TEACHER BELIEFS ABOUT LITERACY LEARNING AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES—

A SURVEY BASED STUDY OF RURAL EASTERN LONG ISLAND NEW YORK SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

TEACHER BELIEFS ABOUT LITERACY LEARNING AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES—

A SURVEY BASED STUDY OF RURAL EASTERN LONG ISLAND NEW YORK SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Brigid P. Collins

This survey-based study examined rural Eastern Long Island elementary school teachers' beliefs about literacy, and identified the degree to which those beliefs are traditional, eclectic, or constructivist in their approach. Data were gathered using Likert Surveys within three small, rural districts. Surveys were comprised of 30 statements (15 belief and 15 practice statements). Results indicated that literacy teachers have a definitive point of view about constructivism and that teachers are not necessarily practicing what they believe. School instructional leaders can look to see the discrepancy between teachers' belief score and practice score.

Data were gathered from 36 teachers. Represented in the data, the discrepancy illustrated in the results of this study points toward a problem for school leaders insofar as their teachers who have difficulty aligning with a theoretical framework may be less optimal in their instructional results with children's literacy acquisition than teachers who follow a clear conceptual model. Areas of significance include an increase in emphasis placed on teacher-created assessments, parental involvement, stages of writing, writing across the content areas and a focus on reading, writing, and listening around key concepts.

Data indicate the need for strong professional development in literacy classrooms; this is particularly true if the goal of school leaders is the alignment of teacher beliefs and practices. When teachers are clearly aware of the needs of their individual students, and have the strategies necessary for best instructional practices, and when those practices are aligned to teacher beliefs, then school leaders are achieving the best outcome possible in their schools and are carrying out their ultimate mission. When school leaders are fully aware of the beliefs and practices of their teachers, they may support them in the ways necessary and can assist them in making decisions about creating deep, rich, and constructivist learning environments.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research in loving memory of my father, Robert J. Collins, and my daughter, Kathryn Collins Stewart, both of whom are among my greatest gifts and inspiration.

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Most importantly, I offer my sincere thanks to my family for their love and support. My parents cared deeply about education, and raised me to love reading through their own example, and they also taught me the importance of persistence and grit. Thank you to my sisters, Cathy and Margaret, and my brother Andrew. Your influence continues. Thank you to my dear husband Jim for your patience and support during all those times I needed to be at school, studying, or researching; I would not have achieved this goal without your love. For my own children: Katy in heaven, your mom finished! I promised you I would! Robert and Christopher, I hope I make you proud, and have taught you, by example, to reach for your dreams, and to work hard to achieve them. Thank you to my father and mother-in-law, Walter and Elizabeth Stewart, who supported my dream.

Thank you to my Aunt Kathleen Reilly, who has always been a source of inspiration. I would not be here without the love and kindness that I received from all of you.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Background

This study examines rural Eastern Long Island elementary school teachers' beliefs about literacy and identifies the degree to which those beliefs are traditional, eclectic, or constructivist in their approach. Using the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) developed by Susan Davis Lenski, Gregory Cook, and Mary Ann Wham (1998) as an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices, and by building off the existing research on this topic, particularly that of the Margaret McGlynn (2009), the study sheds light on teacher beliefs and aims at informing instructional leadership in the related districts.

On the East End of Long Island, Suffolk County, New York, there are different approaches taken toward teaching reading. Some schools use a basal reading approach, while others use a literature-based, guided reading approach, also known as a balanced literacy approach. The basal approach uses readers that are usually a grade-leveled series of textbooks. The programs are specifically designed to teach skills. Spelling and writing texts, workbooks, and projects guide students from the kindergarten through the secondary level. The basal reader is aligned with a traditional approach to literacy instruction. The balanced literacy approach is characterized by explicit skill instruction and the use of authentic texts, and is implemented through the Reading and Writing Workshop model. The workshop model is aligned with a constructivist approach to literacy instruction. This study attempts to explore the specific teacher beliefs about reading instruction on the East End of Long Island, and will examine those beliefs in three rural East End districts.

Conceptual Rationale

Slavin (1994) contends that helping children read depends on the application of well understood theoretical principles in practice. The Literacy Orientation Survey (Lenski et al. 1998) was designed as an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices, and thus aids in examining a theoretical principle in practice in classroom settings. It measures types of literacy acquisition as related to a constructivist model. The LOS also acts as a vehicle for teachers to examine their beliefs about literacy instruction and the ways in which their instruction manifests in classroom settings. The survey places teachers' literacy beliefs and teaching styles on a continuum, allowing them to be identified as constructivist, traditional, or eclectic in their approach. Because Lenski et al. (1998) have shown that the survey often identifies that beliefs and approaches do not always consistently correspond, this research will examine how the LOS can be useful for teachers as well as instructional leaders whose goal it is to use professional development to build future capacity and the realization of continuous improvement in literacy learning (See Figure 1).

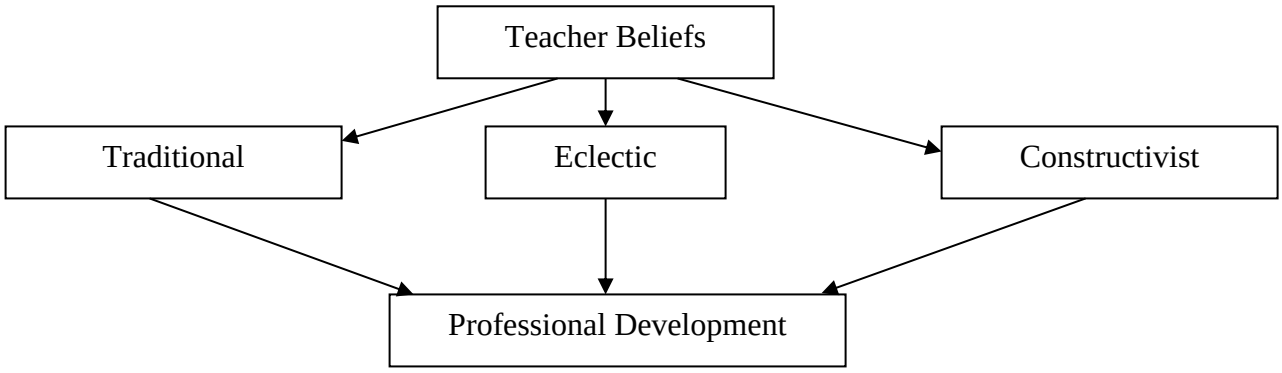


Figure 1: Conceptual Rationale Representation *(*From Lenski et al. (1998), edited by Brigid Collins (2011))

Statement of the Problem

This study is designed to gain knowledge of what elementary school teachers believe about literacy instruction and practice as well as provide school leaders with information that will allow them to understand their teachers' perceptions and how it informs their practice, and in turn, educate them about how it influences student literacy learning.

Statement of Purpose

Teachers' beliefs are important insofar as they influence student learning and hold meaning for directing instructional leadership. In their 1986 study, Clark and Peterson reveal that a better comprehension of the relationship between teachers' thinking and actions should provide a better understanding of how these components interact to help or hinder student performance.

Literacy achievement is at the forefront of modern educational discourse. Since the 2002 passage of the legislation entitled *No Child Left Behind*, there has been an increase in public awareness of the importance of literacy instruction (Young & Draper, 2006). Researchers in the field of education, along with teacher educators, have looked to teacher beliefs and the way in which they manifest in classroom practice, notably in terms of literacy instruction and achievement as a way of understanding student success in reading and writing. The very notion of *belief* in itself is characterized by acceptance of ideas or tenets held by an individual or a group. While belief may or may not imply certitude, it suggests intellectual assent or acceptance of an idea or set of ideas. Beliefs affect expectancy, and expectancy, in turn, influences experience and performance

(Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Because there is an inherent lack of clarity and no sharply defined parameters when it comes to the concept of belief, it is a difficult to attain exact outcomes and influences, yet it remains, nonetheless, a worthy pursuit. Both educational theorists (e.g. Greene, 1971; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992) and researchers (e.g., Reutzel, Hollingsworth & Cox, 1996; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 2000) agree that teacher practices and behaviors, as well as student learning, are deeply influenced by teacher beliefs; thus, given that the acquisition of literacy learning is a vital component of academic development, it is imperative to give a serious attempt toward its rigorous examination.

While student achievement has captured widespread interest, the goals of increasing thinking and reasoning abilities have been a goal in many societal pockets dating back to the time of Plato. These goals, however, were generally for a small, elite segment of the population; they did not apply to the more recent surge of schools for the masses. It is by no means new to emphasize thinking, problem solving, and reasoning in a student's curriculum; it is new, relatively speaking, to include these skills in everyone's curriculum. It is new to make the goal of making, thinking, and problem solving a regular portion of a school focus for the whole school population, including minorities, non-English speakers, and the poor. It is a new challenge for schools to adapt the curriculum in a way that matches it with the method through which each learner learns most effectively.

More recently, there have been moves toward even greater shifts in the way U.S. schools approach teaching and learning. As of 2011, 47 states and the District of Columbia have made an amazingly rapid commitment by signing on to replace their state

content standards with newly developed *Common Core State Standards*. Educational Policy Researcher David Conley (2011) believes that, if implemented correctly, the common standards and assessments can vault American education toward the goal of world-class learning outcomes for all students. Since educators will be affected by these standards, it makes good sense that closely examining the beliefs they currently hold about literacy (particularly in that everything children tackle in schools hinges on good strong reading and writing skills), identifying them, and providing strong professional development and supporting curriculum as a top priority will help to ensure the development of strong cognitive and instructional strategies, particularly in the areas of reading and writing, thus allowing schools to give students what they will need as they move forward.

Conley (2011) reveals that, because the ideal result of *Common Core Standards* implementation will be to move classroom teaching toward an engaging, challenging curricula that supports content acquisition through a range of instructional modes and techniques, deeply understanding current beliefs and practices, and then adjusting, redesigning, and developing curriculum and instruction in ways that fully engage students in cognitively challenging tasks will result in students who are better prepared to succeed.

Richards (2003) explores teacher beliefs and process of change, and this research brings up the point that changes in teachers' practices are the result of changes in teachers' beliefs. What's more, the study of teachers' beliefs forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work. In order to understand how teachers approach their work, it is necessary to understand the beliefs and principles from which they operate.

The analysis of variables such as behaviors and decisions provides for better understanding of teacher development. Researchers argue that teacher development is an ongoing process of fostering teachers' beliefs, not only through changing those beliefs, but also through strengthening and refining them (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). This process of growth and positive change does not, however, come easily. It has long been established that beliefs are resistant to change (Nespor, 1987; Rokeach, 1972). Because our beliefs help us to block out confusion and misunderstanding (Eisenhart et al. 1988), we tend to hold strongly to them, even despite conflicting evidence (Green, 1971). The link then between beliefs and practices that do indeed lead to successful student achievement in literacy development must therefore be carefully investigated.

Wray et al. (2002) conducted research in order to examine the characteristics of a group of 228 primary teachers identified as effective teachers of literacy by school supervisors. Also identified was a sample of teachers shown to be ineffective. The ultimate findings of the study showed that almost all effective teachers of literacy showed a tendency to "*believe* that it is important to make it explicit that the purpose of teaching literacy is to enable their pupils to create meaning using text" (p. 9). Further, Fang (1996) concludes that "teachers' thinking about their roles and the beliefs and values they hold help shape their pedagogy" (p. 53). Children's academic performance can be, then, better understood through understanding how this component interacts with teacher thinking.

Research points to an understanding that teachers possess theoretical beliefs toward reading and writing and that these beliefs tend to shape instructional practices. In their study, Wray et al. (2002) found that effective literacy teachers were more coherent

in their beliefs about reading and writing and tended to favor activities that corresponded to these beliefs. While there is a strong link between teacher belief and student achievement, Thompson (1992) found that the relationship between beliefs and practices is not a simple one, because it entails a dynamic reciprocal connection. On the other hand, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) described this relationship as a casual chain that proceeds from beliefs, to attitudes, to intentions, and finally to behaviors. It would seem then that the exact nature of the relationship is not always clear and consistent. As Wray et al. (2002) points out, stronger evidence is necessary.

Instructional approaches in classroom contexts account for literacy engagement, and ultimately allow for research-based approaches to motivating readers through integrated instruction (Guthrie & Wingfield, 1997). In fact, Squires and Bliss (2001) show how decades of research (Bigge, 1982; Combs & Yellin, 1985; Kaye, and Dudley-Evans, 1998; Gove, 1983) on the connection between teachers' theoretical beliefs and their practice yield a common theme: all teachers bring to the classroom some level of beliefs that influence their critical daily decision making. Demonstrating the relationship between beliefs and classroom practice concerning literacy instruction is the key element to understand engaged literacy learning.

