

Spring 5-11-2015

A Self-Study Exploring My Literacy Beliefs

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A Self-Study Exploring My Literacy Beliefs

by

Brittany Kline

May 2015

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of
The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Abstract

The purpose of this self-study was to explore my literacy beliefs first as a substitute teacher and then as a teacher's assistant. Over the span of six-weeks, I was able to scratch the surface of understanding my beliefs however, six weeks was not a sufficient amount of time when exploring an in-depth concept. With the triangulation of data to gather the information for my study, I used a journal, classroom observations, and artifacts. The results of data yielded three themes; my literacy beliefs being supported, my literacy beliefs being challenged, and resources affecting my beliefs. The conclusion for my study is that with each classroom experience as either a substitute teacher or a teacher's assistant, my beliefs came out with each literacy instructional decision that was made.

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Chapter One: Introduction

As I accepted a substitute teaching job using the phone system for a kindergarten class in a school I have never subbed in before, I was filled with excitement. The excitement that I was experiencing was linked to becoming familiar with a new school setting and being able to see what the literacy foundations of a kindergarten class at this school looked like. The night before I researched directions on how to get to the school and spent some time thinking over everything I have learned about emergent literacy. After successfully arriving early to the new school and connecting with the main office staff, I headed down to the kindergarten wing to begin my day.

As I walked into this unfamiliar classroom and looked around the room I noticed some unique aspects to this classroom. The room is set up in a way to foster emergent literacy. The students have tables where there are about five students to the five sets of tables that allow for students to collaborate with one another. There are computers along the back wall that are logged on and open to an educational web-site. There is a carpet in the front of the room along with an interactive whiteboard. Lastly, on the other side of the room there is the teacher's desk along with a guided reading bean table with materials behind the table to supplement the work that will take place there. I made my way over to the teacher's desk to read the plans for the day. After reading the plans, I was taken aback and I immediately started to compare what the assigned teacher was having me complete for the day to my own literacy beliefs which I reflected on the previous night. Where were the read alouds? How come the instruction was not learner-centered? How are the needs of all the students in this class being addressed, as I saw no differentiated instruction indicated? With all of these thoughts fluttering through my mind regarding the planned instruction for the day as outlined, I knew that I had to follow the plans the teacher had given for

the students' instruction for that day, but if I found any time during the day to implement my literacy beliefs I was going to attempt to.

The bell rang and the kindergarten students began to enter the room. I said "hello" to each one of them, and introduced myself as their teacher for that day. As they filed in they knew to go right to their seat and begin their morning work on a worksheet that was left on their assigned sitting area by their teacher. Following this, we began to dive into the day, and I was exposed to more of what the literacy experience is like in the classroom with the help from the students. We went over letter-sounds as we worked our way through the alphabet chart, and the students completed writing (drawing) that connected to a story that they heard previously. Whenever we finished an assignment early, I called the students to the rug and read them a book aloud. By the end of the day, I had one student turn to another student and said, "She's reading us another book." and I read three books aloud total that day. Much of the day was spent reading from scripted material, assisting students with worksheets, and monitoring behavior based on lack of engagement with the instructional material.

After I finished writing a note for the classroom teacher and neatened the classroom, I drove home reflecting on the day that I spent in this new environment and experience. The classroom that I was in had the potential to be a supportive emergent literacy environment. However, there were aspects of the instruction that did not support my literacy beliefs. Being a substitute teacher, it is important to know and reflect on your own literacy beliefs because they will either be challenged or supported depending on the classroom that you enter each and every day.

Statement of the Problem

From the two years of substitute teaching experience under my belt in the professional world of education, I have come to a crossroads with my literacy beliefs and the literacy instruction left by the assigned teachers. There are some classrooms that I used to substitute in that aligned with my beliefs, and others that fall short with regard to the literacy instruction that I would be implementing if it was my own classroom. Literacy is the foundation for every child's education, and it is the responsibility of educators to know where they stand in their literacy beliefs because of the important impact they will have on the literacy instruction of the students they teach. According to Squires and Bliss (2004), "Decades of research on the connection between teachers' theoretical beliefs and their practices yield a common theme: All teachers bring to the classroom some level of beliefs that influence their critical daily decision making" (p. 756). In order to make these crucial decisions for our students, teachers need to properly reflect on their own literacy beliefs in order to maximize on the learning potential of students through our delivery of effective literacy instruction. The method of self-reflection has been used by teacher-researchers in order to understand and develop beliefs in connection to instruction. In 2013, Meidl noted that "Participants' reflections regarding teaching and learning and their student population, highlighted connections to personal experiences as a salient influence on pedagogical approaches and instruction" (p. 5). By using self-reflection in a self-study, it allows multiple windows into thinking and exploring thoughts on educators teaching and instructional methods. As Beeman-Cadwallader, Buck, and Trauth-Nare (2014) explain, "In summary, self-study provided a mode for challenging our assumptions, values, and beliefs, and their intersection in teacher education as a way to enhance practice" (p. 71). Literacy instruction in the

classroom will only enhance for teachers as they learn more about their own beliefs and values in connection to literacy and teaching.

From the research that this study has expanded upon, there is a general consensus that more research needs to be completed on this topic. Researcher Meidl (2013) indicates the following regarding literacy instruction and teacher pedagogy,

"As such, more evidence regarding teachers' implementation of the basic instructional routines, their views of the relative importance of the different skills (constrained/unconstrained; skill-based/meaning-based) and how their implementation of the balanced literacy framework varies based on their teaching or training experience, grade level taught or their literacy beliefs, is clearly warranted" (p. 17).

In addition, a study completed on Head Start teachers' literacy beliefs also commented that this topic needs to develop with the future research. As stated by Hindman and Wasik (2008), "All of these resources might receive greater focus in future research, as the field continues to map out the origins of teachers' beliefs and their connections to practice" (p. 487). By examining my own literacy beliefs through conducting a self-reflection study, my own thinking will be further informed regarding the way I plan and facilitate literacy instruction, students' response and engagement to the literacy instruction they receive and how to effectively impact their literacy learning. This may result in teachers and educators considering applying the method of self-reflection to their own beliefs and instruction methods in order to inform and adjust their thinking, continue to develop and grow in their knowledge and understanding of what it means to provide effective literacy instruction and consider areas in which they can improve in providing literacy instruction.

Significance of the Problem

The great literacy debate that has taken place for many years now, also known as the 'reading wars', has helped guide literacy instruction to what it is today. Educators are responsible for the building blocks of the essential literacy components to maximize on the literacy learning potential of a student and increase their chances of literacy successful throughout their school career and beyond. As stated by Tompkins (2014), "Literacy is the ability to use reading and writing for a variety of tasks at school and outside of school" (p. 17). In order to provide students with the proper literacy instruction, teachers and educators need to know their literacy beliefs. These beliefs will be used in the classroom multiple times throughout the day, and connect to important literacy decisions that will need to be made for every student. Teachers' literacy beliefs and practices are shaped by classroom realities, regulations from the state and district, and teaching methods (Powers, Zippay, & Butler, 2006, p. 122). Literacy beliefs are unique to each teacher and educator. According to Flint, Maloch, and Leland (2010) regarding teacher beliefs, "Teachers' beliefs are complex because they are individually constructed" (p.3). Beliefs are formulated by backgrounds and experiences that educators went through. Flint et al. (2010) describe, "Literacy practices involve one's values, attitudes, knowledges, and networks of relationships" (p.14). Teachers and educators use these beliefs to inform their decision making, especially their literacy beliefs as they help successfully prepare students for the rest of their lives.

