “Although varying gaps exist between the teachers’ beliefs and the principles of reform, the teachers’ beliefs suggest that teachers are moving in a direction consistent with science education reform.” (Levitt, 2001). Milner (2012) found that teacher beliefs about science instruction did not change in spite of mandated changes in NCLB, although less time was spent overall on science lessons.

**Implications for Researchers**

As this review demonstrates, there is a need for continued research on the impact of teacher beliefs about literacy on curriculum planning and classroom instruction, particularly with respect to outside pressures the teachers may encounter. Research in this area could further inform how policy-makers and administrators implement the Common Core State Standards and how teacher preparation programs train future
educators. Findings from this review also exhibit that teachers prefer to teach in a manner mirroring their personal beliefs about literacy, but this practice is affected by outside pressures from policymakers, school administration, parents, and society in general. This body of literature offers an introductory investigation, but more information is needed about the factors influencing a teacher’s decision-making process when implementing a given curriculum.

Future research should be conducted on how teachers’ beliefs about reading and personal reading experiences affect their planning and reading instruction. Researchers in the future will need to consider the increasing demands on teachers from outside of the classroom such policies and stakeholders and the urgent need to address the effect this is having on classroom instruction and student learning.

**Theoretical Framework**

Just as DeFord (1985) designed the TORP from the constructivist theory, the current study also uses Piaget’s ideas of building on prior knowledge to construct meaning (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Teachers use personal experiences and understandings to form beliefs about the most effective ways to teach reading. They then transfer these beliefs into their own instructional techniques and curricular decision-making (DeFord, 1985). Thus, it may be that a teacher’s theoretical orientation towards reading would impact student achievement.

Of particular interest is the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, developed by Vygotsky but embellished upon by Rubinshtien and Vygotsky’s student, Leont’ev. A model illustrating Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory is found in Figure 2.1
(Flavin, 2012). Cultural-Historical Activity Theory can be described as a dialectic system, where seemingly disparate ideas combine to create a unified whole, and none of the parts can be fully understood separately from the others (Roth & Lee, 2007). Roth and Lee (2007) use the analogy of a thread. When examining a thread, it appears to be one piece. However, with magnification, it is obvious that the thread is actually comprised of many very short fibers. Without the fibers, the strand of thread would not exist. However, without the existence of the strand of thread, the fibers would be part of something very different indeed (Roth & Lee, 2007).

A teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading can be thought of in much the same way. Many different experiences influence the teacher’s thoughts and beliefs about literacy and literacy instruction, thus impacting his or her curricular decisions. The choices a teacher makes when planning and implementing literacy instruction has a direct effect on a student’s literacy learning and achievement. Some aspects of a teacher’s theoretical orientation are fluid, shifting with forces of change such as professional development, current research, peer opinions, and personal experiences. In looking at Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory as it pertains to education, there are many different forces at work between the subject, or teacher, the object, or student, and the outcome, or student achievement (Vygotsky, 1978). There also are many outside factors to be considered, such as community, rules, and other artifacts. Just as in Roth and Lee’s (2007) thread analogy, all these forces are like fibers in a thread, and change in the influence of one can drastically affect the outcome.
The question then remains, how does a teacher’s theoretical orientation toward literacy impact curricular planning and classroom instruction? The current study will seek to answer this question through the lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. More specifically, the current study will address what each particular theoretical orientation toward reading looks like in planning and practice, and how those practices can be impacted by outside pressures.

**Conclusion**

The results of the 18 studies reviewed support the importance of teachers’ personal beliefs and their decision-making processes in literacy instruction. However, none of the studies specifically examine what those beliefs look like in practice and how those beliefs can be affected by outside pressures. The next chapter will outline a study based upon Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in relation to a teacher’s literacy beliefs and the impact they have on decision making, specifically to answer the questions: (a) In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?; (b)
How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?; and (c) What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?
CHAPTER 3

STUDY DESIGN

Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents. (NCEE, 1983)

The above quote from analyst Paul Copperman published in A Nation At Risk illuminates the importance of examining educational policy and practice in the United States. The current study focuses specifically on the beliefs and curricular decision-making of kindergarten teachers in literacy classrooms, seeking relationships that contribute to the current body of knowledge about best educational practice.

Rationale

As outlined in the previous two chapters, there is a significant gap in educational research considering the impact a teacher’s beliefs about literacy and literacy instruction, as well as his or her personal literacy experiences, has on ensuing curricular decision-making and classroom practice. The ability to read and comprehend information is significant to success in all areas of life, and decisions made about how to instruct students in those literacy skills are ultimately left up to the classroom teacher (DeVries, 2008; National Institute for Literacy, 2009). A teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading
affects the choices he or she makes when planning a literacy curriculum and implementing classroom instruction (DeFord, 1985; Massetti & Bracken, 2010). Thus, this chapter describes the design of the current study on how teachers’ theoretical orientation to reading and personal literacy experiences impact curricular decision-making and classroom practice in literacy instruction.

**Research Questions**

As evidenced in Chapter 2, little research exists about how a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading and his or her personal literacy experiences influence curriculum choices and classroom practices with regard to the demands of current federal and state educational mandates. The current study examines the literacy beliefs of eight teachers and illustrates to what extent those beliefs are reflected in the teachers’ day to day curriculum planning and student instruction, even as external factors continue to change. To that end, this study has three main research questions:

- In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?
- How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?; and
- What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?
Research Design

The current study is qualitative, using case studies to highlight and support findings. Patton (2002) suggests qualitative methods facilitate the study of issues with greater complexity, writing, “Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry.” Thus, the theories emerging within the study are taking place in the real world – through teacher interviews, classroom observation, and artifact collection. Case study research examines phenomena through both the outside lens of the researcher and the more personal point of view of the classroom teacher. For this study, it is hypothesized that a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading will play a large role in his or her curricular planning and classroom practice, and that personal reading experiences will be reflected in teachers’ beliefs about literacy instruction. Dyson and Genishi (2005) suggest that a case study approach allows researchers to enter others’ perspectives through collecting observations, talking with people, and collecting artifacts. Using case study research provides insights into the intricacies of the eight teachers’ decision-making processes.

Yin (2003) outlines four considerations for using case study research: (a) when the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) when you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) when you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; and (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. The current study meets these criteria, particularly as the “case” is the actions and decisions of the teachers, but the case cannot be considered without the context: teacher training,
classroom setting, and outside pressures. It would be difficult to have a true picture of how a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading affects classroom practice without considering the context within which the decision-making occurs.

**Participants**

The sampling for this study is non-random and purposive, utilizing a volunteer sample. All 59 parochial elementary schools from a large Roman Catholic archdiocese in the Midwest were invited to participate in the study. This sample included 62 kindergarten teachers, all but one of whom was female. The teachers’ experience ranged from one to 39 years, with an average of 15 years in the classroom. The researcher had full access to all necessary demographic and academic data from the schools and complete cooperation from the assistant superintendent. A letter granting permission for research is found in Appendix B.

All teachers who participated in the study design their literacy instruction around the Common Core Standards for Language Arts as is mandated by the state and the archdiocese. All kindergarten teachers in the archdiocese received the same training in implementing the Common Core Standards as a Language Arts curriculum. The same instructor provided a training session for all kindergarten teachers, thus allowing for a consistent form of teacher training and support. The kindergarten teachers also had equal access to online resources and networking provided by both the archdiocese and the state’s Department of Education.

Principals for each of the 59 schools were initially contacted via e-mail in the first part of August 2012 to share information about the study and secure permission to
conduct research within each individual school. Invitations to participate in the study containing an embedded link to an online survey and informed consent document were then sent to all 62 kindergarten teachers via email in mid-August. All recruitment materials are located in Appendix C. A copy of the Informed Consent document is found in Appendix D.

After invitations to participate in the study were issued, every effort was made to encourage 100% participation from schools. E-mail reminders were sent to both principals and unresponsive teachers in September 2012, striving to create a total population sample. The schools in the Mid-western archdiocese are found in 39 of the state’s 92 counties and include students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, living in locations from rural to urban, and representing all socio-economic levels. This diversity provided ample opportunity to examine teachers from schools of varying student populations and backgrounds.

Thirty-nine of the 62 kindergarten teachers responded to the initial invitation by the deadline in mid-September, generating a 63% response rate to the survey. Of the 39 respondents, 38 were female and one was male. These teachers had a mean age of 37 years, with ages ranging from 22 to 62 years old. Thirteen teachers were between the ages of 22 and 29, six teachers were between 30 and 39 years old, six teachers were between 40 and 49 years old, nine teachers were between 50 and 59 years old, one teacher was 62, and four teachers chose not to report their ages. The years of teaching experience of the 39 teachers ranged from brand-new teachers with no years of experience to 30 years in the classroom. The average years of teaching experience was 11 years. Nineteen teachers had 10 or less years of teaching experience, eight teachers
taught between 11 and 19 years, seven teachers taught between 20 and 29 years, one teacher had 30 years of experience, and four teachers did not report years of teaching experience.

From these 39 teachers, case studies were selected for formal interviews and classroom observations relevant to the research question. The ideal number of case studies was initially identified as six, with two teachers representing each of DeFord’s three theoretical orientations. As the study focuses primarily on the two extremes of the theoretical orientation continuum, three teachers reflecting a phonics orientation and three teachers reflecting a whole language orientation were selected to decrease the effects possible participant attrition should teachers drop out of the study. Three teachers of each the phonics and whole language orientations along with two teachers of a skills-based orientation brought the sample size to eight.

Using DeFord’s (1985) scoring system for the TORP, the teachers scoring the highest in each of the three theoretical orientations were invited to participate in the study via phone call or e-mail in late September of 2012, with three teachers agreeing immediately. The remaining five highest-scoring teachers did not respond to the initial invitation and were contacted again via e-mail in early October. In late October 2012, a second wave of invitations was issued to the next highest-scoring teachers in each of the theoretical orientations as needed to fill the case study slots. All of the teachers issued second-wave invitations agreed to participate, thus bringing the total number of case studies to the desired eight, representing three phonics orientations, two skills orientations, and three whole language orientations.
Case Study Participants

The eight case study participants represented seven of the 59 schools initially invited to take part in the online survey. As evidenced in Table 3, the teachers came from varying backgrounds and brought different experiences and levels of expertise to their classrooms. All eight teachers were female, ranging in age from 24 to 57 years old with a mean age of 38.5. Three teachers were between the ages of 20 and 29, two teachers were between 30 and 39 years old, and three teachers were between 50 and 59 years old. Their total years of teaching experience varied from one year to 30 years, and their experience teaching kindergarten ranged from one to 27 years, with an average of 7 years in the kindergarten classroom. Four of the eight participants (50%) were teaching kindergarten for the first time, with two being first-year teachers and two having experience teaching in different grade levels.

Although all eight teachers held a valid teaching license, their backgrounds and educations are quite varied. The eight participants possessed a bachelor’s degree, while four (50%) also had an earned master’s’ degree. Six of the participants received their primary degrees in education. Of those six, three of the teachers earned a bachelor of science in elementary education and/or special education, whereas the three other teachers have completed a master’s degree in education. The remaining two participants came to the field of education through a program called “Transition to Teaching”, wherein a degree from another field of study can be utilized in conjunction with additional training through college courses to obtain a teaching license. One of these teachers held a Bachelor of Arts in English Writing, while the other completed a master’s degree in industrial psychology. Through the interview process, all eight teachers
indicated participating in training and professional development specific to kindergarten teachers and early childhood education.

Within their classrooms, the eight participants reported complying with the state-mandated 90-minute reading block and employing full implementation of the Common Core Standards for Language Arts for kindergarten. All eight utilized a commercially-published reading program in their classrooms, the specifics of which can be found in Table 3. Seven of the eight programs used are considered basal reading programs. These programs introduced one or two new skills each week and focused on one or two pieces of literature that were chosen because of their use of the targeted weekly skill. Since the programs were designed for kindergarten, there was a heavy emphasis on letter learning, sight words, and word families. These basal programs were purchased prior to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and it is the responsibility of the teacher to adapt the materials to meet the CCSS. The extent to which the teachers had control over the purchase and usage of the reading programs will be addressed in chapter 4.

All eight participants reported that they enjoy reading for pleasure at least once or twice a week, and three read almost daily. Their preferred personal reading experiences are outlined in Table 4. Each of the eight participants owned 20 or more books unrelated to the field of elementary education. Three teachers reported having between 30 and 50 books at home, while three teachers had more than 50. Three participants indicated a preference for personal reading during breaks from school, while five read whenever the opportunity arises. The preferred genres were extremely varied, including children’s books, memoirs, mystery, romance, biographies, science, self-help and history.
Observations on how these personal reading experiences may be connected to each participant’s theoretical orientation to reading will be offered in chapter 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Number</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex*</th>
<th>Degree Held*</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching Kindergarten</th>
<th>Self-Reported Theoretical Orientation</th>
<th>Language Arts Program</th>
<th>Language Arts Minutes per Day</th>
<th>Common Core Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>Scott Foresman Reading Street</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M.S. Early Childhood Development &amp; Elementary Education</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>McGraw Hill Treasures</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Learning A-Z</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>Scott Foresman Reading Street</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.A. English Writing (Transition to Teaching)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>McGraw Hill/SRA Imagine It</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.A. Psychology &amp; Sociology; M.S. Industrial Psychology (Transition to Teaching)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>McGraw Hill/SRA Imagine It</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.S. Elementary Education &amp; Special Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Houghton Mifflin</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>MacMillan-McGraw Hill</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: F = Female; M = Male; B.S. = Bachelor of Science; M.S. = Master of Science; B.A. = Bachelor of Arts; WL = Whole Language*
Table 4
Participants’ Personal Reading Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Number</th>
<th>Teacher Pseudonym</th>
<th>Reads for Pleasure</th>
<th>Number of Days per Week</th>
<th>Favorite Time to Read</th>
<th>Number of Books at Home</th>
<th>Genre of Reading Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Evenings</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Romance, Fiction, Self-Help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Whenever possible</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>Fiction, Non-Fiction, Biography, Mystery, History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Weekends</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Biographies, Memoirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Evenings</td>
<td>100+</td>
<td>Fiction, Mystery, Historical Fiction, Romance, Suspense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Whenever possible</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Whenever possible</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>Fiction, Non-Fiction, Biography, Mystery, History, Science, Fantasy, Children’s Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Summer Vacation</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Fiction, Children’s Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Whenever possible</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

*Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile*

DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) was used to measure each kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading. The instrument was
administered to teachers via SurveyMonkey to increase the response rate. The validity of
the instrument was outlined in chapter 2. The TORP yields a single score for each
teacher, placing him or her on a Continuum of Instruction, ranging from complete
phonics instruction to whole language. An informed consent document, found in
Appendix D, was part of the initial online survey. Each case study participant also was
presented a printed copy to sign.

