EARLY LITERACY: TWO KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

A Dissertation to be Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of Master's in Education

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March 2005

i

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Graduate Studies

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PRACTICES

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I dedicate this dissertation to my loving parents, Mahmoud and Fatima Ballan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ABSTRACT

This case study explored two Lebanese teachers' beliefs and practices about the teaching of early/emerging reading and writing. The aim was to discover what literacy strategies were implemented in two Kindergarten classrooms to teach English-second learners (ESL) early literacy skills as to examine the extent to which teachers' beliefs coincided with their classroom environment and teaching practice. Data was collected from two KG 2 teachers and their classrooms in Beirut. Data collection methods included non-participant observations over a two month period, interviews, and a classroom physical environment rubric. Data revealed that one of the two teachers implemented an eclectic literacy approach, combining emergent literacy and reading readiness strategies. The quality and quantity of literacy materials in her classroom were rated as moderate. The interviews revealed that this teacher's beliefs about the teaching of early reading and writing generally matched her classroom practices. The second teacher observed implemented a reading readiness approach, applying product-centered literacy instruction. The quality and quantity of literacy materials in this teacher's classroom were rated as poor, with children having limited access to print and few opportunities to participate in literacy activities. The interviews revealed that while the teacher's beliefs about the teaching of early reading and writing were aligned with a combination of emergent literacy and reading readiness views, her beliefs conflicted with her observed classroom practices. Both the lack of resources and the school policy on literacy instruction prevented her from fully implemented her philosophy. The study sheds light on heretofore unexplored area, namely Lebanese Kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices on early literacy instruction, as well as on some of the constraints within which teachers may sometimes operate.

TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Early Literacy Introduction

All schools and early childhood educators have one common goal and that is to produce early readers and writers. However, today this task is challenging since Kindergarten classrooms are attended by children with a wide range of abilities, learning styles, interests, literacy background and knowledge, and personalities. This task becomes even more challenging when it comes to teaching young children learning English as a second language (ESL), as in some countries such as Lebanon. Within a bilingual classroom some children may speak English fluently, while others may have no experience and exposure with the English language.

Two distinct and opposing views exist related to early literacy development and teaching: emergent literacy and reading readiness approaches. According to McMahon, Richmond, and Reeves-Kazelskis (1998), over the past decade the emergent literacy approach has been gradually replacing the reading readiness philosophy. The reading readiness theory suggests that there is a specific age requirement and prerequisite skills that need to be acquired before children are ready to begin to learn to read and write. Reading readiness programs usually focus on formal, academic instruction occurring in an isolated context (e.g., worksheets, workbooks, and basal materials). On the other hand, emergent literacy supporters suggest that the development of literacy is a continuous process that begins from infancy. According to the emergent literacy approach two criteria need to be met in order for children's literacy skills (reading and writing) to emerge: a language program/approach that focuses on the child's own natural learning

ability and the right conditions; a print-rich environment. To understand what goes on in early childhood classrooms two essential questions need to be answered: What early reading and writing strategies are used to teach young children learning English as a second language to read and write? How do teachers' beliefs about emerging reading and writing effect their classroom practices?

Teacher Beliefs and Practice

Recognizing and understanding teachers' beliefs is equally as important as understanding their practice as teachers' beliefs to some degree reflects on their classroom practice. Research that examines teacher practice and beliefs provide clearer insight of the context of the study. To understand how teachers' beliefs may affect their practice the following questions need to be answered: Is there a correlation between teachers' beliefs and literacy practices? What factors may influence teachers from implementing their beliefs? Is there a correlation between teachers' education level and teacher experiences with their beliefs and practice?

Purpose of the Study

This case study aims at gaining some insight into Lebanese Kindergarten teachers' approaches to teaching emerging reading and writing to ESL children as well as these teachers' perceptions about how early literacy skills should be taught. Also, the study sets to examine whether teachers' practices reflect their beliefs or are teacher practices influenced by supervisors, curriculum, or other aspects? To answer these questions, two teachers will be interviewed, using both semi-structured and unstructured

2

interviews, and their classroom practices observed over a 2-month period, using both

systematic observations and narrative field notes. This study will contribute to a

heretofore un-researched area, namely the early literacy practices of Lebanese preschool

teachers and the beliefs guiding these practices.

CHAPTER II: EMERGING LITERACY IN KINDERGARTEN

Introduction

Long before children begin formal schooling they start to construct knowledge about early reading and writing skills. For instance, children as young as three can read familiar Logos and environmental prints within their familiar context; e.g., a four or five year old child that can recognize and read the word "Crest" from its box but probably is unable to recognize it printed on paper. Discussion about environmental print (letter names, sounds, and pattern) will enhance children's recognition of these words in other contexts (Morrow, 1997). Similarly, children as young as three also develop pre-writing skills; for instance, a child who understands that marks and symbols tell a story may attach meaning to his/her own scribbles (e.g., 'This is what I want Santa to bring'). These are all signs of early literacy (Rog, 2001). However, early literacy experiences are relative to children's backgrounds and their exposure to print. Since some children's home environment may not build a strong literacy background, the school must fill this gap and ensure the success of all children. As a result, many educators and advocates believe that there is no age restriction for literacy activities; rather informal literacy experiences should begin as soon as possible (Clay, 2001; Morrow 1997).

Learning to read and write are essential tasks in childhood. Over the years, researchers have recommended many different ways to teach reading, from simply exposing children to many books to worksheet exercises to using multi-strategies. Even today disagreement continues regarding the methods or strategies used to promote literacy skills. Some educators believe that preschoolers should be exposed to informal

literacy experiences, while others feel that literacy instruction can only take place through formal instruction (Clay, 1998). Research has shown that it is possible to reinforce literacy activities in preschool by providing a print-rich environment (Miller, 2000).

This chapter briefly outlines the development of two currently prevailing philosophies of early literacy instruction and discusses the different aspects of the reading readiness and emergent literacy approaches: physical environment, social context of literacy instruction, storybook reading, emerging/early reading, emerging/early writing, integration of reading and writing, and teacher beliefs about early literacy instruction.

Historical Perspective

Much of the research on early literacy instruction comes from the United States, thus focusing mainly on native English speakers. However, recently researchers have focused on early literacy instruction also from the perspective of non-native English speakers. While the research studies cited here may apply to Lebanese children's culture, background, and abilities, it needs to be acknowledged that they reflect primarily the research on American children and schools.

Reading Readiness Philosophy

The reading readiness approach was introduced into the American reading instruction during the 1920's. In this approach, literacy skills instruction occurred between the ages of 5-6 when it was assumed that children's biological maturation enabled such instruction. It was assumed that children before the age of 5 cannot learn to read or benefit from direct instruction. Underlying the reading readiness approach was

the belief that children can learn to read only through formal, structured literacy instruction and only with adult assistance (Crawford, 1995). It was believed that preschoolers enter the school environment with no literacy background; therefore, it is the school's job to prepare them for the more formal instruction that will occur in grade one by building the prerequisite skills that will allow a successful transition into grade one. This preparation period usually involved worksheets and abstract literacy activities (Morrow, 1997); the belief being that children learn to read through a development of carefully sequenced isolated skills (Crawford, 1995). Typical strategies included using worksheets to match letters symbols to their picture representation and pictures that rhyme, as well as using flashcards to identify colors, shapes, letters, and words (Miller, 2000). Finally, reading was viewed as a subject and skill by itself, not to be integrated with other subjects or areas (Crawford, 1995).

Emergent Literacy Philosophy

Research over the past 20 years has led many educators to modify their beliefs about early reading instruction (McMahon, Richmond, & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998). While some have continued to support the reading readiness theory, others have changed their way of thinking. During the early phase of this shift of thinking, Clay in 1966 construed the concept of "emergent literacy". She was one of the pioneers of the emergent literacy philosophy, which subscribes to the idea that young children can have early reading and writing experiences even though they cannot read and write in a conventional sense. Clay viewed terminologies such as 'reading readiness' and 'pre-reader' as inaccurate, even demeaning descriptors of children's early literacy behaviors

(Crawford, 1995). According to Clay, emergent literacy is a gradual process that progresses over time, from birth until a child can read and write in the conventional sense with the term emergent literacy more appropriately describing children's gradual growth in early literacy skills. More importantly, Clay recognized writing development and gave it equal importance to reading development, in contrast to the reading readiness view in which writing development was not emphasized. It wasn't until the early 1970's that researchers began studying and documenting young children's writing development, for the first time educators were interested in how writing develops and how it can be further stimulated (Crawford, 1995). This shift led to a move from training students for conventional literacy tasks to providing students with a print-rich environment at an early age.

As researchers' views of emergent literacy have changed over the years from the growing research on literacy, Clay's concept on emergent literacy has grown to include a number of principles as shown in Table 2.1 (p. 10).

Literacy Physical Environment

Characteristics of Print-Rich Classrooms

As all literacy teachers, teachers of ESL children need to create a motivating, comfortable and print-rich environment (McLaughlin, 1995). A literacy-rich environment provides exposure to, enables practice, and promotes children's growth in their second language (Tabors, 1997). In fact, students are more likely to participate actively when provided with reading and writing centers that are attractive and appealing to them (Perry, Nordby, & Vandekamp, 2003). Research has defined an emergent literacy

7

classroom as one that contains library and writing areas with a number of characteristics as shown in Table 2.2 (p. 11).

Print-Rich Environment Is Not Enough

Many educators have misinterpreted the idea of emergent literacy assuming that literacy is intrinsic and presuming that all children naturally develop literacy skills in a print-rich environment. However, in reality literacy is both learned and supported in a print-rich environment (Nielsen & Monson, 1996). McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, and Brook (1999) argue that in addition to providing a print-rich environment teachers need to be trained in effective methods of exposing students to books and print-related materials, such as puppets and story costumes. They found that trained teachers were more likely than non-trained teachers to display books and print props in an attractive, stimulating manner, and read to students more often. Trained teachers also implemented more meaningful book-related activities.

The classroom environment should go beyond exposing young children to print; rather the classroom physical environment needs to provide students with the opportunity to use, build on, and practice acquired literacy skills, as well as to communicate their ideas in a fun and play-like atmosphere. For example, the dramatic center may be set up as a restaurant to allow children to pretend to take friends' orders or to "read" a menu. Such accommodating atmosphere provides students with the opportunity to practice what they know about print in an unstructured surrounding (Roskos & Christie, 2002; Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002). This is especially true when it comes to ESL children who need to observe and explore print in a supportive, non-threatening environment (Braunger et.

8

al., 1998). Adam (1996) also agreed that a print-rich environment is not enough, rather students develop literacy skills through their active involvement in the process of creating print, for example dictating their ideas or opinions to the teacher. Thus, the emergent literacy approach combines both the constructivist and socio-cultural views of learning; a print-rich environment is important, because it encourages children to explore, experiment, and construct their own knowledge, and while interaction between the adult and children enables the adult to scaffold children's learning into the next stage (Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 1999; Braunger, et al., 1998).

Teachers can help children develop literacy naturally by including a variety of opportunities for reading and writing in the classroom and by creating a motivating, supportive, and fun literature-rich classroom environment with literacy-enriched centers and with an abundance of literacy materials (Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002). They must as well guide, motivate, and support students' reading and writing skills. In these literacy-enriched centers children are often observed reading to a doll, scribbling a peers' pretend order, or using invented spelling to write a letter to a loved one (Braunger, et. al., 1998).

Table 2.1

Emergent Literacy Principles

Emergent Literacy Principles	Authors
Literacy begins early in life and continues throughout an individual's life span. Children have contacts with many forms of print from an early age; when a child arrives at school he/she already knows a great deal about language and literacy.	Crawford, 1995; Miller, 2000; Rog, 2001
Reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently (develop together and support one another).	Crawford, 1995; Miller, 2000
Literacy develops from real life situations.	Miller, 2000
Children need to be provided with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills, as well as to develop at their own pace.	Miller, 2000
Children learn literacy skills through active participation in meaningful activities.	Miller, 2000; Crawford, 1995
Literacy skills are reinforced when teachers read daily to their students.	Miller, 2000; Rog, 2001
Learning to read and write is a developmental process, children pass through similar stages in a variety of ways.	Crawford, 1995; Rog, 2001

Table 2.2

Characteristics of Reading and Writing Centers

Characteristics of Literacy Centers	Authors
Clear-defined location and borders.	Roskos & Neuman, 2001
Contains two types of shelves: one type that allows the cover of books to be seen (emphasizes important books) and the other type allows the bulk of books to be seen (where larger number of books are stored).	Morrow, 1997
Large enough to fit 5-7 children.	Roskos & Neuman, 2001
Contains literacy related activities within children's reach; students have easy access to these materials.	Roskos & Neuman, 2001; Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 1999
Comfortable furnishing; rugs, pillows, and rocking chairs can create a comfortable atmosphere for reading.	Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 1999
Large supply of books and literacy-related materials; e.g., books, writing tools, paper, magnetic letters, and a mailbox.	Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 1999
Wide variety of books. Library area should contain a large selection and variety of books; for instance: nursery rhymes, fairy tales, informational books, picture books, books about real life issues, easy-to-read books, wordless books, poetry, and big books.	Morrow, 1997
Books sorted according to specific categories; for instance, all animal books may be identified by a blue mark on the pine, while holiday books may have another color.	Morrow, 1997
Books changed and added every two weeks.	Morrow, 1997

11

Social Structure of Literacy Instruction

Vygotsky (cited in Miller, 2000) stressed on the importance of exposing children to literacy occurring within their social context, as well as engaging and involving them in literacy. Social interaction also provides ESL children with important opportunities to explore, practice, and experiment with the new language (McLaughlin, 1995). Tabors (1997) acknowledged that whereas an environment which does not encourage a child to explore and experiment with the second language will hinder the learning process, an environment that encourages the use of the new language will aid in language growth. Because of the social nature of English as a second language learning researchers recommend the implementation of literacy instruction in small-groups. As Tabors point out, ESL learners' needs, interests, and abilities may be more effectively catered for during small-group literacy instruction, during which ESL children learn about the new language by observing adults and peers engaging in literacy activities, as well as by being involved in exploring and using the new language themselves.

Whole-Class versus Small-Group Literacy Instruction

Even though research has acknowledged the importance of small-group instruction as compared to whole class instruction, teachers today continue to implement reading and writing activities involving the entire class (e.g., Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). For instance, Nielsen and Monson (1996) found that in reading readiness classrooms more time was spent on whole class instruction, while in emergent literacy classroom there was more focus on small group and one-to-one instruction. Taylor et al. (2002) and Taylor et al. (2000) observed

whole class instruction as being more common in the Kindergarten setting even though students benefited more from literacy instruction occurring in small-groups. Whole-class instruction does not provide students with the opportunity to comprehend and practice new skills, especially when it comes to struggling students (Chard & Kameenui, 2000; Greenwood, Tapia, Abbott, & Walton, 2003). Teachers who focused on small-group instruction were more aware of students' needs and more able to scaffold and guide students' learning (Taylor et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2000). In contrast, Pianta, et. al. (2002) and Belsky et al. (2002) discovered that teachers who often implemented whole-group instruction were more teacher-centered in their instruction. The researchers concluded that schools and early childhood educators are not keeping up with nor implementing practices consonant with research findings.

Factors that Hinder Small-Group Instruction

Research has also sought to understand why literacy instruction occurs in the manner that it does. For instance, Ketner, Smith, and Parnell (1997) found that the social structure of literacy instruction was directly determined by the number of students in a given classroom; teachers with more than twenty students had to resort to whole class and teacher-directed instruction to get the job done. Other studies concluded that the social structure of literacy instruction is directly determined by the complexity of the activity itself. For example, O'Connor, Notari-Syverson, and Vadasy (1996) and Morrow, Tracey, Gee Woo, and Pressley (1999) discovered that when early childhood educators implemented whole class, small group, and one-to-one literacy instruction, the number of students involved in literacy activities was determined by the complexity of the activity.

13

That is, teachers implemented activities that required modeling and explicit instruction such as phonological awareness activities in small-groups, and simpler activities such as story reading in whole-class.

Storybook Reading

Print Awareness

Before children can learn to read any language, they first need to become aware that printed words and sentences have meaning and carry a message. Children learn about this awareness from a variety of sources, such as books, signs, labels, logos, and so on. They also learn about directionality, that text in English begins at the top of the page, moves from left to right, and continues as pages are turned one by one. While knowledge about print enables children to understand the structure of language, it also helps children understand that spoken language can be presented on paper through words and sentences. Children also learn that letters have names and produce specific sounds (Rog, 2001; Clay, 1998). Because print awareness is a prerequisite for learning to read and write, teachers need to nurture it through meaningful, developmentally appropriate activities such as storybook reading and discussions about books (Kaderavek & Justice, 2000).

Print Awareness and Storybook Reading

Reading to students is an effective way to enhance among other things, students' concept of print, phonological awareness, and vocabulary (Adams, 1996; Yaden, et al., 2000; Rog, 2001; Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Research studies comparing children who are read to daily for long periods of time and those not regularly read to

reveal that students who are regularly read to achieve higher on vocabulary, comprehension, and reading tasks (Morrow, & Gambrell, 2001). In Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampton's (1998) study, students rated as high-achievers came from classrooms with a wide variety of texts, whereas students rated as low-achievers were enrolled in classrooms where students had limited exposure to texts. Similarly, Denton and West (1999) found that children who were read to three times a week before Kindergarten were more likely to succeed in learning initial and final letter-sound correspondence and print awareness skills by the end of their Kindergarten year. Also, they developed better reading skills by grade one, as compared to their peers who were read to less than three times a week before Kindergarten.

McLaughlin (1995) argues that storybook reading is essential when it comes to young ESL children, especially with children that lack exposure to the English language at home. Similarly, McGill-Franzen, Lanford, and Adams (2002) stressed the importance of exposing young children, especially ESL children, to large quantity of books and daily reading to them more than one book. The study concluded that frequently sharing books with ESL children is one of the most effective ways to help these children develop literacy skills at an early age.

Interactions during Storybook Reading

Storybook reading takes on additional significance in light of research studies which indicate that the benefits of story reading comes from the teacher-student interaction such as, book related discussions and literacy activities related to the book. Hence, it is how teachers read to students that has a significant influence on their literacy

15

development (Belsky et al., 2002; Adams 1996). For instance, Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) compared three distinct forms of teacher-reading style: teachers who read without asking questions or generating discussions; teachers who read and then encouraged students to discuss the book after they finished reading the story; and teachers who encouraged students to discuss words and concepts before, during, and after book reading. Results showed that teachers who encouraged discussion before, during, and after the story enhanced students' vocabulary and comprehension development, while teachers who read without initiating discussions produced the least vocabulary and comprehension development in their students. Ukrainetz, Cooney, Dyer, Kysar, and Harris (2000) recommend that book discussions should come from the students' ideas and questions.

Even though research has shown the significance of a collaborative teacher-child interaction during the book reading process in enhancing print awareness, in practice few early childhood educators seem to implement such a dual communication. For instance, McGill- Franzen, Lanford, and Adams (2002) found that only few early childhood educators promoted storybook discussions before, during, and after the book reading experience. In their study only two out of five teachers encouraged an open-ended communication, while other teachers promoted limited interaction. Similarly, Girolametto, et al. (2000) and Taylor, et al. (2002) reported that during book reading activities preschool teachers expected students to listen and answer closed questions with one correct answer. These interactions were dominated by the teacher, focused on the whole-group, and promoted limited conversation. Barone (2002) presents a similar perspective, indicating that book discussions are controlled by the teachers; teachers

focused is on transmitting knowledge to the students rather than promoting an open discussion that would expose students to new vocabulary. Block and Mangieri (2002) also reported that few teachers in their study used books to reinforce phonological and phonemic awareness skills and few teachers were aware of the importance of book reading and discussion in children's daily lives. Therefore, Taylor, et al. (2000) and Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez (2002) defined effective teachers as those who employ high-quality questions during book discussions, for example questions that enhance critical thinking as related to students' feelings or personal experiences.

Reading Books is not enough

In 2000, Fang revealed that book discussions about the author, story characters, setting, and plot, and students' reflections are not enough to develop print awareness. Rather, young children need to gain awareness that oral language can be represented on paper through letters, letter clusters, and words. Therefore, McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, and Brook (1999) recommend that teachers receive training in effective reading aloud strategies. They found that students who came from classrooms where teachers had received training in reading techniques were read to more by their teachers and scored higher on letter naming, phonemic awareness, and writing assessments as compared to students that received limited book exposure experiences.

Early/Emerging Reading

Much of the research on early reading instruction has focused mainly on native English speakers; however recently researchers have focused on early literacy instruction

also from the perspective of non-native English speakers. Therefore, research studies focusing on native English speakers dominate studies which focus on Kindergartners learning English as a second language. Even though research studies cited here reflect research on fluent English speakers, the recommended reading instruction and strategies may be adapted to meet the needs and backgrounds of ESL learners.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Phonological and phonemic awareness are important elements of early/emergent reading. Phonological awareness is defined as the ability to recognize and manipulate "larger parts of the spoken language" (p. 3), whereas phonemic awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate single sounds or phonemes in the spoken language (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Both phonological and phonemic awareness skills are prerequisites for future reading development and success. While some phonological and phonemic awareness skills develop before children learn formal reading, others develop after the child can actually read. Further, since phonological awareness skills range in difficulty they cannot be acquired by all Kindergarteners (Adams, 1996). Hence, in order for students to develop phonological and phonemic awareness skills they need time and opportunities to practice these skills, in playful, non-threatening literacy activities occurring in small groups or one-to-one base (Lane, Pullen, Eiselle, & Jordan, 2002).

Kindergartners and Phonemic Awareness

There is now proof that young children can be trained in phonological and phonemic awareness and that such training enhances children's future reading and spelling skills. For instance, rhyme helps children develop an awareness of the

phonological structure of words by enhancing children's sensitivity to sounds in words (Majsterek, Shorr, & Erion, 2000; Hayes, 2001; Hayes, 1999). Cafouleas and Martens (2002) showed that although sound blending and deleting tasks were too difficult for Kindergarten students, sound segmentation, phonics, and rhyme tasks had a positive affect on kindergarten students' literacy achievement. Similarly, Ukrainetz, et. al. (2000) found that while sound deletion was too difficult, Kindergarteners benefited from phoneme recognition and segmentation tasks. Thus, schools need to develop an age-appropriate curriculum consisting of expectations that can be met by the students.