Being a former substitute teacher in three different school districts in my surrounding area has allowed me to not only reflect on the literacy comparisons between schools, but the literacy comparisons to my own beliefs. As a former substitute teacher, I was put into this predicament every time I entered a classroom. This caused a strain on my beliefs and how I

should teach the material that was left for me. Similar to the teaching day that I explained above, I was implementing my literacy beliefs about read alouds into the classroom during down time because I believe that read alouds should be taking place in classrooms multiple times in one day. According to Tompkins, "There are many benefits of reading aloud: introducing vocabulary, modeling comprehension strategies, and increasing students' motivation..." (p. 44). Similarly, how our teachers developed our beliefs we as teacher and educators are doing the same thing for our students' beliefs.

Purpose

The main purpose of this self-study was to examine my own literacy beliefs and the implementation of my beliefs into different classrooms with regard to literacy instruction. The goal is to use this information to more effectively provide literacy instruction to my future classroom. This study is designed to understand how literacy beliefs are formed and how these beliefs are reflected through facilitation of literacy instruction. Furthermore, I hope that the work that has been completed through this research connects to not only other substitute teachers, but all teachers who are still exploring their own literacy beliefs. Thus, my research questions are as follows:

- How are my literacy beliefs influenced by the literacy material classroom teachers leave for substitute teachers?
- How do literacy interactions with students reflect on my teaching beliefs?

Study Approach

The design of this study is a self-study to examine closely my literacy beliefs in the classrooms where substitute plans have been left for substitute teachers. This study took place over a six-week span where my position as a teacher's assistant in an elementary school in one school district to study daily plans left for substitute teachers. In addition, I will collect the data

necessary to complete this study by using a journal, classroom observations, and artifacts. The journal will be used to reflect on the literacy instruction left by the teacher whom I am substituting for, and its connection back to my beliefs. The classroom observations will be recorded in a separate section of the journal in order to record interactions, classroom/school environments, and expand on the literacy instruction. The artifacts that I will gather will vary from classroom to classroom. These artifacts can include literacy programs/elements, technology, and any other important documents that link to the instruction that I used.

Rationale for the Study

As a former substitute teacher, I am studying the plans of each classroom with the beliefs and values that I believe in. The assigned classroom teachers will not always hold the same beliefs as I do, which in turn will result in my facilitating instruction as outlined by the teacher which does not always align with my beliefs regarding what I may consider to be the essential elements of effective literacy instruction and how it should be facilitated. As I reflect on classrooms that align with my literacy beliefs and classrooms that do not, the results that will follow from my self-reflection will give other educational professionals and me insight into an important topic. With the success and completion of my study, I hope to gain insight into my beliefs of literacy, and what effective literacy instruction in the classroom should look like and consist of in order to have the students in the classrooms that I teach in succeed through my self-reflection.

Summary

As I study substitute teaching plans, my literacy beliefs will be sometimes matched and at other times tested. The real understandings and growth will come from the self-reflection that will take place along the six-week period with the analysis of my data. With the guidance of past

research on literacy beliefs, they have laid the groundwork for my study and have helped explore the importance of understanding teachers' literacy beliefs and their impact on literacy instruction.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The recent pressure for teachers to provide effective instruction has been linked to proper literacy instruction as a key component for children succeeding in the classroom. Before teacher and educators can provide effective literacy instruction, it is important that teachers and educators know their beliefs and values of literacy because beliefs and instruction are intertwined. The research that this study has examined on literacy beliefs has provided my theory. The first part of this chapter will expand on the formation of beliefs and where they come from. Then, the chapter will delve into the past research that has been completed on teachers' literacy beliefs. This section will be divided up into the different methods of studies completed. The last aspect of this chapter will discuss my own literacy beliefs with the research that supports these beliefs.

Formation of Beliefs

Belief is defined by Hindman and Wasik (2008) as, "The broad term "belief" describes the "knowledge or ideas accepted by an individual as true or as probable" (p. 480). Beliefs and values begin to formulate in children from an early age. These beliefs are adapted and molded as children grow into adults and go through different life experiences. In the case of a pre-service teacher, another factor that has influence on beliefs is the instruction provided within the teacher preparation program at the university which the student is attending and pursuing their teacher certification. In addition to this, there are the resources, textbooks, and other materials that pre-service teachers engage with that continue to shape their beliefs as a teacher and educator. Below, all of these important pieces are expanded on in order to better understand how beliefs and values are formed for educators.

Background

As little children, our beliefs begin to form along with the formation of language. The implementation of communication allows for expression of ideas and reflecting on the views of others around us. How children are raised and the environment that they are raised in has an effect on their beliefs. Children can follow the beliefs of their surroundings and have similar values or the opposite could take place with different viewpoints and values than those they associate with. Flint et al. (2010) state, "Individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about learning draw on a combination of psychological, philosophical, sociological, political, and scientific principles" (p. 3). Future teachers' and educators' beliefs also begin to form while they are in school and are learning from their teachers. For example, I knew I wanted to be a teacher from an early age, and knowing this, I studied the teachers that I had throughout my schooling. By the time I got to high school, I knew how I learned best and the beliefs that I carried with me about my own learning were challenged by my teachers. As a visual learner and a student who received extra support ever since elementary school, I dealt with challenging instruction. However, this was also, at the same time, a learning experience because it shaped my beliefs as a teacher and educator. According to Flint et al. (2010), "Beliefs are constructed based on theories of how the world works, as well as teachers' social and cultural backgrounds—combined, these act to mold teachers' thoughts about teaching and learning" (p. 3). The last part of background connects to cultural and social aspects that shape beliefs. The students that will enter into our classrooms come from all different types of cultures and walks of life. These cultures might not be the same culture that we grew up in that shaped our beliefs. Our jobs as teachers and

educators is to be open to the diversity, and be able to look at other's perspectives in order to be able understand and effectively address the needs of all students.

Teacher Preparation Programs

The second formation of beliefs for teachers and educators is the instruction of the teacher preparation program that each teacher and educator received from their university. These programs are designed to prepare pre-service teachers with the most up-to-date and effective tools, instructional strategies and knowledge. The information that is learned within these programs stays with teachers as they enter into their professional role. Flint et al. (2010) state, "In year one, she commented that what she learned in her teacher preparation program had been "applicable" and that she was "able to use a lot of it ... There's not one thing I can say that wasn't included" (p. 16). As pre-service teachers begin these programs, they are walking in with beliefs that have already formed. Through these programs, their beliefs will strengthen when the material lines up with their beliefs. When they are introduced with information that does not align with their beliefs, they will need to decide whether the information presented provides a strong enough case to change the beliefs they already have or if they will continue to not believe in it. Teachers will carry their literacy beliefs along with everything they learned from their teacher preparation programs into their teaching. According to Flint et al. (2010), "As teacher educators we believe it is critical to continue investigating the transition teachers make between their preparation programs and their first few years of teaching" (p. 20). These past studies shine light on to the importance of the beliefs that are carried from the programs into the professional world of education.