Reading Interest-A-Lyzer

The Reading Interest-A-Lyzer, an inventory for gifted students developed by
Sally M. Reis (2005) and based on the Interest-A-Lyzer by Joseph S. Renzulli, measures
personal reading experiences (see Appendix E). The Reading Interest-A-Lyzer contains
open-ended and multiple-choice items accompanied by Likert-type responses and was
administered via Survey Monkey in conjunction with the TORP. Although originally
intended for use with students, this instrument gives insight into the personal reading
experiences of teachers, specifically pinpointing the amount and type of reading they
engage in outside of the education profession.

Interviews and Observations

In addition to the TORP and Reading Interest-A-Lyzer, teachers were asked to
provide demographic information about themselves and their current class of
kindergarten students. This information included each teacher’s years of professional
experiences, degrees held, age, current class size, and the textbook series or other
teaching resources used on a regular basis (see Appendix F). No student identifiers were
collected.
Teachers also answered several open-ended questions on SurveyMonkey about curriculum planning and instructional decision-making. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix F. Responses were used to select the case studies for in-depth interviews and observations taking place throughout the school year focusing on literacy teaching methods and curricular decision-making. “Observing Reading Instruction: Kindergarten” from The Essential Guide to Selecting and Using Core Reading Programs (Dewitz, Leahy, Jones, & Sullivan, 2010) was used for classroom observations. During the classroom observations, the Classroom Literacy Environment Checklist from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2004) was completed. These two observation protocols were chosen because of their clarity in identifying targeted behaviors and classroom practices aligning with each of DeFord’s theoretical orientations to literacy. A copy of the observation protocol can be found in Appendix G and the literacy environment checklist in Appendix I.

Each case study teacher was interviewed twice during the school year through a combination of face-to-face questioning, e-mails, and phone calls. Interview questions can be found in Appendix H. Two thirty-minute classroom observations were completed for each teacher, one during each semester of the school year, to allow for comparison and growth in the curriculum and the students. Each observation included both the researcher and a research assistant, providing two sets of data per site visit. In addition to interviews and observations, lesson plans and work samples were collected as artifacts.

Table 5 contains a timeline for data collection. The interviews and classroom observations took place between November and April of the 2012-2013 school year. Collecting data through interviews, observations, and artifact collection assisted in the
consideration of the previously stated research questions and allowed for a more thorough description of the case study teachers, their decision making, and their classroom instruction. An analysis of how each research question will be addressed by data collection measures is found in Table 6.

Table 5
Data Collection Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Approximate Collection Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TORP, Reading Interest-A-Lyzer, open-ended questionnaire and demographics</td>
<td>September 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 1: Formal interview, classroom observations, and artifact collection</td>
<td>October/ November 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial analysis</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Round 2: Formal interview, classroom observations, and artifact collection</td>
<td>March/ April 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin final analysis</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Data Collection Method by Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?</td>
<td>• TORP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Classroom observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?</td>
<td>• Reading Interest-A-Lyzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• TORP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Classroom observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive affect their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?</td>
<td>• Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Classroom observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Artifacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Constant comparative data analysis was used to make connections and construct meaning from the collected data. Using the constant comparative method entails systematic collection and examination of data and the subsequent revision and refinement of emergent concepts and theories (Patton, 2002). The current study is designed for this method, collecting data twice before an initial analysis followed by a third gathering of information before the final analysis.

In addition to data collected from the TORP, Reading Interest-A-Lyzer, and formal interviews, the researcher kept detailed field notes using the double-entry method to accompany observation protocol and environmental checklists. Double-entry note taking is designed to generate further thinking on topics already observed at face value (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002). Figure 3.1 illustrates the use of double-entry field notes in conjunction with a section of the reading observation checklist from the International Reading Association (2010). To delve more deeply into the field notes and assist with reflection, Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2002) suggest tracking assumptions, positions and tensions within the collected data. This can be accomplished by considering three questions: (a) What was surprising?; (b) What was intriguing?; and (c) What was disturbing? (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Are You Looking For?</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>What Did You Observe?</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIGHT WORDS</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Introduced in whole group setting using flashcards</td>
<td>Could this have been done in small groups since some children already know them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher introduce sight words?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the visual features of sight words identified?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Introduced using word families – what looks the same about these?</td>
<td>I could really see the “aha” moment for some students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the sound structures of sight words explored?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Word family discussion continued into rhymes</td>
<td>This is very phonics-heavy and she scored as whole language on the TORP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are sight words placed on the word wall?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Cards were put away, white board erased</td>
<td>I should ask the teacher why she doesn’t use a word wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher provide practice with sight words in and out of context?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Not practiced in context</td>
<td>Oops…she went back and did this later in the lesson using the story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.1. Detailed Field Notes Sample*

All data collected were coded for comparison. The researcher used the online qualitative data analysis software, www.dedoose.com, to organize and analyze coding. The initial coding scheme consisted of broad codes for each of the three identified theoretical orientations to reading as identified by the TORP, as well as codes for external factors affecting teacher decision making. The initial coding scheme, derived from the literature, is outlined in Table 7.
Table 7
*Initial Coding Scheme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Language</td>
<td>- Lessons center around a mentor text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- New words are introduced as they appear in text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Student inquiry about text guides instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>- Word shapes are taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Skills are taught through pattern identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>- Students are tested on flash cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Phonics skills are practiced on worksheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Pressures</td>
<td>- In interview, teacher mentions making decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>based on pressure from federal, state, or district mandates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Pressures</td>
<td>- In interview, teacher mentions making decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>based on pressure from principal, peers, or parent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding schemes emerged and evolved throughout the data analysis process. The initial coding scheme was broadened to better reflect both DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile and Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. The final coding scheme used in analysis of all interview and observation data can be found in Figure 3.2. Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory is tied to Codes 1 through 10, which correspond to the third research question, “What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?” Codes 11 through 13 assist in answering the second research question, “How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?” Codes 14 through 44 were taken directly from DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile to serve as a comparison between the participants’ self-reports and their behavior in the classroom, thus providing information for the first research question, “In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?”
Other Instructional Practices, listed as codes 45-49, and Instructional Goals, listed as code 50, were added to accommodate those observations not directly linked to the DeFord’s TORP.

**Final Coding Scheme**

1. Childhood Reading Experiences of Teacher
2. Policy (State or National) Pressures
3. Professional Development
4. Common Core
5. School Pressures
   6. Use of textbook
   7. Ability Levels
   8. Class Size
9. District Pressures
10. Parental Pressures
11. Current personal reading experiences
    12. Love of reading
13. Pre-service Experiences
14. Skills
    15. Fluency and expression indicate comprehension
    16. Glossary and dictionary use to determine meaning and pronunciation
    17. Words are repeatedly used to ensure sight word vocabulary
    18. Ineffective readers repeat words or phrases when reading
    19. Grammatical function is important in reading
    20. Root words should be introduced before inflectional endings
    21. Accent patterns should be developed
    22. Word shapes should be taught
    23. Skills should be taught in relation to other skills
    24. Dropping inflectional endings while reading causes difficulties
25. Phonics
    26. Child verbalizes phonics rules
    27. Increase in reading errors leads to decreased comprehension
    28. Dividing words into syllables
    29. Sounding out words
    30. Reversals are significant problems
    31. Correct a child as soon as an oral mistake is made
    32. Paying close attention to punctuation is necessary for comprehension
33. Controlling text through spelling patterns
34. Formal instruction in reading is necessary to insure adequate skill development
35. Phonic analysis of new words
36. Whole Language
   37. Materials should be written in natural language
   38. Children should be allowed to read in their own dialect
   39. Reader should be encouraged to guess at unknown words and move on
   40. It is not necessary to know the letters of the alphabet to learn to read
   41. Flashcards/Sight word drills are unnecessary
   42. Initial encounters with print should focus on meaning
   43. Substitution with the same meaning should be uncorrected (house for home)
   44. It is not necessary to introduce new words before they appear in the text
45. Other Instructional Practices
   46. Comprehension prior to reading
   47. Comprehension during reading
   48. Comprehension after reading
   49. Vocabulary instruction
50. Instructional Goals

Figure 3.2. Final coding scheme

Reliability

DeFord (1985) reported a reliability rate of 98% ($r = .98$). There is a small threat of unreliability of treatment implementation. When studying any human population, it is possible that plans may go awry due simply to the fact that human beings are independent thinkers who make their own decisions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). It is entirely plausible that within this study, teachers may have reported one theoretical orientation and yet teach in a completely opposite manner. However, it is the belief of the researcher that the strong reliability of the TORP and the large sample size from which the case studies are chosen will help to reduce this particular threat to statistical conclusion validity.
Credibility and Trustworthiness

Analysis of high-quality qualitative research differs from that of quantitative research. In case study methodology, rather than speaking of validity or reliability, the terms “credibility” and “trustworthiness” are used. Researchers using case study methodology must make certain enough details are offered to allow the reader to evaluate the credibility of the work (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Baxter and Jack (2008), researchers have a responsibility to ensure that: (a) the case study question is clearly written; (b) case study design is appropriate for the research question; (c) purposeful sampling strategies appropriate for the case study have been applied; (d) data are collected and analyzed systematically; and (e) the data are analyzed correctly. As outlined in this chapter, the current study meets these guidelines.

The use of multiple data sources is a trademark of case study research, which increases data credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). The term triangulation is based on the idea that no single method ever adequately addresses a problem (Patton, 2002). Triangulation adds credibility to qualitative work not only by providing diverse ways of looking at the same problem, but by strengthening confidence in the conclusions that are drawn (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) describes four kinds of triangulation contributing to verification and validation of qualitative analysis: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation.

Methods triangulation checks the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods (Patton, 2002). To answer the question of the current study, data
were collected from six sources: the TORP, an open-ended questionnaire, interviews, classroom observations using two unique rubrics, and artifact collection. Each case study teacher was observed and interviewed two times during the school year and artifacts such as lesson plans, work samples, and photographs of the literacy environment were collected to triangulate the qualitative data.

Analyst triangulation uses multiple analysts to review findings as opposed to a single observer or analyst (Patton, 2002). Observations and interviews were conducted by the researcher and a research assistant, both primary level educators with degrees and certificates above the master’s degree level. The research assistant is a retired elementary teacher. Her more than 30 years of service in the public schools serve as a balance to the primary researcher’s experience in private education. The data collected were reviewed by participants, thus providing member checks for the research. All interview responses were typed and shared with case study participants before coding to ensure comments were accurately recorded and interpreted.

**Conclusion**

The current study has three research questions: (a) In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?; (b) How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?; and (c) What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?. The methodology outlined in this chapter answers these questions using qualitative means as was illustrated in Table 6.
As evidenced in chapters 1 and 2, the study is both timely and relevant. Recent research has not directly addressed the effect of a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading on students’ reading achievement. The current study gathered and analyzed data to fulfill the following three goals:

• to describe how a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading manifests in curricular planning and classroom practice;

• to discover perceived external pressures affecting a teacher’s curricular planning and classroom practice; and

• to contribute to the current body of knowledge on literacy teaching and learning.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

Kindergarten teachers come to the classroom with an immeasurable array of experiences, bodies of knowledge, and beliefs, which impact their curricular planning and classroom practice (DeVries, 2008; Lortie, 1975; Miller, 2009). In addition to the teachers’ own backgrounds, curricular decision-making and implementation are affected by outside forces, such as local, state, and federal educational policies and pressure from stakeholders. Chapter 1 set these observations within an historical context and outlined the need for the current study, while chapter 2 reviewed literature revealing a paucity of research focusing on the role a teacher’s personal beliefs about literacy and reading experiences play in his or her decision-making process for literacy instruction. A detailed description of the current study seeking to expand the knowledge base on this topic was outlined in chapter 3.

The following chapter will review results from the current study and illustrate how those results shed light on the three research questions, namely: (a) In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?; (b) How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?;
and (c) What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?