The relationship between teacher literacy beliefs and their practices is intriguing. Again, it follows that beliefs would be linked to understanding student performance and outcomes. Teacher beliefs have been linked to students' perceptions, conceptions, understandings, and performance regarding reading and writing as well as other areas of learning (Fang, 1996; Harste & Burke, 1977; Reutzel, 1999; Wing, 1989). Studying the impact of such beliefs becomes meaningful in the larger picture of literacy education.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the study:

1. What are the literacy beliefs of K-5 teachers?
2. Are the beliefs and practices of literacy teachers considered traditional, eclectic or constructivist?
3. How do teacher beliefs align with their practices?
4. How can instructional leaders use information about teacher beliefs to build continuous improvement for future literacy learning?
5. Are the literacy beliefs the same among the three districts studied?

Significance of the Study

This study may contribute to a better understanding of teacher literacy beliefs. Attention to teachers' beliefs can inform educational practice (Pajares, 1992). This may allow for adjustments to curriculum and instructional approaches as a way for realizing continuous school improvement. The State of New York certifies elementary teachers, but does not require a separate reading certification. The duty to instruct all children to read and write, however, falls on the elementary teachers' shoulders. They are required to instruct their students in order to help them become proficient in all New York State standards. Because of shifts that take place, teachers need to clarify their beliefs about literacy learning (Olson &Singer, 1994), so they can integrate their changing theories with their instructional practices.

Overview of Methodology

Literacy Orientation Survey

Most teachers are eager to improve their professional effectiveness. The Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) (Lenski et al., 1998)) is an instrument that allows teachers to monitor their own movement toward a more constructivist approach when teaching literacy. The LOS has wide range implications for teacher self-reflection and staff development. Teachers can use it to reflect upon their teaching and make decisions about their instruction (Lenski, Griffey &Wham, 1998). The LOS provides a core along a continuum that gives a picture of the degree to which the teacher's beliefs and practices are congruent with constructivist philosophy. Teachers can use the score to find out how much they adhere to constructivist theory in general. Using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), teachers select the score that best represents their degree of commitment to each statement.

Traditional Classrooms and Instructional Practices

In more traditional reading classrooms, instruction is based on the notion that children develop literacy competence by mastering a series of discrete skills from simple to complex. Assessment is most often provided by the publisher of the textbook adhered to. These assessments aid in examining student mastery over each subset of skills. The students' complete work around exercises in phonics workbooks, and students are expected to learn to read aloud with fluency. Writing is viewed as separate from reading. Desks are typically aligned in rows, and students are expected to work independently, maintaining a quiet atmosphere (Lenski et al., 1998). Lenski et al. (1998) define traditional teaching as teaching that uses traditional reading methods such as basal

reading instruction, where teachers use primary direct instruction and where students are viewed as vessels to be filled.

Direct instruction is a specific approach to teaching. It is skill-oriented and teacher-directed. It emphasizes the use of small-group, face to face instruction. The lessons are often carefully articulated, and cognitive skills are typically broken down into small units, sequenced deliberately, and taught explicitly (Carnine, 2000). Direct instruction in relation to literacy is most typically taught through the textbook program model. There are basic components of direct instruction: setting clear goals for students and making sure they understand them, presenting a sequence of well-organized assignments, giving clear, concise explanations and illustrations of subject matter, asking frequent questions to see if students understand the work, and giving students frequent opportunities to practice what they have learned (Cole et al., 1993).

Constructivist Classrooms and Instructional Practices

Constructivist classrooms are structured so that learners are immersed in experiences within which they may engage in meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing, and personal reflection. Teachers must recognize how students use their own experiences, prior knowledge, and perceptions, as well as their physical and interpersonal environments to construct knowledge and meaning. The goal is to produce a democratic classroom environment that provides meaningful learning experiences for autonomous learners (Gray, 1997).

Constructivism has roots in the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990). It is a philosophical perspective derived from the work of Immanuel Kant, which

views reality as existing mainly in the mind, construed or interpreted in one's own perception. An individual's prior experiences, mental status, and beliefs bear upon how experiences are interpreted. The focus is on how knowledge is built, rather than on its product or object (Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990). The practice of constructivist literacy learning asks the following questions: What do constructivist teachers believe about literacy learning?; How would instruction be organized and developed by a teacher who believes in constructivist principles?; What does the teaching environment in a constructivist classroom look like?; How would differences between traditional approaches to learning and constructivist approaches be revealed in classroom practices? (Lenski et al., 1998). Ultimately, literacy is taught in a way that allows students to build on their prior understandings and knowledge base.

Eclectic Classrooms and Instructional Practices

The teacher who applies an eclectic approach to classroom instruction is one who combines traditional elements with some constructivist elements as well. This kind of literacy classroom may employ a basal program as part of the materials used for instruction, but also makes use of literature books and other supplemental materials. Writing activities are frequent, but are characterized by teacher guided topics and writing genres. Interestingly, research done by Edelsky et al. (1991) reveals that "being eclectic" is often "like holding an unexamined underlying theoretical position, borrowing typical practices from conflicting positions while unwittingly and inevitably distorting them to find the one unacknowledged position (Lenski et al., 1998). If the two approaches are blended together, by combining a basal program with literature books in a guided reading

approach, an accurate assessment tool must be developed to ensure quality literacy instruction (Leggett, 1999).

Definitions

Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) is an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices. It examines instructional practices and teacher beliefs in a constructivist, traditional and eclectic classroom framework.

Constructivist Teacher as delineated by Lenski et al. (1998) as a term that characterizes a teacher who uses whole text and integrated instruction. This type of teacher uses primarily an inquiry approach, and views students as using prior knowledge to construct meaning to learn.

Traditional Teacher as delineated by Lenski et al. (1998) characterizes a teacher who uses traditional reading methods, such as basal reading instruction, and teaches using primarily direct instruction. This type of teacher views students as "vessels to be filled."

Eclectic Teacher as delineated by Lenski et al. (1998) characterizes a teacher who uses some traditional and some constructivist reading methods, frequently applying basal kinds of methods to pieces of literature, and combines traditional and constructivist views about student learning. This type of teacher is often unsure about how students learn.

Professional Development Principles, National Council of Teacher of English (2006)

1. Professional development of teachers/faculty is a central factor leading to student success.
2. Professional development treats teachers/faculty members as the professionals they are.

3. Professional development supports teachers/faculty at all levels of expertise; its value is confirmed by external validation.
4. Professional development relies on a rich mix of resources including a theoretical and philosophical base, a research base, and illustrations of good practices.
5. Professional development can take many different forms and employs various modes of engagement.
6. The best models of professional development—best in the sense of first enhancing teacher practice to lead to the enhancement of student learning—are characterized by sustained activities, by engagement with administrators, and by community-based learning.
7. Professional development is systematically reviewed with evidence of efficacy provided by a review process including multiple stakeholders and NCTE's own research.

Limitations

A limitation to the study is that the researcher did not survey all districts on Eastern Long Island in Suffolk County, New York. The researcher included three elementary schools from three different districts, which are called "district 1," "district 2," and "district 3." Furthermore, this researcher did not look at school districts or schools outside of Eastern Long Island, Suffolk County, New York.

Chapter II

Literature Review

For elementary school students, literacy opens the door to lifelong learning and opportunities for success. It is then clearly imperative for schools to examine what comprises effective literacy instruction. Literacy Specialist and researcher, Rebecca Alber (2010) affirms that content is *what* teachers teach, but there is also the *how*, and this is important when literacy instruction takes place. There are an endless number of engaging, effective strategies to get students to think about, write about, read about, and talk about content. The ultimate goal of literacy instruction is to build a student's comprehension, writing skills, and overall skills in communication in order to accomplish this goal effectively. Instructional leaders are aware that student success hinges on successful literacy instruction. They understand that literacy cannot and should not be viewed in isolation. Consequently, the review of the literature is comprised of a theoretical perspective, the three inclinations of teachers' beliefs about literacy, i.e. traditional, constructive and eclectic, as well as accountability (Afferbach, 2005) and its role for instructional leaders.

Theoretical Perspective

Constructivist Learning Theory

Theorist Thomas Popkewitz's work *Educational Restructuring* (2001) explores the notion of constructivism through examining differences in types of culture. His scholarly pursuit lies not only in the intellectual movement of constructivism within the frame of reference of an educational setting, but also in viewing it as a historically

produced system characterized by the changes in governing practice through which individuality is constructed. His work examines the changes in the systems of reason that govern schooling, and it focuses on the relation of knowledge to power in the curriculum, teaching, and teacher education. He explores the notion of the teacher as "problem solving" and flexible in responding to multiple and contingently defined contexts. He posits that, through examining the historic phases of school reforms employing the lens of social practices, many paradoxes and ironies that are present in the effects of power are revealed (Popkewitz, 2001). Further, theorist Deborah Stone's *Policy Paradox* (2002) points out that there are often contradictions or paradoxes in public settings. Her work showcases ways in which all settings embody the paradoxical nature of politics, and it brings up the importance of examining culture in terms of goals, problems, and solutions. Her work in the art of political decision making holds that education plays out in regard to the individual versus the community, and understanding it through this frame of reference allows for a true grasp of the social and constantly dynamic community settings, and for the purposes of this research, specifically the setting of a school community itself (Stone, 2002).

The constructivist approach is grounded in Jean Piaget's groundbreaking work (1896-1980) in the cognitive and psychological development of children. It is considered to be strongly influential in the development of constructivist learning theory. Essentially, constructivism is widely defined as an epistemology or theory used to explain how people know what they know. The basic idea is that problem solving is at the heart of learning, thinking, and development. As learners solve problems and discover the consequences of actions through reflecting on past and immediate

experiences, they construct their own understanding. Learning is an active process that requires a change in the learner. This is thought to be achieved through activities the learner engages in, including the consequences of those activities, and through reflection; people only deeply understand what they themselves have constructed. To this end, Piaget's theory of cognitive development proposes that humans cannot be given information which they immediately understand and use. Instead, learners must construct their own knowledge. They build their knowledge through experience. Experiences enable them to create schemas — mental models of the world. These schemas are changed, enlarged, and made more sophisticated through two complimentary processes: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of taking new information into previously existing schemas, and accommodation is the changing or altering existing schemas in light of new information. Though Piaget is often named the "father of constructivism," ideas related to the theory are touched upon by many educational philosophers and thinkers.

Two 20th century philosophers whose ideas intersect with one another are Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey. Vygotsky and Dewey wrote of the need to educate for participatory democracy, which has been identified as a primary benefit of constructivist teaching (Popkewitz, 1998). Through their use of knowledge as a social construct, a notion of knowledge as a practical tool emerges and seeks to end a dualistic understanding of separate government that acts upon its citizens. Citizens, through the use of their practical knowledge concerning their communities, are thus able to become active within the government and work for change (Popkewitz, 1998).

Perhaps Vygotsky's most important contribution concerns the inter-relationship of language development and thought. This concept, explored in Vygotsky's book *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, 1962), establishes the explicit and profound connection between speech (both silent inner speech and oral language), and the development of mental concepts and cognitive awareness. It should be noted that Vygotsky described inner speech as being qualitatively different from normal (external) speech. Although Vygotsky believed inner speech developed from external speech via a gradual process of internalization, with younger children only really able to "think out loud," he claimed that, in its mature form, inner speech would be unintelligible to anyone except the thinker, and would not resemble spoken language as we know it (in particular, being greatly compressed). Hence, thought itself develops socially (Santrock, 2004). Vygotsky's idea of the "zone of proximal development" is where a learner can extend his competency beyond his individual reach with the help of others. This approach means maintaining optimal levels of challenge. Too little challenge will prove boring, whereas too much will foster frustration (Churchland, 1986).

In addition to his ideas regarding what education is and what effect it should have on society, Dewey also had specific notions regarding how education should take place within the classroom. In *The Child and the Curriculum* (Dewey, 1902), Dewey discusses two major conflicting schools of thought regarding educational pedagogy. The first is centered on the curriculum and focuses almost solely on the subject matter to be taught. Dewey argues that the major flaw in this methodology is the inactivity of the student; within this particular framework, "the child is simply the immature being who is to be matured; he is the superficial being who is to be deepened"(Dewey, 1902). He argues that

in order for education to be most effective, content must be presented in a way that allows the student to relate the information to prior experiences, thus deepening his or her connection with this new knowledge.

