

1-1-1992

The influence of teachers' beliefs on literacy instruction for at-risk first graders: A multiple case study

Sylvia P Maxson

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/rtds>

Repository Citation

Maxson, Sylvia P, "The influence of teachers' beliefs on literacy instruction for at-risk first graders: A multiple case study" (1992). *UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations*. 2967.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/afjd-chtc>

This Dissertation is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Dissertation in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Dissertation has been accepted for inclusion in UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 9420588

**The influence of teachers' beliefs on literacy instruction for
at-risk first graders: A multiple case study**

Maxson, Sylvia P., Ed.D.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1993

Copyright ©1993 by Maxson, Sylvia P. All rights reserved.

U·M·I

**300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106**

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' BELIEFS
ON
LITERACY INSTRUCTION
FOR
AT-RISK FIRST GRADERS:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

By
Sylvia P. Maxson

A dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Education

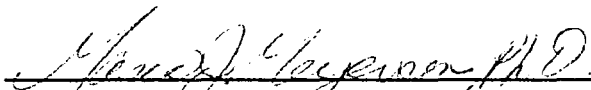
in the

College of Education
Department of Instructional and Curricular Studies;
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December, 1993

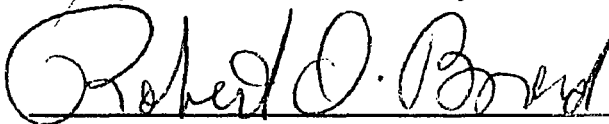
©1993 Sylvia P. Maxson
All Rights Reserved

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

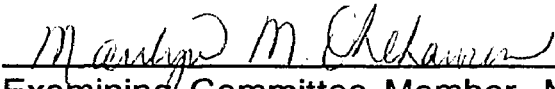
The dissertation of Sylvia P. Maxson for the degree of Doctor of Education in Instructional and Curricular Studies is approved.



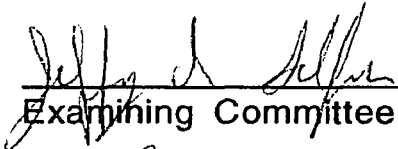
Chairperson, Maria J. Meyerson, Ph.D.



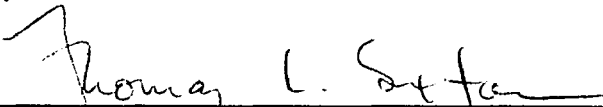
Chairperson, Robert O. Boord, Ed.D.



Examining Committee Member, Marilyn M. Ohlhausen, Ph.D.



Examining Committee Member, Jeffrey I. Gelfer, Ph.D.



Graduate Faculty Representative, Thomas L. Sexton, Ph.D.



Graduate Dean, Ronald W. Smith, Ph.D.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December, 1993

DEDICATION

...to a master teacher...
a man who believes in the life of the mind,
the honor of teaching, and
whose guiding spirit has lead UNLV
to it's rightful place as
a rising star in higher education.
My friend, my mentor, the love of my life,
Bob Maxson

ABSTRACT

Through a multiple case study design the influence of teachers' beliefs on literacy instruction for at-risk first graders was examined and described. A volunteer sample included five female teachers who taught in different high risk schools within the same school district. Five research questions guided the study: (1) What are teachers' beliefs about instructing young at-risk children to read and write? (2) What do teachers say they do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write? (3) What do teachers actually do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write? (4) What influences teachers' instructional decisions as they teach young at-risk children to read and write? (5) Are there congruencies between teachers' stated beliefs and their practice?

Data were collected from interviews, observations, questionnaires and a reflective activity over an academic year. Through the constant comparative method twelve general findings emerged: (1) Teachers must possess an understanding of the individual needs of at-risk children and address those needs; (2) Teachers must recognize and build on children's individual strengths; (3) Teachers should nurture children's enthusiasm for learning to read and write; (4) The learning process should begin at the appropriate developmental level; (5) At-risk children should be continuously stimulated in order to build confidence necessary for

learning. A structured environment is important to accomplishing this goal; (6) At-risk children break the bonds of at-riskness by becoming literate; (7) Literacy instructional theory does not influence teachers' practice as much as their beliefs; (8) There is no single method of literacy instruction for at-risk children, a combination of pedagogical approaches best serves their literacy needs; (9) Teacher modeling is a positive motivational factor for at-risk children learning to read and write. (10) All at-risk children can learn.

Other findings indicated: (1) Teachers' literacy instructional decisions are influenced by multiple factors; (2) There are congruencies between teachers' stated beliefs and practice.

The five case studies validate the work of previous researchers who suggested that teachers' beliefs are an integral part of classroom practice. The teachers provided documented instances of the congruency between beliefs and classroom practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
FORWARD	xii
CHAPTER I Introduction to the Study	1
Background of the Study.....	3
Teachers' Beliefs About a Specific Content Area.....	5
Teachers' Beliefs About a Specific	
Student Population	7
The Interrelationships Between Teachers' Beliefs.....	9
Assumptions and Theoretical Framework.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	12
Rationale for Methodology.....	13
Limitations of the Study.....	14
CHAPTER II Review of the Literature.....	16
Section One: Teachers' Beliefs About the	
Task of Teaching.....	17
Reviews of Research Related to Teachers' Beliefs.....	17
Research Studies Related to Teachers' Beliefs.....	19
Section Two: Teachers' Beliefs About	
Literacy Instruction.....	27
Review of Research Related to Teachers' Beliefs	
About Early Literacy Instruction	28
Research Studies Related to Teachers' Beliefs	
About Early Literacy Instruction	29
Section Three: Teachers' Beliefs About	
The At-Risk Student.....	35
Section Four: Teachers' Beliefs About Early Literacy	
Instruction For At-Risk Students: Interrelating the	
Factors of the Study	38

CHAPTER III Methodology.....	42
Criteria for Teacher Selection.....	43
Site Selection.....	44
Participant Selection.....	46
Anonymity.....	49
Profiles of Five Teachers.....	49
Data Sources.....	53
Interviews.....	53
Teacher Observations and Field Notes.....	54
Teachers' Reflective Activity.....	56
Additional Data Sources.....	56
Data Analysis.....	57
Realibility and Validity.....	58
Coding Procedures.....	60
Case Study Format.....	61
Peer Debriefing.....	62
Role of the Researcher.....	62
CHAPTER IV Introduction.....	64
Case Study One: Mary.....	64
Case Study Two: Angela.....	85
Case Study Three: Lindsey.....	103
Case Study Four: Taylor.....	122
Case Study Five: Valerie.....	136
CHAPTER V Major Findings, General Observations, Discussion, and Implications.....	154
Summary.....	154
Major Findings.....	155
General Observations.....	167
Discussion.....	171
Figure 1.....	173
Implications for Future Research.....	175
A Final Note.....	178

APPENDICES

I	Propositions About Reading Instruction.....	179
II	Meyerson Reflective Activity.....	184
III	Human Subjects Approval - UNLV.....	185
IV	Committee Approval for Research - CCSD.....	186
V	Agreement Statement.....	187
VI	Initial Screening Interview.....	188
VII	Duffy Letter.....	189
VIII	Case Study Consent Form.....	190
IX	First Set Interview Questions.....	191
X	Second Set Interview Questions.....	192
XI	Teachers' Written Belief Statement.....	193
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		194

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is not a singular effort. It is my dream, but only through the support and help of many, has the dream become a reality. I would like to acknowledge those persons at this time.

Kimberly Maxson, the light of my life and for the past five years a sole-mate in the learning process. The Maxson women did it!

Drs. Todd and Susi Maxson, the constant encouragement that every mom needs.

To my own mother, who still isn't quite sure why I did this, but who supported me all the way; and to my sister Debbie, for caring enough to call "just to check and make sure everything was going OK."

Dr. Maria Meyerson, for knowing that this was possible and charting the course. I thank you for your wisdom, for allowing me to grow as a thinker and as a writer, for sharing your knowledge of research, and most of all for your patience. I have learned so much from you, my mentor, my friend.

Dr. Robert Boord, for always being a wise counselor, a concerned listener, a gentle and steady friend, and for sharing so much of your knowledge over the years.

Dr. Marilyn Ohlhausen, for always knowing just when I needed a little extra nudge or pat on the back. I thank you for telling me long ago that somewhere inside everyone is a writer.

Dr. Jeffery Gelfer, for giving me the first bit of advice when I began this project. You said, "Keep It Simple Stupid." Good words, well taken.

Dr. Thomas Sexton, for being the "outside" committee member who was "inside" all the way, and for letting me know how exciting such a venture could be.

Barbara and the ladies in the CML, for caring, for being such wonderful friends and for "holding me in your thoughts."

Dr. Bob Quinn, my constant friend who was always "on time" for me. Thank you for helping all of us make it through.

Dr. Ken Stiedel, what would I have done without you, my friend. A thank you that cannot be said often enough.

Dr. Carlos and John, for having keen eyes, sharp minds, and even sharper pencils.

Emily, for being so willing to help and for being patient. You taught me everything I ever wanted to know about computers. And yes, I will plant a tree.

Vonnie for always knowing what to do and when to do it. I thank you for your encouragement and for being so supportive.

To the faculty and staff in the entire College of Education, particularly ICS. You have always been there to ask how things were going and offer your support. Perhaps it was because we were the first group of Doc students, but no faculty could have been more

nurturing or more caring than you have been. You are indeed, our best and brightest.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to Michelle, Mary, Angela, Lindsey, Taylor and Valerie. Please tell your Moms what wonderful first grade teachers they are. I can never thank these teachers enough for showing me, and everyone who will read this dissertation, what believing in yourself, in teaching, and in children can do to turn at-risk into at-promise.

Foreword

In 1936, John Dewey (cited in Levin, 1991) stated that public schooling should nurture individual learning differences in a common learning community. Dewey believed that educators should build bridges between the learners' personal and educational worlds rather than create gaps between the two. For me, building the bridges between students' personal and educational worlds was a monumental task when I began my career teaching at-risk children. I accomplished this task by merging my personal and professional beliefs about pedagogy with my insights about the children I taught in order to create a safe and nurturing environment where learning could take place.

Between 1980 and 1985, I taught in three different classroom settings where the majority of children were considered to be at-risk of failure. My students came from numerous ethnic backgrounds and diverse home environments; many were children of poverty. They were bright-eyed, energetic children who did not know the meaning of at-risk. I knew the meaning, however, and I knew that I had to do something very special to insure them every opportunity to succeed.

The school district charged me with the responsibility of teaching a core curriculum that led to specific outcomes expected of all young learners. Although that was not an unusual expectation, it

caused me concern in light of my students' backgrounds. A second, self-imposed responsibility required that I capitalize on the vast differences these at-risk children brought to the classroom by addressing the individual and cultural diversity of each child. These responsibilities, coupled with my own pedagogical beliefs, allowed me to create a learning environment that matched the children's needs with a correspondingly appropriate curriculum.

As I gained experience as a teacher, I realized that bridging the multiplicity of experiences that my students brought to the classroom with what needed to be taught was both a difficult and challenging task. One complexity was how my own personal philosophy about teaching and knowledge of child development conflicted with my teacher education background and the school district's curriculum requirements. Another complexity was the special challenge of teaching at-risk children. Recognizing these complexities helped me to form and articulate a strong belief system that greatly influenced my own teaching.

My awareness of the importance of teachers' beliefs as a critical part of teaching has been supported throughout my teaching career. Ten years after my initial experience teaching at-risk children, I began my studies as a graduate student. As part of my university work, I conducted an intensive three-month case study of a first grade teacher named Michelle in a classroom with a high population of at-risk children. This case study served as a pilot study for this dissertation.

During the time I spent with Michelle, I observed some of the same characteristics in her classroom that had existed in my own

classrooms in previous years. First and foremost, I noticed the children. Many of the children came from diverse and often disadvantaged backgrounds which offered few, if any, early literacy experiences. Next, I observed the importance that Michelle placed on creating a classroom environment rich in educational experiences. These experiences were geared not only toward educational development for the class in general, but were also experiences that met the needs of each individual child. I knew from my own involvement in similar situations that many of these experiences had not been afforded Michelle's students prior to beginning school.

Michelle told me that she viewed her students differently than she would have had they not been considered at-risk. She held distinct expectations about what her students would accomplish during the school year based on their earlier experiences and the many external factors that influenced their lives. I saw Michelle put into practice her beliefs about teaching and about at-risk children, beliefs that gave her the security to make the intuitive decisions necessary to create a learning environment for her students.

I also found that Michelle created a learning environment reflective of key strategies and models proposed for at-risk learners by prominent educational researchers. These learning theories include the use of a natural learning environment (Rousseau, 1962); a curriculum rich in language through the use of children's literature (Durkin, 1966; Morrow, 1983; Nino & Brunner, 1978; Teale, 1984); reading and writing activities (Clay, 1975); and a developmentally appropriate, child-centered curriculum (Dewey, 1966; Piaget, 1969). Furthermore, the curriculum that she used

reflected her own personal beliefs that all children can learn and that each student is a different and unique learner. Just as Dewey suggested so long ago, Michelle focused on building the bridges needed for her students to succeed.

The more opportunity I had to observe Michelle interacting with her students, the more I understood how influential teachers' beliefs were to the task of teaching. I realized that Michelle's beliefs were strong and of extreme importance to her as a teacher. I also came to know that teachers' professional beliefs reflect both theoretical knowledge about the task of teaching and the deep, innermost personal feelings that guide actions. In addition, I came to understand from my own experience and the experience of observing Michelle, that teachers' values and beliefs are key components to how they respond to different situational demands and various populations of students.

After the completion of my case study, there were still many questions left unanswered. Although I understood that teachers' beliefs influenced their teaching, I wanted to know more; specifically about how this happened. How do teachers' beliefs influence the way they teach? What is the influence of the at-risk child on teachers' beliefs of teaching? Because of these lingering questions I wanted to explore the concept of teacher beliefs in more depth.

CHAPTER I

An Introduction To The Study

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.

(Carson, 1990)

For many children, one of the most important adults in their lives is their classroom teacher. What teachers do and how they do it greatly influences the extent to which children learn. Some teachers readily embrace the challenges of preparing children for a better and more productive life than that of previous generations and become for children the companions needed "to keep alive an inborn sense of wonder" (Carson, 1990). Other teachers do not assume this role or do not assume the role on a regular basis. Why, then, do teachers do what they do in their classrooms?

Three approaches to answering this question have dominated research on classroom practice over the past twenty years. Some researchers have focused on the connection between how educational theory has influenced classroom practice (Harste & Burke, 1980; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Porter & Brophy, 1988). Other researchers have examined why teachers select certain classroom practices by

investigating the context of teaching, including teachers' personal and practical knowledge, classroom events, and the dynamics of student populations (Schwab, 1970; Clandinin, 1985; Doyle & Ponder, 1975; Stephens & Clyde, 1985; Cooper & Speech, 1990; Koehler, 1988; Slavin & Madden, 1989; Gambrell, 1990). While these two approaches have shown that classroom practices are influenced by multiple factors, they have not completely explained why teachers do what they do.

A third approach has examined what influences teaching by investigating teachers' beliefs (e.g. Elbaz, 1981; Nespor, 1985; Kinzer & Carrick, 1986). This perspective attempts to reveal the reason individual teachers respond in particular ways to different situations and different students. It assumes that teachers' beliefs are the impetus for all that occurs in the classroom, from interaction with students to the management of classroom environments and the implementation of the curriculum. By identifying teachers' beliefs, researchers have attempted to explain what guides teacher decisions, actions, and interactions.

The investigation of teachers' beliefs, however, has proven to be a very complex endeavor. Researchers have not agreed on a definition for teachers' beliefs and thus, generalizations from the existing literature are tentative at best. The issue is further complicated by the uniqueness of teachers' educational knowledge as well as the individual feelings, emotions, and life experiences which form their beliefs. Finally, because of the dynamic nature of teaching, teachers' beliefs may be continually modified by the presence of individual students in the classroom and the content of

the curriculum being taught. In spite of these complexities, it is important to continue to study teachers' beliefs in an effort to understand why teachers do what they do in the classroom. This is the focus for my study.

Background Of The Study

In this section, I will define teachers' beliefs in relationship to the task of teaching. In addition, I will discuss the relationship between teachers' beliefs and two external factors (early literacy instruction and at-risk children), and classroom practice. Also discussed are assumptions made about teachers' beliefs which are supported by previous research studies and are congruent with the present investigation.

Defining Teachers' Beliefs

There is little agreement among researchers about an acceptable definition for the term "teacher beliefs." Beliefs are difficult to define; thus, many researchers use a variety of abstract terms synonymously with the word "belief." For example, Nespor (1985) used multiple terms such as "ideologies," "theories," or "opinion systems" in her definition of beliefs. Similarly, other researchers followed Nespor's approach by using such terms as "faith," "trust," "opinion," "those things thought or supposed," as well as "propositions accepted as true" (Fenstermacher, 1978 & 1986; Green, 1971; Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding & Cuthbert, 1987).

More concrete terms have also been used to describe teachers' beliefs. Beliefs have been defined by some as one of the categories of teachers' thought processes that include teachers' knowledge, planning, practice and decisions (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Harste and Burke (1977) defined teachers' beliefs as "teacher decisions" while Duffy and Ball (1986) discussed beliefs in terms of "cognition" and "conceptual frameworks" which lead teachers to teach in one particular way as opposed to another. Clark and Peterson (1986) referred to teachers' theories and beliefs as "the rich store of knowledge teachers have that affects their planning and their interactive thoughts and decisions" (p. 11).

Another perspective for defining teacher beliefs evolved from an attempt to understand how knowledge and beliefs are related. Nespor (1985) stated that beliefs reflect knowledge and are important influences on the ways tasks are conceptualized and learning takes place. Harste and Burke (1985) focused on knowledge as the basis for practice and concluded that all practice is theory-driven.

On the other hand, Price (cited in Smith & Shepard, 1988) reported over twenty years ago that beliefs and knowledge are distinct because knowledge is based upon facts while beliefs are based upon supposition. Similarly, Smith & Shepard (1988) suggested that beliefs and knowledge are different because beliefs are akin to emotional attitudes or propositions.

Price defined a belief as "that which an individual holds to be true" (p. 20). While this definition states simply what teachers' beliefs are, further clarification is needed. I have, therefore,

expanded upon Price's definition. For the purpose of this study teachers' beliefs are defined as those propositions teachers hold to be true as a result of various external and internal influences. External influences that impact teachers' beliefs result from various knowledge sources such as theoretical knowledge, personal and professional knowledge, and knowledge gained from life experiences. These influences include external factors such as the content being taught, specific populations of children, and the classroom environment. Internal influences that impact teachers' beliefs are those insights and values that drive teachers' behavior as well as internalized knowledge and/or theories resulting from life experiences.

Teachers' Beliefs About A Specific Content Area: Early Literacy Instruction

As already noted, teachers' beliefs may be influenced by a variety of external factors. One external factor is the content to be taught. For the purpose of this study, I examined teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction. The term "early literacy instruction" refers to the various philosophies, strategies, and methods that teachers use as they teach young children to read and write.

In the early grades, literacy instruction is one of the most important areas of pedagogy. One reason for its importance is that many influences outside of the classroom impact upon literacy instruction. For example, parents expect that their children will learn to read and write early in their educational experience and

they hold teachers accountable for imparting this knowledge. Similarly, society holds teachers accountable, even at the most basic level, for their students' success or failure in literacy. Finally, teachers set high standards regarding their responsibility for literacy instruction. Because of the numerous pressures placed upon teachers of early literacy, it is important that researchers continue to examine what teachers do as they teach young children to read and write.

Historically, little is known about what teachers have done as they implemented literacy curricula other than to follow a prescribed pedagogical format for literacy instruction. Prior to 1977, virtually no research investigated teacher beliefs about reading (Belli et al., 1977). Since that time, however, numerous studies have been conducted that report that teachers do have beliefs about early literacy instruction and teach in accordance with their beliefs (Kagan & Smith, 1988; Mills & Clyde, 1991; Stephens & Clyde, 1985). According to some researchers, teachers hold implicit theories about how reading should be taught and often behave in ways which validate these beliefs (Barr & Duffy, 1978; Gove, 1981; Harste & Burke, 1977). Other studies have focused on how reading and writing are taught in relationship to different philosophies of literacy (Morrow, 1989; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Goodman, 1985). Few studies, however, have investigated the connection between teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction and what they actually do in the classroom. Thus, by describing and reporting why teachers do what they do in the classroom in relationship to early

literacy instruction, a clearer understanding of the connection made between teachers' beliefs and classroom practice may result.

Teachers' Beliefs About A Specific Student Population: At-Risk Children

Another external factor to be explored in relationship to teachers' beliefs is the impact of the student on classroom practice. Classrooms of the past included a wide variety of children who came from all walks of life, but only a few of whom were considered to be at-risk. Today, the composition of many of our schools has changed from a few at-risk students in a few classrooms to schools comprised entirely of at-risk students.

Just as with teachers' beliefs, there are various and conflicting definitions about the term at-risk, and who at-risk children really are. Two basic definitions of the at-risk child are found in the literature. According to Slavin and Madden (1989), "the at-risk child is one who is in danger of failing to complete his or her education with an adequate level of skills" (p.4). In a similar vein, Greer (1991) defined at-risk children as "those children who are at-risk of not developing to their potential and not succeeding in school" (p. 390). Payne & Payne (1991) support Greer's definition in their research by stating that at-risk learners are those who are not achieving up to their potential and not meeting the expectations of the teacher.

Levin (1988), however, makes a much different assumption in his definition. He defined at-risk students as students who will fail to succeed in school because of the way schools are presently

constituted. The reason for this is that students' families and community environments are totally different from that of the school; thus, children have no basis for understanding what is expected of them at school. It is apparent that one definition places the blame for potential failure on the child while the other places the blame on the school for not recognizing and conforming to the outside influences that impact the child as a learner.

There are numerous contributing factors that have led to an increase in the at-risk student population. One factor is that approximately 30 million people in the U.S. live in poverty. One out of every five are children (Reed & Sautter, 1990). Homelessness is another contributing factor. Out of an estimated 3 million homeless people in the U.S., 220,000 were children and 65,000 of those children did not attend school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1991). Other members of the at-risk population include many children from single parent families and minorities (Frymier, 1992).

The dramatic increase in the at-risk student population alone presents a valid reason for studying teachers' beliefs about these children (Hodgkinson, 1988). Another reason is that both veteran and novice teachers may not be prepared to teach children whose experiences prior to entering school are not the same as mainstream America.

It also appears that at-risk students influence teachers' beliefs about the task of teaching. Levin (1988) strongly suggests that understanding what teachers do as they teach may be the key to reducing failure for at-risk students. Thus, by examining why

teachers do what they do in the classroom when teaching at-risk children and understanding how teachers' beliefs about at-risk children influence the task of teaching may enhance the likelihood of educational success for these children.

The Interrelationships Between Teacher Beliefs, Early Literacy Instruction, And The At-Risk Child

It is apparent that teachers' beliefs are very complex, difficult to define, and somewhat confusing. When the influence of the aforementioned external factors are examined in relationship to teachers' beliefs, comprehending the task of teaching becomes even more complex.

In this study two external factors, the content (early literacy instruction) and the student (at-risk), are examined in relationship to teachers' belief systems. To date, only one other study has examined the interrelationship between these external factors and teachers' beliefs. Dillon (1989) used a case study to examine one teacher's beliefs about reading and writing and the creation of a learning environment for at-risk secondary students. By constructing the social organization of the classroom from factors gleaned from the students' backgrounds, the teacher established an open environment in which the students felt free to take risks and in which successful learning took place. This teacher was successful because he did not conform to any model for teaching other than his own. His model was based on his life experiences, his experiences as a teacher, his knowledge, beliefs, and actions. At the conclusion of her study Dillon suggested that future research was needed that

addresses the issue of teachers' beliefs as they impact reading and writing for at-risk students at the primary level. This suggestion paved the way for the present study.

There are numerous studies that address reading instruction for at-risk students at all levels (Roser, Hoffman & Farest, 1990; Dillon, 1989; Vacca & Padak, 1990). These studies, however, do not acknowledge teachers' beliefs as a factor which influences reading instruction for at-risk children. Despite abundant research on the various components of this study, to my knowledge there are no studies that have explored the variables related to how teachers' beliefs impact the way they teach at-risk first grade students to read and write. Understanding the influence of these two factors on teachers' beliefs is paramount to educators as they prepare to teach all children in the 1990s and beyond.

Assumptions And Theoretical Framework For The Study

While researchers have approached the study of teachers' beliefs from a variety of perspectives, there are commonalties in the underlying assumptions of their work which I have incorporated into the theoretical framework for this study. The first assumption is that teachers' beliefs guide what they do in the classroom, and that these beliefs play a significant role in shaping curricular decisions and classroom learning experiences for students. Included in this assumption is the idea that teachers' practices are firmly rooted in their beliefs about learning and reflect personal and professional knowledge (Mills & Clyde, 1991). In addition, teachers'

plans and actions are filtered through their beliefs (Stern and Shavelson, 1983).

A second assumption guiding this study was that external factors affect teachers' beliefs. These external factors may include the content being taught (early literacy instruction), the population of students (at-risk children), the administrative requirements, state and federal guidelines, etc. (Duffy & Anderson, 1982; Duffy, 1983; Lampert, 1985). When external factors complement teachers' beliefs, classroom practice and beliefs are compatible. When these factors interfere with teachers' beliefs, classroom practice and beliefs are disjointed. In addition, teachers have beliefs about specific external factors. For example, if teachers truly believe that all children are capable of learning, then their pedagogical practice will reflect the highest standards regardless of the student population. Because teachers have beliefs based on their personal and professional knowledge as well as external factors, classroom practice is ultimately shaped by the interrelationship of these components (Nespor, 1985).

A third assumption of this study was that teachers are capable of articulating their beliefs given the opportunity to do so. Watson, Burke & Harste (1989) implied that in order for teachers to become completely aware of the scope of learning opportunities they are offering their students, they should first examine their own belief systems about teaching, learning, and the uniqueness of individual children. This examination requires a reflective thought process, which in the past has not been an important component of teacher education. Recent research endeavors have centered on classroom

teachers engaged in reflective thinking and have demonstrated that teachers are able to articulate their beliefs through a variety of reflective activities (Argyrus & Schon, 1975; Bussis, Chittendem, and Amarel, 1976; Goodman & Watson, 1977; Spodek, 1988).

Purpose Of The Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the influence of teachers' beliefs on literacy instruction for at-risk first graders. The goals were to report what teachers say they believe about teaching a specific content and a specific population of children, and to observe and report the connection between what they say they do and what they actually do in the classroom.

The following questions provided a basis of inquiry and initially guided the collection of data for this study:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about instructing young at-risk children to read and write?
2. What do teachers say they do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write?
3. What do teachers actually do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write?

Two additional questions were implied from these three:

4. What influences teachers' instructional decisions as they teach young at-risk children to read and write?
5. Are there congruencies between teachers' stated beliefs and their teaching practice?

Rationale for Methodology

For the purpose of this research, a multiple case study design was used. Yin (1984) described the case study design as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). Case study design was appropriate for this study because it allowed inquiry into the experiences of the subjects, while allowing the events that were taking place in the environment to remain virtually uninterrupted (Knowles, 1988). Case study methodology was well suited to attain an understanding of the teachers' beliefs from the teachers' own points of view (Yin, 1991). The subjects were five first grade classroom teachers who taught in five different high risk schools in one school district.

In this study, several sources of evidence were used: frequent and prolonged observation (Sanjek, 1990; Jorgensen, 1989), focused and open-ended interviews (Yin, 1984), and a reflective activity completed by the teachers (Meyerson, 1993). In addition, The Propositions of Reading Inventory (Duffy & Metheny, 1979) was used to elicit teachers' pedagogical beliefs about reading instruction. Information from these sources was triangulated (Mathison, 1988) in an attempt to understand and describe how important teachers' beliefs are to teaching at-risk first graders to read and write. A

fully developed explanation of the specifics for this study appears in Chapter III.

Limitations Of The Study

The focus of this study was twofold. First, the purpose was to investigate and document how beliefs articulated by teachers were actualized in their practice. The second purpose was to observe and describe how teachers' beliefs impacted early literacy instruction for at-risk first grade students. This study did not attempt to compare practices among teachers. Rather, the attempt was to explore and describe what teachers do as they teach at-risk first grade children to read and write. Findings from this study are not generalizable to the greater population; however, findings may be generalized to theory (Yin, 1984). It is anticipated that the insights gained and the conclusions derived from the data will add to the body of knowledge and strengthen the research theories available on teachers' beliefs.

Three limitations are commonly cited in case study research: the small sample size; the inability to generalize the findings to the general population; and the limitation of the response effect. The sample for this study consisted of five first grade teachers. It was anticipated that data collected from this sample would adequately answer the questions generated at the outset of this study. It was further assumed that from the multiple sources of data gathered there would be adequate information available to describe teachers'

beliefs as they affect early literacy instruction for at-risk students.