Methods Summary

This qualitative study utilized case study methodology and constant comparative analysis in an effort to answer the three research questions (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Thirty-nine kindergarten teachers completed an online survey containing DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (1985), Reis’ Reading Interest-a-lyzer (2005) and open-ended demographic questions to determine their beliefs about literacy instruction and their personal reading experiences (see Appendices A, E and F). Responses to the TORP were tallied, and from this information eight teachers were selected to participate as case studies. Each case study teacher represents one of DeFord’s three theoretical orientation clusters (phonics, skills, or whole language) as based on her self-reports from the online survey. These eight teachers participated in individual interviews, classroom observations and artifact analysis over the course of one school year to examine how their theoretical orientation to reading instruction and personal reading experiences impacted curricular decision-making and classroom practice. Also of interest was the sway of pressures outside of the teachers’ control, such as local, state and federal educational policy and pressure from other educational stakeholders.

The collection of this varied data allowed for deeper investigation of the research questions and the opportunity to triangulate findings. The use of case study methodology allowed the researcher to enter into the teachers’ perspective and provided insights into
Due to the vast amount of data gathered from each participant, a brief description of the population sample and individual case study reports will be presented first, followed by a discussion of the results as they pertain to each of the research questions.

**Participant Summary**

As described in chapter 3, 62 kindergarten teachers from Catholic schools in a large, Mid-western archdiocese were invited to participate in the original online survey, with 39 responses (63%). From these 39 responses, eight teachers were selected as case study participants based upon their self-reported beliefs about literacy as measured by the TORP. Further addressed later in this chapter, Table 8 provides a summary of the case studies’ demographic and professional data, including age, sex, degrees earned, years of teaching experience, years of kindergarten teaching experience, self-reported theoretical orientation to reading, Language Arts program used, Language Arts minutes per day, and implementation of Common Core State Standards. All eight teachers in the study were female, ranging in age from 24 to 57 years old. Four participants (50%) have earned a bachelor’s degree and four (50%) have earned a master’s degree. The average teaching experience was 9.88 years, with a range of one to 30 years. Four (50%) of the participants were first-year kindergarten teachers, although two had experience teaching at other grade levels. The other four (50%) had varying years of experience in the kindergarten classroom. All eight teachers reported teaching the state-mandated 90-minute Language Arts block and utilizing full implementation of the Common Core State Standards.
Table 8

**Participant Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Number</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex*</th>
<th>Degree Held*</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching Kindergarten</th>
<th>Self-Reported Theoretical Orientation</th>
<th>Language Arts Program</th>
<th>Language Arts Minutes per Day</th>
<th>Common Core Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>Scott Foresman Reading Street</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M.S. Early Childhood Development &amp; Elementary Education</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>McGraw Hill Treasures</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Learning A-Z</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>Scott Foresman Reading Street</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.A. English Writing (Transition to Teaching)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>McGraw Hill/SRA Imagine It</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.A. Psychology &amp; Sociology; M.S. Industrial Psychology (Transition to Teaching)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>McGraw Hill/SRA Imagine It</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B.S. Elementary Education &amp; Special Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Houghton Mifflin</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M.S. Elementary Education</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>MacMillan-McGraw Hill</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: F = Female; M = Male; B.S. = Bachelor of Science; M.S. = Master of Science; B.A. = Bachelor of Arts; WL = Whole Language
Case Study Overview

The eight case study teachers agreed to one year commitment to this study. Data were collected at two points, once in the first semester of the school year and once at the end of the school year. At each data collection point, the teachers participated in an in-depth interview, classroom observation, and artifact analysis. Interviews were conducted prior to each classroom observation. Due to the physical distance between the locations of the teachers’ schools, interviews were held in one of three ways: in person, by phone, or via e-mail. All interviews were transcribed and member-checked for accuracy by each teacher. Two 30-minute classroom observations were completed for each case study. During each observation, the researcher and a research assistant independently assessed classroom environment and practice using two protocols: Observing Reading Instruction: Kindergarten (DeWitz, et al, 2010) and the Classroom Literacy Environment Checklist from the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2004), which are found in Appendices G and I. This yielded two transcribed interviews and ten observation checklists per case study which were entered into Dedoose for coding and analysis. Table 9 displays each case study teacher’s self-reported theoretical orientation as compared to the frequency with which each theoretical orientation cluster was coded during interviews and observations. Derivation of codes was described in-depth in chapter 3, but consists mainly of teachers’ beliefs as outlined by the DeFord’s TORP. The coding analysis shows that regardless of self-reported beliefs, all eight teachers consistently exhibited behaviors matching DeFord’s definition of a phonics-oriented teacher most frequently, followed by skills-based teaching, with a whole-language orientation being the least frequently coded for all teachers.
In addition to the interviews and observations, two weeks of Language Arts lesson plans and other relevant artifacts were collected from all eight teachers. Following is a brief discussion of each case study, including analysis of interview and observation data and information gleaned from accompanying artifacts.

Table 9
Frequency of Observed Theoretical Orientation Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Theoretical Orientation (Self-Reported)</th>
<th>Observed Frequency per Code:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ann</td>
<td>Whole Language</td>
<td>Phonics: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Denise</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Phonics: 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gail</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Phonics: 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Judy</td>
<td>Whole Language</td>
<td>Phonics: 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lisa</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Phonics: 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Patty</td>
<td>Whole Language</td>
<td>Phonics: 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sandra</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Phonics: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Wendy</td>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>Phonics: 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills: 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Language: 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case Study 1: Ann

Ann is 34 years old and a first-year kindergarten teacher, although she has eleven years of classroom experience. Both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees were earned in elementary education. From her own days in elementary school, Ann recalls mostly working in leveled reading groups and learning to write in cursive. She enjoys reading for pleasure at night before bed one or two nights a week. When she finds time to read, her genres of choice are self-help, Christian romance, and other works of fiction.

This year, Ann shares a classroom space with another case study teacher, Judy. Between the two of them they have 26 students, many of whom have distinctive needs. Ann and Judy team-teach some whole group lessons, but the students are divided into two smaller groups for reading and math instruction in separate classrooms. Some planning takes place together, but each is responsible for her own small group curriculum according to the children’s needs. This situation is unique to the school and occurred only because of an unexpected influx of students at the last minute. Ann’s school generally keeps class sizes to 18 students and she was originally to be the sole kindergarten teacher. As students continued to register and the school year began, it became apparent that a second teacher was needed to meet the needs of this particular group of students. During an interview, Ann said this was definitely not a typical group of kindergarten students. “There’s a big span of levels. One is reading chapter books while some don’t even recognize their letters.”

Ann’s self-reported theoretical orientation was whole language. Classroom observations and interview coding showed evidence of more occurrences of phonics-based and skills-based teaching and thinking than of whole language. She teaches a
ninety-minute reading block daily, which includes read-aloud stories, centers work, vocabulary and comprehension skills, and phonics instruction. As required by her school and the archdiocese, Ann plans her curriculum around the Common Core State Standards and uses the Reading Street series published by Scott Foresman. A morning spent in her classroom starts with a morning message, a story, and whole group instruction on sight words and particular phonemic awareness and phonics skills. New skills are reinforced with games, manipulatives, and workbook pages. When it is time for centers, students rotate through five stations over the course of the week, including individual or small group time with the teacher, independent reading, word work, writing, and phonics practice. Ann says her students are, “eager and excited to learn to read. They love finding our sight words in everything we do. They like to do the centers that match the literacy skills they’ve learned.”

The requirement of using the Common Core State Standards is one of Ann’s frustrations. She says it makes planning more difficult; however she is pleased with her students’ progress and success. After her first year of teaching kindergarten, Ann was surprised by how quickly her students became readers and writers. Over the year, she learned, “They are sponges! I can make everything a learning experience.” Her goal for her students is to provide a good foundation and beginning for learning to read.

Case Study 2: Denise

Fifty-five-year-old Denise is a thirty-year teaching veteran, with 27 years in the kindergarten classroom. Her bachelor and master’s degrees are both in early childhood development. As a child, she remembers learning to read and having difficulty in first and second grade. She recalls, “Reading was taught as a one size fits all, phonics-based,
with lots of memorization of rules. There wasn’t much extra help for me as I struggled to learn.” Despite a rough start, Denise reports reading for pleasure between five and seven days a week, as often as she can. Her preferred genres are biographies, mysteries, and history books.

Denise has 26 students this year with a full-time aide. She believes her class is fairly typical compared to other years: a handful of higher-level children, most on-level, and a few approaching level. Her school has fully implemented Common Core State Standards and utilizes the McGraw Hill Treasures series for reading instruction. She believes, “If literacy is tied to technology, my students are very engaged. We do most of our whole group instruction with the SMART board and use the SMART board activities as a station during small group activity time.”

A self-reported phonics theoretical orientation matches findings from observations and interviews with Denise, although skills and whole language activities were also noted. Her ninety-minute reading instruction includes 45 minutes of whole class instruction and 45 minutes of small group instruction. A separate twenty-minute writing workshop also takes place each day. Whole group instruction begins with a review or introduces new phonics and phonemic awareness skills. This is followed by vocabulary and comprehension work. During one observation, Denise read aloud the book Whales Passing by Eve Bunting. Students discussed story-specific vocabulary and then compared the content to another book they had read recently about bees. Small group instruction includes rotations through centers practicing word work, fluency, and independent reading as well as individual time with the teacher or aide. Denise plans her curriculum using the Treasures teacher’s manual, and her school has aligned their
reading and writing instruction to the Common Core State Standards. With the transition to CCSS, Denise reports some changes in her teaching. “I am spending more time with vocabulary and I have literacy small groups for independent learning. We work with students in Response to Intervention until they master a needed skill – especially with letter recognition, sound and letter associations, phonics, and high frequency words. They are making good progress, so I think the methods we are using are working well.”

The size of Denise’s class has been a frustration for her over the course of the year. She feels it has limited the amount of time she can spend with students in small groups, as well as taking more time to do routine chores such as restroom and drink breaks and snack time. While her school awaits the opening of a new campus, the kindergarten classes are located in a different building from the rest of the school, which requires more time when going to lunch and attending special area classes. Still, she celebrates what she considers phenomenal progress despite the large class size. Denise holds her students and herself to high standards.

My goal is for my students to look at books like they are candy – something to be savored and enjoyed. I want them to understand the craft of authors and illustrators and what components excellent literature has. I want them to be able to express themselves in a written manner than entices their readers to read their writing. My goal is to have my children well-prepared to meet the challenges of first grade successfully and have a strong literacy base to build upon.
Case Study 3: Gail

Gail is a 24-year-old with a bachelor’s degree in education. She is a first-year kindergarten teacher with three years of teaching experience in the preschool setting. Gail recalls having a very difficult time learning to read.

My teachers had very little patience with me. I switched Catholic schools in first grade and my teacher was very unhappy that I hadn’t been introduced to phonics in kindergarten. I spent time every day in a resource room with dry erase markers, reviewing the difference between a long “a” and a short “a”. Even at the end of first grade, I didn’t understand the difference. My first grade teacher wanted to hold me back, but at the public school I tested into second grade so my principal allowed me to move on. I remember I had horrible writing. The nuns worked with me a lot on the correct way to hold a pencil.

As a result of her experiences, Gail does not push children toward books more than they want to at the beginning of the year. She tries to pick funny books at the beginning of the year to introduce positive reading experiences to students who may already be struggling. Gail enjoys reading for pleasure on the weekends, usually choosing biographies or memoirs.

There are thirteen students in Gail’s kindergarten class, which is unusually small for her school. She also has looped this group of students, meaning she taught them in preschool and has them again as kindergarteners. Gail’s school uses Learning A-Z but does not have an adopted reading series for kindergarten. She plans her lessons around the Common Core State Standards and her school has recently started using Café and Daily 5, a method of reading strategy instruction developed by Gail Boushey and Joan
Moser. Although the school has a lower socio-economic population of students, they have an abundance of resources. Gail’s classroom has a SMART board and a SMART table, as well as a set of i-pads for student use.

Gail’s self-reported theoretical orientation to reading is skills-based, although phonics was the most frequently coded orientation cluster in her observations and interviews. Her daily ninety-minute reading block includes whole group mini-lesson instruction followed by Daily 5. An observed mini-lesson reviewed phonics and decoding skills on the SMART board, introduced and revisited sight words, and modeled a comprehension strategy. During another observation, the students participated in Daily 5, which are small group activities to be completed by students each day. The Daily 5 includes: read to self, read to someone, word work, work on writing, and listen to reading. During Daily 5 work, Gail circulates for individual conferencing and assessment with students. “I watch the children’s body language during my lessons and make sure they are interested. The children get excited to learn sight words through a song and then when they see it in a book they get so excited!”

Gail is frustrated by her school’s lack of a published reading program. She finds it difficult to find books and attach skills to them, as well as finding all her own resources to map out a curriculum without a guide to go by. “I was okay without having a reading series at the beginning of the year because I liked having the freedom to teach what I wanted. However, I have made a 360 and am begging for a reading series. Without a guide, I am all over the place. I need a map to follow and supplement with my own lessons.” Overall, Gail has been pleased with her students’ progress this year. The students have surpassed her goals for the year and she thinks they will do well on end-of
the year testing. Her goal for her students is always, “to foster the love of reading and give the skills they need to be successful life-long readers”.

Case Study 4: Judy

Judy is a 23-year-old first-year teacher with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. As a child, Judy remembers doing reading groups in elementary school and participating in the Young Author’s program. She continues to read almost nightly as an adult, owning over a hundred books. Her preferred genres to read are mystery, historical fiction, romance and suspense.

Judy began teaching about a month after the school year started. She was hired to team teach with case study teacher #1, Ann, to alleviate parental concerns about class size and to allow for more differentiated instruction. They have 26 students in their classroom for whole group lessons, but the children are split into two smaller groups for reading and math instruction. Judy’s school uses Scott Foresman’s Reading Street series paired with the Common Core State Standards for their language arts curriculum. She feels as though she has had a typical group of kindergarten students this year, with the exception of several who attended despite being too young. They will be retained in kindergarten for a second year.