Two leading contemporary researchers in the areas of constructivist theory are Jaqueline Grennon Brooks and Martin Brooks. Their seminal work entitled *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms* (Brooks & Brooks,1993) outlines five key principles of constructivist learning theory:

1. Pose problems of emerging relevance to students
2. Structure learning around primary concepts
3. Seek and value students' points of view
4. Adapt instruction to address student suppositions
5. Assess student learning in the context of teaching

The power of instruction that implements these five principles is important to consider, but only to those teachers not wedded to linear approaches to educational renewal (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

Dr. Carol Dweck's work (Dweck, 2006) *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success,* examines the concept of "growth mindsets" versus "fixed mindsets." Her research has resulted in a major shift in thinking about learning and intelligence. Dweck (2006) asserts that intelligence is a malleable quality and can be developed—a *growth mindset.* Children and learners in general with a growth mindset believe they can learn anything. This may come about through struggle, effort, and perseverance, but they believe that, with effort, they will succeed in the end. What is emphasized is the learning,

not intelligence or being perceived as smart. An educator with a growth mindset also believes that, through hard work and perseverance, all students can demonstrate growth, and therefore, all students deserve opportunities for challenge. Important to the research is the idea that an effective teacher armed with many instructional tools and the ability to differentiate can respond to student needs and promote an optimal learning environment. On the other hand, a *fixed mindset* is the belief that intelligence is something that an individual cannot change, and the level of his or her intelligence is something with which he or she is ascribed at birth. For students who think of themselves as not good at something, or not smart, the fixed mindset becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. These are students who give up easily. Conversely, those who are used to being perceived as smart are often obsessed with others thinking about them and will avoid situations where they fear they may fail. In other words, they can become "risk adverse." Fixed mindset educators often believe that children come as they are, and they do not believe that they will do much to change them. In this way, an educator's mindset can directly affect how a child feels about him or herself as a learner. A child with a fixed mindset may give up easily. An educator with this mindset views the child through a deficit lens, and as a result, Dweck research asserts, he or she will not give the child the same opportunities to grow and learn (Dweck, 2006).

Literacy Instruction

What determines the effectiveness of reading instructional methods? The National Reading Panel (NRP) was established in 1997. The panel was forged when Congress charged the director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in

consultation with the Secretary of Education to assess research-based knowledge about teaching children to read. The panel's conclusions were presented in early 2000. The NRP followed closely on the heels of another national report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (PRD) (Snow, et al.1998), which was commissioned by the National Research Council. What the report illuminates regarding literacy instruction allows for schools to closely examine what constitutes the reliable development of literacy instruction.

The NRP held regional hearings, and after some debate, settled on the following larger topics for intensive study: phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency, comprehension (including vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction, teacher preparation, and comprehension strategies instruction), teacher education and reading instruction, and computer technology and reading instruction. The wide-ranging study revealed that the findings and determinations of the NRP add further knowledge about how those skills are best taught to beginning readers who vary in initial reading-related abilities. The panel identified a number of instructional approaches, methods, and strategies that hold promise for immediate application in the classroom setting.

Specifically, phonemic awareness instruction was the cause of improvement in students' phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling following instruction. These findings were replicated repeatedly with consistent results. Phonics instruction is also a key component. Systematic phonics instruction is designed to increase accuracy in decoding and word recognition skills, which in turn facilitate comprehension. This instruction, however, does not happen in isolation. The NRP research findings stress that

teachers need to understand that, while phonics skills are necessary in order to learn to read, they are not sufficient in their own right. Phonics skills must be integrated with the development of phonemic awareness, fluency, and text-reading comprehension skills. Fluency, defined as the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression, is found to be one of the critical factors necessary for reading comprehension. Research here points out that guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels. On the whole, however, comprehension is what is critically important to the development of children's reading skills and their ability to move forward and obtain an education. The report elucidates that, indeed, reading comprehension has come to be the "essence of reading" (Durkin 1992), essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas, but to lifelong learning as well. Further, the research reveals that there are three predominant themes in the development of reading comprehension skills. It points out that first, reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear description of the role that vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction play in the understanding of what has been read. Second, comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text. Third, the preparation of teachers to better equip students to develop and apply reading comprehension strategies to enhance understanding is intimately linked to students' achievement in this area.

Findings also show the results of in-service professional development insofar as it generally produces significantly higher student achievement in relation to literacy.

However, also pointed out is that not enough long-term research has been done in this area, and that there are still many questions that remain; most importantly, what precisely is the relationship between the development of standards and teacher education as related to the gap in current knowledge, teacher effectiveness, and ultimately, student achievement?

The connection between computer technology and reading instruction shows some positive results. While computer based instruction cannot take the place of classroom instruction, there is much promise in terms of the supports that may be provided, particularly in the area of vocabulary development and phonemic awareness. However, further research in this area is also required, and questions still exist.

Education is currently undergoing great reform in the United States. The development and adoption of the Common Core State Standards by the majority of the states is bringing about this change, and it is aimed at improving teaching and learning for all children. The Common Core Standards are: "As specified by CCSSO and NGA, (1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked. A particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that its mastery was essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society. The Standards are intended to be a living work: as new and better evidence emerges, the Standards will be revised accordingly." The standards particularly feature an emphasis on reading and writing across the content areas. The goal is to help all children become college and career ready. In order to do this, the core standards emphasize six primary shifts of literacy instruction.

Shifts in Literacy, The Common Core Standards (NY)

Shift One: An equal balance of information and literal text in grades K-12

Shift Two: Use of complex primary and secondary texts in grades 6-12

Shift Three: Advancement in text complexity and difficulty

Shift Four: Focus on text-based answers

Shift Five: Writing from sources, writing to argue and inform

Shift Six: Use and instruction of academic vocabulary

The feeling is, in short, that it is crucial for students to meet the Standards and develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language as they move forward throughout their lives.

Ultimately, children are motivated to read and write for different reasons or purposes, and it is important to distinguish among them (Lenski et al., 1998). Teachers have strong effects on children's motivation to read (Ruddell, 1995; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). One thing is clear again and again in the research, and that is that teachers make a difference, and their beliefs about literacy instruction relate to reading activity and achievement.

Teacher Beliefs about Literacy

During the mid-eighties, Deford (1985) conducted research into teacher beliefs about literacy. His research, in turn, led him to create an instrument to classify teachers

along a continuum based on their instructional focus in reading: phonics, skills and whole language. His aim was to profile teacher belief systems accurately and reliably, and the instrument he created became known as the TORP, which is short for Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile. TORP uses a Likert scale response system to determine teacher beliefs about practices in reading instruction. Three phases of data collection are used to evaluate the instrument:

1. Administration to a sample of 90 teachers of known theoretical orientation.
2. Comparison of responses by three judges from the discipline of reading as their concordance on the profiles expected from phonics, skills, and whole language respondents.
3. Observation of 14 teachers by trained observers who in turn predicted the responses of the teachers of the instrument.

Based on the descriptive data, factor analysis, and discriminant analysis, the TORP was proven a reliable, valid instrument for grouping teachers based on their theoretical orientation to reading. The thinking and research came about in order to provide integral information to educational leaders, as teachers are decision makers who process information and act upon these decisions within complex environments (Deford, 1985).

The Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) built upon Deford's work (Deford, 1985), specifically honing in on the growing research being conducted on the constructivist classroom. Researchers then searched for literature around topics of constructivist classroom and applied the test of whether each principle was congruent with

constructivist philosophy (Lenski, Wham & Griffey, 1998). The LOS construct is built on the following principles:

Principle one. The teacher views literacy as a process by which meaning is made. Reading is the process of constructing meaning through examining print via the actual interaction between the reader, the text, and the reader's orientation or specific situation. Because the ultimate goal of reading is for the reader to make meaning, the most important instructional goal of literacy educators should then be to help students read and engage more deeply with printed text.

Print is understood by using four curing systems: graphophonic cues, semantic cues, syntactic cues, and schema cues. Readers use their background knowledge. Meaning that is constructed by each reader may be different since each reader brings a different understanding and purpose to their reading.

Principle two. The classroom instructor is key to facilitating child-centered instruction. An educator who fully understands this provides developmentally appropriate instruction, and values this type of instruction. A teacher whose teaching is developmentally appropriate believes that children construct learning from their experiences. Children in this kind of classroom are actively involved in reading and writing activities, solving problems with peers, doing project work, and making choices. This style of teaching embodies sensitivity to what children know and do not know. This kind of classroom is shaped around what individual students need rather than by external forces, like curriculum manuals or basal reader manuals.

Principle three. Constructivist teachers guide and encourage reading and writing instruction that goes hand in hand with each other and takes place simultaneously.

Classroom environments are created to aid students in exploring language and discovering reading and writing skills. In these classrooms, children are at the center of all learning, and various kinds of print is always available. The classroom activities are always with purpose, and literacy instruction is primary to everything.

There is a very clear and elevated rate of success for children who receive developmentally appropriate literacy instruction. Because instruction meets them where they are at, these students are willing to take risks and have more confidence as readers and writers. When reading and writing experiences are authentic, children thrive, and teachers in these kinds of classrooms model this kind of approach to a literate life in natural ways throughout the school day.

Principle four. The work of Paris, et al., (1983) relates to teacher beliefs in that the research illuminates that those teachers who believe that reading is a construction of meaning understand that it is key for students to have strategies to access planning, monitoring, analysis, and regulation of their reading. Further, Baker and Brown point out that successful teachers instruct metacognitive strategies, or the awareness of the resources that students need to meet reading tasks. Direct and indirect instruction is required in terms of helping children know which strategies to apply and when in order to facilitate their own comprehension of text.

Background knowledge is central for students in critical understanding of text. Reading comprehension requires that students are able to summarize, draw inferences, and apply meaning to what they read. Teachers must help students monitor their own comprehension, and they must give them strategies to apply if they realize they need to back up and delve back into the text to construct deeper meaning. This kind of student

reflection must be taught. Students must learn to ask themselves if they understood text meaning, and if not, teachers must help them know the appropriate strategies that they may employ in order to access meaning. Ultimately, this kind of metacognition is paramount for student readers.

Principle five. The foundational work of Donald Graves (Graves, 1983) in the area of writing gave rise to the clear understanding that reading and writing go hand in hand. Writing, therefore, must be learned through illustrative text and cannot be learned in isolation. Writing, too, must be authentic in nature. Children need to be immersed in writing, and as Graves (Graves, 1985) noted, they must have continuous practice on a daily basis with experimenting with language. Children need to know that they can and may need to change their words in order to communicate more effectively. They must be taught that writing takes place in stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, sharing, and publishing. Writers may move forward or backward through the stages, and they may move through them again as needed; the process, thus, is not linear in nature.

Important also is the notion that children naturally understand that the purpose of writing is to communicate. Ruddell and Ruddell's (1995) research showcased that, although children's words may be indecipherable, they have the goal of sending a message. Helping them to learn the alphabet, spell, and use writing conventions moves them along as students of writing.

Principle six. Wham's research points to the importance of grouping children in patterns that fit instructional purpose and that mixing it up with instructional groups of children who are learning together is vital to strong instruction. Research has long showed that ability grouping does not work well (Brooks & Brooks,1993). What often

ends up happening is students in higher reading groups receive more attention and time, while students in lower groups spend time working on independent work sheets, and receive too much drill and not enough rich and diverse instructional opportunities.

Principle seven. Teaching ideas and concepts in ways that are fragmented, compartmentalized, and isolated from other ideas is not a natural way in which children can gain knowledge and make important connections to understanding the world around them. What works best for students is if the classroom is a place where thematic learning can take place. Children need to link ideas. Thematic units that are implemented across the curriculum allow them to make natural connections between knowledge that they glean from language arts, science, social studies, math, art, music, and drama. This approach lets students understand how the world is interrelated and encourages them to become independent learners.

Principle eight. It is essential for schools to employ a form of assessment that matches the philosophy of approaching literacy with a constructivist approach. Literacy learning is not best understood through a multiple choice test. It must be evaluated, rather, through showcasing the natural growth and development of the learner. Evidence of both the process and the product must be incorporated into the assessment, and it should grow out of the instructional process. It should be embedded into the daily activities so that there is a clear balance of measures. This is not to say that there is no place for formal evaluation, but there must be assessment that is formal and informal, standardized as well as contextualized. Only then will there be a clear ability for the teacher to make decisions about the students' progress.