Response effect is also a limitation of this study. This term refers to the likelihood that the subjects of the study will give "inaccurate or incorrect responses" (Borg & Gall, 1983) based on what they think the researcher would like to hear. Montgomery (1990) outlined certain measures that the researcher can take to minimize this limitation: (a) inform the subjects about the project, (b) assure the subjects confidentiality will be maintained, (c) make interview appointments in advance, (d) forward a letter of explanation about the project to the subjects, and (e) allow for short as well as in-depth answers from the subjects. To minimize response effect, all of these measures were incorporated in this study.

CHAPTER II

Review Of The Literature

The literature review is divided into four sections based upon topics central to this investigation. Although the literature is replete with studies about teachers' beliefs in various areas of education, there is a dearth of research regarding teachers' beliefs as related to the task of teaching young at-risk children to read and write. The research germane to this present study involved Teachers' Beliefs About the Task of Teaching, Teachers' Beliefs About Early Literacy Instruction, Teachers' Beliefs About the At-Risk Student, and Teachers' Beliefs About Early Literacy Instruction For At-Risk Students, Interrelating Factors of the Study.

Each section is comprised of two parts presented in chronological order--studies which review the research related to the topic, followed by individual studies. The structure of presentation for each of the individual studies reviewed includes the purpose, subjects, methodology, and major findings. Only those studies completed since 1980 which are considered relevant to this study are included. A summary will be found at the end of each section.

Section One: Teachers' Beliefs About The Task Of Teaching

This section of the literature review examines studies that form the theoretical framework for understanding teachers' beliefs related to the task of teaching and teachers' beliefs as related to practice. Included here are research studies that describe teachers' thinking, planning, and decision-making processes as well as the influence of both personal and theoretical knowledge on teachers' beliefs. In reviewing these studies, the reader should keep in mind the complexity of defining teachers' beliefs as discussed in Chapter I and the fact that authors use a variety of terms synonymously with the term beliefs.

Reviews of research related to teachers' beliefs

In a comprehensive review of the literature spanning nearly two decades, Munby (1981) addressed the issue of teachers' beliefs as related to teacher thinking, planning, and decision-making. The purpose for reviewing this body of research was to identify and bring to the attention of educators the varied and complex beliefs that teachers hold which ultimately drive planning and teaching. Munby's review was divided into three sections. The first section reviewed two prevalent models in research on teacher thinking, the second discussed several contemporary studies on teacher thinking, and the final section outlined a methodology for studying teachers' beliefs and described a single case study that addressed the complexities of understanding a teacher's belief system. Munby concluded that research on what teachers do in the classroom, i.e.

classroom practice, addressed only teacher thinking and paid little attention to what one might call teachers' beliefs. He suggested that more attention be directed specifically to teachers' beliefs, theories and repertoires of understandings, and to ways in which these might be understood.

Shavelson and Stern (1981) conducted a similar review of research on teachers' pedagogical thoughts, judgments and decision-making. The purpose of their work was to assess the progress made over the past decade on improving teachers' practice and to identify future areas of needed research. They found that two fundamental assumptions could be made about teachers' thought processes. First, it was found that teachers are rational professionals who make judgments and carry out decisions in an uncertain, complex environment, the classroom, and second, that teachers' behavior is guided by their thoughts, judgments, and decisions. Findings revealed that instructors' thinking and decision-making profoundly influenced what students learn.

The significance of teachers' beliefs to the understanding of teachers' thinking, planning and decision-making cannot be overemphasized. However, the bulk of the research on teacher thinking has focused on teachers' interactive decision-making and planning, with relatively few studies specifically addressing teachers' beliefs. Clark & Peterson (1986) pointed out that investigations of teachers' beliefs are central to a complete and useful understanding of thought processes in teaching. The purpose for Clark & Peterson's research was twofold. First, they wanted to describe the mental lives of teachers, and second their intent was to

understand and explain how and why the observable activities of teachers' professional lives take on the forms and functions they do. Their goal for reviewing the body of research on teachers' thought processes was "to construct a portrayal of the cognitive psychology of teaching for use by educational theorists, research, policy makers, curriculum designers, teacher educators, school administrators and practicing teachers" (p.255).

Clark and Peterson accomplished their goals by conducting an extensive meta-analysis of data collected from numerous studies over the past decade. They concluded that teachers' theories and beliefs represent the rich store of knowledge that educators have, which affects their planning and their interactive thoughts and decisions. While no single study has documented every aspect of the thought processes of teachers, Clark & Peterson's research presents a more complete picture of the teacher as a reflective and thoughtful professional.

Research studies related to teachers' beliefs

Banach (1984) conducted a study to investigate the degree to which teachers' beliefs about instructional practice influence teachers' behavior. Banach also looked at the degree to which teachers' assumptions about instructional practices influence the perceptions of their students.

The sample included 182 elementary teachers from Goodlad's Study of Schooling (1984). The method Banach used was a paper and pencil inventory based on the work of Kerlinger (1967) to explore teachers' beliefs. Banach assessed teacher practice through

questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation of instruction. Basing her judgments on the belief dimensions of teacher discipline, control, and student participation, Banach categorized the teachers into systems which described the teachers as autocrats, strategists, laissez-faire, or democrat and revealed teaching behaviors that distinguished them according to their philosophical belief systems and teaching behaviors.

Through discriminate content analysis Banach found that teachers' instructional beliefs were generally consistent with their teaching behaviors. Banach found that, "educational beliefs do influence teaching practices thereby contributing to the context in which learning occurs" (p.16). One of the implications Banach brought forth for further study was the need for in-depth case studies and longitudinal surveys of teachers' instructional beliefs under varying school conditions.

While Banach looked at how beliefs influence teachers' behavior and ultimately student learning, Clandinin (1985) investigated the how and why of teachers' practice. She theorized that teachers develop and use a special kind of knowledge that is neither theoretical in the sense of theories of learning, teaching, and curriculum, or practical in the sense of knowing about children. This knowledge is blended with beliefs, personal background, and characteristics of the teachers and is expressed by the teacher in particular situations. Clandinin called this knowledge "personal practical knowledge" and explained that the study of personal practical knowledge begins in the study of practice. The teacher's personal practical knowledge is revealed through interpretations of

observed practice over time and it is given meaning through the reconstruction of the teacher's narrative of experience.

The purpose of Clandinin's study was to understand the implementation of curriculum innovations in the classroom and to acknowledge the body of knowledge that teachers have in order to explain how and why they do what they do in the classroom. Two primary teachers participated in a qualitative study; one, a former early childhood teacher with 12 years of experience teaching kindergarten, the other, an elementary school teacher with 12 years of experience teaching inner city children. Data collection lasted over a two year period within two classrooms. In both situations, the researcher participated in classroom activities with the children and observed classroom occurrences. In addition to field notes, two unstructured, open-ended interviews were conducted followed by focused interviews. Findings from the study indicated that the concept of understanding personal practical knowledge, as a language and as a perspective for viewing school practice, allows educators to more fully value the knowledge held by teachers.

In a more detailed study, Nespor's (1985) Teachers' Belief Study (TBS) investigated the structures and functions of teachers' belief systems. This two year study conducted at the Center for the Study of Teaching at the University of Texas, explored the nature and functions of teachers' beliefs across different domains of activity in a variety of contextual arenas and work settings. The goal of the study was to clarify not only the "what" of teaching and how classroom performance is influenced, but also the "why" of teaching. The study was conducted to provide insight into the reasons

teachers do what they do in the classroom. Nespor accomplished this by investigating teachers' perceptions of teaching tasks and processes, how their beliefs and behaviors were shaped, and the constraints placed on teachers' beliefs by outside influences. Nespor assumed that teachers' actions are often guided by their beliefs, theories, and the models that influence teaching. The study also addressed factors such as the contexts of teaching and the teachers' perceptions regarding the important influence of text on their practice.

The subjects of the TBS were eight teachers who taught in three different school districts. Data were collected in several ways including classroom videotaping and teacher interviews. The data were analyzed by both teacher and researcher using Bloom's (1954) "stimulated recall", and Kelly's (1955) "repertory grid" technique.

Findings from the data indicated that:

1. Belief systems frequently contain propositions or assumptions about the existence or nonexistence of entities.
2. Beliefs serve as means of defining goals and tasks, whereas knowledge systems come into play where goals and the paths to their attainment are well-defined.
3. Belief systems can be said to rely much more heavily on effective and evaluative components than knowledge systems.
4. Beliefs often derive their subjective power, authority, and legitimacy from particular episodes or events.
5. Belief systems are less malleable or dynamic than knowledge systems.
6. Beliefs can be described as loosely-bounded systems with highly variable and uncertain linkages to events, situations, and knowledge systems (p. 318-324).

Findings of the TBS suggest that if educators want to know why teachers do what they do in the classroom, "they must pay attention to the goals teachers pursue and to their subjective interpretations of classroom processes" (p. 325). In addition to the findings, several basic conclusions were drawn from the data. First, results indicated that there was much to learn about the factors that impact certain decisions made by classroom teachers. Secondly, results revealed a strong need to continue investigating the area of teachers' beliefs as a way to inform current classroom practice. Findings also provided an understanding that there is a way to improve teacher training programs as educators develop curricula for pre-service teachers.

In a follow-up study conducted in 1987, Nespor addressed the structure and function of teachers' beliefs concerning their teaching roles, their students, and the subjects they taught. This study was grounded in a body of field-based research on teacher thinking, the TBS, and was to serve as a model for systematic and comparative investigations of belief systems. Subjects for this study were the same eight teachers who participated in the TBS. All teachers had at least two years of experience in either seventh or eighth grades. Two types of interviews were used, semi-structured interviews and repertory grid interviews, approximating a total of 20 hours.

Findings suggest that the contexts and environments within which teachers work, and many of the problems they encounter, are ill-defined and deeply entangled, and that beliefs are particularly suited for making sense of such contexts. Nespor concluded that by understanding the nature of teachers' beliefs the complexity of

teaching and refining pedagogy in the eyes of many educators will be clarified. To understand the nature of teaching, one must understand teachers' thought processes about teaching and the belief systems that drive those processes. One of the significant aspects of the Nespor study was found in the contributions made to the improvement of teacher education.

In a similar study, Spodek (1987) investigated teachers' practice in relationship to their beliefs. His thesis was that in order to understand teachers' actions, teachers must first understand their thought processes. The stated purpose of this study was "to identify the theories-in-use that underlie the day-to-day classroom decisions of preschool teachers," (p. 197).

Subjects of the study were four preschool teachers. They were observed four times each for periods of from 40 to 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted regarding the teacher's thought processes during decision-making, and later their stated thoughts were dichotomized into value beliefs and scientific concepts. An analysis of the data resulted in designation of twelve categories that were organized according to the content of teachers' thoughts, such as class management, planning and organization, instructional processes, children's needs, evaluation and assessment.

Findings suggested variation in the complexity of teachers' thought processes as indicated by the large number and range of concepts and beliefs underlying teachers' decisions. For example, out of the 730 different beliefs and concepts reported by the four teachers, only eight were held in common for the group which would suggest that their beliefs were more personal than theoretical.

Spodek also found that few of the theories used by the teachers were grounded in reliable knowledge of child development and learning theory.

Understanding the nature and complexity of teachers' beliefs in relation to the complexity of teaching was the focus of Kagen & Smith's (1988) research. Their purpose was to examine relationships between teachers' philosophic beliefs and behaviors. They also examined the cognitive plans of kindergarten teachers in terms of being either child-centered or teacher-structured. The subjects of this study were fifty-one kindergarten teachers in three public school districts in metropolitan Omaha. Fifty of the teachers were female and the range of professional experience for the entire sample was from one to twenty years. Data were gathered from various instruments which assessed teachers' cognitive style, teaching ideology, classroom behavior, and occupational stress. Teachers' cognitive styles were measured through the administration of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers and McCaulley, 1985), and the Inquiry Mode Questionnaire (Harrison and Bramson, 1977, 1982). Occupational stress was assessed with the Teacher Occupational Stress Factor Questionnaire (Clark, 1980). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about structuring kindergarten classes was assessed using the Teacher Belief Rating Scale (Verma and Peters, 1975), and teachers' classroom behavior was evaluated with the Teacher Structure Checklist (Webster, 1972). In addition to teachers self-reported beliefs, outside raters observed in each classroom for two hours recording verbal interactions and 'mapping' teacher/student interaction.

Chi square analysis revealed significant correlations ($p < .05$) between teachers' stated attitudes and behaviors and those behaviors observed by outside raters. Teachers who endorsed child-centered classrooms were found to use more child initiated activities and less teacher structured activities. These teachers also had a clearer perception of their own attitudes and behavior in the child-centered classroom.

Two important findings resulted from this research. First, Kagen and Smith found that teachers' self-reported beliefs and behaviors were strongly consistent with the outside raters' observations. They also found that the teachers' cognitive styles could be explained in general terms as the characteristic ways individuals perceive, organize, and evaluate information, often including aspects of personality. As a result of their findings, Kagen & Smith concluded that kindergarten teachers did appear to operationalize their beliefs about the best way to teach young children and were quite accurate in their own perceptions of the learning environment they had created.

Conclusion

Research findings have been remarkably consistent in establishing the relationship between teachers' beliefs and teachers' behaviors as characterized by practice and student learning. However, research studies prior to 1980 appeared to ignore the value of investigating teachers' beliefs in relation to practice. It was not until the early 1980s that researchers began reporting

teachers' beliefs as a reflection of classroom behavior and what they expected in the way of learning outcomes for their students.

Researchers discovered that teachers do not always base their practice solely on theoretical beliefs, knowledge, or on practical experiences but seem to integrate these factors into their own belief systems. It appears that teacher knowledge is not always theory based, nor does it always result from practical experience, but the combination helps form the belief system which determines how teachers think, plan and make decisions which ultimately result in practice. Based on the research reported in this review, there does appear to be a high level of congruency between teachers' beliefs and their practice. This view serves as support for my study as it indicates a need for addressing the task of teaching and specifically how teachers' beliefs influence practice.

Nespor's study, for example, is critical to my research because it serves not only as a basis for understanding teachers' beliefs about the task of teaching, but also draws on other research involved with the nature of "entangled" environments which could easily relate to the at-risk environments found in my study. For this reason, I believe it is paramount to understand the impact that teachers' beliefs have on this particular student population as well as on the task of teaching.

Section Two: Teachers' Beliefs About Early Literacy Instruction

Any attempt to provide the best possible education for children must focus on the classroom teacher (Seefeldt, 1988). The

effectiveness of the classroom teacher may be influenced by one of many external factors such the content being taught. This section reviews research on teachers' beliefs in relationship to how beliefs influence literacy instruction for children. The studies reviewed here are not limited to a specific reading instructional paradigm or one specific population of student.

Reviews of research related to teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction

In a comprehensive review of literature on the relationship between the reading theories and reading instruction of elementary grade teachers, Duffy (1981) identified three factors that have the most influence on practice: (1) the nature of the student, (2) the commercial reading material used in the school, and (3) the desire or need to maintain a smooth activity flow. Duffy suggested that the theories implicit in basal readers are major factors in shaping observable teaching practice related to reading instruction. The theory inherent in the reading text may replace the teachers' beliefs about how reading should be taught. In addition, Duffy listed demands placed on the teacher such as peer and administrative pressure, and applicable accountability mandates as factors influencing teachers' beliefs about their practice.

While Duffy reviewed the literature on the relationship between reading theory and reading instruction, Stern & Shavelson (1983) reviewed research that addressed the issues of teachers' thinking, planning and decision-making in relationship to reading instruction. The researchers summarized the major findings from

the early 1970s to 1981 on how teachers' judgments, instructional planning, and interactive decision-making influenced practice while acknowledging specifically teachers' behaviors regarding reading instruction. Stern & Shavelson concluded that teachers form judgments about pedagogy based on the amount of information they have on the subject or the student.

Stern & Shavelson suggested that teachers do not plan instruction based on the way they were trained and that for the most part planning is unsystematic. The researchers found that decision-making usually occurred when a routine was not going as planned and was influenced by a multitude of factors. They also found that teachers' thinking and decision-making profoundly influenced what students learn. Stern & Shavelson concluded that "research on teachers' judgments, plans, and decisions has contributed to a better understanding of teaching in general and reading instruction in particular" (p. 285).

Research studies related to teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction

Duffy and Anderson (1984) conducted a four year study which focused on teacher beliefs about reading. The purpose of the study was to determine if "reading teachers possess theoretical orientations which organize and trigger their instructional behaviors" (p. 97). In an attempt to answer this question, the researchers used the Conceptual Framework of Reading Interview (Gove, 1983) (CFRI) to assess teachers' beliefs about reading theory and reading instruction. The CFRI was also used to help teachers

analyze their own belief systems as well as their instructional decision-making practices.

Over a four year period, the CFRI was administered to 128 graduate students with teaching experience. Data analysis indicated that when surveyed outside the classroom, teachers could articulate their theories of reading. However, they were not able to match the five areas of reading instruction representing two general categories, "content-centered" and "pupil-centered", frequently discussed in the literature.

The findings suggested that teachers' practice was governed by a complex set of contextual factors or theories. In addition, teachers' conceptions of reading were associated with their years of experience. For example, the older and more experienced teachers tended to reflect "content-centered" concepts, while younger, less experienced teachers tended toward "pupil-centered" concepts. Findings also indicated that teachers possess implicit beliefs about reading; however, initial findings did not support the contention that teachers' beliefs about reading reflected those discussed in the literature. For that reason, Duffy and Anderson extended their study to include observation procedures to gain another perspective of how teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading were put into practice.

Field studies were conducted for the next three years. The teachers were observed to determine the relationship between conceptions about reading and instructional practices. Eleven teachers representing grades one through six in three geographical areas were the subjects. Four teachers were from a group of Michigan State University graduate students and four teachers were

nominated for the study by their school administrators and other reading educators. Each teacher was observed in early September, early December, mid-February and late April. In addition, each teacher was interviewed formally and informally during the year. A second group of primary teachers was selected to represent different theories or views as revealed by the CFRI. Teachers selected were from both high and low socioeconomic schools as well as from schools where there was flexibility in regard to the reading program used.

Findings reported that teachers possess a variety of beliefs about reading as measured by the instrument but upon observation congruence between teachers' practice and their belief systems about reading was not strong. The researchers concluded that teachers made decisions about what to do for a variety of reasons, that the teaching context seemed to be more powerful than any particular theoretical belief, and that instruction appeared to be based more on the basal textbook than on the espoused reading theory used by the individual teacher.

Unlike the Duffy and Anderson study, the purpose of Kinzer & Carrick's (1986) study was to differentiate between a dual belief system that explained not only the process of reading, that is, how reading takes place, but also how reading develops. The questions examined were:

- 1) Can teachers' beliefs be differentiated within explanations for how reading takes place and how it develops?
- 2) Are teachers' beliefs about how reading takes place and how reading develops related to their instructional decisions?

- 3) Do teachers' beliefs about how reading takes place and how reading develops differentially affect their instructional decision-making?

The subjects of their study were 27 experienced first-, second-, and third-grade teachers randomly selected. Kinzer and Carrick investigated, through questionnaires, how belief systems influence teaching decisions. Two sets of questions consisting of three subsets of statements were used to elicit explanations for how reading takes place, i.e. how reading happens (textbook, reader-based or interactive) and how reading develops, i.e. how reading is acquired (skills, holistic or differential acquisition). Additionally, the teachers were asked to read nine lesson plans, three each in the areas of vocabulary, comprehension, and syllabication, and respond to which best suited their teaching style. Data were analyzed using Chi-Square and Phi and Cramer's V coefficients. Findings reveal that the majority of teachers chose reader-based and holistic explanations for how reading takes place and develops respectively. Additional findings suggests strong relationships between how reading takes place and teachers' choices of vocabulary lessons, and the relationship between how reading develops and teachers' choices of vocabulary and comprehension lessons.

In response to the research questions posed by Kinzer and Carrick, it was found that teachers do have differing belief systems, but that teachers show more consistent patterns of lesson choice within their beliefs about how reading develops than about how reading takes place. The researchers concluded that these results reflect the fact that teachers may be influenced more by practical considerations than by theoretical considerations.

Wing (1989) conducted a study similar to Kinzer and Carrick's by examining the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional decisions as they taught young children. In addition to investigating how teachers' beliefs influenced practice, Wing also looked at preschool children's conceptions of reading and writing. Two nursery school programs were selected because of the differing curriculum views espoused about reading and writing instruction. One site was a Montessori school which followed the belief that children learn by being shown interesting approaches to learning; the other followed constructivist methods based on children learning through discovery as they actively construct knowledge. The subjects were the two school directors and ten four-and five-year-old students from each school

Data were collected from director interviews, observations of literacy materials, methods and experiences, and child interviews. During the interviews, the directors were asked to describe the general philosophy of their programs, their beliefs about how children learn to read and write, and what they believed were the most important things that help children to do so. Ten children were interviewed at each school. They were asked if they did reading and writing at school as well as what they thought about reading and writing. They were also asked how one learns to read and write, if they knew anyone who could read and write, how they knew these people were reading and writing, and what kinds of things people read and write. Finally, the children were asked why people needed to know how to read and write.

Findings from the Montessori school students reflected a skills/text based understanding of reading and writing, linking reading and writing to an understanding of how letters are formed and letter sound association. Findings from the constructivist school children reflected the holistic/reader-based orientation, followed closely by responses that were reflective of a home experience orientation, indicating that reading and writing for them meant reading stories and making up stories or drawing.

Results from interviews of the directors showed that their beliefs were highly consistent with the philosophy of their programs. Results also showed that preschool children's conceptions of reading and writing reflected the instructional beliefs and decisions of the program in which they were enrolled. It was suggested from this investigation that teachers should be aware of the effect they may have on young children's developing ideas about reading and writing.

In conclusion, research on teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction range from those studies that find beliefs have minimal impact on teaching practice, to those that reveal that teachers' beliefs drive virtually all practice. Early studies suggested that teachers are theoretical in their approach to reading instruction and that teachers' theoretical orientations about reading and writing can influence their thoughts, plans and decisions. Although some contemporary researchers confirm this finding, they are in conflict with others who believe that teachers' practice can be influenced by both internal and external factors such as beliefs

about the student, the classroom, curriculum mandates, and personal influences.

The consensus of the studies reviewed here is that beliefs drive classroom practice. If this is the case, then the variety of reading methodologies used in classrooms and the ongoing debate between philosophical camps is more readily understood. However, since only three major studies have addressed teacher beliefs about reading instruction for young children, it would be prudent to continue such investigations.

Part Three: Teachers' Beliefs About The At-Risk Student

This section of the literature review examines teachers' beliefs about teaching at-risk children. This section is not a comprehensive review of all studies related to at-riskness; rather it is a review of studies which investigated the influences of teachers' belief systems on their practice for the child considered to be at-risk academically. Not included here is a review of research about prevention programs designed to inhibit the drop-out rate or programs specifically designed for physically or mentally handicapped children.

One of the most sophisticated studies on teachers' beliefs as related to teaching at-risk students was part of a larger ethnographic study conducted by Koehler (1988). The purpose of this study was to determine the nature of the teachers' beliefs about at-risk students, the issue of labeling students, and how teachers' beliefs could be assessed. Koehler questioned whether labeling a

child as at-risk would create in teachers' minds certain expectations that would affect the way students were taught. According to Koehler there were two reasons to examine teachers' thoughts and beliefs about their at-risk students. The first reason is the relationship between teachers' "mental lives and their actions" (1988, p. 2). The second reason for exploring teachers' beliefs was to help explain teachers' "motivation to change" (p. 2).

The methodology used for this study included ethnographic and heuristic techniques. Five female teachers were asked open and closed-ended questions about their "declared" or "public" beliefs as well as their more "private" beliefs about their at-risk students. Responses from the teachers were recorded as they described their beliefs regarding at-risk children in general and how they actually described the at-risk children in their classrooms. At the end of the year, the same teachers were asked if their beliefs and descriptions of at-risk students had changed.

Using a constant comparative method for data analysis, Koehler was able to show that the theme of at-risk emerged for each teacher. Findings indicated that all but one of the teachers in the study exhibited a feeling that what they did as teachers made a difference for their students. In one school two of the teachers felt success if occurrences such as intrusions were kept to a minimum. One teacher, the most experienced, believed in a strong developmental approach for instructing at-risk children. In the other school, teachers believed in a more varied approach to teaching. Koehler's conclusions indicated a need for continued research in this area. She stated that "an understanding of teachers'

beliefs is crucial to the development and implementation of new programs and effective inservice education" (p. 2). She also concluded that teachers' stated beliefs related directly to their practice.

Three years later in a similar study, Mills and Clyde (1991) conducted a case study to determine teachers' personal theories and beliefs about literacy instruction. The purpose of this study was to look at how teachers' beliefs influenced practice for academically disadvantaged children, i.e. at-risk children. The subject of the study was a young boy engaged in early literacy development in two different kindergarten programs. The teachers in the study, one kindergarten teacher in a regular kindergarten classroom and teachers in a Child Development Center, represented classroom environments where literacy instruction was approached from vastly different perspectives. One approach used reflected a holistic philosophy which considered language as a meaningful, natural part of learning and the other a more traditional program that reflected a part-to-whole philosophy.

In their discussion of the beliefs teachers hold about the various approaches to reading instruction, Mills and Clyde reported:

Teachers' classroom decisions are by no means random or accidental, but rather, whether or not a teacher is conscious of it, her 'practice' is firmly rooted in her beliefs about learning and reflect a personal theory of what she believes effective teaching is all about (p. 54).

As a result of their investigation, Mills and Clyde found that this child's development could not be explained by theory but there was "irrefutable" evidence of the impact of the teachers' belief

system. They indicated that the teachers' beliefs impacted not only practice within the classroom but also the children within the classroom.

Conclusions from this review of the research on teachers' beliefs about teaching at-risk children, indicate that teachers hold very personal belief systems about their at-risk students. Because of this and other considerations, speculation may lead teachers and researchers to believe that teachers' beliefs are often predetermined and that these predetermined thoughts may shape a teacher's basic beliefs about the planning and implementing of instructional programs for at-risk children. In general these three studies suggests that practice is, in fact, belief driven.

Section Four: Teachers' Beliefs About Early Literacy Instruction For At-Risk Students: Interrelating The Factors Of The Study

In a search of related literature, no study was found that combined the components addressed in my study. A number of studies were found which were related to the separate components I examined; however, these studies did not address the issues in combination. This final section will review the one study that does investigate the interrelated factors of my study; the focus, however, was on secondary students rather than young children.

Dillon's (1989) research described the social organization and belief system of one teacher in his attempt to teach at-risk students to read. Dillon conducted an ethnographic study that allowed her to observe and describe the social organization of minority secondary students in a low-track English-reading

classroom. The purpose of the study was to determine how one teacher constructed the social organization of the classroom and how the students communicated during reading and writing lessons. The teacher in the study used knowledge about the students' background and his own beliefs about relationships between teachers and students to form the risk-free environment that allowed learning to take place. According to Dillon, it was clear that the teacher believed that learning could not occur without certain conditions being met. These conditions included the students' feeling good about themselves and the students' feeling good about their environment and their ability to learn. Because the students were considered at-risk of failure, the aforementioned conditions were important barriers to overcome if learning was to take place. During the course of the study, the teacher defined his beliefs about how his students learned and reported his opinion that students need to have the opportunity to talk and to "get personal" with their teacher (p. 244). It was apparent from the prolonged observation of this classroom teacher that what he believed was consistent with what he practiced during the course of the day. The teacher did construct a social organization within the classroom that supported his belief, that by using the cultural background of his students as a basis for instruction they could succeed.

The importance of the Dillon study is that it has helped illustrate what one teacher did in order to improve the reading and writing skills for at-risk students. Findings from the Dillon study enable teachers in similar settings with similar students to examine their own teaching and determine what works best to

improve not only their teaching but also student learning. According to Dillon, the why of effective classroom teaching "will enable present and prospective teachers to identify and reflect upon their own actions as teachers in various contexts" (p. 257). At the conclusion of this study Dillon suggested that it may serve elementary teachers well if a similar study was conducted using teachers of young children.

Summary of the Review of the Literature on Teachers' Beliefs

While some researchers concluded that teachers' beliefs have little effect upon practice, others acknowledged that practice is dictated by teachers' beliefs, thoughts, plans and decisions. Teachers interpret and respond to students in terms of their own belief systems. Thus, instructional methods can be seen as a direct result of the teacher's own thought processes. Teachers appear to operationalize their beliefs regarding the best way to teach young children based upon the relationships between articulated beliefs and practice. The research reviewed here indicates that teachers' beliefs are an important component of teachers' day-to-day pedagogical decisions and greatly influence teachers' practice.

What is apparent in the literature on teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction and at-risk children is that little research has been conducted. With the exception of the Koehler (1988) and Dillon (1989) studies, it appears that no other researchers have looked at the impact of how teachers' beliefs influence teaching students considered to be at-risk. Understanding this, it is apparent that there is indeed a gap in the research regarding teachers' beliefs

and this specific student population; a gap that the present study will attempt to fill. Banach (1984), Nespor (1985, 1987) and Dillon (1989) suggest that the study of teachers' beliefs represents an important substantive area of teaching that has been long neglected.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter details a multiple case study applied to the investigation of how teachers' beliefs impact literacy instruction for at-risk first grade students. Included are the procedures employed for school and subject selection, data collection and analysis methods, and a discussion of my role as researcher.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the influence of teachers' beliefs on literacy instruction for at-risk first graders. The following research questions provided a basis of inquiry and initially guided data collection for the study.

