UNDERSTANDING EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT: THE IMPACT OF A
COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE

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By
Jonathan Gillentine

Dissertation Committee:
Stephanie Feeney, Chairperson
Donna Grace
Linda McCormick
Joanne Cooper
Dana Davidson
Dedication

I dedicate this work to teachers and I offer them these words of advice: Be who you are. Think and feel and teach the way you do. But stop once in a while and take a look around. Look at where you have been, where you are, where you are going. Only you can decide whether to repave the road, redirect the journey, or redraw the map of your teaching. Our solitude notwithstanding, in this vocation we travel together and share our stories making us less alone and all the richer.
Acknowledgements

I have life because of my mother, and so I acknowledge her first. My mom, Betty, has always encouraged me to read (and learn). She is the inspiration for my love of books. We both believe that books offer a place of escape, not from, but to places that welcome our imagination with all the possibilities we can consider. Her influence in my interest in early literacy is immeasurable. When I give a book to a child, I offer it with my hands and your heart, Mom.

My late father was always interested in new words, even those from other languages. He taught me that words are interesting and can be crafted together into stories, like the one he wrote for me when I wanted a dog with a handle. Dad, I know the importance of stories because of you.

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Lastly, I borrow the words of J. S. Bach to declare the source of the power, intellect, patience, passion, and care that was needed to become who I am, both as a teacher and a person: Soli Deo Gloria – to God alone be glory.
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a collaborative professional development course in early literacy development, using the tools of narrative and reflection, upon a group of ten early childhood educators. The study considered this impact in terms of teachers’ beliefs, values, knowledge, practice, and sense of professionalism.

In this qualitative study, data originated from teacher writings and included reflections, responses to readings, and narrative descriptions of lessons taught. These were analyzed to identify themes concerning the impact of the course.

Analysis of the data revealed four primary themes that provided evidence of impact of the professional development course: (1) impact on teacher knowledge; (2) impact on teacher beliefs; (3) impact on teaching practice; and (4) impact on teachers’ understanding of professionalism. The impact on teacher knowledge was described with relation to the topics covered in the course. Teacher feelings revealed beliefs, validation, values (including authentic learning and family literacy), and growth within a learning community. Teacher practice demonstrated how the learning environment, the social climate, assessment practices, and pedagogy (individualization, language, listening, print awareness, letter recognition, phonemic awareness, phonics, responding to print, and purposeful writing) supported early literacy development. The teachers’ sense of professionalism described growth, change and meeting external expectations of the literacy development of students.
A constructivist framework for designing and conducting the course allowed teachers, regardless of training and experience, to participate and contribute to the course.

Many lessons were learned. Dialogue among participants allowed them to share teaching knowledge. The collaborative learning community established a group identity within the course and validated participants as experts within the context of their own teaching. Classroom teachers can, and should, be viewed as leaders in professional development ventures. Their position as both peer and expert provides them with a perspective that is not often considered when choosing professional development leaders. A constructivist approach to professional development allows teachers to start from what they know and build new knowledge. Reflection and narrative are useful tools for improving teaching.

Future research should consider narrative and reflection in collaborative professional development settings for other audiences and other areas of learning.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Quality in public education has become a topic of primary significance in recent years. A great deal of attention, much of it negative, has been focused chiefly on teachers; indeed, Americans have been decrying the quality of its public school teachers since “A Nation at Risk” was released in 1983 (Rothstein, 1999).
Subsequently, calls for educational reforms have been heard from many sources. While such reforms have the potential to create significant change within classrooms and in how learning is perceived, shaped, and experienced, no single reform has had the impact of the “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) Act of 2001, as the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has come to be known. The law was designed:

to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education . . . by . . . ensuring that high-quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials are aligned with challenging State academic standards so that students, teachers, parents, and administrators can measure progress against common expectations for student academic achievement (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, p. 1439).

The law was also intended to guarantee that teachers are “highly qualified,” eliminate achievement gaps for disadvantaged and other needy students, allot resources where needs are greatest, afford more authority for decisions at the school level, ensure enrichment and acceleration in educational programs, promote scientifically-based instructional strategies, provide substantial professional development for school staff, encourage coordination of services, and allow
substantial participation for parents in educational matters (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, p. 1439).

Reading such a description of the law's provisions, one would assume that public education is in a state of crisis. Indeed, that crisis may be real; the reason for that crisis, however, depends on what perspective one is taking. President Bush, in last year's State-of-the-Union address (January 20, 2004), explained that the lack of basic skills was the root of the predicament: "for too long, for too many children, [basic skills in reading and math] were never mastered. By passing the No Child Left Behind Act, [we] have made the expectation of literacy the law of our country" (Hawai'i State Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). His stated intent, through the revision of the ESEA, has been to raise student achievement, establish public school accountability, set standards of excellence for all students, and place a qualified teacher in every classroom (National Education Association, 2003).

Many educators have taken a different view of the new law. They see the public education crisis as arising from restrictive impositions required by such reforms as NCLB. Administrators and other educators are concerned with the one-size-fits-all approach: all students being required to meet the same level of achievement within the same time period (Weaver, 2003). Many teachers feel the pressure of having to ensure that their students meet those required achievement levels on tests, rather than taking the time and effort to meet individual needs of students in their learning. Teachers are also concerned that proficiency on tests is taking the place of reading enjoyment on a daily basis (Jehlen, 2004, February; Posnick-Goodwin, 2003, December).
Statement of the Problem

Reforms for school and system accountability, improved test scores in order to show efficacy of federal programs, and legal requirements imposed by revised laws are having a significant impact on early childhood education in the state of Hawai‘i. We are faced with a “back-to-basics” approach to the teaching of academics, especially reading; use of standardized tests without apparent consideration for more holistic assessment tools; and an emphasis on reading achievement to an extent that overshadows such areas of learning as dispositions of learning, aesthetics, physical education, social studies, the arts, or the development of character. At Rev. Benjamin Parker School, in Kane‘ohe, Hawai‘i, where I teach preschool special education in an inclusive setting, these factors seem to strongly influence curriculum in promoting basic skill development, particularly phonics and phonemic awareness, and the insistence for such teaching strategies as direct instruction, while discouraging a philosophy that would promote child-initiated learning and emergent curriculum, and play.

The situation has been created wherein a teacher must either choose between producing a predetermined product in the form of child’s performance and be held accountable for it, or instead move a child from where he is to as far as he can go and explicitly share the child’s strengths and needs with his next grade teacher (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). Whether it is conscious or not, and whether it is made by the teacher or someone else, it is a choice. An additional factor weighs heavily in this dilemma, particularly at schools that are not up to acceptable performance levels as measured by standardized tests. Many of these schools
receive Title I services for literacy development (based on the large number of low income families in a school’s neighborhood). Due to unacceptable test results over several years, some schools have not met “adequate yearly progress” and are in “corrective action” to address this failure. This status does provide additional support, but with it comes a high price: expectations to raise students’ test scores within a specified time of short duration. Failure to do so will result in “restructuring” the school; thus far, it is unclear what that means. These expectations add to the anxiety of teachers in lower grades who are already uncomfortable with the heavy focus on basic skills. Some of them feel that their students must learn to read at all costs, since such an emphasis on reading instruction will eventually, they are told, raise test scores and provide a more favorable reputation for the school. This fear of a single focus for the purpose of teaching and learning is not unwarranted. Implementing developmentally appropriate, learner-centered approaches “seems to be especially difficult in schools where the stresses of poverty are greatest. There, a narrow emphasis on basic competencies seems to work against proceeding with the learner’s strengths, needs, and interests in mind” (Rust, 1999, p. 378).

Demands for improvement in achievement are not only external; oftentimes they come from within a school. Several years ago a kindergarten colleague told me, “The first grade teachers are down our throats to get the kindergarten kids to learn to read. I don’t understand that.” This feeling of pressure to get all children ready to read, regardless of their age, is echoed by many other kindergarten and preschool teachers I have met. One researcher in early childhood education used the following
analogy to describe the dilemma that teachers face: “Primary grade teachers…are caught between a rock – the nationally recognized exemplars for high quality education for the children in their care – and a hard place – the norms, traditions, and expectations of the school settings in which they work” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 4). Clearly, the fields of early childhood education and elementary education hold different perspectives, many of which are incompatible, concerning their approaches to children and the ways they learn (Rust, 1989). Coincidentally, academic approaches to curriculum for young children have only appeared since the middle of the 20th century and “are not the traditional American model” (Peck, McCaig, & Sapp, 1988, p. 34).

The situation has become so intolerable that one of my colleagues, a kindergarten teacher for more than ten years, has taken a teaching assignment in upper elementary in order to get out of the early literacy arena and all of its associated requirements. This fine teacher feels that his creativity is prohibited and that his decision-making power is gone. How many more teachers will leave the field of early childhood education because of the pressure they feel from the mandates of NCLB?

Teachers are also uneasy about NCLB requirements that all teachers be “highly qualified.” What is the difference between “qualified” and “highly qualified”? We do not yet know all the implications of the demands for “highly qualified” teachers. NCLB does not even identify what high-quality professional development is or how it should be made available to teachers (Borko, 2004).
I am a special education teacher in an inclusion setting; I share teaching responsibilities with a Head Start teacher. We serve a class of twenty children. Some of them have developmental delays and others are disadvantaged with respect to family income. In my role as an early childhood educator in the public school system concerned not only with doing what is right for young children, but also wanting to support my profession, I have two questions that remain unanswered: How does professional development fit into that definition of a highly qualified teacher? Is it possible to create and provide professional development activities that fulfill the law while providing teachers the opportunity to collaboratively examine ways that children can learn effectively while meeting the expectations of educational reforms?

**Significance of the Problem**

Professional development in a school setting should consider the unique circumstances of each teacher (Schwarz & Alberts, 1998). For this reason, teachers need to engage in professional development that takes into consideration the contexts of their teaching, if such efforts are to have a positive impact on students. But the awareness of the need for professional development alone is not sufficient. The design and delivery of professional development must also be considered if we want to truly examine how teaching has a positive impact upon the achievement of students.

Professional development can be viewed by teachers as an opportunity to learn rather than another requirement by outsiders who do not understand the interplay of teaching and learning that occurs between teachers and the children for
whom they are responsible. In my experience, professional development must be supportive to be effective. The professional development settings that I have most valued were those in which my teaching experience was validated, my commitment to the profession and the accomplishments of my teaching team were acknowledged, and my opinions about what I needed to do to become a better teacher were both valued and sought.

Given the current political climate and the heavy emphasis it places on reading, I believe that it would be helpful if teachers had opportunities to collaboratively examine their teaching practices, and the curriculum for which they are responsible, particularly literacy. I also believe that teachers’ conscious efforts to examine their teaching practices will improve their teaching and raise achievement. Furthermore, I believe that teacher narrative (stories about teaching practice and critical learning events) and reflective journals (written thoughts about teaching and ways to refine it) can serve teachers well as they seek to improve themselves as professional educators. Because of these beliefs, I chose to design a professional development course in early literacy to study the impact of this approach to professional development and its effectiveness upon the practices of teachers who participated in such a course (see Appendix A). I chose to collect and examine qualitative data to address some of the affective aspects of collaborative inquiry into teaching.

This qualitative study was conducted within the context of a professional development course on early literacy development for public school teachers of students ranging from preschool to first grade. The course was offered through the
Professional Development and Educational Research Institute (PDERI) of the Hawai`i State Department of Education. The course consisted of twelve weekly, two-hour sessions; it was adapted from a trainer's course in early literacy development for early childhood educators (Christensen, Harris, & Nakanishi, 2003). Requirements for the course included a portfolio consisting of weekly written reflections, written responses to professional readings in early literacy, a collection of lesson plans, written narratives exploring the impact of these lessons, as well as attendance at and participation in course sessions. The sessions addressed the topics of: language development; cultural factors in learning to read; access to literature; the impact of brain development on literacy learning; book genres; reading to children; purposeful reading by children; the association of writing to reading; phonemic awareness, phonics, and the alphabetic principle; purposeful writing by children; literacy environments; literacy assessment; literacy for diverse learners; and literacy in families and the community. I chose to use this course because, having participated in it during its pilot phase, I believed it to be both comprehensive and engaging.