Principle nine. Without parental support, a child is far less likely to be a successful student. Parents and teachers must work together to ensure student progress. There must be a shared responsibility. Teachers who understand this, and who also understand that parents may be uncertain as to how they can help support a child, know that reaching out to parents with well-planned interaction and strategies for academic achievement will help parents know they can have a positive influence on student achievement. This continual connection between parents and school translates to sustained improvement and student growth.

Principle ten. Teachers who take a constructivist approach are teachers who view themselves as lifelong learners. They are self-reflective, and consistently thoughtful about their classroom practice. They pose questions and proceed to make change based on the action research they gather. In short, they see themselves as ever-growing and evolving, and they do not operate in a static classroom setting. Their students benefit because they work hard to meet individual student needs based on their own teacher as researcher approach.

Constructivist Classrooms and the Literacy Orientation Survey

The Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) was created around ten principles that Lenski, Wham, and Griffey keenly understood embody the constructivist literacy classroom. The ten principles must be evident in order for a literacy classroom to be construed as constructivist in nature. In constructivist literacy classrooms, students are immersed in literature, there are literacy blocks allowing for ample time, thematic units characterize instruction, and students are viewed as vital participants in the learning

process. Structures are put in place that allow for independent as well as collaborative learning. Because of this, behavior management is often a non-issue. Students are far too involved to act out, and they are typically engrossed in their learning. Writer's Workshop thrives in the constructivist literacy environment. Invented spelling is encouraged and accepted, and student choice is integral to the process (Lenski et al., 1998).

In 1998, researchers Lenski, et al. developed a Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) to clarify teachers' beliefs and practices. Content validity of the LOS was established by a panel of experts who reviewed the items, judging how well items reflected principles of constructivist approaches to literacy instruction. A draft survey of 44 items was administered to 110 teachers, responses were factor analyzed. Thirty items, fifteen belief statements, and fifteen practice statements that respectively loaded at a .80 level were retained. The resulting LOS survey was administered to thirty different teachers to determine the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was computed as $r = 0.927$. The LOS was subsequently administered to 95 teachers. Correlation between belief and practice items was 0.65. While the LOS was determined to have robust internal validity and reliability, questions remained about external validity of teachers' self-reports of their approach to instruction. To assess external validity, 42 teachers were observed during actual classroom instruction. They were categorized as traditional, eclectic, or constructivist based on indicators used during the observations. The LOS was then administered to these same 42 teachers. LOS scores, by teaching category, were compared using Analysis of Variance. Homogeneity of variance across groups was assured (Leven Test). A significant $F = 66.01$, with $p < 0.001$ resulted in the

conclusion that the LOS consistently predicted a difference in the LOS scores among the teaching categories. Lenski et al. (1998) concluded that the LOS could be used as a reliable and valid indicator of teachers' practices during literacy instruction.

Lenski et al. (1998) found that teachers with literacy orientations more closely associated with constructivism tend to be concentrated in elementary schools (not in high schools) and in suburbs (not in rural areas). Teachers with more traditional orientations tend to be concentrated in high schools (not in elementary schools), and they tend to be employed more often in rural (not suburban) settings. With one exception, literacy orientation was not related systematically to levels of education or years of teaching experience. Based on the data from this study, teachers with a stronger orientation towards constructivism may have one or more of the following characteristics: they teach at the elementary level, have taught between six and ten years, and teach in suburban settings. As mentioned earlier, literacy orientation was not related systematically to levels of education. This finding was unexpected as it is commonly believed that more education will result in more knowledge about constructivism. Teachers who remain abreast of educational research about effective instruction usually do so through continuing education (Lenski et al. 1998).

Ultimately, one of the main goals of constructivism is to have teachers become self-directed learners as opposed to teacher-directed learners. Teachers should be given the opportunity to reflect on their thinking and their teaching through tools such as the LOS. The LOS can provide teachers with a measuring stick to gauge their current progress and can help them make decisions about what they need to change to become more successful literacy teachers. It is through such self-assessment and reflection that

teachers can become increasingly better at the craft of teaching (Wham, Cook & Lenski, 2001).

Accountability

Through assessing and evaluating a child's progress, teachers and administrators can gain more confidence that a student is progressing on or above grade level throughout the school year. Knowledge about where a student is at in terms of performance allows for immediate instructional changes, which can be made to ensure all students are on the right track toward appropriate literacy achievement. Assessing children regularly will also help teachers to identify students who are not reading proficiently at a grade level, enabling them to shift groups around, implement individualized instruction, and provide extra support whenever necessary.

Afflerbach's (2005) research pointed to the major problems with high stakes testing in terms of literacy achievement. The work showcased the need for more frequent, informal kinds of assessment to determine developmental trends and identify specific instructional needs. According to Ravitch (2010), there is virtually no evidence that testing has improved public education. All of U.S. education policy is now firmly hitched to standardized test scores. Research out of University of Texas shows that standardized testing predicts how students will do in the future in relation to how well they have done on the same standardized tests of the past. They do not show what children have learned. In the end, society must find ways to balance the various needs of accountability so that it does not miss the most important accountability of all—accountability to and for readers and reading (Wilson, 2005).

Meier (2000) argues that standardization threatens disaster for democracy. She believes that, although it is widely held that teachers should not teach to the test, federal policy actually demands teaching to the test. Test scores determine teacher evaluation, teacher salary, teacher tenure, and in some schools, teacher bonuses. She contends that the results of these tests should not determine our social structure, let alone the lives of students, teachers, and principals, and the fate of their schools. In the end, real and valuable assessment, particularly in the area of literacy, comes from more qualitative forms of local assessments that advance literacy, foster school readiness and increase overall academic achievement.

Paul Trough's work *How Children Succeed* (2012) makes the point that the push on standardized tests is missing out on some serious parts of what it means to be a successful human. Great schools already recognize the multiple pathways through which young people must grow and develop. Great programs already exist to support schools in the work of growing healthy and intellectually balanced children. In high performing schools, according to Carlson (1996), regardless of all past history, shared principles govern; that is, in successful schools, there is a capacity to cherish individually and inspire communality.

According to Lenski et al. (1998) teachers can use the LOS to find the relationship between their beliefs and theories about literacy and apply it to their actual practice. One of the difficulties with the shift in paradigms from a traditional instructional model to constructivist theory is that teachers may be using good constructivist practices without understanding the theoretical underpinnings of those activities. Without a solid theoretical base, these teachers may not have the background

to continue to choose activities in agreement with constructivist teaching. On the other hand, teachers may learn constructivist theory, but not know how to apply it in practice. The LOS can point to these sorts of differences between knowledge of theory and actual practice (Lenski et al., 1998).

Finally, a study looking at teacher beliefs would be remiss if it did not also include one more key topic for consideration, which is the notion of *change theory*. The ultimate purpose of gaining an understanding of teacher beliefs for school leaders is finding the potential methods toward facilitating systematic change in literacy approach and instruction, which includes implications for professional development, moves toward the end goal of district cohesiveness, and that ultimately, produces evidence of student progress. In fact, the research of Fullan (2006) indicates that change theory knowledge can be very powerful in informing education reform strategies and, in turn, getting results, but he points out that the people involved must also push to the next level to make their theory of action explicit as it relates to the specific assumptions and linkages that connect the strategy to the desired outcomes. Further, Fullan (2006) indicates that results come only in the hands (and minds and hearts) of people who have a deep knowledge of the dynamics of how the factors in question operate to get particular results. In terms of accountability, change knowledge does matter and ignoring it results in peril (Fullan, 2006).

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

This quantitative study was designed to gain knowledge of the approaches of literacy instruction rural Eastern Long Island, New York elementary school teachers carry out in their daily routines and procedures in the reading and writing classroom, as well as to provide instructional leaders and school administrators with information that will allow for a better understanding of their teachers' beliefs about literacy instruction. The data were obtained from a survey and were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics in order to address the proposed research questions.

Research Questions

1. What are the literacy beliefs and practices of K-5 teachers?
2. Are the beliefs and practices of literacy teachers considered traditional, eclectic, or constructivist?
3. How do teacher beliefs align with their practices?
4. How can instructional leaders use information about teacher beliefs to build continuous improvement for future literacy learning?
5. Are the literacy beliefs the same among the three districts studied?

Selection of Subjects

Data were collected from teachers within each of the 3 elementary schools participating in the study with permission from their school administration. Subjects surveyed included classroom teachers who instruct K-5, along with certified reading teachers and special education teachers. Teachers varied in the amount of experience

they possess, and include tenure and non-tenured, and some leave replacement teachers. Approximately 100 surveys were distributed.

Setting

Participants of the study included teachers from three schools (one from each of the selected three rural districts) on Eastern Long Island, in Suffolk County, New York. Hereinafter these schools will be called "school one," "school two," and "school three."

The first school is responsible for the education of approximately 580 students. According to 2011 data, the total per pupil expenditure for school "one" is $25,000.00. All teachers have a valid teaching certificate. Fifty-seven percent hold a master's degree or above. The average class size is 18. Fifty percent of the students are white, forty-five percent are Hispanic or Latino, three percent are Asian, and two percent are African American. The attendance rate is reported as 99%. None of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and seven percent are limited English proficient.

The second school is responsible for the education of approximately 920 students. According to 2011 data, the total per pupil expenditure for school "two" is $22,245.00. All teachers have a valid teaching certificate. Fifty-seven percent hold a master's degree or above. The average class size is 17. Eighty-two percent of the students are white, fourteen percent are Hispanic or Latino, one percent is Asian, and two percent are African American. There are no Native American or Other Pacific Islander. The attendance rate is reported as 99%. Two percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and seven percent are limited English proficient.

The third school is responsible for the education of approximately 152 students. According to 2011 data, the total per pupil expenditure for school "three" is $49,186.00. All teachers have a valid teaching certificate. Sixty-eight percent hold a master's degree or above. The average class size is 11. Thirty-one percent of the students are white, thirty-four percent are Hispanic or Latino, one percent is Asian, and thirty-three percent are African American. There are no Native American or Other Pacific Islander. The attendance rate is reported as 99%. Twenty-three percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and fifteen percent are limited English proficient. Table 1 depicts summaries of the three school.

Table 1

Summaries of the Three Schools

	School "One"	School "Two"	School Three"
Number of Students	580	920	152
Teachers	All have valid teaching certificate	All have valid teaching certificate	All have valid teaching certificate
	All have more than 3 years experience	All have more than 3 years experience	All have more than 3 years experience
	57% Masters or above	56% Masters or above	68% Masters or above

Table 1 (continued)

	School “One”	School “Two”	School “Three”
Average class size	18	17	11 students
Attendance	Reported as 99%	99%	99%
Free or reduced Lunch	0%	2%	23%
English as a Second Language	7%	7%	15%
Demographics	50% white	82% white	31% white
	45% Hispanic	14% Hispanic	34% Hispanic
	3% Asian	1% Asian	1% Asian
	2% Black	2% Black	33% Black

Data Collection Procedures

The Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) is an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices. The survey consisted of 30 Likert-scale questions (See Appendix A). Teachers were asked to answer the surveys and return them within a one-week period. This researcher collected quantitative data and used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A survey request was distributed to each of the participating schools. A web-based survey instrument was used to gather the data. Once the surveys were completed, they were analyzed using version 11.5 of SPSS.

Survey Questionnaire

The Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) is an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices. The content validity of the LOS was determined by Lenski et al. (1998). To construct the validity of the LOS, authors began by refining the definitions of ten principles related to constructivism. After the definitions were completed, Lenski et al. (1998) independently developed a preliminary bank of survey items designed to test the principles. They wrote belief statements that were theory-based and then developed statements that would translate each belief into a classroom practice. They then combined their preliminary items and discussed how well each one fit the ten principles. They retained, as part of their survey, those items on which they had 100 % agreement. After rewriting the items for clarity, they had a preliminary pool of 118 survey items. Approximately half of the statements on the survey focused on beliefs ("Literacy assessment should be continuous, ongoing and

varied."), and half focused on practices ("I provide my students with individual learning opportunities.").

In order to further explore content validity, they conducted a judgmental review to establish whether the survey items clearly reflected the principles from which they emanated. Twenty experts in literacy education were contacted and asked to read the survey items and match them to the list of principles. The reviewers were also asked to judge whether each item reflected a belief or practice, and to indicate on a three-point scale (1 for not confident, 2 for somewhat confident, and 3 for very confident) the degree to which they were comfortable with their decisions. Lenski et al. (1998) conducted an item analysis of the responses from the judgmental review that was conducted. An item was retained for the survey if it met the following guidelines: (1) it was judged by 80% of the reviewers to describe the principle for which it was intended; (2) it was identified correctly by 80% of the reviewers as a belief or a practice; and (3) the reviewers reported their confidence level about their choices to be 2.5 or higher. From this judgmental review, 44 items were retained for the LOS.