1. What are teacher' beliefs about instructing young at-risk children to read and write?
2. What do teachers' say they do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write?
3. What do teachers' actually do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write?

Two additional questions were implied from these three questions:

4. What influences teachers' instructional decisions as they teach young at-risk children to read and write?
5. Are there congruencies between teachers' stated beliefs and their teaching practice?

Criteria For Teacher Selection

I used a multiple-step process to select five teachers for this study. My criteria for selection of schools and teachers were established prior to the commencement of the process and resulted in a prospective sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My own theoretical sensitivity as a former elementary school teacher coupled with the responses prospective participants gave during initial interviews were the key factors in the final selection of teachers.

The first criterion for selection was that the teachers had to be employed in high-risk schools; that is, schools in which a large percentage of the student population was considered at-risk. I also predetermined that each teacher should be employed at a different school, thereby eliminating collaboration between teachers in the same school, which could possibly modify and/or bias the results of this study. Next, I chose to write case studies on five teachers. Each teacher represented one of the five categories of teachers' beliefs about reading instruction as determined by the Propositions About Reading Instruction Inventory (Duffy & Metheny, 1979) (PRI) (Appendix I). Since there are a variety of reading instruction methods, I wanted to describe teachers of at-risk students who used varied instructional methods.

Another criterion was that all teachers would volunteer to participate in the study. Teachers who saw the value in the study and were willing to participate in research would likely be more responsive subjects than would teachers who were told to participate by their principals. As volunteers, each teacher would participate fully in the requirements of the study: commit to a time frame of at least six months; allow classroom observation; engage in various interview sessions; complete the PRI Inventory; and respond to a reflective activity (Meyerson, 1993) (Appendix II).

An additional criterion was that only first grade, self-contained classrooms would be used. This criterion was established in an effort to use an instructional situation that places emphasis on early literacy instruction. Since first graders are in school for the entire day, this grade was more suitable than kindergarten for study. The decision to use only self-contained classrooms allowed maximum flexibility for observations during the school day with relative assurance that the teachers and students would be consistently available.

Site Selection

As stated above, subjects of this study were teachers in high-risk schools. I contacted officials of a large district in the southwestern United States for the names of schools that were designated as high-risk by that district. The school district defined an academically at-risk student as:

One who is not acquiring essential skills and understanding as defined by district-adopted courses of study at an

acceptable proficiency level established by the district, or one who scores significantly low on the state-adopted nationally normed achievement test.

According to district officials, the following factors are taken into consideration when making this determination:

The child may represent: (a) non-English speaking, (b) low family income, (c) low academic achievement. Other contributing factors may be, among others: academic deficiencies, credit deficiencies, low attendance, deficient behavior, family instability, family behavior patterns, family calamity, non-English proficiency, personal crisis (Elementary and Secondary Education Divisions, 1993).

It is apparent from this definition that the school district viewed at-risk students in a similar manner to Slavin & Madden (1989) who acknowledged that a variety of external factors contribute to the level of risk of the children in our schools.

In this district, 27 elementary schools were designated as high-risk, nine of which were considered highest priority by the district and in need of special support. After receiving a complete list of these high-risk schools, I requested permission to contact school principals to help identify teacher participants for my study. The school district officials gave me clearance to contact the principals and teachers after I submitted an approved copy of the Human Subjects Committee form from my university, and the required school district approval form (Appendix III and IV). After obtaining permission from all the necessary entities, I contacted the principals of the high risk schools to present the proposal for the study and to ask for their support for my research.

Given the predetermined criteria for the study, some of the schools were eliminated as possible sites. Telephone conversations

with some principals, for example, revealed that their schools could not be included because of multi-age primary classrooms, team-teaching classrooms, or Chapter I first grade classrooms which depended upon federally mandated curriculum programs. Two of the principals contacted did not consider their schools to be high risk even though the schools were identified as such at the district level.

I asked each school principal to identify first grade teachers teaching in self-contained, single teacher classrooms. In addition to identifying the teachers, the principals introduced me to the teachers or offered to call a meeting with the teachers so I could discuss my study with them. After my initial meeting with the principals and teachers, approximately thirty teachers indicated that they would be interested in participating in the study.

Participant Selection

The participant selection process began by setting meeting times with the thirty teachers who had indicated an interest in participating in the study. At the meetings I explained the study in its entirety and offered to answer any questions asked by the teachers. At the conclusion of the meetings, the teachers were asked to consider the time commitment for the study; the requirement to complete an ongoing reflective activity; and the agreement to have unscheduled classroom observation. Given these requirements, half of the teachers declined to continue with the selection process. The remaining fifteen teachers expressed a continued interest and signed an agreement statement to that effect (Appendix V).

The next step in the selection process involved scheduling individual meeting times with the remaining teachers. During these sessions, the teachers were asked a series of questions designed to elicit information concerning their beliefs about at-risk children, the literacy paradigm they espoused, the classroom environment they had created, and how their beliefs influenced literacy instruction for the at-risk students in their classroom (Appendix VI). Each session was audio taped and I took brief notes of each teacher's comments.

Following these interviews, I gave each of the 15 teachers a copy of the PRI to complete by the following meeting. This instrument is a 45-item Likert-scaled questionnaire that assesses the nature of teaching concepts of reading along five dimensions: linear skills, basal text, natural language, interest, and integrated curriculum. The responses from the PRI allowed me to align these teachers with specific categories of reading instruction that followed two basic reading instruction paradigms: "content-centered" or "pupil-centered." "Content-centered" conceptions included both the basal text and linear skills orientation to reading instruction; "pupil-centered" conceptions included interest-based (using pupil selection of trade books), natural language (including both psycholinguistics and language experience), and integrated curriculum models (a combination of basal text and natural language/experience methods). The PRI was validated over a two year period with over 500 subjects. With the permission of Dr. Gerald Duffy, author of the instrument, I modified some words and

phrases in the instrument to reflect current literacy terminology (Appendix VII).

In the meantime, several more of the fifteen remaining teachers eliminated themselves from the study reducing the number of possible participants from fifteen to eight. Several of the teachers who withdrew from the selection process stated that they were not willing to keep the reflective journal because of the time involved in such an endeavor. One teacher could not complete the PRI Inventory due to her busy schedule. Two other teachers stated that they felt that the entire project was too involved and too time consuming. Finally, one teacher stated that she did not want to be involved in such a project because "it would not make any difference anyway."

The rationale for selecting the five final participants was based on the predetermined criteria and two other important considerations. One consideration was my own theoretical sensitivity about the inherent teaching characteristics and personal attitudes of the remaining eight teachers. The other consideration was the fact that although all the remaining teachers had agreed to the requirements of the study, one of the participants did not feel comfortable with unscheduled observations in her classroom.

Considering these factors, I made the final selection of the five teachers who would participate in the study. The five teachers were Caucasian women who taught in single teacher, self-contained, at-risk first grade classrooms. Each voluntarily agreed to all of the requirements of participation. In the final analysis, these five

teachers met every criterion that I initially established for participants in the study.

Anonymity

Subjects of the study were afforded complete anonymity for the duration of the study and in the final report. Each teacher was asked to sign a consent form that allowed me to use information from the various data sources for the purpose of analyzing and reporting my findings. Confidentiality was also maintained with reference to any activity involving students in the classrooms observed.

In compliance with the requirements of both the University and School District Human Subjects Review Process, each subject signed a consent that informed them of the purpose of the study, the extent of the distribution of information collected from the research, the confidentiality of all subjects and school sites used in the study, and the right of the subjects to withdraw from the study at any time (Appendix VIII).

Profiles Of Five Teachers

The teachers in this study are five Caucasian women, ranging in age from twenty-seven to forty-nine. One teacher is a native of the city in which she teaches, while the other four have moved from out-of-state. All five teachers are married and all have children. Three of the teachers were educated at the local university, the

remaining two at schools outside the state. One of the teachers has her masters degree, the others hold bachelors degrees in elementary education. Total teaching experience ranged from two to fourteen years. Two teachers have been teaching first grade for four years, the others less than two years. Brief profiles of each of the five teachers follow. Chapter IV provides more information about each of the teachers.

Mary

Mary has been teaching at-risk first graders for four and a half years. She is in her mid forties, married, and has three children. Mary received a degree in secondary education but had a negative student teaching experience and was disillusioned with the idea of secondary education. For that reason she elected to stay home with her children until the youngest began kindergarten. She returned to school to earn a degree in elementary education. Mary began her teaching career in a Chapter I kindergarten but taught at that level for only a half year. Since that time she has taught only first grade at-risk children. Mary aligned with the "interest approach," on the PRI, but also indicated some use of the "natural language approach" and a slight propensity toward the "skills based approach."

Mary is quiet in nature, yet an enthusiastic, highly organized teacher. When asked what was special about her as a teacher, she replied, "It's the little things I try to do for the children. I work very hard for the children."

Angela

This was Angela's second year in the district, after moving from out-of-state where she taught 3, 4, and 5 year olds. This was the first year Angela taught first grade. She is in her mid forties, married and has two grown children. She was educated in a teachers' college and received a degree in elementary education. She left teaching for a number of years but returned because she said she missed the children. She is continuing her education at the graduate level by taking classes at the local university. Angela registered a strong "natural language approach" on the PRI.

Angela is a creative and energetic teacher. When asked what makes her special as a teacher she replied, "You really don't learn how to be a teacher, it has to come from inside. I have a basic love and caring for these children. I really want to help them."

Lindsey

Lindsey is a young woman in her early thirties, married, the mother of a second grader and expecting her second child. She is a sensitive and caring professional with a warm infectious smile that is quick to surface. In addition to these qualities, I noted a depth and seriousness about her when she talked about her philosophy of teaching and especially when she talked about the at-risk students in her classroom. Lindsey followed a strict "basal text approach" to literacy instruction as indicated on the PRI.

Until last year, Lindsey had never taught in an at-risk school. She chose to return for a second year, explaining that she returned because she could not give in. She felt that she had something to

offer students. When Lindsey was asked what was special about her as a teacher she said, "I don't know everything about teaching at-risk kids, but I care about them and I am providing them with more of an education than just academics; I think that is pretty important."

Taylor

Taylor was born and educated in the same city in which she now teaches. Her teaching degree is in elementary education. She is married, has a young daughter, and has been teaching for almost two years. Taylor, the youngest of the participants in the study, is in her late twenties and currently expecting her second child. Taylor displays a warm and gentle nature and is an extremely creative teacher. On the PRI, Taylor favored a combination of "natural language" and "interest based" approaches to literacy instruction. Her teaching experience has been exclusively in at-risk schools. When asked what was unique about her as a teacher, Taylor said, "I am very positive in my teaching. Although these children are at-risk I have high expectations for them. I won't let them slide, I won't let them fail."

Valerie

Valerie teaches in a year-round school. She has taught at her present school for four years and in first grade for the past two years. She spent a number of years substitute teaching before she secured a permanent teaching position. Valerie is a vivacious, active woman in her late thirties. She is married and has two

daughters. Valerie earned a degree in elementary education, and has many credits in special education and psychology which she says have been of enormous help to her as she teaches at-risk children. The results of her PRI indicated that Valerie used an "integrated approach" to reading instruction following not only the tenets of a "skills based" belief system but also a "holistic" approach. She is a dedicated teacher who, when asked about her uniqueness as a teacher, said that she considers her greatest strength her "ability to recognize the individual needs of her students and to maintain a positive learning environment."

Data Sources

The methods used to explore teachers' beliefs in multiple classroom settings were those associated with prolonged field observation and in-depth interview strategies (Jorgensen, 1989). Using these methods, I was able to examine and describe the subjects of the study in the context of their own classrooms, observe the interactions between teachers and students, capture the teachers' personal interpretation of both beliefs and practice in the classroom setting, and explore the consistency of practice as related to teachers' beliefs (Yin, 1984).

Interviews

During the data gathering segment of the study, I used two types of interviews: focused, open-ended interviews; and informal, open-ended interviews (Yin, 1989). Focused interviews were used

initially to elicit responses to specific questions about each teacher's personal history and beliefs. The first set of interviews was designated as the initial teacher interviews and lasted approximately one hour (Appendix IX). From the initial interview questions, I elicited specific information from each teacher about her family background, personal history and educational experiences.

During the second set of formal, open-ended interview sessions, I asked the teachers to describe their personal teaching philosophies, their classroom environments, their beliefs about literacy instruction, and their beliefs about at-risk children (Appendix X). I divided these topics into separate interview sessions because of the complexity of each area.

Informal, open-ended interview sessions were used occasionally throughout the data collecting phase of the study. These interviews, although more casual and usually following an observation session, were considered focused, open-ended sessions. Each interview yielded information that directly responded to my need to clarify a classroom occurrence or an entry from the teachers' reflective journals.

Transcripts from each interview provided a rich source of descriptive data and preserved the integrity of the teachers' own perceptions of their interactions within their individual classrooms.

Teacher Observations And Fieldnotes

Extensive field observations began in the fall, immediately following the initial formal interview sessions. These observations were conducted to obtain first-hand knowledge of the methods and

approaches used by the teachers as they introduced and supported the development of reading and writing for their first grade students. I used direct observations in each setting on a regular basis over a prolonged period of time (Sanjek, 1990). Each observation session focused on the documentation of data pertinent to the mission of the study. Detailed narratives of these classroom occurrences were written (Sanjek, 1990). This practice allowed me to report actual happenings and interactions that proved insightful and informative in answering the research questions posed in this study.

Most classroom observations were unscheduled. This flexibility in scheduling allowed me to observe classroom activities at various times of the day when different activities took place. I made every attempt to visit each teacher in the study during each day of the week and at different times throughout the instructional day. Each visit lasted from one to two hours, although I occasionally visited for an entire morning or afternoon session. This observation period continued for six months.

Data from field notes included detailed recording of classroom occurrences such as teacher/student interaction, teacher and student responses to literacy activities, classroom management activities initiated during instruction, transitions between various literacy instruction activities, notation of the "mood" of the classroom, and a description of the overall classroom environment. Over twenty hours of observation were conducted, recorded, and analyzed with each of the participants in the study.

Teachers' Reflective Activity

In addition to interviews, observations and resulting field notes, the five teachers were asked to participate in a "Reflective Activity" (Meyerson, 1993). This activity involved detailed documentation of the factors that impacted decisions about teachers' literacy instruction. The reflective activity took the form of journal entries in which the teachers considered the influencing factors that affected their own pedagogical beliefs about literacy. The journal entries began with a concept web in which each teacher considered: "Why I Teach Literacy The Way I Do." Each teacher was then asked to identify factors that influenced her teaching of reading and writing. In some cases the reflective activity revealed decisions teachers made during the course of the school day. The teachers wrote in their journals periodically throughout the course of the study.

Additional Data Sources

At the beginning of the study I added an additional component to my data base of information by interviewing the school principals. Each scheduled interview was formal and lasted approximately one hour. From these interviews I learned more about each school, as well as how the at-risk student population of the school affected the teachers and the academic focus of the various schools. The use of this additional information allowed me to "further corroborate and augment evidence from other data sources" (Yin, 1989, p. 86).

In order to obtain a complete and accurate representation of what teachers did as they taught young at-risk children to read and write, I also gathered data from the teachers' daily lesson plans and their anecdotal records about children in their classrooms. I asked the teachers for their permission to read these records while I visited in their classrooms, but at no time were the lesson plans or anecdotal records removed from the teachers' classrooms. These documents yielded another source of information about how beliefs affect decisions that result in classroom practice.

Toward the end of the study each teacher was asked to respond to a written questionnaire. Responses to this questionnaire provided additional information about other areas of teachers' beliefs and practices that were not apparent from other sources of data previously collected (Appendix XI).

Data Analysis

Erickson (1986) states that the purpose of analyzing data from qualitative studies is "to generate empirical assertions, largely through induction" (p. 146). According to Yin (1989), it is the prerogative of the researcher to determine the data evidence sources presented for analysis; therefore, I used only those data sources that directly supported how teachers' beliefs influenced classroom practice.

In most cases, I collected and analyzed the data simultaneously and continuously using the constant comparative method of data analysis (Strauss, 1987). My analysis procedure

consisted of reading and rereading field notes, reading transcriptions of and listening to audio tapes of interviews conducted with the teachers in the study, looking for patterns of actions and meaning in the data, and reflecting on the data by writing theoretical memos (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process continued throughout the data collection segment of the project in order for me to confirm, expand, or negate my assumptions about the influence of teachers' beliefs on classroom practice as stated in Chapter I. For example, one assumption I had made was that teachers are able to articulate their beliefs if given the opportunity to do so. During the study, I found that these five teachers clearly articulated their beliefs about classroom practice, the at-risk child, and literacy instruction, both verbally and through their writing in the reflective activity.

As a final analysis procedure, I looked for key linkages in the data connecting similar instances of the same phenomenon across different subjects. For example, as I looked at teachers' stated beliefs about teaching at-risk children, I found that all five participants had concerns about behavior problems exhibited by the children and how those problems influenced classroom instruction.

Realibility and Validity

Data analysis involves addressing issues of reliability and validity. Yin (1989) describes three validity/reliability tests that are appropriate for case study: construct validity, external validity and reliability.

Construct validity refers to the establishment of correct operational measures regarding the concepts being studied. In this study several steps were taken to insure construct validity: (1) Multiple sources of data were used; (2) A chain of evidence was established; and (3) All data were reviewed by the key informants (the teachers) themselves.

External validity establishes that the findings are generalizable beyond the present study. Although it is understood that it is not the intent of qualitative research to generalize to a greater population, establishing external validity in a study does allow the researcher "to generate empirical assertions, largely through induction" (Yin, 1989, p. 43). In this study, external validity is assured by replication of findings among the five subjects in the study. For the most part there were similar findings that could be construed as reflective of all five teachers involved in this study. The results/findings may not be true to every at-risk first grade classroom teacher, however, as Rawlings (1942) suggests, researchers look to the specific in order to better understand the general.

Reliability refers to the possibility that another researcher could replicate the study with similar results. The goal of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in a study (Yin, 1989). In this study it was my intent to reproduce in as complete manner as possible the actual experiences, actions and thoughts of the five subjects of the study. Reliability for this study was established by designing and implementing recognized and accepted case study protocols, by pre-determining the use of multiple sources of data

and by acknowledging my own theoretical sensitivity as a former teacher of young at-risk children and as an experienced qualitative researcher.

Another major method of assuring reliability is through triangulation of the data sources. In order to confirm and unify the findings, multiple method triangulation was employed (Mathison, 1988). Triangulation of the data consisted of information gathered from interviews, direct observations, the use of my own theoretical memos, and the teachers' reflective activity. Yin (1984) and Mathison (1988) agree that triangulation of data allows researchers to be more accurate and convincing in the presentation of evidence. By using multiple sources of data, construct validity of the research study was enhanced (Yin, 1989). This was accomplished as a result of measuring the same phenomena from a variety of sources, i.e., interviews, both formal and informal, observation, and conversation with teachers. Additionally, the use of multiple source data collection contributes to the trustworthiness of the data and adds to the confidence of the research findings (Denzin, 1988).

Coding Procedures

After the data were collected, open coding procedures were initiated (Strauss & Corbin, 1991). The process of coding provided a method to categorize the information in an organized and meaningful way. Storage, sorting, and retrieval of field notes was accomplished by the use of the HyperQual, Computer Data Analysis System (Padilla, 1991). This program was used in the initial storage and coding phases of data collection and analysis.

Themes used for sorting and analyzing data were determined prior to data collections and were based on the research questions posed at the outset of the study:

Theme One: Key Influences On Teachers' Beliefs About Literacy Instruction. This theme described factors that impacted upon teachers' beliefs and resulted from written documentation in the teachers' reflective journals.

Theme Two: Teachers' Beliefs About Literacy Paradigms. This theme discussed teachers' beliefs about literacy paradigms and described how each teacher's belief system influenced her practice.

Theme Three: Teachers' Beliefs About At-Risk Children. This theme described teachers' perspectives of at-risk children in their classrooms and from their perspectives, two categories emerged. Category I, The Learning Environment For Teaching At-Risk Children, examined the total environment including the physical, social, and emotional elements of the classroom developed specifically for at-risk children. Category II, Teacher Expectations About Student Learning, examined teachers' beliefs that all children can learn.

Case Study Format

The case study format employed in Chapter IV begins with a biographical sketch of each of the five subjects investigated. Each sketch included information regarding personal history, educational background, and professional experiences. The remaining data were sorted into the three themes previously presented. Concluding each

case study is a summary of how teachers' beliefs influence literacy instruction for at-risk first graders.

Peer Debriefing

During the final data gathering stage, peer debriefing was conducted with the teachers involved in the study, which made them aware of the content and format of the data collected. This process of "member checking" offered the participants the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy and completeness, thus adding to the rigor of this study (Guba, 1981).

Finally, through the use of multiple data sources, I was able to gain insights into the teachers' theoretical orientation to reading instruction as well as their beliefs about at-risk students and the decisions inherent in developing teaching curricula for first grade students.

The Role of the Researcher

I assumed the role of participant-as-observer for the purpose of observing and gathering data in the classroom environments for the duration of this study (Babchuk, 1961). As a participant-as-observer I did not interact with the participants of the study while they were teaching nor did I interact with the children in the class. This role allowed me to devote my total observational time to systematic recording of field notes. As noted, scheduled and unscheduled observations were made with permission from each individual teacher. Information from these observations allowed me

to document the educational paradigms within which the teachers operated, as well as how curricula were developed and implemented in accordance with the teachers' educational objectives and stated beliefs.

CHAPTER IV

Introduction

This chapter details five case studies beginning with a biography of each of the teachers. Each teacher's beliefs about literacy instruction for at-risk first grade students has been organized into themes and categories as described in Chapter III. Following the themes and categories is a summary of each case study.

Case Study One: Mary

Biographical sketch

Mary grew up in a middle class family where values such as honesty, hard work, and education were stressed. Her father was a civil engineer and she described her mother as a self-made woman. Even though her mother had little formal education, she was a successful business woman and helped put her father through school. Mary's mother died when she was twelve. She said that she experienced a loving and nurturing relationship with her step-mother who filled her adolescent life with happy and successful experiences.

Mary told of loving going to school both as a child and as an adult. In 1967 she graduated from the local university with a degree in secondary education, majoring in history and minoring in art. Mary's concluding experience in her teacher education program was not what she hoped it would be and at the conclusion of her student teaching she decided not to teach. After graduation she elected to stay home with her young children. It wasn't until 1985, when her youngest child entered kindergarten that Mary considered teaching again. At that time she went back to school for three years to become certified in elementary education.

Mary's first teaching job in 1989 was in a half day Chapter 1 kindergarten. From there she moved to her present position in first grade where she has been for the past four years. She explained that she was drawn to her present school because of the principal and her philosophy toward whole language, and her commitment to providing quality education for at-risk children.

On several occasions Mary told me how much she loved learning and explained that she often attended workshops and in-service meetings in an attempt to learn to teach literacy in a more exciting and successful way. Mary admitted that because her only teaching experience has been with at-risk children, she felt that her teaching style and techniques work for her and her students mainly because they were developed with the at-risk children in mind. Mary stated:

The way I teach is definitely the result of my belief system. I'm still in the learning stages of teaching and I hope to take a more structured, systematic approach at some point, but for right now this is working.

Key Influences On Mary's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

Through the reflective journal Mary revealed six major considerations which influenced her teaching beliefs and subsequent classroom practices. She cited the following six areas in order of priority: family, education, peers, at-risk children, class size, and her love of literature. As Mary completed her explanation of the factors that most impacted her teaching, she stated, "There are so many things that influence my teaching but the guiding focus is the desire to give them [students] more than they came with."

In examining each of these areas, Mary first explained that her father and step-mother encouraged her to get a good education, and that her grandmother had been the one who encouraged her to become a teacher. Even though detained by her initial disillusionment with teaching, she did follow their advice.

The next area impacting Mary's practice included professional and peer influences. Mary credits her principal, her fellow teachers, and inservice training as major factors influencing her philosophy of teaching and her subsequent practice:

Because of the opportunity to learn from others, I spent my first year focused on interest, meaning, and stimulation, rather than on skills. My students benefited and so did I. I later took graduate courses at the university and felt that what I had learned as an undergraduate now came alive and had real meaning.

The presence of the at-risk child in her classroom also influenced Mary's pedagogy. Mary began by talking about the home environment from which her at-risk children came. She also spoke

of her beliefs about what she must do to provide a classroom atmosphere that was conducive to learning and free of what she considered limiting experiences. "I'm sure the biggest impact on my way of teaching is the student's need for structure, support, and stimulation." Mary proclaimed unequivocally that the fact that her students were at-risk was one of the major factors influencing her practice:

Their environments have not been particularly stimulating or child-friendly. Their self-esteem, their sense of themselves as independent, unique and self-confident beings needs nurturing and constant reinforcement. In many cases I'm the first person who has valued them as thinking, creative individuals. If they are going to learn, they have to have confidence in themselves. Consequently, I spend lots of time on positive talk and self-esteem. They influence everything I do.

Mary began her explanation of factors that lead to the establishment of her unique literacy program by discussing the profound impact that children's literature made on the way she teaches reading and writing:

I love to read. It's a joy to read to my first graders and to see the mental images created by our stories flitting across their faces. We're sharing my life-long love of books. We read anything and everything. We read all of the time. Children need to be interested in their learning, books provide that interest.

Mary concluded that these six factors directly affected her planning, decision-making and evaluation of literacy experiences for her at-risk students. She also expressed her belief that it was the outside social and economic factors, and not the children themselves, that created the educational dilemma she faced:

These children (at-risk) are not to blame for their life circumstances. They are the product of the external factors that impact their lives and those things cause serious learning problems. They need a safe, predictable environment. They need to focus, work hard and feel proud of their accomplishments. Our daily routine reflects all of these elements.

Mary' Belief About Literacy Instruction

Belief: "My basic belief about literacy is that reading empowers children. I believe in doing what works for my students."

When I first asked Mary to tell me her beliefs about teaching children to read and write she said, "I really don't think about reading, I think I just do it." Although we both laughed, Mary quickly acknowledged that she did have a strong belief about teaching reading. Mary outlined how her belief system about literacy instruction developed:

During my university experience I learned something about both reading instruction approaches, but I did my student teaching in a school where the principal said, 'We will do whole language', and that was the beginning. We had inservice training sessions and I fell in love with the whole thing. I see the whole language approach to teaching reading and writing as a label for my philosophy because whole language stresses meaning and interest and child-owned experiences. However, I have modified that to some degree by developing my own philosophy about teaching children to read and write.

From Mary's statement I understood that her primary instructional focus was grounded in the whole language philosophy,

but I was curious about her statement "I have developed my own philosophy of reading instruction." When I asked Mary to explain why she taught reading the way she does, her answer was:

I wanted to be top down. I wanted to take the whole, and I wanted to have a very interesting whole and I wanted them to learn the skills we needed to learn from that whole. That is what we do here.

Mary went on to tell exactly how she structured a top down approach for literacy instruction:

The whole language experience has for me two basic elements that critically affect my teaching of reading and writing. First, the material I use is child-centered. The children need to be interested in what they are doing; they must buy into the activity for it to work. Second, developmental considerations are crucial. Exposure, exploration, and approximation are appropriate activities and goals for first graders. I find interesting reading material, things the children will like, then I read, the group reads, we read together, and we read individually. Then we break that down into skills. They don't get bored, but they get the skills they need.

Mary continued to refer to her philosophy as whole language, yet she spoke in terms of the mechanics of a more traditional skill-based approach. When I pointed this out to Mary she said:

I call myself a whole language teacher, yet I'm focused on Piaget's developmental approach to teaching. I still find myself sticking to these little things like spelling lessons; I just can't let them go. I guess I believe in doing what works for my students. I may be what some people call in the middle of the road; when I took the PRI, I thought I would end up in the middle.

As Mary talked of her modified whole language or dual approach to literacy instruction, I asked her to elaborate on how

using the two approaches reflected her beliefs about the way literacy should be taught:

A part of me felt like the part to whole approach was too hard, too overwhelming for them. I needed to see things starting at the beginning and getting harder. I think they're comfortable now. I think if it's only that way [skills] it's too boring. Boring for me and boring for the children. So we do both. I guess it's the interest that makes it work.

Mary voiced real concern about enhancing the literacy opportunities for her students and explained that she felt that her children were doomed without having a strong background in reading and writing. From our first encounter Mary stated that she clearly had a plan of instruction that was firmly connected to her literacy philosophy:

My philosophical belief about reading instruction is that reading helps children to move beyond the structures of family and environment and see themselves as thinking, contributing individuals. It's possible to know something their parents don't know because they have read it.