Although she has a self-reported whole language orientation, the most frequently coded behaviors during Judy’s observations and interviews were from the phonics cluster, followed by the skills cluster. Judy teaches a ninety-minute reading block, with an hour of whole group instruction and thirty minutes of centers. An observed whole group lesson began with a message on the easel in which students reviewed sight words, phonics and phonemic awareness. Vocabulary and comprehension skills also were
introduced in conjunction with the weekly reading selection. Judy’s reading centers require students to rotate through stations practicing guided reading, independent reading, and other relevant skills throughout the week. She says, “The reading program lays out a pretty good guideline to follow; however, when students need more help with a certain area it can be included and something else they do not need as much help with can be discarded.”

As a first-year teacher, Judy has been surprised and frustrated by the amount that kindergarteners are expected to do and know. She is impressed when the students rise to the occasion and meet the goals she has set.

My goal for my students this year is for them to make progress. For some students, that progress might just be recognizing all the letters of the alphabet and for others that may be reading on level or above. I think I’ve met my goals for the year pretty well but there are always things that can improved. I think it is very important to always keep trying new things until you find something that works well, but every class will be different.

Case Study 5: Lisa

Lisa is a 36-year-old first-year teacher. She holds a bachelor’s of arts degree in English writing, completing a Transition to Teaching program to receive her teaching license and is currently enrolled in a master’s degree program. Lisa loved to read as a child, but doesn’t remember reading by herself at school very often. “My memories are more of being in reading groups and reading passages and answering questions. I do remember learning the alphabet in kindergarten and liking it. I also remember my
teacher reading to us and I loved that.” She enjoys reading for pleasure one or two days a week whenever she can find time, usually choosing fiction books.

There are two kindergarten sections at Lisa’s school, and her class has 23 students. She and her partner teacher have an ideal setting for teaching young children. Lisa’s classroom is exceptionally spacious, with plenty of room for tables, a gathering place in front of the SMART board, and an elevated platform area in front of a broad bay window inviting impromptu performances or solitary readers. There is an appropriately sized bathroom and separate small kitchen area. The two kindergarten rooms are connected in the back by a small hallway and exterior door that leads to the playground. Lisa’s school uses the SRA Imagine It series from McGraw Hill. The Common Core State Standards have been mapped and aligned with their report cards. She has a fairly typical group of kindergarteners this year, although she says, “Some are already reading. The ones that are reading seem to want to read fast and guess at words without looking at the whole word.”

Lisa’s self-report of theoretical orientation is phonics, matching her observation and interview data. She plans for a full two hours of reading instruction daily which, in contrast to the other case study teachers, includes ninety minutes of centers work and only thirty minutes of whole group lessons. Whole group instruction is given in mini-lessons to teach phonics, reading strategies and new concepts. An observed whole group lesson using vocabulary words to write and act out math problems revealed a large amount of cross-curricular integration and creativity. Students also rotate through six centers each week, which focus on response to literature, phonemic awareness and sight words, comprehension strategies, word work, fluency, and independent reading. “I try to
have a weekly theme like apples or pumpkins so I can incorporate other subjects like social studies or math. I use our report card as a guide and then lay out the weeks of the year in a rough draft. I use centers to reinforce new skills or review.”

This year, Lisa felt pressured from parents who seemed to want their kindergarten students to be reading fluently early in the year. Despite these demands, she had three very clear goals for the year that she believes her students will meet. “I want my students to be fluent in letter sounds and recognition, able to decode three letter words and recognize beginning, middle and ending sounds, and able to write sentences using their phonemic skills.”

Case Study 6: Patty

At age 57, Patty is the oldest of the eight case study teachers. She has been teaching for eight years and has six years of kindergarten experience in both parochial and public schools. Patty earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and sociology and a master’s degree in industrial psychology before completing a graduate level Transition to Teaching program culminating in her teaching license. Patty remembers learning beginning reading and writing in first grade. She loved reading and enjoyed word study and writing poetry and stories. She still reads daily whenever she can find time, choosing from a wide variety of genres including biographies, mysteries, history, science fantasy and children’s books.

Patty has thirteen students this year and an aide that is shared between the kindergarten classrooms. When planning and teaching, she uses the McGraw Hill/SRA Imagine It series as well as additional best practice activities she has found to help students excel. The school also has completed curriculum mapping to tie all materials to
the Common Core State Standards. A SMART board is a new addition to Patty’s classroom this year. “I have incorporated it into my daily literacy stations. There are more resources available through the SMART board and children have responded well to the new technology.” She also has a set of five laptops for student usage. Patty believes she has a typical group of kindergarten students this year.

Students coming into kindergarten move quickly from phonemic awareness skills into phonological skills and reading. A wide range of students enter kindergarten, from those not recognizing their ABCs, to those knowing some of their ABCs, to those who are already reading. Right now, I have a range of readers from those who are reading the early decodable readers to those reading chapter books.

Patty’s self-reported theoretical orientation is whole language, although observations and interviews indicated a greater frequency of phonics cluster behaviors. She teaches a daily ninety-minute reading block, with an hour of whole group work and thirty minutes of literacy centers. Observed whole group instruction included teaching of specific phonics and phonemic awareness skills and reading stories together in a common area, and then returning to individual seats for practice in a workbook. During the same observation, students practiced reading fluency by using song-books to sing Christmas songs together and identifying sight words in each song. Centers time is spent practicing literacy skills on the lap-tops, SMART board, or with manipulatives while Patty holds individual conferences with students. This year, she has increased the amount of writing and incorporated more oral reading into her lesson plans, along with adding activities to help with sight word recognition.
Interviews and observations did not reveal outside pressures on Patty, although she did mention frustration over her students’ reading fluency. She is pleased that all her students have met benchmark standards and are reading. When asked about her goals for her students, Patty says, “I want my students to not only learn to read, but to have a passion for reading. I want them to enjoy the opportunity to write and express themselves creatively. I want every child to leave my room saying, ‘I am a reader and I am a writer. I am a success!’”

*Case Study 7: Sandra*

Sandra is 26 years old and has been teaching kindergarten for four years, holding a bachelor’s degree in elementary and special education. Reading has always been something she has enjoyed. “I remember my mom and dad reading to me as a young child and I distinctly remember falling in love with reading independently when I stumbled through *The Boxcar Children #9* by Gertrude Chandler Warner when I was in first grade. Throughout elementary school, I constantly had a book I was reading.” Sandra reads for pleasure mostly during summer vacation and prefers fiction as well as children’s books. During the school year, she reads a lot of news and social media on her computer and Smartphone.

Sandra has nineteen students in her class, one of whom speaks English as a second language. Her school uses a reading series published by Houghton Mifflin while implementing the Common Core State Standards. They have created a report card addressing the CCSS but do not administer the IREAD-K for assessments. Overall, Sandra feels as though she has had a very typical group of kindergarten students this year. They have progressed as she would have anticipated. Sandra says, “I have seen strong
growth and feel confident they are prepared for first grade. The only atypical case is an ESL child in my class.”

A self-reported skills-based teacher, Sandra is the only case study teacher whose frequency of codes observed in each orientation cluster was almost even. She teaches a ninety-minute reading block daily, including a daily read aloud, phonemic awareness and phonics reviews, introduction or practice of a specific skill, and reading centers. Students rotate through weekly reading centers activities such as individual instruction and assessment, computer time, and standard-specific practice. Sandra tries to include as many learning modalities as possible. During observation, the class read the story *When Sophie Gets Angry* by Molly Bang and discussed the different emotions the main character was experiencing. They acted out the feelings and also gave opinions on why certain colors were used to represent specific emotions. With the move to Common Core State Standards usage, Sandra has seen her teaching focus more on what she calls, “the big picture”. She says, “I feel like my emphasis in the past has been more phonics, but with the transition to Common Core there is a shift in building up skills that will be used throughout my students’ educational careers.”

Sandra is often frustrated by her lack of resources in many capacities, but in particular for helping her ESL student. She also sees many children who are only reading at school and never at home, which she feels is detrimental to a struggling reader’s progress. When asked about her goals for her students, Sandra says, “I want them to enjoy reading and I want them to be successful. I want them to be confident and prepared to be successful in first grade and beyond in their educational careers.”
Case Study 8: Wendy

Wendy is a 53-year-old who owned a preschool where she taught for nine years. She has 21 years of classroom experience, twelve of which have been in kindergarten. Wendy holds a bachelor and master’s degree in elementary education. Growing up, she remembers that sight words were hard for her to learn. “We recited things as a class and always read out loud. Comprehension skills were hard at first. I don’t remember doing much writing until my junior and senior years of high school.” Wendy reads for pleasure three to four days a week, whenever possible, and prefers to read works of fiction.

In a classroom of twelve students and an aide, Wendy is able to provide more individual instruction. Her school follows the Common Core State Standards while using a reading program published by MacMillan-McGraw Hill. Over the course of her career, she has developed a language arts routine including use of the published materials as well as outside resources. Wendy says her class this year is not at all a typical group of kindergarten students. Besides the small class size, she was also surprised to find that all of her students are above level and a little more advanced than she is used to seeing.

Wendy’s self-reported theoretical orientation was phonics, and observations and interviews revealed the highest frequency of codes occurred for phonics cluster behaviors. She teaches a ninety-minute reading block each day. Whole group instruction encompasses phonics and phonemic awareness practice on the SMART board as well as in workbooks, sight word introduction and practice, story read-alouds, and comprehension skills. During small group instruction, students were observed working individually with Wendy or her aide and rotating through the following centers: using PBS Kids on the SMART board, listening to a book on tape and completing a
corresponding worksheet, writing a story, or playing word building bingo to practice medial vowels. Above all, Wendy says her kindergarteners are always eager to learn. “They usually come in at all different levels and it takes a while for reading to click with some of them. Most panic the first time I make them spell or read on their own. They don’t like to be wrong!”

Throughout Wendy’s two interviews, it was very apparent that she disagreed with the state mandated ninety-minute reading block. She says, “An hour and a half of uninterrupted reading time is ridiculous.” However, she does admit to putting more time into her reading and writing instruction as a result of requirements. She has an abundance of specific goals for her kindergarten students each year, including such things as learning how to read, recognizing sight words, using decoding skills, understanding story structure and retelling stories. Wendy feels as though her reading and writing experiences as a teacher have improved over the course of her career.

Summary of Findings

The three research questions for this study were each examined using the original survey results for the eight case study teachers as well as qualitative data gathered through interviews, observations, and artifact collection. A cross-case analysis reveals that regardless of educational background and despite differing self-reported theoretical orientations to reading, all eight kindergarten teachers consistently taught from a phonics-based orientation. Seven of the eight teachers used a commercially-published basal reading series as their main curriculum. Two of the three teachers with a phonics orientation were over 50 years old with more than 20 years of teaching experiences,
while all three of the teachers with a whole language orientation had been teaching fewer than 11 years. There was no clear pattern between the teacher’s degree earned and her self-reported theoretical orientation. All of the case study teachers reported reading for pleasure and enjoying a wide variety of genres outside of professional reading. A summary of the findings as they pertain to each research questions follows.

Research Question 1

The first research question, “In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?” was addressed through the online administration of DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile as well as individual interviews, classroom observations, and artifact collection. Case study teachers were chosen based upon their self-reported theoretical orientations. Of the eight teachers, three reported a phonics orientation, two reported a skills-based orientation, and three others reported a whole language orientation. An analysis of frequency of codes, however, indicated that all eight case studies most often planned and implemented instruction from a phonics orientation. Skills-based planning and instruction occurred second most frequently, while whole language teaching was found least frequently in all eight teachers.

Lesson plans collected from each case study teacher, although not included in the coding frequencies, also show this trend. No matter how each teacher divided up her ninety minutes of reading instruction, there was a consistently heavy focus on phonics and phonemic awareness, with attention also given to sight words, vocabulary instruction and comprehension skills. In each classroom, reading instruction began with a whole group lesson focusing on phonics and phonemic awareness. This was followed by
discussion and review of sight words and introduction of other reading skills. Individual practice and small group reading center work reinforced whole group instruction through worksheets, technology, games and activities. Beyond the stories in the basal reader, children’s literature was often shared during instruction or used in centers but rarely significantly connected to the skills being taught.

Despite the literature read in class, none of the teachers provided pure whole language instruction as defined by Kenneth Goodman. Goodman gave very definite exclusions to the definition of whole language. Whole language is not: (a) outcome based education; (b) phonics-only reading programs; (c) direct instruction; or (d) a single program, set of materials or technique (Goodman, K., 1992; Watson, 1989). Each of the case study teachers very definitely provided outcome-based education at least partially through direct instruction. Thus, despite three very distinct self-reporting categories, all eight teachers appear to use similar curriculum planning and implementation techniques.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question, “How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?” seeks to find a link between the case studies’ self-reported theoretical orientation to reading and their personal reading experiences outside of the field of education. This question was answered with data from The Reading Interest-A-Lyzer (Reis, 2005), which was administered as part of the original online survey, and an interview question asking teachers to share about their experiences as a reader and writer.

Five of the eight case study teachers had positive memories of learning to read and write as a child, while three teachers reported struggling with learning to read. The
strongest memory for three of the teachers was of participating in reading groups. Two teachers also mentioned memorization of sight words and oral recitation. Perhaps interesting to note is that of the three teachers who struggled with reading as students themselves, two self-identified as having a phonics orientation to teaching reading and one had a skills-based orientation. Further research could be conducted on how a teacher’s childhood reading experiences connect to her theoretical orientation to reading.