Next, in the same year, 1998, the LOS was administered to a sample of 110 elementary teachers in two Midwestern states to ascertain that items deemed to represent a certain construct did in fact group together. A factor analysis was conducted, and items that loaded at a 0.40 level or higher were retained for the survey. Some items were rewritten based on suggestions from teachers taking the survey. Thirty items, fifteen belief and fifteen practice statements, were retained for a draft version of the LOS.

In order to test the reliability of the LOS, Lenski et al. (1998) conducted a test-retest analysis. The LOS was then administered to 30 teachers attending a graduate class

at a large university at the same time in two consecutive days. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the entire instrument was 0.927. The LOS was determined to be sufficiently reliable.

During the reliability study, teachers were encouraged to identify any survey item or vocabulary that seemed confusing. Three of the 30 survey items were noted as being somewhat confusing. (For example, six teachers were unfamiliar with the term "connected discourse.") As a result, three survey items were superficially revised, and the final version of the LOS was completed.

Analysis indicated that a significant $F = 66.01$, at the $p < 0.001$ level resulted in the conclusion that the LOS consistently predicted actual classroom practice. It was concluded that the LOS tells you that there was a difference in LOS scores among the teaching categories (Lenski et al. 1998).

Thus, the LOS survey questionnaire contains 30 questions for teacher's belief and teacher's practice (Table 0). The letters "b" and "p" associated with the question number indicate teacher's belief and teacher's practice, respectively. The responses of questions for teacher's belief are 5-point Likert-scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. The responses of questions for teacher's practice are 5-point Likert-scale: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = a moderate amount, 5 = a great deal.

According to Lenski et al. (1998) they found that teachers who scored in a range of 90-110 are most likely traditional teachers. Teachers who scored in the 110-125 range are most likely eclectic teachers, and teachers who score in the 125-145 range are most likely constructivist teachers. Additionally, beliefs and practices of the teachers were

analyzed. A teacher whose beliefs score is closest to 51 has beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher, a teacher whose score is close to 61 has beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and a teacher whose score is closest to 69 has beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher. A teacher whose practice score closest to a 51 has beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher, a teacher whose score is closest to 56 has beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and a teacher whose score is closest to 63 has beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher (Lenski et al., 1998).

Table 2

The LOS survey questionnaire

Question	Question description
q1b	The purpose of reading instruction is to teach children to recognize words and to pronounce them correctly.
q2p	When students read text, I ask them questions such as "What does it mean?"
q3b	Reading and writing are unrelated processes.
q4p	When planning instruction, I take into account the needs of children by including activities that meet their social, emotional, physical and affective needs.
q5b	Students should be treated as individual learners rather than as a group.
q6p	I schedule time every day for self-selected reading and writing experiences.
q7b	Students should use "fix-up strategies" such as rereading when text meaning is unclear.
q8b	Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis.
q9p	I encourage my students to monitor their comprehension as they read.
q10p	I use a variety of pre-reading strategies with my students.
q11b	It is not necessary for students to write text on a daily basis.
q12b	Students should be encouraged to sound out all unknown words.

q13b	The purpose of reading is to understand print.
q14p	I hold parent workshops or send home newsletters with ideas about how parents can help their children with school.
q15p	I organize my classroom so that my students have an opportunity to write in at least one subject every day.
q16p	I ask the parents of my students to share their time, knowledge, and expertise in my classroom.
q17p	Writers in my classroom generally move through the processes of prewriting, drafting, and revising.
q18p	In my class, I organize reading, writing, speaking, and listening around key concepts.
q19b	Reading instruction should always be delivered to the whole class at the same time.
q20p	I teach using themes or integrated units.
q21b	Grouping for reading instruction should always be based on ability.
q22b	Subjects should be integrated across the curriculum.
q23p	I use a variety of grouping patterns to teach reading such as skill groups, interest groups, whole groups, and individual instruction.
q24b	Students need to write for a variety of purposes.
q25p	I take advantage of opportunities to learn about teaching by attending professional conferences and/or graduate classes and by reading professional journals.
q26b	Parents attitudes toward literacy affect my students' progress.
q27b	The major purpose of reading assessment is to determine a student's placement in the basal reader.
q28p	I assess my students' reading progress primarily by teacher-made and/or book tests.
q29b	Parental reading habits in the home affect their children's attitudes toward reading.
q30p	At the end of each day, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.

Treatment of the Data

The data gathered through the administration of the survey in this study were coded and entered onto an SPSS spreadsheet. Data were looked at regarding teachers' beliefs about literacy.

Analysis Methods

The 5 research questions of this study are:

1. What are the literacy beliefs of K-5 teachers?

2. Are the beliefs and practices of literacy teachers considered traditional, eclectic, or constructivist?

3. How do teacher beliefs align with teacher practices?

4. How can instructional leaders use information about teacher beliefs to build continuous improvement for future literacy learning?

5. Are the literacy beliefs the same among the three districts studied?

Descriptive statistics and frequency tables were used to answer research questions 1, "What are the literacy beliefs of K-5 teachers?" The teachers' scores were examined to determine what percent were traditional, electric, or constructivist (research question 2).

Paired *t*-test was proposed to answer research question 3, "How do teacher beliefs align with their practices?" In specific, paired *t*-test was utilized to compare the scores of teachers' beliefs and the scores of teachers' practice in literacy. A p-value less than 0.05 from the paired *t*-test suggested that teacher beliefs did not align with their teacher

practices. The normality assumption of the paired *t*-test was examined though skewness, kurtosis, and the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality.

Research question 4 asked: "How can instructional leaders use information about teacher beliefs to build continuous improvement for future literacy learning?" Descriptive statistics and frequency table were used to summarize the responses of the survey questions regarding teacher's literacy practices in order to answer research question 4.

Research question 5 asked: Are the literacy beliefs the same among the three districts studied? Teachers' types of literacy belief were identified according to the scores of literacy beliefs. A two-way contingency table for school and types of literacy belief was created. The χ^2 test of independence was used to investigate if there was an association between school and literacy beliefs. A p-value less than 0.05 indicated that there was an association between school and literacy beliefs. In addition to χ^2 test of independence, Fisher's exact test was also performed. Fisher's exact test does not depend on any large-sample distribution assumptions, so it is appropriate even for small sample sizes and for sparse tables. In general, when expected cell counts are less than 5, Fisher's exact should be used as the alternative for the χ^2 test of independence.

Chapter IV

Findings

This study is designed to obtain knowledge of what teachers do in their literacy practices as well as provide school leaders with information that will allow them to learn more about their classroom teachers and their teachers' perceptions of literacy, and then classify them on a continuum as being traditional, eclectic, or constructivist.

Data were gathered from 30 Literacy Orientation Surveys, which were developed by Lenski et al (1998). Surveys were completed in school "one," school "two," and school "three." The LOS surveys are comprised of 30 statements; 15 belief statements and 15 practice statements, each of which is ranked using a Likert Scale. This researcher set out to answer the following questions:

1. What are the literacy beliefs and practices of K-5 teachers?
2. Are the beliefs and practices of literacy teachers considered traditional, eclectic, or constructivist?
3. How do teacher beliefs align with teacher practices?
4. How can instructional leaders use information about teacher beliefs to build continuous improvement for future literacy learning?
5. Are the literacy beliefs the same among the three districts studied?

Demographics

Surveys were implemented in three schools (numbers in parentheses are total number of subjects): School one (9 teachers), school two (19 teachers), and school three (8 teachers). The four demographic questions asked in the survey are as follows:

- In what area do you teach?
- Are you male or female?
- What grade level do you teach?
- How many years of service?

Note that these demographic questions were asked, but only answered by school two and school three.

The results of the first demographic question (In what area do you teach?) indicate that, among the 27 teachers at school two and school three, 12 were classroom teachers, 8 were special education teachers, 2 were ESL teachers, 1 was a reading teacher, 1 was a classroom and special education teachers, 1 was a classroom & reading teacher, 1 was a special education & reading teacher, and 1 was a classroom & special education & reading teacher.

Among the 27 teachers, 2 were male and 23 were female. There were 2 missing responses.

Among the 27 teachers, 2 have taught the Kindergarten, 2 have taught grade 1, 4 people taught grade 2, 3 have taught grade 3, 3 have taught grade 4, 3 have taught grade 5, 1 has taught grades 2, 3, & 4, 1 has taught Kindergarten & grades 1, 2, 4, & 5, 4 have taught Kindergarten & grades 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5, and 1 has taught Kindergarten & grades 1 & 2. 3 teachers did not answer this question.

Regarding years of service, among the 27 teachers, 16 teachers have had more than 16 years of service, 4 teachers have had 11-15 years of service, 6 teachers have had 6-10 years of service, and 1 has had 1-5 years of service.

Major Findings

Analysis results for research question 1. Research question 1 asked: "What are the literacy beliefs of K-5 teachers? " Table 3 shows the frequency counts and percentages of the responses of questions for teacher's literacy belief. The total sample size was 36. There was one missing value for each of Q13b, Q22b and Q26b. Table 4 shows the frequency counts and percentages of the responses of questions for teacher's literacy practices. There was one missing value for Q2p. Mean, standard deviation (SD), and mode are also displayed in both tables.

According to the results of the data analysis (Table 3), the most important item for teachers' literacy belief was "Students need to write for a variety of purposes. (Q24b)," which received an average rating of 4.83 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The 2nd most important item for teacher's literacy belief was "Parental reading habits in the home affect their children's attitudes toward reading. (Q29b)," with an average rating of 4.75. "Students should use 'fix-up strategies' such as rereading when text meaning is unclear. (Q7b)" and "Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis. (Q8b)" received the same attention. The average rating for both items was 4.72.

According to the results of the data analysis (Table 4), the literacy practice used most often by teachers was "I encourage my students to monitor their comprehension as they read. (Q9p)," which received an average rating of 4.69 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The 2nd most used literacy practice was "At the end of each day, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions. (Q30p)" with an average rating of 4.64. "Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis. (Q8b)" was the third most used literacy practice with an average rating of 4.56.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of teacher's literacy belief

Survey question	Frequency counts and % of the responses					Mean (SD)	Mode
	1	2	3	4	5		
Q1b	5(14)	8(22)	15(42)	4(11)	4(11)	2.83(1.16)	3
Q3b	33(91)	1(3)	0	1(3)	1(3)	1.22(0.83)	1
Q5b	0	0	1(3)	13(36)	22(61)	4.58(0.55)	5
Q7b	0	0	3(8)	4(11)	29(81)	4.72(0.62)	5
Q8b	0	0	2(6)	6(16)	28(78)	4.72(0.57)	5
Q11b	23(63)	7(19)	2(6)	2(6)	2(6)	1.69(1.17)	1
Q12b	3(8)	6(17)	13(36)	9(25)	5(14)	3.19(1.14)	3
Q13b	1(3)	3(8)	10(28)	9(25)	12(34)	3.80(1.11)	5
Q19b	19(53)	12(33)	5(14)	0	0	1.61(0.73)	1
Q21b	5(14)	6(17)	13(36)	4(11)	8(22)	3.11(1.33)	3
Q22b	0	1(3)	5(14)	11(31)	18(52)	4.31(0.83)	5
Q24b	0	0	0	6(17)	30(83)	4.83(0.38)	5
Q26b	0	0	4(11)	7(20)	24(69)	4.57(0.70)	5
Q27b	19(53)	11(31)	6(16)	0	0	1.64(0.76)	1
Q29b	0	0	3(8)	3(8)	30(84)	4.75(0.60)	5

Note: Numbers in parentheses are percentages. SD = Standard deviation. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of teacher's literacy practices

Survey question	Frequency counts and % of the responses					Mean (SD)	Mode
	1	2	3	4	5		
Q2p	2(6)	0	7(20)	12(34)	14(40)	4.03(1.07)	5
Q4p	0	0	4(11)	8(22)	24(67)	4.56(0.70)	5
Q6p	0	4(11)	12(33)	8(22)	12(33)	3.78(1.05)	3
Q9p	1(3)	0	2(6)	3(8)	30(83)	4.69(0.82)	5
Q10p	0	1(3)	3(8)	8(22)	24(67)	4.53(0.77)	5
Q14p	2(6)	7(19)	6(17)	12(33)	9(25)	3.53(1.23)	4
Q15p	1(3)	3(8)	5(14)	17(19)	20(56)	4.17(1.13)	5
Q16p	1(3)	10(28)	12(33)	9(25)	4(11)	3.14(1.05)	3
Q17p	0	1(3)	4(11)	14(39)	17(47)	4.31(0.79)	5
Q18p	0	1(3)	5(14)	15(42)	14(39)	4.20(0.80)	4
Q20p	0	2(6)	14(39)	16(44)	4(11)	3.61(0.77)	4
Q23p	0	2(6)	6(17)	13(35)	15(42)	4.14(0.90)	5
Q25p	0	1(3)	4(11)	12(33)	19(53)	4.36(0.80)	5
Q28p	9(25)	4(11)	12(33)	7(19)	4(11)	2.81(1.33)	3
Q30p	0	0	2(6)	9(25)	25(69)	4.64(0.59)	5

Note: Numbers in parentheses are percentages. SD = Standard deviation. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

Analysis results for research question 2. Research question 2 asked: "Are the beliefs and practices of literacy teachers considered traditional, eclectic or constructivist?" Recall that total LOS scores of teachers' perceptions of literacy could be created by summing the responses of the 30 survey questions. In addition, teachers who scored between 90 and 110 are most likely traditional teachers. Teachers who scored between 110 and 125 are most likely eclectic teachers. Teachers who scored between 125 and 145 are most likely constructivist teachers. Furthermore, scores of beliefs and practices were also created by summing the responses of the corresponding survey questions. A teacher whose beliefs score is closest to 51 has beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher, a teacher whose score is close to 61 has beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and a teacher whose score is closest to 69 has beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher. A practice score closest to a 51 indicates that a teacher has beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher, a score closest to 56 indicates that a teacher has beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and a score closest to 63 indicates that a teacher has beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher.