Mary voiced similar views about writing:

All of the first grade teachers here decided to incorporate the writing process into our curriculum. My children are writing and illustrating and sharing their own stories. I see real benefits for my students because their confidence level is increasing. They love to write and that is pretty important.

Mary displayed a willingness and ability to articulate her knowledge by explaining how she taught literacy to her at-risk students. As she concluded the discussion of how she taught her young students, Mary explained that she believed that the

combination of approaches she used was working for her students. She continued, "By my standards I believe that my children are learning to read and write."

Over the months I observed Mary's classroom, I saw many examples of the various approaches to literacy instruction she had spoken of in our interviews. Reading and writing were incorporated into all of the children's daily activities. Some of their writing was self directed in the form of daily journal writing and individually created stories, but usually they copied from the board or created and wrote stories as a group with Mary facilitating the process.

Similarly, reading took on various forms. The children read constantly, either with the teacher, in groups, or individually. They read aloud or silently with Mary as she read instructions and stories or student created text. The diversity of reading material was vast, including picture story books, poems, written directions, or anything containing print that was available in the classroom or the school environment. One of the focuses of Mary's reading program was the use of chart stories that the children and teacher created together. These stories were read and reread daily. Mary stated, "They [the children] loved their own creations and are eager to read what they have written themselves." In addition to student generated books, Mary encouraged the children to read silently or in small groups from a collection of big books or other library books found in the reading center of the classroom.

In general, the classroom environment was structured. Mary created a learning environment that aligned with the developmental philosophy that was congruent with her belief system. During my

visits I observed the children working at their desks at tasks that were teacher directed, such as word identification drills, traditional spelling lesson activities, and a variety of skills involving letter sounds. There were also times of student focused work such as independent journal writing or story writing. During the time of day that Mary called reading time, she took what she referred to as "a traditional approach" by having the children come to the reading table to read either collectively or individually. The children did not read from basals but rather from story books or readers that the teacher called, "my own readers." The text in these books was simple, yet the children appeared to enjoy the stories and read them with relative ease.

The whole language philosophy became reality as the children engaged in reading and writing activities involving student generated text. To begin this practice, Mary and the children would brainstorm story ideas, outline the story format and begin the creation and writing process. As the process continued the children were given the opportunity to read and reread their creations and finally to illustrate and complete their own work prior to taking it home. Mary and the children made big books from their chart stories and occasionally individual small books for each of the children. Mary stated, "They think of themselves as authors and often they don't realize the amount of work and learning that has gone into a writing project."

At the beginning of the school year Mary decided on the topics for the children's writing but, as they became more experienced, she encouraged them to determine the focus of the stories. She often

suggested a personal focus in order for the students' stories to reflect familiar topics such as their family, their parent's job, a pet, or a home or school experience. Mary stated, "My goal is to keep the reading and writing lessons comfortable, simple and meaningful in order for the children to be successful with their literacy experiences." In order to accomplish this Mary encouraged her children to write about personal experiences. Throughout my observation I saw evidence of Mary's attempt to accomplish this goal. Mary believed that if the children were somewhat responsible for their own learning and used familiar situations, reading and writing would be more meaningful.

Mary's' Beliefs About At-Risk Children

Belief: "Bonding is absolutely the most important element in teaching at-risk children. Through expectation, modeling, praising, touching, and firmly enforced classroom rules, we bond as a group and learn to care about each other. We're then ready to work hard and learn."

Throughout the course of the study Mary was asked to express her understanding of the at-risk factors that influenced her students' learning and her teaching. She also chronicled her belief system as it related to her pedagogy, the creation of a classroom environment conducive to learning, and the educational expectations she held for her at-risk students.

As we began talking about at-risk children Mary referred specifically to the students in her classroom as opposed to at-risk

children in general. She told me that her belief system definitely reflected her own personal understanding of the uniqueness of these children and what she had to do to teach them. When asked to explain why she considered her students to be at-risk Mary stated:

Well, they are at-risk. If you just visited another school and looked at those children and compared them to mine, it's abundantly clear. Many of the children in my classroom come to school with limitations. First, their prior knowledge base is limited because they haven't been exposed to a variety of [life] experiences. Second, their knowledge and use of the English language is basic. Some of my students have had very little opportunity to converse in English with an adult. Third, some of my students live on limited diets, without proper rest and without adequate adult supervision. Their physical environment imposes limitations. I can just look at the student body and see a great big difference, and it's usually clothing and the condition of their hair. I also see more minorities. So first of all it's the physical things.

Mary cited "poor nutrition, dysfunctional family environment, immature and disruptive behavior, and a lack of continuous and proper adult supervision" as key factors affecting the children in her classroom, in addition to the aforementioned elements.

Compounding these circumstances, Mary noted that many of her at-risk children were considered to be at the poverty level which she felt limited opportunities generally afforded children in more economically stable situations. Her overall conclusion was that the biggest risk factor present in her students' lives was economic limitations.

As I observed Mary interacting with the children in her classroom I noted that one of her main teaching strategies included modeling the various skills that she expected the children to

perform. She began with the simplest of tasks and built upon them, constantly demonstrating, and talked to the children about how she wanted them to do their work until they reached the competency desired.

Praise was a common part of Mary's pedagogy. Prior to beginning an assignment she would say, "Now this is hard work but I know you can do it because you are learning so well." Upon completing a job, Mary would compliment each child and make a personal comment to indicate her pleasure with the accomplishment. Although Mary stated that she was not a "sit in your lap type of teacher," (a teacher who was not physically demonstrative with the children) she was not inhibited when it came to patting a shoulder or arm as she said "well done."

Because she understood the nature of her at-risk children, Mary was able to provide emotional and physical support for her students. When a task was difficult she moved about the room observing and helping where help was needed. Each morning she provided a snack for the children because, as she explained, "I know that many of my children come to school hungry and the majority of food that they get during the day, they get here." Mary demonstrated her care for her students in many other ways but the most obvious was in her tireless effort to provide a variety of learning opportunities in order to ensure interest and success as they learned.

The Learning Environment For Teaching At-Risk Children

Belief: "If I had to give one belief that influences my overall teaching philosophy it would be the need to create an environment that is warm, consistent, structured, and stimulating; an environment that the children can depend on."

Mary explained many of her teaching beliefs were centered on a necessity to provide a "stimulating atmosphere" for all her students because she felt their home environment was so limited. Mary effectively articulated her teaching beliefs about creating a learning environment for at-risk children, but quickly explained that this was a limited perspective since her teaching experiences had been totally confined to teaching at-risk children.

She said she believed that it was important for at-risk children to feel a sense of comfort and security in their school environment and that she had learned how to provide those experiences. She stated that she also believed:

These children love school. It's a safe place, a place where they can relax. School is also very structured and my students know that, but this classroom is stimulating and they are excited about learning here. If I told my students that they had to stay at school every day until 5 p.m., they would love it. For them, school is a comfortable place and that's what I think it should be.

The room was a large open space with big windows that let in an abundance of light. The walls were decorated with copious representations of the students' work such as products of group and individual writing efforts. There were games, books, toys, and other

materials that are found in most first grade classrooms. I saw a computer, easels and paints, bulletin boards, chairs and tables, and student desks arranged in traditional rows. I observed many of the physical and social characteristics of Mary's classroom that she had mentioned.

Mary explained that when the children came into the classroom at the beginning of the school year, the walls and bulletin boards were bare. She told the children that this was their classroom and they had to do the work to make the room really pretty. As the year progressed, the room was decorated with the children's work, including chart stories taped on black boards and art projects hanging from the ceiling. There were paintings, poems, writing samples, and weekly spelling tests displayed throughout the room. Mary concluded, "The children feel ownership in this room and that contributes to the sense of family I want for them."

The orderliness of the classroom environment was reflected by the manner in which the children conducted themselves. They had a sense of knowing when and how they should do certain things. This observation of student behavior aligned with Mary's belief that "at-risk children need structure and a controlled, predictable environment." She stated, "I need for the room to be quiet and organized and when I am comfortable with the atmosphere of the room the children are too."

According to local school officials, the school in which Mary teaches is designated as the "top priority" high-risk school in the district. The school, however was not physically depressed or run down. On the contrary, except for the fact that it was old, it was

pleasant and inviting. Mary talked to me about her feelings for the school environment. "I believe that this is a good place for my children. The building is bright and open and much nicer than many of them experience at home."

During my first few weeks in the school many of the public areas were being remodeled. According to Mary, the new color scheme of soft pastels reflected an atmosphere of calm and tranquility for children who did not experience that mood in their home environment. One day I found the children down on the floor exploring their new carpet. One child enthusiastically told me about her "new" school and described in great detail how beautiful she thought it was. Mary's statement was, "I believe this environment makes a big difference because for many children this is the first time they have ever experienced fresh new paint and attractive surroundings. We all feel good about learning in such a beautiful place."

Mary's belief system also included aspects of the social and emotional environment that she had created for her students. "I believe that at-risk children must have a positive environment. Their home environment is not positive, safe, and in many cases is not happy. Therefore, school must be." When asked to explain how the environment she had created affected her practice, Mary said that she believed the physical and emotional climate of the classroom was critical if learning was to take place. She continued:

Our daily routine reflects all of the elements of my belief system concerning how at-risk children learn best. First and foremost, they need to bond as a class and with me. They need

to feel secure and know that this place is safe. They need high interest, predictable reading and writing challenges and they need structure, support, and stimulation.

Mary's concluding statement about the creation of a learning environment for at-risk children was:

These children have to know that their environment here at school isn't going to change, that rules are rules, and that I will be very consistent, extremely consistent. Once they know that, they are happy with the classroom and what they feel about school.

According to Mary, problems that frequently confront many at-risk children greatly limit their abilities to cope and function in a regular first grade classroom. She noted that one of the more crucial concerns she had regarding her role as a facilitator was in the establishment of a "comfort zone" for learning. Mary believed that if this could be accomplished, her students would eventually be empowered with enough self confidence, motivation, and discipline to continue the learning process:

Everyone knows this is what empowers learners. This is extremely important for at-risk children but I will tell you that even this belief takes on new meaning when teaching at-risk children. And I will tell you that there is nothing in my personal or professional experience that prepared me for this kind of teaching.

Mary's philosophy of showing kindness to those in the classroom environment was expressed through the consideration she demonstrated to the children and they in turn demonstrated toward one another. Mary created an attitude of mutual respect between the members of the class by establishing firm rules and maintaining strict enforcement of those rules. For example, she would not allow

the children to "cut in line," and pushing and shoving were never permitted. Consequently, none of these activities were ever observed.

Many of the classroom activities that Mary engaged the children in reflected her belief that learning should be simple and that children should have the opportunity to work within a familiar framework. I noticed that many of the writing projects mirrored the children's own family experiences. Mary supported any statement made by her students regarding their home or family life, never passing judgment or criticizing. She stated, "You can never, never judge them by what goes on in their homes." Mary's stated belief was that teachers should be tolerant of their students and she demonstrated this belief through her heightened degree of sensitivity toward at-risk children. Despite economic limitations and often a lack of family structure, Mary responded to her students in a manner that suggested that real problems can and will be overcome. Her persistence and genuine interest for the educational success of her at-risk children were apparent as I observed her practice. Mary stated that she believed that she had created a learning environment reflective of her belief system. She acknowledged her belief system by concluding:

We work hard every day and the children feel proud of their accomplishments. Our daily routine reflects all of the elements of my belief system. I spend lots of time establishing a controlled and dependable environment; and I try to provide the stimulating atmosphere that will awaken my students for further learning.

Mary's Expectations About Student Learning

Belief: "I believe that first grade is exploration; it's not turning out the finished product."

According to Mary, many of the students in her classroom function at the kindergarten level. She told me that her expectations for her students vacillated from high to low depending upon the circumstances of the day. "Sometimes teaching is frustrating, sometimes very rewarding. It's hard because there is so little to draw upon, and because behavior problems are so prevalent." Here again, Mary spoke of empowering her students: "The keys to successful teaching revolve around expectation, modeling, motivation, and management. The key to my teaching," Mary explained, "is to expect them to succeed." Mary told me how she translated her beliefs into teaching strategies for at-risk children:

I draw upon my students' limited knowledge base, and with lots of praise and high expectations we tackle the job of learning. I promote the idea of hard work and the inner satisfaction of accomplishing our goals. I encourage imagination and a sense of individuality to empower my students as individuals with strengths and identities separate from their circumstances. I want my students to wake-up and grow. I believe they can succeed in the face of all the adversities they face.

I asked Mary how her beliefs resulted in academic success for her at-risk children. Specifically, I asked her if she thought her students would succeed academically. She answered without hesitation:

Well, some of them will, very definitely, the brighter ones. I think first grade is exploratory. I don't think it is turning out a finished product in any way, it just isn't. So I guess I really do think this place is the best thing for these children. Yes, they will make it.

I asked her to elaborate on her expectations for her at-risk students:

First, I believe that children should understand that school is hard work. When there has to be a sense of accomplishment children value school more. They bring to the classroom a loving nature. I think probably more so than most children, these children are loving. They show you how appreciative they are by being loving.

Even though Mary articulated her belief that her students would succeed, I asked her to tell me more of what she actually did to assure her students' success.

So what do I do? I spend a lot of time with positive talking and self esteem. The last thing, and I feel that this is important, I let my students know that school is hard work, it is work like their parents go to work, and there are extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for that. I think encouragement is everything. I believe that you have to suspend your disbelief, you have to say, my expectations are high, this is how it's going to be, and just picture that and then at the end of year, maybe it isn't what you had hoped, but it isn't too bad. You have to suspend your disbelief and you just work in the most positive framework. I'm good at this so I think I'll stick with it.

She also spoke of what she expected from her students:

I expect my students to work hard and succeed and I want them to expect the same thing. I don't water down their curriculum, but I am aware of their backgrounds. I push them hard and I tell them that they can do it. At-risk children just need for some adult to tell them that they are special.

I often observed Mary praising her students for their strengths and telling them that she knew that they would do well at the task assigned. She also went out of her way to make them feel important as individuals by telling them to be proud of their accomplishments and to keep striving for excellence. Mary pointed out the students' positive points and made them aware of how well they were learning. Mary indicated to the children that she cared about them and the attitude of caring appeared to be pervasive within Mary's classroom.

Summary Of Case Study One: Mary

Factors such as family, formal education, peer influences, and the at-risk children themselves provided the foundation for constructing Mary's beliefs and teaching approach which she implemented throughout this study. The cornerstones of Mary's teaching perspectives revolve around her belief that learning empowers children and offers them the opportunity to move beyond the family structure. She uses a modified whole language approach to literacy instruction tempered with what she calls a developmental approach. Mary explained that she was a strong proponent of developmentalist Jean Piaget and that she supported and implemented many features of the developmental approach to education in her teaching of literacy.

Mary did not waver in her proclamation that whole language provides the basis for successful literacy development for at-risk children. Although she used a dual approach, she explained that she

does so in order to accommodate the many individual needs of the children in her classroom. This approach was predicated on the need to create a structured environment which she believed was lacking in many of the lives of her at-risk children. These two beliefs, the need for structure, combined with Mary's philosophical belief in whole language, helped synthesize and chart a positive course toward literacy development for her at-risk children. Through observation and discourse, it was apparent that many of Mary's expectations for her at-risk children have been realized despite the sometimes given realities surrounding their daily lives.

Mary was fluent in her ability to articulate what she believed and what she practiced in teaching at-risk children. Included in this understanding was her sensitivity to the elements that affected the lives of her at-risk children, such as poor nutrition, dysfunctional family environments, language limitations, and a lack of continuous and proper adult supervision.

Mary's instructional strategies were supported by an atmosphere conducive to learning. Mary fostered a collaborative effort toward learning by developing a strong bond with her students. The cement which maintained this bond was solidified by Mary's consistent reinforcement through praising, touching, modeling, and most importantly, her genuine care for the students in her charge.

Mary was committed to the belief that at-risk children are capable of learning and must not be given a weak or "watered down curriculum." She acknowledged that her curriculum begins at the kindergarten level, but that as soon as the children are able, they

move rapidly toward expected first grade outcomes. Mary firmly maintains that, "At-risk children must wake up and get ready to learn. I tell them every day that learning is hard work; but, I also tell them that together, I know that we can make it happen." When asked if her belief system was reflected in her teaching, Mary's reply was, "I hope so!" Throughout my observation, Mary's affirmation was a reality as her beliefs were reflected in every facet of her teaching.

Case Study Two: Angela

Biographical Sketch

The principal and vice-principal in Angela's school both felt that she was the perfect subject for the study and strongly urged me to consider her. When I approached Angela, she immediately agreed to participate in the study and welcomed me into her classroom. From the beginning she appeared to understand why research of this nature was important and often she anticipated and answered questions before I had the opportunity to ask them.

Angela is married and has two grown children, one of whom recently graduated from college and is considering becoming a teacher. Angela is extremely proud of her children and stated that many of the beliefs that she has about the way her students' learning literacy skills came from her own children.

Angela began her personal history by sharing the fact that her own mother had wanted to become a teacher but could not afford to go to college; her desire was for her three daughters to become

teachers. Angela's mother worked for the school district as a school secretary which exposed her daughters to aspects of the school they would not have known simply as students. Angela's membership in high school in Future Teachers of America offered a first glimpse of teaching young children.

Angela joined her sisters at a teacher's college in eastern Illinois immediately after completing high school. While there, Angela had the opportunity to work within the university lab school. After working with all grade levels, Angela realized that she wanted to teach primary students. It wasn't long until Angela's mother's dream was realized: today all three daughters are teachers.

Angela began her professional career teaching first grade in a university town. She told me that her greatest worry as she began teaching was how she would teach children to read and write. She soon found a mentor at a nearby university who encouraged her to try different teaching strategies associated with literacy instruction. One that she found especially successful was the use of cartoons rather than basals as reading texts.

Angela said that while she enjoyed teaching, she decided to stop for a time to stay home with her young children. By the time her youngest child was ready to begin kindergarten the family moved to a large city in the midwest. After relocating Angela found no teaching jobs available so she trained for a job outside the teaching profession. She worked as a para-legal for over two years, but stated, "It just wasn't quite the same as working with children and I loved my kids."

When she reapplied for a teaching position, Angela once again found no first grade openings. She accepted a position teaching pre-kindergarten and spent the next eight years in an affluent urban school district. Currently, Angela is in her fourteenth year of teaching and her third year in her present school. This year was her first teaching in an at-risk transitional first grade classroom (T1) which, according to Angela, is a specially designed classroom for children who have been identified as developmentally delayed. This classroom is considered an intermediate step between kindergarten and first grade and is expected to provide at-risk children with the extra attention and nurturing to catch up to their grade level. Angela believed that her pre-kindergarten experience offered her valuable training and background for teaching in her present situation.

Key Influences on Angela's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

Data from Angela's reflective activity revealed four major categories which influenced her practice. These categories included family, parenting, previous work with young children, and educational background. In describing the influence of her family upon her practice, Angela explained that reading and literature were key factors in her young life:

My parents were outstanding role models for my own literacy development. My mom and dad read to my sisters and me every night as we were growing up. When I was young, mom kept me busy reading labels, recipes, and finding items that started with certain letters. I love to read now and I think that love is obvious to my students. The modeling I experienced by my parents is an important part of the way I teach literacy.

Angela reported that her own parenting efforts influenced the way she taught her at-risk students to read and write. "My own children read at an early age and loved it. I spent a lot of time working with them because their interest was obvious. I use many of the activities today that I found successful years ago." Angela acknowledged that working with her own young children served her well as a teacher of at-risk children. She explained:

The at-risk children in my classroom are very much like my own children were when they were very young. They had no experience with letters or words and I had to start them out from scratch which is exactly what I do with my students. They [at-risk children] too have no basis for reading and writing because they have no experience. They love to be read to and that made me believe that reading to children consistently from an early age does influence them to be readers and to love books.

Similar factors were noted as Angela spoke about teaching preschoolers. She acknowledged that many of the techniques she found successful were what she had used with her own small children. She also noted that reading began as a very natural experience and explained:

I found that if I showed enthusiasm for a book the children loved it more and asked to hear it often. I label everything in the room and talk about words whenever I can. I even read the print on grocery bags with as much enthusiasm as I read picture books.

Next, Angela spoke about the influence of two things that happened during her university experience that later influenced her teaching practice. First, she told of the support and encouragement she received from her older sisters who attended the same college.

It was comforting, she said, to always have someone available when questions about teaching arose. Secondly, her university experience provided her with first hand practical experiences as a result of the opportunity to practice in a lab school setting. She commented that she truly learned about teaching after practicing what she had learned in the classroom in the lab school setting. Angela also reflected on how her college experience directly influenced her literacy instruction:

My college background was in a more traditional teaching method. We were into basal readers, skills lessons, and workbooks. When I began teaching in my own classroom I found that my students didn't do well with this approach and I didn't like it either. Thankfully I knew enough about teaching to be able to make the changes that were best for me. I changed to the whole language approach.

Although varied in their genesis, the influencing factors pertaining to Angela's practice came primarily from her experiences teaching young children. Whether tutoring as a young teenager, working with children in her university experience, as the mother of two small children or as a teacher of pre-school and elementary school children, Angela came to realize that practice steeped in the whole language philosophy resulted in positive outcomes for young children engaged in literacy learning.

Angela's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

Belief: "My belief about literacy instruction is that we surround kids with words and make reading and writing

meaningful for them. The only way to do this is through the whole language approach."

Angela revealed that, like many teachers, she was taught one approach to literacy instruction but believes in and uses another. She explained that the theoretical foundation for her literacy program began in a traditional, skills based approach to literacy instruction. She readily points out that the fundamental basis for the teaching approach she uses today came from literacy experiences she found beneficial to her own young children. Although Angela called her approach, "a fly by the seat of your pants approach," many of the strategies she has implemented in her at-risk classroom are acknowledged emergent literacy activities.

Angela described how and why her theoretical foundation changed:

As a first year teacher my students were not interested in the basal readers and were not reading well. I changed my approach and the kids started reading stories they wrote from cartoons, comics, and anything I could find that interested them. I controlled the vocabulary and used a lot of innovations. I moved from what some would call a traditional approach to what is referred to as a whole language approach. I did this before it became popular but I believe it is a very natural way to teach and to learn. I also strongly believe in integrating the curriculum and teaching everything at once so children learn naturally.

Angela was firmly committed to her belief system in regard to her teaching axioms, explaining:

I have no problem with basal readers but I do think that basals are very dry, very boring, and have nothing to do with what is happening to these children. On the other hand, I think that we should teach children to read using literature and lots and lots

of words. I want them to know that we can read lots of different things, that reading is a part of our life. Basically, I use an experience based approach to reading. The only way I can accomplish my goal is through a whole language approach.

Angela was enlightening when sharing techniques that she used to teach her at-risk students to read and write:

For the most part, these children do not recognize any of their letters. They have no idea that there is a difference between a 'b' and a 'd', so we do a lot of things such as watching our mouths as we say letters and make letter sounds, we talk about the way letters look, we write and cut out shapes of letters. I use a lot of what used to be thought of as special education materials where we actually form letters and feel them as we talk about them. Basically using every tactile approach we can use to introduce a concept or idea.

When asked to explain the need for the variety of approaches, Angela explained that the children in her class were limited in their educational experiences; therefore, she had to provide a multitude of learning opportunities. She began by telling that she used a whole group approach to teaching because her students were not able to function independently. She cited the lack of self discipline and an inability to stay on task as the key factors inhibiting small group or independent work. She explained that her teaching focus began with basic, experience-based, simple tasks that were repeated numerous times using a variety of avenues to explore the same topic. She stated, "Even reviewing over and over sometimes doesn't get the job done."

Regarding reading, Angela gave the following examples:

We are to the point now that the children are pretending that they are reading. I use a lot of big books and they actually mimic me a lot so that is a major reason why I read to them

so much. I have to immerse them in reading, letting them hear it constantly, and then take them from there to the understanding that these are words and that we use words to write and express ourselves, as well as for reading.

Regarding writing, Angela noted that the children were still in the drawing stage of writing development:

We write every day in our journals and most of it [writing] is still in the form of pictures. Occasionally, they [the students] may put a letter next to a picture to represent the word; for example, a p next to a picture of a pumpkin. I encourage invented spelling but there is only one child in the class that will actually sit and try to write and spell.

Angela acknowledged that her students' backgrounds offered few early literacy experiences and, therefore, she believed that the entire process of learning to read and write begins once they enter her classroom. Although able to identify and state her beliefs about literacy instruction, she was, nevertheless, realistic in what she believed she could accomplish:

I must begin with the most basic of basics and I progress at the rate that they can handle. I do everything that is done in first grade but I do it in an entirely different way. I teach using a multitude of approaches. These children experience everything for the first time so everything is hands on, practical and I have to model everything.

As I observed Angela, I saw her modeling and explaining many of the tasks that she expected her children to perform. Writing was a prime example. During one of my first time visits to the classroom, she modeled a paper folding activity that was used in a writing project. I often observed Angela modeling the same activities repeatedly in an attempt to teach her students one particular concept. For example, DOL (Daily Oral Language)

experience offered the children the opportunity to copy sentences from the board. That activity was followed by Angela reading the sentences and carefully explaining how the children were to correct them. Although conventional spelling tests were not given, Angela repeatedly spelled words for the children during their writing activities and often asked the children to spell along with her. Many of their writing activities were directed by the teacher; however, the children were offered the freedom to add their own ideas as they were generated.

I observed Angela reading to the children every day from a variety of materials. One of the favorite story poems that the children read was the "Meanies." It was rare that the children did not ask for that book. I noted that choice was also a part of the children's reading program but only on a limited basis. Angela would often ask a child to select the book that would be used for oral reading time, but other than that she made most of the selections. Angela had a large selection of big books that were frequently used for choral reading, reading-aloud, or independent reading. As the children became familiar with many of the poems or stories, Angela would encouraged them to "read along" with her and often they would.

The pace in Angela's class was slowed down considerably. She presented less material and provided more time for the children to complete a task. After observing this for several months I asked Angela to explain:

Learning takes place at a slow pace and I must work very hard to simply motivate them to do something. I go over and over

and over things. Hands on experiences seem to work best and even those must be repeated if the ideas are to stick. There must be consistency.

Angela was consistent with the approaches she used in her classroom. She stated her belief was that reading and writing should be the focus of all of the students' learning, and I saw evidence that it was in her classroom. Everything that the children in Angela's classroom experienced was tempered with some form of reading and writing. She surrounded the children with words: books, signs, posters, charts, etc. Angela was relentless in offering a variety of experiences and attempted to make them meaningful and practical for her students. According to Angela, although drastically limited in emergent literacy skills, the students were reading and writing in an environment that encouraged and supported their literacy efforts. When asked, Angela told me that her beliefs were reflected in her practice, and I saw evidence of that throughout the course of the study.

Angela's Beliefs About At-Risk Children

Belief: "I believe that these children are at great risk of failing because of their home environment, their lack of experiences, and their lack of self control."

Although I spent a great deal of time talking with Angela about her beliefs and observing her literacy instruction, it was obvious from what she said and from what I observed that classroom management and discipline issues were the major focus for her class. Angela told me that before she could teach her children any

literacy skills, she must first and foremost get their behavior under control. "There is no possibility for teaching or learning until they learn self control. The way I see things, there is no control in these children's homes, and therefore they know nothing about the consequences of their own actions."

When explaining her students' behavior, Angela often made references to the "at-riskness" of the children:

In the school district that I came from, even though the children came from very affluent families, I felt that some were at-risk. They had opportunities and vast experiences to draw upon, but there was some control from the inside. I noticed a lot of sad and lonely children. Here, these children have had no experiences and no structure, no control. I guess all children are at-risk in various ways.

I was told by the principal that most of the children in Angela's classroom came from low income families; however, Angela did not consider all of her students poor. She said, "I would prefer to say that they were disadvantaged." When asked to talk more about the at-risk factors that influenced her students Angela said:

Several of my children have both a mom and dad who are working. Most come to school clean, and wear nice clothing. I realize that some get attention and love, so even though the family may not have a lot of money that to me doesn't make that child poor. I believe that at-risk children are very different, nothing like the children they teach you about in college. They come to school not ready to learn due to a lack of communication at home, a lack of experiences, and a lack of behavior. Each day in school is a struggle because they come not ready to learn. They are sleepy, hungry, angry, sad, and aggressive.

When I entered the classroom, I could see what Angela meant regarding the social, emotional and educational development of the

students, and I realized that she was correct in describing her job as difficult. She made interesting observations as she continued talking about teaching at-risk students:

These children would be absolute misfits in any other classroom. Behavior and social skills are of primary importance early on; without these no learning takes place. Understanding this I must get some of these skills under control early on in the school year. Learning takes place at a much slower pace in the beginning, anyway, therefore you must find an interest level. My feeling is that the teacher must, absolutely must, provide as many experiences as she can for these children.

Angela made reference to the behavior of her students throughout our sessions. She often spoke of one child who could be very volatile and reflected the behavior and personality of many of her at-risk children:

She [child] changes with the wind and you never know what she will do. One minute she can flash a million dollar smile and then 'wham', she can turn around and hit someone else for no apparent reason. I am fighting a battle here. I'm not a TV, I'm not entertaining. I try to get them interested in what I am talking about. Instructing these children is a real struggle. In August when we started to school it would have blown your mind. I have to be very patient, very consistent, but very firm.