Regardless of their childhood experiences with reading, all eight case study teachers reported an enjoyment of reading outside of the educational setting as an adult. Half of the teachers reported reading for pleasure between one and two days per week, one reported reading three to four days per week, and three teachers find time to read for pleasure between five and seven days per week. Four of the eight teachers read whenever they can find time, while two prefer evenings, one reads on the weekends, and one does most of her reading over summer vacation. Seven of the eight teachers favored reading fiction books, while one listed biographies and memoirs as her preferred genre. With all eight teachers reporting an enjoyment of reading in their free time, it would appear that a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading is not directly connected to personal reading experiences.

Research Question 3

The third and final research question, “What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?” seeks to understand the outside pressures which influence a teacher’s decision-making. This question was addressed during the second interview with each teacher, but also noted during classroom observations. Regardless of self-reported theoretical orientation,
varying aspects of a teacher’s background as well as day-to-day experiences can change the way instruction is planned and implemented. This can be better explained by examining Figure 4.1, Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory as it pertains to education (Flavin, 2012). Cultural-Historical Activity Theory states that there are many different forces at work between the subject (teacher), object (student), and the outcome (achievement) (Vygotsky, 1978). There are also outside factors to be considered, such as the community, rules, division of labor and mediating artifacts.

All eight teachers reported some degree of outside influence over their teaching. The most commonly mentioned force was the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the state mandated ninety-minute reading block. Only one case study teacher mentioned the ninety-minute requirement as a frustration, while the other seven teachers accepted both directives as a necessary part of their profession. Throughout the interview process, all eight teachers discussed the changes they had made in their
curriculum and instruction as a direct result of the implementation of the CCSS and ninety-minute block and spoke positively about the impact they were seeing on student achievement.

The case study teachers also reported feeling pressured by forces closer to home than federal and state policy. One teacher was extremely frustrated by the lack of a commercialized reading program to use as a guide for her instruction. Her school adopted a program for all grades except kindergarten, leaving her to find outside resources for her curriculum. Another teacher struggled with a lack of resources to help a student who did not speak English. There were no funds available at her school to hire an ESL teacher for the current school year, and she had no reading material to use with the student. Similarly, one teacher struggled with lack of a classroom on the school’s main campus due to rebuilding. The location of her class along with class size affected her instruction by imposing time constraints she doesn’t normally face. Three teachers also felt pressured by parents who wanted their children to achieve more quickly. All of these factors are out of the teacher’s locus of control, but still impact her decision-making and classroom instruction.

The outside factors affecting a teacher’s curriculum and instruction do not always have a negative impact. All eight case study teachers reported participating in professional development opportunities over the course of the school year, ranging from independent reading selections to faculty focus groups to district and statewide conventions to national conferences. The teachers unanimously reported these opportunities as refreshing and always mentioned at least one change they made to their instruction as a result.
Rethinking the Activity System Model: An Interdependent Activity Systems Approach

The data collected from the current study validates prior research but offers no innovation to the education community. However, when the findings from the study are examined comprehensively, a new model emerges. When reviewing data, a new question arises. Why do teachers from differing theoretical orientations and educational backgrounds gravitate toward the same teaching methods? The results from this study suggest that teachers do not operate within one isolated activity systems model as suggested in chapter 2. Rather, teachers are constantly shifting between several competing yet interdependent activity systems, as illustrated in Figure 4.2.

The current findings lend themselves to a new theory of interdependent activity systems, suggesting that teachers’ curricular decision-making and classroom practice originate from a competing set of activity systems that each teacher possesses. The interdependent activity systems model builds upon Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity System as described for this study and is influenced by Wolhwend’s (2008) model of interactive activity systems between literacy and play in kindergarten students. The new model posits that each of the three research questions also represents an activity system, which influences a teacher’s actions. Teachers must choose the importance they place on each system when making educational decisions, thus the term “competing”. However, each activity system holds some influence over the final outcome; therefore the teacher is ultimately dependent upon the way his or her systems interact. It is likely there are other activity systems influencing a teacher’s behavior, which are not addressed in the current study.
In this study, there are four activity systems affecting each teacher’s decision-making and classroom practice. The activity system initially presented as the theoretical framework for this study places the teacher as subject and students as objects, with student achievement as the outcome. This system will be further referred to as the “school setting” and includes the aforementioned outside pressures such as curriculum, standardized testing, policy, and stakeholders in the places of “instruments”, “rules”, “community”, and “division of labor”. The other three activity systems place the teacher in the role of object, with the teacher’s own behavior and actions as the outcome. These systems will be labeled and referred to as “personal reading experiences”, “theoretical orientation”, and “educational background”. Each decision a teacher makes come from a weighing and balancing of his or her interdependent activity systems. This theory can be further illustrated by reexamining three of the case studies.

Gail is a 24-year-old first-year kindergarten teacher. She has earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and has two years of preschool teaching experience,
which are represented in her educational background system. Her self-reported theoretical orientation is skills-based. Gail reported having a very difficult time learning how to read and write, although she enjoys reading for pleasure as an adult, which corresponds to her personal reading experiences system. One of her biggest frustrations is the lack of a formal reading program to use as a basis for her teaching, information that appears as an outside pressure in Gail’s school setting system. Interviews, classroom observations, and artifact collection indicated Gail was teaching from a phonics-based perspective. The phonics-based teaching is a result of Gail’s leaning most heavily upon the school setting activity system of her four interdependent activity systems, which emphasizes the use of phonics in teaching kindergarten students to read. Her educational background system, including her years teaching preschool and her own struggles with learning to read as a child, may also play a role in her phonics-based teaching.

At age 57, Patty is the oldest of the eight case study teachers. She began teaching eight years ago after completing a transition to teaching program. Before teaching, Patty held a bachelor’s degree in both psychology and sociology and a master’s degree in industrial psychology, which impact her educational background activity system. She loved to read as a child and continues to enjoy reading as an adult, which are both a part of her personal reading experiences system. Although her theoretical orientation is whole language, results of the study indicate that Patty most frequently teaches from the phonics-based perspective. It can be surmised that this is a result of Patty’s reliance on her school setting activity system when planning and implementing instruction.

Wendy holds a master’s degree in education and has 21 years of teaching experience, with twelve years in kindergarten. Her educational background system also
contains memories of being a struggling reader as a child. Despite this, Wendy’s personal reading experiences system includes reading works of fiction for pleasure three to four days a week. Wendy’s theoretical orientation was phonics-based, which matches the data from interviews and observations. Although Wendy had complaints about some district and state requirements within her school setting activity system, she did report adhering to expectations. Thus, her phonics-based teaching results from a balance of at least three of her activity systems: educational background, theoretical orientation, and school setting.

The discussion of Gail, Patty, and Wendy illustrate the theory of interdependent activity systems. When making choices for their students, teachers must weigh what they learned from their own educational background, examine their beliefs in their theoretical orientation, reflect on their personal reading experiences, and consider the importance of their school settings. The crux of interdependent activity system model, shown in Figure 4.3, is the nexus of practice, or the place wherein a teacher’s work takes place.

Figure 4.3. Interdependent Activity Systems Nexus of Practice
Teachers are constantly drawing upon their own activity systems, choosing systems on which to rely for each decision they make in their curricular planning and classroom practice. When teachers work within the nexus of practice, they successfully balance the competing systems and discover a space where authentic teaching and learning occur. The implications of this theory of interdependent activity systems are discussed further in chapter 5.
INTRODUCTION

Researchers and policymakers have recognized the importance of providing students a solid educational foundation, particularly in the area of reading instruction (National Institute of Health and Human Development, 2000). However, there is a gap in the existing research regarding the extent to which a teacher’s beliefs impact his or her actions in the classroom. The current educational climate, with particular emphasis on teacher efficacy, underlies the importance of examining how teachers’ beliefs about literacy and literacy instruction manifest themselves in curriculum planning and classroom practice. The previous four chapters presented a rationale, examined available research on the topics, and outlined the current study and its findings. The following chapter will include a review of the methods, procedures, and major findings as presented in chapters three and four, as well as offer discussion of implications and possibilities for future research.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In this qualitative study, I sought to answer three research questions: (a) In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?; (b) How is a kindergarten
teacher's theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?; and (c) What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?. Case study methodology and constant comparative analysis were utilized in an effort to answer these questions (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). At the beginning of the school year, 39 kindergarten teachers completed an online survey containing DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (1985), Reis’ Reading Interest-a-lyzer (2005) and open-ended demographic questions to determine their beliefs about literacy instruction and their personal reading experiences. Responses to the TORP were tallied, and from this information eight teachers scoring the highest in each of DeFord’s three theoretical orientation clusters of phonics, skills, or whole language were invited to participate as case studies.

These eight teachers participated in individual interviews, classroom observations and artifact analysis over the course of one school year to examine how their theoretical orientation to reading instruction and personal reading experiences impacted curricular decision making and classroom practice. Also of interest was the sway of pressures outside of the teachers’ control, such as local, state and federal educational policy and pressure from other educational stakeholders. The collection of this varied data allowed for deeper investigation of the research questions and the opportunity to triangulate findings. The use of case study methodology allowed the researcher to enter into the teachers’ perspective and provided insights into the intricacies of their decision-making processes (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).
Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question, “In what ways does a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading impact curricular planning and classroom practice for literacy instruction?”, was answered with data collected from DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile, open-ended survey responses, interviews, classroom observation, and artifact collection. Despite the case study teachers representing each of the three orientation clusters, an analysis of frequency coding indicates all eight teachers most often planned and implemented instruction from a phonics orientation. Skills-based planning and instruction occurred second most frequently, while whole language teaching was found least frequently in all eight teachers. A review of lesson plans and artifacts support these findings. Given that the significance of teacher beliefs was demonstrated in chapter 2, the question of why eight teachers of differing theoretical orientations provided seemingly uniform instruction to their students remains.

Seven of the eight case study teachers were required to use previously-purchased commercial reading programs. These programs were produced before the Common Core State Standards were adopted by the state of Indiana. During the school year in which this study took place, teachers were expected to provide instruction meeting the CCSS while using a reading series that was written to match Indiana state standards from four years earlier. These programs were basal reading series, wherein particular phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension skills were introduced and practiced all week in conjunction with a reading selection. It is possible that despite training in the CCSS, the teachers relied heavily on the materials they were already
comfortable using. A reliance on a basal reading series would cause a teacher’s instruction to lean heavily towards phonics- and skills-based teaching, regardless of her personal beliefs.

Another explanation of the findings is closely related to the first. Findings indicating a higher frequency of phonics cluster behaviors could be related to the age of the students being taught. A kindergarten curriculum looks much different than that of older students who are already proficient readers. Simply based on developmental level, a language arts class for kindergarten students relies more heavily on phonics and skills-based teaching in order for young children to discover the basic strategies needed to learn to read. The Common Core State Standards (2012) lists print concepts, phonological awareness and phonics as the three categories of foundational skills in the English-Language Arts Standards for kindergarten. Regardless of a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation, the standards and materials she is expected to utilize to instruct an emergent reader include phonics-based teaching to meet students’ needs. Also, little is known about the details of the training the eight teachers received. It is possible the training focused more heavily on phonics and phonological awareness than on the other foundational skills identified by the CCSS.

A final possible explanation for findings related to the first research question could lie in the instrumentation. Diane DeFord designed her Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile in 1985, 28 years prior to the current study. Educational research and recommendations for best practice can change rapidly, so it is feasible that the TORP may need updating. The TORP is a well-validated instrument and has been used in multiple research studies, so the question does not lie in its ability to accurately measure
teacher beliefs but rather in the categories into which those beliefs fall. Literacy instruction has changed considerably in the last thirty years and with overlap in many theories and practices, there may no longer be the same three easily discernable categories in which to place teachers of differing belief systems. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the current study only utilized eight cases. More recent research by Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2011) found the TORP to still be a useful and relevant tool. In a study of 581 teachers, they discovered that teachers’ participation in reading and writing routines was related to their literacy beliefs. For this reason, although the responses of the five of the teachers do not align with their TORP responses, it is feasible that the answers to the questions for this study may lie elsewhere.

Research Question 2

The second research question, “How is a kindergarten teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading connected to his or her personal reading experiences?” seeks to link teachers’ self-reported theoretical orientation to reading to personal reading experiences using responses from The Reading Interest-A-Lyzer (Reis, 2005) and interview questions asking teachers to share about their experiences as a reader and writer. Five of the eight case study teachers had positive memories of learning to read and write as a child, while three teachers reported struggling with learning to read. Regardless of their childhood experiences with reading, all eight case study teachers reported an enjoyment of reading outside of the educational setting as adults and it would appear that a teacher’s theoretical orientation to reading is not directly connected to personal reading experiences.

Although a teacher’s personal reading experiences may not reflect his or her theoretical orientation to reading, Gambrell (1996) found “one of the key factors in
motivation students to read is a teacher who values reading and is enthusiastic about sharing a love of reading with students”. In her book, *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child*, Donalyn Miller (2009) writes that teachers who have an aesthetic view of reading have a greater long-term impact on the reading experiences of their students. All of the eight case study teachers indicated a love of reading and a desire to pass that enthusiasm on to their students, regardless of the teacher’s self-reported theoretical orientation.