Figure 2 shows the histogram of the total LOS scores for the 36 teachers. It provides a general picture of how the total LOS scores were distributed according to the survey results of the 36 teachers. The results indicated that, among the 36 teachers, 5 (14%) were traditional teachers, 30 (83%) were eclectic teachers, and 1 (3%) was a constructivist teacher.

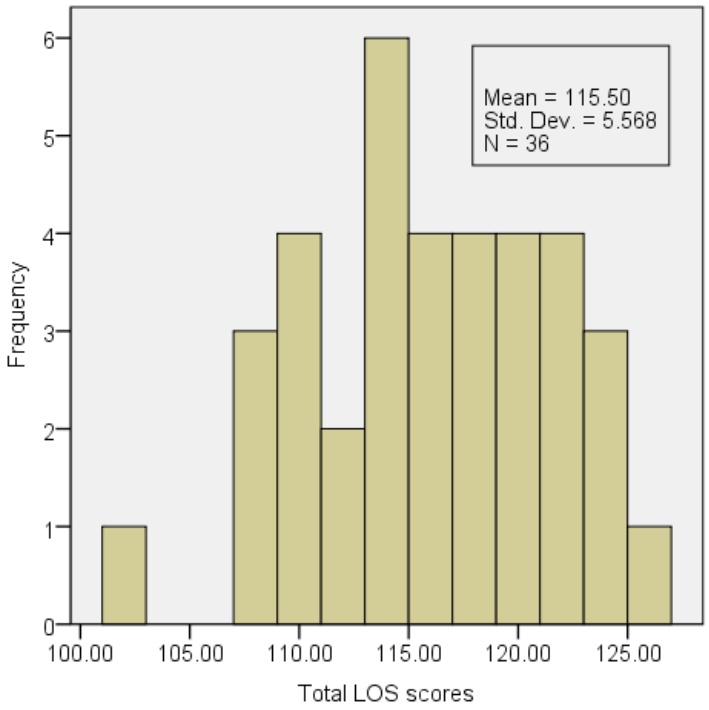


Figure 2: Histogram of the total LOS scores of the 36 subjects.

Figure 3 shows the histogram of the scores of beliefs for the 36 teachers. It provides a general picture of how the scores of beliefs were distributed according to the survey results of the 36 teachers. The results indicated that, among the 36 teachers, 1 (3%) had beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher, 25 (69%) had beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and 10 (28%) had beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher.).

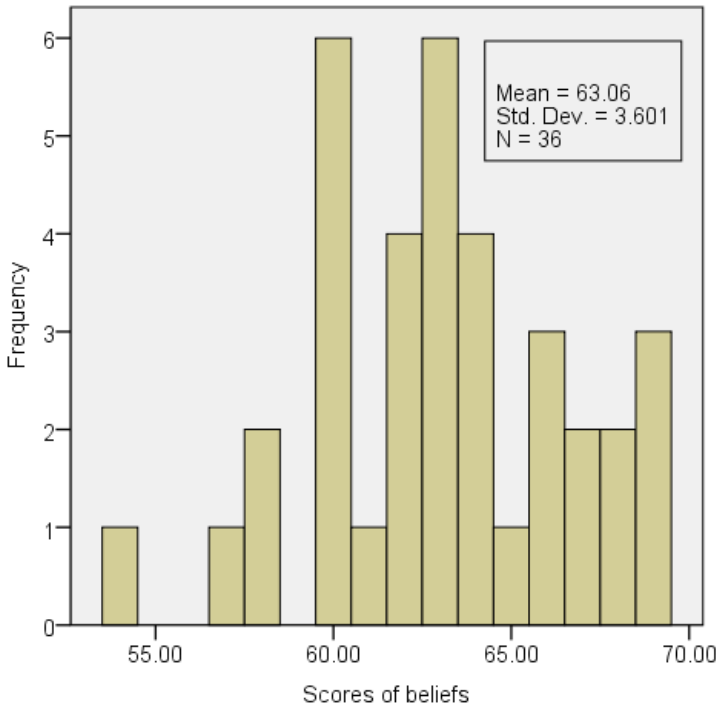


Figure 3: Histogram of the scores of beliefs of the 36 subjects.

Figure 4 shows the histogram of the scores of beliefs for the 36 teachers. It provides a general picture of how the scores of beliefs were distributed according to the survey results of the 36 teachers. The results indicated that, among the 36 teachers, 20 (56%) had practices similar to those of a traditional teacher, and 16 (44%) had practices similar to those of an eclectic teacher.

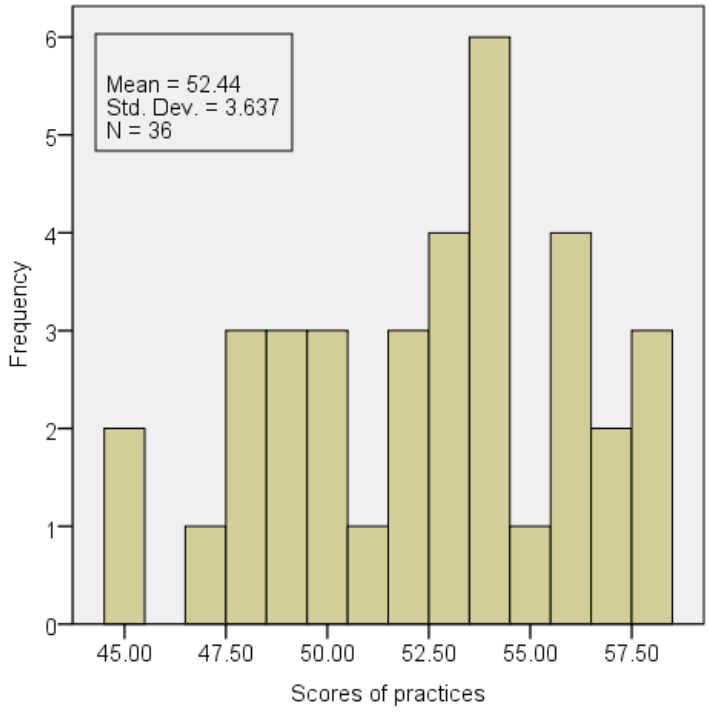


Figure 4: Histogram of the scores of practices of the 36 subjects.

Analysis results for research question 3. Research question 3 asked: "How do teacher beliefs align with their practices?" Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of scores of beliefs and practices for the 36 teachers participating in the survey. The average score of teachers' literacy belief was 63.06 (SD = 3.60), with the minimum and maximum scores equal to 54 and 69, respectively. The average score of teachers' literacy practice was 51.21 (SD = 3.64), with the minimum and maximum scores equal to 45 and 58, respectively. The mean difference of the scores of beliefs and practices was 10.61 (SD = 4.62). Based on the results of the paired t-test, the mean difference was statistically significantly different from 0 ($t(35) = 13.76$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that teachers' beliefs did not align with their practices.

The skewness and kurtosis of the differences of the scores of beliefs and practices are 0.03 and -0.80, respectively. The Shapiro-Wilk test did not reject the null hypothesis of normality ($p = 0.313$), indicating the normality assumption of paired t-test was satisfied. Thus, it was appropriate to use the paired t-test to investigate research question 3.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of scores of beliefs and practices

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Median
Scores of beliefs	63.06	3.60	54	69	63
Scores of practices	51.21	3.64	45	58	53

Note: SD = standard deviation. N = 36.

Analysis results for research question 4. Research question 4 asked: "How can instructional leaders use information about teacher beliefs to build continuous improvement for future literacy learning?" The analysis results of research question 3 indicated that teachers' beliefs did not align with their practices. Table 6 shows the frequency counts and percentages of the responses of questions for teacher's literacy practices with a mean less than 4.0. These 6 questions are:

- Q6p: I schedule time every day for self-selected reading and writing experiences.
- Q14p: I hold parent workshops or send home newsletters with ideas about how parents can help their children with school.
- Q16p: I ask the parents of my students to share their time, knowledge, and expertise in my classroom.
- Q20p: I teach using themes or integrated units.

- Q28p: I assess my students' reading progress primarily by teacher-made and/or book tests.

Table 6 can be useful for teachers and administrators as they can also look at teachers' practices that fall below a mean score of 4.0 and work to improve them. Results indicated that teachers and administrators could emphasize self-selected learning experiences, parental involvement, teaching methods, and assessments.

Table 6

Questions for teacher's literacy practices with mean less than 4

Survey question	Frequency counts and % of the responses					Mean (SD)	Mode
	1	2	3	4	5		
Q6p	0	4(11)	12(33)	8(22)	12(33)	3.78(1.05)	3
Q14p	2(6)	7(19)	6(17)	12(33)	9(25)	3.53(1.23)	4
Q16p	1(3)	10(28)	12(33)	9(25)	4(11)	3.14(1.05)	3
Q20p	0	2(6)	14(39)	16(44)	4(11)	3.61(0.77)	4
Q28p	9(25)	4(11)	12(33)	7(19)	4(11)	2.81(1.33)	3

Note: Numbers in parentheses are percentages. SD = standard deviation. 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = a moderate amount, 5 = a great deal.

Analysis results for research question 5. Research question 5 asked: "Are the literacy beliefs the same among the three districts studied?" Table 7 shows the two-way frequency table of type of literacy belief and school. It appeared that

- For the 9 participants of School one, 4 (44%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher and 5 (56%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher.

- For the 19 participants of School two, 3 (16%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher, 15 (79%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and 1 (5%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher.
- For the 8 participants of School three, 3 (38%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher and 5 (62%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher.

The results of the χ^2 test of independence and Fisher's exact test indicated that there was no association between type of literacy beliefs and school ($\chi^2(4, N = 36) = 3.6026$, $p = 0.4624$; p for Fisher's exact test = 0.4417). Thus, we concluded that there was no difference in literacy beliefs among the three districts studies.

Table 7

Two-way frequency table of type of literacy belief and school

	School		
Type of literacy beliefs	One	Two	Three
Constructivist	4(44)	3(16)	3(38)
Eclectic	5(56)	15(79)	5(62)
Traditional	0	1(5)	0

Note: Numbers in parentheses are percentages.

Summary Statement

It is indicated that teachers in all three schools are not currently practicing what they believe. School leaders can look to see the discrepancy between teachers' belief scores and their practice scores. They can look particularly at questions 1, 13, 16, 20, 25 and 26 and see what is being done differently among classroom literacy instructors. When teachers are not strongly associated with any one theoretical orientation to reading and the components of literacy instruction, they are classified as eclectic in orientation by Lenski et al. (1998).