It was my intention for the teachers in the course to better understand what they were called upon to do, as well as how to best serve young children (ages 3-6) engaged in early literacy development. I wanted them to feel supported and acknowledged in their work, in terms of who they are as teachers and how they interact and serve the learning needs of their students. I also sought to strengthen bonds among teachers and encourage them to see each other as resources and collaborators in the teaching of literacy to young children. To meet these goals, I
designed a professional development course that provided a supportive environment where teachers could gain information, share their knowledge and experiences, reflect on their practices (both individually and corporately), and learn collaboratively, both concerning what they do to promote literacy development in young children and who they are as members of the teaching profession.

The choices I made in designing the course were deliberate and made with teachers in mind. I chose to address the topic of early literacy since it appears to be perceived by many elected officials, policy makers, and the general public as an area of significant weakness in our schools. Because of such opinions, the federal government has strenuously sought to adopt reading programs that are "scientifically research-based." Due to my own knowledge and experience in this field, I felt I had important things to share about what is and is not appropriate for teaching young children as they attain literacy knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

I chose to create a supportive environment within the course, since, in our statewide public education system; professional development for in-service teachers can sometimes have a "bureaucratic" flavor to it. In my experience, much of professional development, particularly relating to literacy and also within the field of special education, is required for compliance to federal Title I or NCLB regulations or Felix mandates.¹ It sometimes feels like those who design the sessions are expecting the participants to go through the motions, simply for the sake of fulfilling requirements for additional training. There never seems to be enough time

¹ Felix v. Cayetano was a landmark case resulting in widespread changes in the delivery and documentation of special education services in the state of Hawai‘i.
to completely address all of the proposed agenda items and there is rarely time for professional inquiry and the rich, informal discussions that explore the issues pertinent to teachers. The interests of individual teachers are rarely taken into consideration; follow-up activities related to these sessions are not always practical or useful in improving teaching practices. In my course, I allowed teacher inquiry in several areas, including learning materials, teaching practices, and literacy environments. I provided time for teachers to discuss their experiences and allowed them to determine what they wanted to reflect upon in their teaching.

Even prior to the beginning of the course, I viewed it as a community of learners. I did so because, in my own experience as a learner within professional development settings, I valued the opportunity to develop relationships with colleagues and knew that there was the potential for productive dialogue and collaboration among those participating in the course. I was hopeful that the prospect of having time to engage in such dialogue, and being acknowledged for engaging in it, would be seen as a beneficial experience for the teachers in the course. I also hoped that creating a community of learners would foster an atmosphere of collaboration and support among the participants as they worked to improve their teaching in literacy for their students.

The reason I chose teacher stories as a professional development tool is that I believe these stories can help teachers to understand how to improve their teaching practices. The stories we tell, as teachers, are about children, for children, and sometimes by children; they bring an added dimension to the daily experiences of teachers and students engaged in teaching and learning (Jalongo, 1992). The stories
come from our classrooms: from learning events, from social interactions, from unique utterances by children (and their teachers), from stories parents share and are retold at school, and from problems that we face as we live and grow together with children. These stories have many purposes, yet one of the most significant functions they have is to convey meaning within and about the learning process (Ambrose, 1993). Stories are an essential part of what teachers do because of their capacity to reveal how children are learning in a school setting. Teachers who are attuned to what is happening in the classroom and can represent these experiences in stories gain a new and different perspective of what is occurring during the interplay of teaching and learning (Carter, 1993). This perspective hopefully allows them to reexamine their practice and find areas where changes can be made to strengthen teaching, address areas of weakness, and enrich the nature and array of learning opportunities.

I chose to use reflection as a professional development tool in that it is useful in many aspects of a teacher's work. In addition to creating and modifying curriculum, considering daily practice helps a teacher to assess and document children's learning (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1997, 1998). As a candidate for national certification in early childhood education, I learned that reflecting on teaching practices is an essential characteristic of an exemplary teacher. Teachers who engage in reflection "regularly analyze, evaluate, and synthesize [their practice] to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their work" (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001, p. 59). Examining teaching practices has also been cited as one way to demonstrate a disposition for self-evaluation and
professional growth (Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board, 1998). The Hawai‘i State Department of Education has specified teacher reflection as a required duty of licensed educators; written reflection is now included as one component of their teacher evaluation program (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 2002).

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of my research was to examine the effects of a course in early literacy development upon the professional development of teachers of young children (ages 3-6) within the public school setting. I examined the ways in which a supportive, constructivist professional development course on early literacy development had an impact on teachers’ beliefs, values, knowledge, and practice.

My research questions were:

1. In a professional development course for teachers incorporating a supportive, collaborative learning environment, and using the tools of narrative and reflection, what did teachers report as influences upon their sense of self as professionals in terms of their beliefs and values?

2. In a professional development course for teachers incorporating a supportive, collaborative learning environment, and using the tools of narrative and reflection, what effects on teacher knowledge and teaching practices did teachers report?

3. Did the professional development course in this study have an impact on teacher’s sense of professionalism, balancing external expectations for literacy instruction and one’s own expectations? If so, in what ways was this impact manifested?

4. Was the design of the course effective in determining the impact of the course on teachers? Were the essential components of the course design, including reflection, narrative, and a learning community useful learning tools for teachers?

In this study I sought to examine not only the cognitive aspects (in terms of what teachers know and do) of teaching, but also the socio-emotional aspects (what
teachers believe and value concerning their teaching) and how professional development might have an impact upon both of these aspects. The third question was designed to clarify what teachers feel about their professionalism within a context of criticism and changing views of how teachers affect the achievement of students. The first three questions seek to determine what occurred as a result of the course, in terms of impact upon teachers. The fourth question, by examining the course design, identifies why I believe the evidence explains such impact on teachers.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study was limited in that it only included in-service teachers. It also only included teachers of young children (grades P-1) in public schools. This limitation, however, was in part due to the subject matter of the professional development course. A course for teachers of a broader range of grade levels would have been too wide in its scope of literacy topics and would have been less meaningful for the participants, due to the lack of commonality in student needs and teaching strategies for such a group. Additionally, the course was specifically designed for classroom teachers; a course on early literacy development for pre-service teachers would be significantly different than the course I designed.

The number of participants for the study was small; yet limiting the study was necessary in order for me to complete the research while fulfilling my daily responsibility as a classroom teacher. Additionally, the course was conducted in a school not centrally located on the island of O‘ahu. Thus, the participants came from only two school districts.
This study did not measure student outcomes. Its focus was on the professional development of teachers. However, it is assumed that there was a positive impact on the young children served by the teachers participating in the study. As teachers become more aware of their practice and the instructional and curricular decisions they make, it is hoped that their students will demonstrate growth in their learning.

**Significance of the Study**

The focus of this study was on a group of teachers in a professional development course and the interactions in which they were engaged as they reflected on their practices, shared stories about their teaching, and gained insight into new research on early literacy development within a supportive, collaborative learning community.

The significance of this case study is that it will help educators, specifically those in the field of early childhood education, better understand how professional development can have an impact on their teaching. An additional benefit from the study is the use of a different approach to professional development, specifically, using reflection and narrative as tools, within a setting that promotes collaboration, to learn about the teaching profession. Finally, this study was significant in that all the participants were early childhood educators engaged in professional development specific to early literacy development for young children, a primary focus of NCLB. This is important in that, as those of us who teach in the public schools begin to face the requirements, and possibly the sanctions, imposed in
NCLB, we must be vigilant in doing what is best for young children within the structure of the law until, hopefully, it is changed.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is comprised of five sections; each pertains to this study in a significant way. The first section describes professional development, its importance and significance, and its impact upon teacher quality. The second and third sections examine the nature of reflection and narrative, respectively, which were examined as tools for professional development in this study. The fourth section describes issues pertaining to early literacy development. This section is further broken down into five subsections; each is significant for its impact upon currently-held views of teacher quality by key role groups that influence policy and practice in settings that serve young children. These sections are: scientifically-based research; phonemic awareness and phonics in early literacy instruction; best practices in early literacy instruction; and early literacy development from the perspective of early childhood education. The final section discusses "community of practice," a model for social learning theory. It contains subsections on theory of, research on, and professional development as a context for a community of practice.

Professional Development

Under the current sociopolitical climate, the consideration of what "professionalism" means is essential when discussing teacher education and professional development in the field of early childhood education. Fromberg (1997) identified six characteristics that distinguish a professional: ethical performance, expertise, a body of knowledge, autonomy of practice, commensurate
compensation, and a professional organization. Berliner supported the view that teachers are professionals, stating:

The craft knowledge of the expert pedagogue is no different in kind [than that of management consultants, surgeons, attorneys, and accountants], but it is clear that it is not always as valued by society. Nevertheless, it is a unique form of knowledge. It is complex, acquired slowly, and learned only through hard work and reflection on that work. (Berliner, 1994, p. 123)

What does it mean to be a teacher who is a professional? The answer lies in a number of perspectives. Expectations, both from within and outside our educational system, drive teachers to continue to learn and strengthen their practice not only to meet the needs of students but to also meet accountability measures of standards (Zederayko & Ward, 1999). From the perspective of a teacher, however, we see a broader response to that question. Being a member of the teaching profession brings an assumption of growth, improvement, continual learning, new discoveries, in-depth study, and a full expression of what we are called to do (Brooke, 1994). In a study that examined professional development within New York's universal prekindergarten program, Friedman (2004) arrived at several observations concerning the professionalism of teachers:

- Professional development empowers teachers not only as learners, but also as professionals.
- Teachers engaged in professional development are autonomous individuals engaged in a collegial process, reflecting, sharing ideas, and solving problems together.
- Change is affected through active involvement in making decisions, establishing goals, solving problems, and reflecting on practice in a supportive community of learners.
- The process of integrating new knowledge with a teacher's lifetime of experience requires time, concentration, and persistence.
- Professional development should not only seek to inform teachers about child development and developmentally appropriate curriculum, but should also strive to change how we see teaching and learning.
Yet professionalism is not a destination, but a journey. It is a continuous process of becoming, incorporating new knowledge of children's development (Caulfield, 1997). Carter and Curtis (as quoted in Baptiste, 1996), said that the methods we use to educate our teachers are surely reflected in how they teach children; it is necessary then to encourage teachers to construct their own knowledge of teaching and learning processes in order to improve learning environments for children.

Bredekamp and Willer (1993) identified several advantages to the development of professionalism for the field of early childhood education: a shared knowledge base among early childhood educators; consistency across early childhood settings; expanded knowledge and ethical behavior through professionalism; forward movement of the field through shared meanings; and improved compensation for workers.

As I considered professional development as the context for my research, I asked the question: What is professional development? In attempting to answer that question, I encountered a challenge. Unfortunately, in school settings, professional development is not what it should be. Consider Miles' (as cited in Smylie, Bay, & Tozer, 1999) description of how professional development has not met the needs of educators:

It's everything that a learning environment shouldn't be: radically undersourced, brief, not sustained, designed for 'one size fits all,' imposed rather than owned, lacking any intellectual coherence, treated as a special add-on rather than as part of a natural process, and trapped in the constraints of the bureaucratic system we have all come to call 'school.' (p. 50)
Indeed, Lieberman (1995) stated that the conventional view of professional development “as a transferable package of knowledge to be distributed to teachers in bite-sized pieces needs radical rethinking” (p. 592). These descriptions certainly describe much of the professional development in which I have participated. Recently, however, the trend in professional development for educators is shifting in its focus from disseminating information to focusing on questions that encourage the investigation of effective practices (Harada, 2001); whether this trend will continue under the requirements of NCLB remains to be seen.

Littky and Grabelle (2004) noted that professional development is an essential step for those who seek to redesign what learning can be. But the goal of professional development must not only be to improve the instruction provided by a teacher. The goal must go beyond the improvement of how a teacher interacts with students. In the setting of early childhood education, professional development should: address needs of individual children and their families; promote quality of teaching systematically; allow and encourage career advancement; and support active participation of all role groups in program planning and delivery (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1994, emphasis theirs). In order to be effective, professional development must also encourage, among other things, collaboration, reflection, sharing, and enduring discussions about teaching and learning (Routman, 2002).