Experience

Applying both, background and teacher preparation program, to this section on experience also connects to teachers' and educators' beliefs. An teacher's and educator's beliefs will begin with the background he/she experienced, following a teacher preparation program and then transferring those into classroom experience. Some examples of this experience would be a per diem substitute, long-term substitute, teaching assistant, or full-time position in a classroom. According to Flint et al., (2010), "Teachers' beliefs are influenced by the understandings and experiences educators bring to the classroom" (p.3). As different experiences take place, teachers will react to the situations they are put in according to the beliefs that they have. One literacy belief that I have is that students should be read aloud to daily. Like in the example above, one day while substitute teaching in a kindergarten classroom my beliefs were influenced when I saw in the plans that there was no read aloud planned for the day. Read alouds allow students to hear how books are read and build proper literacy skills through these experiences. Flint et al., 2010 state, "Teacher beliefs are critical to promoting meaningful educational experiences because their beliefs about teaching and learning guide their practice" (p.3). Day in and day out, teachers and educators are influenced by the classroom experiences, which in turn influences our beliefs and then influences our instruction. According to Flint et al., 2010, "...stresses that teachers' daily interactions with children are guided by personal philosophies and/or an internal belief system" (p.3). The more experiences that teacher educators go through, the stronger their beliefs are going to become.

Resources

Similarly, like the above three sections, the resources that teachers and educators interact with help formulate their beliefs. From college textbooks to district provided reading programs,

all of these materials have had an impact on our beliefs. In college reading, Gail Tompkins Literacy for the 21st century: A Balanced Approach, was one textbook I read for one of my college literacy courses that aligned with my beliefs concerning the balanced literacy approach. However, there are other materials that do not support the literacy beliefs of teachers. Some of these materials could be given to teachers and educators from the state or district which has educators teaching literacy material against their beliefs. According to Meidl (2013), "As a result, these programs have dictated to teachers *what to teach, when to teach, and for how long to teach* and not *how to teach*" (p. 2). That type of program would be hard for me to teach because with the program being dictated, it takes away from my learning beliefs of learner-centered instruction. Powers, Zippay, & Butler (2006) state,

"In an interview, Catherine indicates that she believes the Accelerated Reader (AR) program places "little emphasis" on higher-level thinking. She goes on to explain that even though she is encouraged to use AR, she limits the significance and role it plays in her classroom to align with her mostly constructivist practices and beliefs" (p.133).

Teachers use their literacy beliefs to design, facilitate and evaluate effective literacy instruction for their students; and these beliefs are shaped by backgrounds, teacher preparation programs, experiences, and resources.

Past Studies on Teachers' Literacy Beliefs

The research that has been completed previously on teachers' and educators' literacy beliefs, is one that has been studied through a variety methodology. Self-study is a research methodology that can be added to the list of research studies. Some of the research literature that this study examined was the survey method, case study, cross-case study, and questionnaire.

Teachers' literacy beliefs are a topic that varies for each individual, which is why there is always room for additional research to be conducted on this subject.

Survey

The researchers Gary Bingham from Georgia State University and Kendra Hall-Kenyon from Brigham Young University used the survey method to research teachers' beliefs and the implementation of the balanced literacy framework in three different school districts that are all instructed to implement balanced literacy. This research provides a window into the idea of the best approaches to literacy instruction in the classroom in connection teachers' beliefs. The authors' findings from teachers reporting back on their beliefs in connection to their classroom implementation of balanced literacy illustrated that teachers do have a balanced literacy view of literacy instruction. According to Bingham and Hall-Kenyon (2013), the findings of their study suggest "... that teachers' beliefs about effective reading instruction appear to reflect a balanced literacy mindset, as evidenced by teachers' scores on the TORP scale" (p. 25). The work done here by Bingham connects to my own research as the purpose of their study of looking into the implementation of the balanced literacy framework in teachers' literacy approaches, is similar to my own exploration.

Case Study

The author, Dr. T. Meidl, is an assistant professor at St. Norbert College in teacher education, who teaches pre-service teachers entering into the field of education. The case study that was completed on two elementary teachers in an urban low-income community used three different data sources (observations, interviews, and documents) in order to balance the pressures of teaching a curriculum and being able to support the academic needs of students. The findings indicated that teachers needed to adjust their teaching beliefs to the mandated curriculum that

their district was giving them, which in turn was doing an injustice to their students. According to Meidl (2013), "Curricular control at district levels transformed and distorted teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, which were constructed through personal and professional experiences" (p. 7). This work by Meidl illuminates my topic because I will be taking a deeper look into my beliefs when it comes to teachers providing me with literacy plans that differ with my beliefs like the teachers in this study given material that differs with their beliefs.

The authors (Powers., Zippay, and Butler) are researchers at Western Kentucky University. They conducted a case study examining the literacy beliefs of four teachers as they worked one-on-one with struggling readers through a university literacy clinic to complete their graduate coursework. These researchers spent a year following these four teachers to determine if teachers' beliefs and classroom instruction are consistent with one another. The findings of this research suggest there is an inconsistency when it comes to teachers' beliefs and classroom instruction. According to Powers et al. (2006), "This inconsistency can be caused by several factors, including classroom management and environment issues, requirements and limitations set forth by administrative and district policies" (p. 130). In connection to the above research by Meidl, the teachers that were in the study reported similar findings with the limitations put into place by administration and district policies. This work illuminates my topic not only with the connection of looking at teachers' literacy beliefs similarly as I will be looking at my own, but also they emphasize reflecting on teaching through the use of journaling.

Cross-Case Study

The researchers of the cross-case study referred to in my literature review include Amy Flint from Georgia State University and Beth Maloch from University of Texas, who are both Associate Professors of literacy courses at their corresponding universities; and Christine Leland

who is a professor of literacy courses at Indiana University-Purdue University. These researchers used cross-case analysis of three years of observational and interview data to examine three beginning teachers and their literacy choices. The results of this study showed that all three teachers varied in their beliefs of how the literacy curriculum should be practiced. According to Flint et al. (2010), "Overall, the teachers in this study actively constructed, negotiated, and transformed literacy events to create what they believed to be effective and meaningful literacy instruction" (p. 16). The connections for these differences are linked to their experiences with teacher preparation programs, professional development, and school/district pressures. This research has its comparisons to the study done by Meidl, as two of the teacher's literacy beliefs that evolved from their teacher preparation programs did not align with the literacy instruction at the school where they teach. This caused the two teachers, like in Meidl's study, to adjust their beliefs. This research illuminates my work that will be taking place in connection to my own research as I self-reflect on the influence of my teacher preparation program on my pedagogy and the beliefs that formed from my experiences within the literacy program.

Questionnaire

Annemarie Hindmana (University of Michigan) and Barbara Wasikb (Temple University) are the two researchers who studied 28 Head Start teacher's answers to the Preschool Teacher Literacy Belief Questionnaire and a background questionnaire in order to understand their beliefs alignment or connection to the early childhood literacy practices and approaches of the Head Start program. The findings from the questionnaires showed that the teachers agreed with the research-based practices; however, the background questionnaire showed no link between background and beliefs. According to Hindmana and Wasikb (2008), "In general, teachers agreed with research-based practices related to oral language and book reading, but

more variability was apparent around code-related and writing beliefs" (p. 479). This research study compares to Bingham's study, above, by using similar research methods when looking into teacher beliefs. When connecting this research study to my own study, they both have connections with regard to the importance of teachers playing a major role in students' literacy foundations.

My Literacy Beliefs

Along with this self-study, it is important to present my own literacy beliefs because it will be my beliefs that will be examined throughout this study. My literacy beliefs are extensive, and it would be nearly impossible to thoroughly examine and demonstrate my thinking of all of my beliefs, values and pedagogy when discussing literacy and what it should look like in the classroom for all students. Therefore, I have narrowed down my beliefs to five essential literacy beliefs that I hold key. The five literacy beliefs are as follows: learner-centered, explicit instruction, scaffolding, differentiated instruction and reading and writing are interrelated. These five aspects will be described in more detail and why they are an important belief that I hold.