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

This survey-based study examined rural Eastern Long Island elementary school teachers' beliefs about literacy and identified the degree to which those beliefs were traditional, eclectic, or constructivist in their approach. The primary interest of this research was in using the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS) developed by Lenski et al. (1998) as an instrument for assessing teachers' beliefs about literacy learning and classroom practices, and by building off the existing research of McGlynn (2009). The study aimed at replicating the study McGlynn conducted, which was set in an urban setting, and applying it to a rural setting. Findings may or may not illuminate differences in urban v. rural literacy instructional classroom settings – this may require further research – but as with McGlynn's study, the study set out to shed light on teachers' beliefs, in this case, in rural schools surveyed with the aim of informing instructional leadership.

McGlynn's research was conducted in a borough of Queens, New York with an urban-type setting. Her findings in this setting showed the discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices. Her study showed that classroom teachers are 13.8% traditional, 82.4% eclectic, and 3.4% constructivist. Ultimately, her research results indicated that teachers did not practice what they believed. Table 20 found in her study represents that there is a ten point difference between teachers' beliefs 61.86 and their practices 51.75 ($t(17) = 15.86$, $p < 0.001$).

Results of the Study

The discrepancy illustrated in chapter four of this study, represented in the data, points toward a problem for school leaders insofar as their teachers who have difficulty

aligning with a theoretical framework may be less optimal in their instructional results with children's literacy acquisition than teachers who follow a clear conceptual model. Inappropriate or ineffective literacy instruction is shown to have adverse outcomes for children.

In face of the challenging demands school leaders face, with pressure to raise academic standards and to improve the international standing, teachers and administrators are expected to meet unprecedented benchmarks of student achievement with fewer and fewer resources. The current Race to the Top and common core standards agenda aims at ensuring that American children will achieve this as a results of innovation and reform (US Department of Education, 2009; NGA Center for Best Practices, 2010).

Given the shifting paradigm, it is now more crucial than ever that school leaders understand teachers' theoretical beliefs about literacy learning in order to fully grasp the practical pedagogical implications for student learning and the extent to which literacy teachers' instructional practices consistently align with their theoretical beliefs. In other words, teachers need to clarify their beliefs about literacy learning for themselves as well as for school leaders in order to clearly and properly integrate their theories with their instructional practices and improved learning outcomes.

In the State of New York, elementary school teachers are certified for the common branch (K-6), and in recent years, they are able to become even more specific in their certification areas (e.g. early childhood education, K-2, 3-6, etc.). While it is true that many schools have licensed reading teachers who specialize in literacy instruction, and specifically reading instruction, the weight and bulk of that instruction is on elementary school classroom teachers. These teachers must ensure that all students are

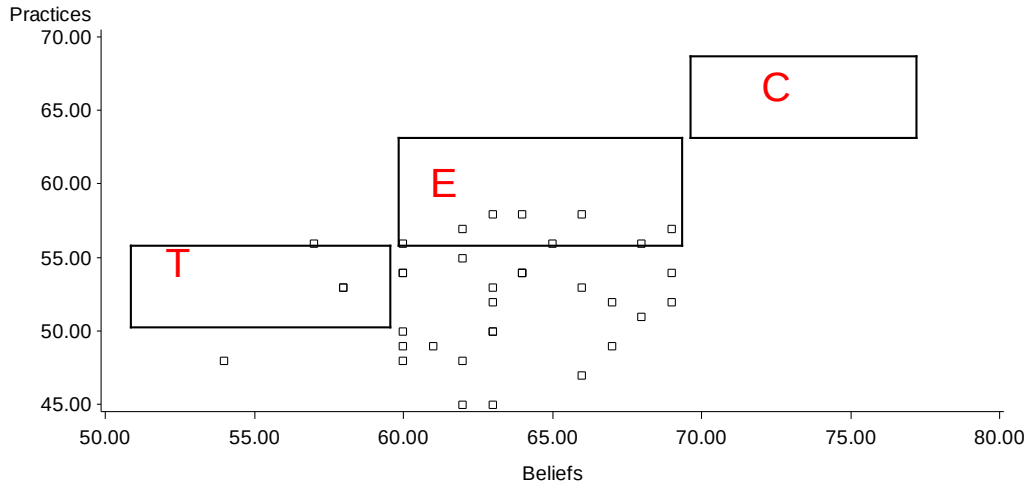
meeting the New York State Standards for Learning. School leaders, in turn, must be assured that all teachers on their watch are indeed able to meet this challenge and assure individual student competencies. The question then becomes, where are we now in the journey, and where do we need to go?

Connected to this very charge is just what this analysis was devised to gauge (i.e. the beliefs of elementary literacy teachers). With this knowledge in hand, school leaders could better determine policy implications for schools, and in turn, better assist the literacy learning of the children under his/her charge

A total of 36 teachers were surveyed. They included teachers from three districts in rural Suffolk County, on the eastern end of Long Island, New York, including elementary classroom teachers, special education teachers, and teachers of English as a second language.

Analysis and Synthesis

Literacy Orientation Surveys were analyzed using SPSS in a teacher's license area, total score, total belief score, and total practice score. In addition, questions were then analyzed in order to determine where on the continuum of traditional, eclectic, or constructivist teachers' perceptions and beliefs scores were located. Figure 5 is an illustration of the data analysis results for teachers' beliefs and practices.



T = Traditional; E = Eclectic; C = Constructivist

Figure 5: Illustration of teachers' beliefs and practices

Analysis results for research question 1. Research question 1 asked: "What are the literacy beliefs of K-5 teachers?" Table 1 shows the frequency counts and percentages of the responses of questions for teacher's literacy belief. The total sample size was 36. There was one missing value for each of Q13b, Q22b and Q26b. Table 2 shows the frequency counts and percentages of the responses of questions for teachers' literacy practices. There was one missing value for Q2p. Mean, standard deviation (SD), and mode are also displayed in both tables.

According to the results of the data analysis (Table 1), the most important item for teachers' literacy belief was "Students need to write for a variety of purposes. (Q24b)," which received an average rating of 4.83 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The second most important item for teachers' literacy belief was "Parental reading habits in the home affect their children's attitudes toward reading. (Q29b)", with

an average rating of 4.75. “Students should use "fix-up strategies" such as rereading when text meaning is unclear. (Q7b)” and “Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis. (Q8b)” received the same attention. The average rating for both items was 4.72.

According to the results of the data analysis (Table 2), the literacy practice used most often by teachers was “I encourage my students to monitor their comprehension as they read. (Q9p),” which received an average rating of 4.69 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The second most used literacy practice was “At the end of each day, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions. (Q30p),” with an average rating of 4.64. “Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis. (Q8b)” was the third most used literacy practice, with an average rating of 4.56.

In total, 14% of teachers were reported as traditional, 83% were eclectic, and 3% were constructivist. In their beliefs, 3% were traditional, 69% were eclectic, and 28% were constructivist. In their practices, 56% were traditional, 44% were eclectic, and 0% were constructivist.

Teachers in each of the districts surveyed are adhering to New York State standards in terms of the way they deliver instruction. All these districts cover the same instructional topics and material; however, there is a range of classification about teacher’s perceptions of literacy.

Analysis results for research question 2. Research question 2 asked: “Are the beliefs and practices of literacy teachers considered traditional, eclectic or constructivist?” Recall that total LOS scores of teachers’ perceptions of literacy could be created by summing the responses of the 30 survey questions. In addition, teachers who

scored between 90 and 110 are most likely traditional teachers. Teachers who scored between 110 and 125 are most likely eclectic teachers. Teachers who scored between 125 and 145 are most likely constructivist teachers. Furthermore, scores of beliefs and practices were also created by summing the responses of the corresponding survey questions. A teacher whose beliefs score is closest to 51 has beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher, a teacher whose score is close to 61 has beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and a teacher whose score is closest to 69 has beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher. A practice score closest to a 51 indicates that a teacher has beliefs similar to those a traditional teacher, a score closest to 56 indicates that a teacher has beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and a score closest to 63 indicates that a teacher has beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher.

Analysis results for research question 3. Research question 3 asked: "How do teacher beliefs align with their practices?" Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of scores of beliefs and practices for the 36 teachers participating in the survey. The average score of teachers' literacy belief was 63.06 (SD = 3.60), with the minimum and maximum scores equal to 54 and 69, respectively. The average score of teachers' literacy practice was 51.21 (SD = 3.64), with the minimum and maximum scores equal to 45 and 58, respectively. The mean difference of the scores of beliefs and practices was 10.61 (SD = 4.62). Based on the results of the paired t-test, the mean difference was statistically significantly different from 0 ($t(35) = 13.76$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that teachers' beliefs did not align with their practices.

The skewness and kurtosis of the differences of the scores of beliefs and practices are 0.03 and -0.80, respectively. The Shapiro-Wilk test did not reject the null hypothesis

of normality ($p = 0.313$), indicating the normality assumption of paired t-test was satisfied. Thus, it was appropriate to use the paired t-test to investigate research question 3.

Analysis results for research question 4. Research question 4 asked: "How can instructional leaders use information about teacher beliefs to build continuous improvement for future literacy learning?" The analysis results of research question 3 indicated that teachers' beliefs did not align with their practices. Table 4 shows the frequency counts and percentages of the responses of questions for teacher's literacy practices with mean less than 4.0. These 6 questions are:

- Q6p: I schedule time every day for self-selected reading and writing experiences.
- Q14p: I hold parent workshops or send home newsletters with ideas about how parents can help their children with school.
- Q16p: I ask the parents of my students to share their time, knowledge, and expertise in my classroom.
- Q20p: I teach using themes or integrated units.
- Q28p: I assess my students' reading progress primarily by teacher-made and/or book tests.

Table 4 can be useful for teachers and administrators as they can also look at teachers' practices that fall below a mean score of 4.0 and work to improve them. Results indicated that teachers and administrators could emphasize self-selected learning experiences, parental involvement, teaching methods, and assessments.

Analysis results for research question 5. Research question 5 asked: "Are the literacy beliefs the same among the three districts studied?" Table 5 shows the two-way frequency table of type of literacy belief and school. It appeared that

- For the 8 participants of School 3, 3 (38%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher and 5 (62%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher.
- For the 19 participants of School 2, 3 (16%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher, 15 (79%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher, and 1 (5%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a traditional teacher.
- For the 9 participants of School 1, 4 (44%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of a constructivist teacher and 5 (56%) had literacy beliefs similar to those of an eclectic teacher.

The results of the χ^2 test of independence and Fisher's exact test indicated that there was no association between type of literacy beliefs and school ($\chi^2(4, N = 36) = 3.6026$, $p = 0.4624$; p for Fisher's exact test = 0.4417). Thus, we concluded that there was no difference in literacy beliefs among the three districts studies.

Conclusions

According to Popkewitz (2001), if we look historically at the knowledge of social reforms such as social practices, the logic and reasoning can be understood as having paradoxes and ironies that are effects of power. In his view, difference produces problems of distinctions, and ultimately, these differences may lead to exclusion and

discouragement. Further, according to Stone (2002), the purpose of reform is always to subordinate self-interests to other interests, sometimes to the public interest. It is, therefore, important for school leaders to ensure that the teachers under their watch are focusing on the needs of all their individual students. Teachers must ensure that the needs of their students are being met, and that all children are receiving the same educational opportunities, regardless of the fact that these children are experiencing different teachers and different instructional leaders.

The constructivist approach, as pointed out in the study, is grounded in Jean Piaget's groundbreaking work (1896-1980) in the cognitive and psychological development of children. Constructivism is a theory used to explain how people know what they know. Problem solving is at the heart of learning, thinking, and development. This is done through past and immediate experiences, and allows students to construct their own understanding. Vygotsky and Dewey both believed in participatory democracy, which Popkewitz identifies as the primary benefit of constructivist teaching (Popkewitz, 1998). Being active helps knowledge and learning come alive. Brooks and Grennon Brooks's work on constructivism discloses that classrooms born out of this theory are places where students are encouraged to "construct" deep understandings of important concepts. To do this, a new set of images and settings must emerge—providing deeper student engagement, interaction, reflection, and construction (Brooks and Grennon Brooks, 1993). Dweck (2006) asserts that intelligence is a malleable quality and can be developed—a *growth mindset.* Children and learners in general with a growth mindset believe they can learn anything. This may come about through struggle, effort, and perseverance, but they believe with effort, they will succeed in the end.

Important to the research is that an effective teacher armed with many instructional tools and the ability to differentiate can respond to student needs and promote an optimal learning environment (Dweck, 2006). As noted by Brooks and Grennon Brooks (1993), this kind of deeper engagement is what constitutes a constructivist learning environment.