Change, in the field of education, is an essential part of professional development. If change is to be sustained, teachers must become actively engaged in aspects of that change, either in creating or applying new strategies within their
daily practice (Englert & Zhao, 2001). In order to facilitate change through professional development, teachers must also gain an understanding of the theoretical foundation and purposes that underlie the intention of a professional development endeavor (Englert & Tarrant, 1995).

Professional development should promote growth in how a teacher understands her daily practice; for it to be effective there is a presumption that teaching is an intellectual enterprise (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Some of that growth-in-practice for teachers should occur while engaged in professional development within a learning community, where learning by using a new skill with support occurs. Studies have shown that improved student achievement occurs in conjunction with changes in teacher practices that are based on sustained collaborative professional development, grounded in the curriculum they teach and that emphasize the examination of teaching methods and student work (Darling-Hammond, 1999).

Why is professional development important? The growth that results from the critical reflection that professional development requires should lead to a change in student performance. Harris (2002) stated that professional development brings about changes in teachers that will improve student learning in some observable way. Professional development demonstrates a commitment to continued learning on the part of a teacher and the positive impact it can have on the success of students’ learning (Morrow, 2003). Unfortunately, opportunities for teachers to consider the purposes of their work are scarce in professional development settings (Schwarz & Alberts, 1998). In order to develop a culture of support among
professional educators in schools, there should be opportunities to develop collegiality and collaboration, disciplined inquiry, learning in context, and new functions of leadership (Lieberman, 1994). Consideration for what teachers do, how they perceive their practice, and the stories they tell about themselves, their students, and their engagement in the process of teaching and learning, therefore, are essential in the professional development of teachers. Due to the complexity of the teaching profession, professional development cannot be oversimplified or taken for granted as routine. Professional development must incorporate opportunities for teachers to critically reflect upon their practice and formulate new knowledge pertaining to learners, the content for which they are responsible to teach, and the pedagogy they will employ in their teaching (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). One of the keys to successful professional development is more teacher involvement in the creation of courses designed to share information, innovations, and new knowledge (Gullo, Burton-Maxwell, & Bruk, 1995).

In order to continue learning about their profession, teachers must have collaborative settings for professional development where they can exercise leadership and make relevant choices (Sweeney, 2003). James Stigler, author of The teaching gap: Best ideas from the world's teachers for improving education in the classroom, commented on the needs of teachers concerning professional development:

Teachers . . . need to learn how to analyze practice – both other teacher’s practice and their own . . . they need to think about the relationship between teaching and learning in a cause-and-effect kind of way . . . teachers [also] need to be exposed to [alternative teaching practices] . . . teachers [should] get together to plan instruction, to observe what happens when it's
implemented, to analyze what went wrong, to come up with ideas for improving it, and to try doing it again in their classrooms. (Willis, 2002, pp. 6-7)

The importance of continued professional development throughout a teacher’s career cannot be disputed; professional development is a reiterative process. There is always more to learn, more to experience, and more to share about teaching: “We are talking about the ‘development’ of a professional, not simply training in a few specific skills. . . [It] implies, just as the concept of ‘development’ implies for children, a combination of maturation mediated by experience” (Duff, Brown, & Van Scoy, 1995, p. 82). There are some very basic reasons for continued professional development in the area of early literacy development, which is vital for this research:

Teachers will surely continue to expand and refine their own teaching as they read, collaborate, and reflect on how their children respond to learning experiences . . . Understandings of literacy development should continue to grow as teachers explore the best practices for young children. (Bruneau & Vacca, 1996, p. 170)

What aspects of professional development are important in the consideration of early literacy development? Professional development for teachers of young children is recognized as an important component of high quality early literacy programs. This is particularly true for children who are disadvantaged, including those in low-income schools (Goldenberg, 2001) and at-risk African American children (Strickland, 2001). It is vital to recognize the impact of teachers’ professional development upon the achievement of underprivileged students. McGill-Franzen and her colleagues (as cited in McGill-Franzen & Goatley, 2001) found that, in an urban kindergarten setting, when a 200-book classroom library and
professional development for teachers on effective ways to read to children were provided, children outperformed their peers (who had only the books) on measures of children's print knowledge and vocabulary. What was notable in the cited study was that the children of teachers who received only the classroom library performed no better than the children of teachers who received neither the books nor professional development opportunities. We must remember, however, that not all children are the same; professional development efforts must continue, as they currently are inadequate (Dickinson & Sprague, 2001; Borko, 2004).

But why is professional development so important? Don’t teachers already know (or shouldn’t they know) how to teach children the beginning steps in acquiring literacy skills? Questions such as these that come from the media, elected officials and the general public demonstrate the limited knowledge they have of what teachers do and know. Yet the questions, when we consider them and seek to explain what teaching is all about, help to strengthen the teaching profession. The answer in part to these questions is what we learn about literacy from those who are engaged in its teaching and the tools they use. As Morrow and Gambrell (2001) stated: “Professional development opportunities are necessary for developing the extent of knowledge of literature required for effective practice” (p. 357). One could extend that belief into other areas of literacy instruction, other than just the selection of appropriate literature. Another part of the answer has to do with the knowledge that teachers acquire through their own work. If professional development allows time and structure for teachers to examine questions that interest them, and acknowledges what they learn about their own profession, true change can occur.
(Fleischer, 2004). We must also remember that the profession of teaching is not static, but is continuously reframed, due in part to changing characteristics of children, communities, and society itself. Therefore, we continue to learn about how best to provide early literacy instruction through both research and practice:

"Teachers of young children . . . have a unique responsibility to promote children's literacy development, based on the most current professional knowledge and research" (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998, p. 38).

The law now requires schools that are failing to make sufficient growth in accountability measures (as defined in NCLB) to take corrective actions:

. . . including providing appropriate professional development for all relevant staff, that is based on scientifically based research and offers substantial promise of improving educational achievement for low-achieving students and enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, p. 1484, emphasis added).

Despite this fact, I believe early childhood educators in such schools, indeed in all schools, must do whatever they can to hold fast to the notion of providing appropriate instruction in all areas of learning, but especially literacy. As children have gained the right, in recent history, to a publicly funded education, we have come to see them as thinking, creating, and problem solving beings, and it has led us to find ways to provide learning experiences that are valuable to children as individuals (Yatvin, 2004). It is necessary for teachers to have a wide array of instructional strategies if they are to accomplish such a provision. As Guskey (1995) stated: "What works in one situation may not work in another" (p. 117). This applies not only to how children learn, and how teachers teach, but also to how professional
development is provided for teachers. An approach to professional development that incorporates reflection and collaboration, and relies upon a broad base of expertise of the teachers involved, serves to close the gap between practice and research (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2001).

In making decisions concerning professional development in this context, we must ask: what is important in providing literacy experiences for young children? Despite NCLB and its requirements, we cannot lose sight of what is important in early childhood education, particularly with regard to early literacy development. It is crucial to recognize the diversity of the learners whom we serve. We must consider the needs of children who are different and provide teaching that is supportive and interactive, not teaching that relies on scripts (Dyson, 2003). We should use the theory of multiple intelligences, not as a perspective to debate different approaches to teaching, “but as a template with which to view the many different aspects of the reading process” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 79). An understanding of the uniqueness of learners is needed in order to meet the needs of all children. Personalized curricula – akin to Gardner’s (1991) apprenticeships and museum schools – are one avenue to consider in addressing individual learner needs (Wolk, 2004).

Value in, and knowledge of, a variety of approaches to teaching are central to the education of young children. We have evidence of how best to approach literacy instruction in programs for young children:

Taken as a whole, the research conducted over the past thirty years has amassed more than adequate evidence to support programmatic guidelines that clearly lay out the expectation that teachers provide children varied
ways to engage in uses of print, guide children’s engagement in literacy activities, and actively support their language growth. (Dickinson, 2002, p. 27)

Differentiation in instruction is crucial, particularly for children who have styles of learning that do not match the instructional approaches most often used in schools. Balance may not be the best term to use to describe the incorporation of multiple teaching strategies in literacy instruction, since even scripted programs can claim that they are balanced; it is more useful to implement differentiation in instruction, which seeks to identify both group and individual learning experiences based on assessments of students’ needs (Camilli & Wolfe, 2004). One example of differentiation – anchored word instruction, which incorporates students’ background knowledge of words, analysis of meaning, and phonics – was found effective in helping kindergarten children learn words in the curriculum more than just using contextual cues (Juel & Deffes, 2004).

A broader understanding of achievement gap issues is paramount in dealing with the many issues that affect learning for young children. Barton (2004) identified more factors influencing the gap that occur before and beyond school (birth weight, lead poisoning, hunger and nutrition, reading to young children, television watching, parent availability, student mobility, and parent participation) than factors related to school. Schools need more information in these areas if they are to be part of the solution to achievement gaps.

Motivation, imagination, and emotion are all key issues for young learners. Katz and Chard (2000) identified four types of learning goals; not just knowledge and skills, but also dispositions (or habits of the mind), and feelings. Children who
are invested emotionally in their learning have a distinct sense of engagement, having a positive impact upon achievement:

... the program planner who starts with a concern for emotions is not subtracting from academic priorities. In fact, the teacher will actually increase the likelihood that children will benefit intellectually and academically. A focus on emotions helps early childhood educators to make their entire program more effective. (Hyson, 2004, p. 21, emphasis hers)

Play, exploration, and creativity cannot be overlooked in contexts for young children engaged in meaningful learning:

In this era of performance standards and skill-based/outcome-based education, it is more important than ever for educators and families to articulate the values and support the creativity of play and exploration as ways to meet the standards – and to go beyond them. (Drew & Rankin, 2004, p. 44)

Families are undeniably essential in considering the most effective ways to support early literacy development. Oral language skills in young children must be provided both at home and in school, since such skills provide a strong base for the development of vocabulary and other literacy skills in later years (Dickinson & Tabors, 2002).

An inclusive attitude must be adopted in considering who can benefit from early literacy interventions:

Too often students who do not follow a typical developmental sequence of literacy are seen as being unable to profit from academic instruction related to reading, writing, speaking, and listening. When teachers expand their understanding of literacy, however, they can facilitate the development of a range of abilities and build on the skills that students do have. (Kluth & Darmody-Latham, 2003, p. 533, emphasis theirs)

Access to literature, in a variety of forms, is imperative in addressing literacy needs. Neuman and Celano (2004) stated that even in libraries having poor
circulation figures, those facilities are always crowded. They found that the actual number of hours spent in the library were about the same for low-income and middle-income children. Younger students need to have access to non-fiction and should be taught how to use it. Duke (2004) found that young children trying to understand informational text for authentic purposes (such as reading to learn and sharing information) look significantly different from those reading it as assigned by the teacher – they are more engaged and attentive to details.

Child development is still a significant piece of what teachers should know about young children. Successful efforts in phonics instruction of young children were influenced by teachers' understanding of students' developmental abilities rather than an instructional manual (Juel, Biancarosa, Coker, & Deffes, 2003).

Early intervention continues to drive efforts to change the lives of young children and their families. Universal preschool programs are being considered in many communities across the nation. Smith (2004) urged for the establishment of universal, high quality early education programs for all children, particularly for those in poverty and children of color, as a means to achieve NCLB goals.

New perspectives can also be helpful. Yet despite such innovations in early childhood education as those developed by schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, new ideas have not had a pervasive impact on U. S. elementary schools (New, 2003). Reggio Emilia schools embrace the idea that children experience the world through feelings, which imparts to them “the gift of metaphor and personification in perception and in language” (Cadwell, 1997, p. 61). Professional development may offer us a way to bring new ideas into classrooms.
Finally, positive relationships with our students are a primary means to helping young children learn. Cole (2004), in examining cueing systems for early reading instruction, found that while many educators were aware of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cueing systems, many overlooked pragmatic cueing, which considers comfortable relationships between a child and the place of learning, the book that the child is reading, and the teacher who is supporting the child’s reading.

Within the context of this study, I examined how specific tools, including collaboration, narrative, and reflection, can have an impact on professional development with the intention of providing teachers a better understanding of early literacy development and the growth of young children in this area of learning.