*Research Question 3*

The third and final research question, “What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?” seeks to understand the outside pressures, which influence a teacher’s decision-making. This question was addressed during the second interview with each teacher, but also noted during classroom observations. All eight teachers reported some degree of outside influence on their teaching. Regardless of theoretical orientation, varying aspects of each teacher’s background as well as day-to-day experiences were reported and observed as impacting the way instruction was planned and implemented. These results support Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, the theoretical framework for the study, as it pertains to education.

The findings relating to the third research question were as expected. Any teacher, if asked, could list a myriad of outside forces affecting his or her teaching. It is interesting to note that all eight case study teachers mentioned the implementation of the Common Core State Standards as having a major impact on their curriculum planning and classroom practice, although all spoke positively about resulting student
achievement. All the teachers also referred to the state-mandated ninety-minute reading block with only one citing negative feelings. It would seem that these particular changes handed down by federal, state, and local administration had the largest influence over the teachers’ literacy curriculum and instructional choices.

Another factor largely affecting the teachers’ literacy planning and classroom practice was professional development opportunities. All eight teachers reported participating in professional development experiences over the course of the school year. These experiences, whether conferences, conventions, or in-school opportunities, all affected the actions teachers took in the classroom. For four of the case study teachers, class size also impacted the literacy curriculum and classroom activities. Large class sizes increased the amount of time necessary for every task, which limited the amount of time the teachers could spend on lessons and working independently with students. One teacher also mentioned feeling pressure from parents to increase the pace of her curriculum so the students were learning to read more quickly. Overall, the factors mentioned by the case study teachers as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice were viewed either as positive occurrences or necessary changes.

**Interdependent Activity Systems**

In addition to the findings for individual research questions, the concept of interdependent activity systems also emerged within the study. Introduced in chapter 4, the theory of interdependent activity systems builds upon Vygotsky’s Cultural-Historical Activity Systems, the theoretical framework from which this study was designed. As shown in Figure 5.1, this theory suggests that teachers are constantly balancing multiple activity systems in their daily work. The circle in the center indicates the nexus of
practice, or the point at which teachers are making decisions and implementing classroom practice by drawing upon experiences from all their activity systems, thus creating authentic learning opportunities for their students. Understanding the new model of interdependent activity systems provides additional implications of findings, as discussed further in this chapter.

Figure 5.1. Interdependent Activity Systems

Limitations

It is difficult to design a study without some limitations. In using case study methodology, the engagement of the participants is essential to answering the research questions. This caused two major limitations for the current study. First, DeFord’s (1985) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile and The Reading Interest-A-Lyzer (Reis, 2005) are self-reporting instruments. There is always the risk that participants may not answer truthfully or may respond in way that is what they believe the researcher wishes. This leads to the question of whether or not the case studies chosen were actually of the theoretical orientation they reported. The issue of unresponsiveness and negative responses provided a second setback. Originally, the teachers scoring highest for each theoretical orientation cluster on the TORP were invited to participate as case studies.
However, five of those teachers either did not respond or refused the invitation. A second round of invitations was sent to the next highest scoring teachers in each cluster. Interestingly, the phonics orientation case study teachers were the top three phonics scores from the TORP, while all three whole language teachers were from the second round of invitations. Thus, the phonics teachers were very “strong” in their beliefs while the whole language teachers may not have been as invested in their orientation. There is a question of whether or not the actual highest scoring teachers would have performed in a different manner than those in the second tier of scoring.

The research setting could also be considered a limitation in this study. All participants from the initial survey and the eight case study teachers were employed in parochial schools in the same Catholic archdiocese. Research was conducted in this setting due to the unlimited access granted to the researcher by administrators. The schools and teachers in the archdiocesan system must adhere to the same federal and state standards as a public school system. However, teachers, students, instruction, and perceived pressures vary from school to school and could potentially look very different in a public school setting than in a private school environment.

**Implications of Findings**

*Policy-Makers and Administrators*

The findings of the third research question, “What other factors do kindergarten teachers perceive as affecting their literacy curriculum and instructional choice?” has implications for those who create and implement federal, state, and local educational policy. Findings indicate several areas teachers perceive as affecting their curriculum
and instructional choice. The introduction of the Common Core State Standards and the ninety-minute reading block were accompanied by a tremendous amount of professional development. These are evidence of policies, which have been implemented and appear to be having a positive effect on teacher instruction and student progress. With the recent emphasis on teacher efficacy and merit-based pay, policy-makers should look to the way new programs are introduced and the ensuing professional development provided to teachers to ensure a change in classroom practice.

At the same time, policy-makers should take into consideration the concept of interdependent activity systems. Regardless of mandated policies and curricula, teachers also have theoretical beliefs about reading and background experiences that will affect the way they interpret and implement new practices. A teacher’s personal beliefs and background hold merit and are invaluable sources of knowledge. Teachers should be encouraged to examine their own beliefs about teaching and find a way to act upon their beliefs during classroom instruction. Administrators must find a way to provide teachers with the tools they need to teach from their own personal belief systems while still meeting state and national standards for instruction.

Policy-makers and administrators are faced with the challenge of balancing the development of research- and evidence-based curricular standards while building upon the classroom teacher’s own expertise and experience. Keeping in focus the idea of interdependent activity systems, teachers should be empowered to operate within their nexus of practice, thereby providing authentic and creative educational opportunities and experiences for their students.
Teacher preparation programs should look to findings from this study to inform planning and implementation of teacher training. Colleges and universities should be aware that a teacher’s theoretical orientation may not necessarily match the way he or she teaches. This finding, coupled with the theory of interdependent activity systems, indicates that training programs should be organized around best practices, research-based methods, and recent policy, as teachers will be expected to tailor their instruction to what schools expect of them. Teacher preparation programs must look to findings about teacher beliefs and recognize the importance the beliefs hold. Pre-service teachers need to be taught to recognize and verbalize their own beliefs and should be empowered to translate those beliefs into classroom practice, while still utilizing evidence and research-based teaching methods.

Teacher preparation programs should share the model of interdependent activity systems with pre-service teachers to help them better understand how to balance their own activity systems and to find their nexus of practice to best educate their students. New teachers should be taught how to balance the expectations of schools and districts with what their own competing activity systems of educational background, personal reading experiences, and theoretical orientation to reading. Teacher preparation programs may also want to consider expanding instruction to include more principles of whole language and skills-based teaching, understanding that the teachers in this study adhering to the Common Core State Standards taught most frequently from the phonics orientation cluster. It should also be considered that the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile may need to be updated to include more current literacy education trends.
The findings from the second research question suggest that regardless of theoretical orientation to reading, all eight teachers shared a love of reading for pleasure and a desire to pass that love on to their students. Teacher preparation programs should encourage self-selected reading and take advantage of a pre-service teacher’s prior reading experiences to enhance classroom instruction.

Those who design and provide professional development to teachers should consider the idea of interdependent activity systems. Teachers operate within their four activity systems of educational background, personal reading experiences, school setting, and theoretical orientation to reading. Teacher trainers should take all four systems into account when offering professional development. For example, the school setting in which the training could impact its effectiveness if what is presented is not feasible within the constraints of the school’s policies. Presenters could build an understanding of each teacher’s personal reading experiences and educational background by taking a short inventory before beginning their training. Knowing whether teachers had a positive or negative educational background could influence how receptive they will be to new ideas. Just as teachers do in the classroom, trainers should activate prior knowledge from a teacher’s educational background and personal reading experiences to build instruction.

In order for professional development to have a lasting impact, a shift must occur in the teacher’s thinking. Festinger (1957) introduced Cognitive Dissonance Theory, wherein an uncomfortable clash of beliefs and the resulting tension motivates a subject to change. By using the Cognitive Dissonance Theory to plan professional development, it could be possible to shift teachers’ beliefs about literacy instruction, thereby effectively changing their theoretical orientation to reading. Designers of professional development
should use the concept of interdependent activity systems to better understand how to change teacher behaviors.

Teachers

The findings from this study imply that classroom instruction is complex and a dynamic interaction of beliefs, history, and practices. Eight teachers of three differing theoretical orientations were studied through observations and interviews revealing that curriculum planning and classroom practice looked remarkably similar across all settings. This creates an interesting question of why teachers reported belief in one method of teaching reading but practiced a different method. Within the concept of interdependent activity systems, theoretical orientation is just one of four competing systems. The five teachers in this study who did not identify themselves as phonics-based orientations but still taught from a phonics perspective were not balancing their activity systems and therefore did not operate within their own nexus of practice. The answers to why this occurred can be found in the teachers’ interviews and observations. The teachers were expected to teach using a reading series and a set of standards that did not match, while balancing other outside pressures. In looking at the interdependent activity systems model, these five teachers were allowing their school setting system to have more influence over their actions than their other three systems.

Teachers should revisit their other three activity systems to consider ways to balance their own knowledge, experience, and beliefs into classroom instruction while still adhering to state policy and using researched best practices. Teachers should be encouraged to examine their own beliefs about teaching and find a way to act upon their beliefs during classroom instruction. It is important for teachers to understand the
concept of interdependent activity systems and to examine the best ways to balance their own competing systems to provide the best possible instruction to their students. In order to find their nexus of practice, teachers must be willing to shift their thinking and continually engage as learners themselves.

Future Research

This study allows for a vast amount of future research. First and foremost, it would appear that there is a need for an updated instrument to measure teacher beliefs. It is possible that while the TORP is a well-validated instrument, the three theoretical orientations as defined by DeFord in 1985 are not as applicable to teacher belief systems at the present time. A researcher could also further examine the disconnect between a teacher’s self-reported theoretical orientation and classroom practice by widening the number of case studies or increasing the time spent in each classroom.

Another option for expanding upon the current research is to broaden the population. It would be interesting to look at teachers of other grade levels to see if the results are applicable. Reading instruction in middle school or high school would most likely not be as skills focused as kindergarten. Teachers of those grade levels might also score themselves quite differently on the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile. Similarly, another area of future research is to conduct the same study in a different setting. As previously mentioned, visiting kindergarten classrooms and teachers in public schools might garner completely different results as the current study of parochial schools.
A researcher might also be interested in delving further into the concept of interdependent activity systems. Further research could provide stronger links between the four systems examined in the current study, or present more activity systems competing for a teacher’s attention. A large-scale study of teacher practices with regards to the four systems of teacher background, reading experiences, outside pressures and theoretical orientation could reinforce the patterns found in this study. It would be fascinating to examine to what extent theory of interdependent activity systems holds true across other content areas, such as math or science. A large amount of research could be undertaken with regards to the impact interdependent activity systems have on student achievement, a piece of data that was intentionally left out of the current study.

Conclusion

The current study adds to the existing body of knowledge on teacher beliefs and practices because previous research on the topic was conducted prior to the introduction of the Common Core State Standards. The findings answered all three research questions, although not always in the manner one might expect. It was found that for these eight kindergarten teachers, their theoretical orientation to reading did not impact his or her curricular planning and classroom instruction rather, outside factors such as the Common Core State Standards dictated what they were teaching.

Within the study, the new thinking about interdependent activity systems arose, providing more insight into the findings. When the four interdependent activity systems are balanced, teachers can authentically instruct students from their nexus of practice. Despite the implications of this new model, however, there continues to be a disconnect
between what teachers know and believe, how they’ve been trained, the materials they are expected to use, and the accountability measures they are expected to meet. When teachers’ activity systems are in conflict, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to find their nexus of practice. This disconnect could be the reason for the current findings. More importantly, this dissonance could also be at the root of larger issues such as student achievement and teacher efficacy.

The goals of the study as outlined in the first chapter were threefold:

- to examine the interaction between a teacher’s theoretical orientation towards reading and classroom practice;
- to describe the impact of a teacher’s personal reading experiences and theoretical orientation on curricular planning and classroom practice; and
- to contribute to the current body of knowledge on literacy teaching and learning.

All three goals were met over the course of the study, and despite unexpected findings the end result is still related to the opening statement from Perkins (1992): “Education ultimately depends on what happens in classrooms…between teachers and learners. That is fundamental.” Perhaps the best evidence of this statement came from the case study teacher named Denise who said in an interview, “My goal is for my students to look at books like they are candy – something to be savored and enjoyed. I want them to understand the craft of authors and illustrators and what components excellent literature has. I want them to be able to express themselves in a written manner than entices their readers to read their writing. My goal is to have my children well prepared to meet the challenges of first grade successfully and have a strong literacy base to build upon.”
When we create the classrooms that Denise and all teachers can live out their vision and beliefs about how children learn to read and write, we can begin a conversation beyond simply meeting standards and creating a vision of lifelong literacy learners.
REFERENCES


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Munby, H. (1982). The place of teachers' beliefs in research on teacher thinking and decision making, and an alternative methodology. *Instructional Science, 11*, 201-225


APPENDIX A

DEFORD’S THEORETICAL ORIENTATION TOWARD READING PROFILE (1985)

The DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile

Directions: Read the following statements, and circle one of the number responses that will indicate the relationship of the statement to your feelings about reading and reading instruction. SA 1 2 3 4 5 SD (select one best answer that reflects the strength of agreement or disagreement—SA is strong agreement, and SD is strong disagreement)

1. A child needs to be able to verbalize the rules of phonics in order to assure proficiency in processing new words.
2. An increase in reading errors is usually related to a decrease in comprehension.
3. Dividing words into syllables according to rules is a helpful instructional practice for reading new words.
4. Fluency and expression are necessary components of reading that indicate good comprehension.
5. Materials for early reading should be written in natural language without concern for short, simple words and sentences.
6. When children do not know a word, they should be instructed to sound out its parts.
7. It is a good practice to allow children to edit what is written into their own dialect when learning to read.
8. The use of a glossary or dictionary is necessary in determining the meaning and pronunciation of new words.
9. Reversals (e.g., saying “law” for “war”) are significant problems in the teaching of reading.
10. It is good practice to correct a child as soon as an oral reading mistake is made.
11. It is important for a word to be repeated a number of times after it has been introduced to ensure that it will become a part of sight vocabulary.
12. Paying close attention to punctuation marks is necessary to understanding story content.
13. It is a sign of an ineffective reader when words and phrases are repeated.
14. Being able to label words according to grammatical function (nouns, etc.) is useful in proficient reading.
15. When coming to a word that is unknown, the reader should be encouraged to guess based upon meaning and go on.
16. Young readers need to be introduced to the root form of words (run, long) before they are asked to read inflected forms (running, longest).
17. It is not necessary for a child to know the letters of the alphabet in order to learn to read.
18. Flashcard drill with sight words is an unnecessary form of practice in reading instruction.
19. Ability to use accent patterns in multi-syllable words (pleno to graph, pho to graph) and plno to graph should be developed as a part of reading instruction.
20. Controlling text through consistent spelling patterns (The fat cat run back. The fat cat sat on a hat.) is a means by which children can best learn to read.
21. Formal instruction in reading is necessary to insure the adequate development of all skills used in reading.
22. Phoneme analysis is the most important form of analysis used when meeting new words.
23. Children’s initial encounters with print should focus on meaning, not upon exact
graphic representation.