Learner-Centered

The teaching practice that I believe in when teaching literacy would be learner-centered or student-centered practice. According to Tompkins (2014), "Student-centered theories that advocate children's active engagement in authentic literacy activities have become more influential" (p. 6). However, this was not always the theory practiced in schools. Before the learner-centered theory, there was the teacher-centered theory that had the focus of what the educator is doing and everything was on the teacher. This shift to a learner-centered approach to teacher-centered approach to teaching is a significant turning point in education and allowed for students to grow in their education because teachers and educators were more aware of each

child's individual needs and the importance of providing instruction which effectively addresses each child's needs. The delivery of instruction also changed on the behalf of the teacher and educator. With help from Vygotsky, teachers use his method of the gradual release of responsibility. According to Tompkins "Vygotsky realized that students can accomplish more challenging tasks in collaboration with adults than on their own, but they learn very little when they perform tasks that they can already do independently" (p. 8). The gradual release of responsibility connects to the learner-centered theory because teachers and educators support students' learning in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) until the shift takes place and students can complete the task independently. Learner-centered theory allows for students to be provided with tools and strategies to become life-long learners.

Explicit Instruction

The second literacy belief that I look for in literacy instruction is explicit instruction. Explicit instruction benefits students because they are exposed to new material slowly and have multiple opportunities to engage with the material which increases their chances of experiencing success. Researchers Denton et al. (2014) state the following regarding explicit instruction, "They provide direct explanations and modeling of concepts, skills, and strategies, along with extended opportunities for guided and independent practice with clear corrective and positive feedback" (p. 269). When using explicit instruction to teach literacy skills, students are able to learn pieces of the whole. One important aspect of explicit instruction is teacher modeling. Modeling gives students examples and guidance of the learning that is taking place. According to Tompkins (2014), "Teachers provide the greatest amount of support when they model how expert readers and writers write" (p. 23). Explicit instruction is a belief that I have in literacy because it provides students with clear instruction and examples of this instruction.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding instruction is the third belief that should be included in all literacy instruction. When instruction is scaffolded effectively, students are able to move from modeled to independent reading or writing instruction. According to McGee and Ukrainetz (2009), "To scaffold appropriately, teachers determine what kind and how much help or information is needed for each child to respond correctly to the task and to internalize skills needed for independent performance later" (p. 600). Scaffolding should be used to break down material into manageable instructional level parts and students will work up until independence is reached with each part. This strategy also takes place in classroom instruction when teachers and educators want to start with simple instructional material and slowly increase the difficulty. By approaching teaching in this manner, teachers are able to observe and assess where students are developing on a gradient and provide instruction that matches where they are to get them on the path of where they need to be going.

Differentiated Instruction

Out of all my beliefs, this fourth belief is the most important to me. Differentiated instruction allows for instructional material to address the needs of all students in a classroom. The job of the teacher and educator is to properly assess students in order to know the level they are performing at in order to provide them with instruction at their instructional level. This can be seen in multiple aspects throughout a classroom. For literacy, differentiated instruction is most likely seen when students are placed in guided reading groups. These groups have students in small numbers receiving instruction from their teacher that allow them to grow more efficiently as they are working with appropriate material. Research conducted by Fountas and Pinnell (2012) suggests, "Many teachers have embraced small-group teaching as a way of

effectively teaching the broad range of learners in their classrooms" (p. 269). Differentiated instruction contains explicit instruction and scaffolding in order to provide effective literacy instruction and thus maximize on the learning potential of the student.

Reading and Writing are Interrelated

The last belief that I have when it comes to literacy instruction is that reading and writing are interrelated. This concept has its connections to balanced literacy with guided, interactive, shared, and independent reading and writing. However, in addition to balanced literacy, teacher educators need to make meaningful connections between what students are reading and in turn with their writing. According to Tompkins (2014), "Reading and writing are reciprocal; they're both constructive, meaning-making processes" (p. 59). Teacher and educators can provide multiple opportunities for students to connect their reading to their writing and vice versa. Students can understand both the reading and writing process when their literacy learning experiences are comprised of both.

Summary

All beliefs are formed from an early age. Beliefs adapt over time through the background and experiences that we all go through. Like all professions, the preparation program connected to the desired profession has an influence on our beliefs one way or another, along with the resources. My self-study on literacy beliefs has been influenced by the past research literature on this topic. By examining other methods of studies, I was able to have a foundation for the topic and where I wanted to go with my own research. Defining my own literacy beliefs into five important literacy instruction methods, will be the base of my research going forward.

Chapter Three: Study Designs

Introduction

I designed my six-week self-study to determine how my literacy beliefs influenced by the literacy material classroom teachers leave for substitute teachers and also to examine how literacy interactions with students reflect on my teaching beliefs. This study was completed using substitute teaching plans which took place in two out of the six buildings in the district. The two elementary schools serve students from kindergarten to grade five. The classrooms throughout the entire district have SMART boards and are equipped with different technology for student interactions, along with the district allowing students to bring in technology for school purposes. The literacy resources available to students are vast with not only school-wide libraries, but classroom libraries as well.

Participant

I am conducting a self-study; therefore, I am the sole participant. Being a teacher's assistant in an elementary school allows me to collect data for my self-study as I know teachers that will be leaving substitute plans. The substitute jobs that are left are for a variety of grade levels and positions. The school district is in a suburban area in Western New York. With the most recent data from the New York State Report Card from the school year of 2012-2013, this document allows insight into the school district in which this study took place. There has been approximately 3,800 students enrolled in the district where 85% of students were white, 5% of the students were African-American, 4% of the students were Hispanic, 2% of the students were Asian and 3% of students were multiracial (New York State Education Department Data Site). In addition to this data, the district has 18% of students receiving free lunch and 9% receiving reduced lunch (New York State Education Department Data Site).

My Positionality as the Researcher

With this study being a self-study, it is crucial for me to look at my positionality as a researcher. When I was in elementary school, I began to receive extra support in literacy based on my grades on test and my school performance. Being pulled out of the classroom, I was able to work in smaller groups and have more help in specific areas where I was struggling. All of this started taking place in second grade and that's when understanding of my beliefs started. My second grade teacher was phenomenal. She made learning fun and exciting with hands-on activities and real life applications. Through her inspiration and teaching was one of the many reasons why I wanted to become a teacher. Although for all of my elementary school classes were spent in some aspect of remedial classes, this shaped my beliefs and me as a learner. I had to work harder than most students and this created a determination to be better throughout middle and high school. When I entered college, I felt prepared and was able to carry out a high GPA throughout all of my undergraduate and graduate level coursework. The obstacles that I had to overcome as a younger student and being more dedicated than a student who was more successful in school, prepared me for the future. These experiences have shaped me into the teacher that I am today and the beliefs that I hold.

The beliefs that I hold toward literacy and how literacy is instructed have been tested when I entered different classrooms as a substitute. My literacy beliefs are learner-centered with the use of explicit instruction, scaffolding, and differentiated instruction for students to succeed. In addition I believe that reading and writing are interrelated. All of these beliefs are important to me in regard to literacy, the facilitation of literacy instruction and what I would want to instill in my future classroom. By studying my beliefs now as a former substitute teacher and being a

visitor in so many different classrooms, I will be able to strengthen my beliefs, which will in turn strengthen my literacy instruction.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Several data collection techniques were used in when researching my literacy beliefs in the classrooms that I explored. I gathered input during my self-study through self reflection in an electronic journal, my observations, and artifacts. By updating my data collection every day, I was able to get the most out of this triangulation of data.