Reflection

The concept of teachers giving thought to their practices and the resulting consequences is not a new idea. Dewey (1916) described how reflection can make foresight in teaching more accurate and comprehensive; he defined reflection as involving not only a sequence of ideas, but a consecutive ordering of ideas, such that they are connected and continually used toward some conclusion. One of the desired effects of reflection is to enable teachers to continually refine their teaching. Teachers who engage in reflection are evaluating their own practice as it relates to student responses (Duff et al., 1995).

Reflection allows a teacher greater consciousness as to what is happening in learning and how changes, even those based on reflections during the act of teaching, can improve learning experiences for students. Reflection-in-action for educators, as described by Schön (1983), is active reflection during teaching, rather
than engaging in reflective thought after teaching occurs. Thinking and learning are
developed by “doing, thinking about what you are doing, and considering why it matters” (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000, p. 72); such an approach to reflection reveals the complexity of everyday classroom experiences (Gillespie, 1996).

Some teachers might argue against using reflection, regardless of its purpose: “When is there time for reflection? How am I supposed to do it? Nobody really cares about what I think anyway, so why bother?” While these questions must be answered, they draw attention to the challenge of how to encourage teachers to engage in reflection. Indeed, Wesley and Buysse (2001) noted that in early childhood settings, as educators’ roles become more collaborative, we often overlook reflection within a community of learners as a way to both inform and reframe our practices. Oakes and her colleagues (2000) stated that reflection provides a level of personal professional satisfaction and that teachers enjoyed seeing meaningful changes brought about by their struggle with challenging current practices. Reflection is one method by which life and its stories are retold; it is a way for educators to determine their practice balanced among the influences of culture, tradition, and other factors (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991).

Conditions for reflection in a group setting need to be intimate, supportive, and challenging, if an examination of teaching contexts beyond the superficial level is sought (James, 1996). Reflection is important in that it imposes changes that reduces isolation of teachers and heightens their value (Cooper & Boyd, 1998). It also allows teachers to examine their professional knowledge and understand how it
informs daily teaching practices (Loughran, 2002). Time and dialogue are required for reflection. When these essential conditions are supplied, teacher knowledge is increased, assumptions are made clear, potential arenas for learning are explored, and choices and creativity are increased (Wortman & Matlin, 1995; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001). Douillard (2002) believed, based on her examination of research (by Vygotsky and Bodrova & Leong), that even young children can develop, with support, reflective thought processes that they can use to link new learning with prior knowledge.

One meaningful aspect of teacher reflection is that teachers are answering, or responding to, some of their own questions; reflection is, in many ways, a private venture (Jersild, 1955). But reflection is not optimized without support from peers. For this reason, teachers should be encouraged to reflect, not only by themselves, but paired with colleagues, mentors, and in small groups (Black, 2001).

Reflection can be a useful tool for teachers in early childhood settings. In a policy statement on developmentally appropriate practice, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identified a number of guidelines which describe the teacher's role in making decisions about their practice that enhance development and learning: posing problems; asking questions; making suggestions; selecting from a range of strategies; coaching and guiding; calibrating the level of activities; providing cues; and encouraging children to reflect on their own learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997). In my view, such actions will most often be taken by a teacher who is engaged in active reflection while teaching; this belief is supported by leaders in the field who
espouse reflection (Tertell, Klein, & Jewitt, 1998). Espinosa (1992) also stated that reflection, in a variety of settings and conducted with sufficient time, is essential for effective professional development leading to necessary changes in programs for young children.

In describing necessities for profound, rather than superficial, change in educational settings, Smith (1995) stated that rather than relying on discussions of what schools should be achieving: “We must talk of what people do and how they interact with each other” (p. 85, emphasis his). While change at that level is not easily attained, reflection allows for such fundamental conversations. Yet dialogue concerning change that is based on reflection is complex, due to the nature of reflection. In order to be useful in improving teaching practice, a teacher must engage in reflection while in the act of teaching; either task alone is already a complicated venture (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996).

Almost all of the studies in the literature that examined reflection in concert with professional development were related to teacher preparations programs (Clarke, 1995; Rearick, 1997; Ross, 1990; Stout, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). Some preservice teacher education programs require or encourage candidates to engage in reflection activities (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Han, 1995; O'Donoghue & Brooker, 1996; Verkler, 2000; Wade & Yarborough, 1996; Willard-Holt & Bottomley, 2000). Reflective portfolios have also been used as an evaluation tool for professionals in a few early childhood settings (Seng & Seng, 1996).

Very few studies in the literature examined reflection in professional development for in-service teachers, despite its purported usefulness in supporting
the daily practices of teachers. One study (Freidus, 1997) examined a single graduate student's reflections as part of a portfolio project on teaching philosophy. Another study examined three specific approaches to reflective professional development used by the Far West Region Laboratory: case methods, the Peer Assisted Leadership process, and action research (Filby, 1995). Only one of these studies, however, pertained specifically to early childhood educators, and none of them examined reflection within a professional development course. These gaps in the research were the impetus for my study.

**Narrative**

What is narrative? Why is narrative important to this study? How is narrative experienced? Langer, from a literary perspective that sought to know how we build our realities around literate experiences, explained that narrative is the way we tell ourselves about ourselves:

> Life is incoherent unless we give it form. . . . Usually the process of formulating our own situations and our own [story] . . . follows the same pattern – we 'just put it into words,' tell it to ourselves, compose it in terms of 'scenes,' so that our minds can enact all its important moments. The basis for this most imaginative work is the poetic art we have known, from the earliest nursery rhymes to the most profound, or sophisticated, or breathtaking drama and fiction. (Langer, 1953, p. 400)

Hardy (1978) suggested that all of our constructs of reality are stories we tell ourselves about our experiences within the world from individual perspectives:

> We dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future. (p. 13)
As an expression of that social realm, our feelings and thoughts become resources for communicating with others about our personal realities as we live and work in community with those around us.

Polkinghorne (as cited in Jalongo, Isenberg, & Gerbracht, 1995) identified three important aspects of narrative: it gives meaning to both temporal experiences and individual actions; it synthesizes actions and events into units; and it structures the past and plans future events. Narrative provides the necessary lens, and it is through that means that we are able to examine, within units of stories, what we have experienced (or are experiencing) to keep our past within a meaningful perspective and to decide how we will contend with what lies before us. Within the context of teaching, narrative has a unique meaning. Narratives, set within a framework of the evolving process of being a teacher, reflect “teachers’ own descriptions of memorable experiences, first lived out within classrooms, then interpreted and reinterpreted through various perceptual lenses” (Jalongo et al., 1995, p. xxxi).

Why is narrative significant? Narrative is important, to paraphrase Connelly (1995), because the telling of a story goes beyond the limits of the imagination of its author, since stories interact with listeners, readers, and other storytellers. Why should teachers use narrative in their professional development? “Teachers’ stories, these positive and negative personal accounts of our lives in classrooms, are central

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2 It is helpful at this point to consider the terms “narrative” and “story” within the context of research. According to and Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative describes both phenomenon and method. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) indicated that while it is acceptable to use the terms interchangeably, they tend to use “story” to describe particular situations and “narrative” for longer-term events; “narrative,” however, is always used when describing research and research methods.
to the type of inquiry and reflection that lead to professional development and personal insight” (Jalongo, 1992, p. xvi). It is that aspect of personal insight that helps us understand who we are and what we are trying to accomplish: “... personal narrative is the creation of coherence. Our lives need to make sense, to have their various elements be in a reasonable relationship with one another” (Clark, 2001, p. 87). Teacher stories, though not always certain in their direction, provide a meaningful path to bringing about social change (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991).

It is essential to recognize that there is ambiguity in a model of inquiry involving narrative, and that such inquiry is interpretive. Narrative allows teachers to tell their own stories while it also tells stories about teachers. Narrative helps teachers to engage in inquiry while it allows inquiry into their teaching acts and practices. The ambiguity, this bidirectionality, is both real and purposeful, as narrative provides both an honest look at teachers and the satisfaction of stories resonating within our own teaching experiences (Connelly, 1995). Such inquiry requires “a passion to understand the meaning that people are constructing in their everyday situated actions [that convey both the intentions and meanings of the actor]” (Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993, p. 465, emphasis theirs).

How does narrative relate to professional development? Narratives reveal what is incorporated within a teacher’s sense of reality. Susan Ohanian said: “The more I teach, the more I realize that we teachers are nothing more than our anecdotes, our reflections on experience (Schuster, 1989, p. 542). Teacher stories, the subject of narrative, “are a viable means for understanding one’s teaching and for supporting professional development along the path of ‘lifelong learning’”
Personal narratives about teacher’s lives and work are also basic to professional growth (Jalongo, 1992). The focus of narrative begins on an individual level, when teachers collaboratively share stories; narrative, in such a collaborative setting, allows individuals to see themselves in a new light (Castle, Drake, & Boak, 1995). In examining narrative as a reflective tool in teacher evaluation and professional development settings, Wood (1992) described the value of what teachers offer to the arena of educational research:

Teachers . . . negotiate all the exigencies and contradictions of real classroom life . . . the contradictions are too numerous and bewildering to list . . . yet they inhabit the daily lives of teachers who struggle with them. What [is amazing] is that so many struggle successfully, and yet somehow these successes have not become the grounds for systematic research. We have much to learn from teachers. (p. 548)

While there is a need to examine narrative within contexts pertinent to professional educators (Cooper & Heck, 1995), there are few studies in the literature that describe how narrative can be used to understand and improve teaching practices.

**Early Literacy Development**

The metaphor of a swinging pendulum has been used to describe the ever-changing approaches to the instruction of reading for many years. As early as 1962, the action, if not the metaphor, was observed by Miel in her introduction to Durkin’s *Phonics and the Teaching of Reading*:

For much of this [20th] century there has been a running argument between those who seem to believe that a phonetic approach alone should be employed in teaching beginning reading and others who are extremely dubious about using such an approach too exclusively or too early. (Miel, 1962, p. v)
Holdaway (1979) also used the pendulum metaphor to describe the phenomenon of repetitive change between opposing theoretical stances of literacy instruction. More recently, Reutzel (1999) stated, “As a matter of common knowledge, the reading profession has been plagued by the ‘pendulum effect,’ with reading practices swinging from one extreme to the other decade after decade” (p. 96). This same pendulum effect has been observed in all curriculum areas, not just reading. Katz stated that as the expectations that are associated with this phenomenon are becoming “more academic and narrow, rather than intellectual and open, their appropriateness for younger children has become a major issue for all who have a stake in the healthy development of young children” (1991, p. 52).

This section includes several topics that are relevant to a discussion of how professional development of early childhood educators might have an impact on early literacy development and how we might examine best practices of literacy instruction for young children in public school settings. The first section describes the emphasis on scientifically-based research in creating and selecting reading programs and the impact that research has on literacy instruction for young children. Much of that research emphasizes phonemic awareness and phonics in early literacy instruction. I discuss the impact the role these skill areas have in early literacy development and the opinions about how they are sometimes overemphasized. Next, I review a broader perspective of early literacy development in terms of what young children need. Since some early childhood educators have a different perspective on teaching and learning than those of their peers in elementary school, I discuss how early literacy is seen from the early childhood perspective. Finally, I
examine the effect that NCLB is having on various communities around the nation and describe how they are coping or struggling with its requirements.

*Scientifically-Based Research*

Clearly research is helpful in deciding how to help our students learn; however, it is unfortunate that research, and how it is framed, has often marked divisions among the general public, educators, researchers, and the media. It seems that we cannot all agree on how to use research to best serve our children. Thus we are faced, yet again perhaps, with the controversy: Who gets to say which discipline(s) research is based upon, how it should be used, and what it reveals? Berliner (2002) responded to this question in part, saying that:

> Doing science and implementing scientific findings are so difficult in education because humans in schools are embedded in complex and changing networks of social interaction. The participants in those networks have variable power to affect each other from day to day, and the ordinary events of life . . . all affect doing science in school settings by limiting the generalizability of educational research findings. (p. 19)

Perhaps the assumptions that are made in framing some research are not always valid and factors that are relevant in a given research setting may be overlooked. Indeed, despite the efforts of those who speak of the importance of scientifically-based research to promote reading instruction emphasizing phonemic awareness, there is evidence that we are being lead down the wrong path (Rasinski & Padak, 1998).