Learning to Read and Phonemic Awareness

Phonological and phonemic awareness are important in learning to read and write; phonemic awareness being the base of phonics (Savage, 2001). Before children can break up phonemes to read or put together phonemes to write, they first need to be aware of phonemes in the spoken language. Phonological and phonemic awareness tasks expose children to early reading skills that help them become more successful readers. "Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how the sounds in words work. They must understand that words are made up of speech sounds or phonemes" (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 2). It is recommended that early childhood educators expose young students to phonological awareness skills from as early as possible, as long as such literacy instruction is modified and adapted to fit students' needs and development (Abbott, 2000). Because it is difficult for children to recognize and perceive sounds in spoken words (especially vowels as compared to consonants), teachers need to help children gain awareness of the sounds or sound clusters in words (Clay, 1998).

Many research studies have shown that phonemic awareness is a strong indicator of a child's future reading success whereas learning to recite the alphabet does not help children learn to read (Rog, 2001). Children who lack phonemic awareness are at risk for future reading failure. For instance, Snider (1997), Majsterek, Shorr, and Erion (2000), Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, and Ary (2000), and Kjeldsen, Niemi, and Olofsson (2003) revealed that both future reading success and problems may be detected from Kindergarten; failure to acquire phonemic awareness skills in Kindergarten may be a predictor of reading difficulties in elementary. Children who have strong phonemic awareness skills are likely to have easier time learning to read and spell than children who have few or none of these skills.

Context of phonemic instruction. Phonemic awareness instruction occurring in holistic, contextualized lessons is more likely to enhance students' application of these skills (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). For example, when Qi and O'Connor (2000) trained students in phonological awareness skills in an isolated context through flashcards, their findings supported Adams's (1996) study which showed that Kindergarteners did not benefit from the ten week training sessions; their phonological awareness skills remained below the recommended percentage. Thus, the researchers recommended that for literacy programs to be effective, phonological awareness skills should be integrated into the classroom setting in a meaningful, child-centered approach. Similarly, Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, and Ary (2000) also acknowledge the importance of a phonemic awareness program occurring in a meaningful context. They implemented contextualized literacy training using texts; results of the study revealed that ESL children's phonological awareness skills improved. Presenting literacy skills within

meaningful experiences is equally essential and effective for both ESL children and native English speakers; such experiences foster pleasure of reading and writing as a means to communicate ideas, feelings, and experiences (McLaughlin, 1995).

Explicit versus implicit phonemic awareness instruction. Some educators view the process of learning to read as natural and that children learn to read in the way they learn to speak; however, most children need explicit instruction in phonics in order to learn to read (Braunger et al., 1998). As Morrow (1997) puts it in her book *Literacy Development in the Early Years: Helping Children Read and Write*:

> As we have spent a few years exploring these ideas, we have come to realize that some of the old can blend and indeed is needed along with the new. Explicit instruction is important for most children. However, this type of instruction needs to be directed at the needs of individuals and to be a small part of the literacy program (p. 139).

She further points out that meaningful, holistic instruction does not imply that literacy skills are taught spontaneously as situations arise. Even though the emergent literacy approach stresses the importance of reading and writing through a literature-based curriculum, the emergent literacy approach also supports explicit and teacher-directed literacy activities, as long as activities meet the needs of students, are meaningful, and take place in a small-group stetting or one-to-one instruction.

Justice and Pullen (2003) acknowledge that ESL children also need the exposure to phonological awareness and emerging writing instruction occurring in an explicit and holistic program. Therefore, an effective reading program is one that uses age-appropriate, fun, hands-on, holistic, systematic, explicit phonological awareness and

phonics instructions that are integrated into children's daily experiences with language, literature, and writing (Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, & Pianta, 2001).

Preschoolers enter school with varying experiences; some may have been exposed to print, while others may have some or no experiences with print. For instance, upon entering Kindergarten some children may already know some or even most of letter names, while others may know none. Students with limited exposure to print need more time and opportunity to learn. The level, pace, and nature of phonological and phonemic awareness instruction should vary from one child to another, catering to individual differences (Adams, 1996). Because letter-sound correspondence are not easily remembered and can be confusing to young children, teachers need to start from the beginning and provide instruction according to each child's abilities and follow his/her pace, in other words, to go as slow or fast as needed.

Knowledge of Letters of the Alphabet

Phonics instruction begins with the knowledge of the letters in the alphabet. Similarly to phonological and phonemic awareness, knowledge of letters and sounds of the alphabet has been correlated with reading success (Savage, 2001). While it is recommended that early childhood educators expose young students to letters of the alphabet from as early as possible (Abbott, 2000), programs which combine both letter names and sounds in the preschool level seem to help children become successful readers by grade one (McGill-Franzen, Lanford, & Adams, 2002). When Huba and Ramisetty-Mikler (1995) compared "early readers" (those that learned to read before Kindergarten) and "nonearly reader" from Kindergarten through grade two, their results indicated that

"early readers" differed from "nonearly readers" by their ability to perform better on early reading skills, such as naming letters, recognizing letter-sound, phonic awareness, and recognizing some sight words. Furthermore, "early readers" maintained their advantage over "nonearly readers" in reading achievement throughout elementary.

Learning Letter-Names is not enough

Learning letter names and sounds is not enough to learn to read. Children between the ages of 3 to 5 may be able to name all letters of the alphabet and may recognize all sounds letters produces, yet this does not guarantee that they comprehend the purpose of print and understand that letters produce sounds that make up words (Bialystok, 1991). Children need to learn to use literacy as a means to communicate ideas (Whitehead, 2002); therefore letter symbols and sounds are only a small part of a literacy program that consists of explicit, holistic phonics instruction. In order for children to decode words they need to be comfortable with letter-sound associations, as well as be exposed to a large vocabulary. Thus, literacy activities need to go beyond letter and sound associations; rather direct, hands-on experiences are more likely to enhance children's understanding of letters and words (Adams, 1996).

Sight Words

Sight word acquisition has been included into many early childhood education curricula for two essential reasons. First, the familiarity with a vast number of sight words promotes fluency in reading. Second, "many words that children encounter in their early reading and writing experiences do not have a consistent one-to-one sound-symbol relationship that make them easy to sound out" (e.g., is, was, has, said) (Savage, 2001, p.

150). Some researchers support sight word recognition strategies, others support sight word identification strategies, and still other researchers recommend children's exposure to both sight word recognition and identification strategies.

Sight word recognition is simply recognizing or being able to pick out a word immediately when it is located with other similar appearing words. On the other hand, sight word identification is being able to identify or pronounce (actually say) a word immediately when it is encountered while reading. (Miller, 2000, p. 111)

Teaching Emergent Reading

Some research studies compared and contrasted various literacy strategies and approaches. For instance, Ukrainetz, et. al. (2000) revealed that Kindergarteners who attended an emergent literacy classroom, where they were taught phonemic awareness skills that occurred in a natural context through shared reading and writing activities benefited more than their peers in the reading readiness classroom. Similarly Freppon and McIntyre (1999) found that students in whole language classrooms developed more effective reading skills as compared to their peers in reading readiness classrooms. When Juel and Minden-Cupp (1998) also compared different approaches to teaching early literacy, they documented four different literacy approaches to teaching grade-one students with poor reading and writing skills. One Teacher implemented a whole-language approach, another combined a rigid style of both the phonics and whole-language approaches, the third implemented a literature-based approach, and the fourth implemented a balanced approach. Results indicated the following:

In May of first grade, children in Classroom 4 were reading on a late-second-grade level; children in Classroom 3 were reading on a mid-second-grade level; children in Classroom 2 were reading at an end-of-first-grade level; and children in Classroom 1 were reading at a primer level (p. 23).

The researchers concluded that an effective literacy program should include the following elements: teacher modeling reading and writing skills, concrete literacy activities, invented spelling, and small-group instruction that tailors the abilities of different students in the classroom.

Similarly ESL children can become literate best in a child-centered, meaningful, child-initiated, and holistic approach (Tabors, 1997). Fox (2001) and Short, Kane, and Peeling (2000) found that when teachers introduced literacy skills in a meaningful approach, e.g., during shared reading and modeling reading strategies in small groups, students were encouraged to exchange ideas and practice pre-reading skills. In related work, Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000) conducted research in 14 schools across the United States focusing on Kindergarten to third grade. They found that most "effective" teachers supplemented explicit phonics instruction in small-groups, used coaching to promote self-learning, modeled reading strategies used in everyday reading, asked higher-level questions, and promoted independent reading.

Early/Emerging Writing

Another route to print and phonological awareness is through writing or invented spelling. Even though children develop at different rates, they all pass through similar stages of writing development. Writing begins with "scribbling", and then moves to

creating "letter-like forms", followed by "invented spelling", and finally more "conventional" writing develops. An effective literacy program provides students with varied instruction that support their particular developmental stage (Rog, 2001). Awareness of children's writing stage allows teachers to plan effective and appropriate activities based on students' needs, abilities, and interests. For instance, if a child is currently in the invented spelling stage the teacher's goal is to provide him/her with age and individual appropriate and stimulating activities in order for the child to eventually with time move to the conventional spelling stage (Ahmed & Lombardino, 2000). Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez (2002) characterize effective teachers as those who promote free writing using invented spelling and least effective teachers as those who write for the students, e.g., writing the morning message and then directing students to recite what was written, rather than promoting students' involvement during the writing process.

Invented Spelling

Today, many open-ended strategies are implemented with Kindergarteners that aim at promoting invented spelling and writing skills.

Writing Workshop

Rog (2001) supports the idea of teaching students to self-select a topic, write about it using invented spelling, and edit their final draft. Rog further suggests that teachers should encourage Kindergarten students to consider some basic rules as writing. For instance, begin a sentence with a capital letter, end a sentence with a punctuation mark, and leave spaces between words. In conclusion, effective writing workshops are

those that combine invented spelling with phonemic awareness instruction and word study.

Shared, Interactive, and Independent Writing

Children also learn about writing through shared, interactive, and independent writing. Shared writing aims at exposing young children to grammatical rules, story structure, and conventional spelling, during which the teacher uses a large text to teach letters, words, or sentences. During interactive writing both the teacher and students take turns writing on a large chart, and the teacher usually scaffolds and guides students as they write. During independent writing students independently participate in open-ended writing activities (Fox, 2001).

McMahon, Richmond, and Reeves-Kazelskis (1998) have shown that Kindergarteners in emergent literacy classrooms are provided with more time and opportunity to write daily, using invented spelling. On the other hand, preschoolers in reading readiness classrooms did not participate in any meaningful writing opportunities. Similarly, Nielsen and Monson (1996) noted that in reading readiness classrooms more than half of the time was spent on worksheets and paper and pencil tasks, whereas in emergent literacy classrooms most of the time was spent on both modeling writing and invented spelling opportunities. It appears that emergent literacy programs tend to encourage independent writing occurring in meaningful, enjoyable, and interesting activities (Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 1999).

Integration of Reading and Writing

27

From an emergent literacy perspective, reading and writing are interrelated processes that cannot and should not be taught separately. Phonemic awareness has an effect on invented spelling, just like invented spelling has an effect on phonemic awareness. Children who receive instruction in phonemic awareness become better writers and spellers, similar to children who receive instruction in invented spelling become better readers (Tangel & Blachman, 1992). Richgels (1995) examined 119 Kindergarten children's ability to identify letter names, as well as their writing (invented spelling) and reading abilities (reading words). None of the participating children received any phonemic awareness instruction prior to or during the study. The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between invented spelling and reading abilities. The researcher concluded that learning letter names, developing invented spelling skills, and reading words are not linear processes. Even though children categorized as "poor", "medium", and "good inventive spellers" at the beginning of the study could write more words than they were actually able to read, with time "good inventive spellers" became more advanced readers. In other words, there is a high correlation between phonemic awareness and invented spelling, with "inventive spellers" being able to apply their current sound knowledge to both writing and reading.

Teachers' Beliefs about Early Literacy Instruction

Teachers' beliefs about how children learn to read and write are gaining attention more than ever due to their recognized influence on classroom practice (McMahon, Richmond, & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998). This section summarizes the rather limited number of research studies that have compared teachers' beliefs with their practice.

Teacher Beliefs and its Influence on Practice

Many research studies reveal a high correlation between teachers' perceptions about how students learn to read and write and the literacy instruction they implement in their classroom, educators practices reflect their beliefs. When McMahon, Richmond, and Reeves-Kazelskis (1998) and Nielsen and Monson (1996) compared the beliefs and practices of teachers they found that teachers holding an emergent literacy view involved students in meaningful literacy activities, whereas those that adhered to reading readiness philosophy provided de-contextualized literacy activities and skills. Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, and Pianta (2001), Nolen, (2001), Vartuli, (1999), Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosley, and Fleege (1993), Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1991), and Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) also studied the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice. All six studies concluded that most of the participating teachers did implement their reported beliefs. For instance, Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, and Pianta (2001) found that most of the preschool teachers believed that writing and letter recognition are not important skills to be taught in preschool; therefore, writing and letter recognition activities were rarely observed.

Some research studies have searched for explanations to why teachers' beliefs and practices do not sometimes complement each other. For instance, Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) acknowledged that in the few cases where teachers did not implement their beliefs, they were influenced by a shift in beliefs they were undergoing. Because these teachers were going through a process of change, their literacy practices were slowly changing and thus did not yet reflect their new beliefs. However, Vartuli

(1999) and Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1991) report that even though some teachers claim to have beliefs and practices that matched, in reality they attempted to provide the researchers with information that seemed more acceptable and appropriate than what actually occurred in their classroom and what they actually believed.

School's Literacy Philosophy and its Influence on Teacher Practice

Sometimes teachers are also required by supervisors, parents, or their district to implement practices that do not correspond to their beliefs (Vartuli, 1999). Research studies show that the type of literacy instruction implemented in a given classroom is usually correlated with the school's philosophy more than with the teacher's personal view on how children learn to read and write. In fact, the early childhood educator may hold a contradictory view to that of the school. For instance, Bridge, Compton-Hall, and Cantrell (1997) revealed that even though teachers in their study reinforced writing development through invented spelling, some of the sample group felt that students may never learn writing skills unless exposed to worksheets and literacy instruction occurring in an isolated context. Similarly, Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampton (1998) noted that teachers who implemented effective literacy strategies and those who implemented the least effective strategies, both believed that reading and writing develops with age and maturation.

Teacher Background

Some studies correlated the type of literacy instruction with educators' teaching experience. For instance, teachers in Fox's (2001) study claimed that their teaching

practices were influenced by their teaching experience, rather than knowledge of most recent research and strategies. In the same vain, Cassidy and Lawrence (2000) found that teachers defended their current classroom practices by referring to their teaching experience, rather than theoretical knowledge of appropriate and effective strategies. The researchers concluded that it was not clear whether the teachers lacked knowledge and theory or that experience was easier to recall and attain.

Several studies in fact, have concluded that many teachers lack skills, knowledge, and education to implement meaningful and developmentally appropriate literacy activities. For instance, Block and Mangieri (2002) found that teachers lacked knowledge of activities that would reinforce reading skills as seventeen percent of educators in their study could not name one activity that enhances reading skills. In Troyer and Yopp's (1990) study, which documented 150 Kindergarten teachers' knowledge of the term 'emergent literacy' found that 51 percent of teachers categorized as least experienced (1-5 years of teaching experience) were aware of the term emergent literacy and its implications in the classroom as compared to 24 percent of teachers with 16 to 30 years of experience. Kindergarten teachers who were familiar with the term emergent literacy had limited teaching experience but had recently completed their Master's degree in Education.

Conclusion

The review of the literature suggests that early childhood literacy experiences affect successful reading and writing acquisition. To summarize, an effective early literacy program, whether teaching native or non-native English speakers, is one that

incorporates the following aspects: 1) a print-rich literacy environments as evident from a variety of books, literacy materials and props, as well as meaningful and real literacy activities; 2) literacy activities and instruction that occur often in small-groups; 3) daily reading a variety of books to students, as well as promoting effective discussions before, during, and after book reading; 4) exposing children to meaningful, holistic, and explicit reading and writing instruction; 5) providing children with opportunity and time to construct texts and explore writing (e.g., writing workshops, shared, interactive, and independent writing); 6) planning for lessons and activities that connect reading and writing.

The review of literature further indicated that research studies on the degree to which teachers' practices reflect their beliefs is still inconclusive. Some research suggests that teachers' practices were influenced by the school's philosophy, while other research correlates teachers' practice with their beliefs. Some studies found that teachers' practice is influenced by the level of the teachers' education, whereas others pointed to teaching experience as the determining factor.

This literature review has attempted to present an overview of the features of the emergent literacy approach, as well as to explore teacher practice and beliefs. Although research shows that teachers' classroom practice generally match their beliefs about how children learn to read and write the school philosophy may, at times, prevent teachers from implementing their preferred approach.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

There is limited research that has compared the beliefs and practices of early childhood educators as most of teacher beliefs and practice research has looked at elementary and secondary teachers (McMullen, 1997). No research studies up to now have investigated Lebanese teachers' beliefs and practices as regarding literacy instruction. This case study aimed at examining the beliefs and literacy instruction practices of two Lebanese Kindergarten teachers of children learning English as a second language. The purpose of this study was to discover what is happening in these two classrooms and also to examine the extent to which teachers' beliefs coincided with their teaching practice. The study examined questions concerning teacher beliefs about literacy instruction, as well as self-reported and observed practices, and the relationship between their beliefs and practice. (Operational definitions are included in Appendix C as all terms were defined in Chapter Two.)

Research Questions

The research questions investigated two basic aspects: A) teachers' classroom literacy practices and B) their beliefs about literacy instruction.

A. Teacher Practice

Question 1: What kind of print environment does the teacher provide?

Question 2: In what social contexts does literacy instruction occur?

Question 3: What type of literacy strategies does the teacher employ?

Question 4: What connections does the teacher make between reading and writing?

B. *Teacher Beliefs*

Question 5: What are the teacher beliefs about how early literacy should be taught and reinforced, and what strategies does the teacher perceive as being most effective to teach early reading and writing?

Question 6: Is the teacher aware of recognized effective strategies in shaping children's future reading and writing skills?

Question 7: What does the teacher perceive to have influenced her current beliefs?

Question 8: Is there a match between the teacher's reported beliefs and her practice?

Method

An exploratory case study was conducted in order to begin to develop a picture of Lebanese teachers' beliefs and practices regarding literacy instruction. Case studies are "the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 1). The researcher first collected data about how literacy practices occurred in the two classrooms, and attempted to gain insight into why some practices may or may not correspond to participants' beliefs. The aim was to document literacy practices of the two teachers and to compare these practices

with their beliefs. No attempts were made to label the teachers' practices as effective or not, to compare the two teachers, or to make generalizations. The researcher did not attempt to influence the environment or teacher practice and beliefs, observing participants in their natural setting.

The question of sample selection is "a perennial worry of many qualitative or case study researchers," as Silverman (2003, p. 103) says. Purposive sampling was used in the present study to identify the two teachers in Lebanon; roughly half of the student population is enrolled in public schools, with the other half in private schools. Since the researcher had easy access of the new private school where she works, she identified a new public school in the same part of the city. Following Bryman (1988, p. 91), the researcher was not concerned so much about the two teachers and their classrooms as being typical, but rather about how these teachers' beliefs and practices could be said to reflect those of early literacy teachers as large.

A meeting with the supervisors of each school was scheduled during which the researcher explained the purpose of the study and secured access. The supervisors were asked to recommend one teacher in their school willing to participate and contribute to the study, head KG 2 teacher teaching in English, and holder of a BA or BS degree in education.

Participants

Two professionally trained Kindergarten (KG 2) teachers in two different schools in Beirut participated in this study. To keep the identities of the participating teachers

confidential, the private school teacher will be referred to as Mss. X and the public school teacher will be referred to as Mss. Y.

Mss. X taught in a new private school in Beirut. It was her first year teaching KG 2. In her early twenties, she was a recent graduate from a local university with a B.A. in Early Childhood Education.

Mss. Y taught in a new public school in Beirut. Mss. Y was also teaching KG 2 for the first time but had ten years experience in a daycare setting. In her early thirties, Mss. Y had a B.A. in Early Childhood Education from the same university as Mss. X. Both teachers taught children whose mother tongue was Arabic, with English being their second language. In Mss. X's class, there was also one child whose mother tongue was Korean.

Data Collection Procedures

The primary data source consisted of observations made throughout a two-month period. The observations were further supported with a literacy environment assessment as well as structured and semi-structured interviews with the teachers. At the onset of the study, the researcher administered a structured interview to each teacher. She then completed the Literacy Physical Environment Rubric and collected field notes over 8 observation sessions. The data collection phase concluded with a semi-structured, in-depth interview with the teachers.

Literacy Physical Environment Rubric

The Literacy Physical Environment Rubric was developed based on Morrow's (1997) recommendations for a print-rich environment (Appendix A3). The rubric has three categories: library, writing, and listening centers. It is a 6-point rating scale, where the rating ranges form 0 (none apparent) to 5 (abundant). It aims at describing the quality of the literacy physical environment and quantity of relevant materials in each of the classrooms being observed.

Teacher Structured Interview

In the beginning of the study, the researcher met with both teachers to administer a face-to-face structured interview. This meeting provided the researcher with the opportunity to explain the purpose of the study and to explain the researcher's role during classroom observations. There is great disagreement related to whether or not the researcher should reveal the purpose of the study and to what extent or depth the purpose should be revealed. For example, Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) suggest that once aware of the purpose of the study, participants tend to change their practice to meet the researcher's purpose, giving the researcher a false image of the day-to-day practice in the classroom. Hence, they recommend that the researcher not inform participants of the true purpose of the study until the end of the data collection phase. Others believe that participants should be provided with limited information about the purpose, while some propose that the purpose should be discussed and shared with participants openly (Oishi, 2003). Since keeping the truth from participants would be unethical, the researcher in this study provided participants with a general purpose of the study, but in a way as not to disclose what the researcher expected or wanted to see: "This study is designed to gather

information about KG teachers' classroom practice and personal beliefs about literacy instruction."

The interview provided the researcher with introductory information about the teachers' personal profile, classroom structure (classroom setup, number of students, length of day, etc.), teacher's beliefs, school philosophy, and basic instruction about teacher practice. In other words, the researcher gained some knowledge about the type of program and instruction implemented in each classroom, as well as about teachers' perceptions about their classroom practice and beliefs.

The structured interview also provided the researcher with aspects to focus on during the observations (e.g., structure of literacy activities and beliefs that were implemented) as well as aspects to be clarified during the later semi-structured interview (e.g., self-reported practices that were not observed during the observation sessions). In summary, the structured interview helped the researcher answer "what" questions. Complementary to the structured interview, field notes and the semi-structured interview helped the researcher expand on the "what" questions (e.g., what is the sequence of the language arts block in each classroom?), as well as to answer "how" (e.g., how are early reading and writing strategies implemented in each classroom?) and "why" questions (e.g., why does the classroom lack a print-rich environment? Why does the teacher's practices and beliefs match or do not match?). Finally, the structured interview indirectly stimulated participants' thinking of the addressed topic, thus preparing them for the semi-structured, in-depth interview later on.