Journal

An electronic journal was kept throughout the six-week period, to record my personal reflections and thoughts. In addition to reflecting after each day that had plans during the week, I also wrote at the end of each week to connect back to my beliefs and connections that I found from classroom to classroom. This journal was also used to reflect on the classroom observations that I recorded when at all possible.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations took place throughout the six-week study when time was allotted. When a classroom observation did occur I recorded on the literacy environment, students' discussions, and interactions with the literacy instruction. The literacy environment observations would be aspects of the room that are related to literacy that I notice influence students literacy development. Students' discussions with one another were recorded privately with no names of any students given. These discussions were for me, and the reflection that I completed after these discussions occurred. Students' interactions with the literacy instruction

provided were also recorded to analyze my thinking regarding what I learned in my observing students as they interacted with the material provided for the day's instruction.

Artifacts

The artifacts that were collected throughout the six-week period were for me to use for my personal reflection. These artifacts varied from instructional resources the assigned teacher left, classroom resources, and/or district resources. These documents allowed me to reflect on how they influenced my literacy teaching and the beliefs I hold when I teach literacy.

Data Analysis

There were two overall themes that emerged when I looked at the data that took place over the six-week period. The first theme was "supported beliefs," which came from the analysis of my journal, classroom observations, and artifacts in connection to the literacy practices which I observed that aligned with the beliefs I explained above. The second theme that emerged was "non-supported beliefs," which also came from my journal, classroom observations and artifacts for literacy practices that did not align with my beliefs that I described above.

Procedures of Study

Outlined below is the procedure illustrated over the six week span to collect my data:

Week One and Two:

- Become aware of substitute teaching jobs at the two elementary schools in which I work in order to become familiar with the literacy plans left for the substitute teacher.
- Begin to reflect in my journal, collect artifacts and make observations in the classrooms that had substitute teachers in them.

Weeks Three and Four:

- Become aware of substitute teaching jobs at the two elementary schools in which I work in order to become familiar with the literacy plans left for the substitute teacher.
- Continue to reflect in my journal, collect artifacts and make observations in the classrooms that had substitute teachers in them

Week Five and Six:

- Become aware of substitute teaching jobs at the two elementary schools in which I work in order to become familiar with the literacy plans left for the substitute teacher.
- Finish reflecting in my journal, collecting artifacts and making observations in the classrooms that had substitute teachers in them

Criteria for Trustworthiness

Completing this study as a teacher-researcher, it is imperative that the self-study is conducted properly, and ethnically in an objective manner. With proper and thorough documentation, I am able to use my electronic journal and classroom observations to reflect on the research that was conducted. The emergence of the two themes came from the data collection methods of a journal, classroom observations, and artifacts. From the beginning to the end of this study, all of documentation was concise, succinct and detailed for dependability. This study will also use member checks to ensure the trustworthiness of the work being completed.

Limitations

Throughout this self-study, there were two limitations. The first limitation of this study was the time length. The six-week period for this study is an insufficient amount of time to yield enough results on my literacy beliefs as a whole. The second limitation for this study would be my role as the only participant in this self-study. As I am the only participant in my study, there is the possibility that my results could be skewed and biased regarding my observations of the classrooms that I enter and the reflections I complete of these classrooms.

Summary

Examining substitute teacher plans in a district where I teach allows for me to understand the literacy plans full time teachers are leaving in the brief absence for substitute teachers as a guide to follow in facilitation of literacy instruction. The data that will be collected as I participate in my study will be classroom observations, an electronic journal, and artifacts from different classrooms. As I analyzed the data that I gathered, two major themes emerged in my data from instruction practices that supported beliefs and those that did not support my beliefs. The six-week period that this study took place over is one limitation along with myself being the only participant.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine my own literacy beliefs and the implementation of my beliefs into different classrooms. The work that was completed for this study will influence not only my own teaching when I become a teacher in an elementary classroom, but hopefully the work can influence current elementary teachers in the field. In this profession, there are many different reasons that teachers need to be out of the classroom and will in turn need to create sub plans. The sub plans that are left for the substitute teacher need to be detailed and effective in order for students to have a successful day of learning. When the data for my study was gathered in the six-week period, the first week I was a substitute teacher and the last five weeks I was gathering data as a teacher's assistant. By using triangulation of my data, I was using three different methods of data collection in order to find themes throughout the data that either coincide with my beliefs or did not coincide with my beliefs. The final outcome of analyzing my data yielded three themes; (1) my literacy beliefs being supported, (2) my literacy beliefs being challenged, and (3) resources affecting my literacy beliefs.

Theme One: My Literacy Beliefs Being Supported

With the formation of my literacy beliefs, the data that was collected allowed me to examine different literacy plans that I would need to teach that either went along with my beliefs or not. Out of all the beliefs that I hold in literacy, there were five beliefs that I was analyzing specifically. The five beliefs are differentiated instruction, reading and writing are interrelated, learner centered, scaffolding, and explicit instruction.

Differentiated Instruction

With the collection of eighteen different substitute plans, only seven of these plans consisted of instructional material that was differentiated. Most of the differentiation was completed through guided reading groups or center materials. The plans that were analyzed from a sixth grade special education classroom contained the most differentiated material during the literacy timeframe and are labeled as artifacts A and B. In my journal, I reflected on trends I noticed, specifically, that most of the differentiated instruction was taking place in the upper elementary grade levels. During a classroom observation of this sixth grade classroom, students knew the instructional level at which they were working and that they were placed into groups with other students within the same level.

There was also some differentiated instruction in the primary grades, however it was not as prominent. When looking at the use of centers with the primary grades, one center of guided reading and meeting with the teacher is when I observed the different instructional levels being addressed. One example from my artifacts that supported this literacy strategy was artifact G in which the teacher listed each center and included guided reading where students at each group would meet with the teacher. When looking at both of these classroom examples, my literacy belief on differentiated instruction was found in multiple grade levels across elementary classes and was connected to guided reading. Differentiated instruction allowed for these students to be actively engaged in the material and have their individualized needs met. This experience strengthened my beliefs and thinking concerning facilitating literacy instruction by having all the students in the classroom being provided instruction at their instructional level.

Reading and Writing are Interrelated

The second literacy belief which I consider of critical significance is that reading and writing are interrelated during literacy instruction. Looking over the data that I collected and the artifacts, exactly half of the substitute plans had students writing after reading. When analyzing this data a little more closely, I found that there were two different ways that reading and writing were being interrelated. The first being that students completed the reading then followed up with writing. The second way was that the teacher would be doing the reading and then the students would complete writing. Artifact B was a prime example of the students completing the reading with an educational news magazine article followed up with a writing piece answering a question on making inferences on the article. The students were successful because they went back into the text to help them answer the question. This was an observation that I noted in a field note as students went back used the reading in order to support the writing that was occurring. Another example of the teacher completing the reading and then having students write after was artifact R. The substitute teacher read aloud Horton Hears a Who to the class and then they were told to head back to their seats to write about character traits from the story. In connection to my literacy belief on having reading and writing interrelated, the literacy plans could have better integrated the two in more ways to lift the number to more than half of literacy plans. When reading and writing are interrelated, students are more successful because it takes the learning deeper than just reading or writing something and not interacting more in depth with the material.