Although controversy over the emphasis on scientifically-based research, particularly that which addresses reading instruction and other aspects of literacy, reached a high point when the National Reading Panel (NRP) report was released in
2000, there had been serious concerns about the emphasis of this document both with regard to how "science" was being defined and how scientific research was being interpreted.

A steady stream of information and statistics concerning public education is available from the media, private foundations, public agencies, and other sources. The trouble is that such information is not always accurate. As a case in point, Allington (2002) cited a 1993 report of the National Center for Educational Statistics that indicated that 47% of American adults were basically illiterate. McQuillan (1998) revealed seven additional myths about reading in America (based upon misapplied, misunderstood, or misrepresented research) relating to: poor reading achievement; dyslexia; declines in reading scores compared to current scores in other nations, and historically when compared with scores of previous generations; and the negative influence of whole language on the decline of reading scores in California. This last myth was promulgated when, as the pendulum swung once more, the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Performance scores for fourth grade students' in reading achievement were released, revealing that California had tied for last with Louisiana.

This event, in particular, may have set the stage for the scenario concerning reading instruction and federal mandates that we currently face. Flippo (1999) stated that in reaction to California's results, politicians and education officials were outraged and quickly adopted programs requiring the teaching of explicit phonics-based instruction in reading and spelling. Public education officials in California were joined in adopting phonics-based reading instruction by their counterparts in
Texas. As a result of a series of complicated associations between researchers, politicians, education officials, and publishers of instructional programs, Texas further established the scenario for the questionable use of scientifically-based research in beginning reading instruction. Consider Taylor’s (1998) rendering of the influence of politics in Texas, and its ramifications in other states, upon efforts to identify how children can learn to read well. Barbara Foorman and her colleagues, according to Taylor, demonstrated that the explicit teaching of phonemic awareness skills raised test scores of the children in their studies. State officials in California praised Foorman’s results, as well as that of other phonemic awareness proponents, such as Keith Stanovich, and used them to formulate strategies to incorporate phonemic awareness into P-3 reading programs. What troubled Taylor is that these two researchers, among others, cited each others work so often that it took on an air of credibility. She also found that the studies conducted by Foorman and Stanovich used to support their position on phonemic awareness were flawed:

To some degree, all of these experimental studies: (1) were based on the assumption of cultural uniformity; (2) focused on aggregates of children; (3) separated children’s everyday lives from their performance on isolated cognitive tasks; (4) artificially disconnected the forms of written language from the functional meanings of print; (5) assumed that children’s early cognitive functions work from abstract exercise to reading as meaningful activity; (6) depended on cognitive tests that have no value outside the testing situation; (7) assumed the transfer of learning; and (8) totally disregarded the critical relationships that exist between teachers and children. (Taylor, 1998, pp. 10-11)

As Taylor attempted to analyze Foorman’s research as it had been presented in Texas, she requested a more complete version of it, including data collection procedures, and analysis and interpretation of the data. Foorman referred Taylor to a
then unpublished article, as well as to the director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), who in turn referred her to that same unpublished article. Coles (2000) further examined the evasive nature of Foorman’s research. He stated that while a paper by Foorman describing her field testing of a phonemic-awareness-training program was cited by Adams, Lyons, Moats, Foorman herself, and other researchers, the paper only briefly summarized another report supporting 15 minutes of daily phonological awareness activities. According to Coles, the paper stated that additional information was available elsewhere, which turned out to be another paper, in which only three pages described the study of the training program, and did not include any test score information, making it impossible for the assessments in the study to be analyzed by anyone else.

Although Foorman’s research had been widely shared as evidence for the need of phonics-based reading instruction, the unavailability of the actual documentation of the work made it, in effect, unassailable; by the time it was actually published, it was too late to criticize as it had already been used to inform state and federal policy on beginning reading instruction (Taylor, 1998). Ironically, according to Taylor, at a reading summit meeting in Texas, Foorman herself revealed the flaws of her research; she defined whole language (a literacy program she had studied), but then indicated she did not know what that definition meant. She also indicated that the whole language control group used in one of her studies had been the lowest SES group, and told the summit participants that, although there had been large teacher variability in the study, she had not taken teacher effects into consideration.
So while we are caught in the pendulum’s wild swing, we should be mindful of two points from a position statement of the International Reading Association (1999): there is no single method that guarantees the success of all children in learning to read; and therefore, teachers must know well both the children that they are teaching, and a variety of methods for teaching reading.

**Phonemic Awareness and Phonics in Early Literacy Instruction**

The terms “phonemic awareness” and “phonics” refer to different aspects of phonological awareness, which have to do with attending to sounds in language (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Christie, Enz, and Vukelich (2003) defined “phonemic awareness” as “understanding that words consist of a sequence of phonemes” (speech sound units), while “phonics” was defined as “making connections between letters in written words and [phonemes]” (p. 94).

Despite criticisms of the NRP report, instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics plays a significant role in early literacy development. It would appear that the challenge, or perhaps the wisdom, is to know what aspects of phonological awareness to teach to whom, at what time and in what context. Adams (1990) suggested: “Phonological awareness, letter recognition facility, familiarity with spelling patterns, spelling-sound relations, and individual words must be developed in concert with real reading and real writing and with deliberate reflection on the forms, functions, and meanings of texts” (p. 422). Caution was advised in the implementation of these learning strategies, however, considering the concerns of some experienced in the field of teaching reading and writing to children.
What appears to be a concern for some educators is not that phonemic awareness and phonics are being emphasized in early literacy instruction, but the way that instruction is being implemented. Yatvin, Weaver, and Garan (2003) urged (in response to the NRP report) that several cautions be considered when using phonemic awareness and phonics in instruction:

- neither should be taught prior to children having experience with reading and writing, which would make them meaningless;
- neither should be taught in isolation, which decontextualizes them;
- the benefits from these instructional areas may not be lasting over time – the increase in scores tend to disappear after first grade;
- and, using a small amount of training in phonemic awareness and phonics is better than a large amount of training. (Less than 20 hours with no session lasting more than 30 minutes was found to be adequate).

Smith (2003a) also urged caution, and offered criticism, in the promotion of “sounding out” strategies for young readers. He stated that this strategy is unreliable, as there are too many alternatives and exceptions; he suggested that learning whole words was a better and more reliable way for learning to read and write.

Finally, some educators and researchers have indicated that NCLB is to blame for an overly heavy emphasis on phonics and phonemic awareness. Meyer (2002) criticized some commercial reading programs, particularly those endorsed by the NCLB Act, as lacking the views of classroom teachers and their students. He stated that these programs ignore the needs and differences among learners and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, at the cost of authentic learning and in order to benefit special-interest groups and publishers. Such criticism gives weight to other complaints made against the heavy reliance on phonics and phonemic awareness in

How should phonemic awareness and phonics be used to teach reading and writing to young children? Strickland (1998a) called for the use of instructional strategies involving skills in these areas to be used in particular ways:

- the best context for using these skills is actual reading and writing.
- providing several strategies to read unfamiliar words rather than relying on just one (or two).
- using a whole-to-part-to-whole approach to new words, examining context, sound/letter patterns for onsets (beginning letters up to the first vowel) and rimes (the first vowel and the following letters), structural analysis, and other patterns.
- skills that address the alphabetic code should be used in concert with skills that address comprehension, responding to literature, and the use of the writing process.

Schiller (2001) identified several ways to approach the teaching of, and providing experiences to encourage attentiveness to, phonemic awareness and phonics skills appropriate for young children: poems; alliterative sentences and phrases; songs; tongue twisters; stories featuring props, flannel boards, and teacher-drawings; finger plays; action rhymes; small group extension activities; and books.

Cunningham (1999) stated that educators should view three different approaches to teaching phonics: synthetic, analytic, and analogic. In synthetic phonics, sounds are presented first, and then words that contain those sounds are learned. In analytic phonics, children are taught some words and then learn to
analyze the sounds therein. In analogic phonics, children are taught words and then taught patterns, which they then use to figure out other words. Cunningham also stated that up to one fourth of the literacy time block should be used for decoding and spelling instruction, devoting most of the time to guided reading, self-selected reading, and writing. Cunningham further reported that she used the analogic approach to phonics since research on the workings of the brain best support that approach; she also claimed that, although there is no research to show that analogic phonics is better than synthetic phonics or analytic phonics, there is evidence that analogic instruction improves decoding and spelling.

It would appear, then, that phonemic awareness and phonics can, and should, be included in a balanced approach to literacy instruction for young children. At the early stages, the use of meaningful experiences is paramount, so that the very young see this aspect of learning as play (playing with sounds), just as they should in so many other areas of learning. As young children gain more experience, they should feel successful, and have confidence that their play with letter sounds is useful to them in extending and amplifying their play in other arenas. Finally, as they begin to gain actual experience in reading and writing, conscious reliance on these skill areas should be replaced by a desire to extract meaning from print and express meaning in their own words.

Best Practices in Early Literacy Instruction

Balance appears to be essential in early literacy instruction. Many researchers have cited Beginning to Read (Adams, 1990) to support their claims for programs that focus on aspects of phonological awareness, yet as Weaver (1998a)
noted, Adams actually argued for a broad range of experiences with print and books prior to being taught phonics. But is that enough? What does the term “balance” actually mean? In the field of education, specific terms describing ideas take on a life of their own. Some may speak of a particular concept or strategy without considering that those listening may not be thinking about the same thing. When such circumstances occur, trouble arises as the concept that was originally created is being adapted, (mis)interpreted, transformed, truncated, or implemented without the teachers who will use it having the proper training and it becomes something else altogether while still bearing the original conceptual name.

Such was the case, I believe, for “whole language,” despite its long history and clear definitions spelled out by its proponents. I recall a principal at my school, who decided that, over the course of several years, the faculty should implement integrated curriculum, character education, whole language, and several other innovative programs, taking one year to start up each new reform. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time: time to adjust to new parameters and strategies, time for students to become accustomed to new ways of thinking and learning, time for the training needed for teachers to successfully conceptualize and internalize new strategies and thinking that supported them. So when we came to the “whole language” year, some tried on their own, while others waited for a more formal introduction (which never occurred) and we were never really clear about the implementation, or the impact of a whole language philosophy, on the learning of our students. I tell this story because it applies to the concept of balance. The term ‘balance’ reminds me of the image of the pendulum and the extremes we have dealt
with in the past concerning opposing views on literacy, which are usually described as phonics-based and meaning-based. Again, however, that metaphor is problematic. We cannot simply rely on methodology and philosophy to determine balance; a balanced literacy program is much more than phonics balanced with literature. We must also consider individual needs to help us find balance. In my experience, a variety of essential components, including resources, professional development, support, and leadership must be considered in determining a balanced approach to early literacy. To achieve and maintain balance, a variety of factors must also be considered. So what does balance in early literacy look like?

The definition of balance in reading instruction, like other aspects of reading, is complicated. Reutzel (1999) offered this description of balance:

[T]he balance discussed in New Zealand embraced far more complex constructions of instructional practice than do the current simplistic and undisciplined thinking and rhetoric surrounding balanced reading in the U.S. today. The balance offered by New Zealand educators addresses issues of environmental design, assessment, modeling, guidance, interactivity, independence, practice, oral language acquisition, reading and writing processes, community, and motivation. (p. 232)

Yet teachers still struggle with the decision of which approach to use. Should we not take a more global examination, as seen in this definition? I believe that in many circumstances teachers do the right things intuitively without giving much conscious thought to their practice. While such teaching is good, is it consistent? Do we lose good habits when conditions change? I feel that we, as teachers, in seeking to find a balance must carefully examine and reflect upon our instructional practices in order to make the best use of them as we work with individual children and in order to share with other teachers what we have found to be effective. Fitzgerald (1999)
proposed the view that balanced reading is a perspective or a set of beliefs. Perhaps a broad perspective of what is needed in beginning reading instruction is a good starting place.

But what does balanced reading instruction look like? What does it do? While conducting a National Reading Research Center project (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, Rankin, Mistretta, Yokoi, & Ettenberger, 1997), a team of researchers stated that balanced reading is a complex venture and that highly effective teachers do combine explicit skills instruction with the reading and writing of authentic texts. They identified several classroom characteristics and instructional practices promoting effective early literacy learning: a literate environment; teaching of reading in context and in isolation; various types of reading; various types of materials read; teaching of writing in concert with reading; the reader’s ability driving the depth and level of directness of instruction; making literacy and instruction motivating; and accountability on the part of the student. Heald-Taylor (2001) emphasized that meaning is paramount to balanced reading and that learning and instruction must occur within a meaningful context. However, she also described graphophonic (the relationships between letters and sounds) cueing as one strategy to be used in concert with semantics and syntax, rather than the emphasizing only phonics as do some phonics-based programs.