When Angela and I talked, she repeatedly articulated her concern for being able to maintain order in the classroom. As I attempted to understand the methods she used to teach her students to read and write, I heard her refer to the fact that she believed the keys to her success were consistency and the ability to maintain classroom order.

As she concluded the session dealing with her beliefs about teaching at-risk children, Angela stated, "My beliefs about teaching have never changed, only my approach to the children and the pace of introducing information and skills." Once when Angela had a particularly difficult day she declared that she had no background that prepared her for teaching at-risk children. "My husband says I'm crazy for doing this; some days I think maybe he's right. The way I see it, school is the only opportunity for these children to grow. It's my job to see that it happens."

Observing Angela over the months, I witnessed two things happening on a regular basis. First, I noticed the respect that she gave the children under sometimes difficult circumstances. She used words like, "My friend" or "My helper" as she addressed the children. She never lost her composure even when involved in the most arduous situation and continually encouraged the children to do the same. One day after hearing some unkind and inappropriate language from one of the children, I asked Angela how she handled that. She said, "I never act shocked or lose control. That's what they get at home and that is not what I want for them here at school."

Secondly, I observed Angela's effort to offer the children a multitude of "real life" learning experiences. She stated her belief that varied experiences were important to these children and, as I observed her practice, I saw her systematically providing those opportunities she felt important for them. Angela and the children cooked, acted out stories, sang, danced, and continuously engaged in reading and writing activities. Angela worked with the children in a

whole group setting, down on the floor, or with them at their desks. She moved about the group offering assistance, guidance and support. Angela acknowledged that positive reinforcement was one of the most important components of her belief system as related to teaching at-risk children. She had a quick and ready smile for the children and encouraged them to be happy as they moved about their learning environment. She gave the children treats but her most obvious reward was her words of acclamation.

During my entire time observing in Angela's classroom, she made me aware that the major instructional focus for her students was on behavior management. Although she admitted that this was a very difficult group of children to teach, I did see some progress and change in behavior as exhibited by the children attempting to monitor themselves as they worked on class projects. Angela explained that teaching at-risk students could be extremely frustrating but there were some satisfying times too. When I asked her to tell me about the good times she said:

It is satisfying to see the change in the children. Occasionally I feel like I make a difference helping those who have no one to love them or spend time with them. I hope I make a difference in the lives of at least a few of the children. But I must say, I don't think there is anything easy about working with at-risk children.

The Learning Environment For Teaching At-Risk Children

Belief: "I believe that one of my top priorities is to make my room as inviting as possible without over-

stimulating the children. I think that the more inviting and warm the environment, the more you get from the children."

Angela began her discussion about teaching at-risk children by explaining the importance of the classroom environment. Her need to maintain some semblance of order in the classroom and manage the children's behavior was a major contributing factor in establishing the learning environment:

There is a real problem when these children are in an environment that is too stimulating, too active. This is real tricky because some days I do over stimulate them and then they lose control completely. There is a fine line here. I think the environment should be warm and inviting but I also need to keep them calm. They enjoy being in this environment because of all of the things we do but I have to be very careful.

One of Angela's students calls her classroom a "happy place," and Angela added her interpretation of this statement:

For many of my students this is a safe haven, a place where there is consistency, a place they can count on. This classroom represents unconditional love. I want them to know that it's OK to try and fail and that I will still care for them. These children are not risk-takers so I have to make the environment a place where they can take those chances without fear.

Angela explained that the creation of a positive, nurturing classroom environment was important for the students because "it represents something that they are comfortable with. It is theirs, their own space, a place where their belongings are kept and will be there when they return." Angela's belief that these children's homes were places of instability lead her to conclude, "It is my belief system that allows me to create an environment for these children

to learn and function in successfully. If I don't do it, it won't happen."

Angela's school was located across the street from a large federally funded housing project in the northern part of the city. The vast majority of the students in her classroom lived in this project or other nearby areas. As I visited Angela on a regular basis I became acutely aware of the nature of some of the problems that her students were exposed to on a daily basis. For example, as I arrived for a visit one day I encountered several police cars in the parking lot adjacent to the school. I asked Angela what could be happening. She told me that it was not uncommon for the police to be called to the area because of acts of violence or drug related problems.

Angela's school was one of the older schools in the district. Although the classrooms were quite large they had not been refurbished and modernized recently. Her room had only a few windows which were too high to see out of and too small to offer much outside light. She had, however, made the room attractive and comfortable for the children. The desks were arranged in small clusters of three or four. I noted that the students had their own water bottle on their desks in addition to the other personal things brought from home. There was student work on most of the bulletin boards and center areas arranged throughout the room. A large overstuffed chair for reading, and a collection of big and regular sized books were placed in one area; other interest areas included an aquarium, a cooking center, a shelf for manipulatives, and a traditional calendar area. The room reflected Angela's belief that

the children should be exposed to real life experiences. This was demonstrated in their art work and other student generated endeavors.

Angela's Expectations About Student Learning

Belief: "I believe these children will be beautiful first graders next year, and they will fail miserably in second grade."

This was the reply Angela gave when asked if her students would succeed academically during the next school year. Angela explained that behavior management and maintaining classroom order was a major focus for Angela. She also explained that she spent as much time as possible introducing and reinforcing literacy skills for her young students but that if the classroom was in chaos, no learning could take place. Angela stated that, "These children's home environments do not support positive behavior." She also explained that she knew that many of her students went home in the afternoon with no care or supervision and few expectations placed upon them concerning their behavior:

These children often have no meal at night. Their sleep is interrupted by violence in their neighborhoods and in their own homes. It undoes everything I have spent the entire day trying to do here in school. That doesn't mean that we stop trying, it just means that we have to be realistic.

Although Angela admitted that teaching at-risk children was very hard work, she joyfully explained that she was seeing some progress:

They come to school with no social skills and no expectations about learning. I look at their environment, the neighborhood, the lack of reading materials in their homes, and their behavior and I can understand why they have the potential to fail. I believe that's why it's so satisfying when they do make a breakthrough, when they do something on their own. If you realize that academically they are not much farther along than four year olds, it's not so depressing.

Many times during my visits to Angela's classroom I observed the techniques that she had spoken about as she worked with the children. I listened as she told them how well they were doing and encouraged them to continue to do their best. She often praised them for the simplest act and urged them to do more in spite of what she called "their disregard for any academic endeavor." There were times when Angela delighted in her progress with the students; at other times, she despaired over the fact that the majority of her teaching time was spent preventing disruptive behavior. Yet, through it all, Angela's beliefs about early literacy development, and more importantly, about her students, determined the way she dealt with each situation. Her beliefs, more than theory or training or any other factor, shaped the behavior and environment of her classroom.

Summary of Case Study Two: Angela

Angela acknowledged her family, parenting experiences, teaching young children, and her education as the major factors influencing her literacy instruction. She told me, however, that the factors that most influenced her teaching evolved from her experience teaching her own young children. As she articulated her

beliefs about teaching and what she does in the classroom, she portrayed confidence and enthusiasm for the methods she employed.

Angela was firmly committed to an experience based approach to literacy instruction following the tenets of whole language. One of the major obstacles Angela faced in her attempt to teach her students was classroom management. She reported that these problems resulted from her children's immature and disruptive behavior. In order to alleviate as many problems as possible, Angela's belief was that her top priority must be to make her classroom as inviting as possible without overstimulating the children. Although she was confident about the literacy approach she had in place for her students, she remained concerned that their behavior would prevent them from reaching the goals she had established. When asked if her beliefs were actualized in her practice Angela replied, "Definitely! I am seeing change in the students."

Case Study Three: Lindsey

Biographical Sketch

If there was only one word to describe Lindsey as a teacher, it would be "determined." "I find my capacity for dealing with things has slowly broadened," she stated. "I have grown as a teacher and as a person." Lindsey had faced numerous changes in her life over the past few years and this statement reflected her willingness to acknowledge her growth and expand her abilities as a teacher of at-risk children.

According to her principal, "Lindsey had an eye-opening experience her first year of teaching after moving from California and going from teaching middle to upper class students to an at-risk first grader population." Approximately one week before this study began Lindsey was reassigned from team teaching in a first grade class to teaching in a self-contained classroom. She had taught in a self contained classroom in the same at-risk school the year before and considered the experience a disaster. Although her first year teaching at-risk children was difficult, Lindsey chose to continue teaching in the same environment. After her second year, Lindsey expressed security and confidence in her role as a teacher of young at-risk children and although she will move from first grade to kindergarten next year, her outlook is positive.

Lindsey grew up in southern California. Both parents were educated, her father a surgeon and her mother a teacher. Before Lindsey's older brother was born her mother decided to stop teaching and stay home with the new baby. Lindsey remarked that she and her two brothers grew up and went to school, kindergarten through high school, in the same town. She noted that she only recently realized how unusual that was.

Education and religion were important aspects of family life for Lindsey and her family. When asked when she decided to become a teacher she replied:

I think I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. My mom read to us all the time and I loved to hear her talk about reading to her students and being a teacher. I played school as a young child at home and when I went to school I watched my teachers and tried to do just what they did.

Lindsey mentioned that there was never any question that she and her brothers would go to college; the only question was where. She seemed pleased to report that she had gone to the same university for her undergraduate degree that her father and mother had attended. Lindsey felt the importance of continuing her education once she found herself in the role of a single parent. She attended a small Christian college in California where she completed her master's degree in education.

Speaking about her teaching experiences, Lindsey said she taught for nine years in three different states and until now had always taught in "your kind of average middle-class type of neighborhood school." About being assigned to teach in an at-risk school, she said, "I came to my new school last year from a conservative, middle income school district in another state and never experienced any situation as difficult or as frustrating as this new assignment." She referred to her first year in her present at-risk school as a "nightmare." She stated:

I think everyone here was surprised when I returned to give it another try, including myself. The reason I came back was because I couldn't give in. I felt like I was needed, like I could make a difference. That couldn't happen if I left.

Although teaching was still a challenge in this, her second year, she indicated that she was happy with the progress she and her students had made. She acknowledged that both had grown tremendously.

Key Influences on Lindsey's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

The key influences that determined the way Lindsey teaches young children to read and write came from a multitude of sources. Lindsey characterized five factors as the major influences on her pedagogy: family, religious beliefs, personal love of reading, professional training, and the students.

She began by crediting her strong family ties as one of the major influences on the way she teaches. Both of her parents were educated; therefore, the idea of getting an education and attending college was taken for granted. When asked how her family influenced the way she taught literacy, Lindsey explained:

I realized from the way I was brought up that we are all different creatures. I know now that I was very fortunate and I feel that it is my responsibility as a teacher to offer to my students those things that they may not get at home because of the kind of environment they come from.

Reading was another important part of family life for Lindsey. She told of the opportunities that she and her brothers had as they were growing up and how she had developed a deep and lasting love for reading. She shared many positive experiences that she enjoyed with books, and acknowledged that her mother was an avid reader and a positive role model for her. Lindsey explained, "When I was little my mother read to me all of the time. I received books as gifts and there were always books in my home. As I became older my mother and I often read the same books." She told of her feelings when her mother read aloud, "It felt like my mother reading to me and my brothers was the most wonderful time of the day. It was almost a one on one experience and I remember it so fondly." As

Lindsey talked about her own reading experiences, she explained why she believed reading was so important for her students.

I took books for granted, which is something that my students cannot say. Few if any of them own books. One of the most important things I could ever hope to instill in my students is a love of books and reading.

Lindsey explained that she believed that instilling in students a love for books and reading was an important part of her task as a teacher. "I read to my students every day. If something [else] has to be missed, so be it, but reading is a must."

Lindsey also voiced a strong belief that teachers should be responsible for developing the minds of children to become intelligent, thinking individuals. She told me that she acquired this insight as a result of her strong religious belief that suggested that educating youth was a major focus of all adults. According to Lindsey, having access to good books, knowing how to read them, and being committed to developing the mind, could inspire children to succeed in the learning process. She explained further:

I look at the kids I teach and it's hard to believe what happens to them when they go home at night. I don't think there is much stimulation at home, and I believe that a developed mind is a gift from God and within the reach of almost everyone.

An important influence in the way Lindsey teaches children to read and write was her university experience. Even though the university gave her the basis for teaching literacy skills, she explained that practical, every day experiences were much more beneficial to her:

Interacting in real school settings has provided my real education. My masters program helped me to find out more about what I was doing as a teacher. When I went back to school, I realized that I really didn't know much. I'm really interested in finding out what is going on out there and that is what I mean when I talk about learning from those around me. My fellow teachers, the teacher in the next classroom, all provide a lot of learning opportunities for me.

The final factor influencing literacy instruction for Lindsey was her students. She began by stating that "working with at-risk children is like a different world of teaching." After making that statement she corrected herself and said that was too strong. "I should say, there are aspects of teaching at-risk children that are different." When asked to explain more of her beliefs in relationship to the influence of her students on her practice Lindsey said:

I believe these children need a positive feeling about me and themselves in order to learn. And, I believe that children need positive experiences about reading and writing. That is why I try never to miss the opportunity to share literacy experiences with them because they have had so few. I try to bring something to the story other than just the reading. Being at-risk doesn't affect how I feel about academics and children learning, but I do have to remind myself where these children come from.

Lindsey concluded that although the aforementioned factors were important influences on her practice, much of her teaching was the result of trial and error. She said, "In an effort to meet the needs of my students I have learned a lot about myself as a teacher."

Lindsey's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

Belief: "No one really knows how to teach literacy. For that reason, I believe in a broad perspective involving a multitude of philosophical approaches to teaching reading and writing."

The cornerstones for Lindsey's instructional beliefs were a result of numerous influences. She admitted that her formal education gave her the basic theoretical tenets for teaching, but also explained that she felt, because of her willingness to be flexible and open to change, she had accumulated a variety of approaches that were serving her well. She believed that she was presently in a state of flux and considered herself a "little splintered"; yet she did not consider that a weakness. "Quite the contrary," she stated, "I have developed a broad perspective involving a multitude of philosophical approaches to literacy instruction and believe that these perspectives have served me well, especially as a teacher of at-risk children." When I asked about her beliefs concerning literacy paradigms in general, Lindsey stated:

No one has found the one true way of teaching literacy. I believe there are strengths in both philosophies, therefore, I take a little from everything I see and hear, not falling too heavily into any one method. I hope that the longer I spend in first grade, the more directed and cohesive my methods will become.

When asked what one reading paradigm she aligned with most closely, Lindsey said:

I am traditional with a desire to be whole language. What I end up doing is probably more skills-based with whole language as a big emphasis. I was trained at the university to use a skills-based approach so that is kind of what I started out doing and it is hard to get away from that. I feel children need a lot of literature, which is where the whole language comes in, but I find that teaching the skills is just as important. I would like to say I'm whole language because it is the trend now but it takes a lot of time and time is a precious commodity.

Lindsey told me that she used both approaches because she believed each could benefit her students. She acknowledged that whole language was important because at-risk children needed to be involved in literature, reading, writing and other literacy activities that had not been a part of their pre-school experience. She credited the skills based approach with giving children the structure and basic foundation they needed for learning to read and write. She justified her pedagogy further by saying:

We dip our feet over here a little and over there a lot but this [skills] is kind of where we're based. I think the reason for using skills is two fold; first, it is the method I know best and second, I believe the children need this type of structure. I feel like these children need to learn to read through a kind of sequential build-up because they have such limited backgrounds.

Lindsey's beliefs about teaching her students to read and write were greatly influenced by the fact they were considered to be at-risk for potential failure. She noted that there were two essential factors that she kept in mind as she planned literacy instruction for her at-risk students. First, she felt it imperative to remember that her at-risk children entered school with major limitations regarding prior literacy experience. Second, she believed that her children were not supported at home in their academic endeavors once they

began school. Lindsey voiced her concern that these factors minimized many of the learning opportunities she offered her students. Lindsey also indicated that she felt the same pressure any teacher felt as she planned and implemented a literacy program for at-risk children. She continued, "I am secure in the fact that I can accomplish my goals through a combined literacy approach using traditional teaching methods and a strong literature focus. I am also acutely aware of the problems I face teaching these children. I really have an awesome responsibility."

Lindsey and I talked at length about her teaching style, her students, and her beliefs about literacy. She frequently mentioned that she did not know the true basis for why she taught the way she did, nor what led her to respond to her students in a particular way. She said:

I do like to have a plan and I follow my plans to some degree, but I am very flexible in that I abandon plans for some activity or conversation that appears relevant to the particular moment or when a need arises. I am keenly aware that these children are very different and when we have a problem or need to address an issue, I immediately stop and do what is needed right then and there.

Lindsey explained that her flexibility was a result of her at-risk students not being able to handle situations that many first grade students handled due to their lack of maturity and experience. She mentioned that there were parts of her curriculum that were not flexible, such as the way she taught reading:

Although I feel splintered sometimes, I am secure in what I do during reading. I have some children who are just now learning their letters, and I have some kids who are reading rather well.

One child in my class is reading on the third grade level but he does not have the building blocks to support that progress. Therefore, I am dedicated to the skills based approach and I work very hard with the children on their skills. I ask the children about the rules I have taught them and I expect them to know them.

Finally, I asked Lindsey to tell me how she taught at-risk children to read and write.

I have kids at all stages of reading and writing development. Because of that I work with the group as a whole most of the time. I use DOL and some independent writing. While they are working I move about the room giving individual attention where it is needed. During reading time I work with small groups at the reading table and use ability grouping for reading. I work on sight words at that time. I give the traditional weekly spelling test, in fact we do all of the things that any traditional teacher would do. Added to that I read and write and engage them in conversation. Because I love reading so much I probably over do that part of my curriculum but I think it is important.

Lindsey realized that her practice was a result of a variety of approaches or, as she called it, "a hodge-podge of philosophies." Although she toyed with the idea that the whole language philosophy would enhance her literacy program, Lindsey remained a solid proponent of the more traditional, skills-based approach. Observations also provided confirmation that Lindsey and her students were engaged in numerous literacy activities such as the use of basals, workbooks, worksheets, and flash cards, all implied skills based activities. Conversely, I also watched her reading to her students daily, encouraging independent writing, and providing numerous opportunities for creative expression through story writing, drawing, retelling of stories and other documented whole

language experiences. Lindsey characterized her practice in the following way, "My practice is a mixture of my beliefs about what I believe is essential, and the theories I was taught." When asked if her beliefs were reflected in her practice, Lindsey concluded, "My beliefs are not totally reflected in my practice and that is very hard for me to acknowledge. In reality, I have many more ideas than I can realistically put into practice."

Lindsey's Beliefs About At-Risk Children

Belief: "I believe that I have a tremendous responsibility as a teacher of at-risk children. I believe this because these kids don't have a sense of pride; they are victimized and they know it to some degree."

Both Lindsey and her principal said that the neighborhood surrounding the school was made up predominantly of low income, working class families, many night shift workers, single parent families, and many single family dwellings. They acknowledged the presence of crime and violence in the neighborhood as well as several active gangs. The principal told me that there were homeless children attending school last year, but to the best of her knowledge, there were none this year.

Lindsey was able to give specific information about the factors that impacted upon the lives of the children in her classroom. She explained:

I have seen more potential abuse cases here because the parents are frustrated with their own dead-end type of lives

and they take it out on their kids. They have no control over their lives and I believe that truly frustrates them. Because the parents have little control these kids are street wise and I worry that they will join gangs and turn to violence themselves.

Lindsey voiced concern for her students because she believed that many of them spend a great deal of time on their own with little or no supervision. She explained further that, "The parents can't pay for after school babysitting so the children simply take care of themselves." She told of one child in her class, a six year old, who took care of younger twin sisters from the time school ended until their mother returned home in the early evening. Lindsey also voiced concern for her students based on her belief that many of their parents lack "parenting skills." She said, "These children live in situations that definitely required a strong adult hand and as far as I can tell they don't have that." She told me that she did not know of one child in her class who had a father who was working and a mother who stayed at home. She continued:

Almost all of my families are on welfare. The parents grew up in the same situation and so they are carrying with them their lack of skills as parents. Although I think poverty contributes heavily, I think what really makes these children at-risk is the lack of a family unit.

Next, Lindsey explained some of the teaching tactics she employed. She expressed her belief that her primary task was to get the children to "buy into school". Her second task was to get the children to accept her as their teacher. In order to do that, she said, "I have to gain their trust, which with some is very difficult." Another tactic that was a must for Lindsey was being consistent and

following through with her plans and rules. "I can't be too flexible there." Finally, Lindsey told me that she was firm in her belief that she had to maintain a composed atmosphere in her classroom:

I can't get frustrated and take it out on the children. It is my responsibility to teach these children to get along and be responsible for themselves. If I am not a model for the behaviors I expect, I will lose them completely.

As I observed Lindsey's classroom I noticed how she interacted with her students. She began the year with simple reading and writing tasks and then moved to more difficult and sophisticated activities as the children progressed. She kept them continuously engaged in reading and writing activities and appealed to their interest by making the activities fun. She allowed the children to freely communicate with each other and with her about their learning experiences.

In addition to observing Lindsey as she implemented her literacy program, I also noted her classroom management techniques. Classroom management was an important component of Lindsey's practice and she told me that she was very sensitive to the behavior patterns of the children and tempered her discipline accordingly. She said, "Although I certainly do not overlook bad conduct I am a little softer because I understand where they are coming from." I noticed her concerted effort to make classroom rules and expectations clear to the children. Generally, at the beginning of the day, she reviewed the complete daily agenda. She gave explicit instructions for work tasks and often repeated her explanation.

Lindsey had very definite beliefs about classroom management. Rather than embarrassing a child by public scolding, which she strongly opposed, Lindsey would quietly move to the child and whisper her concerns. If there were several children involved in disruptive behavior, Lindsey would make a comment such as, "Is this the way we know how to behave?" When I asked Lindsey to explain her practice as related to her beliefs, she said:

I really try to always build them up. I never criticize, never ever come close to letting them think they are dumb. I build on the small successes and I make sure that if I say something about them publicly, it is positive.

Lindsey's concluding statement about teaching the at-risk students was, "I need to help them learn to survive. If they can read and express themselves both verbally and in writing they will be able to get along and my job will be complete."

The Learning Environment For Teaching At-Risk Children

Belief: "I believe that the emotional environment is important because it enhances the academic environment. At-risk students can excel if they're in the right environment."

In describing the learning environment she had created, Lindsey acknowledged that her classroom was both attractive and peaceful:

If I lose my temper, and I do occasionally, I apologize. I talk a lot about their emotions, about getting angry and how to deal with anger appropriately or inappropriately. I try to model

behavior that I want the children to exhibit. I take time out to solve little problems that crop up in the classroom and I work on creating an atmosphere of politeness.

I was curious to know more about her beliefs related to the learning environment and why Lindsey did what she did to create a positive classroom environment. She said:

My classroom is child-centered. These children notice things that are put up around the room and they respond to attractive surroundings. One thing about these children is that they are coming from completely different home environments and school for them is a haven. School is the safe, warm, loving atmosphere they do not have, for the most part, at home. I truly believe that the emotional environment enhances the academic environment. For example, I feel that my responsibility is to provide for them an atmosphere that goes beyond academics. They [the children] say that they want to be here and that is what I want to hear.

Lindsey's classroom would best be described as traditional. It is a large room, bright and open, with the front wall partially filled with windows. Everything was in its place and the classroom was neat and orderly. There was one bulletin board that featured students' work such as various holiday art projects and weekly 100% spelling papers. The learning centers were flexible rather than stationary and Lindsey assigned students to the centers according to their need for extension activities. I noticed that the centers usually consisted of art or writing projects. One corner of the room contained the daily calendar and various related activities that the children participate in as a group on a daily basis.

Lindsey's school was an older building in a relatively depressed area of town. There were approximately 550 students in the school during the year of the study; a reduction from 800 the

year before. This was done in an attempt to give more personal attention to the at-risk population attending the school. When I spoke with the principal I asked if there were any plans to renovate the school and she said that the physical condition of the school had already been improved. She mentioned that the school was occasionally vandalized or subjected to graffiti painting by "gangs in the neighborhood," but that for the most part she felt that the building was attractive and well kept. She explained, "I envision the school as an inviting place, a comfortable place for children to learn."

Lindsey's Expectations About Student Learning

Belief: "I tell my students that there are no losers here. We can make it. I believe it and they must too."

"I wish I had more time. I wish I could come earlier and stay later. I wish I were more whole language and completely choice centered, but that's not the way it is." Lindsey voiced concern about what she wanted to happen in her classroom, and she acknowledged the importance of the expectations she had placed on herself as well as those placed on the children.

First she spoke of accomplishing her established teaching goals:

I always want to do more than is physically possible and I want the children to be more than they think they can be. That's not all bad because if they see me working hard maybe some of my drive will rub off on them.

When I asked Lindsey how she kept her students from becoming discouraged she told me that she always tells them:

There are no losers here. I try and do as much as possible because these children need so much. I also feel that one of the most important things I do as I teach is to praise the children and offer them as much opportunity for choice and self selection as possible. I try to continually build up their confidence. I want them to feel good about themselves, about me and about school. I constantly tell them that they can do anything and I also tell them that if they stumble, all they have to do is just keep trying.

During the early part of the school year I interviewed Lindsey's school principal. I was eager to hear her beliefs about the at-risk children in her school and I asked questions about the learning environment and her expectations for this at-risk population. She told about a project in which all of the teachers in the school, including Lindsey, were involved in:

We are involved in a program here called TESA, Teacher Expectation Student Achievement, which is basically to raise our level of expectations so the students will do better [academically]. We believe that all children can learn no matter what their background or the school environment. I tell these children that the sky is the limit for them, and I tell the teachers that we must do more.

In Lindsey's classroom I saw evidence of many of the expectations that Lindsey had spoken about. She explained that she scaled down her curriculum to meet the limited abilities of the children. However, when I examined the reading and writing activities I found that they were doing expected first grade work, and that their work was accurate and well done.

Lindsey indicated that she believed that her children were capable of learning. I observed the slower paced curriculum that Lindsey had mentioned and found that in addition to the pacing, she gave the students a great deal of individual attention in an effort to meet the specific needs. Although the tempo in the classroom was relaxed, Lindsey made sure that the children knew that certain work was expected to be completed at given times. When asked if her students would succeed, Lindsey said, "Yes, some of them will do very well; some will need a lot of help."

Summary of Case Study Three: Lindsey

The major influence on the way Lindsey taught literacy resulted from a combination of her love for reading and the strong traditional approach she had been taught in her teacher education program. She used basals and the major components of a skills-based philosophy with as much literature as she felt comfortable incorporating. Her strong family background shaped her beliefs regarding the overall importance of education, but her pedagogical focus was influenced by the interaction with at-risk students.

Lindsey clearly articulated her beliefs about the emotional needs of her at-risk children during their first grade experience but was not as clear as she explained her academic beliefs. She acknowledged the importance of building a solid reading foundation in order for her students to "survive in the world," while acknowledging that academics may be set aside if more pressing social or behavioral situations arise. She called this "real life

instruction." Lindsey admitted that she was not totally clear as to which approach would yield the most positive results in teaching children to read and write, but she continually searched for the right combination. Many of the strategies Lindsey incorporated in her curriculum were the result of trial and error and, as she said, "the ability to be flexible." Although she voiced a desire to move more toward the whole language philosophy, she felt constrained by the lack of time and resources.

Lindsey told how she had struggled in her early efforts to teach her at-risk students. She declared that her first year in her present position was a "nightmare," but that this year was totally different because of the differences in the children. She was pleased with the progress that both she and her students had made this year. Lindsey acknowledged that she believed teaching first grade at-risk children was an extremely difficult task and that she worked very hard at succeeding in her established goals.

Lindsey believed that at-risk children could excel academically if they had the right environment. She explained that the emotional climate of her classroom was comfortable and non-threatening which allowed her students the opportunity to build on their strengths. She said that her classroom was a "nice mix of structure and child-centered activity which enabled the children to take risks and grow."

She concluded by telling me that her students would probably never say, "My first grade teacher really made a difference," but she did express her dream for her students. "My job is like planting seeds. Hopefully other teachers will water and nourish them. I just

want them leaving first grade feeling good about school; I want them to want to come back."

Case Study Four: Taylor

Biographical Sketch

Taylor, a woman in her twenties, considers herself a novice teacher. When she reflected on her childhood, she spoke specifically of her family and the love, support, and acceptance she received, especially from her mother. Although she enjoyed school, she considered herself only average academically, and never had a real desire to read. That changed when she entered junior high school and had a teacher who read to her every day. Taylor said, "At that point books became very appealing and worthwhile for me." Upon graduating from high school she decided not to go on to college. As an expression of that ever-present love and acceptance, her mother agreed that it was not the best thing for her at that time. When she finally decided to attend the university, once again, her mother fully supported her. Taylor chose to attend the university in the city where she had attended elementary, junior high and high school. Taylor now teaches in the same school district that educated her. Although she never talked much about her university experience, she did tell me that she did her student teaching in a very affluent school which was totally different from her present teaching situation.