Learner-Centered

When literacy material is learner-centered, students are engaged in the work and able to take the learning into their own hands. There were six substitute teacher plans that were learner

centered. All six of these plans had students in literacy or reading centers in order to qualify them as learner centered. When students are participating in centers, they have rehearsed the routine day in and day out. Students know what is expected of them and the instruction that they need to complete. In a classroom observation field note, I wrote how well the students were interacting with centers. Students were able to work independently and if they had a question, they asked other classmates because they knew the expectation of not bothering the teacher while they are working with other groups. When analyzing artifact B, it was clear to understand that students knew exactly what to do because the teacher did not leave specific instructions on what the students would be doing and that they should be working in their folder. My belief that learner centered classrooms have students more engaged was definitely noticed as I observed different classrooms and saw how students react to center material. Learner centered classrooms allow teachers to focus on small groups of children at a time and be able to provide specialized instruction.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding instruction is difficult to judge if it was included in plans because a substitute can scaffold material at any point. However, when looking into the plans that I have gathered, I could observe that half of the plans had the instruction that was scaffolded. Literacy plans that had instruction scaffolded all had a similar process regarding the gradual release shift from the teacher assisted learning to the students learning independently. The substitute plans where scaffolding took place most frequently were special area classes. This was demonstrated in artifact L from an enrichment specialist's substitute plans, where she used scaffolding within her literacy plan. There were multiple steps where instruction began with the substitute teacher and slowly shifted over to the students performing a task on their own.

Another example of material being scaffolded is the guided reading lessons. The teacher begins by completing a book introduction and provides students with mini-literacy activities in order to prepare them for a skill or the book that they are about to read. The teacher walks the students through the book, and then the shift happens when students read the book independently. The teacher needed to make sure that at each of the steps that he/she were going through, students were able to be successful before they could release them to read the book independently. In a journal reflection that I wrote, I found that it was easy to scaffold instruction when the whole lesson was laid out from beginning to end. With smaller time filler activities, scaffolding instruction resembles more of just directions on what needs to be accomplished rather than a larger shift taking place. The use of scaffolding impacts students' literacy learning by providing students with the necessary information and steps for them to be successful independently.

Explicit Instruction

Similar to scaffolding, unless clearly stated in plans explicit instruction is a personal decision when giving instructions because each substitute delivers instruction in their own way. There were three lessons that stood out right away that explicit instruction needed to take place for a certain lesson. Artifacts D, M, and R have the learning objective stated, followed by the modeling piece that needs to take place before students complete the activity, so they know the expectations of the learning that is about to take place. Now, not all teachers needed to be this straight forward on how to guide a substitute through a lesson as explicitly. Some substitutes might do this very naturally in their style of teaching. For the substitute plans for the enrichment specialist, the lesson plans guided the substitute through the lesson so that the material is taught

explicitly. These plans do not label it modeling specifically, but that is what is happening in the layout and details of the lesson.

Theme Two: My Literacy Beliefs Being Challenged

For the second theme, I found that there were many literacy plans left for substitute teachers that did not align with my beliefs. The data showed that there were certain beliefs lacking in each of these plans. There was never one piece of data that matched with every literacy belief that I hold. Below, is a more detailed explanation of what was lacking from the literacy plans in connection to my beliefs.

Differentiated Instruction

Substituting in diverse classrooms across multiple grade levels, I accepted the literacy material to be meeting the needs of the learners in the classroom at the appropriate levels. The findings challenged my beliefs that classroom instruction needs to be differentiated. Students in the classrooms that I was substituting in were all at different instructional levels. For the majority of the substitute plans that were left, the instruction had students completing assignments that were at the same instructional level. One meta-conversation that I had in connection to artifact D was on guided reading plans. The teacher had left each of the six centers and described what would be taking place at each center for each student to complete. In my reflection, I discussed how guided reading is meant to have students completing instruction at their instructional level. The students were all working on the same level for all six centers. For center number three, students had a Ground Hog Day book that they were working with. This center should have had multiple levels of Ground Hog Day books to meet the needs of the students in the classroom.

Another example of how the lack of differentiated instruction was challenging my beliefs was that some of the plans that I gathered were from special area teachers in order to see how

they are bringing in literacy into their own classroom. What I discovered with these substitute plans was that they were also not differentiated. The material that all students were completing, even special education students, was all at the same instructional level. This is significant because all students need to be provided individualized instruction in order for them to be successful in the classroom.

Reading and Writing are Interrelated

While examining the substitute teacher plans, there were many times where students would complete reading in isolation and writing in isolation. Reading, for example, would be linked to independent reading time and writing was connected to writer's workshop. Both of these tasks do not have to have reading and writing interrelated. However, there were some missed opportunities in making the connection to reading and writing in the literacy plans. The substitute teacher was asked to read aloud an educational news magazine and then move on to a different worksheet that didn't support what the students had just heard from artifact I. In my reflection from the week of February 9th about this activity I noted the students were not getting much out of this activity and it could have been expanded on with a quick write on the Chinese New Year. All of these missed opportunities could have provided students with a purpose to the work that they were completing by bringing the two aspects together.

The last aspect of reading and writing are interrelated that I found was against my beliefs was that it was always a one way street when the topics were connected. For example, the reading always took place first and then the writing followed after. There was never a time in any of my data collection when writing took place first, and then students were asked to read about what they wrote. If the opportunity presented its self, I would have students writing perhaps

before a read aloud or before a reading activity in order to have students interacting with the material.

Learner-Centered

When analyzing the literacy plans I detected twelve plans that did not have students engaged in the learner-centered instruction. Developing learner centered instruction takes time to establish a routine that students need to be involved with in order for them to be successful. That is why most of the learner-centered instruction was center based because the students have been established in this center routine since September. Leaving a brand new learner centered instruction plan with a substitute is not something that would happen often. One of the major reasons for this is because of behavior management. Learner centered activities has the teaching in the students hands, which could potentially cause behavior issues if the substitute teacher was not careful enough to explain the directions and expectations. In a journal reflection that I wrote in the first week of collecting data, both of the substitute plans had centers and students moved flawlessly through the centers as they engaged in learner-centered material. I found this to be linked to the routine set into practice from the beginning of the year. Another aspect was that because students did know the expectations of the centers there were no behavior issues.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding takes place on an individual level for each substitute teacher. Some substitutes might scaffold more and some might not scaffold the material at all. This will have an effect on the students either way. My beliefs are that scaffolded instruction should always occur; however, this was not the findings of half of the plans that were left. The plans left on artifact G for the day needed to be more detailed for the substitute and have the necessary activities be laid out on how they should be scaffolded. The plans were an overview of the entire week and gave

general information on what was to be completed at certain times of the day. For example, from 12:30-1:00 the teacher has in her plans "sight words sort" and no other information is included for this activity. Are the students doing this independently? What sight words are they sorting? How are they sorting? All of these questions and more pop into my head as a substitute teacher concerning how scaffolding for this instruction was going to take place with little to no information. This is important because in order to scaffold instruction properly teachers need to be able to see the whole lesson and that was lacking in these plans.