Both respondents were given the same set of questions in the same sequence (Appendix A2). The interviewer asked the questions orally and jotted down the

respondent's comments on the interview guide accordingly (Oishi, 2003). This interview was not audio taped as the respondents were not yet familiar with the interviewer. As some of the questions (9, 10, and 12) were rather detailed, participants were given a written copy of the questions with a set of possible responses. The response options for these questions were explained by the researcher as to avoid any misinterpretation and misunderstanding. This interview did not provide participants with an opportunity to explain why they selected a certain answer or to expand on their responses (Burns, 2000). However, the semi-structured, in-depth interview conducted at the end of the data collection phase gave participants the chance to explain their practice and beliefs (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

The structured interview guideline (Appendix A2) is divided into four sections: 1) personal profile of each participant, 2) description of the classroom structure, 3) teacher's beliefs about the teaching of reading and writing, and 4) school's approach to teaching reading and writing. As indicated, the structured interview consisted of mostly closed questions with the primary aim being to classify teacher practices and beliefs as "emergent literacy", "reading readiness", or "eclectic".

Observations

The researcher conducted observations in the two classrooms in order to document teacher practices evident. Field notes were collected in order to note participants' actions and speech as much as possible, as well as to describe the environment in which the interactions were taking place. Thus, field notes served to document observable aspects of interaction and behavior (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), to

identify and describe literacy instruction occurring in each of the two classrooms, and to gain a clearer picture as related to how each teacher taught and introduced literacy skills; in other words, the language art routines, instructions, and activities. The observations also aimed at determining whether teachers' self-reported practices matched their actual practice.

From late February to late April the two Kindergarten classrooms were observed once a week, a total of eight times each during the language art block, each observation lasting an hour and a half. During classroom observations, the observer took detailed field notes to capture as much of the activities and speech of the teachers and students as possible. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) recommend non-participant observation over participant observation as non-participant observers are more likely to gain a clearer picture of what goes on in the classroom. This technique of data collection allows the researcher to record the actual behavior of participants in their natural setting, allowing the researcher to gain deeper understanding of participants' actions and interactions without influencing them. Based on Fraenkel and Wallen's (2003) recommendation, the observer was seated in a location that allowed her to clearly see and hear the teacher and students. The observer did not participate or interact with the teacher or students unless approached; however when asked a question the observer briefly answered it.

Since the presence of an observer in a given classroom may have an effect on the behavior, actions, and interactions of participants being observed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003), the researcher began recording observations only after three observation sessions, after which the participants had become more comfortable with the presence of the researcher.

Another disadvantage of observation is the researcher's subjectivity in recording the data. To limit subjectivity, the researcher compared information reported by participants in the interviews with the field notes. She also developed a more objective Teacher Observation Form (Appendix A1) derived and based on literacy strategies recommended by Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999, p. 475). The observation instrument is divided into two sections: The first provides space to record information about the context of observation. The second section provides space for a running record of what is going on, including samples of teachers' and students' speech.

Teacher Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interview

A semi-structured, in-depth, audio-taped interview was conducted at the end of the eight observation sessions. During the interview participants were encouraged to elaborate on and explain their school's approach along with their personal approach to early literacy instruction and to describe what they perceived occurred in their classrooms. Through this interview, the researcher was able to better understand the teachers' behavior and attain a more coherent picture of the classrooms' literacy environment, social structure, and program, as well as to achieve a better understanding of the teachers' beliefs. The interview also enabled the researcher to gain clearer insight into aspects noted during the structured interview and to help the researcher better understand the reasons behind observed literacy practices (Seidman, 1991). As Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) put it, "Interviewing (i.e., the careful asking of relevant questions) is an important way for a researcher to check the accuracy of - to verify or refute – the impressions he or she has gained through observations" (p. 455). Further, the semi-

structured interview provided deeper insights into participants' perceptions, feelings, and beliefs, and complemented the observations by revealing aspects that could not be directly observed. Finally, the in-depth interview also presented the respondents with the opportunity to clarify their observed practices and self-reported beliefs; to explain why they implement a specific strategy or why they feel a certain way about an issue (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

The semi-structured interviews revolved around guiding questions and occurred in a conversation-like manner; questions were open-ended and did not need to be asked in a specific order (Burns, 2000). Therefore, the interviewer was able to manipulate, refine, and expand on the questions; each question was constructed from the respondent's previous answer.

While having its advantages, a semi-structured interview also has some drawbacks. First, the reaction of the interviewee cannot be predicted as "the respondent may be pleased to contribute, or frightened, or irritated because of the time take" (Bassey, 1999, p. 81). Further, the answers to the interview questions may not be honest and truthful but rather relative to what the interviewee perceives as being more appropriate than what actually is occurring in the classroom or what he/she honestly beliefs. Finally, the interviewee is put on the spot and forced to answer questions within limited time, without the opportunity to critically think about and explore the questions (Bassey, 1999). Several safeguards were adopted to limit these drawbacks. To begin with, the interview was scheduled a week in advance, during a time and day convenient to the interviewee, with the aim of helping the participants feel more comfortable and react more positively to the interview (Darlington & Scott, 2002). To verify the participants' consistency of self-

reported beliefs and practice, their answers were compared and contrasted with their responses on the structured interview and the researchers' field notes. Also, the structured interview had indirectly prepared participants to think about issues that may be discussed during the interview.

The interview was audio-taped even though the presence of a tape recorder may have a negative effect on the interviewee, causing discomfort, stress, and nervousness. However, tape recording enabled a natural flow of conversation, and provided the interviewer with the opportunity to focus on the participants' gestures, body movements, and facial expression, rather than spending the interview time recording as much as possible of the conversation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Bassey, 1999). The interview guide (Appendix A4) consists of a set of questions derived from the Literature Review and was designed to explore teachers' literacy practices, the strategies they employ, and their beliefs about literacy instruction, as well as their school's literacy philosophy.

Data Analysis Methods

To analyze the data, the structured interviews, field notes, and audio-taped semi-structured interviews were transcribed and turned into text documents, a procedure similar to those recommended by Seidman (1991) and Burns (2000). Then the respondents' statements were cut-out, sorted, and filed into folders with corresponding labels. Statements were sorted into categories derived from the Literature Review: (1) literacy physical environment, (2) social context of literacy instruction, (3) storybook reading, (4) early/emerging reading, (5) early/emerging writing, (6) integration of reading and writing, (7) teacher beliefs about literacy instruction. For instance, all statements

describing writing strategies implemented in a specific classroom were placed in an envelope labeled early/emerging writing, and the same procedure was applied to the remaining categories.

The researcher searched for patterns and relationships among participants' beliefs and practices, looking for a rationale for the teachers' behaviors and perceptions, e.g., explanations about why a teacher may implement a specific strategy, why a teacher's beliefs and practice do or do not match, or why a teacher implements activities the way she does. This was accomplished by re-reading and highlighting the categorized statements in yellow if a statement described a practice or belief, and in green if a statement described a reason behind a specific practice or belief. Distinguishing statements that answered "how" and "what" questions from those that answered "why" questions facilitated the interpretation and enabled a cause-effect relationship to emerge.

To analyze the literacy environment, the scores from the 16 items in the Literacy Physical Environment Rubric were obtained by adding the result scores (range from 0 to 5; the highest possible score is 80), and the classrooms' literacy environment were rated as "rich" (total score ranges from 54 to 80), "moderate" (total score ranges from 28 to 53), or "poor" (total score ranges from 1 to 27).

The data analysis occurred on three levels. The first level for analysis was to describe literacy events and teacher beliefs, during which the researcher looked at the literacy physical environment of the two classrooms, the social context of literacy instruction, what and how literacy instruction strategies were implementing in the classrooms, as well as what the teacher beliefs were. The second level examined to what

extend the teachers' beliefs and practice matched, while the third level focused on why

teacher literacy beliefs and practice did or did not match.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into two sections, the first section describing the literacy practices and beliefs of Mss. X, followed by the practices and beliefs of Mss. Y. The results will be discussed in the order of the research questions.

Classroom and Literacy Practices of Mss. X

Question 1: What Kind of Print Environment does the Teacher Provide?

Table 4.1 (p. 48) shows the results of the Literacy Physical Environment Rubric, indicating that Mss. X's classroom may be labeled as moderately rich literacy environment as it scored average on the rubric.

Figure 4.1 (p. 49) presents the physical layout of Mss. X's classroom and shows all available furniture, classroom layout/design, and organization of space and centers in the classroom. Figure 4.1 also illustrates the organization and arrangement of the following features in the classroom's physical environment: learning centers, group tables, rug for whole class activities, chalkboard, shelves, and bulletin boards. Children worked on large tables that promoted social interaction and sharing of ideas. The classroom further contained various clearly defined learning centers such as those recommended by Roskos and Neuman (2001), including a library center. The library center was located in a quiet area in the room and had one comfortable feature which was a rug. It also contained a moderate selection and variety of books stored on open-faced shelves and was large enough to fit 5-7 children. Even though over twenty books were displayed in the library area (with an average of 5 books per student), these books were never changed or replaced during the eight observation sessions. Possibly due to the

limited number of books students were not able to borrow books. Nevertheless, the library area contained a variety of genres and titles; for example, *Mouse's Birthday, Hey, Little Ant, Put on a happy Face, Mathew's Dream,* and *It's Mine, Whales and Dolphins, Fish is Fish, What's up with that cup?, Morning, Noon, and Night,* and *What time is it?.* However, the classroom did not have alphabet books, nursery rhymes, repetitious stories/pattern books, traditional books, poetry, big books, fairy tales, or wordless picture books that Morrow (1997) considers important.

The classroom had colorful rugs, commercial and teacher-made posters, a variety of writing tools, blank paper (large and small), and all child-sized furniture, tools, and materials were labeled, as recommended by Morrow (1997). On the walls and bulletin boards there were literacy materials, such as a calendar, a weather chart, children's work, posters, alphabet charts, and charts with functional information. The teacher made frequent use of the charts, flashcards, and posters displayed by continuously discussing and referring to them. Consonant with the recommendations of Roskos and Neuman (2001), all the charts and posters were placed at children's eye-level. These charts further indicated concepts and skills taught in the classroom; for instance, a word wall with vocabulary words (both the printed word and its pictorial illustration), a chart of months in the year, posters of opposites and positions (printed word and its pictorial illustration), charts with word families (e.g., words that end with –an, -it, and -at), flashcards modeling sentence structure (e.g., "The ox said it is a fox."), and charts with songs.

Table 4.1

Mss. X's Literacy Physical Environment

0 (none)   **1**(one)   **2**(few)   **3**(several)   **4**(many)   **5**(abundant)

Library Center	Mss. X
Element of softness (e.g., rugs, cushions, pillow, stuffed animals, rocking chair, and sofa).	2
Area is placed in a quiet section of the room.	5
Books placed on shelves.	5
Variety types of books (e.g., concept, rhyme, informational, poems, picture, and big books).	4
Poster or alphabet chart.	5
Literature props (e.g., puppets, felt-board stories, recorded stories, or roll movie).	0
An average of 5 to 7 books per child.	5
Large enough to fit 5 to 7 students.	5
Children may borrow books on a daily base.	0
Writing Center	
Writing tools (e.g., washable markers, crayons, colored & black pencils, and chalk).	3
Different types of paper of various sizes.	3
Materials for making student books (e.g., construction paper, white paper, stapler, scissors, whole puncher, & yarn).	0
Magnetic, felt, or wooden letters.	0
Mail box for each student.	0
Materials and tools are labeled.	5
Listening Center	
Books along with story cassettes.	3
Total Score	47/80

Figure 4.1

Mss. X's Classroom Design and Layout

4.70m.

Science & Math Bulletin Board

Table with Art Materials

Student Cubbies

Door

0.85m.

Math & Science Center

Art Center

Book Shelf

Arabic Bulletin Board

Table for Group Writing Activiteis

Chalkboard

Rug

Computer

Pool Table

Language Bulletin Board

Drama Center

Mirror

Rug: Group Meeting

Shelves with Literacy Materials

Shelves with Dramatic Props
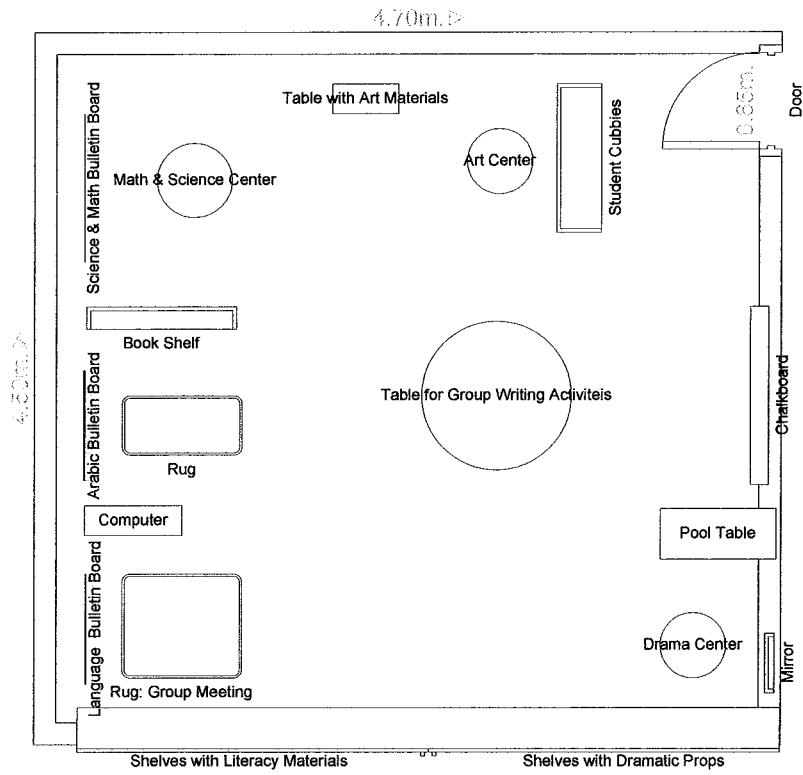
Even though children were provided with the opportunities to explore and experiment with print within a supportive environment, as most literacy materials were within children's reach and the classroom had a moderate literacy physical environment, reading and writing materials were not available in all the centers. In fact, the classroom lacked a clear writing area; rather writing activities took place at a group table in the middle of the classroom, where only writing tools but no writing materials were available. In fact, writing materials were displayed only in the art center. Further, the following materials recommended by Morrow (1997) were not accessible in the classroom: materials and tools to create child-made books, story props, magnetic/felt/wooden letters, and a mail box. The classroom also did not have a listening center. Even though children listened to taped stories daily, they could not participate independently in this activity as there were no earphones, and taped stories were kept away from the students on the teacher's shelf. In addition, the library area did not have comfortable furnishing such as pillows, cushions, stuffed animals, or rocking chairs which Saint-Laurent and Giasson (1999) recommended. The books were randomly displayed on shelves and not by categories, for example all animal books may be identified by a blue mark on the pine, while holiday books may have another color (Morrow, 1997).

Question 2: In What Social Context Does the Literacy Instruction Occur?

Observations showed that Mss. X implemented literacy activities in a whole-group and one-to-one settings. Literacy instruction and activities took place at different areas in the classroom during writing and reading activities. Students wrote and read at

the group table facing the chalkboard, and during storybook listening activities and/or discussions, students sat on a carpeted area. Mss. X reported during the structured interview that literacy instruction occurs in a whole-group, small-groups, or one-to-one with equal emphasis on these three social contexts. However, due to the small number of students, her whole-group instruction must be considered as small-group instruction as it involved only four children. Mss. X reflected on the equal importance of whole-class, small-group, and one-to-one instruction:

> Sometimes I work with one student and sometimes I work with the whole class, which is a small group. Reading always happens one-to-one because my students are early readers and need my help. But they have been writing for sometime, so we do it all together. (Interview, April 19, 2004).

> The classroom's physical layout facilitated the groupings. For instance, as Mss. X worked with a student during individualized phonics and reading lessons, the remaining students independently rotated from one self-selected center to another and from one activity to another. For instance, children could choose to write in their journals, play in the dramatic corner, read a book, participate in math games, or draw.

Question 3: What Type of Literacy Strategies Does the Teacher Employ?

Strategies Used During Book Reading Activities

Table 4.2 (p. 53) shows statements related to the teacher's self-reported book reading practices, describing when and how storybook reading sessions took place in her classroom. Similar to participants in a study conducted by McGill-Franzen, Lanford, and Adams (2002), Mss. X read to her students 2-3 books a day at different times during the

day; there was no specific time of the day for book reading. Observations supported Mss. X's responses during the interview, indicating that she read aloud daily to her students two or more books on an average of 10 minutes. The books read by the teacher were placed on the teacher resource shelf, for teacher's use only, separate from books displayed in the library center for students use. There was equal emphasis on reading to children and encouraging children to independently look at or read books during transition, learning centers, and individualized reading lessons.

In the classroom there were also interactive and open discussions of texts. To begin with, students listened to both taped stories and books read by the teacher on a daily basis. When reading, Mss. X asked both open-ended questions (e.g., "Can real animals do all these things, why not?") and closed questions (e.g., "Where did the story take place?"). She also encouraged students to read picture cues and words (e.g., "Look at the picture, is the farmer happy?") and to make predictions.

Teacher: What do you think will happen next?

Students: Shoo.

Teacher: You think he will say shoo to the animals. What does shoo means? Yes, go away.

Book reading promoted a two-way communication between the teacher and students. Hence, students were able to make accurate predictions, to derive meaning form pictures, and were encouraged to think like readers. In addition, the teacher introduced multiple reading strategies children could use during independent reading. For instance, during a reading aloud session Mss. X asked, "What happens if there is a word that we don't know?" (Field notes, March 22, 2004)

Table 4.2

Mss. X's Self-Reported Book Exposure Practice

Statements	Mss. X
I read to my students two or more books daily.	*
I read to my students, one book daily.	
I don't have time to read daily to my students.	
Students are encouraged to respond to the story (e.g., discuss words & concepts, make comments, and answer questions) before, during, and after the book reading.	*
Students are encouraged to make predictions before and after the story.	*
Students are encouraged to discuss the story only after I finish reading the book.	
Students are encouraged to answer open-ended questions about the story.	*
Students are encouraged to answer close questions about the story.	
Books are read for pleasure; we never discuss books.	

Student 1: We look at the picture.

Teacher: Here we have the word pantry. Have you ever heard this word before?

Student 2: Yes, pantry means a room and there is food in it.

Teacher: If you don't know what pantry means, we can look at the picture.

Mss. X implemented reading aloud techniques which complemented book reading guidelines recommended Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002), Rog (2001), Saint-Laurent and Giasson (1999), Morrow, Tracey, Gee Woo, and Pressley (1999), and Morrow, Rand, and Smith (1995). She encouraged students to discuss words and concepts before, during, and after book reading and employed the following procedure when reading to students: First, before book reading Mss. X typically introduced the title and author of the book. Next, during book reading Mss. X discussed concepts on each page, offering explanations, pointing to important information, and explaining new words. She discussed illustrations and encouraged children to make comments. She also asked and answered questions, encouraged children to make predictions, and connected the story to learning experiences within the classroom. During reading both students and the teacher generated and answered questions and students were given the freedom to ask questions and share opinions before, during, and after the book reading. Hence, discussions were not limited to the end of the book rather discussions naturally occurred throughout the book reading activity. Students were observed matching spoken/read words with print and to recognize familiar words by sight. For example, they read frequency words such as "the, are, here, is" in the book cover and the pages, as well as guessed book titles and text meaning by looking at picture cues. Thus, previously taught phonics lessons were connected to and practiced during book reading sessions. Additionally, students were

further encouraged to read along and the teacher continuously asked questions to review events that occurred in the story (e.g., "So far, what animals did we meet in the story?"). She discussed words and meaning of story, as well as initiated questions that aimed at raising children's curiosity in the illustrations (e.g., before reading print the teacher asked "Why did the farmer wake up?...Yes, coffee was spilled on him. Is the farmer happy...why not?"). As Fang (2000) recommended, Mss. X initiated book discussions that focused on the story elements as well as book discussions that focused on print awareness concepts such as, directionality, print carries the message, letter-sounds association, and sight words. Finally, after book reading students answered more closed and open-ended questions and Mss. X also guided students in summarizing major events in the story.

Corresponding to her self-reported practices, Mss. X used shared reading to promote comprehension skills (e.g., making predictions and answering questions) and the acquisition of high frequency words and sight words, as well as to model reading strategies (e.g., sounding out words and using pictorial cues to predict meaning of text). Further, observations supported Mss. X's interview responses indicating that she reads to students daily, asks open-ended questions, and encourages discussions throughout the book reading process. However, even though Mss. X claimed to only ask open-ended questions, observations also revealed her use of closed questions during and after storybook reading.

Strategies Used During Early Reading Instruction

Table 4.3 (p. 59) shows the results of statements reflecting the teacher's self-reported methods and strategies implemented in her classroom with the purpose of

teaching emerging or early reading skills. As indicated in Table 4.3, Mss. X stated that she exposes children to phonics and phonemic awareness skills through both formal and informal strategies and that she plans early reading lessons that cater to her students' individual needs and abilities.

The general format of the language arts usually began with a calendar activity, during which children placed the appropriate flashcard under "yesterday", "today", and "tomorrow", as well as the corresponding date on the calendar. Then the teacher wrote the date on the chalkboard (e.g., March Monday 1, 2004), which the students copied in their workbooks. By April Mss. X began selecting a child volunteer to independently write the date on the chalkboard. After calendar activities, students were frequently observed free-writing in their journals before a phonics lesson. This process usually took one hour and a half, as Mss. X reported during the interview. During the semi-structured interview, Mss. X stressed that due to the small number of students she was able to cater to each child's needs and abilities, and to set the literacy block time accordingly.

Mss. X guided children in learning early reading skills. As Table 4.4 (p. 61) shows, she made five statements describing phonological and phonemic awareness instructions occurring in her classroom. Mss. X taught phonological and phonemic awareness skills through reading aloud, journal writing, and phonics lessons. These categories emerged from the structured interview and were confirmed by the observation records and semi-structured interview. When asked whether literacy instructions were determined by her or the school, she clarified: "Some of them, if you see the Houghton Mifflin, these are set by the school (they are phonics), but everything is set by me" (Interview, April 19, 2004). Even though the language arts program was based on the

Houghton Mifflin Reading kit (a basal-phonics series), Mss. X had the freedom to discard, modify, and implement activities based on her students' abilities and needs. Sometimes she implemented activities from the kit, other times she implemented activities from other resources; the kit was used only as one of many resources. Consequently, reading instruction did not occur in a specific predetermined sequence, rather reading instruction was mainly determined by the teacher's perception of what children needed to learn and when they need to learn it.