This was Taylor's second year of teaching. Her first year as a kindergarten teacher was good but she acknowledged that teaching

first grade was very different and much more appealing to her.

"Even though there is just one year's difference in their ages," she stated, "I like this age group much better. I like having them all day; I love teaching these children."

Key Influences on Taylor's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

Three major factors influenced the way Taylor taught literacy. These influences included parents as caring supportive models, the opportunity to read daily, and a variety of [personal] experiences. The first influence, her parents, supported her instructional efforts the most. She explained that her parents provided the opportunity for her to explore life and created an atmosphere of love in their home. Taylor recalled numerous personal situations that reflected the guidance and support she received from her family. As a result of this support, Taylor felt that she was better able to anticipate and fulfill the needs of her at-risk students.

Although she said that her mother did not read to her, she recalled having abundant materials and books to support her desire to participate in literacy activities at home. Taylor told me that she was firmly convinced that reading and being read to were powerful motivators for young children. She stated:

In elementary school I was only an OK reader. My desire to read was much stronger than my ability. My fondness for reading [literature] came as an adult, especially with regard to children's literature. As a parent and teacher I make the time for daily reading and for sharing my favorite books and those favorite books of my daughter and my students. I know that through reading one gains the desire to read and improvement happens. I want my students to be better readers than I was.

The final influence on the way Taylor teaches literacy was from what she calls "life experiences." She stated, "My students do not have any of the life experiences that I had as a child. I believe those experiences are very important in learning to read and write." She suggested that she considered her students "culturally deprived" and stated, "These children are not aware of what is out there. When you try to build background in order for them to write or to support something that they are reading about, there is just nothing there." She said that she believed that it was the richness of her childhood and young adult experiences that motivated her to teach literacy the way she did.

Taylor admitted that for many teachers identifying the factors that influence their literacy instruction may not seem important. For her it was extremely important. It gave her the opportunity to identify the positive elements of her literacy program and it allowed her to support and challenge her students through the most effective reading and writing experiences. The use of literature was among the most beneficial factors identified because it allowed her to bring the excitement and language of the world to her students.

Taylor's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

Belief: "I believe that the combination of a whole language approach and my own personal philosophy about reading and writing instruction is what works best for my at-risk students."

The foundation for Taylor's approach to literacy instruction was a result of the reading paradigm that she was exposed to in her teacher education program. She explained that she combined the tenets of whole language with her own philosophy about how at-risk children should be taught to read in order to develop the approach she uses in her classroom today. She stated, "First of all I love books and love to read. Additionally, I believe that the more exposure a child has to books and reading and writing, the more receptive they are to learning to read and write." Lindsey readily admitted that the whole language philosophy shaped the majority of her practice. Her explanation for using whole language was:

If you teach with a whole language approach you are incorporating all subject areas and all components of learning to read and write. In the long run children are going to gain because of experiencing everything as a whole.

When I asked Taylor to define her literacy philosophy and to explain how she taught reading and writing, she said:

I am whole language. My whole curriculum is based on reading and writing; it is truly a whole language approach. I try to build success into everything they do, into the paper work, into the centers. Each day we write in journals. They can write either on a topic that I suggest, on something we have done in class, or on something that is of interest to them. I use centers that are both flexible and interesting and get really good results because the centers have success built in. We write our own reading books or use picture books for reading; no basals. I teach phonics to make spelling and reading easier and I use the action alphabet approach. They do very well with both.

My observation revealed that Taylor shared her love for literature with her students daily. She stated, "I know that the

whole language philosophy is good for children because they are learning and they love to read and write." I noticed Taylor using a mini-lesson approach to reinforce skills when there was what she called "a breakdown" or when the children needed extra help. Although she told me that she thought skills were boring, she claimed that she really "digs into phonics" on certain days of the week. When asked why, she stated, "Just because they need some of that [phonics] too."

Taylor's Beliefs About At-Risk Children

Belief: "I believe that my primary responsibility for teaching at-risk children is to fulfill for them what is not going to be done for them at home."

When asked to describe the factors that she felt placed her students at-risk she stated:

Over 90% of my students are at-risk. I base this on their appearance, how they dress and whether they come to school clean. I look at location, where they live; and family, many come from dysfunctional family environments. Some live in single parent homes. I also would include in this area the fact that many of my students do not live with their natural parents and that those who do live in family situations other than with their natural parents, do not experience a real stable situation; and poverty, I think about 90% of them live at the poverty level. I also base my answer on the fact that these children come from environments that are unsafe and I can identify this by the behaviors that the children exhibit.

When I asked Taylor to tell me about her classroom management techniques, she seemed pleased to report that she rarely

had problems. She told how she established rules and guidelines early in the year and that the rules were fair and the children could understand and follow them. Although I never observed anything other than complete harmony in her classroom, Taylor explained that occasionally there were problems and told me what she did to remediate them:

I don't really punish if they get out of line. My belief is to simply withhold rewards. It seems to work. That is not to say that occasionally punishment is not called for, but not too often. I must realize that things happen in the lives of these children that don't usually happen in other children's lives. I must take all that into consideration.

Taylor expressed her belief that one of her primary responsibilities was to expose her students to both the social and educational experiences they had not been exposed to in their homes:

I need to expose them to things like the importance of washing their hands, how to respect others, obvious social skills, and more than anything self esteem. When we've done all that then we teach them to read and write and do math.

Taylor explained some of the tactics she used as she taught her at-risk students. She told of trying to follow the district's curriculum guide because the children were tested at the end of the year and she wanted to be sure to cover the necessary material:

I give them a lot of exposure to a lot of different experiences. I believe that if they learn to read and write they must have the opportunity to do a lot of reading and writing. I must model the things I expect them to do and I must be very positive in my teaching techniques. I know what their individual needs are because I understand at-risk kids. Meeting their individual needs is essential. I know that each one is special and very unique.

As I observed Taylor teaching, I found that first and foremost she gave her students the opportunity to explore as they learned. She provided a variety of learning opportunities and patiently guided them through the learning process. Taylor acted as a model but in many cases she talked the children through an experience and then let them attempt it on their own. This "scaffolding" technique resulted in the children trying out many of the learning strategies that Taylor had taught them earlier in the school year. An example of this was the picture/spelling dictionary the children used. Taylor had the children make their own dictionary using words that they learned for their weekly spelling test plus any other words they needed to know. In addition to writing the word in the dictionary, the children drew a picture of the word as a reminder in case they had difficulty recalling the word when they went back to use it. According to Taylor, "This dictionary proved helpful during independent writing time and gave the child needed self confidence."

I also saw many of the reading instruction methods Taylor used to support whole language. Her strategies included daily Sustained Silent Reading, journal writing, and daily reading aloud by both teacher and student. The children were allowed free time to read independently when they completed their projects. There were charts and posters in various places in the room containing poems, stories, or lists of words for the children to copy or refer to as necessary. As the children wrote, they were asked to read their writing with a partner or in small groups. Occasionally I observed Taylor encouraging the children to read for the entire class and noted that they appeared most willing to do so.

As Taylor talked about teaching at-risk students she told what a difficult job it was:

Teaching at-risk children is really hard work. Things don't always go as planned. Some days teaching here is depressing, other days it is very uplifting, especially when I see them make a step in the right direction. My job is to fulfill what's not going on at home. Sometimes it doesn't happen, occasionally it does; that's the bright side.

When asked where she had learned to teach at-risk children, Taylor replied:

I did my student teaching in a very affluent school and had no idea about what to do when I was assigned to a school with at-risk children. The major difference in the way I teach and the way I practice is in the way I meet the needs of the children. It may not be anything meaningful but I believe more than anything that it takes a special person to teach at-risk children.

The Learning Environment For Teaching At-Risk Children

Belief: "I firmly believe that a positive learning environment is the key to success for these kids. My students love school, they love it."

The school that Taylor worked in was in a poor neighborhood where gang activity and acts of violence were reported on a regular basis. The building was old and did not appear to have been refurbished recently.

Taylor's classroom was large, spacious, but dark, and located in an area where the sounds from adjoining classrooms permeated the walls. When I asked her if the activity and talking from the

other classrooms bothered her, Taylor said, "No, it bothered me at first but I got use to it. My children live in environments where there is little peace and quiet so it doesn't bother them at all."

Taylor created a jungle theme environment in her classroom consisting of palm trees, wild animals and swinging monkeys. Even the peanut tokens the children received for good behavior or exemplary work were reflective of the theme. The room was divided into three areas, one for work such as art or projects, a center area including a reading area, and the children's desk and work area. In the work area the desks were grouped in clusters with the teacher's desk in the back corner of the room. When asked what was special about her classroom, Taylor told me that her children loved the classroom and that they told her frequently that they loved coming to school. "They [the children] are eager to learn, eager to please. They feel safe and comfortable here; it's a safe haven. We feel like a big family here, we have rules, we work together." She told me that the children worried when they had a day off. "Before the weekend or when they are off because of conferences or something, they ask if they are coming back soon and they look frightened."

Taylor had an almost endless variety of approaches for teaching literacy skills to her young students. One of her approaches focused on instructional consistency. She explained:

My classroom is structured and my practice very consistent. My children know that there are rules we follow. I cannot teach unless they follow the rules. Next is the routine. They know what to expect even though I try to expose them to everything I can. These children can't learn unless they have an environment that they feel comfortable in; they need that security.

Taylor's classroom atmosphere was calm and the pace slow. I noticed that Taylor never rushed the children, but rather gave them time to think, talk, and complete their work at their own rate. Although she kept them on task, there appeared to be plenty of time for thoughtful pursuit of knowledge and understanding on the part of the children. I noticed other "kid appealing" things about this room. There was an area next to the calendar area where Taylor featured an "author of the week." Taylor had the author's name in bold letters suspended from the ceiling plus a collection of books by the featured author that the children could choose from during their free reading time. She had a mailbox for note or letter distribution and each child had his or her own cubby for storage of personal items. When asked to describe her classroom, Taylor said, "This is the children's room, it is child-centered. I am here to guide and facilitate their learning. I think the room is a comfortable place, an inviting place for the children."

The approaches that Taylor believed worked best for her consisted of a variety of experiences used within a structured and loving environment where the children were told they could succeed. "This is what I'm after," Taylor explained, "and this is what works."

Taylor's Expectations About Student Learning

Belief: "There is nothing wrong with these students' minds. They can all learn. I believe that if you took these children out of their home environments, they'd be OK."

As we began to talk about the expectations Taylor had for her at-risk children, she told me that she knew that being at-risk was not the fault of the children, and because of that fact her expectations were much different than they would be for children not considered to be at-risk. "They didn't make their situations. They are not to blame for their parents being poor, or in jail or never giving them any educational opportunities such as exposing them to books." Taylor also told me that she was well aware of the fact that because of their lack of experience, her students also lacked self confidence and were not what she called "risk takers." She continued:

Many of the children are reluctant to do certain tasks because they are afraid of failing, others, because they have no idea what to do or even how to begin. I try everything I can to make them more secure in their efforts. I push them to do more and better and I encourage and praise them when they try hard. I never try to discourage the children, I never tell them they are wrong. I try to model for them all of the time, to show them what to do, because they have never had that before.

In addition to lacking self confidence, Taylor told of her students' lack of reading and writing experiences prior to entering school:

I read to my daughter every day, but these children have never seen books and certainly have not had books read to them. They have difficulty relating to certain experiences that I talk about in class for two reasons. One, because they have had no personal experience, and two because they have never had anyone read to them about things.

Once again, Taylor expressed her belief that she had to provide many of the experiences in the classroom environment that the

children did not get at home. When asked to define her role in the classroom, she described herself as a guide. Next, I asked if she felt the children could function independently enough for her to realistically assume that role and she stated:

They are free to choose activities, but of course I have structured the activities, to accomplish what I want them to learn. I guide them through their learning individually or as a group, depending on how I think they will learn best. I do things over and over and the reason for that is to boost their confidence. The key is patience, understanding, and meeting their needs and knowing what's wrong. In reality that is my job.

I asked her to explain that last statement and she told of an instance when she assigned homework and very few of her students completed it. After questioning the children she said:

I realized that there were several reasons why they had not done what I asked. Many of them did not have the tools available, such as paper or pencils, to do the work. I also know that their homes are so disruptive that they can't do any meaningful work.

Finally, she pointed out that she was almost sure that few of the children had an adult at home who would supervise a homework assignment. "I can't expect them to work at home under those conditions so when they don't complete an assignment, I simply try to understand. That doesn't mean that I let them slide, it means that I understand."

Taylor told me, "I have very high expectations for the students in my class. I push a lot of writing and when they say they can't do something, I simply say, 'Yes you can.'" As I observed Taylor, I looked for evidence that her expectations for academic achievement

and social growth in her students were being realized. I noticed that she offered the children a variety of learning opportunities including paired, group, and independent self-directed learning. She spent the majority of time encouraging student directed learning in an attempt to maintain her posture as a facilitator in the classroom. She did this mostly through their writing activities. The children had the option to write by copying from the board, using free writing in response to a given topic, as a team project with another student, or as a totally independent writing experience such as in their daily journals. "I encourage invented spelling because their spelling isn't well developed and they are still hesitant. They are not risk takers yet," Taylor explained.

In general, I found that the children were anxious to attempt the activities that Taylor provided. Some children were slow and appeared to labor over the assigned tasks but they did make the effort. I also noticed that the effort to complete an assignment became less laborious over time as the children became more confident with their abilities.

My observations continued to give me insights into how Taylor's beliefs were reflected in her practice. She once took the children on a field trip to a local wildlife refuge. Following this experience the children wrote, drew, and created maps of their trip, and read their writing aloud to the class. Once again Taylor provided the children with an opportunity not available in their home environments. Additionally, the focus was a new learning experience for the children and the opportunity to read and write about a real life adventure. Taylor explained that as the children had

more opportunities to participate in similar activities, they gained self confidence and advanced both socially and academically.

Taylor frequently encouraged the children to work with partners, which she believed was another way for them to become more comfortable with their reading and writing independently. One of her strategies was for a team to create a story that reflected their knowledge of world events. An example of this was the writing they did the day President Clinton was inaugurated. In their letters to the new President, they asked him what he thought he could do to make the country a better place. As the children worked on this assignment I noticed how aware they were of some of the problems that needed to be addressed. Taylor explained that the class had been talking about social and environmental issues for some time and that she was pleased to see them incorporating their knowledge into their writing. She concluded by saying, "I knew they could do it."

I was curious about Taylor's perception regarding how successful her young students would be in the future. My question was, "Do you think these children will make it?" Taylor's reply, "Oh yes, most of them are connecting, clicking. There are a few that I worry about, a few that would do better if they repeated first grade, but for the most part they'll be OK."

Summary of Case Study Four: Taylor

There are no shades of gray in Taylor's philosophical stance on literacy instruction for her young students. It is 100% whole

language. Taylor practiced her belief system in relationship to the way she taught her young students to read and write. She used various teaching methods, including some basic skills and phonics intervention to support reading instruction when her students were having difficulty.

It was not difficult for Taylor to articulate her beliefs. She clearly verbalized what she believed about teaching at-risk children, specifically about the task of teaching them to read and write. When asked how she came to the understandings she has about literacy instruction Taylor reported that she really didn't know but that whatever she was doing appeared to be working.

Taylor was committed to the belief that all children can learn. She articulated her belief that at-risk children are stigmatized by external factors which can be overcome by positive influences in the classroom. Taylor told of pushing her students to become independent thinkers and offering them the opportunity to achieve that goal. Although highly structured, Taylor considers her classroom completely child-centered and an inviting place where her children are happy to come to learn. When asked if these students would succeed Taylor very quickly assured me that they would.

Case Study Five: Valerie

Biographical Sketch

"Casual" is the best description of Valerie. She is very matter-of-fact in her attitude toward her students, yet quiet and gentle in her approach. Valerie grew up in a family of nine children

and will quickly tell you that she began learning about the importance of individual differences as a member of that large family unit. She talked a great deal about her parents. "My mother and father married early in life and I believe the family all grew up together." She explained that her parents liked to move around, starting out in Indiana and moving to several of the western states while she was growing up. She described her father as "very quiet, very affectionate and a real hard worker. That's where I get my drive." Valerie described her mother as "the disciplinarian in the family. She is the most compassionate woman I have ever known and she is my closest friend." Although the oldest child, Valerie was not responsible for the younger children nor made to feel like a "second mother" to them.

Valerie is in her late thirties and has two daughters whom she considers her "most precious gifts." As a youngster, school was not easy for Valerie, but she loved it, stating:

I don't remember having a negative experience in school until I reached junior high and I don't know if that was so much of a problem with school or just the age that I was going through. I graduated from high school with a B+ average, but it was difficult.

Her cousins, on the other hand, had no difficulty with school and she recalled truly admiring them because learning seemed so effortless for them. As a result of the influence of her relatives, Valerie stated, "I understood how learning could vary from one student to another and I am especially aware of this with the children in my classroom."

Valerie began her education in a junior college in Arizona as a child psychology major. While there she completed approximately thirty hours of psychology courses which she is convinced help her today as she teaches her at-risk students. She moved to her present city soon after completing her associate's degree in order to pursue a degree in deaf education. Because there were no deaf education programs at the university, she decided to go into elementary education with an emphasis on special education.

Valerie has taught a total of twelve years but only four of them as a full-time teacher. After completing her associate's degree she worked in deaf education as a tutor before going on to complete her four year degree. While at the university, Valerie worked at various jobs including two years with the State in the area of severely emotional, self abusive and aggressive children. At that time, she began substitute teaching for the school district while continuing to complete her degree in elementary education with a minor in science. Valerie stated, "subbing in the district made me very aware of the diversity of students in the different schools."

Valerie has been in her present teaching position for two years; prior to that she taught fifth grade. When asked to describe what was special about her as a teacher, Valerie simply stated, "I care."

Key Influences on Valerie's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

When first asked why she taught literacy the way she did, Valerie's initial response was, "I have no clue." After some

reflection, Valerie was able to cite the following areas as major influences of her literacy instruction: upbringing, her own experience in school, training, "gut" feelings, philosophies on education, and input from peers. Valerie wrote in her reflective journal about the influence of these factors on her teaching and during the course of our time together she talked at length about many of them.

In examining and exploring the influence of her upbringing, Valerie explained:

I was the oldest of nine children. My parents offered me security, unconditional acceptance and an abundance of love. They treated each of us as individuals and instilled in us a sense of values and fairness. My family had a profound influence on the way I teach. I learned tolerance and respect from my family. I use these guiding beliefs to support the way I interact with my students. I know that it is important to have a lot of compassion and to be willing to overlook a lot of things. I want my students to be able to read and write but I also have to be realistic and deal with these children on their own terms.

Valerie shared her belief that because of these attributes she was secure in the approach she took with her at-risk students, an approach that allowed her to view each child as an individual with unique needs and abilities.

Valerie's experiences as a student also colored her beliefs and practice as a teacher of literacy. One of the persons that helped shape Valerie's philosophy was her fifth grade teacher:

My earliest recollections of school were positive. I remember that school didn't come easy for me but I thought it was good. My fifth grade teacher made learning come alive. She was into

the arts and taught with wonderful music. I try to make learning positive and fun for my students just as she did.

Another important individual was Valerie's grandfather. She told of being read to by her grandfather whom she adored. She recalled that he instilled in her a love for reading, and she shared the fact that today in her classroom she stops teaching three or four times during the day just to gather the children together and read stories to them.

The next factor that influenced Valerie's literacy instruction was what she called, "training and gut feelings." When asked to explain she said:

I was taught to use a traditional, skills based approach to reading and writing but I am not a total skills person. I use a dual approach because I think it is what the children need to learn to read and write. Literature gets the children excited about reading so I use skills and literature. My gut feeling tells me it works and I believe in this approach.

Valerie also explained, "My gut feelings also tell me that a child can't learn when he is hungry or frightened or insecure. I try to respond to each of these kids and their needs with understanding."

Valerie explained that her personal philosophy of education determined the way she taught. She stated:

My teaching goals are simple. I believe that it is important to offer every child a positive learning experience and deal with each one differently, fairly, but differently. I also am greatly influenced as a result of my previous teaching experiences. I learned more about teaching from subbing than from any of my university professors. I learned how to survive.

Finally, Valerie mentioned the influences of peers:

I have learned from my family and from those around me. I learn something new every day. I am constantly asking people to tell me how to do something and usually they give me good advice. I have a lot of education and that education has served me well in my practice. There are some people who believe that there is one teaching system for all children, I don't believe that. I believe really smart teachers are learning all the time from those around them.

In addition to peer influence, Valerie noted that she did a lot of "self-instruction" in her attempt to teach herself about how at-risk students learn to read and write. "I try everything I can think of. I talk to people, I look through articles that come out about new approaches, I am always looking for something that may work better."

Valerie acknowledged the importance of the many factors that influenced her pedagogy. She spoke of being keenly aware that her primary responsibility as a first grade teacher was to teach her young students to read and write. Her concern, however, goes far beyond simply teaching literacy. A typical day in Valerie's classroom illuminates her belief that all children have the natural right to feel loved, accepted, and wanted. The influence of this belief provides her students with the opportunity of an open door for learning.

Valerie's Beliefs About Literacy Instruction

Belief: "I believe that there is no one philosophy that will work with at-risk children; therefore, I do whatever it takes."

The foundation for Valerie's approach to literacy instruction developed during her university experience. She stated that for years she has followed the fundamental tenets of whole language not knowing that there was a name for the approach she was using. Today she relies heavily on a dual system of literacy instruction, focusing mostly on a traditional program of skills based instruction and what she calls a "natural literature approach" for enhancement and reading enjoyment. Valerie stated:

The first step in reading understanding must be that reading is enjoyable. Basic skills come from basals and are accompanied with drills, worksheets, etc. That wasn't all fun but it was necessary. I didn't have much luck with basals at first so I went to the kindergarten department and used their materials, but they were too low. Literature, on the other hand, has the fun element. I don't believe in all literature or all basals so I came up with this system.

Valerie was comfortable with the behavioral problems and the lack of experience in literacy skills that at-risk children bring to the learning environment. She found that the theories and philosophy she espoused were both logical and serviceable for her.

Valerie's instructional day was segmented to accommodate her instructional plan by teaching skills in the mornings and an integrated approach with literature as the focus in the afternoon. Valerie voiced real concern as she considered her responsibility for teaching young children to read and write. "The dual approach helps me cover all of the bases." She acknowledged at the very outset of our interviews that she had no set plan of action, yet she felt comfortable with a combination of approaches because, "they seem to be working." As I observed Valerie during the morning, I found

that she spent the majority of her time instructing her students in basic skills. She used workbooks, drill and practice activities, and flash cards. She played word games and used fun worksheets to teach various phonics skills. Writing for the children was predominantly copying. Valerie stated, "They are not risk takers and few will venture out on their own to attempt writing."

Although Valerie did read occasionally to her children during the morning, this activity was reserved most frequently for the afternoon. After read-aloud time Valerie encouraged the children to respond to the story either by talking about the plot, characters, setting, etc., or by drawing pictures or writing about it. One extension approach Valerie often used was to have the children illustrate and rewrite the story. After completing their version, the children "read" their story to Valerie and the class. She praised them by telling them that they were "really reading." She explained that when she responded that way she was encouraging the children to also believe they were reading. "Self motivation is a powerful tool and one that I use as often as possible," explained Valerie.

When I asked if the dual approach that she used was confusing to her or to the children, she explained her reason for using it. "The children are very immature and have great difficulty staying on task." For that reason she had to work on concrete tasks early and move to less tedious and more playful activities as the day progressed. She told me that she had tried various types of tactics to excite the children about reading, but disappointedly stated, "Some of the things I wanted to try had to be put on hold or delayed until the children were more mature and ready. Journal writing is a

good example. The bottom line is, finding out what they need and finding some way to get it to them."

Valerie's dual literacy instructional path led her to engage in a project Valerie called "a tour around the world." Her "world tour" offered the children the opportunity to explore peoples, cultures, lands, and customs that they more than likely have never known existed. This was accomplished through the use of children's literature and a host of activities involving science and social studies. Valerie said, "The children enjoy the fun activities and this method allows them to enjoy books more so than the workbooks and basals."

Valerie's Beliefs About At-Risk Children

Belief: "I believe that it is my responsibility to give children whatever it takes to get them where they need to be."

Those were Valerie's first comments as she began talking to me about teaching at-risk children. She described her class as small in number, mostly Caucasian with an even mix of boys and girls.

When asked to share her beliefs about at-risk children, she stated:

I believe that these children are environmentally neglected. They are not introduced to the things that they need to survive in our world, and most of the world sees them as behavior problems.

Valerie was able to articulate the affect of various external factors upon the lives of her at-risk children, beginning with a definition of what the term at-risk meant to her:

The at-risk child is a child coming to school with disadvantages, some type of baggage that keeps them from learning at the same pace that other children do. I believe it is a lack of interest at home or lack of responsibility on the part of their parents.

Following those comments, Valerie described specific factors that influenced the lives of the students in her class:

I know that these children are poor and they are disadvantaged in the experiences that they are given. I think most of my kids are fed properly and they are fairly clean but they have no supervision, or parent modeling. The most obvious factor is the fact that they come from confused families, very confused families. There are children in my classroom who live with one family member one week and another the next. They call three or four people 'daddy' and they have no idea whether their mom is their real mother or their step mom. The families of many of my students don't appear to be involved in their upbringing at all. The kindest thing I can say about them is that they just exist.

When asked how she taught her at-risk students Valerie said:

I recognize where they are coming from and teach accordingly. For example, I know that they are not ready to read or write so I am satisfied when they are willing to listen to stories and copy from the board. I pace my teaching according to their attention span and what they can handle and I find that I have to do a lot of one on one. Whole group is effective followed by one on one but centers can be a disaster. Many of the things that I use have fun activities built in to spark their attention. I use peer tutoring very successfully. For example we have fifth grade students as 'Buddy Bookit' partners and my students love being with the older students. I do anything and everything to build self esteem and confidence.

Over the course of time I spent with Valerie, she told me about other tactics that she used as she taught her at-risk children. She often mentioned the importance of having compassion, patience, and

a willingness to overlook many things about the children. She explained that she had come to realize that there was virtually no control over the children in their homes which meant no control over their behavior; therefore they had difficulty controlling themselves at school. She felt she had to use a lot of personalized instruction and to look for the individual learning abilities in each child. "I know that everyone learns at a different rate. That is especially true of these children," Valerie explained.

I noticed that most of the classroom activities were teacher directed. The instructional day was highly predictable as the children moved from one activity to another with Valerie guiding them through most of the schedule. Her manner was firm but supportive and she was always available to help the children as they attempted their assigned work. Whole group instruction was pervasive yet there was the opportunity for independent learning through the established centers. Valerie encouraged those who finished early to help others who have difficulty and she often encouraged the students to read together when completing their assignment.

On several occasions, Valerie stopped after an assignment to gather the children at the "calendar area" to read a story. Her practice was to use various Directed Listening Teaching Activities (DLTA) as she read to the children. She encouraged conversation and thoughtful discussion during this time but required the children to remain relatively silent during independent work time. When asked about the structure that she maintained within the learning environment, Valerie explained that she used many special education

techniques with her children. She stated, "I believe that being at-risk makes children as much of a learning disability as a visual or perceptual problem. They need structure in order to survive in the classroom."

I asked Valerie to summarize her beliefs about teaching at-risk children to read and write. Her comments were:

There are more at-risk children in our schools than ever before. If these children are our future, then we can't take a chance on them being illiterate just because of their environment and their background. We have them six hours a day and we have to make the most of that time.

My final question for Valerie was to describe what she believed was special about her at-risk students. She said:

These children are special because they love so much . They want to learn, they want to do the work. One thing I feel very strongly about is that these children don't choose to be disruptive. They don't have control over their lives; therefore they should never, never be humiliated.

The Learning Environment For Teaching At-Risk Children

Belief: "I believe it is important to make school and learning a natural thing. My classroom is a natural learning environment."

Valerie referred to the home environment of her students as "confused." She explained that as far as she knew they had no positive models for behavior, no opportunity to learn basic activities such as social skills or self control, and no opportunity to

read or write prior to coming to school. She stated, "School, for these children, is their first experience with structure and order."

Valerie's room was a classic example of structure and order with "a place for everything, and everything is in its place." The students' desks were arranged in a U with the open end facing the only blackboard in the room. The room contained various activity areas such as cooking, writing, drawing, and reading centers. Charts were posted with the names of children who were to do certain jobs or activities. These lists were changed either daily or weekly according to the tasks assigned.

The room was large, had no windows and could have been dark and dismal if it were not decorated so colorfully with posters and signs. There was a large overstuffed chair in the reading/calendar area of the room where I often noticed the children reading silently or in small groups during free time. Valerie told me one day, "This room represents a safe and happy place for these children."