Explicit Instruction

As I stated in chapter two, explicit instruction should be taking place all the time in literacy lessons. Unfortunately, explicit instruction is based on personal teaching styles so it is hard to analyze if this was happening in classrooms with substitute teachers who did not have it specifically in the classroom teachers plans. Like scaffolding, there were many missed opportunities for classroom teachers to leave better literacy plans by including explicit instruction. Artifact H is one of the plans in which I would have included explicit instruction. Students were asked to complete work on main idea and supporting details for an hour and the only direction for the substitute was "do together as a close reading practice and find details from the text". These directions are not explicit instructions. For a substitute who does not have a background in literacy, they might not know what a close read is. If these were my plans I would have defined what close reading is and provided more detailed instructions for this lesson to be successful.

Another aspect to explicit instruction that was not included in this set of directions is that students were not gaining understanding piece by piece, until they have the whole picture. The lesson should start with students understanding main idea, and when that concept was mastered

work on supporting details, followed by connecting the two of the concepts together. My understanding of these instructions is that both skills would be taking place simultaneously when the close reading was taking place. If I had the opportunity to instruct this lesson, I would have students first find the main idea and then find the details that support the main idea.

Theme Three: Resources Affecting My Beliefs

The third theme that was discovered was the resources that were used in the classroom that had an affect on my literacy beliefs. The results of the resources were mixed in comparison to them aligning with my beliefs and not aligning. The resources were once again classified under the five major literacy beliefs that I held throughout the entire study.

Differentiated Instruction

The resources that were left for substitute teachers in connection to differentiated instruction were supportive to my beliefs. The instructional literacy plans that had material differentiated, the plans were for guided reading. There were two different approaches in regards to the resources used to satisfy guided reading depending on the grade level. The upper elementary classes were using Leveled Literacy Intervention, also known as LLI, as their guided reading. This allowed for students who are at similar, but different reading levels, to have a program set in place that was regimented, and allowed them to know the expectations of guided reading. The lower primary grades used centers as their guided reading while having one of their centers meeting with the substitute at a separate location in the room to work with a book at the instructional level. These leveled readers were from websites with printable texts and books from the schools bookroom. All of these resources at both of the upper and lower elementary levels support learners in the literacy instruction level that qualifies the needs of each and every learner.

Reading and Writing are Interrelated

The resources for reading and writing being interrelated varied depending on the context of the activity. Scholastic News, Time For Kids, and CQ Magazine are some of the most top choices teachers left for substitute teachers that had students reading and then responding to the reading by writing. The other resources that teachers used that aligned with this area of my literacy belief, was a book that they selected to support a writing activity that took place after the reading experience.

Learner Centered

Learner centered resources were linked to center material left by the classroom teacher for each student complete in a series of rotations. The resources varied from class to class and grade by grade. In the upper elementary grades, students had a folder with a checklist on which they needed to indicate the completion of each item before moving on the next. Some of the resources that they would complete included reading comprehension worksheets, word study activities, guided reading material, and other instructional level work. The primary grade resources that students completed at each center activity had students working on developing literacy skills. These resources included phonics worksheets and activities, writing, alphabet activities, leveled books, and interacting with different types of literacies. Artifact G includes substitute plans left for kindergarten and one center was a worksheet that focused on them working on CVC patterns, which was the perfect resource for students at this level.

Scaffolding

The resources that were put into place in order for scaffolding to be most successful to my beliefs was guided reading. The teachers in the upper elementary levels use scaffolding correctly because it is easily broke down in the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) program.

The LLI program is even scripted of what you should be saying to the students as you go through a lesson, so students are provided the precise information needed to be successful. When guided reading plans are left that are detailed about how a normal guided reading lesson should go, students might not get out of the lesson what the teacher was expecting if the substitute who accepted that job does not have a background in literacy. The other resource that made scaffolding successful in the classroom was when the teacher was detailed in his/her plans how to model what needed to be done and walked the substitute through the lesson with the expectations that they have of the activity. This assists the substitute in providing proper classroom instruction because the more information they have regarding a lesson the more successful it will be for the students.

Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction had two connections to resources when they were used in the classroom to accomplish the lesson. The first resource was once again guided reading. Guided reading has students working in a series of steps as they go through the lessons. Students need to reach a level of mastery before adding or moving on through the rest of the lessons. Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), again, helped substitute teachers with explicit instruction because that is the way that the program was designed. The second resource was also similar to scaffolding, where teachers' detailed lessons helped substitute teachers perform explicit instruction. When teachers included statements like "model to students..." or stated step by step the important aspects to reach before moving on the next step, all helped substitutes provide explicit instruction. In return, the explicit instruction helped students be able to stay focused and understand what is being explained in more clear instructions.

Further Results

With each classroom that I entered as a substitute or interacted with substitute plans, I found that the results were mixed when analyzing them with my beliefs. As classroom teachers are out of their classrooms for a variety of reasons, there will always be a need for substitute teachers. The material left for substitutes can vary based on what the classroom teachers decide to leave for that day. During one half day as a substitute teacher, I had a conversation with the classroom teacher about my research and she provided some light onto some plans would not line with my beliefs. The classroom teacher's initial response to my topic was "I am sure the plans that I leave for subs are not to the best quality as they should," which then lead me to ask her why she thought that. The response that she gave me was that she does not leave important literacy aspects because she does not always know who is going to take the substitute job. This conversation was important to add to my results because it says a lot in connection to my beliefs. The jobs that I accepted as a substitute were classrooms where I have worked in the classrooms before and the teachers generally know that my background is literacy. In the substitute plans, I was analyzing the five beliefs I hold about literacy to each plan if any belief was included or not.

For teachers who do not know the substitute teacher's background, the material that they left was simple. Some of the activities that were left were time filler activities like worksheets or magazine subscription articles. With each classroom assignment, the substitute brings his or her own beliefs into the classroom. The significance of this study showed that each person who is a substitute teacher has their own beliefs that affect the way that they facilitate literacy instruction. When looking specifically at literacy, when classroom teachers know that a substitute holds a certain background in education or literacy they are more entailed to leave plans that support a literacy environment. Some of these plan would include guided reading, read alouds, shared

writing, writers workshop and word study. Going back to that first day that I opened with in the kindergarten classroom, that was a new school for me and I had no connections. It could be a possibility that the teacher had the same line of thinking when I accepted the job that she does not know my background and did not know exactly what to leave for the instruction for the day.

Literacy instruction is one area that can be challenging when creating lesson plans for substitutes who may not be familiar with the students or facilitating literacy instruction. Guided reading is one of the main literacy activities that takes place in a literacy block and is something that is specific to each and every teacher. Some teachers follow a program for their guided reading lessons, so their absence might not allow them to assign guided reading for the day, which can put them behind a lesson. Guided reading is also used to meet each student's needs and provide them with the proper instruction at their level. The teacher knows his/her students the best, so making sure that their needs are met each and every day might not have the substitute teacher be teaching guided reading.

As I go forward with my career, there are many ways in which I would try to fix the situation as a teacher's assistant and then as a classroom teacher. As a teacher's assistant, I would hold a conversation with classroom teachers about the literacy plans that they leave for substitutes. I think that it is important to get their perspective on what they leave for substitute teachers, and why they choose the instruction that they did. From this conversation, I can provide them with guidance that I have gained through this research in order to support them in the plans that they leave.