Mss. X stressed the importance of a flexible curriculum that promotes natural learning; phonics and phonemic awareness lessons often spontaneously evolved from children's questions and trade books, and other times were planned according to students' individual needs and abilities. This is what she said:

> For instance, while I'm reading a story if it has words that rhyme I catch my students' attention and ask them to tell me how these words may be similar or different or what do you notice. They may say for example the words rhyme. So basically, I do teach phonics but it comes naturally during the day. I never say that everyday from this time to that time I will teach phonics. I used to follow the same steps in teaching letters. (Interview, April 19, 2004)

Mss. X also trained her students in phonological and phonemic awareness skills. In addition to and often as part of this instruction, Mss. X provided instruction in rhyme, blending, segmentation, and deletion. Consonant with her self-reported reading practices, children were prepared for independent reading through discussions of words and letter clusters during book reading sessions, sight word building lessons, lessons focusing on beginning, final, and middle uppercase and lowercase letter symbols and sounds, rhyme

activities, as well as, phoneme blending, segmentation, deletion, and addition. These skills were introduced and promoted before children began to read decodable mini-books; while some of these skills have been mastered others continue to develop and grow along with independent book reading. For instance, three of the children had mastered all uppercase and lowercase letter names and sounds, as well as phoneme blending, segmentation, addition, and deletion; therefore lessons promoting these skills were not observed. Yet, rhyme and sight word recognition lessons continued and complemented independent reading lessons. These skills were taught using two methods: big books and flashcards. Mss. X implemented phonological and phonemic awareness skills in a holistic manner, through game-like, hands-on activities, as recommended by Allor and McCathren (2003). For example, during a lesson on rhyming words the teacher gave each student a card with a word printed on it, she then held a card and instructed the students to come and stand next to her if their card rhymes with hers or ends with the same sound; "If you have a word that sounds like the word I'm holding, come and stand here" (Field notes, March 15, 2004).

Further, supporting recommendations provided by Kaderavek and Justice (2000), the children were taught all uppercase and lowercase letter names and sounds. When referring to uppercase and lowercase letters, Mss. X used the correct terminology as Miller (2000) advices, never referring letters as "big" and "small" but "uppercase"/"capital" and "lowercase" letters. Since some lowercase letters, such as b or k are taller than other letters they may be misinterpreted by children as "big" than "small". Hence, using uppercase and lowercase is more apparent and less misleading.

Table 4.3

Mss. X's Self-Reported Reading Instruction Practice

Statements	Mss. X
Students are encouraged to recognize some letters and words in big books.	*
Students are encouraged to recognize some letters and words on flashcards.	*
Students are encouraged to say the sound of letters.	*
I introduce one meaningful letter at a time (e.g., letters found in their names or related to theme).	*
I introduce letters that are not related to the theme or students' names.	
Students are encouraged to identify beginning sounds in words (e.g., "dog" begins with the /d/ sound).	*
Students are encouraged to identify final sounds in words (e.g., "dog" ends with the /g/ sound).	*
Students are encouraged to identify middle sounds in words (vowels).	*
I teach students to recognize uppercase letters.	*
I teach students to recognize lowercase letters.	*
I encourage children to recognize and identify rhyming words.	*
I encourage children to sort or categorize words based on initial, final, or middle sounds in words.	
I encourage children to say words slowly so that they can hear the sounds in the words.	*
I encourage children to count the number of sounds heard in certain words.	*
I encourage children to sometimes remove or add a certain sound or letter and say the new word (e.g., the child may be asked to remove the /k/ from the word "monkey" which becomes "money").	*
Reading instruction varies from one child to another, depending on their abilities.	*
Reading instruction is planned according to the age span of the children, as such,	*

all children participate in the same activities.	
I use basal books to teach my students to read.	
By the end of KG 2, all students are expected to read a book aloud to an adult.	*
Usually, reading instruction occurs in a preplanned and structured manner (e.g., planning the literacy program from simple to complex activities or skills).	
Usually, reading instruction occurs in no specific or prescribed sequence; rather our program encourages informal literacy instruction based on my perception on what students need to learn and when they need to learn it.	*

Table 4.4

Frequency of Mss. X's Comments during the Semi-Structured Interview

Category: (Code)	
	Mss. X
Category 1: Literacy physical environment (LPE) • Library center • Writing center • Listening center	0
Category 2: Social context of literacy instruction (SCLI) • One-to-one • Small group • Whole class	2
Category 3: Storybook reading (SR) o Reading books o Story discussion o Make predictions o Answer and ask questions	1
Category 4: early/emerging reading (EER) o Sight words o Word wall	5

o Letter symbols & letter-sound correspondence	
o Sequence of letter taught	
o Rhyme	
o Blending sounds	
o Segmenting sounds	
o Deleting/adding sounds	
o Shared/interactive reading	
o Word discussion	
Category 5: Early/emerging writing (EEW)	1
o Copying/tracing words	
o Independent writing (invented spelling)	
o Interactive writing	
o Shared writing	
o Journals	
Category 6: Integration of reading and writing (IRW)	0
• Taught together	
• Not taught together	
Category 7: Teacher beliefs about literacy instruction (TBLI)	
• Beliefs match practice	1
• Beliefs contradict school's philosophy	3
• Beliefs influenced by level of education and/or experience	1

In the classroom, Mss. X taught sight words through word recognition and identification strategies, thus abiding by recommendations of Miller (2000) and Juel and Minden-Cupp (1998). She encouraged children to read sight words by decoding words, using meaning, and through familiar word families. Mss. X also taught sight words within context (big books) as well as in isolation (flashcards), and with children she discussed letter patterns and compared and contrasted sight words, as recommended by Miller (2000). Mss. X typically began by introducing the word on a flashcard, then constructed and printed sentences on the chalkboard with the sight word in them. Next, students were encouraged to create their own sentences and, finally, students took part in an activity which promoted the recognition of the new sight word. For instance, during one observed lesson the teacher introduced a flashcard with the word "have"; then she printed sentences with the word "have" in them (e.g., "I have crayons in my hand"). All printed sentences were meaningful to students and related to their background. The lesson continued with the students dictating the teacher sentences with the word "have", followed by students creating and writing their own sentences in their workbook (Field notes, March 27, 2004). However, even though children in the classroom were taught sight words through word families, the classroom lacked literacy manipulative materials that would promote the meaningful teaching of analogy. Nevertheless, the classroom did contain an alphabet chart, flashcards, and stencils (Morrow, 1997).

During another lesson with a similar purpose, the teacher first read a poem and asked students to circle the word "are" on the large chart. Next, she explained that "We use 'is' for one person and 'are' for many." Next, she printed sentences on the chalkboard and asked students correct each sentence. For instance, she wrote "The pigs is here."

Students had to cross out the word "is" and write "are" instead (Field notes, April 3, 2004). During the semi-structured interview, Mss. X explained the essentiality of implementing more challenging activities as students' literacy skills develop (Interview, April 19, 2004):

> Sight words, I usually teach through flashcards; I used to include both picture and word but now since my students can read I only write the word on the flashcard.

Corresponding to Mss. X's response during the structured interview, all students were expected to read age- appropriate books. Book reading opportunities occurred in three ways: reading independently, with a friend, or with the teacher. One-to-one book reading allowed the teacher to meet the needs of each individual child in the classroom. For instance, one student was reading more advanced books as compared to her peers due to her highly developed reading ability. Hence, the reading materials were "neither so challenging that anxiety and frustration overwhelm their efforts nor so easy that nothing new is learned" (Braunger et. al., 1998, p. 47). In other words, literacy experiences did fit each student's needs, abilities, and development, consonant with recommendations of Adams (1996).

In the classroom, reading was taught through two strategies: sounding out sounds and guessing words based on pictorial cues. Whenever children were stuck on a word, the teacher coached, guided, and helped them sound out phonemes in the word or guess based on picture cues; difficult words were never skipped. Mss. X never provided children with the correct word or corrected their mistakes; rather she continuously reinforced their efforts, motivated them, provided them with cues (whether verbal or pictorial), and encouraged them to sound out words. This reflected reading techniques

64

recommended by Taylor et. al. (2002), who noted that providing struggling students with the correct word has a negative effect on reading development, while coaching has a positive effect. Further, Mss. X always helped children review what had happened in the story; this occurred continuously throughout story reading. Reading activities and instruction varied from one child to another, depending on the child's abilities, and all the children were expected to participate in specific age-appropriate reading instruction (Interview, April 19, 2004):

> I read to them everyday, we always have discussions about book we read. Sometimes for example I sit with one child and I ask her to read. She starts to read; when she gets stuck I usually guide her in figuring out the word. I sit with her and encourage her to read to find out her reading level and to be able to plan according to her needs. And some children demand to read. For instance, I have a student where she always wants to read whether with me or alone and when stuck she quite often demands assistance in breaking the word. I do this so I know where their level is.

The following example of teacher-student interaction during a one-to-one individualized reading session demonstrates the reading strategies implemented in the classroom (Field notes, April 19, 2004):

> Teacher: [Student's name] can you read this story for me.
>
> Student: Got got got a big pot.
>
> Teacher: O.k. this is the title.
>
> Student: Got got got a big big big pot. Got got got /c/-/c/-/c/...
>
> Teacher: What is this picture?

Student: Carrot. Got got got a carrot. Got got got potatoes.

Teacher: Good.

Student: Got got got beans. Got got got a /m/-/a/-/n/.

Teacher: Yes, man.

Student: Got got got a man…

Teacher: So he is preparing a meal for his friends. He is inviting his friends for lunch.

Student: Yes.

During one-to-one instruction students read simple decodable texts from the Houghton Mifflin's phonics library. These texts range in difficulty and are simple (contain sight words and CVC words) and short; each page has 1-2 sentences, texts are highly predictable and repetitive, and illustrations explicitly support the text (e.g., the story may be told from the illustrations). The following is the text of a book titled Big Rig by Amy Griffin in the phonics kit.

Big Rig can dig.

Dig, dig, dig.

Big Rig can dig a pit.

Big Rig can dig a pit for Dan.

Dan can (picture of a hammer).

Dan can (picture of a seesaw). Big Rig can dig.

Educators and researchers have not reached an agreement as to the benefits or drawbacks of teaching early reading through such decodable texts. Some researchers view these texts as effective, especially when it comes to struggling students and that

even though decodable books may appear shallow to adults, children may actually enjoy reading them and especially decoding words in these books, hence feeling a sense of accomplishment and achievement (e.g., Holdren, 1995). While others warned educators of using decodable texts as they are uninteresting, dull, lack meaning, and may lead to frustration, and since these books can only be read through decoding, they may be confusing due to the irregularity of some sounds and "unnatural" language (e.g., Rog, 2001; Braunger, et. al., 1998).

In summary, children in the classroom were exposed to two-way discussions about texts, multiple reading strategies (e.g., sounding out words, using picture cues to guess word, and word families), phonemic awareness lessons, and individualized reading lessons. Hence, there was a connection between the teacher's self-reported practices (during the structured and semi-structured interviews) and the researcher's observations.

Strategies Used During Early Writing Instruction

Table 4.5 (p. 70) shows statements reflecting the teacher's self-reported methods and strategies implemented in the classroom with the intention of teaching early writing. As indicated in Table 4.5, Mss. X stated that she encouraged children to write legible letters and words using invented spelling, writing lessons were derived from students' abilities and needs, all children were expected to participate in the same writing activities, and children often observed her modeling the writing process.

Mss. X motivated children to write independently about their personal experiences and imaginative stories in their journals; this practice reflected her claim during the structured interview of promoting process-centered writing activities. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampton (1998) and Morrow (1997) have stressed the

67

importance of students selecting their own topics during independent writing, and Mss. X's practice of encouraging children to select their own topics and use their knowledge of print awareness along with their knowledge of phonemes and sight words to independently write resonated with their suggestions. In the classroom, journals consisted of sheets of paper stapled together to create a booklet; each page was divided into two sections: a blank space for illustrations and a lined page for writing to occur on. Again, Mss. X's practice corresponded with her self-reported claim of reinforcing good handwriting by expecting children to writing on line paper. Even though Whitehead (1997) recommends that educators provide young children with only blank paper during writing activities, Mss. X provided students with both lined and blank paper. Mss. X did not force students to write within the lines, yet felt that it was important for Kindergarteners to be exposed to lined paper.

During writing opportunities children sometimes wrote alone, with friends, or with the teacher. Writing lessons and activities focused primarily on using invented spelling and drawing skills to express experiences as well as sharing writing with peers. Observations supported Mss. X's claim that children participate in free-writing activities daily on an average of 15 minutes. During journal writing, Mss. X encouraged children to write independently followed by reading out their journal entries and sharing their illustrations with peers. Students were frequently observed sounding out words as they wrote in their personal journals and all four students were familiar with the spelling of some high frequency words, such as: my, I, a, the, are, have, for, is, here, and mom. During and after journal writing Mss. X never checked, edited, or corrected students'

work for accuracy; she only re-wrote their sentence at the bottom of the page as Adams (1996) recommended.

During journal writing children were encouraged to write about anything of interest and to express their ideas, feelings, and opinions. Hence, writing was viewed as a means of self-expression and occurred in an informal-natural setting. The following example of teacher-student talk during a journal writing session illustrates how writing events were constructed (Field notes, March 22, 2004):

Teacher: What do you want to write about Tala?

Student 1: My mom has flowers.

Teacher: You want to write my mom has flowers. O.k. My, go ahead and write my mom. What do you hear? (Name of student 2) what do you want to write?

Student 2: My sister is sick.

Teacher: Go ahead and write my sister is sick. (After the child wrote My) What do you hear?

Student 2: /S/

Student 3: How can we write coming?

Teacher: What do you hear?

Student 3: /K/ no /c/.

Teacher: (She goes back to student 2). Sister, what do you hear (name of student 2)?

Student 2: /S/

Teacher: Go ahead and write /s/.

Student 3: How can we write coming? What comes after /m/?

Table 4.5

Mss. X's Self-Reported Writing Instruction Practice

Statements	Mss. X
I use worksheets to teach the formal writing of letters and words.	
Students are encouraged to write daily in their journals using invented spelling.	*
Students learn to correctly spell words through dictation activities.	
I reinforce good handwriting by expecting students to write on lined paper (in between the lines).	*
Writing instructions are planned according to my observations of individual students' writing phase, abilities, and needs.	*
All children are expected to participate in the same or similar writing activities.	*
I usually model the process of writing during group time by printing students' dictated ideas on large charts.	
I usually model the process of writing during group time by printing students' dictated ideas and by involving students in the process of writing (e.g., asking some students to write letters or words).	*
I never or rarely model the process of writing.	

Teacher: My daddy is coming; /ing/. What do you hear? /ing/; /ing/; /ing/.

Student 3: ing

Teacher: Yes, ing. Go ahead and write coming. (Turns to student 1). What do you want to write about now?

Student 1: back

Teacher: /b/, /b/, what do you hear?

Student 1: /b/, b.

Teacher: When do we write an uppercase?

Student 1: At the beginning of a sentence.

Teacher: At the beginning of a sentence, good. So, what do you need to write hear?

Student 1: Lowercase.

Teacher: Lowercase, good. /ba/ /ck/ /ck/. What do you hear? (Student 1 wrote ck). O.k. and...

Student 1: A full stop.

Teacher: A full stop, good. Start drawing your story. (Name of student 2), what do you want to write about now?

The previous example of teacher-student talk during a journal writing session illustrates how the teacher interacted with each child in the classroom and coached and guided children, as well as introduced mini-lessons that evolved spontaneously. Mini-lessons were derived from children's individual abilities, needs, and writing phase. During journal writing the teacher often discussed, introduced, and reviewed some spelling and letter cluster rules. In one instance, the teacher gave a child an explanation

about how the letters /m/ and /n/ are written differently; "n has one bump, but m has two bumps; n like 'Neyla' has one bump; m like 'Maha'...like 'Mustafa' has two bumps" (Field notes, March 29, 2004). Journal and writing discussions also took various forms; some discussions focused on grammatical rules, other discussions focused on the content of writing and illustration (e.g., "What did you draw and write in your story?"); while some discussions were initiated by the students, and others by the teacher (Field notes, March 22, 2004). Other times, the teacher asked questions to promote the students' sense of curiosity and imagination, especially when a student was stuck and could not think of something to write about. For instance, "What did you do over the weekend?" (Field notes, March 29, 2004). Mss. X also used book read-aloud sessions to help children generate topics to write about. For instance, after reading a fiction book about farm animals, Mss. X asked (Field notes, Mach 22, 2004): "Can real animals do all these things?"

Student 1: No, they are fake.

Teacher: They are just pretending; it is make belief. That is why I sometimes ask you to use your imagination when you are writing. The author here used his imagination and is pretending.

Sometimes students were asked to copy sentences from the chalkboard or charts onto their workbooks (lined-paper). This occurred usually during literacy lessons with the purpose of teaching phonics, sight words, and phonemic awareness skills. These lessons typically began with the teacher modeling new literacy skills by constructing and printing sentences on the chalkboard, but towards the end of the lesson children were encouraged to construct their own sentences. For instance, during one lesson the teacher and students

constructed plural and singular sentences, stressing on two sight words: "are" and "is". The teacher printed students' sentences on the chalkboard as she discussed these sentences with her students. These lessons focused mostly on phonics, phonemic awareness skills, sight words, and handwriting skills, rather than expressive writing. Mss. X used phonics- and sight word-based lessons to model writing (sentence structure and conventional spelling). These lessons did not aim at having children copy sentences rather the aim of these lessons was to encourage children to construct their own sentences using the introduced literacy skills. Documented observations complemented Mss. X's self-reported response, indicating that she does model writing, prints students' dictated statements on a large chart, as well as involves her students in the process of writing; however, the primarily aim of these activities was usually phonics. Even though children did participate in interactive and shared writing, they were never observed writing a letter, constructing a list, or developing a story as a whole class, something that McCarrier, Pinnell, and Fountas (2000) suggest.

According to Mss. X, worksheets were used occasionally. The purpose of worksheets was for phonics skill practice and worksheets were presented in the phonics practice book. These worksheets may require students to write a specific letter (lowercase and uppercase), search and circle a specific letter, color pictures a specific color, draw pictures, write the missing letters, make predictions by drawing, write high frequency words, draw something that begins with a specific sound, and/or circle specific words. Even though the practice book is part of the Houghton Mifflin kit, the teacher placed minimal emphasis on it; only 30 pages out of 312 were filled by the end of April. In fact, during all eight observation periods, Mss. X was never observed using worksheets to

teach literacy. According to McLaughlin (1995), worksheets do not complement experiences and background of children in a given classroom, leading to exposing children to artificial reading and writing experiences. Resonating with McLaughlin's recommendation, Mss. X constructed more relevant literacy materials and instruction that better suited her students' culture, background, interests, and abilities. During the semi-structured interview, Mss. X further explained why she occasionally used worksheets (Interview, April 19, 2004):

> In KG 2, I think we shouldn't use worksheets all the time. I mean at the beginning of the year I wasn't sure of myself, I used worksheets to feel safe and sure that the children are learning. But know I hardly use worksheets or the workbook from Houghton Mifflin (I'm more confident).

> In summary, children in the classroom were exposed to both formal and informal writing instruction that ranged from phonics and sight words lessons to free-writing in journals. Children were expected to participate in the same process-centered writing activities that resulted in different products; as a result, encouraging individual differences and abilities (which matched her response during the structured interview of planning similar writing activities). In conclusion, Mss. X's self-reported practices were consistent with the researcher's observations. However, during the semi-structured interview, Mss. X discussed in more detail reading practices occurring in her classroom, while placing less emphasis on writing strategies.

Question 4: What Connections Does the Teacher Make between Reading and Writing?

The integration and connection of reading and writing in a meaningful context leads to "higher level of thinking", as compared to teaching each skill separately (Braunger et. al., 1998, p. 48). Reading and writing were continuously integrated primarily through open-ended (process-centered) activities. For instance, during journal writing children were first encouraged to write freely by sounding out words and then to read their journal entries to the teacher and peers. During journal writing children also used higher-order thinking as they broke down words to read and put phonemes together to write. Students also took part in structured literacy instruction, which consisted of constructing and writing their personal sentences (with a target sight word or word families), followed again by reading it out loud.

Even though reading and writing were integrated through structured and unstructured literacy activities, the primary goal for literacy lessons was always clear; children constructed different writing products that reflected their different abilities, interests, and backgrounds. Further, Mss. X promoted her students' curiosity in different topics by reading various books and exposing students to a wide range of topics to be used during journal writing. Hence, there was effective and meaningful integration of reading and writing with the purpose of engaging children in reading and writing. Finally, even though students were encouraged to construct and read personal sentences, Mss. X was never observed constructing a text or message with her students with a purpose other than phonics instruction (e.g., morning message), and children were not observed constructing personalized, child-made stories as suggested by Braunger, et. al. (1998).

During the semi-structured interview Mss. X did not acknowledge, nor place emphasis on the importance of connecting reading and writing. Even though in practice

she integrated emerging reading and writing skills, during the interview she spoke about reading and writing activities and skills separately.

Literacy Beliefs of Mss. X

Question 5: What are the Teacher Beliefs about How Early Literacy should be Taught and Reinforced, and What Strategies Does the Teacher Perceive as Being Most Effective to Teach Early Reading and Writing?

Table 4.6 (p. 80) shows the results of the statements reflecting the teacher's self-reported beliefs. Overall, Mss. X has emergent literacy beliefs about literacy instruction as all responses indicate an emergent literacy view. Reflecting the emergent literacy approach, Mss. X believes that literacy develops from real life situations, and that it is reinforced when adults daily read to children. Observations documented children's freedom in expression during journal writing, where children were provided with the opportunity to express their ideas, experiences, and emotion, as well as during regular reading aloud periods throughout the day. Mss. X also believes that children learn to read and write through the participation in meaningful and relevant literacy activities, as well as by being provided with time and opportunity to practice literacy skills at their own pace. Again field notes documented the effectiveness of journals as a mean for self-expression that encouraged children to apply and develop literacy skills. Other than developing writing skills at their own pace, students also took part in individualized book reading opportunities (using decodable books) that catered to each child's needs and abilities. For instance, Mss. X had the following to say about her new student (Interview, April 19, 2004):

Like I have a Korean student that can not speak English very well; so she needs a lot of one-to-one, but my other students are very independent. Since she couldn't independently write or read, I had to plan activities that benefit her abilities; so I have different expectations for her.