24. Word shapes (word configuration, big) should be taught in reading to aid in word recognition. SA 1 2 3 4 5 SD

25. It is important to teach skills in relation to other skills. SA 1 2 3 4 5 SD

26. If a child says *house* for the written word *home,* the response should be left uncorrected. SA 1 2 3 4 5 SD

27. It is not necessary to introduce new words before they appear in the reading text. SA 1 2 3 4 5 SD

28. Some problems in reading are caused by readers dropping the inflectional endings from words (e.g., jumps, jumped). SA 1 2 3 4 5 SD

Scoring Directions

1. Identify items 5, 7, 15, 17, 18, 23, 26 and 27.

2. Score all other items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25 and 28 by giving the number of points corresponding to the number circled in each item. i.e., if a 4 is circled, give 4 points, etc. Do not score items 5, 7, 15, 17, 18, 23, 26 and 27 when doing this.

3. Now score items 5, 7, 15, 17, 18, 23, 26 and 27 by reversing the process. If a 1 is circled, give 5 points. If a 2 is circled, give 4 points, a 3 = 3 points, a 4 = 2 points, and a 5 = 1 point.

4. Add the total of the two scores for one total score and compare with the following scale.
   - 0 - 65 decoding perspective – Bottom-Up Philosophy - Behaviorism
   - 66 - 110 skills perspective – Blended philosophy - Cognitivism
   - 111 - 140 wholistic perspective – Top-Down Philosophy - Constructivism

Note: A score in the 85 - 120 range would probably indicate the ability to learn to use a balanced approach to reading instruction.

This test was copyrighted by the International Reading Association in 1985.
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF SUPPORT

Jacque Singleton

From: Mears, Kathy <kmears@archindy.org>
Sent: Monday, April 16, 2012 8:38 AM
To: Jacque Singleton
Subject: RE: Dissertation

Jacque,
You have our permission to conduct your research in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. We are happy to support you in your efforts!
Kathy

Kathy P. Mears
Assistant Superintendent
Archdiocese of Indianapolis
1400 North Meridian Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202
1-317-753-6029
1-317-261-3364 (fax)

Please prayerfully consider supporting the Church and its ministries.
For more information, visit http://www.archindy.org/support

From: Jacque Singleton [mailto:jsingleton@stanthonyschool.us]
Sent: Monday, April 16, 2012 9:21 AM
To: Mears, Kathy
Subject: Dissertation

Hi Kathy!

I know that months ago you gave permission for me to use the Archdiocese Kindergartens as my research sample for my dissertation. I can’t locate the email you sent affirming that and my committee would like it included in an appendix. Can you please email me again with permission to use the schools? No names of teachers or students will be published, and the majority of the study will be conducted online.

Thanks!
Jacque
APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Wanted:
A Few GREAT Kindergarten Teachers!

Jacquelyn Singleton, doctoral candidate at the University of Louisville, is conducting research for her dissertation and she needs your help!

The purpose of her study is to examine kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about reading instruction as they relate to curriculum planning and student achievement.

Questions you might have…

How can my teachers participate?
In September, your kindergarten teachers will be sent an email with a link to a survey that can be completed online. Please encourage them to participate!

But my teachers are busy! How long will it take?
The survey shouldn’t take more than 20 minutes to complete online.

Is the survey confidential?
The survey will be confidential and no names will be used in the research.

More questions?
Contact Jacquelyn Singleton at (812) 989-0923 or at jacquelynjoy@yahoo.com

This research has the support of Kathy Mears and the Office of Catholic Education.
Recruitment Email

Dear Teachers,

Greetings! My name is Jacquelyn Singleton and I am a Ph.D. candidate from the University of Louisville. I am currently conducting my dissertation study which examines the effects of different teaching methods on kindergarten students’ reading achievement.

As your principal has told you, I am asking all kindergarten teachers in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis to complete a short survey online. This instrument, DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation Toward Reading Profile, will ask questions about your preferred style and opinions regarding reading instruction. It should take less than 20 minutes to complete. All answers will be confidential.

If you are willing to help me, please click on the link below. It will take you directly to a consent form and the survey. If you have any questions at all, please feel free to contact me at (812)989-0923 or jacquelynjoy@yahoo.com.

Thank you in advance for your valuable time and for all you do for our students!

Jacquelyn Singleton

<insert survey link here>

Telephone Script for Case Studies

Hello, this is Jacquelyn Singleton. You recently received an email and completed an online survey for my dissertation study, which is researching the effects of different teaching styles on children’s achievement. Thanks so much for your help!

I’m calling to ask if you would be interested in further contribution to my study. I am seeking six kindergarten teachers to volunteer as case study participants. This participation would involve two interviews with you and two 45-minute observations of your classroom and teaching.

If you are interested, I would be happy to come to your school to discuss the study further and answer any questions you may have.

<If interested, set up a meeting time>

Thank you so much for your time!
APPENDIX D

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Subject Informed Consent Document
THE IMPACT OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ THEORETICAL ORIENTATION TO READING ON CURRICULAR PLANNING AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN LITERACY

IRB assigned number: 
Investigator(s) name & address: Jacquelyn J. Singleton 
501 Windemere Rd. 
Clarksville, IN 47129
Site(s) where study is to be conducted: Archdiocese of Indianapolis Elementary Schools
Phone number for subjects to call for questions: (812) 989-0923

Introduction and Background Information
You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Dr. Lori Norton-Meier, Ph.D., the principal investigator, and Jacquelyn J. Singleton, M.S.. The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Teaching and Learning. The study will take place at elementary schools within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Approximately eight subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to examine the personal beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers with regards to reading instruction and the impact of those beliefs on curriculum planning and classroom practice.

Procedures
In this study, you will be asked to complete DeFord’s Theoretical Orientation Toward Reading Profile and share basic background information via SurveyMonkey at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year. This survey should take about twenty minutes to complete. Teachers asked to take part in a case study will be visited twice at their school. Each time, an interview lasting no more than thirty minutes will be conducted and a classroom observation of less than one hour will take place. The study will conclude in May of 2013. Subjects may decline to answer any questions which make them uncomfortable.

Potential Risks
There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions.

Benefits
The possible benefits of this study include impacting future professional development and training for teachers in the area of reading instruction. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Participating teachers will be asked to share lesson plans and anonymous student work samples.
Compensation
You will not be compensated for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

Confidentiality
Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:
- The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office
- Government agencies, such as the Indiana Department of Education
- Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)
- Office of Civil Rights
- The Archdiocese of Indianapolis, Office of Catholic Education

All data will be kept in a password protected computer and/or in a locked file cabinet.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

Research Subject’s Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints
If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact the principal investigator, Dr. Norton-Meier at (502) 852-1316. You may also contact Jacquelyn Singleton at (812) 989-0923.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.
THE IMPACT OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ THEORETICAL ORIENTATION TO READING ON CURRICULAR PLANNING AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN LITERACY

Participating teachers will be asked to share lesson plans and anonymous student work samples. This paper tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature means that this study has been discussed with you, that your questions have been answered, and that you will take part in the study. This informed consent document is not a contract. You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a signed copy of this paper to keep for your records.

Signature of Subject/Legal Representative Date Signed

Signature of Person Explaining the Consent Form (if other than the Investigator) Date Signed

Signature of Investigator Date Signed

LIST OF INVESTIGATORS PHONE NUMBERS
Jacquelyn J. Singleton (812) 989-0923
Dr. Lori Norton-Meier (502) 852-1316
APPENDIX E
READING INTEREST-A-LYZER

**Reading Interest-A-LYZER®**
Based on the Interest-A-Lyzer by Joseph S. Renzulli

Name ____________________________
Grade ___________________ Age ______

1. When I read for pleasure, I pick the following (Check all that apply):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novels/chapter books</th>
<th>Cartoons/comic books</th>
<th>Humorous books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports books</td>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>Magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry books</td>
<td>Fantasy books</td>
<td>Mystery books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History books</td>
<td>Science books</td>
<td>Scary books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographies</td>
<td>Other ________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. If I were in charge of my reading/language arts class, I would have my students do 10 of the following activities (Check 10):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write a story</th>
<th>Learn sign language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write a book</td>
<td>Create a game or puzzle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a poem</td>
<td>Learn about an author or illustrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a newspaper article</td>
<td>Read a poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about a book with a friend</td>
<td>Write the story of your life (autobiography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a play</td>
<td>Draw/illustrate a story or poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give a speech</td>
<td>Read a true story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read a favorite book again</td>
<td>Read a biography or autobiography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read a challenging, new book</td>
<td>Read to learn how to do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell a story</td>
<td>Work on a crossword or other word puzzles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a cartoon or comic</td>
<td>Read a book aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn a different language (Spanish, French)</td>
<td>Watch a play/movie of a book that you have read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to someone read aloud</td>
<td>Write a story about someone's life (biography)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.) I am most likely to read a book for pleasure that:

- [ ] a teacher suggests
- [ ] a librarian suggests
- [ ] is by an author whose books I have read
- [ ] my friend suggests
- [ ] has won an award
- [ ] I just happened to see (hear about) in _________________

4.) Three favorite books that I would take on a month-long trip are:

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________

5.) In the past week, I have read for at least half an hour (30 minutes):

- [ ] No days
- [ ] 1-2 days
- [ ] 3-4 days
- [ ] 5-7 days
- [ ] 6-7 days

6.) In the past month, I have read ______ book(s) for pleasure:

- [ ] No books
- [ ] 1-2 books
- [ ] 3-4 books
- [ ] 5-7 books
- [ ] 8 or more books

7.) My favorite time to read for pleasure is:

- [ ] Never
- [ ] During school
- [ ] Lunchtime
- [ ] In the evening
- [ ] Whenever I can
- [ ] In the morning before school
- [ ] During the midmorning
- [ ] After school
- [ ] Before falling asleep

8.) When I read I like to:  

- [ ] read one book
- [ ] juggle more than one book at a time

9.) I like to receive books as presents.

- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO

10.) I view books as presents.

- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO

11.) I have a library card.

- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO
12.) If I read a book that I like, I am likely to read more books by the same author.  □ YES  □ NO

13.) If I read a book that I enjoy, I am likely to read more books about that topic.  □ YES  □ NO

14.) I borrow books from the library:
   □ Once a week  □ Twice a week  □ A couple of times a month
   □ Every few months  □ A few times a year  □ Hardly ever
   □ Never

15.) The number of books I have at home:
   □ None  □ Less than 10  □ 11-20
   □ 21-30  □ 31-40  □ Too many to count

16.) If I could meet any literary character (for example, Laura from *Little House on the Prairie*, the Lion from *The Wizard of Oz*, Harry from *Harry Potter*, Curious George, Arthur, Babar) I want to meet:
   • __________________________
   • __________________________
   • __________________________

17.) Where is your ideal reading spot?
   □ Bedroom  □ Living Room  □ Family Room
   □ Public Library  □ Kitchen  □ Bookstore
   □ Car  □ Home Library  □ Other ________

18.) The last three books that I have read are:
   1. __________________________
   2. __________________________
   3. __________________________
Questions to Accompany the TORP

- How many years of teaching experience do you have?
- What degrees do you hold?
- What other licenses/certificates pertaining to education have you obtained?
- What is your age?
- What is your current class size?
- What language arts textbook series do you use?
- What other resources do you use when making your language arts lesson plans?
- How far in advance do you write your lesson plans?
- What type of formal assessments do you use in literacy?
- What types of informal assessments do you use to measure literacy growth?
APPENDIX G

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observing Reading Instruction: Kindergarten
Teacher’s Name _______________ Grade __ Date of Observation _______________