As a classroom teacher, this is where I will be able to make my biggest strides for substitute teachers that come into my classroom. I have been a substitute for close to two years and then interacting with many substitutes in my teacher assistant position, I feel like I have had

many experiences that have impacted me and the beliefs that I hold. When I am a classroom teacher and will be absent, my substitute plans will be detailed. The more details in the lesson plans that substitutes have, the more confident they will feel in the facilitation of instruction and the classroom management. In regard to scaffolding, I will have different aspects of the lesson broken down so the sub can see how the lesson should progress. Students are able to benefit from the sub clearly building on each part of the lesson. Explicit instruction will be included by having students interacting with the material multiple opportunities and giving students different strategies to perfect the skills they need to learn. Reinforcing positive feedback in the plans will help substitutes in turn help students. Learner-centered is one belief that I feel strong about, and that will be established in my classroom from the first day of school. Having the routine of centers or another student lead activity will help tremendously when the time arrives that a substitute will need to be in the classroom. The students will know the expectations and proper procedures. Out of all of my literacy beliefs, reading and writing are interrelated is the belief that is most flexible and is not as included in literacy plans like it should. From the above results, I never saw any writing before reading. If they are truly interrelated, there could be writing after reading and reading before writing. I would have more quick writes spread out throughout the day to incorporate more writing because of the lack of writing that I found while completing this study. The last literacy belief that takes more work, but needs to happen in order for every student to be successful is differentiated instruction. The only time that I found differentiated instruction in substitute plans was for guided reading or centers. If I have students in my classroom that need a modification or an accommodation, I will include this information in the plans with what the substitute should do for those students. This study has helped solidify my beliefs even more and has allowed me to grow as an educator.

Summary

After conducting this self-study for six weeks, three themes emerged in connection to understanding more about my literacy beliefs. The first theme was connections that I found throughout my study that align with my literacy beliefs in the classrooms that I substitute in. The substitute plans allowed me to identify all five of my beliefs that I found through the data that I collected. The second theme that emerged was teaching against my literacy beliefs. In this section, I was able to analyze the substitute plans another step further by seeing material that did not align with the five beliefs in literacy that I uphold. The last theme that arose from my data based on the resources that aligned or did not align with my beliefs. By looking at the classroom instructional material, I was able to compare it to my beliefs and how it was beneficial or not. Following these themes, I looked at the perspective of the classroom teacher to see if it could paint a clearer picture on the topic and how it will influence my decision making process with my beliefs when I become a classroom teacher.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

My self-study was aimed to answer the above two research questions that I looked to answer as I completed this six-week long study. The overall conclusion from these two questions was that one question was supported and the other was not supported. When looking into the first question that this study looked to analyze on literacy interactions with students that reflected my literacy beliefs was not supported. With the change of my position through the study to a teacher's assistant, I was no longer able to gather the proper data to answer this question in its entirety. The answer to this question would need to be examined more in depth in better circumstances for future research. The second question on the different classrooms influencing my literacy beliefs was supported completely. The answer to this research question is explained more below.

Teaching Beliefs

Throughout my study, with each substitute teaching job, my beliefs were affected. The material that was left for me either supported my literacy beliefs or did not support my beliefs. It was through these affected beliefs I was able to understand more about my literacy beliefs in connection to literacy instruction. First, all I will not necessarily be able to implemented my literacy beliefs every time I teach literacy instruction. There were many factors that had impacts on my literacy beliefs. One factor was the resources that the school was or was not using. From looking at my data, when the classroom teacher was using a program like Leveled Literacy Instruction (LLI) or guided reading with centers was when I found my beliefs were most aligned with the instruction. The results of using these types of resources puts into place literacy instruction that has differentiated instruction, scaffolding, explicit teaching, integrating reading and writing, and is learner-centered. Second, the filler activities that were to be completed for

literacy instruction do not align with any beliefs that I hold because most of them do not have a literacy meaning behind them nor effectively address the literacy learning needs of the student. My hope after completing my study is that classroom teachers can change some of the methods of instruction that they leave for their classroom substitute.

Literacy instruction left by classroom teachers can vary depending on the classroom teachers' level of familiarity with the substitute and his/her ability to effectively facilitate literacy instruction. In chapter four, I mentioned a conversation that I had with a classroom teacher about my study and her take on her own literacy plans that she leaves for substitutes. With two years of substituting experience, I saw a difference in the literacy plans for teachers that I knew and for random job assignments that were new classrooms to me. This same parallel was found in this study. Classroom teachers that pre-assigned jobs to me or that I accepted based on past connections to the classrooms, had literacy instruction that was more aligned to my beliefs. For those random jobs where the classroom was new to me the literacy instruction was not as aligned to my beliefs. I concluded that the reason for this difference is that teachers who know the background of their substitute are going to leave literacy instruction to match this background level. As a classroom teacher, it is hard to know the background of random substitute teachers, which causes him/her to alter the literacy plans to make it the day easier for the substitute as well as the students. However, it is important for classroom teachers to leave detailed plans, so no matter the background of the substitute it is possible for them to carry out the same level of literacy instruction that the classroom teacher normally would.

Connection to Past Literature

When comparing this self-study to past literature on teachers' literacy beliefs, this study supports work that has been previously completed. The types of studies that have been

previously completed on teacher's literacy beliefs are the survey method, case study, cross-case study, and questionnaire. Now, with the completion of this self-study it too can be added to that list. By pulling out some major themes from the previous studies, I have found that the work completed here aligns with previous studies conclusions. One important theme was the balanced literacy framework and this was supported with the classrooms that left Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) plans or guided reading with centers. The second theme from past literature was the affect on teachers' beliefs through the instruction mandated by the districts. This also supported my conclusions because I found instruction that was left for me that was a district wide implementation was affecting my literacy beliefs one way or another. Past literature on teachers' literacy beliefs for the third theme was that there was an inconsistency when it came to teachers' beliefs and the classroom instruction. Inconsistency to teacher beliefs and classroom instruction supports the second conclusion I have explained above based on the instruction left for substitute teachers is inconsistent not only to each substitute teacher, but the teachers own literacy beliefs. The last theme that was pulled from past literature would be the teacher preparation program. Although this theme is unique to each teacher, I have found that in connection to my own literacy beliefs the teacher preparation programs not only prepared me as a substitute teacher, but they were a major factor in the formation of my literacy beliefs. All of the past literature discussing teachers' literacy beliefs has provided insight in the completion of my self-study, and the results of this study confirm the findings of prior studies.

Implications for Future Research

From looking at the past studies themes of teachers' literacy beliefs, there is no question that this topic is an important topic to be researched. By stating the importance, this will not be the end in studying teacher's literacy beliefs. Going forward, there are a couple of items to

improve on in connection to this studying teacher's literacy beliefs. The first improvement would be to try to remain in the same position throughout the entire study. When I changed from a substitute teacher to a teacher's assistant, it became a limitation to my study. Although I still tried to remain as true to the study as possible, if this can be avoided in the future research it will help with the continuity of the results. The change in my professorial position affected the second improvement for future research; answering both research questions. Along with the change that I experienced in this study, I was no longer able to effectively answer the first research question that I set out to answer on literacy interactions with students that reflected my literacy beliefs. If this study was completed again, one important aspect to examine would be understanding the students' perspective with their interactions and how this affects my literacy beliefs.

Final Thoughts

Teachers' literacy beliefs are an important topic to be studied because they allow teachers to grow and develop the beliefs they are implementing into their classrooms, which in turn will affect the students through the way literacy instruction is delivered. As self-study can now be one of many different types of research studies completed on literacy beliefs of teachers, teachers can now learn from the past studies or even take it one step further and participate in their own study on literacy beliefs. Teachers who are able to look inward and reflect on the beliefs that they hold true will strength their values and make them a better teacher.

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