Further, Mss. X reported that reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently and that learning to read and write is a developmental process. Writing activities such as independent and shared writing helped her integrate and connect reading and writing. Furthermore, Mss. X provided students with one-to-one instruction with the aim of scaffolding each individual child's learning into the next developmental stage; for instance, she helped children learn the conventional spelling of self-selected sight words and guided them as they read more challenging decodable books.

Question 6: Is the Teacher Aware of Recognized Effective Strategies in Shaping

Children's Future Reading and Writing Skills?

Mss. X was aware of effective strategies in shaping children's future reading and writing skills as she had only emergent literacy beliefs. Further, she made modifications in her school's Kindergarten program based on her beliefs on how young children learn to read and write, as well as on her students' needs. For instance, when she was asked to what extent she agrees or disagrees with the school's approach to teaching early literacy, Mss. X mentioned the importance of a flexible curriculum. She perceived the phonics approach as extremely structured and formal to be used with young children, thus, she rejected the phonics kit (Interview, April 19, 2004):

Because I'm a beginner and I don't have experience, these books, I can say that just at the beginning these books helped me to teach. Just at the beginning, to give me hints. And then I started to plan according to what I thought was best for my students... Phonics; they are boring and structured. Every skill is taught in the same way; it always the same. Here they focus mainly on phonics. Even though, there is a focus on hands-on learning; reading and writing focuses on phonics because our kit is based on phonics. Now they are almost done writing our own standards, so that may change; you know it's a new school. Also, we as teachers can do anything we feel is more effective. Mmm, I don't always use the kit; no one is forcing me to use it. I mean, I believe that we shouldn't over stress on phonics. Here they over stress on phonics. I mean, here they say now this period is for teaching phonics. I disagree with that. Why should this period be only for phonics? I believe everything should be combined and integrated. I mean at the beginning of the year I had a scheduled, basically phonics period each day.

This quotation clarified that Mss. X used the Houghton Mifflin kit in the beginning of the year, but throughout the year the kit was used only as one of several resources. There was a shift from using the kit primarily as the one and only resource, to implementing more child-centered activities that she felt met her students' needs. The worksheets were filled out only in the beginning of the year and were later replaced with journals. Mss. X is not against phonics as she does teach phonics; rather she disagrees with the format and structure of the phonics activities presented in the kit (being too repetitive, formal, and structured). Therefore, Mss. X was aware of the limitations of using only the phonics approach, structured and repetitive instruction, and worksheets to

teaching early reading and writing. She counteracted these drawbacks by implementing a more balanced approach of phonics and emergent literacy instruction (structured and unstructured), as well as replacing worksheets with journals.

Mss. X disagreed with the school's literacy expectations, stressing more age- and individual- appropriate expectations. By the end of KG 2 the school expected students to: name and recognize all uppercase and lowercase letters and sounds, identify rhyming words, recognize some punctuation, read age appropriate decodable books, write using invented spelling, as well as, blend, segment, substitute, and delete sounds in familiar words. Mss. X agreed with most of these expectations; however, she acknowledged that not all five-to-six-year-olds may be ready to read and write, and that teaching reading may be more difficult in a larger group; her students can read because they are advanced and are a small group. She recognized individual differences of students and that children have different abilities, needs, interests, and backgrounds (Interview, April 19, 2004):

> They should know uppercase and lowercase, their sounds, they should know that a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a period. They should know punctuations; like the question mark and exclamation mark. I introduce them, I want children to recognize it but not necessary to use it; just exposure. Also, they need to blend, clap sounds in words, and replace the first letter in a word with another to make a new word. It depends on the children; I can not really say what they should and shouldn't learn. But reading and writing is usually too early for KG 2 students.

Table 4.6

Mss. X's Self-Reported Beliefs about Early Literacy

Statements	Mss. X
Literacy develops from real life situations (e.g., a child writing a letter to a friend).	*
Literacy develops from a structured and well planned literacy lessons (e.g., teaching children to decode words or to copy sentences in their workbook).	
Literacy skills are reinforced when teachers read daily to their students.	*
Literacy skills are reinforced through formal literacy instruction (e.g., identifying letters on flashcards, matching letter to its corresponding sound on worksheets, and copying letters, numbers, and words).	
Children learn to read and write through participation in meaningful and relevant literacy activities (e.g., pretending to "read" or "writing" a story).	*
Children learn to read and write through participating in predetermined formal literacy activities (e.g., identifying and recognizing rhyme, letters, and sounds through worksheets).	
Children need to be provided with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills.	*
Children need to be provided with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills; within limits.	
Children develop literacy skills at their own pace.	*
Children from a similar age group develop literacy skills at a similar pace.	
Reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently (develop together and support one another).	*
Reading and writing develop as separate skills.	
Learning to read and write is a developmental process. Children pass through similar stages in a variety of ways.	*
Learning to read and write is a sequential process. Children pass through the same stages in the same manner.	

To sum up, Mss. X was aware of effective strategies in shaping children's future reading and writing skills and held mostly emergent literacy beliefs which were reflected in her practices.

Question 7: What Does the Teacher Perceive to Have Influenced her Current Beliefs?

Similarly to teachers from Fox's (2001) research study, Mss. X conveyed that her student teaching experience determined and had a greater influence on her teaching instruction than university education. This was because her teaching experience was more practical and hands-on, while knowledge derived from university was more theoretical and as such, forgotten (Interview, April 19, 2004).

> No my training experience of course! At least I observed them, I worked with them. University provided me with theories, I forgot about them. I cannot. I'm the kind of person that cannot learn from theories; I have to see and work to learn.

Question 8: Is There a Match between the Teacher's Reported Beliefs and her Practice?

The findings support the studies that have come to the conclusion that teachers' literacy practice and beliefs do match (e.g., Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, & Pianta, 2001; Vartuli, 1999; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosley, & Fleege, 1993; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991; McMahon, Richmond, & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998; Nielsen & Monson, 1996). Mss. X's beliefs fairly matched her teaching practices. She planned and implemented literacy instruction that she viewed as relevant to her students. She was given flexibility and freedom to make necessary changes and modifications within her classroom and to implement practices that matched her beliefs.

81

Finally, even though it appears that Mss. X disagrees with the school's approach to teaching literacy, she was given the freedom to plan and implement literacy instruction she viewed as effective and meaningful to her students. Thus, she was not required or forced by her supervisors to implement the phonics kit as is. Her role as a teacher extended from the traditional Lebanese role of implementing a given approach, but was able to organize a print-rich physical environment, plan and implement multi process-centered literacy activities, and make age- and individual-appropriate decisions.

Classroom and Literacy Practices of Mss. Y

Question 1: What Kind of Print Environment Does the Teacher Provide?

Table 4.7 (p. 83) shows the results of the Literacy Physical Environment Rubric, indicating that the literacy environment of Mss. Y's classroom may be best classified as a 'poor' literacy environment as it scored low on the rubric (10/80). The classroom lacked rich literacy materials and props. Figure 4.2 (p. 84) presents the physical layout of Mss. Y's classroom and shows all available furniture, classroom layout/design, and organization of space in the classroom. Figure 4.2 also illustrates the organization and arrangement of the following features in the classroom's physical environment: group tables, shelves, easels, and a chalkboard. Furniture were arranged in a way that promoted whole class instruction, as shelves with limited puzzles, Lego, and dramatic props were arranged by the wall next to each other, around the group tables. Hence, the classroom's physical arrangement focused more on giving the teacher space to rotate from one group table to another and from chalkboard to easel, rather than providing children with adequate space to interact with materials in the classroom.

Table 4.7

Mss. Y's Literacy Physical Environment

0 (none)   **1**(one)   **2**(few)   **3**(several)   **4**(many)   **5**(abundant)

Library Center	Mss. Y
Element of softness (e.g., rugs, cushions, pillow, stuffed animals, rocking chair, and sofa).	1
Area is placed in a quiet section of the room.	0
Books placed on shelves.	0
Variety types of books (e.g., concept, rhyme, informational, poems, picture, and big books).	0
Poster or alphabet chart.	2
Literature props (e.g., puppets, felt-board stories, recorded stories, or roll movie).	0
An average of 5 to 7 books per child.	0
Large enough to fit 5 to 7 students.	0
Children may borrow books on a daily base.	0
Writing Center	
Writing tools (e.g., washable markers, crayons, colored & black pencils, and chalk).	5
Different types of paper of various sizes.	0
Materials for making student books (e.g., construction paper, white paper, stapler, scissors, whole puncher, & yarn).	0
Magnetic, felt, or wooden letters.	0
Mail box for each student.	0
Materials and tools are labeled.	0
Listening Center	
Books along with story cassettes.	0
Total Score	10/80

Figure 4.2

Mss. Y's Classroom Design and Layout
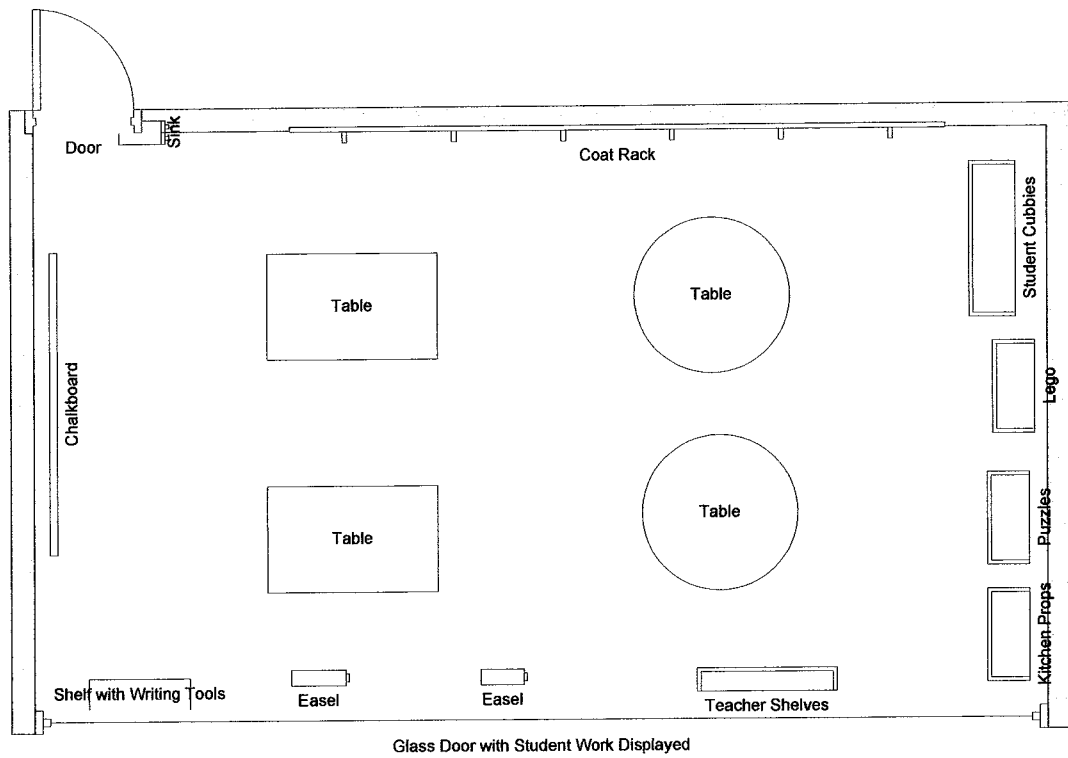
In Mss. Y's classroom, students sat in assigned locations around four group tables, two square and two circular. The classroom had a colorful rug, posters, and some writing tools. On the walls there were literacy materials, such as a calendar, a weather chart, a seasons in a year chart, flashcards with vocabulary words, days of the week and months in a year, children's work, and charts with functional information. Both commercial and teacher made posters were regularly referred to and discussed daily during literacy lessons. However, contrary to the recommendations of Roskos and Neuman (2001), some charts were displayed at adult eye-level. To be more specific, four charts were displayed at adult eye-level: days of the week chart, months in a year chart, fruit picture-label poster, and number flashcards. In fact, on many observed occasions children had to stand on a chair to be able to point to specific sight words. For instance, Mss. Y daily asked volunteers to pull a chair and stand on it in order to point to the corresponding cards with the days of the week and months in the year printed on it. Again the chalkboard was also displayed at the adult eye-level. As the teacher always wrote the date on the upper-left corner of the chalkboard, most children had to look up to see the print.

Most child work displayed included mostly worksheets and product-centered work that looked identical. For instance, the glass door displayed children's names with colored pieces of paper pasted inside the teacher-outlined names. The door also displayed worksheets where children had written numbers from 1-5 and drew circles representing each numeral.

On the shelf of writing tools, there were scissors, colored pencils, crayons, markers, and paint. Again, contrary to the recommendations of Roskos and Neuman

(2001), most writing tools were in a very poor condition; crayons were broken into small pieces, coloring pencils were small and unsharpened (some were too small to be properly grabbed by students), and markers were without their caps and dry. In the classroom, broken crayons and dry markers were not replaced during the eight observation sessions; rather many children brought their personal writing tools from home. According to the teacher, the school was obliged to provide students with paper, as it is a public school, but students were required to provide their own writing tools. Crayons, markers, and paper were only distributed during writing activities, and were kept out of children's reach at other times.

In addition to, and in contrast to Morrow's (1997) recommendations, the classroom had no learning centers, books, literature props, magnetic/felt/wooden letters, paper of different sizes (and paper was also only within teacher's reach), mailbox, materials for making child-made books, taped stories, and an area for whole class literacy activities. Finally, materials and furniture were not labeled. Although the classroom did not have a library center, the school had a children's library with a few donated books. Nevertheless, the teacher was not observed reading these books to the children and no visits were made to the library.

Question 2: In What Social Context Does Literacy Instruction Occur?

Field notes revealed that Mss. Y focused mainly on whole-class instruction and individual work. All literacy activities took place at the circular and square group tables. During literacy activities the teacher moved around the classroom from the easel to different charts to the chalkboard asking questions, and from one group table to another

assisting and correcting children's work. This was similar to results found by Pianta, et. al. (2002) and Belsky, et al. (2002); Mss. Y also focused on whole-group discussion and activities that occurred in a teacher-directed manner. For one hour and a half, children participated in teacher-directed and dominated activities. Hence, observations did not support Mss. Y's structured interview response which indicated that she also implements literacy instructions in small-groups and one-to-one. In fact, she does not have the time or opportunity to work with individual students due to the structured literacy program and classroom layout; rather, she was occasionally observed sending extra work home with students that needed extra support and help.

During the semi-structured interview Mss. Y explained that teachers at public schools in Lebanon are required by the school to implement activities as a whole-group. She further added (Interview, May 1, 2004):

> In this school we usually focus on whole class, but I would prefer to focus one-to-one, sometimes on the groups; it depends on the kind of information we are going to have. Mmm. We give whole class instruction because it would be more beneficial to those slow ability students to have the information repeated in front of them.

Question 3: What type of Literacy Strategies Does the Teacher Employ?

Strategies Used During Book Reading Activities

Table 4.8 (p. 88) shows the teacher's self-reported book reading practices and how (strategies and frequency) storybook reading sessions took place in her classroom. Mss. Y stated that she reads to students daily, asks closed and open-ended questions, as well as encourages discussions throughout the book reading process.

87

Table 4.8

Mss. Y's Self-Reported Book Exposure Practice

Statements	Mss. Y
I read to my students two or more books daily.	
I read to my students, one book daily.	*
I don't have time to read daily to my students.	
Students are encouraged to respond to the story (e.g., discuss words & concepts, make comments, and answer questions) before, during, and after the book reading.	*
Students are encouraged to make predictions before and after the story.	*
Students are encouraged to discuss the story only after I finish reading the book.	
Students are encouraged to answer open-ended questions about the story.	*
Students are encouraged to answer close questions about the story.	*
Books are read for pleasure; we never discuss books.	

The classroom had no reading area, nor did it have books. Even though Mss. Y reported during the structured interview spending 15 minutes each day reading aloud to her students, no observations documented or supported this claim. In fact, she was never observed reading a book to her students; no observation supports her claim that she reads one book to her students daily, asks open-ended and closed questions, or that discussions occur before, during, and after book reading and that students make predictions throughout the book reading session. During the semi-structured interview Mss. Y did express her concern for the lack of books in the public school, the primary reason for not reading daily to her students (Interview, May 1, 2004):

> I would prefer if we had stories which are related to the themes; we have here only fairytales. Now they are changed, not like before; the ending I mean. We have the old versions, with the wolf that got her stomach or something like that. Because of this sometimes I'm getting stories from my home and reading stories. But I don't have enough stories with all topics. The stories are good for their imagination, sometimes you ask a question to see what they know, they predict the ending of the story (what do you think will happen?); this will help them to speak English more fluently; to use their vocabulary.

Children were exposed to the meaning of new words through discussions that were derived from flashcards (with a picture and/or printed word) and toy/real objects. Mss. Y exposed children to new vocabulary by making a connection between the concrete object and spoken language (e.g., saying "table" as she points to a table). First she introduced the real/toy object, followed by stating its linguistic language symbol. Even though these discussions introduced new vocabulary within context, they focused

on the teacher asking closed questions and children answering the question. For instance, during a review lesson on the theme transportation the teacher asked the following questions (Field notes, March 20, 2004):

She showed a toy vehicle and asked "What is this?"

"What are these? She asked, pointing to windows, doors, and wheels.

"How many wheels does the (name of vehicle) have?"

"Where does it move? (Sample answers: sea, road, sky, or railroad.)

"Who drives it?" (Possible answers: captain, driver, or pilot.)

These questions focused mostly on vocabulary acquisition. Contrary to her self-reported statements, no open-ended discussions were observed in the classroom.

In another context, the teacher introduced a new lesson about television. The following discussion portrays a teacher-directed, almost a lecture-type of discussion (Field notes, March 27, 2004):

Teacher: What is this?

Student 1: Television.

Teacher: This is a television. We put the wire inside the electricity to watch the television (she plugged the cord in). It has buttons (she points to buttons on the T.V). Now the television is on. I turned it on...What are these?

Students: Buttons.

Teacher: We use buttons in order to turn the television on. We have the television on. We have many channels. We press the number on the remote control to get the channel we want. This is channel one. What channel is this?

Students: Two.

After introducing the main concepts and vocabulary she ended the lesson by reviewing information she had presented in the lesson, again by asking children closed questions. Hence, discussions aimed at exposing children to vocabulary and transferring knowledge to students.

During a revision lesson on machines, Mss. Y introduced a worksheet with an outlined picture to be colored by students (picture of a girl helping her mom do laundry). She initiated a discussion by asking; "What is the girl doing?" Again the discussion focused mainly on vocabulary, involved teacher-dominated talk (with a ratio of about 80-20 teacher-student talk), and lecturing. She then proceeded to ask the following closed questions (Field notes, April 3, 2004):

"What is this?" pointing to a picture of a washing machine.

"What is she putting in the washing machine?"

"What other machines are found at home that need electricity?"

Then she created with her students a brainstorming web on the chalkboard (Figure 4.3 on p. 92). The vocabulary presented in the web was initiated from the following questions:

- What do we need to put in the washing machine in order to wash our clothes?

- What do we need with the iron in order to iron our clothes?

- Why do we use the dust cleaner?

- Why do we use the television?

- Why do we use the telephone?

- Why do we use the computer?

- Why do we use the radio?

- Why do we use the refrigerator?

During the task Mss. Y continuously translated words from English into Arabic and from Arabic into English. However, she did not print all the children's suggestions but only information she viewed as important. For instance, a child suggested that the keyboard has letters. She built on the child's idea by adding that the keyboard is used to type letters and to form words. Then she moved to discuss the use of the internet. The child's suggestion was not printed on the web or further elaborated on.

To sum up, Mss. Y initiated discussions that focused primarily on closed questions, lecturing, vocabulary acquisition, and revision strategies. Students were never observed being read to or encouraged to initiate discussions. Further, discussions in the classroom did not promote children's engagement in constructive conversations, rather these discussions focused on the teacher either transmitting or reviewing knowledge.

Figure 4.3

Brainstorming Web
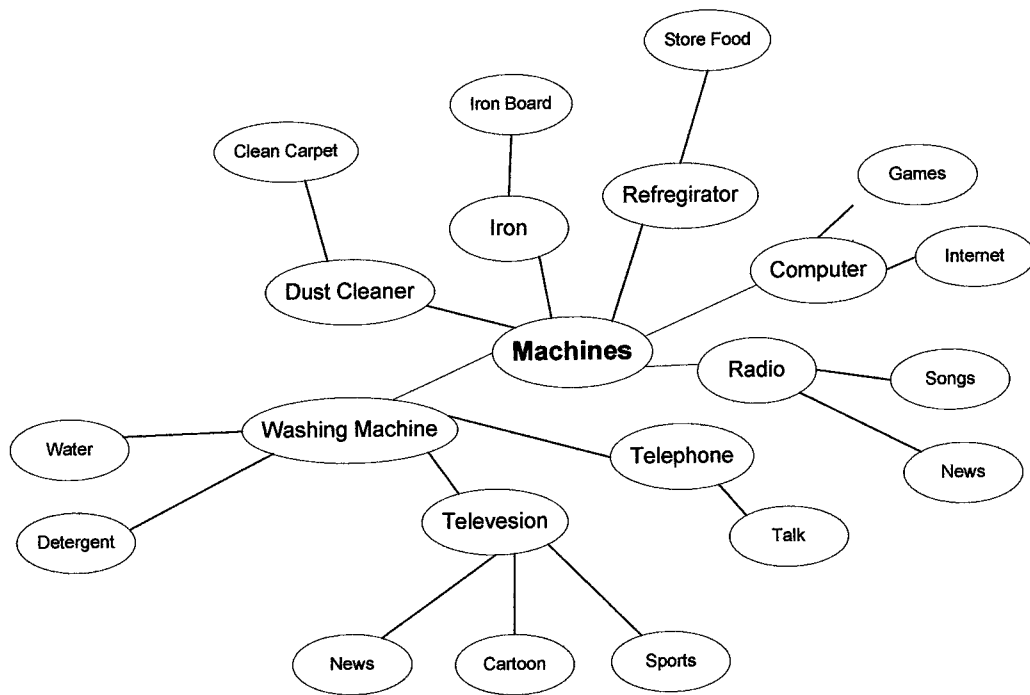
Strategies Used During Early Reading Instruction

Table 4.9 (p. 94) shows the teacher's self-reported methods and strategies implemented in her classroom to teach emerging or early reading skills. As indicated Mss. Y stated that she exposes children to phonemes through flashcards and that she plans early reading lessons that cater to the students' individual needs and abilities.