Morning Message

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Are You Looking For?</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>What Did You Observe?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher create a new message with the students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the students participate in creating the new message, helping to write and spell words?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher use the message to review letters, letter-sounds, words, and principles of punctuation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher use the message to model the writing process?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher include quick reviews of the alphabet, letter-sounds, and phonemic awareness?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Oral Language Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Are You Looking For?</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>What Did You Observe?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher read fiction and nonfiction trade books to the students to develop vocabulary and comprehension?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher stop to define new words while reading?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher model comprehension strategies?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher stop to discuss the text and include students in the interpretive process?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher place the new words on a word wall?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the students and the teacher try to use the new vocabulary daily in oral and written language?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observing Reading Instruction: Kindergarten. From The Essential Guide to Selecting and Using Core Reading Programs by Peter DeWit, Susan B. Leahy, Jennifer Jones, and Pamela Maslin Sullivan. Copyright 2010 by the International Reading Association.
### Developing Print Skills: Sight Words, Phonemic Awareness, and Phonics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Are You Looking For?</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>What Did You Observe?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SIGHT WORDS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher introduce sight words?</td>
<td>Y.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the visual features of sight words identified?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the sound structures of sight words explored?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are sight words placed on the word wall?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher provide practice with sight words in and out of context?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHONEMIC AWARENESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher identify rhyming words and sounds?</td>
<td>Y.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher identify onsets and rimes?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher model the full segmentation or blending of phonemes?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher provide practice for students to segment or blend words?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher work with sound boards or other manipulative to make phonemic awareness concrete?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is phonemic segmentation applied to spelling real words?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHONICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher introduce letter sound patterns?</td>
<td>Y.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher introduce word family patterns (e.g., at, ip)?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher model the decoding process?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher direct students to decode words in and out of context?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the students make and sort words to practice decoding principles?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Observing Reading Instruction: Kindergarten. From *The Essential Guide to Selecting and Using Core 2 Reading Programs* by Peter DeWitz, Susan B. Leahy, Jennifer Jones, and Pamela Maslin Sullivan. Copyright 2010 by the International Reading Association.
### Vocabulary Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Are You Looking For?</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>What Did You Observe?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher introduce new words in context?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher discuss the meaning, examples, and characteristics of the new words?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher provide practice activities that help students explore the meanings of the words?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the students use the words in context?</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Text Reading for Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Are You Looking For?</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>What Did You See?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before Reading</strong></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher activate or develop students’ prior knowledge?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher identify and discuss the genre of the reading or ask students to do so?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher teach topic-specific vocabulary?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher introduce comprehension strategies and model them?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>During Reading</strong></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher stop to ask questions or encourage students to do so?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher encourage or prompt strategy use? (e.g., predicting, summarizing, questioning, decoding, monitoring)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher encourage students to make connections within and beyond the text?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observing Reading Instruction: Kindergarten. From *The Essential Guide to Selecting and Using Core 3 Reading Programs* by Peter Dewitz, Susan B. Leahy, Jennifer Jones, and Pamela Maslin Sullivan. Copyright 2010 by the International Reading Association.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After Reading</th>
<th>Y</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher ask students to retell, dramatize, or summarize what they have read?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher encourage students to make connections to self, world, other texts?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher compare and contrast two or more texts?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher solicit students’ responses, judgments, and evaluations?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent and Learning Workstation Work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Are You Looking For?</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>What Did You Observe?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the students understand what they are to do?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the students quickly transition to their independent work?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the students actively engaged in their independent work?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the tasks require an accountability piece—a record of the students’ work at the station?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the students know what they should work on and why it is important?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Comments**

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Observer ____________________________________________________________

Observing Reading Instruction: Kindergarten. From *The Essential Guide to Selecting and Using Core 4 Reading Programs* by Peter Dewitz, Susan B. Leahy, Jennifer Jones, and Pamela Maslin Sullivan. Copyright 2010 by the International Reading Association.
APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview #1 Protocol

1) Historical Background Information
   a. Literacy History
      i. Tell me about your experience with reading and writing?
      ii. As a learner/student?
      iii. As a teacher?
   b. Pedagogical History
      i. Tell me about your teaching history?
      ii. How long have you been a teacher?
      iii. Where have you taught?
      iv. How long have you been teaching kindergarten?
          1. Have you taught any other grades?
      v. What degrees/licenses do you hold and where did you earn them?
      vi. What professional development experiences in literacy have you
          had?

2) Tell me about kindergarten students. What patterns do you see in their behavior
   and development with regards to literacy?

3) How do you decide what to put in your lesson plans to teach each day?

4) Tell me about your use of the Common Core Content Standards.

5) Tell me about your use of the IREAD-K.

6) What are your goals for your students this year with regards to literacy learning?
Interview #2 Protocol

1) Tell me about your students’ literacy learning so far this year.
   a. Is this a “typical” group of kindergarten students? Why or why not?
   b. Has anything surprised you about your students’ reading and writing this year?

2) Let’s discuss your experience with the Common Core Standards.
   a. What changes have you seen in your teaching?
   b. What changes have you seen in your students’ learning?
   c. What are your frustrations? Celebrations?
   d. How do you think your students will perform on the IREAD-K?

3) Revisit goals
   a. How have you progressed at meeting your literacy goals for the year?
   b. Where do you hope to go from here?

4) What have you learned so far this year?
   a. About your students?
   b. About yourself as a teacher?

5) Have you changed anything about your teaching this year compared to other years?
   a. Why or why not?

6) Have you changed anything about your lesson planning this year compared to other years?
   a. Why or why not?

7) What professional development have you participated in this year?

8) Has it changed your teaching? How?
Is your classroom literacy-friendly?
You have an important role in providing the children in your classroom with some of their first experiences with books and reading.

Look around your classroom and think about what you do with the children. If the statement on the checklist is true, place a check in the “true” column. If the statement is false, place a check in the “false” column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false:</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability of learning materials...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Alphabet books (e.g., Dr. Seuss’s ABC book) are readily available for children’s use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Wood or plastic 3-dimensional alphabet letters are readily available for children’s use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Crayons and pencils are readily available for children’s writing and drawing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Paper is readily available for children’s writing and drawing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Children have tables or other surfaces readily available for writing or drawing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rhyming books (e.g., Joseph Slate’s Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten) are readily available for children’s use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. At least 25 picture books are readily available for children’s use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. At least 50 picture books are readily available for children’s use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s use of learning materials...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Games, materials, and activities are used regularly to help children learn the names of alphabet letters.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Children are encouraged to scribble and experiment with pretend writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Games, materials, and activities are used regularly to help children learn to rhyme.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Children in the class engage in shared book reading sessions with an adult at least twice a week.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Children in the class engage in shared book reading sessions with an adult at least four times a week.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Games, materials, and activities are used regularly to help children learn to print the letters of the alphabet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What the teacher or assistant teacher does...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The teacher sometimes sounds out printed words when reading picture books to children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The teacher frequently introduces new words to children while reading picture books.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The teacher regularly has detailed and informative conversations with children about things that interest the children (e.g., “How do you think ice cream is made?”).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The teacher sends home materials that encourage parents to read with their children at home.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The teacher encourages children to talk about their experiences (e.g., “What happened at the library?”).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. The teacher asks questions of children and encourages them to talk while reading picture books with them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. The teacher sends home materials that encourage parents to help their children learn the letters of the alphabet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The teacher helps children learn nursery rhymes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The teacher encourages children to express themselves using complete sentences.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The teacher keeps a record of how individual children are progressing in their reading readiness skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. The teacher believes that it is important for young children to learn skills that will help them get ready to read.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. The teacher regularly engages children in games and activities that help children break spoken words into sound parts (e.g., &quot;Clap your hands for every sound you hear in ba - nan - na.&quot;).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. The teacher helps children learn to write their own names.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. The teacher regularly helps children learn the sounds that alphabet letters make (e.g., &quot;M makes the mmmm sound.&quot;).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. The teacher helps children learn to write other people’s names.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. The teacher is enthusiastic about the literacy and language activities that are included in the classroom curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The teacher’s background...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. The teacher is a good reader.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. The teacher has a large vocabulary.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. The teacher graduated from college.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. The teacher has received training in early literacy or reading readiness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>About the classroom and school, preschool or center...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. The classroom has a detailed year-long sequence of planned activities to introduce letters, language sounds, and print.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Several classroom projects and trips through the year revolve around print (e.g., a visit to the library; making a picture book; visiting the supermarket).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. The classroom day includes some planned teaching activities in which all children are expected to engage.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Children are generally occupied rather than standing around waiting for the next activity to start.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. The preschool or center screens children for problems with vision and hearing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. The preschool or center screens children for delays in language and literacy development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Children enjoy the literacy and language activities that are included in the classroom curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Count up the number of statements marked TRUE and put that number in the box to the right. See the chart below to find out how literacy-friendly your classroom is.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of True Statements</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31-41</td>
<td>Classroom literacy environment has most of the necessary supportive elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Classroom literacy environment has many supportive elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>Classroom literacy environment has some supportive elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>Classroom literacy environment needs improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

2006 - Present
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky
Ph.D. Candidate in Curriculum & Instruction
Committee Chair: Dr. Lori Norton-Meier
Anticipated Graduation: December, 2013

2002 - 2005
Indiana University Southeast
New Albany, Indiana
Master of Science in Elementary Education

1998 - 2002
Indiana University Southeast
New Albany, Indiana
Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education

1997 - 1998
Transylvania University
Lexington, Kentucky

Employment History

2011 - Present
Indiana University Southeast
New Albany, Indiana
Adjunct lecturer: E341 Methods of Teaching Reading II
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2003 - Present</th>
<th><strong>St. Anthony School</strong> Clarksville, Indiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First Grade Teacher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Reading Coach</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Archdiocese of Indianapolis School Accreditation Site Evaluation Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-present</td>
<td><strong>Safety Plan Committee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-present</td>
<td><strong>Strategic Management Team</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-present</td>
<td><strong>Choreography, school play</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-present</td>
<td><strong>St. Anthony School Enrollment Committee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2008</td>
<td><strong>Special Education Intervention Team</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-present</td>
<td><strong>Certified Mentor for the State of Indiana</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-present</td>
<td><strong>Lead Teacher: Federal Math Partnership (NCLB)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2008</td>
<td><strong>Student Council Adviser</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2008</td>
<td><strong>Title I Teacher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-present</td>
<td><strong>Catholic Schools Week Committee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-present</td>
<td><strong>Co-Chair 2002-2008</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td><strong>School Improvement Committee</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td><strong>Special Education Intervention Team</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002 - 2003</th>
<th><strong>St. Anthony School</strong> Clarksville, Indiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Seventh Grade Homeroom (Religion &amp; Language Arts)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Jr. High Social Studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2003</td>
<td><strong>Coach Academic Olympic Quick Recall Team</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2001, 2002, 2005</th>
<th><strong>Clarksville Community Schools</strong> Clarksville, Indiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Summer School Teacher</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th><strong>Clarksville Middle School</strong> Clarksville, Indiana</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Seventh Grade Language Arts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ten-week substitute position</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2002</th>
<th><strong>Greenacres Elementary School</strong> Clarksville, Indiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Second Grade Teacher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Eight-week substitute position</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1999 – 2001</th>
<th><strong>St. Mary of the Knobs Preschool</strong> Floyds Knobs, Indiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Childcare teaching assistant</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Publications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Literature Review: to be submitted for publication by Dr. Rich Mancil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Literacy interventions for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td><em>Italian Pilgrimage Weblog - A Virtual Unit for St. Anthony School</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grants and Grant Proposals

2012 Proposal, Lilly Foundation Teacher Creativity Fellowship  
   *The Road Not Taken: A Dream Fulfilled*
2010 Proposal, Target Field Trip Grant
2009 Fund for the Arts Grant Recipient
2008 Facilitator, Target Corporation Grant  
   *Books for Bears*
2006 Proposal, Lilly Foundation Teacher Creativity Fellowship  
   *Exploring the Heritage of the Franciscans*
2006 Proposal, Archdiocese of Indianapolis Total Catholic Education Endowment

National Presentations & Proposals

2008 Proposal, National Catholic Education Association Convention  
   *Using the National Reading Panel Findings to Teach Literacy*
2008 Moderator, National Catholic Education Association Convention  
   *Assessing the Quality of Catholic Preschools*
2005 Presenter, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics National Conference  
   *Ensuring Success in Mathematics*

Regional & State Presentations & Proposals

   *Can Your Basal Reader Meet the Common Core?*
2011 Presenter, Archdiocese of Indianapolis Professional Development Webcast: *Phonics*
2011 Presenter, Archdiocese of Indianapolis Professional Development Webcast: *Fluency*
2011 Presenter, Archdiocese of Indianapolis Professional Development Courses  
   *The Five Components of Reading*
2010 Presenter, Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence Conference  
   *Literacy interventions for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*
2010 Proposal, Indiana Non-Public Education Association conference  
   *Readers with Autism: Helping students with ASD succeed in your classroom*

Awards & Honors

2011 Indiana Teacher of the Year Finalist (Top ten in state)
2010 Armstrong Teacher Educator Award Nominee
2009 St. Theodora Excellence in Education Award (Archdiocese of Indianapolis)
2006 National Honor Roll Outstanding American Teacher
2006 Who’s Who Among American Teachers
Professional Memberships

National Catholic Educational Association
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Indiana Non-Public Education Association
International Reading Association
National Council for Teachers of Mathematics
Indiana Council for Teachers of Mathematics
Kappa Delta Pi Honor Society

Community Service and Involvement

2011 – Present  Secular Franciscan Order
2004 - Present  St. Anthony Church Picnic Committee
1999 - Present  American Legion Auxiliary
1999 - Present  Staff Member, Hoosier Girls State
Lifetime  Member, St. Anthony Church, Clarksville, IN
2007 - 2008  Flutist, Providence High School Alumni Pep Band
2006  Candidate, Clark County Council District 2
2006  Flutist, Providence Players Production of *Cats*
2000 - 2004  Co-founder/Assistant Director. Ohio Valley Children’s Theatre
1995 - 2006  Dance and Tumbling Instructor, DanceWorks