Recommendations

Effective professional development for teachers of literacy entails opportunities for teacher immersion in learning about best practices in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills. Most importantly, teachers need the time to learn about and incorporate new practices into their classrooms. They need time to collaborate and debrief with one another about the information they are learning and applying, and they need time to examine and consider the results as well as the student achievement that connects to their practice.

Research supports that teachers' beliefs about literacy influence their instruction and assessment practices in the classroom (Bliem & Davinroy, 1997; Johnson, et al. 1993; Lenski et al., 1998; Maxson, 1996; Pressley, 2006; Pressley et al., 1998; Reutzel, 1996; Richardson et al., 1991). Studies suggest also that teachers' practices and their literacy beliefs are concerned with an intricate range of factors, including what Shapiro and Kilbey call the "practical realities of the classroom." Some of the factors that press on classroom teachers the most are the conditions and restraints put upon them by federal, state, and local district policies, and this includes the multifarious view about what teachers should be doing and the methods they should be implementing in their classrooms (Valencia & Wixson, 2000). When teachers' beliefs do not align with

instructional practices, then the problem becomes that a teacher may not operate with effective instructional practices. Beyond that, rather than follow expected practices, a teacher may change up practices so that they fit better with his or her beliefs (Winograd & Johnston, 1987). A very good example of this can be seen in the time a teacher chooses to devote to children reading silently rather than the time spent in the engagement of specific guided reading instruction.

The best and most effectual teachers hold an understanding that the relationship between assessment and instruction is what is most key for student success. They are consistent in their instructional planning and center it on specific planned, prescriptive targets for whole and individual instruction that grows directly out of the assessment instruments that are being utilized (Afferbach & Moni, 1996). Because of this, teachers should be viewed as the primary decision makers for instruction, and they should be allowed to operate in this way within the school setting (Deford, 1985; Hancock, Turbill & Cambourne, 1994; Johnston, 1987; Pikulski, 1994; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). Further, teachers' observations in their classrooms are a key source of evaluation. They hold the most power in this regard. When teachers are encouraged to be self-reflective and introspective, and when they truly question why they believe what they do in regard to effective instruction, immediate results will come about. This kind of informal assessment can provide immediate results. However, assessment based on more formal kinds of tests (e.g. standardized tests) may not give timely information, and in fact, results may arrive long after a child has left that teachers' classroom (Valencia, 1997). Further, standardized tests, by nature, most often emphasize lower levels of comprehension and are often presented to children in unfamiliar formats, such as multiple

choice questions, that do not ultimately clearly connect to their lives as literate individuals who are able to think, speak, read, and write about the world around them in authentic ways. Moreover, standardized tests do not involve students in the planning of assessments, and they fail to account for the small and positive changes that take place with individual learning and mastery over time because they are simply administered too infrequently (Wixson & Pearson, 1998). Product over process is emphasized, and only a limited number of responses are deemed acceptable. Scores, then, do not really tell us the level of individual understanding (Thomas, 2001) Winograd & Greenlee (1986).

What follows is a need for a number of different kinds of formal assessments that will provide alternative understandings about students and their mastery of learning. As Valencia (1997) points out, informal classroom assessments have a number of contexts, and therefore, more realistic kinds of reading and writing may be evaluated. Self-evaluation is another key, one which allows students to retain ownership over their own reading and writing (Au et al., 1990). The research of Winograd et al. (1991) shows clearly that informal assessment allows for continuous evaluation and provides immediate feedback to facilitate planning. Therefore, an authentic assessment is aligned to students' instructional needs. As Valencia (1997) put it, "good assessment fits the child rather than trying to make the child fit the assessment" (p.5).

It stands that the work of Lenski et al. (1998) is very relevant. It proposes that what teachers believe and what they actually do are, in fact, often really quite different. What can be problematic is that, even though teacher beliefs may change through new understandings and professional development, for example, teacher practices often do not change as a result of their new and key knowledge. There is any number of reasons for

this disconnect between teacher beliefs and practices including issues of bureaucracy, lack of professional development, and lack of administrative support (Gaffney & Anderson, 2000).

Literacy teachers who favor a behaviorist view of reading, characterized by learning isolated skills with decoding as the ultimate goal, can fall prey to having beliefs that are different than their practice. These teachers have historically relied heavily on basal textbooks, valued the final product over the process, and often used decontextualized kinds of assessments in the form of handouts and short-answer tests. In contrast to this is a constructivist model of teaching literacy. Here, the process of learning is what is emphasized, and this is given more value than the final product. A constructivist teacher allows children to have an opportunity to make their own connections and create their own learning. These students are allowed to focus on areas inspiring interest and self-selected exploration. The behaviorist may wish to inspire these kind of understandings while teaching skills, but the isolation of those skills more often leads to a disconnect for the students doing the learning (Anders et al., 2000; Au, 2000; Lenski et al., 1998; Pressley, 2006; Pressley & Harris, 1997).

Also important is the incongruence between policies for teachers and their beliefs and practices. One side effect of the current movement in education is that it often leaves teachers with little opportunity to have personal input and say as to what goes on in their own classrooms. Because of this, there tends to be a prevalence of instruction that is out of context and lacks an authentic purpose in relation to the reading and writing lives of children (Thomas et al. 2000). There is also currently a preoccupation with teaching to

the test, which Thomas calls a “finish line” mentality. This approach opposes many of the best practice qualities found in the constructivist classroom.

If we agree that the ultimate goal of literacy instruction is to create more authentic experiences that lead students to become lifelong readers and competent writers, then those in charge of making policy must involve teachers in the development of standards, and allow them, then, to choose the strategies to implement in helping their students to meet those standards. The negative consequence of not doing so is that there is inevitably a rebellion by teachers in the form of half-hearted attempts at implementing those standards because teacher beliefs simply do not mesh with the push for the current policies (Eisenhart et al., 1988).

Another key problem related to the disconnection between teacher beliefs and practices is a lack of professional development and lack of administrative support. In this instance, the possibility exists that teachers will continue with certain mediocre practices and patterns of instruction due to top-down models where teachers do not feel they have the opportunity to collaborate or have their voices heard. This leads to frustration and resistance. When there is an expectation of implementation without professional development or sustained administrative support, there is a risk that teachers will not embrace best practices; whereas, given a supportive and safe environment to learn and grow, characterized by trust and respect, teachers and students alike will benefit (Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990).

The unfortunate reality and current backlash by educators and families toward educational policies is tied up in the fact that teachers are often strong-armed into accepting and upholding new ways of thinking about teaching that are purported by a

visiting “expert” or governing policy makers at the state level who often disregard previous understandings and imply that everything previously done is wrong. This way of implementing professional development conflicts with the constructivist approach, and it is certainly not conducive to good practice. Good professional development that leads to strong literacy learning is reflective of teacher beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences (Richards et al., 1992) and is able to connect the two.

One more caveat is that teachers are also limited in what practices they can implement due to some very practical issues, like classroom control and the reality of limited resources (Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990). If teachers do not have enough resources in their classroom, and materials such as texts are not widely available, it may mean that students are not grouped as well as they could be. Also, if a classroom only has desks, it is more difficult for the constructivist teacher to create the environment they desire, where social aspects of learning are emphasized. Ultimately, like any workplace, resources and time are important factors for educators to achieve success.

Of further importance is understanding that when teachers are eclectic in their approach, they combine traditional elements with some constructivist components. It may, at first glance, seem that these teachers have a large repertoire to pull from and many kinds of materials to use in their instruction. However, according to Edelsky et al. (1991) being eclectic frequently means something “like holding…an unexamined underlying theoretical position, borrowing typical practices from conflicting positions while unwittingly and inevitably distorting them so they find the one unacknowledged position.” These classrooms never fully achieve the desired result of a traditional or constructivist approach. The traditional classroom is more aligned with theories of

behaviorism, where behaviors or skills are the goals of instruction, and learning is transmitted from one person to another and dominated by teacher talk, and textbooks are the primary source for information. Students are considered 'blank slates' with teachers as the source of knowledge. The LOS was designed to shed light on teacher beliefs, but also to be used as a tool to assist teachers with monitoring their own movement toward constructivist teaching and clarifying the beliefs and practices they hold about literacy learning.

Implications of Findings

In traditional literacy classrooms, students are usually given a one-size-fits-all text, and if they are not strong readers, they will often check themselves out from the learning. They are "assigned" writing and skill work, as opposed to what occurs in a constructivist classroom, where they are taught in such a way that asks them to draw on prior knowledge, and they are engaged in more authentic kinds of learning tasks. In constructivist classrooms, the focus is on learning rather than on test scores. This kind of classroom requires an investment by school leaders in ongoing professional development.

There are many factors that support the clear need for strong professional development in literacy classrooms; this is particularly true if the goal of school leaders is the alignment of teacher beliefs and practices. School leaders must work to strongly support teachers, and in doing so, they are, in turn, strongly supporting students. When teachers are clearly aware of the needs of their individual students and have the strategies necessary for best instructional practices, and when those practices are aligned to their beliefs, then school leaders are achieving the best outcome possible in their schools and

are carrying out their ultimate mission. When school leaders are fully aware of the beliefs and practices of their teachers, they can assist them in making decisions about creating deep, rich, constructivist learning environments. When teachers are able to do their best work because they are supported in their instructional practices by school leadership, then the work they do with students will be transformative, and teachers and school leaders will have accomplished the best possible end: the formation of strong and literate students.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. This study could be replicated with schools in other urban and/or suburban districts.
2. Moreover, the use of qualitative, open-ended questioning could be included in future studies. These questions could be directed at teachers as well as administrators and would allow for more information and results to be established.
3. A hybrid study using both quantitative and qualitative data could allow for deeper research and analysis.
4. Further analysis of urban versus rural literacy classroom settings.

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Appendix A

Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS)

Lenski, S.D., Wham, M.A. & Griffey, D.C. (1998). Literacy Orientation survey; a survey to clarify teachers' beliefs and practices. Reading Research & Instruction, 37, 217-236.

Participant No. _____

Teacher of Grade _____

Directions: Read the following statements and circle the response that indicates your feelings or behaviors regarding literacy instruction.

Using a Likert-type scale ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to 2…3…5…(5) Strongly Agree

Select the number of the scale 1-5 that best represents your degree of commitment.

1. The purpose of reading instruction is to teach children to recognize words and to pronounce them correctly.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

2. When students read text, I ask them questions such as "What does it mean?"

never — always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

3. Reading and writing are unrelated processes.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5.

4. When planning instruction, I take into account the needs of children by including activities that meet their social, emotional, physical and affective needs.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

5. Students should be treated as individual learners rather than as a group.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

5. I schedule time every day for self- selected reading and writing experiences.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

7. Students should use "fix-up strategies" such as rereading when text meaning is unclear.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

8. Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

9. I encourage my students to monitor their comprehension as they read.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

10. I use a variety of pre-reading strategies with my students.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

11. It is not necessary for students to write text on a daily basis.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

12. Students should be encouraged to sound out all unknown words.

strongly d isagree — strongly agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

13. The purpose of reading is to understand print.

strongly disagree — strongly agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

14. I hold parent workshops or send home newsletters with ideas about how parents can help their children with school.

never — always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

15. I organize my classroom so that my students have an opportunity to write in at least one subject every day.

never — always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

16. I ask the parents of my students to share their time, knowledge and expertise in my classroom.

never — always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

17. Writers in my classroom generally move through the process of prewriting, drafting and revising.

never — always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

18. In my class, I organize reading, writing, speaking and listening around key concepts.
never — always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

19. Reading instruction should always be delivered to the whole class at the same time.

strongly disagree — strongly agree

1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

20. I teach using themes or integrated units.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

21. Grouping for reading instruction should always be based on ability.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

22. Subjects should be integrated across the curriculum.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

23. I use a variety of grouping patterns to teach reading such as skill groups, interest groups, whole group, and ind ividual instruction.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

24. Students need to write for a variety of purposes.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

25. I take advantage of opportunities to learn about teaching by attending professional conferences and/or graduate classes and by reading professional journals.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

26. Parents' attitudes toward literacy affect my students' progress. strongly
strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

27. The major purpose ofreading assessment is to determine a student's placement in the basal reader.

strongly strongly
disagree agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

28. I assess my students' reading progress primarily by teacher made and/or book tests.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

29. Parental reading habits in the home affect their children's attitudes toward reading.

strongly disagree strongly agree
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

30. At the end of each day, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.

never always
1---------- 2 ---------- 3 ---------- 4 ---------- 5

Vita

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