Table 4.9

Mss. Y's Self-Reported Reading Instruction Practice

Statements	Mss. Y
Students are encouraged to recognize some letters and words in big books.	
Students are encouraged to recognize some letters and words on flashcards.	*
Students are encouraged to say the sound of letters.	
I introduce one meaningful letter at a time (e.g., letters found in their names or related to theme).	*
I introduce letters that are not related to the theme or students' names.	
Students are encouraged to identify beginning sounds in words (e.g., "dog" begins with the /d/ sound).	
Students are encouraged to identify final sounds in words (e.g., "dog" ends with the /g/ sound).	
Students are encouraged to identify middle sounds in words (vowels).	
I teach students to recognize uppercase letters.	
I teach students to recognize lowercase letters.	
I encourage children to recognize and identify rhyming words.	
I encourage children to sort or categorize words based on initial, final, or middle sounds in words.	
I encourage children to say words slowly so that they can hear the sounds in the words.	
I encourage children to count the number of sounds heard in certain words.	
I encourage children to sometimes remove or add a certain sound or letter and say the new word (e.g., the child may be asked to remove the /k/ from the word "monkey" which becomes "money").	
Reading instruction varies from one child to another, depending on their abilities.	*
Reading instruction is planned according to the age span of the children, as such, all	

children participate in the same activities.	
I use basal books to teach my students to read.	
By the end of KG 2, all students are expected to read a book aloud to an adult.	
Usually, reading instruction occurs in a preplanned and structured manner (e.g., planning the literacy program from simple to complex activities or skills).	
Usually, reading instruction occurs in no specific or prescribed sequence; rather our program encourages informal literacy instruction based on my perception on what students need to learn and when they need to learn it.	

Mss. Y managed her classroom efficiently to get the most out of the one and a half hours she had, as such she led a structured and repetitive literacy routine. The general format of the language arts began with a similar routine and procedures each day. The teacher first took attendance by calling out children's names and students responded with either "absent" or "present". Then the whole-class completed the calendar, months in a year, and season activities, followed by reciting and pointing to numbers 1-31 and revision of previous taught vocabulary and sight word. Finally a new lesson or sight word was introduced. Mss. Y was consistent with the literacy routine in her classroom; every observed session proceeded in the previously described literacy routine, during which children were asked to recite and recognize print on flashcards and posters displayed on the walls, and copy or write words from memory. Mss. Y taught pre-reading skills through sight words; children were required to recognize and copy sight words. For instance, Mss. Y asked the class to show her where the word Saturday was on the calendar. After a volunteer correctly pointed to the corresponding word, she went around the classroom asking a selected number of children to point to the flashcard with the word Saturday among all the days of the week. Finally, a child was selected to copy the word on the chalkboard. The same procedure was implemented for teaching the months in the year, the current season, and weather descriptor (e.g., sunny, rainy, or windy). This contradicts Mss. Y's response during the structured interview where she reported spending 20 minutes each day on teacher-directed literacy instruction.

Table 4.10

Frequency of Mss. Y's Comments during the Semi-Structured Interview

Category: (Code)	
	Mss. Y
Category 1: Literacy physical environment (LPE) • Library center • Writing center • Listening center	0
Category 2: Social context of literacy instruction (SCLI) • One-to-one • Small group • Whole class	3
Category 3: Storybook reading (SR) o Reading books o Story discussion o Make predictions o Answer and ask questions	1
Category 4: early/emerging reading (EER) o Sight words o Word wall o Letter symbols & letter-sound correspondence o Sequence of letter taught o Rhyme	3

○ Blending sounds ○ Segmenting sounds ○ Deleting/adding sounds ○ Shared/interactive reading ○ Word discussion	
Category 5: Early/emerging writing (EEW) ○ Copying/tracing words ○ Independent writing (invented spelling) ○ Interactive writing ○ Shared writing ○ Journals	1
Category 6: Integration of reading and writing (IRW) • Taught together • Not taught together	0
Category 7: Teacher beliefs about literacy instruction (TBLI) • Beliefs match practice	1
• Beliefs contradict school's philosophy	6
• Beliefs influenced by level of education and/or experience	1

As indicated, Table 4.10 (p. 97) shows Mss. Y's semi-structured interview comments. Mss. Y prepared children for formal reading instruction to occur in grade one, making three statements describing the school's pre-reading program. Mss. Y taught early reading skills primarily through vocabulary acquisition and sight word recognition. To teach new vocabulary and sight words, she first introduced a picture or real object to be discussed. For instance, by asking; "What is this?" (Field notes, March 20, 2004)

Student 1: Car

Teacher: This is a car. (Teacher writes car on chalkboard and draws a circle around it)

Student 1: Can I write car? (Student copies the word car on the chalkboard)

Teacher: What are these?

Student 2: Door

Teacher: Yes, a door. We can open and close them. Do we have a door in our classroom?

Student 3: Yes.

Teacher: (Student's name), please open and close the door. (Student's name), is opening the door and know he is closing the door.

Then, Mss. Y continued the lesson by singing the song "The wheels on the Car" as she pointed to each part of a toy car and demonstrated its use to the students. Hence, she followed McLaughlin's (1995) recommendations to teach children new vocabulary through songs and rhymes. McLaughlin notes that songs promote the language development of children learning English as a second language, as children are exposed

to sentence patterns, words, as well as meaning. Throughout the discussion the teacher also encouraged children to speak English in full sentences.

Children in the classroom were taught vocabulary through closed questions, songs with sight words linked to them, and illustration of sight words on paper. For instance, in another lesson, Mss. Y extended the discussion by asking children to write their names on a piece of paper, then copy the date and the word truck, and finally to draw and color a picture of a truck. She also demonstrated the procedure and steps in drawing a car: "We make a rectangle, a small square, and three circles. We made a truck" (Field notes, March 20, 2004). However, according to Isenberg and Jalongo (1997), visual art is a form of expression; young children use drawing to express their ideas, feelings, and experiences. In fact, children should have the freedom to organize their ideas on paper without adult interference. Mss. Y, on the other hand, established the acceptable criteria for her students' illustrations.

Mss. Y also implemented other strategies to teach sight words, such as matching a printed word to its corresponding illustration. Mss. Y confirmed Freppon and McIntyre's (1999) findings that teachers implementing a reading readiness approach taught early literacy skills through isolated skills. For instance, during one lesson on the theme nutrition, students were called upon to read words from flashcards that displayed printed words and their picture representation. However, pictorial representations were very small in size and unclear to students sitting in the back (and to the observer for that matter). As a result, many children could not "read" the flashcards (Field notes, April 22, 2004). In another context, during a revision lesson on the theme transportation, Mss. Y began by printing the following words on the chalkboard: ship, car, bus, bicycle, truck,

train, boat, plane, and helicopter. Next, every child in the class was called on and was asked to identify and read each word on the chalkboard. Students were encouraged to recognize words by sight and were never encouraged to sound-out phonemes in a given word. Then children were asked to match picture illustration of the words with the printed label. While more able children were asked to "read" all the words and match all the pictures to their printed label, weaker students (who were seated in the back of the classroom) were asked to read all the words but match only some, if any pictures to the words. This matched Mss. Y's self- report of implementing reading activities that vary among children depending on their abilities.

During the semi-structured interview, when Mss. Y was asked how she adapted activities to meet the needs of weaker and stronger students, Mss. Y explained that she lacked time and resources to meet the needs of individual students (Interview, May 1, 2004):

> Not all of the time I have the ability to sit with a lower ability child and give him all of my time because there are too many individual differences in my class. There are 10 students that quickly finish their work and give me their papers so I have to quickly provide them with another work. And I have another group of children which are very slow and (laughs) I have some very low abilities in my class; so if I give them one-to-one work they can work with me and give me better results but it is very difficult here to work with them here in our school.

During the structured interview, Mss. Y stated that she introduced one meaningful letter at a time; however the field notes indicated that there was very negligible focus on phonemes and letters. Hence, Mss. Y's self-reported practices did not match the

researcher's observations. During the observation sessions, she often stated 3-6 times that a word began with a given letter or sound. For instance, "[Child's name], can you find Saturday? No, Saturday starts with the letter /s/.../suh/- Saturday." When pronouncing the beginning sound of a word Mss. Y regularly added /uh/ to the sound. For instance, the /s/ sound became /suh/, the /t/ sound became /tuh/, and so on (Field notes March 27, 2004). In another situation, she asked, as she pointed to a flashcard with the word yellow: "Do you see the /wuh/ here? Wassim starts with /wuh/. White starts with /wuh/?" A student saw the connection and screamed out "wipers". "Yes, wipers start with /wuh/ too," she explained (Field notes, March 20, 2004). In addition to adding /uh/ to each sound, she also used examples that started with the same letter, yet produced different sounds (e.g., /w/ in yellow and white make distinct sounds). However, Miller (2000) warns educators against altering such phonemes, stressing that letter names-sounds be taught in context of the word it is in, a process usually referred to as "implicit" or "analytic" phonics. For instance, "the word /d/ would be referred to as the sound that is heard at the beginning of the words dog, duck, and doll" (p. 128). Thus, the sound /d/ should never be pronounced as /duh/, since a /duh/ sound does not exist in the English language.

The language arts program in the classroom was solely based on sight word recognition and prerequisite skills for reading instruction to occur in grade one. Therefore, children enrolled in the classroom were not taught or exposed to early decoding strategies, rather they were taught to memorize and recognize words. According to the program set by the Ministry of Education, Center for Educational Research and Development (CRDP), there should be no focus on any letter names or sounds. In fact,

the public school had a policy that prohibited the teaching of letter symbols and their sounds. This is in contrast to many research studies demonstrating the significance of shared reading and phonemic awareness skills as effective components to future reading skills (e.g., Snider, 1997; Majsterek, Shorr, & Erion, 2000; Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, & Ary 2000; Kjeldsen, Niemi, & Olofsson, 2003).

During the semi-structured interview, it became clear that Mss. Y was unsatisfied with the program. She had the following to say about how early reading and writing were introduced at KG 2 (Interview, May 1, 2004):

In our school here we focus on sight words because this is the nature of our literacy program. But sometimes I give them phonics during giving words. (Laughs) And this is only by me; it is not required by the school or educational board.

In summary, children in the classroom were taught pre-reading skills through sight word recognition lessons; children were expected to read and copy sight words.

Strategies Used During Early Writing Instruction

Table 4.11 (p. 105) shows statements reflecting Mss. Y's self-reported methods and strategies implemented to teach early and emerging writing. As the table indicates, Mss. Y stated that writing lessons were derived from students' abilities and needs, all children were expected to participate in the same writing activities, and children often observed her modeling the writing process.

Children in the classroom were not taught the alphabet; however, were prepared for future writing that will occur in grade one through copying words and filling out thematic worksheets. These readiness worksheets aim at developing children's visual

103

discrimination, matching skills, and hand-eye coordination. As her self-report indicated, all children were expected to participate in the same writing activities. Some worksheets required children to match numerals to their corresponding sets, draw a shape or picture, trace a picture, color specific pictures on the page, cut pictures, or match words to there corresponding pictures. For instance, one worksheet had the objective of helping children match and recognize the printed word "red", and children were expected to first write their name and the date, then to color the inside of the outlined word "red" with a red crayon, and finally recognize and circle the printed words "red" among other printed words with a pencil. During this task the teacher went around checking the students' performance; some children received a smiley face with a check mark, while others received an X. She corrected children's writing, spelling, and handwriting by crossing words and rewriting the correct format over, next to, or on the word.

All the children could match words, but due to the abstract nature and multiple directions of the worksheet exercise, many children circled all the words on the page, rather than only circling the printed word "red". In another worksheet, children were instructed to match pictures to words by connecting a line from the picture to its word. However, some children incorrectly connected pictures to unrepresentative words. Others correctly performed this task by referring to the flashcards on the wall. Only few students independently performed this task without teacher assistance and without looking at the flashcards on the wall.

Table 4.11

Mss. Y's Self-Reported Writing Instruction Practice

Statements	Mss. Y
I use worksheets to teach the formal writing of letters and words.	
Students are encouraged to write daily in their journals using invented spelling.	
Students learn to correctly spell words through dictation activities.	
I reinforce good handwriting by expecting students to write on lined paper (in between the lines).	
Writing instructions are planned according to my observations of individual students' writing phase, abilities, and needs.	*
All children are expected to participate in the same or similar writing activities.	*
I usually model the process of writing during group time by printing students' dictated ideas on large charts.	*
I usually model the process of writing during group time by printing students' dictated ideas and by involving students in the process of writing (e.g., asking some students to write letters or words).	*
I never or rarely model the process of writing.	

Findings in this case study matched those reached by Nielsen and Monson (1996), who noted that teachers implementing reading readiness programs spent a large bulk of teaching literacy through worksheets. As in their study, children in this classroom had little or almost no experience in independent writing; that is they were not provided with the opportunity to write freely and to explore writing and marks created on paper.

During the semi-structured interview, Mss. Y expressed her concern for the lack of appropriate sequence and inadequacy of the thematic worksheets provided by the CRDP (interview, May 1, 2004):

The worksheets that we use with them are sometimes in French and we can not use those French worksheets. And we always have to create our own because it is not beneficial for their themes. I think the whole program should be changed. And sometimes there is a worksheet in number 2, a week later we reach a worksheet on number 10 (in the same workbook) and we are still on number 2. So, there is no sequence. There are gaps in math, there are gaps in language; all worksheets are supposed to be in English because this is what we are teaching, but sometimes they are in French. Sometimes worksheets ask children to color according to the letter, but in the program we are not supposed to teach letters. Also, worksheets do not include science concepts. For example, next week we will start a theme about water but there is not one worksheet about evaporation, to know about density, floating and sinking. So I have to create my own worksheets.

Hence, Mss. Y expressed her concern and dissatisfaction with the insufficient thematic worksheets.

The CRDP provided public schools with thematic worksheet booklets that came in predetermined sequence of topics (a theme for October, another for November, and so on). However, these booklets lacked sequence skills, one common language, and did not meet the philosophy promoted by the CRDP. For instance, even though the CRDP banned the teaching of letters and phonemes, one worksheet instructed students to match vowels to pictures and was available only in French; as a result the teacher omitted the worksheet. Since Mss. Y considered learning through worksheets important, she constructed her own personalized worksheets that complemented themes set by the CRDP.

Writing opportunities occurred through worksheet exercises (on a daily basis), as well as through copying or writing words from memory either on the chalkboard or on paper. Whitehead (1997) recommends that educators provide children with blank paper during writing activities, thus allowing them flexibility in drawing and writing, and stresses on the drawbacks of using lined paper with young children as it is restricting and as young children are still exploring letter forms (size and shape of letters).

During writing exercises, children were always asked to first write their names and the date before filling out worksheets or copying words on a blank paper (which occurred 2-3 times daily). A typical writing lesson usually proceeded in the following format. First, the teacher printed a target word on the chalkboard and volunteers were asked to copy the word on the chalkboard. Then the teacher erased the target word and asked new volunteers to write the word from memory. Finally, children were asked to copy the target word and/or previously taught words on a blank paper and illustrate them. Students typically completed writing tasks individually and were continuously reminded

to stay on task and to stop talking. This resonates with findings of McGill-Franzen, Lanford, and Adams (2002) and Barone (2002), who found that kindergarteners were provided with limited opportunities to engage in meaningful writing experiences, were mostly exposed to literacy instruction occurring in an isolated context, and focused primarily on copying words. Contrary to recommendations of Korat, Bahar, and Snapir (2002), on one occasion Mss. Y was even observed grabbing a child's hand to demonstrate and assist him in writing his name. Based on the researchers' view, teachers should never force children to write, nor should they do the writing for them, rather children should be encouraged to use their current writing knowledge in a play-like literacy classroom atmosphere.

Children were provided with the opportunities to write independently by coping words; however, they were never encouraged to write using invented spelling or to write in complete sentences. The eight observation sessions confirmed Mss. Y's self-report from the structured interview where she indicated that students are daily provided with 10 minutes to write independently. However, observations did not support her claim that writing instruction was planned based on her observations of individual students' writing phase, abilities, and needs. Furthermore, student-dictated statements were never printed on the chalkboard, and children were never observed being involved in the process of writing; they were only involved through copying words. Moreover, during the semi-structured interview Mss. Y did not report modeling writing or process-centered writing activities as being practices implemented in her classroom. In fact, even though she was prompt to discuss how she taught early reading and writing, Mss. Y only discussed her concern with the school's emphasis on sight words and her support for teaching letter

names and sounds. Throughout the interview she did not discuss process-centered strategies used to teach writing, which may indicate that she views reading as more important than writing, or that her university education had exposed her to traditional methods to teaching early writing.

To sum up, children enrolled in Mss. Y's classroom had little or almost no experience in meaningful and relevant writing experiences. That is, they were not provided with the opportunity to write freely and to explore writing and marks created on paper. Also, children were not exposed to meaningful opportunities of observing adults write or modeling writing (e.g., teacher writing student-dictated statements and discussing words and letter clusters). Children were expected to participate in the same writing activities and produce identical products. Furthermore, during the semi-structured interview, Mss. Y discussed in more detail reading practices occurring in her classroom, while placing less emphasis on writing strategies. She mentioned only one statement describing writing instructions occurring in her classroom.

Question 4: What Connection Does the Teacher Make between Reading and Writing?

Mss. Y conducted lessons with the aim of teaching and promoting early reading and writing skills. Even though reading and writing were somewhat connected, they were never integrated in a meaningful way. For instance, students were only encouraged to recognize words by sight and then to write these words either by copying the words or writing them from memory. Students were never encouraged to construct and read personal sentences, and the teacher was never observed constructing a text or message

with her students. Thus, there was inefficient integration of reading and writing that would prepare children for formal reading and writing instruction in the first grade.

Nevertheless, as indicated in Table 4.10 (p. 97), during the semi-structured interview the Mss. Y did not acknowledge nor place emphasis on the importance of connecting reading and writing; rather she separated literacy activities leading to early reading and writing skills.

Literacy Beliefs of Mss. Y

Question 5: What are the Teacher Beliefs about How Early Literacy should be Taught and Reinforced, and What Strategies Does the Teacher Perceive as Being Most Effective To Teach Reading and Writing?

Table 4.12 (p. 112) shows the teacher's self-reported beliefs and reveals that Mss. Y has eclectic beliefs about literacy instruction as four responses indicate a reading readiness view. Mss. Y believes that literacy develops from structured, formal, well-planned, and predetermined literacy lessons. Observations documented children's continuous and regular participation in structured, teacher-directed activities (e.g., identifying words, filling-out worksheets, and copying words). Furthermore, Mss. Y followed sequenced, predetermined lessons on targeted sight words and thematic units. She also believes that learning to read and write is a sequential process, as such literacy activities implemented catered for a similar group of children within the same stage. As a result, she rarely provided students with one-to-one instruction that would scaffold each individual child's learning into the next developmental stage. However, even though Mss. Y supports reading aloud books to children daily, she was never observed practicing her

belief (possibly due to the lack of available trade books). Mss. Y also believes that children need time and opportunity to practice literacy skills at their own pace. Yet, again observations did not document the practice and implementation of this belief; children were not provided with the opportunity to develop at their own pace. The focus was on the whole group rather than the individual children. Finally, although Mss. Y reported that reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently, reading and writing were not really connected as children were copying and reading isolated words.

Question 6: Is the Teacher Aware of Recognized Effective Strategies in Shaping

Children's Future Reading and Writing Skills?

Mss. Y was aware of some effective strategies in shaping children's future reading and writing skills, but lacked awareness of a variety of effective strategies. For instance, she reported and acknowledged the importance of reading daily to students, providing students with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills and to develop at their own pace, and making a connection between reading and writing. On the other hand, she lacked awareness of other effective strategies such as planning meaningful and relevant literacy activities, implementing literacy activities in a natural setting, and planning process-centered activities that meet the needs of children within different literacy stages. In contrast, Mss. Y recognized less effective strategies such as planning formal, predetermined, and structured literacy activities, as well as maintaining the same expectations for all children as they all pass through the same stages in the same manner.

Table 4.12

Mss. Y' Self-Reported Beliefs about Early Literacy

Statements	Mss. Y
Literacy develops from real life situations (e.g., a child writing a letter to a friend).	
Literacy develops from a structured and well planned literacy lessons (e.g., teaching children to decode words or to copy sentences in their workbook).	*
Literacy skills are reinforced when teachers read daily to their students.	*
Literacy skills are reinforced through formal literacy instruction (e.g., identifying letters on flashcards, matching letter to its corresponding sound on worksheets, and copying letters, numbers, and words).	*
Children learn to read and write through participation in meaningful and relevant literacy activities (e.g., pretending to "read" or "writing" a story).	
Children learn to read and write through participating in predetermined formal literacy activities (e.g., identifying and recognizing rhyme, letters, and sounds through worksheets).	*
Children need to be provided with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills.	*
Children need to be provided with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills; within limits.	
Children develop literacy skills at their own pace.	*
Children from a similar age group develop literacy skills at a similar pace.	
Reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently (develop together and support one another).	*
Reading and writing develop as separate skills.	
Learning to read and write is a developmental process. Children pass through similar stages in a variety of ways.	
Learning to read and write is a sequential process. Children pass through the same stages in the same manner.	*

Mss. Y was aware of the limitations of her school's approach to teaching early literacy, viewing a program based solely on sights word recognition and vocabulary acquisition as inadequate (Interview, May 1, 2004):

If it was up to me, I would give the alphabet and from the alphabet I would give the words according to the theme we are giving them. And phonics will come from the words and through the alphabet; it would be much easier to the students. We can start with the uppercase and after six months or three months they have to give them both. Sound also is very important; it is very important and it will be much easier for the students to read and to write because they'll cut the word into syllables and it will be much easier for them. Now they are memorizing the words like they memorize pictures. Yeah, by shape.

Thus, Mss. Y acknowledged the essentiality of exposing Kindergartners to uppercase and lowercase letter names and sounds, as well as sight word that are derived from target letters. As a response to her dissatisfaction with the school's program, she provided students with spontaneous phonemic instruction, as opportunities arose, and created her own worksheets to reinforce target sight words. She specified that she is in no way permitted by the CRDP to give phonics or phonemic instruction.