The school was old but very attractive and inviting. During the early part of the year the school office area was repainted in soft pastels colors and new carpeting and wallpaper were installed. The school was located in a moderate to low socioeconomic area of town, an area that, according to Valerie and her principal, was prone to violence and gang activity. Once during a visit, there was an announcement over the intercom requesting all teachers and students to stay inside their rooms and lock the doors. When I asked Valerie what was going on she replied, "Oh, that's probably some group of students from the junior high school making trouble in the parking lot or out in the street." She was partially correct. We

found out later that a group of junior high school students walking home from school had become annoyed with one another and one student pulled out a gun and threatened another. When I asked Valerie how situations such as this affected her students she said:

I hate to tell you this, but these children are used to that type of behavior. That is why I feel that it is so important to tap every possible resource and educate them. They need to rise above such as this. If we don't reach them early we may never reach them. School is the place. This classroom is where it needs to begin.

Valerie's expectations about student learning

Belief: "I believe that there is one thing that all children have in common whether privileged or at-risk: the desire to learn."

Valerie had a lot to say about the expectations she had for her at-risk students. She explained that she believed that the general public expected the at-risk child to fail because of their disruptive behavior and lack of opportunities. She made it very clear that she did not believe that her students chose to be disruptive but rather that they had little control over the circumstances surrounding their lives. She also said that she believed that the teacher had to assume the main responsibility for student learning because she did not think at-risk students or their parents valued education. "If you give them space, support, and time, it can happen for them," she said, "but it takes a lot on the part of the teacher."

Although Valerie articulated the belief that her at-risk students could learn, she was realistic in her expectations for them. For example, she found that a slow-down tactic was best suited for the overall curriculum. She explained:

Although I have high expectations and push them, I am realistic. I don't expect any less of them because of their problems, I just spend more time and slow down the pace. This gives the child the opportunity to work through the process. I am not soft on them but I am realistic. One of my brightest students gets very angry, very frustrated, and is extremely temperamental. Again as a teacher the key is compassion and a willingness to overlook a lot of things. Joe [not real name] cannot sit in his seat so I have to let him get up and move around. I only draw the line when he bothers someone else.

I asked Valerie if she felt that her students would succeed. Her answer was, "Some will, others, no." Valerie's stated belief was that children must progress from their own starting point at a rate that is compatible with their abilities. I observed this belief demonstrated in her practice on many occasions. Because their experiences were limited, Valerie usually directed their work step by step. For those students who requested independence, she allowed them that option by designing child focused learning centers. She also employed peer tutoring within the classroom and used fifth grade students to work with her students at various times during the week. "My students love it and I think it is good for the older kids too," she said.

Early in the year Valerie had unsuccessfully attempted independent journal writing with the children. "I had every expectation that they could write but it was too frustrating." She went on:

They couldn't write sentences on their own and they couldn't seem to make up sentences. If I go to the black board after I read a story and asked them what they wanted to write about the story they could recall some details, but they have difficulty generating any writing on their own. Some of them copy well, but most of the student generated writing is scribbling or drawing. I know they should be more advanced and we will try again later in the year, but for right now it isn't working.

Understanding her belief system and the expectations Valerie had for her at-risk students, I was curious about the assessment plan she implemented. She explained, "When I give a grade I use my own grading system based on the progress they have made in my class. On the report card I put an asterisk next to the grade and say that this work is below grade level."

When I asked Valerie how long she thought it would take before the children could do independent work at their grade level, she replied, "I see progress all of the time. You just have to remember where they started. They have a lot of catching up to do, and I have to be realistic."

Summary of Case Study Five: Valerie

Although impressed with the tenets of whole language, Valerie voiced the belief that her students needed the additional structure and rigor of a more traditional skills-based approach to literacy instruction. Perhaps the uniqueness of her approach was the manner in which Valerie implemented the two philosophies. She clearly applied one method, a skills-based approach during one part of the

day and later in the day when the children were less attentive, she employed a more relaxed natural approach using literature as a focus. Valerie's beliefs about pedagogy reflected her clear understanding of the abilities possessed by her students though she views her approach as "hit and miss." Her tactics do, however, consistently align with her stated belief system.

Articulation was no problem for Valerie. She verbalized her beliefs regarding all aspects of teaching at-risk children including her understanding of the nature and abilities possessed by these students. She understood the external influences affecting her students and recognized that the circumstances of their home life clearly influenced their ability to learn. In spite of those realizations, Valerie had high expectations for her students and believed that each would be successful learner.

In order to create the structure thought to be necessary to overcome the lack of experience her at-risk children brought to the educational environment, Valerie constantly searched for new methods and strategies to support her literacy philosophy and the individual needs of her students. It was apparent that Valerie was consistent with her educational goals while being somewhat flexible with the process of attaining her goals.

Valerie was committed to her belief that all children have the right to a high quality education. Her goal was to provide the academic climate and personal support that would assure her at-risk students success. Through a program filled with high expectation and challenging academic endeavors, Valerie believed that she and her students were succeeding. She maintains that school is indeed

hard work, but she tells her students that if they work hard enough together they can "make it." According to Valerie, "Success is a powerful motivator."

CHAPTER V

Major Findings, General Observations, Discussion, and Implications

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe the belief system of five teachers involved in literacy instruction for at-risk first grade children. The perspective taken in this study was that external and internal factors, while individually identifiable, are interrelated and thus work in tandem as influences upon teachers' belief systems. The research questions addressed were:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about instructing young at-risk children to read and write.
2. What do teachers say they do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write.
3. What do teachers actually do as they instruct young at-risk children to read and write.

Two additional questions were implied from these three:

4. What influences teachers' instructional decisions as they teach young at-risk children to read and write?
5. Are there congruencies between teachers' stated beliefs and their teaching practice?

Chapter V summarizes the findings from the research questions and includes a discussion. Conclusions from the general findings are followed by implications and suggestions for future research.

Major Findings

Ten general findings emerged from this study in response to three main research questions. Six of these findings relate to teachers' beliefs about teaching at-risk children; four relate to teachers' beliefs about the task of teaching and literacy instruction. These findings are based solely upon the data gathered from various sources of information revealed by the five subjects of the study.

Findings Related To Teachers' Beliefs About Teaching At-Risk Children

1. The teachers demonstrated an understanding of the individual needs of at-risk children and address those needs.

As a result of data sorting, topics emerged revealing common beliefs by the five teachers. All of the teachers acknowledged that in order to teach at-risk children they must first understand the external factors that affect the lives of their students. They explained that among the multitude of factors that impacted upon at-risk children, the most prevalent resulted from poverty and the lack of adult supervision in the home environment. These situations

were manifested in many ways but most often in the form of physical or emotional problems. Mary, for example, prepared a snack for her students each morning because many of them came to school hungry. Valerie and Taylor often spoke of fatigue and possible physical abuses that their children suffered. Valerie stated, "No child can learn if he is cold, or hungry, or tired."

The teachers admitted that in many cases at-risk children presented serious discipline and classroom management problems that required immediate resolution, which often delayed instruction and learning. They explained that they felt that these problems were due to a lack of family guidance, and only by understanding the basis for the children's problems could they meet their needs and teach them effectively. Lindsey spent much of her teaching time helping her students work through conflicts and explaining alternative ways for them to solve their own problems. The other teachers explained that the beginning of the school year was consumed with establishing rules and classroom protocols and developing a sense of trust through a family-like atmosphere. This atmosphere of trust was a result of each teacher working to get to know the children, pacing the learning experiences, and establishing a sense of bonding between them and their students.

2. The teachers recognized and built on children's individual strengths.

Many of the teachers in the study said that they recognized the need to identify and build on the individual strengths of their at-risk children and did so by offering a multitude of opportunities for self

expression and reinforcing positive work habits. According to the teachers, identifying the children's individual strengths and building on those strengths was time consuming, but it was the only way to find out what they could and could not do. They supplemented this approach with praise and support for the child's academic efforts, accepting whatever the child said or wrote without criticism or judgment. Continuous positive reinforcement resulted in a sense of security and enabled the children to take the risks necessary to engage in the learning process.

3. The teachers nurtured children's enthusiasm.

The teachers expressed an understanding of the importance of nurturing children's enthusiasm for learning to read and write. They acknowledged that this was especially important because reading and writing were new experiences for most at-risk children, and could be considered tedious and frustrating for them. Nurturing their enthusiasm was accomplished by using literacy approaches reflecting real-life experiences that were meaningful for the children. Each teacher spoke of the importance of reading aloud to the children on a regular basis and using repeated reading of favorite and familiar text to build a reading repertoire. Books and writing materials were available in each classroom and in many cases the children were encouraged to write as an extension to many other activities. It was amazing to see the reading and writing progress that students made as a result of the enthusiasm and excitement generated by these teachers.

Writing instruction for these teachers began with very basic instruction since few students had experienced writing prior to coming to school. Early in the school year the children were encouraged to "write" by drawing pictures to represent their thoughts. This process progressed to scribbling, beginning writing, and story writing using invented spelling. For most of the children, daily journal writing was one of their favorite activities. Taylor used a "buddy journaling" approach which often resulted in copious amounts of writing, unique plots, and unbelievably sophisticated text. Valerie's students did not do much writing other than copying. She had tried journal writing early in the year but found it to be too frustrating for the children; however, by the end of the school year her students had begun writing. Whatever the approach, the teachers integrated reading and writing into the curriculum and the children were aware of the fact that the two were very much a part of their literacy development.

4. The teachers began the learning process at the appropriate developmental entry level for each child.

All of the teachers in this study said that most of their at-risk first graders entered school at the kindergarten or pre-kindergarten level. Beginning literacy experiences were planned as basic, beginning activities with short spans of time allocated for new experiences such as reading group and independent reading and writing opportunities. The teachers stated that attention to time and pacing of activities were essential for the development of confidence and security in attempting various literacy tasks.

Consistently, short periods of time were devoted to the accomplishment of small tasks, brief attempts at reading and writing, literal tasks rather than comprehension or composition tasks, and praise was a major focus of all literacy endeavors.

5. The teachers believed that at-risk children should be continuously stimulated in order to build the confidence and self esteem necessary for learning. The environment was structured and controlled in an attempt to offer at-risk children the experiences and focus necessary to accomplish this goal.

The creation of a stimulating yet structured classroom environment was an important factor in supporting literacy development for at-risk children. Angela was the only teacher who did not agree that the environment should be stimulating. She explained that her students' behavior was extremely immature and that they did not possess enough self control to handle a stimulating environment. She, therefore, created an environment that was what she considered controlled and calm.

The teachers voiced their belief that the creation of a structured environment was of paramount importance to success with at-risk learners. Collectively the teachers suggested that they felt that a lack of structure in at-risk children's home environments was apparent; therefore, it was critical that they have structure in their school environment. Observation confirmed that each teacher was successful in creating what they considered a structured and controlled classroom by establishing rules, maintaining positive and

consistent interactions between teacher and students, and by maintaining effective classroom practice. In these classroom environments, the teachers determined the activities the children would engage in and the teachers rigorously monitored the children's activities in an attempt to maintain classroom order. Good classroom practice did result in an orderly classroom climate, well-coordinated curricula, and an overall atmosphere characterized by high academic expectations and a caring attitude.

Each teacher also acknowledged the importance of creating a child-centered classroom environment in order to best serve the needs of the at-risk learner. The teachers considered their classrooms child-centered, yet they were predominantly teacher-directed. Although the children did have some choices during free time, the academic focus was teacher determined and guided toward specific outcomes. There was some evidence of student generated work in each classroom, but for the most part the environment reflected activities and learning experiences designated important by the teachers. This practice supports the consensus of teachers' stated beliefs that the learning environment should be structured.

6. The teachers believed that one way for at-risk children to break the bonds of at-riskness was through learning to read and write.

This belief statement strongly influenced the instructional program implemented by the five teachers in this study. Once classroom order and a routine had been established, literacy instruction began immediately and the approaches used were as

varied and different as the teachers themselves. The teachers acknowledged that their students had few literacy experiences prior to coming to school; therefore print in all forms was available in the classrooms. The children were read to frequently, they were allowed to read independently and in groups, they wrote independently, and they copied from many sources of writing. The children were continuously praised and referred to as competent readers and writers. They were encouraged to value and use reading and writing as part of their daily lives.

Findings Regarding Teachers' Beliefs About The Task Of Teaching And Literacy Instruction

7. The teachers articulated their views that theories did not influence their practice as much as beliefs in relationship to literacy instruction for at-risk children. Teachers' knowledge of reading and writing theory seems to be offset by their beliefs about what works best for the at-risk student.

Although the teachers agreed that the theoretical background they had gained in their teacher education programs was important, they all indicated that, in general, conventional wisdom and trial and error tactics employed in the classroom produced the best results. When asked initially how they taught at-risk children to read and write, they explained that they were not really sure what to call their approach. Lindsey said, "Most of the time I teach by the seat of my pants," the other teachers made similar statements such as,

"Hit and miss is the basis for my tactics," or "I do what I think is best at the time." Even though the teachers had some doubts about naming their teaching philosophy, they nevertheless clearly articulated their individual beliefs about what at-risk children needed and the methods they used to teach. In general, they concluded that the relationship of the content to the reality of the student in the classroom was the major determinant of the way they taught, more so than the dictates of a particular reading paradigm. In general, the teachers' stated beliefs about literacy instruction were the result of what they considered "whatever worked best for the students."

There was evidence of a solid whole language approach in models utilized by Taylor and Angela, and a modified whole language approach that satisfied Mary. Lindsey voiced her desire to move into a more literature-based, modified whole language approach while Valerie was completely satisfied with the way her dual whole language/skills-based approach worked for her students. Although conflicting in nature, the diverse reading instruction paradigms held by each teacher in the study were a direct result of individual belief systems influenced by either theory and/or practical experience.

Taylor was the only teacher who did not express the belief that literacy instruction was predicated solely on the fact that the children were considered at-risk. Her belief was that the development of a reading and writing curriculum should be based upon the children's ability to learn, their interests, and their individual uniqueness.

8. The teachers believed that there is no single method of literacy instruction for at-risk children but, rather, a combination of pedagogical approaches which best serve the literacy needs of these children.

The consensus of opinion among the respondents strongly supported the belief that literacy instruction was predicated on the uniqueness of the children in their classrooms, and not on theory. This belief was supported by the finding that no one consummate method of literacy instruction was prescribed by all of the teachers.

The teachers employed many strategies reflective of the skills-based approach to literacy instruction or the whole language philosophy. Skills-based activities such as copying sentences from the board, weekly spelling tests, phonics instruction, and drill and practice worksheets were used. Whole language activities such as language experience activities, peer reading and journal writing, and the use of invented spelling for student-generated writing were also frequently used. Observational data consistently showed a multiplicity of teaching approaches used to accommodate the various individual needs of the students within each classroom. Though conventional pedagogical practice was the cornerstone for literacy instruction by the teachers, it was evident that a high degree of flexibility in teaching methods was continuously implemented in order to optimize student learning.

One of the most dominant influences on practice which was readily apparent in the teaching environment of these five teachers was the unyielding belief that at-risk children can and must learn to read and write. According to the teachers in the study, their biggest

undertaking was to discover what worked best for their students and to implement the program that best served their needs. Lindsey and Angela explained that in many cases this perspective necessitated changing tactics in the middle of a lesson. Mary took exception to this and stated that the structure and focus of the lesson must remain in place. No matter the approach used nor the philosophical stance, each of the teachers was keenly aware of the needs of the students and consistently met those needs.

9. The teachers believed modeling is a positive motivational factor for at-risk children learning to read and write.

The importance of teacher modeling was another strongly articulated belief expressed by all five teachers in the study. They were convinced that most of the children in their classrooms had not learned any literacy skills because the children's parents had not modeled these skills for them. They knew that their students had not been read to and that, in many cases, had no books or other reading material in their homes.

Modeling provided the teachers with the opportunity to demonstrate literacy activities and behaviors. It also gave the teachers the opportunity to express their positive attitudes toward reading and writing. The teachers explained that their role as a model and facilitator of literacy learning included engaging the children in conversation, encouraging and accepting the children's progress as literacy learners, exposing them to language in all

forms, and supporting and praising their endeavors. For the teachers in this study, the result was confident and successful students.

10. The teachers believed that all children regardless of social, economic, or academic status can learn. The learning expectations placed upon children should reflect that belief.

The teachers, without exception, expressed confidence in the fact that their students would be academically successful. They described their practice as one of positive reinforcement of learning behaviors, of creating risk free environments, and of maintaining the belief that all children, regardless of academic or social status could learn. They viewed their practice as the by-product of a belief system that focused on teaching the student to accept the challenge of learning. They realized that at-risk children entered school with certain academic limitations, yet they were determined to help the children overcome those limitations. Practice included a slow pace, continuous reinforcement of experiences, teacher and peer modeling, continuous praise, and numerous opportunities to succeed. The teachers' efforts were tireless, their patience long-standing, and their flexibility a key ingredient to student progress.

Findings Related To The Fourth And Fifth Research Questions

This section focuses on the findings related to the two additional research questions. The data gathered from the

Reflective Activity (Meyerson, 1993), classroom observations, and interviews provided the basis for the findings.

The teachers acknowledged that there are factors that influence their instructional decisions as they teach young at-risk children to read and write.

The teachers in the study acknowledged a multitude of external factors that influenced their belief systems related to literacy instruction. The one factor common to all five teachers was the influence of their family. This influence provided each teacher with a sense of acceptance and well being, a safe and nurturing environment and supportive role models. Because of the influence of their families the teachers expressed the need to provide a similar environment for their students.

Other factors that were acknowledged by the teachers included their own educational experiences, and the influence of the at-risk child in the classroom. Although the teachers perceived their family as the most influential factor in the way they taught literacy, in reality, the presence of at-risk children dominated their thought processes, planning and decision-making. Over the months I spent with them, the teachers focused their energy and creativity on meeting the needs of these children and establishing a literacy environment. The at-risk child, combined with the other influencing factors, gave the teachers a sense of awareness that enabled them to develop a curriculum and create a classroom environment that fostered literacy success for the students.

The teachers articulated beliefs are with their teaching practice.

Data analysis revealed a high degree of congruence among the five cases studied as related to the reading paradigm employed. Whole language was the preferred belief for literacy instruction, yet all five teachers agreed that this belief should be tempered with additional methods and strategies to meet the needs of the at-risk student. Because these children encountered external influences that impeded their progress toward expected literacy outcomes, it was incumbent upon the teacher to exposed the children to a wide array of learning opportunities. Beliefs were reflected in practice as teachers provided a variety of approaches grounded in a modified whole language philosophy.

General Observations

Although I was not able to identify any studies which parallel my research, there is consistency between the findings of my study and the conclusion of some of the recognized major contemporary studies on teachers' beliefs as related to practice (Banach, 1984; Nespor, 1985, 1987; Spodek, 1987). This investigation of five teachers' beliefs supports previous studies in the following ways:

1. There is an apparent relationship between the teachers' beliefs and practice.

Teachers' beliefs are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors (Duffy, 1981) which result in planning,

decision-making and ultimately practice (Munby, 1981; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Clark & Peterson, 1986). What teachers believe about teaching, learning and the nature of children will shape their practice.

2. The teachers seem to hold specific beliefs about teaching at-risk children to read and write.

Although some teachers base their instructional practice on theory (Duffy & Anderson, 1984), others base their beliefs on previous experiences and what they perceive as practical (Kinzer and Carrick, 1986). The teachers in this study acknowledge that it is their belief system about teaching at-risk children that most significantly influences their practice.

3. The diverse reading instruction paradigms within which the teachers functioned appeared to be influenced by an individual belief system reflective of theory, practical experience, and a desire to meet the individual needs of the student.

Teachers' beliefs about theory, practical experience and the nature of the student in the classroom greatly influence the literacy approach used by the teacher (Stern & Shavelson, 1983). For many teachers in this study these influences resulted in the need to use a combination of approaches.

4. There was no agreement on one accepted practice for teaching at-risk children to read and write.

Teachers recognize the magnitude of the influence of at-risk children on the way they teach literacy. What works best under certain circumstances may appear to be the most acceptable method of practice (Allington, et al., 1990; Garcia & Pearson, 1992). The teachers in the study seemed to do the same things but used different language/terms to describe their actions.

5. Articulating their beliefs about teaching at-risk children may have influenced the connection between what teachers say they do and what they actually do in the classroom.

It does appear that the opportunity to articulate beliefs allows teachers to better understand how and why they teach the way they do and why (Nespor, 1985; Clandinin, 1986). Acknowledging their beliefs empowers teachers as they seek the best possible method for instructing young at-risk students.

6. The curriculum minimized the at-risk influences that impacted students and maximized learning opportunities for them while in school.

These opportunities include reading and writing about meaningful and interesting experiences and allowing children to talk about personal experiences without fear of reprimand (Wong-Fillmore & Valadez, 1985; Brophy, 1986).

7. Reading and writing were taught together as an integral component of the literacy program which included high quality literature.

Reading and writing instruction provides the framework for the entire academic curriculum (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Laniger & Applebee, 1987). Teachers acknowledge the value of a variety of literature sources as major components of their literacy instruction. Literature supports the idea that language kept whole and meaningful is the most effective way for children to learn about reading and writing (Morrow, 1993).

8. Motivated teachers built on the individual strengths in their at-risk students.

While teachers are aware of the ramifications of being an at-risk child, they do not accept the problems and circumstances of the children's lives as restricting their ability to become literate (Kaehler, 1988). They look for and build upon the unique and individual attributes present in each child.

9. Structured learning environments developed by these five teachers provided the best opportunities for their at-risk children to be successful.

The schedules and rules of the classroom should be established early in the year and strictly enforced so that the children are well aware of what is expected of them. Teachers who systematically create an atmosphere that stimulates children and reflects high academic expectations, also provide the opportunity for students to

feel ownership and confidence in their learning endeavors (Spodek, 1987). However, a structured learning environment does not necessarily dictate the type of literacy instruction incorporated.

10. The most dominant and consistent pedagogical practice exhibited by all participants during the course of this study was the need to maintain order in the classroom and to create a sense of bonding and trust for the at-risk children.

The practice of maintaining order in the classroom (Brophy, 1982) was impelled by each participant's belief system, a belief system that ultimately influenced every aspect of the task of teaching at-risk children to read and write.

11. The teachers held high expectations for their at-risk students and created a learning environment that supported that belief.

Teachers maintain the belief that all children can learn. The teachers are willing to support that belief as they develop a classroom curriculum and create an environment to foster literacy learning (Winfield, 1987).

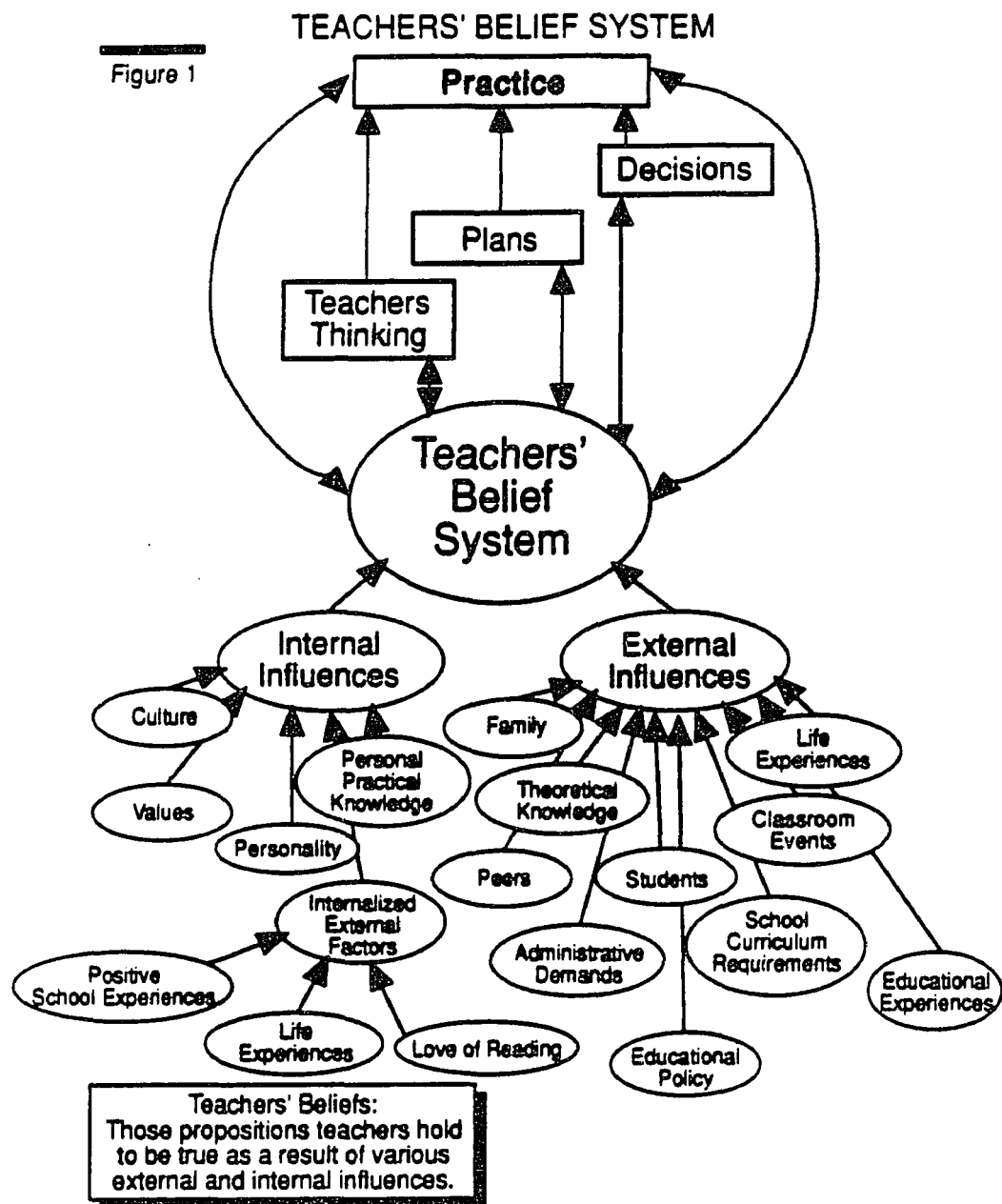
Discussion

Two perspectives of the interrelationship between beliefs and practice have tended to dominate previous research. Some researchers have concluded that all practice is theory driven (Harste

& Burke, 1977; Gove, 1981; Duffy & Anderson, 1982). On the other hand, other researchers have stated that practice is reflective of teachers' belief system (Nespor, 1985; Kagan & Smith, 1988; Mills & Clyde, 1991). Based on the finding of this present study, I offer a third perspective of how teachers' beliefs influence classroom practice. Specifically, I found that classroom practice is driven primarily by teachers' beliefs consisting of both external and internal factors which are strongly influenced by teachers' theoretical and personal knowledge. Teachers' beliefs are continuously evolving and are ever changing to meet the demands of the classroom, the students, and the curriculum.

The model presented in Figure 1 is a graphic representation of this third perspective; it assimilates the two perspectives advanced by previous researchers and shows the complexity of teachers' beliefs. The five case studies support the concept that teachers' beliefs are the result of numerous influences. These influences can be categorized as internal and external factors.

(1) External factors are the most common and easiest factors to identify. The basis for all beliefs originate as a result of outside or external factors. For example, according to the subjects of the study, the first and most important influence on their belief system was their family. Other factors identified included their educational experiences, the children they taught, their association with former teachers and peers, and various life experiences. External factors specifically influencing the classroom teacher



included educational policy, administrative directives, requirements of the curriculum, and classroom events.

(2) Internal factors impacting the belief system of teachers resulted initially from those external factors that were internalized and selected by the teachers as important. These factors included a positive attitude about school, a love of reading and personalized experiences which could also be considered life experiences. Added to these factors were those personal factors which influenced the teacher such as their culture, personality, and their values.

I found, just as Clandinin (1985) suggested, that the teachers in my study combined many of their own personal characteristics with their professional knowledge to develop what is termed "personal practical knowledge". In combination, the personal, theoretical and professional knowledge form both the internal and external influences that make up the professional belief system of the teacher. I have come to realize that although there is a strong relationship between theory and beliefs, the lines that separate the two are often blurred.

Just as internal and external factors influence teachers' belief systems, the model takes the process one step farther to reveal how teachers' beliefs influence practice. As the teachers in this study related their thoughts, made their curriculum plans, and implemented their decisions leading to classroom practice, their belief systems were once again influenced by their own thought processes and the success or failure of their classroom practice. The model shows that all contributing factors are related entities

and that the development of a teacher's belief system is not linear but rather cyclical.

Implications For Future Research

Findings from this research suggest the need for future investigation of teachers' beliefs about various factors impacting education today.

1. How can teacher education programs effectively prepare pre-service teachers for the task of teaching at-risk children to read and write?

Given the fact that the at-risk population is dramatically increasing in our public schools, this need should be addressed initially in our teacher preparation programs. Specifically, research on teachers' beliefs may serve to inform teacher education programs in the development of instructional content focused on preparing pre-service teachers to meet the challenge of literacy instruction for at-risk children.

2. In what way can beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of inservice teachers involved in teaching at-risk children be further investigated?