Developing an understanding of a balanced approach to reading is an evolving process. Flippo (1999) demonstrated this by conducting a compelling study involving a panel of reading experts and their opinions about practices that would make learning to read difficult, or would facilitate learning to read. She
created a list of experts and researchers of reading from a wide range of perspectives and asked P. David Pearson (editor of the original *Handbook of Reading Research*) to validate her list. He did so and verified that it was balanced and represented the major perspectives. Flippo’s experts were: Richard Anderson, Brian Cambourne, Edward Fry, Yetta Goodman, Jane Hansen, Jerry Harste, Wayne Otto, Scott Paris, Pearson, George Spache, and Rand Spiro. Flippo asked the experts to create lists of contexts and practices that would and would not facilitate reading. They edited each other’s lists and continually refined them over a period of ten years. It is notable that many of the items on the list of practices that make learning to read difficult, such as grouping, focusing on skills rather than comprehension, and over-emphasizing phonics are the same practices encouraged by the scripted, phonics-based programs many schools are presently being obliged to use. The list of recommended practices for teaching reading supported a balanced approach to instruction, by such means as providing multiple, repeated demonstrations of how reading is done and/or used in authentic settings.

Still, some presume that there is a single method that is best to use in teaching beginning reading. Duffy and Hoffman (1999) argued against this view stating that teachers should, as professionals develop an eclectic approach to meet differing needs of individual students (see also Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000). However, caution must be exercised in the development of balance in reading instruction. There must also be opportunities for children to use and learn from language: “Children need regular and active interactions with print. Specific abilities required for reading and writing come from immediate experiences with
oral and written language” (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998, p. 32, emphasis theirs). Spiegel (1998) described a balanced literacy approach as having several characteristics: it is built on research; it regards teachers as informed, flexible decision makers; and it is built on a comprehensive view of literacy. Spiegel explained that this comprehensive view means that literacy involves both reading and writing: reading is more than just word identification; readers must take aesthetic and efferent stances; writers must express meaningful ideas; writing is more than just mechanics; and a comprehensive approach to literacy develops lifelong readers and writers. A basic understanding of the theories that form the foundation of early literacy instruction is essential in gaining a grasp of what balance is and what it can do. Without the necessary support of theory binding it together, an attempt at balance may result in an eclectic approach not having sufficient consistency or cohesion (Holdaway, 1979).

In redefining what is “basic” to reading instruction, Strickland (1995) chided: “Don’t waste time debating whether or not to teach phonics, spelling, grammar, and other ‘skills’ of literacy” (p. 299). She also stated that it was impossible for children to learn to read and write without these skills. These thoughts are echoed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in their handbook on teacher standards for early childhood generalists: “Accomplished teachers...recognize that skilled reading involves the integration of interacting systems of knowledge, including complex schemata, such as story structure, and more discrete knowledge, such as letter recognition” (National Board for
Professional Teaching Standards, 2001, p. 30). Greenberg (1998a) also agreed, stating that the observation and teaching of individuals was the essential issue, not phonics, in early literacy instruction. She also claimed that a teacher's judgment was a very powerful tool and that it should be used to decide which tools are to be used in particular instances of teaching (Greenberg, 1998b, emphasis added).

Strickland (1995) further suggested the use of differentiated instruction in reading instruction, which has often been considered an appropriate approach for teaching gifted and talented students. There are several ways to differentiate curriculum or instruction in reading. Towle (2000) recommended reading workshop as a way to differentiate reading instruction and meet all the needs of all readers, describing it as having five components: "teacher sharing time, focus lessons, state-of-the-class conference, self-selected reading and responding time, and student sharing time" (p. 38-39). These components help to set the stage, allow for individualized and small group instruction, and provide students time to present what they are enjoying in their reading. Ivey (2000) stated that reading instruction should be redesigned to permit reading programs to be more flexible: time for reading should be prioritized so that individual reading time could take place; more resources should be available for a greater variety of materials to be purchased; and improved teacher education programs for reading teachers rather than better commercial programs for reading instruction. Schneider (2000) said that children will improve in reading, writing, and thinking when they are exposed to a variety of student perspectives through small group writing tasks, literature circles, and creating biographical sketches or drawings related to critical sections in literature.
These products of children's involvement in literacy demonstrate the importance of its social aspect: they enjoy reading and writing within a community of discourse (Owocki, 2001; Routman, 1996; Strickland, 1995; Wiseman, 2003).

As educators we must expand the way we think if we are to provide new and creative approaches to reading instruction. Strickland (1998b) stated that the whole-part-whole teaching model provides a balanced conceptual framework that uses whole texts for specific skill instruction and includes planned application and practice within reading and writing contexts that are meaningful (see also Berry, 1999; Fowler, 1998; Moustafa, 1998). Strickland (1998a) also proposed several points of agreement amidst controversies of reading instruction: skills and meaning should not be separated; instruction should be systematic and orderly, but should also allow for learner variability; intensive instruction on specific skills should be based on need; documentation and monitoring are vital to determining the skills and intensity of instruction needed by an individual child; and teachers should be familiar not only with mandated instructional objectives within their educational system, but should also be very familiar with objectives for grades above and below those they teach. The message is clear: we must take a more global approach to instruction while providing an individualized approach to those we intend to teach.

*Early Literacy Development from an Early Childhood Perspective*

In an essay decrying the influence of the media upon the lives of children, Postman (1988) blamed the decline of childhood primarily on television. Our society seems to be compounding this decline with the direction our educational system is taking our children. What are the effects on the nature of childhood of our
efforts at driving our schools toward greater and better performance through standards, accountability, skills, and tests? While it may be important for children to perform well on learning tasks to justify the money that we spend on our educational system, what price are we willing to pay to substantiate those expenditures? Much has been said about the effectiveness of code-emphasis, holistic, and balanced approaches to reading instruction. But isn’t there more to consider than just effectiveness? Isn’t it important to also consider what we are doing to children’s motivation? Teachers have many opportunities to actively engage young children in essential literacy experiences: rich teacher talk; storybook reading; phonological awareness activities; alphabet activities; support for emergent reading and writing; shared book experiences; and integrated, content-focused activities (Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2003). All of these serve to maintain motivation and interest in acts of literacy. If the basic needs underlying motivation – competence, belonging, and choice (Gaskins, 2003) – are provided for, a solid foundation for early literacy is set. When children are taught, and treated, with respect they will accomplish much (Morrow & Asbury, 1999). Young children learning through rich, meaningful literacy experiences will be strongly motivated to become literate members of society.

What about belonging? Britsch and Meier (1999) found that ownership, inclusivity, and thinking processes are vital parts of developing a literacy community in an early childhood setting. If we establish these types of environments in preschools, as were present in their study, what happens when
those children go to kindergarten and learn that everything is different when it is
time to learn how to read?

I believe it is important that teachers, as they approach literacy instruction,
should also be aware of the importance of language development in young children.
Language instruction is an essential prerequisite for social and academic
development in young children (Howard, Shaughnessy, Sanger, & Hux, 1998). I
have long understood this progression and have seen evidence of it in my work with
preschool children. If a child is to share an idea, he must be able to express it in
words others can understand. If a child is to engage in social discourse and problem-
solving in a social milieu, she must possess the words needed to express her
opinions, suggestions, and options. If something interferes with language
development in a young child, such as an undetected hearing impairment, it can be
especially difficult to remediate that lag in development. Sometimes it takes years
for the child to catch up.

I believe the same thing can be said of social development. If young children
in kindergarten and first grade are faced with such rigorous instruction in reading
for extended periods of time, when will they have time to learn how to get along
with their peers and develop strategies for life within a social setting that is new to
them? That child (most likely a boy) who does not “get” phonics-based instruction,
may develop into a hostile fifth-grader who hates school. He is hostile because he
doesn’t have the social skills he needs; he did not have sufficient time and support
to develop them when he was younger. He failed to do so because he was spending
too much time being frustrated by phonemic awareness lessons that lacked meaning
for him. The sad part is that no one ever noticed the reason why he wasn’t “getting it” during reading time and he fell behind in other subjects because he never learned to read very well. Where is the joy in that child’s life? Too many children are going unnoticed because they do not fit our view of how children are supposed to learn and yet we wonder why some children turn to violence, or other inappropriate actions, in order to gain, if not understanding, then at least attention!

Owocki (2001) developed four principles for understanding and facilitating early literacy development. It is her belief, supported by research, that literacy develops: as a social and cultural practice; through hypothesis testing; idiosyncratically; and through the simultaneous development of concepts. One example of addressing children’s needs for meaningful, accessible, and social learning experiences is through integration of the foundations for reading instruction and language development. Teachers should use a special time during sharing circle to provide children the opportunity to regularly share a topic of interest with the rest of the class (Spangler, 1997). Children might explore occupations, either those they aspire to or their parents’ jobs, or other thematic topics that they find compelling. These experiences encompass, within an atmosphere that promotes learning within a social environment, the individual interests of children that are developmentally appropriate through the support of their teacher and culturally relevant when they reflect the values and beliefs of their family background. It is important to remember that children’s learning is facilitated, and not necessarily controlled, by their teacher: “Developmentally appropriate practice in early literacy instruction means that literacy development is evident throughout the school day. Teachers
provide literacy instruction when spontaneous situations arise" (Morrow, 2004, p. 88).

Geekie, Cambourne, and Fitzsimmons (1999) discussed their theory of learning that is closely related to whole language philosophy. One of their principles that serves to clarify whole language is: effective instruction is contingent upon the response of the child. Contingent instruction implies the belief that literacy is supported by a complicated array of responses by the teacher that depend on a child's attempt, or lack thereof, to respond to a task. In their view, a teacher should provide the level of support a child needs and thus should be aware of how best to approach those needs as evidenced by the child's response to the task. A teacher must respond to a whole classroom of children, each of them with a unique set of skills and weaknesses; a teacher must use his knowledge of these characteristics to choose the best way to instruct each child in a given literacy task. (See Appendix B for examples of child-centered literacy activities.)

The younger the child, the larger a proportion of time should be spent on informal learning activities, which include dramatic play of a spontaneous nature, art, and "cooperative work on extended group investigations or similar exploratory and constructive projects in which the teacher role is consultative rather than didactic" (Katz, 1991, p. 54). Such work, allowing for learning in depth, is often lacking in elementary classrooms. Clearly a Vygotskyan perspective is needed in the use of direct instruction; written language should be cultivated rather than imposed (Chapman, 1996). A teacher must scaffold learning activities, allowing children to try them and, as they apply concepts to practical and increasingly more complex
tasks, understand how to use them for their own learning purposes (Mason & Sinha, 1993).

Children explore and assimilate new learning through experiences that occur during their involvement in play and projects (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). These transactions, in which children acquire experience with language, are what guide their inventions using language toward its more conventional use (Whitmore & Goodman, 1997). The connections between experiences that allow construction, exploration, and creativity and success in reading achievement are quite evident. "Background experiences are what readers use to develop, expand, and refine concepts that words represent" (Rupley, Logan, & Nichols, 1998, p. 338). These background experiences serve the learner as a lattice upon which they build new and more sophisticated knowledge. Early intervention of appropriate types (that provide necessary experiences) not only serves typical children to grow as learners, but also helps to prevent children in a number of risk groups from dropping out of school when they are older (Denti & Guerin, 1999). Consideration of what is interesting to children should also be considered in creating curriculum for young children, because they will often express curiosity in areas in which they lack experience (Jones & Nemmo, 1994).

Hawai‘i’s education system has recognized the need for personal, constructivist learning. In a rubric to examine each school’s educational foundation and evaluate the extent to which it provides public schools in Hawai‘i a challenging, coherent, relevant, and meaningful curriculum, the highest level score is reserved for schools where “in-depth learning, construction of knowledge, connection of
prior knowledge to new learning across disciplines, and applications of learning in real-life contexts are emphasized,” and “the curriculum is dynamic and valued by students, teachers, parents, and the larger community. Systematic review and renewal of the curriculum and program goals are the norm” (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 2000, p. 47).