In addition, Mss. Y disagreed with the school's literacy expectations and as a result suggested more age appropriate expectations. By the end of KG 2 students in Mss. Y's classroom were expected to understand the English language, attempt to speak in English, acquire a large vocabulary of the English language, and recognize sight words. However, Mss. Y disagreed with there expectations; she felt that students within this age group were ready to go beyond these expectations and, in fact, should. Mss. Y expressed

her concern that children will not acquire basic skills prior to grade one. The following conversation during the semi-structured interview illustrates Mss. Y's beliefs about what needs to be done (Interview, May 1, 2004):

Interviewer. And according to you what do you feel they should be able to do by the end of KG 2?

Mss. Y. According to me, I'm doing by best to work on the phonics. I'm giving the sound of some letters because I think it would be much easier for them to read at grade one, but not all students are getting it because we are not focusing on letters. Even though I have lots of them they know now that when I say for example 'Monday starts with /muh/' they say 'Mahdi, mmm'. We took letter /s/ yesterday; I said 'this is /suh/', he said 'my friend Slayman starts with /suh/ and summer, spring, seeds, the stem starts with /suh/'. So it was lots of vocabulary we got it from the letter /s/. They don't know the letter /s/, but I gave them the sounds. I'm doing this and if my supervisor finds out I may get fired. I'm doing this and it's not even enough.

Interviewer. You feel they are ready to go further.

Mss. Y. Yes, they will not read a sentence if they were given a sentence in grade one.

Interviewer. Do you think in this year they should be introduced to reading and writing?

Mss. Y. Sure, they can do it.

Even though Mss. Y was aware of limitations that resulted from her school's language arts program and expectations, and attempted to make some changes to the best

of her knowledge, recourses, and freedom, she did so using inappropriate strategies. For instance, she attempted to expose her students to some phonemes, yet did not implement effective phonemic awareness strategies.

Question 7: What Does the Teacher Perceive to Have Influenced her Current Beliefs?

Mss. Y reported that knowledge gained from university influenced her teaching instruction, as this was only her first year teaching KG 2. This influence became apparent with her reading readiness beliefs and practices. For instance, she viewed worksheets as essential materials in teaching literacy skills, where she even went out of her way to construct her own worksheets. Further, she expressed the importance of structured, formal literacy lessons presented in a sequenced and predetermined literacy program. Finally, she often added an /uh/ sound when referring to sounds that specific letters make. All these are features of the reading readiness program. In fact, since Mss. Y perceived her literacy practices as being influenced by knowledge gained from university.

Even though in the 1970's American researchers became interested and documented children's early reading and writing experiences, it wasn't under the recent couple of years that the emergent literacy approach dominated the reading readiness view (Crawford, 1995). In other words, since today universities promote the emergent literacy philosophy it may be assumed that in the late 1980's the reading readiness approach may have been emphasized in Mss. Y's university classes.

Question 8: Is There a Match between the Teacher's Reported Beliefs and her Practice?

Some of Mss. Y's classroom practices reflected contradictory beliefs. To be more precise, her reading readiness beliefs matched her classroom practices whereas her emergent literacy beliefs did not correspond to her literacy practices. Similarly, to participants in a study conducted by Bridge, Compton-Hall, and Cantrell (1997), Mss. Y also was required by her supervisors to implement a literacy program that did not fully reflect her beliefs. Furthermore, during the semi-structured interview, Mss. Y emphasized the school's program as the primary constraint that prevented her from implementing her beliefs, rather than the number of students. Hence, the program did not give Mss. Y the freedom to plan and implement instruction and activities she viewed as beneficiary to her students, rather the school forbade her from making choices and changes. In summary, Mss. Y felt that her beliefs to a great extent contradicted her practices. This became more obvious during the semi-structured interview where Mss. Y made six statements expressing how her beliefs contradicted her school's philosophy.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Literacy Physical Environment

Mss. X

Even though Mss. X's classroom did not have a large quantity of literacy materials, she constructed a fun and play-like literacy atmosphere where reading and writing naturally emerged throughout the day. As Roskos and Christie (2002) and Korat, Bahar, and Snapir (2002) have shown, such a literacy environment encourages ESL children to use, build on, and practice literacy skills. Despite the moderate literacy environment, she used the available materials effectively by organizing them in learning centers. Because Mss. X encouraged children to practice and explore literacy skills and children were provided with the freedom and materials to create print, the physical environment in Mss. X's classroom met some criteria of the emergent literacy view. For instance, the classroom was divided into learning centers, materials were within children's reach, and furniture was arranged in a way that promoted social interaction. This is aligned with the recommendations of, for example, Morrow et. al. (1999) and Korat et. al. (2000).

Mss. Y

Mss. Y's classroom lacked many basic materials, and therefore the classroom could not be organized around learning centers. The classroom layout allowed Mss. Y to conduct whole-class and teacher-directed lessons, distribute materials as needed, and manage the large number of students, while the lack of materials, inflexibility of the Language Arts program, and the literacy environment in her classroom did not provide

children with opportunities to explore print. Rather the physical environment in her classroom was arranged to meet the needs of her school's Kindergarten curriculum.

Social Structure of Literacy Instruction

Mss. X

In Mss. X's classroom learning centers allowed her to work individually with selected children as well as with small-groups and whole-class; her classroom's physical layout supported learning in all three social context. For instance, as Mss. X worked with a student during individualized phonics and reading lessons, the remaining students independently rotated from one self-selected center to another and from one activity to another. This supports studies that have found that an effective literacy environment is arranged around learning centers, allows children to explore and experiment with print, as well as enables the adult to scaffold children's learning into the next stage (e.g., Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 1999; Braunger, et al., 1998).

As suggested for example by Taylor et. al. (2002) and Taylor et. al. (2000), teachers who implement activities in small-groups are usually more aware of their students' needs, abilities, and interests. Mss. X appeared aware of students' needs and often guided students' learning as she implemented literacy instruction in whole-class, small-groups, and one-to-one. In fact, the social structure of literacy instruction was usually dominated by students' individual needs and complexity of task. Mss. X implemented simple activities in small/whole groups (e.g., modeling reading and writing, rhyme activities, calendar tasks, phonics lessons, and independent writing in journals) and more complex activities in one-to-one instruction (e.g., individualized reading

lessons). This supports studies that have revealed the social structure of literacy instruction is directly determined by the complexity of the activity itself (e.g., O'Connor, Notari-Syverson, & Vadasy, 1996; Morrow, Tracey, Gee Woo, & Pressley, 1999).

Mss. Y

Mss. Y implemented literacy instruction as a whole-class, which made it more difficult to meet the needs and abilities of students in her classroom. The classroom setup, limited materials, large number of enrolled students, lack of extra aid, and rigid Language Arts curriculum made it difficult for Mss. Y to work with individual or small-groups of students. Therefore, as Mss. Y was obliged to implement a rigid literacy program, she did not have the time, flexibility, and opportunity to work with individual or groups of students. Even though some studies revealed that the social structure of literacy instruction was directly determined by the number of students in a given classroom (e.g., Ketner, Smith, & Parnell, 1997), Mss. Y felt that the primary limitation and reason for her implementing whole-class and teacher-dominated instruction as being restrictions placed on her by supervisors. For that reason, she did not view the high student-teacher ratio as the cause of whole-class and teacher-directed instruction. However, whole-class instruction does not provide young ESL learners with sufficient opportunity to practice new skills (e.g., Chard & Kameenui, 2000).

Storybook Reading

Mss. X

Although Mss X's classroom had only a moderate number of books and limited genres, she read daily to her students, and used reading aloud to enhance students' vocabulary, awareness of story structure, pleasure of reading, background knowledge, higher-level thinking, print awareness, and phonological awareness, aligned with recommendations of Rog (2001). As Mss. X seemed aware of the benefits of stories on children's print and phonemic awareness development, the limited quantity of books did not limit book reading opportunities.

During storybook reading activities Mss. X employed several effective strategies to familiarize children with concept of print and elements of the story. First, she initiated two-way communication as she read stories to students; for instance, she promoted discussions about elements of the story and print awareness skills throughout the story, which align with the suggestions of Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002). Second, she reflected recommendations of Justice and Pullen (2003) by applying both a "dialogic reading" and "print referencing" approach (2003, p. 5). For instance, she asked open-ended questions, expanded on children's comments, followed children's interests, and provided feedback, as well as asked and made comments and requests about print. Therefore, as Mss. X made efficient use of the moderate quantity of books found in her classroom, it seemed that she had the knowledge and training in the use of strategies during reading aloud activities that promote children's print awareness, comprehension skills, and joy of books.

Mss. Y

Even though research has shown the essentiality of literature in young children's literacy development, Mss. Y did not read to her students as her classroom contained no books and the school library displayed only a few fairytales that did not reflect themes assigned for her class. However, Mss. Y acknowledged the importance of literature in young children's literacy development, viewing books as necessary elements to expose children to the English language. As advocated by Rog (2001) she felt that through books children can indirectly become familiar with vocabulary, sequence of events, making predictions, as well as learn to speak the English language more fluently. Yet, Mss. Y used more direct and formal ways to introduce new vocabulary, such as translating words from English to Arabic and vice versa as well as introducing vocabulary through picture-word flashcards. It is possible that Mss. Y promoted rigid discussions derived from flashcards and toy/real objects due to the unavailability of books, rather than her lack of knowledge of the importance of books in young children's literacy development.

Although Rog (2001) found that the teacher-child interaction during discussions should be open and occur in a conversation-like manner, Mss. Y implemented closed discussions that were teacher-dominated, promoted limited conversation, and focused on supplying children with knowledge (e.g., "What is this?"; "How do we use it?"). During discussions Mss. Y failed to take children's responses into consideration, to build on their responses, and to encourage children to share their opinion. For instance, when she created a web during a discussion, Mss. Y did not print all children's suggestions, but only information she viewed as important. However, Morrow (1997) found that by printing all children's ideas teachers send the message to students that their ideas are important, valued, and appreciated. Although Morrow (1997) revealed that webbing is a

strategy that "builds on a child's prior knowledge and makes children become active in the reading process" (p. 216), Mss. Y did not connect the web to children's prior knowledge, and children were not directly engaged in the process nor were their personal ideas built on. Nevertheless, she used discussion webs to promote children's effective communication skills (e.g., take turns listening and speaking) as well as to help children observe her model conventional writing and categorizing concepts, as advocated by Miller (2000). It is likely that Mss. Y did not employ the webbing strategy effectively as she was introduced to the strategy during a recent workshop session and lacked experience in the application of the strategy. Her attempt to apply the webbing strategy indicates that Mss. Y seeks to improve as a professional in her field, however due to the short training session she employed the webbing strategy ineffectively.

Early/Emerging Reading

Mss. X

Mss. X implemented what can be best characterized as an eclectic literacy program, a combination of phonics and emergent literacy. She focused mostly on individualized reading lessons, explorative writing, and reading aloud to students, all basic aspects of the emergent literacy approach, as well as phonics lessons derived from students' individual needs and abilities. The time spent on these literacy activities and the frequency of the activities revealed that she viewed these activities as significantly important. Even though initially the literacy program in the classroom was based on the phonics approach, Mss. X modified and adapted literacy instruction to construct a balanced approach, thus combining the phonics approach with the emergent literacy

philosophy, which led to the formation of a more balanced literacy program, aligned with recommendations of Araujo (2002). Therefore, she combined two views of learning: 1) learning to read and write occurs in a natural manner and 2) learning to read and write occurs through structured, teacher-directed activities.

Concurrent with Whitehead's (1997) recommendations, Mss. X created an equilibrium between the emergent literacy and phonics approaches, as literacy lessons sometimes were developed spontaneously and other times were planned ahead of time and occurred in a structured manner. She avoided potential pitfalls associated with the basal reader approach (Miller, 2000) by modifying, altering, and selecting lessons to meet her students' needs, interests, and abilities. In other words, she was aware of the consequences of implementing the phonics kit as it is, which as a result, led her to implement a more flexible, balanced approach. Two factors clearly played a role in the Language Arts program implemented by Mss. X. First, her supervisors gave her the freedom to make the necessary changes in the curriculum, and second she seemed knowledgeable in effective strategies that promote emerging reading skills.

Mss. X employed strategies recommended, for example, by Burgess et. al., (2001), Taylor et. al., (2000), and Holdren (1995). Strategies, such as individualized phonics instruction, scaffolding children's learning, modeling and discussing reading strategies, asking higher-level questions, and promoting independent reading skills and sight word recognition both within context and in isolation, were observed in Mss. X's classroom and occurred in a child-centered, hands-on, and relevant manner. This indicates that she seemed aware of and up-to-date with emergent literacy strategies used with young children to teach early reading and its implications in the classroom. Even

though children in Mss. X's classroom were ESL learners, the students' fluency with the English language allowed her to apply many of the recommended emergent literacy strategies that were originally initiated to meet the needs of native English-speaking children.

Mss. X placed equal emphasis on both modeling reading and providing students with a large bulk of time to independently "read" books, which took place during transition, learning centers, and individualized reading lessons. However, Mss. X did not promote "choral reading", "tape-assisted reading", or "partner reading", advocated by Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn (2001, p. 28). On the other hand, she did employ a number of strategies suggested by Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000) and Adams (1996), which include providing students with time and opportunity to engage in reading experiences, guiding them during word recognition tasks, and encouraging them to read all difficult words rather than giving students the correct word. Although children read decodable texts independently, these texts lacked a clear beginning, middle, and end, and as such, can be confusing if read independently by children. Even though Mss. X made what changes she could in the phonics kit to make learning more holistic, she was obliged to teach reading through decodable books as she did not have access to sufficient quantity of other types of age-appropriate books.

In the classroom, one-to-one book reading allowed Mss. X to meet the needs of each individual child in the classroom. This reflected Abbot's (2000) suggestion that early childhood educators should expose young students to phonological awareness skills from as early as possible, as long as educators modify and adapt literacy instruction to fit students' needs and development. Because Mss. X provided children with literacy

instruction corresponding to their needs and abilities, it seemed that she was aware of each child's developmental stage and was able to provide each child with instruction in order to help them move into the next stage of development, as advocated by Goldenberg (1991) and Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000). Furthermore, the small number of enrolled students allowed her to work thoroughly with each child on an individualized early reading program and as a result cater to her students' needs.

Mss. Y

Mss. Y implemented a reading readiness program that focused mostly on sight word recognition, vocabulary acquisition, copying words, and worksheet tasks. Children were prepared for prerequisite literacy skills through both explicit (sight words instruction) and implicit (some mini-lessons on phonemes) literacy instruction. The time spent on these literacy activities and the frequency of the activities revealed that Mss. Y viewed them as significantly important. In fact, as Nolen (2001) suggested, the time and frequency of the literacy activities reflect the school's goals and expectations; as the school had a reading readiness view of learning, children were exposed to formal early reading strategies. The goal of the language arts program is to expose children to the oral English language as well as to help children read and write a large quantity of sight words.

Research shows that if a Kindergartner lacks exposure to phonemic awareness skills, he or she may be at risk for future reading failure (e.g., Snider, 1997, Majsterek, Shorr, & Erion, 2000; Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, & Ary, 2000; Kjeldsen, Niemi, & Olofsson 2003). However, Mss. Y prepared her students for formal reading instruction to

125

occur in grade one, and students in her classroom were not exposed to phonological and phonemic awareness skills or letter-sound association tasks. Even though on several occasions she was observed attempting to integrate some phonemic awareness lessons, her approach was not systematic. Two key factors played a role in Language Arts program implemented by Mss. Y. First, there were the constraints imposed by her supervisors, and the rigid and structured Language Arts program. Second, she had no access to literacy materials and resources. In other words, even though Mss. Y appeared to be aware of the pitfalls associated with her school's Language Art program and was interested in changing her literacy practices, she did not have support, materials, resources, and freedom to apply more child-centered literacy strategies.

A number of research studies recommend that educators employ numerous strategies to expose children to early reading skills (e.g., Morrow, 1997; Oyetunde, 2002). However, Mss. Y used only sight word recognition as the primary strategy to teach early reading skills. The public school program aimed at teaching sight words before letter names-sounds, which is aligned with the recommendations of Morrow (1997). However, Miller (2000) found that the pitfall of using sight word recognition as a strategy to teach pre-reading is the limitation of children's ability to memorize. Miller suggests that teachers teach sight words using a combination of strategies, which includes exposing children to sight words both within and in an isolated context, but these were not observed in Mss. Y's classroom. She was only observed teaching sight words in an isolated context, mostly through flashcards, indicating that she was not aware of and up-to-date with a number of emergent literacy strategies used with young children to teach early reading.

Braunger et. al. (1998) found that following children's learning abilities and pace is very essential, especially when it comes to children that lack competence in the English language. Mss. Y attempted to foster children's individual early reading abilities within her constraints by implementing pre-reading activities that varied among children's abilities; however, these activities were closed and hindered the more developed as well as weaker students. It seemed that Mss. Y was aware of children's diverse needs and tried to foster their literacy development using the limited available resources and materials as well as her existing knowledge and freedom.

Early/Emerging Writing

Mss. X

During writing opportunities children in Mss. X's classroom were encouraged to use invented spelling by thinking about letter-sound correlation and letter patterns as well as applying knowledge about conventional spelling and grammar rules. According to Whitehead (1997) young children also need a large block of time as well as variety of writing materials in order to explore the function and purpose of print and spelling patterns, and teachers need to employ a number of different methods to expose young children to early writing. Such methods, which include providing children with age-appropriate guidance, scaffolding children into progressing to the next stage of writing development, and helping children become familiar with grammatical rules, structure of the English language, and spelling patterns, were observed in Mss. X's classroom.

Mss. X provided children with the kind of opportunities called for by Dorn, French and Jones (1998), Saint-Laurent and Giasson (1999), and Adams (1996) and

others. She encouraged independent writing occurring in meaningful, enjoyable, and interesting activities as writing activities were open-ended and children's final products differed from one another. She engaged her students in writing activities as a form of expression to communicate ideas, opinions, and imagination. Furthermore, she used several of the strategies suggested by Huba and Ramisetty-Mikler (1995) and Adams (1996); she never checked, edited, or corrected students' invented spelling and never provided them with the correct spelling. As observed in her classroom, Mss. X promoted free writing using invented spelling as well as supported students' spelling knowledge, where children were encouraged to develop on their own pace and apply their current knowledge of literacy skills by participating in hands-on literacy activities, as recommended by Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez (2002), Ahmed and Lombardino (2000), Bridge, Compton-Hall, and Cantrell (1997), and Morrow, Tracey, Gee Woo, and Pressley (1999). This indicates that Mss. X was knowledgeable and skilled with numerous emerging writing strategies used with young children to teach early writing and up-to-date with recent classroom implications.

Ahmed and Lombardino (2000) argue that invented spelling is only part of the Language Arts curriculum, and recommend that educators plan lessons with the purpose of familiarizing children with letter-sound correspondence and spelling rules. This is what Mss. X did; during journal writing she often discussed, introduced, and reviewed some spelling, grammar, and letter clusters rules. For instance, she encouraged children to begin a sentence with a capital letter, end a sentence with a punctuation mark, say words slowly they write them, and leave spaces between words, which aligned with recommendations of Rog (2001). As Mss. X used mini-lessons to cater to each child's

writing abilities, she seemed aware of her students' writing development and appeared competent to guide and scaffold each child into moving to the next stage of writing development. Furthermore, her minimal emphasis on worksheets and her process-centered writing expectations indicate that the purpose of writing instruction was to encourage children to explore writing, and as a result, the format and structure of writing activities reflected the purpose of writing instruction. This supports studies that found that basal reader workbooks are usually uninteresting, dull, and unimaginative, and do not take into consideration each unique child's interests, characteristics, abilities, and needs (e.g., Miller, 2000; McLaughlin, 1995).

Many researchers have revealed that before young children write in their journals they need to take part in shared and interactive writing, during which teachers can model conventional spelling and discuss strategies used to spell and read (e.g., Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998; Rog, 2001). Although children in Mss. X's classroom were encouraged to independently write daily, they were not exposed to shared and interactive writing with the purpose of communicating ideas; rather Mss. X used shared and interactive writing to teach sight word, phonics skills, and grammatical rules. In other words, she applied shared and interactive writing strategies in a structured, teacher-directed manner.

The writing strategies employed by Mss. X were influenced by two factors. First, she had the freedom to make age- and individual-appropriate decisions. Second, she had knowledge about effective early writing instruction and was skillful in implementing the strategies. However, she demonstrated more competence in writing strategies she employed during independent writing tasks than those she used during shared and interactive writing.

Mss. Y

Mss. Y implemented product-centered writing instruction, the purpose of writing instruction being to expose children to the conventional spelling of predetermined sight words, and as a result the format and structure of writing activities reflected the purpose of writing instruction. She focused mostly on copying/writing sight words and reading readiness worksheets. The time spent on these literacy activities and the frequency of the activities revealed that she viewed these activities as significantly important. Children in her classroom were not taught literacy as a means to communicate ideas, as contrary to what Whitehead (2002) and others recommend.

Some researchers suggest that early childhood educators should teach writing skills through meaningful activities (e.g., Barone, 2002; Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, & Pianta, 2001), but like many other teachers Mss. Y placed minimal focus on meaningful writing instruction. In her classroom, writing opportunities were limited to copying and/or writing words from memory as well as learning how to spell words. This practice goes against the extensive research that acknowledge the importance of invented spelling and constructive writing in young children's writing development (e.g., Huba & Ramisetty-Mikler, 1995; Adams 1996; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Mariage 2001; Ford & Opitz, 2002; Bridge, Compton-Hall, & Cantrell 1997; Morrow et. al., 1999; Ahmed & Lombardino 2000; Ukrainetz et. al., 2000).

Contrary to Adams's (1996) recommendations that the Kindergarten curriculum should place minimum emphasis on copying, Mss. Y placed excess emphasis on copying as a form of writing. Yet, as Adams points out, children do not think while copying and

do not apply their knowledge of letter-sound associations. Mss. Y placed minimal focus on meaningful writing strategies and more focus on sight word recognition strategies that teach children to memorize and correctly spell sight words. However as Clay (2001) discovered, teaching writing though the memorization of words in fact limits constructive writing, which as a result reduces children's attempt to think and write, limits risk taking, and promotes dependency on memorizing words. It seems that Mss. Y lacked knowledge of effective, process-centered early writing strategies, as suggested by her focus on worksheets and copying tasks.

Even though research has shown the importance of explorative writing and essentiality of invented spelling in young children's literacy development (e.g., Braunger, et. al., 1998; Rog, 2001), Mss. Y prepared children for writing through worksheets. However, Miller (2000) found that worksheets do not meet young children's individual differences, and do not present advanced students with more challenging tasks and weaker students with more simple and ability appropriate tasks. Moreover, formal writing did not cater to all her students' abilities and needs. The artificial and formal methods did not expose Mss. Y's students to meaningful literacy activities nor to the pleasure and joy of writing that occur through shared and interactive writing opportunities, as McLaughlin's (1995) advocates. On the contrary, children were exposed to worksheet tasks that some found difficult to complete and did them incorrectly; as a matter of fact when tasks are not clear, children may be frustrated and loose motivation.