The teachers in this study strongly suggested that there is a need to offer more support for planning and implementing programs for teachers of at-risk children. Specifically, findings from this study strongly suggest a need to develop research agendas for

developing curriculum, implementing classroom management strategies, and improving the task of teaching at-risk children to read and write

3. How does examining teachers' beliefs impact practice?

Educators should acknowledge the importance of reflecting on their own beliefs and articulating those factors which influence their pedagogy. Articulating their beliefs will enable teachers to become more aware of the basis for what they are doing in the classroom and why. This will enable teachers to meet the unique curriculum demands of at-risk children.

4. Are there differences between male and female teachers in their beliefs about teaching at-risk children?

Using a varied sample of teachers with different backgrounds may change the findings of a study of teachers' beliefs as related to literacy instruction for at-risk children.

5. What are the similarities and differences of teachers from various geographic locations regarding teaching at-risk children?

A comparative study examining varied geographic locations of teachers of at-risk children, for example, at-risk children in rural versus urban settings, should be considered.

6. How do teachers' beliefs about teaching at-risk children change over time?

A longitudinal study may provide more insights into how individual teachers' beliefs evolve. Such a study may investigate the various conditions that foster change in teachers' beliefs regarding literacy instruction for at-risk children

7. How can we improve existing teaching methodology for literacy instruction for at-risk children?

As we approach the twenty-first century, researchers are obliged to investigate the spectrum of multiple paradigms regarding literacy instruction for at-risk children. Although the findings from this data suggest that there is no single paradigm for teaching literacy to at-risk children, it is incumbent upon researchers to continuously pursue that which may be considered elusive; namely, what is the best way to teach at-risk children to read and write. If we espouse the belief that "the children are our future," we must work constantly to provide a learning environment that guarantees a hopeful future for all our children.

8. Can the teachers' belief systems model be validated with a larger number and more diverse population of teachers?

By applying both quantitative and qualitative methods, the present model may be validated as well as refined.

A Final Note

At the conclusion of the study I asked the teachers where they would rather be if given a choice. Without exception each teacher answered, "Here, teaching these children." One teacher said it so well, "There is a special bond that forms between teacher and children who really need you. These children need me." They told me that they saw confidence, enthusiasm, and a sense of accomplishment in their students, which made all of the frustration and hard work worthwhile. I saw that same confidence, enthusiasm, and joy when I watched these teachers. The teachers in this study have made, and will continue to make, a difference in the lives of their students and have instilled in their students, "that inborn sense of wonder" that Carson (1990) so aptly described.

APPENDIX I

PROPOSITIONS ABOUT READING INSTRUCTION

Directions: For each of the following 45 items, please indicate your level of agreement (or disagreement) by circling one of the five letters. In all cases, A means strongly agree, B agree, C neutral or undecided, D disagree and E strongly disagree. IMPORTANT: If you cannot decide upon a response to a particular item after 30 seconds, you should circle C for undecided and go on to the next item.

strongly agree	agree	neutral or undecided	disagree	strongly disagree

1. I believe that student success in reading should be determined primarily by noting progress from easier reading materials to harder reading materials.

A
B
C
D
E
2. I believe that teachers should directly teach the basic skills of reading to those students who need them.

A
B
C
D
E
3. I believe that some of the best reading materials are those which help children solve problems of importance to them.

A
B
C
D
E
4. I believe that an important indicator of reading growth is how often a pupil voluntarily uses reading in his daily life.

A
B
C
D
E
5. I believe that contextual clues are one of the most important word recognition aids and should receive more instructional emphasis than sight words or phonics.

A
B
C
D
E
6. I believe that basal textbook materials are an important part of good instructional programs in reading.

A
B
C
D
E

7. I believe that primary grade reading should emphasize decoding skills more than comprehension.
- A B C D E
8. I believe that reading success should be measured primarily by noting how well the student uses his reading ability for other classroom activities.
- A B C D E
9. I believe that the teacher's role is to help children learn to love reading by allowing frequent free reading and by conducting individual book conferences and workshops.
- A B C D E
10. I believe that reading instruction should focus heavily on comprehension, even at the beginning stages of reading.
- A B C D E
11. I believe that an important criteria for grouping students is the level basal textbook each is able to read.
- A B C D E
12. I believe that most all children should be systematically taught to use phonics skills.
- A B C D E
13. I believe that the goal of developing comprehension is best achieved by giving students realistic reading problems which they see as meaningful in their lives.
- A B C D E
14. I believe that reading instruction should emphasize the higher-level comprehension processes typically found in good children's literature.
- A B C D E
15. I believe that a very important measure of reading success is the degree to which students use reading as a communication process.
- A B C D E
16. I believe that considerable instructional time should be devoted to conducting guided reading lessons using selections such as those found in textbooks or excerpts from children's books.
- A B C D E

17. I believe that a carefully structured skills guide should be used when teaching reading to insure that each separate skill is mastered.
- A B C D E
18. I believe that reading groups should be formed as the need for them arises and should be disbanded when the need has been met.
- A B C D E
19. I believe that we should spend less time teaching students how to read and more time in getting him interested in reading.
- A B C D E
20. I believe that reading materials should help children learn to read in a natural manner similar to the way they learned to speak.
- A B C D E
21. Children who have similar skills should be grouped together for instruction.
- A B C D E
22. I believe that reading groups should be based on the students' interests.
- A B C D E
23. I believe that teachers should spend more instructional reading time on helping children use language as a communication process.
- A B C D E
24. I believe that word recognition should emphasize the new vocabulary words associated with each new text.
- A B C D E
25. I believe that a significant part of a teacher's time should be spent in teaching basic reading skills.
- A B C D E
26. I believe that word recognition instruction should not become more important than involving pupils in real-life reading tasks.
- A B C D E
27. I believe that comprehension should be taught by asking questions about the text being read.
- A B C D E

28. I believe that one effective way to determine pupil reading success is to note how many skills he has learned.
- A B C D E
29. I believe that a significant amount of the instructional time in reading should be spent on purposeful, real-life projects and activities which call for the use of reading.
- A B C D E
30. I believe that word recognition instruction is not as important in reading as providing children with stimulating, interesting materials to read.
- A B C D E
31. I believe that if grouping is used, student assignment to groups should reflect more emphasis on meaning cues in reading.
- A B C D E
32. I believe that the teacher's role in reading is to assign pupils to appropriate materials and direct them as they complete the material.
- A B C D E
33. I believe that fewer children would have difficulty learning to read if we stopped teaching reading during self-contained reading periods, and, instead, taught it as a part of all subjects.
- A B C D E
34. I believe that children should be allowed to choose the stories and books they want to read during the regular reading period.
- A B C D E
35. I believe that the teacher's role is to emphasize the communication aspects of reading more than the skills.
- A B C D E
36. I believe that a basal text should be used to teach reading.
- A B C D E
37. I believe that reading is a difficult process which must usually be taught in a step-by-step sequence if we are to develop good readers.
- A B C D E

38. I believe that the teacher's role is to involve students in realistic reading tasks which illustrate the functional utility of reading.

A B C D E

39. I believe that reading is not difficult for most children to learn if they are provided with stimulating and lively materials to read.

A B C D E

40. I believe that reading instruction should focus more on the use of meaning cues and less on skill instruction.

A B C D E

41. I believe that I should spend equal amounts of time with the low, middle, and high reading groups.

A B C D E

42. I believe that reading is composed of a series of hierarchical skills which must be taught sequentially and then used in combination if one is to read successfully.

A B C D E

43. I believe that reading instruction should be taught so that students can use reading successfully in all curricular areas.

A B C D E

44. I believe that reading would not be such a problem today if we made greater efforts to interest children in the reading of good children's literature.

A B C D E

45. I believe that too much emphasis is being placed on skills (especially decoding skills) in reading programs today.

A B C D E

APPENDIX II

MEYERSON REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Instructions:

1. In the center of your paper begin a web with the focus question being: "Why I teach literacy the way I do"
2. Support your web by identify the factors which you feel influence your teaching.
Ex. influencing factors for the way you teach literacy may be your educational background, family influence, school district requirements, peers, etc.
3. After completing your web, begin writing narrative which explains the factors you have identified. Write details which explain the "why" part of your statement.
Ex. My educational background has influenced the way I teach literacy in the following way.

NOTE:

You may begin your writing and continue over several days. I hope you will give a lot of thought to this activity. Remember, your beliefs and how they influence your practice is the focus for this study. Please feel free to state anything and everything that has been an influence on your beliefs and ultimate your teaching.


APPENDIX III



ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS
4505 MARYLAND PARKWAY • LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89154-1002 • (702) 597-4240 • FAX (702) 597-4242

TO: Sylvia Maxson, ICS

FROM: Dr. William E. Schulze, Director, Research Administration 

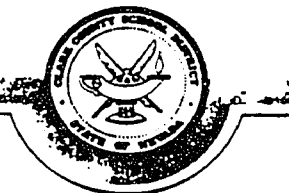
DATE: 8/20/92

RE: Exempt status of human subject protocol entitled:
A Study of the Impact of Teachers' Beliefs on the Creation of a Literate
Learning Environment for At-Risk First Grade Students: A Multiple Case
Study.

This memorandum is official notification that the protocol for the project referenced above has been reviewed by the Office of Research Administration and meets the criteria for exemption as set forth by the Department of Health and Human Services.

If you have any questions or require any assistance, please give us a call.

APPENDIX IV

AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER**CLARK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**2832 EAST FLAMINGO ROAD LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89121 TELEPHONE (702) 799-5011
FAX 799-5063

October 13, 1992

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Dr. Lois Thirumian, President
 Mr. Howard Hollingsworth, Vice President
 Mrs. Judy Witz, Clerk
 Mrs. Yvonne Atkinson Gass, Member
 Dr. Dan Newburn, Member
 Mr. Mark Schofield, Member
 Mr. Martin J. Kravitz, Esq., Member
 Dr. Brian Cross, Superintendent
 FAX (702) 799-5505

Sylvia Maxson
 Department of Instruction and Curricular Studies
 University of Nevada, Las Vegas
 4505 S. Maryland Parkway
 Las Vegas, NV 89154

Dear Sylvia:

The CCSD's Committee to Review Cooperative Research Requests has reviewed and approved your request to conduct a study to "describe teachers' beliefs about the creation of a literate learning environment for at-risk first-grade children." As you and I have already discussed, the schools that might be interested in participating in this project are:

Lewis E. Rowe
 Paradise
 Gene Ward
 Robert E. Lake
 Crestwood
 Ruby Thomas

If you are unable to obtain sufficient volunteers from these schools, please contact me, and I will identify additional schools.

Thank you for involving us in your research. We are pleased to participate in such an interesting and worthwhile undertaking.

Sincerely,

Judith S. Costa, Chairman
 Committee to Review Cooperative Research Requests

JC/mpi

cc: Committee to Review Cooperative Research Requests

APPENDIX V

AGREEMENT STATEMENT

1. Are you willing to participate in a study that is anticipated to last from six months to one academic year in length?
2. Would you be willing to participate in an ongoing Reflective Activity in which you will be asked to describe your beliefs about teaching literacy?
3. Are you willing to submit copies of your lesson plans and student assessment forms on a regular basis for observation by the researcher?
4. Are you willing to allow the researcher to observe in your classroom on a regular and prolonged basis?

APPENDIX VI

INITIAL SCREENING INTERVIEW

1. Briefly explain your beliefs about teaching at-risk children
2. Briefly explain your beliefs about teaching at-risk children to read and write.
3. Does your method of teaching literacy have a name? What do you call the method you use to teach reading and writing?
4. Briefly explain how you have created your classroom environment.
5. What is unique or different about your classroom?
6. Does your personal belief system influence the way you teach at-risk children to read and write? Please explain.

APPENDIX VII



WHITWORTH COLLEGE

February 8, 1993

Ms. Sylvia Maxson
2850 Mojave Road
Las Vegas, Nevada 89121

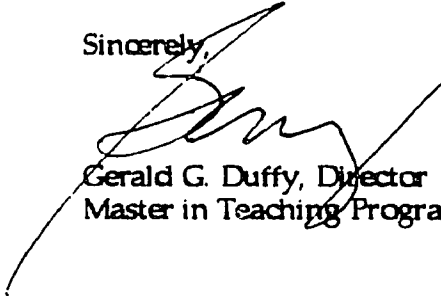
Dear Sylvia:

Certainly, you have my permission to change the wording of questions on the PRI in any way you deem appropriate. Technically, you don't even need to ask me, since it is not copyrighted. But I appreciate it.

I'm glad to hear that your study is progressing well. I will be interested to see how your findings move us ahead in our understanding.

Keep in touch. Also, tell your husband that there's lots of folks out there cheering for him in what seems to be the never-ending saga of the Shark.

Sincerely,



Gerald G. Duffy, Director
Master in Teaching Program

APPENDIX VIII
CASE STUDY CONSENT FORM

Investigator: Sylvia Maxson, Graduate Student, Department of ICS, UNLV

Purpose of project: (1) To satisfy the requirements for the doctoral dissertation, College of Education, Department of Instructional and Curricular Studies, UNLV. (2) Through case study research, to learn about the specific teaching beliefs, strategies, techniques and methods employed by teachers identified for this study as they work with children of various learning capabilities in her classroom.

I, _____, understand that:

1. The information obtained during this research project will be used to write a dissertation using multiple case study methodology which may be read by the respondents, the ICS faculty who serve on the doctoral committee(Drs. Robert Boord, Maria Meyerson, Marilyn Ohlhausen, Jeffery Gelfer and Thomas Sexton), and the general public upon completion of the research.

2. Real names will not be used during data collection or in the written case study.

3. Complete access to data will be made available to the respondents, to ICS faculty doctoral committee members who will check the data on occasion and upon completion of the research and to the general public through dissemination such as publications and presentations.

4. I am entitled to review the case study before the final draft is written and negotiate changes with the investigator (Sylvia Maxson).

5. I will receive a copy of the final case study upon its completion.

6. I may withdraw from this study at any time by speaking to the investigator(Sylvia Maxson) and all data collected from me will be returned immediately.

7. I am willing for the investigator (Sylvia Maxson) to gather information for this study from various sources in addition to my own conversations.

Respondent: _____ **Date:** _____

I (do/do not) grant permission to be quoted directly in the case study report.

Respondent: _____ **Date:** _____

I agree to conduct and report this case study according to the preceding terms:

Investigator: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX IX

FIRST SET OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. I would like to get to know you as a person first and as a teacher second. Today we'll begin by you telling me about your family. Tell me about your parents your brothers and sisters if you have any, and what it was like growing up in your family.
2. Next explain about your early schooling and what you remember about school as a young child.
3. Tell me about any favorite teacher you had and what made that teacher special.
4. Did your family or your teachers have any influence on your becoming a teacher?
5. Do you think your family had any influence on the way you teach?
6. Describe your formal educational background. I would like to know about anything influential about your high school years and your college years.
7. Is there anything that was a major influence on the way you teach today.
8. At any time during your university experience did you learn anything unique or special about teaching children that are considered at-risk?

APPENDIX X

SECOND SET OF TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you consider the majority of students in your classroom to be at-risk of failure? Explain?
2. What factors do you believe determine that a student be considered at-risk?
3. What are the indicators used by the district in identifying at-risk students?
4. What are your beliefs about teaching at-risk students?
5. How have your beliefs influenced the way you have created the learning environment for your at-risk students?
6. Is the physical arrangement of your classroom unique or different because of the at-risk students you teach as compared to a classroom arranged for the non at-risk student ? Explain.
7. What are your beliefs about the specific educational paradigms that you operate within? Specifically, what is your theoretical orientation to reading instruction?
8. How did you come to these beliefs?
9. How do your beliefs support the strategies you use to foster learning with at-risk students in your classroom?
10. How do your beliefs influence literacy development for the at-risk students in your classroom?

APPENDIX XI

TEACHERS' WRITTEN BELIEF STATEMENT

1. Write a statement about your beliefs related to reaching at-risk children.
2. Have your beliefs changed since you began teaching at-risk children?
3. If your beliefs have changed, how have they changed?
4. What is it about teaching at-risk children that makes your job hard? easy? frustrating? satisfying?
5. Do you have a philosophical belief about how reading and writing should be taught?
6. Where did your belief about teaching young children to read and write originate?
7. Is the belief that you have now the same belief you have always had in regard to the way you teach reading and writing?
8. Would you say that your beliefs are reflected in your practice?
9. Are you using different techniques to teach reading and writing because your students are at-risk: Explain.
10. Is the way you teach strictly a result of your belief system or is it based on theory?
11. Are you continuing to learn as a teacher? How? Explain.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allington, R.L., Gasken, R.W., Brockou, K., Jachym, N., & King, S. (1990). Improving school literacy programs for at-risk learners through instructional coordination. Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 1, 123-156.
- Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1975). Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Babchuk, N (1961). The role of the researcher as participant observer and participant-as-observer in the field situation. Human Organization, 21, 73-75.
- Banach, P. (1984). The impact of teachers' instructional beliefs on their teaching: Implications for research and practice. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA.
- Barr, R. & Duffy, G. (1978, March). Teacher conceptions of reading: The evolution of a research study. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto.
- Belli, G. & Reiser, A. (1977). Teachers' concerns and conceptions of reading and the teaching of reading: A literature review. (Occ. Paper No. 1) East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, Institute for Research on Teaching.
- Bloom, B.S. (1954). The thought processes of students in discussion. In S.J. French (Ed.), Accent on teaching: Experiments in general education. New York: Harper Brothers.
- Brophy, J. (1982). Classroom organization and management. East Lansing, MI: Institute for Research on Teaching.

- _____(1986). Research linking teacher behavior to student achievement: Potential implications for Chapter I students. In B.I. Williams, P.A. Rickman, & B.J. Mason (Eds.), Designs for compensatory education: Conference proceedings and papers. Washington, DC: Research and Evaluation Associates.
- Bussis, A., Chittemdem, E & Amarel, M. (1976). Beyond Surface Curriculum. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Carson, R. (1990). Child: Quotations about the delight, wonder, and mystery of being a child. Handley, H. and Samelson, A. (Eds.), Ossining, NY: Penguin Books.
- Clandinin, D.J. (1985). Personal practical knowledge: A study of teachers' classroom images*. Curriculum Inquiry, 15(4), 361-385.
- _____(1986). Classroom practice: Teacher images in action. Barcombe Lewis: Falmer Press.
- Clark, E.H. (1980). An analysis of occupational stress factors as perceived by public school teachers. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Auburn University, Auburn, AL.
- Clark, C.M. & Peterson, P.L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In Wittrock, M.C. (Ed.), Handbook of Research on Teaching, (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Cooper, D.H. & Speech, D.L. (1990). Maintaining at-risk children in regular education settings: Initial effects of individual differences and classroom environments. Exceptional Children, 57 (2), 117-125.
- Cowley, J. (1990). Meanies. San Diego, CA: Thomas C. Wright Inc./The Wright Group. Shortland Publications Limited.
- Denzin, N.K.(1978). The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Dillon, D.R. (1989). Showing them that I want them to learn and that I care about who they are: A microethnography of the social organization of a secondary low-track English-reading

classroom. American Educational Research Journal, 26(2), 227-259.

Doyle, W. & Ponder, G.A. (1975). Classroom ecology: Some concerns about a neglected dimension of research on teaching. Contemporary Education. XLVI(3), 183-188.

Duffy, G. (1983). Context variables in reading teacher effectiveness. In J. Nilles & L. Harris (Eds.) Searches for meaning in reading/language processing and instruction. Thirty-second Yearbook of the National Reading Conference (pp. 289-294). Rochester, NY: National Reading Conference.

Duffy, G.G. & Anderson, L (1982). Response to Borko, Shavelson, & Stern: There's more to instructional decision making in reading than the "empty classroom." Reading Research Quarterly, 17, 295-300.

_____(1984). Editorial comment: Guest commentary teachers' theoretical orientations and the real classroom. Reading Psychology: An International Quarterly, 5, 97-105.

Duffy, G.G. & Ball, D.L. (1986, December). The relationship between preservice teachers' conception of reading instruction and the content of methods instruction. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Reading Conference, Austin, TX.

Duffy, G.G. & Metheny, W. (1979). Measuring teachers' beliefs about reading. (Research Series No. 41). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, Institute for Research on Teaching.

Eisenhart, M., Shrum, J., Harding J., & Cuthbert, A. (1987). Teacher beliefs: Definitions, findings, and directions. Educational Policy.

Elbaz, F. (1981). A teacher's "practical knowledge": Report of a case study. Curriculum Inquiry, 11, 43-71.

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In Handbook of research on teaching, edited by M.C. Wittrock, 119-161. New York: Macmillan.

- Fenstermacher, G. (1978). A philosophical consideration of recent research on teacher effectiveness. In L.S. Shulman (Ed.), Review of research in education. Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock.
- _____. (1986). A philosophy of research on teaching: Three aspects. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching. (3rd ed.) (pp. 37-49). New York: Macmillan.
- Frymier, J. (1992). Growing up is risky business, and schools are not to blame. Final Report Phi Delta Kappa Study of Students At Risk, Phi Delta Kappa: Bloomington, IN.
- Gambrell, L.B. (Eds.) (1990). Learners at risk [Special issue]. Journal of Reading, 33 (7).
- Garcia, G.E., & Pearson, P.D. (1992). Modifying reading instruction to maximize its effectiveness for all students. In M.S. Knapp & P.M. Shields (Eds.), Better schooling for the children of poverty: Alternatives to conventional wisdom.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Co.
- Goodlad, J. (1984). A place called school. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Goodman, K.S. (1985). Unity in reading. In H. Singer & R. Ruddell (Eds.), Theoretical models and processes of reading. (3rd ed., pp. 813-840). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Goodman, Y., Watson, D. (1977). A reading program to live with: focus on comprehension. Language Arts, 54, 868-879.
- Gove, M. (1981). The influence of teachers' conceptual frameworks of reading on their instructional decision making. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, Kent, OH.
- _____. (1983). Clarifying teachers' beliefs about reading. The Reading Teacher, 37(3) 261-268.
- Green, T. (1971). The activities of teaching. New York: McGraw Hill.

- Greer, J.V. (1991, March). At-risk students in the fast lanes: let them through. Exceptional Children, 390-391.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 29, 75-92.
- Harrison, A.F. & Bramson, R.M. (1977). INQ Administration and Interpretation Manual. Berkley, CA: Bramson, Parlette, Harrison and Associates.
- Harste, J.C. & Burke, C.L. (1977). A new hypothesis for reading teacher research: Both the teaching and learning to read are theoretically based. In P.D. Person (Ed.), Reading: Research, Theory, and Practice, Twenty-Sixth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference, Clemson, SC: Madison Publishing Co., (pp. 32-40).
- _____(1980). Examining instructional assumptions: the child as informant. Theory Into Practice, XIX(3), 170-178.
- _____(1985). Viewing Guide, The authoring cycle: Read better, write better, reason better. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hodgkinson, H.L. (1983, April). Notes from National At-Risk Conference. Elementary and Secondary Education Divisions.
- _____(1988). The right schools for the right kids. Educational Leadership, 45, 10-14.
- Jorgensen, D. (1989). Participant observation: A methodology for human studies. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kagan, D.K. & Smith, K.E. (1988). Beliefs and behaviors of kindergarten teachers. Educational Research, 30(1), 26-35.
- Kelly, G.A. (1955). The psychology of personal constructs (2 vols.). New York: W.W. Norton.
- Kerlinger, N.F. (1967). The first-and-second order factor structure of attitude toward education. American Educational Journal, 4, 191-205.

- Kinzer, C. & Carrick, D. (1986). Teacher beliefs as instructional influences. Thirty-fifth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference.
- Knowles, J.G. (1988, April). Models for understanding preservice and beginning teachers' biographies: Illustrations from case studies. A paper presented at the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Koehler, V.R. (1988, April). Teachers' beliefs about at-risk students. Research paper presented to the annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New Orleans, LA.
- Lampert, M. (1985). How do teachers manage to teach? Perspectives on problems in practice. Harvard Educational Review, 55, 178-184.
- Langer, J.A., & Applebee, A.N. (1987). A study of teaching and learning. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Levin, H.M. (1988a). Accelerating elementary education for disadvantaged students. In Council of Chief State School Office. (Eds). School success for students at risk. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 209-225.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? Educational Researcher, 19, 13-17.
- Meyers, I.B. and McCaulley, M.H. (1985). Manual: A guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Meyerson, M.J. (1993). Exploring reading instructional decisions through a reflective activity: A first step in the change process. Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 4(2), 153-168.
- Mills, H. & Clyde, J.A. (1991, January). Children's success as readers and writers: It's the teacher's beliefs that make the difference. Young Children, 54-59.

- Montgomery, J.L. (1990). Factors that influence the career aspirations of mathematically precocious females. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University, Ames).
- Morrow, L.M. (1989). Literacy development in the early years. Helping children read and write. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- _____(1993). Literacy development in the early years. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Munby, H. (1981). The place of teachers' beliefs in research on teacher thinking and decision making, and an alternative methodology. Instructional Science, 11, 201-225.
- _____(1983). A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 21(1), 27-38.
- National Center for Educational Statistics (1991). Publication # NCES91-697; NCES91-490. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Nespor, J.K. (1987). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 19(4), 317-328.
- _____(1985). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching: Final report of the Teacher Belief Study. R&D Center for Teacher Education (R&D Report #8024), the University of Texas Austin, TX.
- Padilla, R. V. (1991). Qualitative analysis with HyperQual Version. Chandler, AZ: Author.
- Payne, B.D. & Payne D.A. (1991). The ability of teachers to identify academically at-risk elementary students. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 5(2), 116-148.
- Piaget, J.P. (1969). The psychology of intelligence. Patterson, NJ: Littlefield, Adams.

- Porter, A. & Brophy, J. (1988). Good teaching: Insights from the work of the Institute for Research on Teaching. Educational Leadership, 45(8),74-85.
- Price, H.H. (1969). Beliefs. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Reed & Sautter (1990, June). Children of poverty: The status of 12 million Americans. Phi Delta Kappan. K-1-K-12.
- Roser, N.L., Hoffman, J.V., & Farest, C. (1990). Language, literature, and at-risk children. The Reading Teacher, 43(8) 554-559.
- Sanjek, R. (1990). A vocabulary for fieldnotes. In Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology, Ed. R. Sanjek, 92-121. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Schwab, J.J. (1970). The practical: A language for curriculum. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association Center for the Study of Instruction.
- Seefeldt, C. (1988). Teacher certification and program accreditation in early childhood education. The Elementary School Journal, 29(2), 241-251.
- Shavelson, R.J. & Stern, P. (1981). Research on teachers' pedagogical thoughts, judgments, decisions, and behavior. Review of Educational Research, 51, 455-498.
- Shepard, A.L. & Smith, P. (1985). Escalating academic demand in kindergarten: Counterproductive policies. The Elementary School Journal, 89(2), 135-145.
- Slavin, R. & Madden, N. (1989). What works for students at risk: A research synthesis. Educational Leadership, 46(5), 53-57.
- Smith, M.L. & Shepard, L.A. (1988, Fall). Kindergarten readiness and retention: A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs and practice. American Educational Research Journal, 25(3), 307-333.
- Spodek, B. (1987). Thought processes underlying presechool teachers' classroom decisions. Early Child Development and Care, 29, 197-208.

- _____. (1988). Implicit theories of early childhood teachers: Foundations for professional behavior. In B. Spodek, N. Saracho & D. Peters (Eds.), Professionalism and the early childhood educators. New York: Teachers College Press, 166-171.
- Stephens, D. & Clyde, J.A. (1985). Curriculum as theory driven: Insights from six classrooms. In J.C. Harste & D. Stephens (Eds.), Toward practical theory: A state of practice assessment of reading comprehension instruction. (Final report #USDE-C-300-83-0130). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, Language Education Department.
- Stern, P. & Shavelson, R. (1983). Reading teachers' judgment, plans, and decision making. The Reading Teacher, 37, 280-286.
- Strauss, A.L. (1987). Qualitative Analysis for the Social Sciences. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1991). Basics of Qualitative Research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strickland, D. & Morrow, L.M. (1989). Young children's early writing development. The Reading Teacher, 42(6), 426-427.
- Teale, W., & Sulzby, E. (1986). Emergent literacy: Writing and reading. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Tesch, R. (1990). Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools. New York: Falmer Press.
- Vacca, R.T. & Padak, N.D. (1990). Who's at risk in reading? Journal of Reading, 33(7), 486-488.
- Verma, S. & Peters, D.L. (1975). Day care teachers' practice and beliefs. Alberta Journal of Educational Research. 21, 46-55.
- Wang-Fillmore, L., & Valadez, C. (1985). Teaching bilingual learners. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Watson, D.J., Burke, C.L., & Harste, J.C. (1989). Whole language: Inquiring Voices, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Webster,P.R. (1972). The teacher structure checklist: A possible tool for communication. Young Children, 27, 149-153.

Wing, L.A. (1989). The influence of preschool teachers' beliefs on young children's conceptions of reading and writing. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4, 61-74.

Yin, R. K. (1984). Case study research. Design and methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

_____(1989). Case study research. Design and methods. (2nd ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.