One construct that must be considered in seeking balance is the theoretical model upon which a reading program is based. According to Weaver (1998b), programs that promote phonics before other components of reading and in isolation are based on a behavioral model: knowledge is transmitted from teacher to students and they learn only what they are directly told or shown. Weaver (1998b) also stated that programs that promote phonics and other cueing systems and strategies in context are based on a constructivist model; “the more meaningful and natural the context in which something is taught, the more likely it is that what’s taught will be learned and used” (p. 8). That consideration, primarily, is what seems to have influenced Weaver’s position on and description of balance:

I argue for instruction based on a coherent integration of the best of differing bodies and types of research and a theory of reading that puts meaning at the heart of reading from the very beginning, rather than as some distant goal. (Weaver, 1998c, p. 14)

Young children want to know about things: how they work, what they look like, and their uses. They are driven to seek meaning in the world around them. When young children are asked to focus on something as abstract, and often ambiguous, as speech sounds, without sufficient experience in this area, they may become confused. The difference of one year’s experience may serve to support a
young child’s literacy development, which is needed to build an understanding of how sounds are related to words. Such was this case in my preschool class during the 2003-2004 school year. The overwhelming majority of the students in the class had already enjoyed one year of preschool. My team and I observed that this class as a whole was particularly aware, not only of rhyming words and sounds, but also of functions of print, environmental print, uses of writing, purposes for reading, and ways to share and enjoy stories and literature. The class included several children who were particularly expressive and/or creative. It was the first year that we had seen more than just one or two children who, given the opportunity, were willing to share songs they had created with their classmates. We enjoyed songs about butterflies, motorcycles, and cars. We found that the expressive children especially enjoyed leading the group in reenacting both favorite stories and dramatic events that had occurred during play time. Such sharing of personal stories is important for children of all ages (Chenfeld, 2002); as children engage in sociodramatic play, they enter into new contexts for literacy development (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002/2003; Owocki, 2001). We believed that the language and literacy phenomena we had observed were greatly influenced by earlier experiences that had occurred in the lives of these children.

It is essential for early childhood educators to understand the partnership they have with parents in developing early literacy. There are many opportunities for teachers to support literacy development at home. Such activities as literacy activity packs, lending libraries for both children and parents, and “homework” assignments that feature the children and their families are often used. It is vital for
teachers to be aware that home contexts afford approaches to literacy that are usually not available within a school context (Hannon, 1998). Yet, literacy activities do more than just provide additional practice; children learn, both in conjunction with and about their families, when they enjoy literacy together (Franklin, 2002).

Finally, access to literacy cannot be overlooked in the grand scheme of addressing the needs of young children and their families. McQuillan (1998) established that reading proficiency must be preceded by access to books, which helps to increase the amount of reading in which a child is engaged. This position was later supported by others (Neuman, 1999; Neuman, Celano, Greco, & Shue, 2001).

No Child Left Behind and Professional Development

The issue of professional development is but one aspect of change being sought through No Child Left Behind. It is imperative, however, to examine other areas of change within the overall picture of the law, in order to see the role that professional development might play in facilitating change that is both widespread and profound.

According to Stewart (2004), NCLB has the capacity to cause significant reforms in early literacy instruction through an emphasis on variety of areas, including word study, vocabulary growth, fluency, comprehension, and access to caring, knowledgeable teachers. While we wait to see the outcome of those efforts in classrooms around the country, some critics are saying the law is flawed and the reforms it seeks are not possible within the law as it is currently being funded. The General Accounting Office estimated that NCLB’s testing requirements alone could
cost between $1.9 billion and $5.3 billion depending on the quality of the testing (Harvey, 2003). Some state officials question the commitment of the federal government as evidenced by the meager portion of the required costs being paid to states. In Ohio, for example, it is projected, the costs of fulfilling the law will grow quickly to $1.5 billion per year by 2010, with the federal government paying only $40 million per year; yet the promised monies are not showing up in the federal budget (Jehlen, Holcomb, Loschert, O'Neil, & Winnans, 2004). A lack of commitment to funding was not limited to literacy programs, as Ivins & Dubose (2003), noted:

The Bush budget for fiscal year 2004 (written in early 2003) provided two thirds of what Bush had promised a year earlier. It eliminated funding for rural education, gifted-and-talented programs, small schools, and technical education. After-school programs lost $400 million. Special education, the issue that drove Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords out of the Republican party, was funded at a rate that will get it to full funding in a mere thirty-three years from the date the No Child bill became law. (p. 88)

Schools that set high standards under the law have been punished for failing to meet them, while states with low standards have not yet been threatened with sanctions. California, which had set the highest standards in the nation for student achievement prior to the enactment of NCLB, had 1200 failing schools, as of last summer (Posnick-Goodwin, 2004, September); Michigan, also with high standards, had 1513 failing schools, while Arkansas, with low standards, had no schools designated as failing (Bracey, 2003). What we are facing is a nationalization of educational policy that overrules the states’ standard capacity to adapt such policy (Elmore, 2003).
We must also consider other, non-dollar, costs. What do we give up under this law? Since there is such a heavy emphasis on test scores in reading and math (and soon to be in science), other areas of the curriculum are being sacrificed, both in terms of time and funding. Vicki Newberry, a teacher on Moloka‘i, decried the fact that environmental education, which fosters learning in other subject areas, is being reduced in its scope because it is not “on the test” (Franklin, 2004). Other learning areas are increasingly being de-emphasized, including music, creative and performing arts, and even social studies (Loschert, 2004); in some areas of the country, teachable moments, field trips, physical education, class discussions, hands-on learning, and even recess are being considered for elimination or severely limited (if such cuts have not already been made), in order to have more time to prepare for testing (Posnick-Goodwin, 2003, December).

There is so much pressure on schools and teachers to raise test scores. P. David Pearson stated that “we could well end up with a nation of kids who can pass tests, but who can neither read critically nor enjoy the act of reading itself” (Jehlen, 2004, p. 25). Some skeptics of the law question the sanctions imposed for schools who do not meet the required test scores. Gerald Bracey said:

Consider that the Bush administration is deregulating every pollution industry in sight. Why would an administration with such a policy perspective turn around and impose many new, straitjacket requirements on schools – requirements that would bankrupt any business? . . . When the pre-ordained high failure rate occurs, privatization will be touted as the only possible cure. (as quoted in Posnick-Goodwin, 2003, February, p. 18)

Posham (2001) stated that the use of standardized achievement tests will fail to accurately evaluate instructional effectiveness for three reasons: what is on the test
does not match what is usually taught in school (or is even supposed to be taught); the format of such a test, and the way the questions are written, is based on the assumption that some completing it will automatically fail; and what causes a poor performance on such tests has more to do with socioeconomic status or inherited aptitude of the individual student than the quality of schooling.

If these statements are true, where does that leave educators, who are faced with this impossible task of fulfilling an improbable task? In a poll taken by the National Education Association, teachers were asked what the most important issues they were facing. ‘Respect’ topped the list, followed closely by ‘fixing NCLB.’ Teachers cited a total disrespect from the federal level of government, accompanied by a disregard for the complex situations in which teachers work (Flannery, Holcomb, & Jehlen, 2004). One could say such feelings were just an excuse for teachers to not meet high standards. Yet the law is inconsistent; it includes stipulations that allow private companies, including faith-based groups, to be paid for tutoring services given to students who attend failing schools. Ironically, such companies are not held to the same levels of accountability that schools and their teachers must meet (Loschert, O’Neil, & Winans, 2004).

So where do we, as professional educators go from this point? How does professional development play a role in this scenario? Jerald (2003) stated that we have more options beyond the two most obvious choices: hoping that accountability will be just another fad that will soon be forgotten; or simply teaching to the test and ignoring the underlying academic needs of students. He claimed that schools need to establish a culture of problem solving to examine what is not working and create
new approaches to problems that are too familiar. Standardized tests are limited, if they serve any purpose at all in determining ways to address specific reading difficulties; it is necessary to conduct diagnostic assessments that will help identify students’ individual needs (Valencia & Buly, 2004). In the long run, it is the solutions with greater potential for change, such as professional development that is focused on curriculum that will help us answer call for accountability, not those short-sighted solutions, such as test preparation, upon which we presently rely (Elmore, 2003). Smith (2003b) claimed that the entire issue regarding how reading should be taught comes down to what one believes about reading, learning, and teaching: whether reading is constructing meaning or decoding to sound; whether the learner plays an active or passive role in learning to read; and whether the teacher or outside authorities should lead instruction.

A Community of Learners

As teachers share their knowledge, experiences, successes, and failures, the teaching practices of those engaged in such dialogue are continually reexamined and refined. This social aspect of the teaching profession reveals educators’ reliance on each other for professional development. Perhaps Engeström (1994) best described the extent of the social characteristic of the learning by professionals:

Learning is always a series of social occurrences. Even when learning takes the form of individual study physically separated from other people, the application of what is studied will eventually happen in arenas of shared practice and social interaction. Learning takes place either directly or indirectly in a community of practice. (pp. 35-36)

Within the context of this study the participants and I became what I would describe as a group whose focus was on professional educators learning together,
specifically, a “community of learners.” This description is based on the theory of “community of practice” that has been described in a broader schema of business, education, and other ventures.

Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) described a process they named “legitimate peripheral practice,” which considers the social nature of learning as newcomers attain mastery of skill and knowledge through participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. “This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Their conceptualization of this process was strongly influenced by Lave’s research on craft apprenticeships among Liberian tailors. It was observed that apprentice tailors became, almost without exception, highly skilled master tailors through an established sequence of learning experiences. Surprisingly, this sequence did not involve explicit teaching, examination, or call for the apprentice to simply copy specific tailoring tasks.

What is unique to the view of Lave and Wenger is that instead of examining only cognitive processes and concepts, they considered how social interaction provides a viable context for learning (Hanks, 1991). Situated learning suggests that the process of learning skills demands a requisite level of interaction and production using the desired skills. Rather than learning a body of knowledge to be replicated in future settings, a learner instead acquires the necessary skills to perform by engaging in the actual use of a skill, under conditions of legitimate peripheral participation within a learning community.
To further clarify the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, the interrelatedness of these terms should be examined. Lave and Wenger explain that as there is probably no such thing as “central participation” (since there is probably no true, or single, center within a community), there is a variability of participation within a community of practice. Any participation, which in their view is described as peripheral, should be considered legitimate. As learners grow toward “full participation” through their exchange of perspectives, they move away from peripheral positions. Peripheral participation should not be considered in a negative light, or as being disconnected from the group. It is a dynamic position in which a learner gains access to information through continued involvement. It is noteworthy that legitimate peripheral participation may occur within a variety of educational forms, or, indeed, in the complete absence of one.

Through the continued work of Wenger, legitimate peripheral participation grew into the theory of “communities of practice” as a conceptualization of learning within a social context (Wenger, 1998). He based this theory on four premises: learning is a social phenomenon; knowledge equates to competence in a valued enterprise; knowing involves participation in the pursuit of those enterprises; and meaning is the ultimate achievement of learning. This theory was further described in terms of the components which translate social participation into a process of learning. This social learning theory assumes four components:

- **learning through meaning** - a means to talk about our capability, both as individuals and as members of communities, to experience meaning in our environment;
- **learning through practice** - a means to talk about factors which can maintain the focus and endeavor of the community
• learning in community - a means to talk about the social structures in which the worthiness to complete a process is determined and participation in the process is deemed valuable;
• learning through identity - a means to talk about how learning changes community members and creates a record of personal transformation in the context of a community.

Communities of practice are everywhere and are integral to our daily lives. They occur in families and within schools. Stamps (1997) described communities of practice in varied forms, including chapters of Alcoholics Anonymous, The Xerox Corp., and three small flute-producing workshops near Boston. Goals of such communities can change with time depending on the needs of the group.