Several factors may have played a direct role in the structured writing strategies applied by Mss. Y. As was the case with the reading program, the supervisors restricted her from modifying the writing program to meet the needs of her students. Inadequate

materials and resources further prohibited the implementation of more effective strategies, while inadequate knowledge did not allow her to make the best use of the available resources. Further, the classroom setup did not allow her to work with small groups of students and the number of students made it difficult for Mss. Y to cater to her students' diverse needs and abilities.

Integration of Reading and Writing

Mss. X

Whitehead (1997) stated "reading and writing are two sides of the same coin and should be taught together as a whole literacy programme" (p. 116). Mss. X employed, indeed, a number of strategies to integrate reading and writing through both structured and unstructured literacy activities. However, Roskos and Neuman (2001) found that reading and writing can be more effectively integrated in a play-like atmosphere; for instance, by connecting literacy into dramatic play. Such connections that allow teachers to create an attractive, stimulating context in which literacy may be explored were not observed in Mss. X's classroom. It is possible that the limited resources posed constraints that limited the possibilities of integrating reading and writing in a play-like manner. It may be difficult and time-consuming for Mss. X to obtain materials on her own to turn the dramatic center into a post office, library, supermarket, book store, office, or restaurant. Further, even though Mss. X was give complete freedom the school expected students to read and write by the end of KG 2, which means that her focus needed be directed be on more structured language instruction.

Mss. Y

Mss. Y attempted to make a connection between reading and writing even though literacy skills were not integrated in a meaningful manner or within context, rather reading and writing were usually connected mostly through sight word lessons and occurred in an isolated and superficial context. She was not aware of the importance of integrating reading and writing as suggested by Braunger et. al. (1998), Richgels (1995), Ball and Blachman (1991), and others. It is also possible that the constraints under which she worked would have made such integration difficult. Mss. Y's literacy practices were directly influenced by her school's curricula and philosophy as well as the restrictions placed on her by supervisors.

Teachers' Beliefs about Early Literacy Instruction

Mss. X

The beliefs Mss. X about the teaching of emerging reading and writing reflect the emergent literacy approach. Following Miller (2000), Mss. X believes that literacy develops from real life situations, is reinforced when adults daily read to children, and that children learn to read and write through participation in meaningful and relevant literacy activities as well as by being provided with time and opportunity to practice literacy skills at their own pace. She also believes that reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently, and that learning to read and write is a developmental process. As Mss. X was in control of her classroom's literacy strategies and held emergent literacy beliefs, she involved students in meaningful, holistic literacy activities.

Findings from this case study support research that has found that newly graduated teachers have sufficient knowledge of emergent literacy terms and strategies (e.g., Troyer & Yopp, 1990; Burgess et. al., 2001). Even though Mss. X had limited teaching experience she was knowledgeable of the stages of phonemic awareness skills as well as strategies to enhance emergent literacy. She was aware of her students' phonemic awareness growth and implemented effective strategies to promote her students' phonemic awareness skills. Since Mss. X perceived the phonics kit as extremely structured and formal to be used with young children and because the school placed high expectations on Kindergarteners, she modified and adapted her literacy instruction to best suit her beliefs and children's needs. Mss. X's practices and beliefs indicate that she was knowledgeable in current emerging literacy practices and trained in the implementation of these strategies even though she lacked extensive teaching experience. Mss. X was able to implement her beliefs as she was given the independence, with limited interference to implement practices she viewed as more meaningful to her students.

Mss. Y

Mss. Y has eclectic beliefs about the teaching of early reading and writing. She believes that literacy develops from structured, formal, well planned, and predetermined literacy lessons, and that literacy lessons should proceed in a sequenced, predetermined manner. She perceives that learning to read and write is a sequential process and that literacy activities should cater for a similar group of children within the same stage. These views are advocated by reading readiness educators (Crawford, 1995). On the other hand, she also holds some emergent literacy views, believing that children should

be read to daily and need time and opportunity to practice literacy skills at their own pace, as well as that reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently (Miller, 2000; Crawford, 1995). Although Mss. Y was aware of some effective strategies in shaping children's future reading and writing skills, she lacked awareness of a variety of effective strategies.

Some research studies found that experienced teachers tend to lack knowledge of the emergent literacy approach (e.g., Block & Mangieri, 2002; Troyer & Yopp, 1990). It is a possibility that since Mss. Y has been out of school for more than ten years she had limited exposure to new, more effective strategies to teach emerging reading and writing. Further, there appears to be a discrepancy in Mss. Y's system of beliefs. In light of Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd's (1991) discovery that teachers undergoing change in their beliefs demonstrate a disequilibrium in their system of beliefs and practice; it is possible that as Mss. Y is in the process of forming and constructing a new perception of how young children learn to read and write her beliefs do not mirror her practices. In other words, her beliefs may be still in the process of being constructed and therefore are not reflected in her practices. This explanation becomes likely when considering that Mss. Y viewed a program based solely on sights word recognition and vocabulary acquisition as inadequate and that the public school has low expectations of children. Consequently, she responded to this dissatisfaction by attempting to expose children to some phonemes, yet did so using inadequate phonemic awareness strategies.

Literacy instruction is influenced by the school's philosophy (e.g., Bridge, Compton-Hall, & Cantrell, 1997; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampton, 1998). This is also clear in Mss. Y's case as some of her beliefs were not reflected in her classroom

practices of literacy instruction, rather she was directed by her supervisors to implement a reading readiness program that did not coincide with her eclectic teaching philosophy. To be more precise, her reading readiness beliefs matched her classroom practices, whereas her emergent literacy beliefs did not correspond to her literacy practices.

Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault, and Schuster (2001) have found that class size also influences teachers' literacy practices, where teachers with a large teacher-student ratio may resort to teacher-dominated strategies to get the job done even though these strategies may contradict their beliefs. However, Mss. Y felt that the class size did not influence her literacy practices. She viewed the primarily limitation that hindered the implementation of her beliefs to be the school policy, rather than factors such as the number of students, limited materials, and physical layout of the classroom. In other words, Mss. Y could not implement all her beliefs as she was restricted by the school from making any changes or modifications in the literacy program set by the Ministry of Education.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, & IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

Approaches and strategies to teach early literacy continues to be debated (Crawford, 1995). This case study documented two classroom settings to show how children were introduced to various literacy practices as well as provided insight into teachers' perception about their practices.

The literacy practices of the two teachers turned out to be complex and could not be categorized straight forward as 'emergent literacy' or 'reading readiness' approaches. Moreover, the study revealed that the teachers were not fully free to implement what they believed to be the most effective strategies. Their practices were constrained by availability of materials, level of freedom to select materials and strategies, as well as their knowledge of current research. However, the primary limitation for teachers to implement their beliefs in this case study was the freedom schools gave their teachers to use their professional judgment.

Limitations

While the two classrooms provided insight into these KG 2 teachers' beliefs and perceptions about early literacy, the study has some limitations. The limited sample of the two teachers does not allow generalizations to be made. In addition, this study may yield to the possible subjectivity of the researcher since only one person conducted the field work and analyzed data. A more serious limitation is that the results were not shared with the teachers and their feedback was not sought due to time constraints. Further, the researcher observed each classroom only on a specific day for a period of two months;

longitudinal, more extensive observations may yield more valid and reliable results (Burns, 2000). However, the "thick description" (Geertz, 1983) made available through the interviews and field notes provides "a close-up, detailed or meticulous view" (Mason, 1996, p. 92) of the two teachers' classroom literacy instruction, that might apply to a wider context.

Educational Implications and Future Research

Today Lebanese schools and early childhood educators are faced with the challenge of bringing up bilingual readers and writers. This task is even more challenging when it comes to Kindergartners that are not exposed to the English language at home, yet they are expected to learn to read and write in English only after a brief exposure to the language. Before children can learn to read and write in a second language they first need sufficient exposure to the oral English language. Furthermore, bilingual children need exposure to meaningful, holistic strategies. This implies a learning context that is rich in print of all kinds, books of diverse genre and level, plenty of writing materials, and that is setup to facilitate the implementation of an array of diverse strategies. The program needs to be balanced and flexible to allow teachers to make necessary modifications to meet their students' diverse needs and language development. Because an effective literacy program and competent teachers go hand in hand, teachers need access to professional development and training in effective literacy strategies and instruction. By hiring qualified teachers who share the school philosophy about learning and teaching, administrators can ensure that their teachers will make appropriate and effective decisions.

This research study proposes the need for further investigation in this area be conducted. It will be useful to continue as Silverman (2000) proposes, by adding more cases to study that will allow for extrapolation of findings to a wider context.

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Teacher Observation Form A1

Teacher: _____

Observer: _____

School: _____

Date: _____

Duration of activity: _____

Fill the following information:

1. Describe what literacy activity is going on.

    _____

    _____

    _____.

2. List materials used by teacher.

    _____

    _____

    _____.

3. Describe where the activity took place, student seating arrangement, & teacher
    location.

    _____

    _____

    _____.

4. Describe if teaching instruction took place in a whole group, small group, or one to one.

_____.

5. Describe the teacher's and students' roles during the activity.

_____

_____

_____.

Running Record:

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

Teacher Structured Interview A2

Informant: _____

Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Time: _____

Other Relevant Information:

_____

     This study is designed to gather information about KG teachers' classroom practice and personal beliefs about literacy instruction. Your cooperation during the study; especially during the two interviews is thus very important and by doing so you will be contributing directly to the research. I appreciate your cooperation. I would also like to point out that your answers to the questions during the interviews are confidential; they will not be made available to your supervisors or others.

Questions:

    I.   **Personal Profile/General Information**

        1. How old are you? Please, provide me with a range:

            20-29, 30-39, or >40

        3. What is the highest teacher education program that you have completed?

        _____

        4. What is the total number of years you spent teaching KG 2?

        _____

        5. What is the name of your school?

        _____

II. Classroom Structure

6. **How many students are enrolled in your classroom?**

_____

7. **How long is your school day?**

_____

8. **During literacy instruction do you mostly, least often, and never work with the entire class at once, small groups of children, or individual students?**

Mostly work with

_____

Least often work with

_____

Never work with

_____

III. Teacher's Beliefs about the Teaching of Reading & Writing

9. Which of the following statements correspond best with your <u>BELIEFS</u> about teaching reading and learning to read?

   a. Literacy develops from real life situations (e.g., a child writing a letter to a friend).

   b. Literacy develops from a structured and well planned literacy lessons (e.g., teaching children to decode words or to copy sentences in their workbook).

c. Literacy skills are reinforced when teachers read daily to their students.

d. Literacy skills are reinforced through formal literacy instruction (e.g., identifying letters on flashcards, matching letter to its corresponding sound on worksheets, and copying letters, numbers, and words).

e. Children learn to read and write through participation in meaningful and relevant literacy activities (e.g., pretending to "read" or "writing" a story).

f. Children learn to read and write through participating in predetermined formal literacy activities (e.g., identifying and recognizing rhyme, letters, and sounds through worksheets).

g. Children need to be provided with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills.

h. Children need to be provided with time and opportunities to practice literacy skills; within limits.

i. Children develop literacy skills at their own pace.

j. Children from a similar age group develop literacy skills at a similar pace.

k. Reading and writing develop concurrently and consistently (develop together and support one another).

l. Reading and writing develop as separate skills.

m. Learning to read and write is a developmental process. Children pass through similar stages in a variety of ways.

n. Learning to read and write is a sequential process. Children pass through the same stages in the same manner.

IV. School's Approach to Teaching Reading & Writing

10. Which one statement best describes your school's literacy approach?

a. My school's literacy approach focuses on preparing children to formally read and write. I focus mostly on letter identification and phonics lesson; where I teach reading and writing through activities such as: letter worksheets, copying letters & words, matching letters or words to there corresponding pictures, identifying the sound of letters, and so on.

b. My school's literacy approach focuses on learning to read and write through exposure to books and a rich-print environment. I continuously surround students with literature and literacy experiences, where I teach reading and writing through multiple holistic strategies (e.g., modeling, guided reading, shared writing, scaffolding, invented spelling, telling and retelling stories, publishing student books, and so on).

11. Please, estimate the total amount of time (in minutes) you spend on each of the following literacy activities:

_____ Minutes each day reading aloud to my students

_____ Minutes each day on teacher-directed and initiated reading and writing instruction (e.g., shared reading & writing, reading groups, or word analysis)

_____ Minutes each day students are provided with opportunity to independently use and practice reading and writing skills (e.g., "reading" books, invented spelling, creating books, or sorting words).

12. Which of the following literacy activities are reinforced your classroom?

<u>Book Exposure</u>

    a. I read to my students two or more books daily.

    b. I read to my students one book daily.

    c. I don't have time to read daily to my students.

    d. Students are encouraged to respond to the story (e.g., discuss words & concepts, make comments, and answer questions) before, during, and after the book reading.

    e. Students are encouraged to make predictions before and after the story.

    f. Students are encouraged to discuss the story only after I finish reading the book.

    g. Students are encouraged to answer open-ended questions about story.

    h. Students are encouraged to answer close questions about story.

    i.   Books are read for pleasure; we never discuss books.

Writing Instruction:

    a.   I use worksheets to teach the formal writing of letters and words.

    b.   Students are encouraged to write daily in their journals using invented spelling.

    c.   Students learn to correctly spell words through dictation activities.

    d.   I reinforce good handwriting by expecting students to write on lined paper (in between the lines).

    e.   Writing instructions are planned according to my observations of individual students' writing phase, abilities, and needs.

    f.   All children are expected to participate in the same or similar writing activities.

    g.   I usually model the process of writing during group time by printing students' dictated ideas on large charts.

    h.   I usually model the process of writing during group time by printing students' dictated ideas and by involving students in the process of writing (e.g., asking some students to write letters or words).

    i.   I never or rarely model the process of writing.

Reading Instruction:

    a.   Students are encouraged to recognize some letters, sounds, and words in big books.

b. Students are encouraged to recognize some letters, sounds, and words on flashcards.

c. I introduce one meaningful letter at a time (e.g., letters found in their names or related to theme).

d. I introduce letters that are not related to the theme or students' names.

e. I teach phonemic awareness and phonics skills occurring within context. For instance, word "dog" may be taken from a <u>chart</u> and students encouraged to identify that "dog" begins with the /d/ sound, ends with the /g/ sound, and contains a short /o/ sound or to identify words that rhyme with "dog".

f. I teach phonemic awareness and phonics skills using worksheets. For instance, children may be asked to circle pictures that rhyme with the word dog.

g. Reading instruction varies from one child to another, depending on their abilities.

h. Reading instruction is planned according to the age span of the children, as such, all children participate in the same activities.

i. I use basal books to teach my students to read.

j. By the end of KG 2, all students are expected to read a book aloud to an adult.

k. Usually, reading instruction occurs in a preplanned and structured manner (e.g., planning the literacy program from simple to complex activities or skills).

l. Usually, reading instruction occurs in no specific or prescribed sequence; rather our program encourages informal literacy instruction based on my perception on what students need to learn and when they need to learn it.

m. Usually, reading instruction is sometimes preplanned ahead of time and other times instruction is initiated spontaneously.

Do you have any additional comments about your classroom practice and beliefs?

Note: Item 10 was omitted from this research study as it did not represent the approach being implemented in Mss. Y's classroom.

Adapted from Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, & Pianta, (2001), 15-21.

Literacy Physical Environment Rubric A3

Observer:

School:

Date:

Instruction: *Please read each item carefully. Identify the response for each item (from none to abundant) that best represents the literacy physical environment at the school being observed. Circle the number that corresponds to your response.*

0 (none)   **1(one)**   **2(few)**   **3(several)**   **4(many)**   **5(abundant)**

Library Center						
1. Element of softness (e.g., rugs, cushions, pillow, stuffed animals, rocking chair, and sofa)	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. Area is placed in a quiet section of the room.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. Books placed on shelves.	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. Variety types of books (e.g., concept, rhyme, informational, poems, picture, and big books).	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. Poster or alphabet chart.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. Literature props (e.g., puppets, felt-board stories, recorded stories, or roll movie).	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. An average of 5 to 7 books per child.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. Large enough to fit 5 to 7 students.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. Children may borrow books on a daily base.	0	1	2	3	4	5
Writing Center						

10. Writing tools (e.g., washable markers, crayons, colored & black pencils, and chalk).	0	1	2	3	4	5
11. Different types of paper of various sizes.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. Materials for making student books (e.g., construction paper, white paper, stapler, scissors, whole puncher, & yarn).	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. Magnetic, felt, or wooden letters.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. Mail box for each student.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. Materials and tools are labeled.	0	1	2	3	4	5
Listening Center						
16. Books along with story cassettes.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score: **/80**

Adapted from Morrow, (1997), p. 182

Teacher In-depth, Semi-Structured Interview Questions A4

Informant: _____

Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Time: _____

Other Relevant Information:

_____

Questions:

1. Describe how much time during the day you spend on literacy activities such as reading and writing?

2. How much time do you think should be spent on literacy activities each day?

3. How do you interact with students during literacy activities (one-to-one, small group, whole class)? Give examples of each. Do you focus more on one-to-one, small group, or whole class instruction? Explain.

4. In your opinion, literacy activities should take place in one-to-one, small group, or whole class instruction. Explain reason.

5. Can you describe the nature of these literacy activities; how do you teach early literacy? Give examples of literacy activities implemented in your classroom.

   o Read to students (How often do you read and how many books do you read daily?)

   o Story discussion (what kinds of questions are asked during discussions (close-ended or open-ended) and when do you allow discussions? (e.g., beginning, during, or end of story)

   o Model reading and writing (shared reading & writing: teacher models reading stories and writes student dictated stories, statements, & messages.)

- o Letter name-sound correspondence (How? For instance, through big books, worksheets, word discussions, word/letter games, & interactive charts.)

- o Phonemic-awareness activities (How? For instance, through rhyme, naming/matching sounds in a give word, blending separate sounds to create a word, braking a word into separate sounds, & counting syllables in a word)

- o Phonic instruction (How? Through systematic or non-systematic instruction. Does your program introduce letter-sound correspondence in a specific pre-determined sequence or are these decisions left to the teacher's perception of what needs to be learned and when to learn it? Do you teach initial, middle, and final sounds?)

- o Sight word identification (How? For instance, matching words on flashcards, copying words using magnetic letters, word wall, illustrating sight words, or collecting a word bank. Do children select their personal words to be collected in their word bank?

- o Writing instruction and activities (How? For instance, worksheets, copying words, independent writing, shared writing, interactive writing, or writing workshops.)

6. If you had a choice, what kind of literacy activities would you use with your students? Why? Give examples.

7. Do you adapt these instructions or activities for weaker or stronger students? How?

8. In your opinion, is your teaching instruction influenced by your teaching experience or knowledge (university)?

9. Describe your school's philosophy for teaching reading and writing?

10. What do you like or dislike about your school's literacy approach? Are you satisfied with your school's literacy program? Explain. What is your philosophy for teaching reading and writing?

11. What are your school's goals for the literacy program? By the end of KG 2, what do you expect students to be able to do in terms of reading and writing?

12. What are your goals for the literacy program?

Appendix B

Operational Definitions

The following terms were frequently referred to throughout the study. The definitions of these terms represent there meanings as used in this study and will facilitate understanding of the study.

- Balanced literacy approach: A literacy approach that combines several literacy strategies (Miller, 2000).

- Basal Readers: A collection of materials such as student workbooks, teacher manuals, and trade books used for developing reading and writing skills (Miller, 2000).

- Emergent literacy program: A literacy approach that focuses on children's (from birth to age eight) early and non-conventional learning of literacy skills in a natural, meaningful manner (Morrow, 1997).

- Emerging writing: This term describes young children's gradual and continuous growth and development in writing skills and knowledge (Morrow, 1997).

- Emerging Reading: This term describes young children's gradual and continuous growth and development in reading skills and knowledge (Morrow, 1997).

- Literacy program: The language arts kindergarten curriculum implemented in a given classroom/school to teach children learning English as second language early literacy skills (reading and writing).

- Meaningful context: Literacy activities occurring in the students' real and natural world (e.g., writing a letter to Santa or sorting words found in a big book that begin with a certain sound); rather than being isolated from the real situation (e.g.,

copying words in worksheets or recognizing sight words from flashcards) (Morrow, 1997).

- Phonemic awareness: "The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate" separate sounds (phonemes) in words; it is a "subcategory" in phonological awareness (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, pp. 3-4). Phonemic awareness can be observed in the following ways: beginning/middle/final sounds, blending or combining sounds to make a word, segmenting or braking-up sounds in a given word, and deleting sounds to make a new word (Lane, Pullen, Eiselle, & Jordan, 2002).

- Phonics instruction: The ability to understand and recognize the relationship between phonemes (sounds in spoken language) and graphemes (letters that represent sounds in the written language) (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, 12). (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 4).

- Phonological awareness: The ability to recognize and manipulate "larger parts of the spoken language" ("words, syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes"). Phonological awareness can be observed in the following ways: recognizing oral rhyme, as well as, identifying syllables (e.g., clapping the parts in the name "/An/-/drew/"), onsets (e.g., /w/ in the word "win"), rimes (e.g., /in/ in the word "win"), and phonemes (e.g., /s/ in word "sun") in spoken words (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 3).

- Print awareness: "Awareness is defined here as being able to attend to something, act upon it, or work with it" (Clay, 1998, p. 42). Thus, print awareness is defined as the understandings a student has about the rules of print and written language.

167

For example, concepts about print includes: reading from left to right and top to bottom, words are made of letters, use of spaces between words, use of uppercase/lowercase letters, spelling patterns, punctuation, etc. (Miller, 2000).

- Print-rich environment: A classroom that encourages print awareness through a rich literacy setting (e.g., labels, signs, charts, calendars, and lists) and through motivating children to use print in functional and useful ways (e.g., the language center has a variety of books, writing tools, and paper within children's reach) (Morrow, 1997).

- Reading readiness program: There are two distinct types of reading readiness programs: 1) programs that focus on play centers; omitting any reading and writing activities and 2) programs that focus on formal, academic instruction; reading and writing are taught in isolation of context (e.g., worksheets, workbooks, and basal materials) (McMahon, Richmond, & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998).

- Social structure of literacy activities: Refers to the context of literacy instruction: whole-class, small-group, or one-to-one instruction (Morrow, 1997).