Members within a community of practice select themselves as participants. The group is informally structured and usually functions within a larger organization, but not as a creation of those who traditionally make important decisions within that organization (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). The participants in a community of practice learn together by examining problems encountered in their daily work and seeking to determine solutions. “The strength of communities of practice is self-perpetuating. As they generate knowledge, they reinforce and renew themselves. That’s why communities of practice give you not only the golden eggs, but also the goose that laid them” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 143).

Research on Group Learning Theory

Communities of practice, although relatively recent in their formal description, have long existed within educational settings. They have proved to be useful for the professional development of teachers (Pugach, 1999b), through “rich opportunities for learning...as a function [of] belonging to a community of practice
that includes highly experienced masters who can ‘sponsor’ the learning of novices” (Pugach, 1999a, p. 269). Since teachers have often felt disenfranchised from the process of building the base of knowledge for teaching (Palinscar, 1999), communities of practice have been ideal channels to allow them some measure of ownership in this process. A number of teacher groups have recently employed a community of practice as the framework for their research. This research was varied and included such topics as the critical examination of approaches to literacy assessment (Perry, Walton, & Calder, 1999) and the development of a restructured teacher education program at a Canadian university (Hutchinson & Martin, 1999).

One study addressed the need to link teachers in the schools with researchers at the university (Henry, Scott, Wells, Skobel, Jones, Cross, Butler, & Blackstone, 1999). What became evident in examining this need was that both perspectives, those of consumer of research and generator and disseminator of research, are needed to continually refine and reform teaching and learning efforts. This study revealed that discourse among community members is valued and encouraged so that more complex understandings are created and that significant teacher change may occur. It was concluded that these understandings are a much better result than superficial attempts to implement a small portion of what was shared at an inservice training session. Indeed, Day (1993) noted: “Much ‘lip service’ is paid to the need for teachers to reflect upon their worth, but . . . not enough is understood about the benefits of opportunities and challenges for reflection of different kinds at different levels” (p. 83).
Some researchers have conducted significant studies that used social learning theory to examine the impact of collaboration and reflection in various contexts within schools. Rust used a case study of the reactions of several role groups to a proposed change in a school’s kindergarten program. She found that early childhood educators enjoy a powerful position in affecting change in schools. “Where teachers have been integral to planning and decision-making, prepared to use the innovation, and know they can count on continued support, innovations are adopted” (Rust, 1989, p. 458). Rust also conducted a qualitative analysis of conversations among new teachers. She concluded:

Adults [who are] engaged in the process of teacher education, whether they be teacher educators, preservice, or inservice teachers, need supported opportunities to reflect upon their own funds of knowledge, explore their attitudes and beliefs, and extend the repertoire of skills and strategies that form the underpinnings of their work. (Rust, 1999, p. 370)

Community of Practice as Professional Development

The concept of community of practice as a venue for professional development has gradually taken hold in the field of education. Although community of practice is not a familiar model for professional development in the early childhood arena, its use is well documented in other areas of education (Buysse, Wesley, & Able-Boone, 2001). A community of practice is a suitable model for professional development, I believe, since it relies on collaboration, self-direction, and ownership of a collective identity and purpose.

A community of practice is a means to allow teacher inquiry to occur through such vital components of professional development as trust, collaboration, and self-evaluation. Trust, the foundation for a community of practice, is instilled
into relationships in a community when members accept that the responsibility for understanding, within the context of their own learning, and the authority for knowing is vested in the community and shared among its members (Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1998). While reflection is important to this process, it is not always culturally appropriate to expect someone to speak in the presence of others, especially those with whom they are not familiar (Bowman, 1994). It should be acceptable for a member of a community to choose to be silent; being sensitive to such cultural values requires time for trusting relationships to be built among group members. Allowances should be made for community members to respond in ways that are both meaningful and comfortable to them. Relationships based on trust should help teachers be willing to take risks as learners. Those teachers who can embrace a level of uncertainty allow themselves to make use of an opportunity to grow together by posing questions among themselves and considering the responses they formulate to make better decisions as teachers (Graham, Hudson-Ross, Adkins, McWhorter, & Stewart, 1999).

Clearly, a teacher’s learning process does not end upon graduation from a university teacher education program, it continues throughout a teacher’s career (Cochran-Smith, 1999). What better model of lifelong learning can a child have than through the teaching and learning that is demonstrated by her teacher? As Kramer affirmed:

Good teaching is a process of exploration, review, reflection, and reapplication. Good teachers don’t view themselves as masters of their art filled with all there is to know about the subject of teaching, but rather are able to view themselves as learners – constantly looking at choices and questioning what works. (Kramer, 1994, p. 30)
One of the basic components of professional development is dialogue (Goffin & Day, 1994). Stott and Bowman (1996) claimed that teacher education should be based on dialogue, rather than information flowing from expert to novice in only one direction. A community of practice not only endorses the use of dialogue among practitioners, it relies on dialogue to maintain connections within the community, keeping the community viable and useful to those within it.

For professional educators, it is more meaningful to learn about teaching based on inquiry within communities rather than through training of individual teachers (Cochran-Smith, 1999). Learning to teach is a lifelong endeavor that is filled with many questions. It is fitting, then, to seek the answers to those questions with others who are like-minded. Lampert (1999) discussed a discourse of practice as a means of teacher inquiry. She described this discourse as a way to talk about the strategies used in teaching to address problems in teaching that arise each day. The time teachers spend together allows them to better understand what is happening in their classrooms as they engage in such discourse. Yamagata-Lynch (2001) viewed a community of practice as a theoretical lens for examining, sustaining, and cultivating teaching practices that already exist.

Communities of practice have been the standard of professional development in Japan for both new and experiences teachers for some time (Shimahara as cited in Lampert, 1999). Lubeck (1998), recommended communities of practice for pre-service teachers as it would provide them opportunities to learn from each other without making judgments about the teaching practices or values of others. A community of practice is also a valuable setting for experienced teachers.
to gain insight into their work; teachers who seek to learn and improve through participation in a community of practice are offered an opportunity to reexamine their teaching practice through the eyes of another.

Teachers should be aware of what challenges they face in their own classrooms. When they consider these challenges, they are lead to observe, reflect upon, and try to understand the reasons for, and the impact of, the practices they employ. While any conclusions made by a teacher engaged in such self-study are contextualized, they serve to challenge not only theoretical frameworks of pedagogy, but also the status quo in the classroom (Clift & Albert, 1998). In addressing professional competencies, collaboration within a community of practice may also isolate new competencies in response to change (Buysse et al., 2001), that can hopefully be shared with other teachers in the field.

Self-evaluation, a by-product of a community of practice, allows teachers to consider their teaching and explain their thinking and decisions and how these have affected teaching practice. Engaging in such evaluation with peers allows teachers to develop as professionals in a supportive setting where coaching and mentoring can occur (Vartuli & Fyfe, 1993). Self-evaluation is also a means of growth through reflection, thought, and ideally, change. Chin and Benne (as cited in Richardson, 1999) theorized that change can provide autonomy for and growth in those who are part of a system. This approach to change is based on the theory that change results from deep reflection on beliefs and practices and requires dialogue to assist teachers in understanding their own beliefs and practices.
Conclusion

The literature informs this study in that, considering our current socio-political climate and the requirements placed on early childhood educators in the public school system, it provides a direction in which to proceed to address aspects of the law pertaining to professional development. The literature also helps to incorporate knowledge from the field of early childhood education about how young children experience early literacy development. Finally, my readings have guided me to potential tools to encourage professional development in this context through the use of reflection and narrative within a supportive, collaborative environment that is based upon research into communities of practice.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

A constructivist view was used in designing the professional development course, implementing it, and in analyzing the data for this study. Based on this view, certain assumptions were made and some limitations were incurred.

Constructivism

Teachers work within a social context. Teaching and learning are influenced by social characteristics of each of the individuals involved. I believe that the best teaching occurs when a teacher and her students have a positive regard for their interactions and understand that they are vital to achieving a shared goal. I also believe that teaching and learning are both constructivist in nature. What is known mutually, by learner and teacher, is used as a foundation to build new learning. Prior learning serves to guide and inform what is learned next. New knowledge in a particular area may also require the prior acquisition of knowledge from another area.

Teachers approach their work within a school in much the same way. Their nature as social beings is reflected in frequent and collaborative engagement among members within an organization. Decisions are commonly made after at least some interaction and discussion among teachers have taken place. Problems are solved cooperatively: teachers who encounter challenges often consult with their colleagues on possible avenues toward a solution in a specific context.
These same truths apply to professional development. It is a social venture; new knowledge about teaching is constructed by those participating in such professional development activities. The experiences that teachers bring to professional development sessions, which are unique because of the distinct social characteristics that exist in each teacher’s classroom, serve as building blocks that help identify what we know about teaching – what works and in what contexts. Teachers engaged in professional development designed to make meaningful changes in teaching practices and have a significant impact upon student learning pursue not just information, but a process of inquiry that involves a partnership among the teachers. They identify questions that are relevant and seek to formulate answers that are generally accepted by all. They examine how they teach and consider ways to improve their teaching. They tell stories about their teaching as a means to convey what they understand about their teaching practices and its impact upon their students. They regard one another as peers, resources, and friends. A common language is spoken among them as they talk about similar experiences within a variety of settings.

Constructivist theory assumes that truth is a result of perspective (Schwandt, 1998). It is reflected, I believe, in this study in a number of ways. First, each participant’s statements, either written or spoken, were taken at face value. The participants did not enter into deliberations concerning philosophical aspects of early literacy development. Rather, they talked about what they understood those aspects to mean, how they were manifest in each of their particular settings, and
how the sharing of that information served all of them in learning more about this aspect of their teaching.

To capture the essence of a professional development course as a setting for teacher learning, I chose to use narrative inquiry within a case study as my methodology. Narrative inquiry aligns well with constructivist theory in that the principal function of narrative is to examine and describe the perspective of the individual (Bruner, 1988). It can be viewed as a way to construct life and what it means: “Life as led, is inseparable from life as told . . . life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (Bruner, 1988, p. 582). Teacher stories, the narrative in this study, lend themselves well to a constructivist paradigm, one could argue, since truth about teaching is constructed as multiple truths, not discovered as a single truth, by teachers themselves, and since no single reality of teaching exists that is independent of mental activity and symbolic language. Statements from the literature support my perspective that narrative serves as a tool for teachers to use to examine, test, and modify their beliefs and practices. Schwandt (1998) said that “we invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience” (p. 237). Sen (2002) claimed that “we can analyse our own ‘narratives’ and find a ‘voice’ with which to record our development” (p. 78). Creswell’s (1998) statement on knowledge is also significant to the issue of social construction of knowledge:

Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with individual biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close
way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied. (p. 19)

Polkinghorne (1995) described two types of narrative inquiry: “analysis of narrative” and “narrative analysis.” He stated that the distinction between the two has to do with modes of thought and the product resulting from such research. “Analysis of narrative” involves classification of information and takes the form of conceptual categories. “Narrative analysis” considers particular characteristics of people’s actions; it takes the form of a story.

Assumptions and Rationale

I chose to study the topic of literacy, because I have a willingness to share what I have learned through intensive reading, learning, and practice during the past ten years, as well as a desire to know more about early literacy development. I think that early literacy was an important topic of study for these teachers because it helped them strengthen their overall teaching practice. The study of early literacy development lent itself well to this study in that teachers could construct what they know and want to know about this piece of the curriculum for which they are responsible.

It is important that we as educators have some knowledge of what occurs in each other’s classroom. This is particularly true in view of the challenges imposed on our profession by NCLB requirements. Alvermann (1996) claimed that:

Narrative research that is grounded in the everyday world of literacy and teaching provides entry into that world. Stories of how local knowledge of literacy conditions can help shape policy decisions are few and far between; however, they signal still further the collapsing of boundaries once thought to separate the research community from the world of practice – the knower from the known. (p. 136)
Through narrative inquiry, it is engagement in this separation of boundaries between educational research and daily teacher practice that I hoped to accomplish through my research, both in terms of an improved understanding of best practices for early literacy development, but also by expanding the knowledge base of effective professional development, particularly in the use of narrative and reflection.

Gillespie (1996) claimed:

As a reflective practice method, narrative exerts its transformative power through allowing the storyteller to explore her self-identity. . . But narrative’s attraction lies in its capacity to let the storyteller express herself as fluid and partial, from this place, at this time, with this student. (p. 18, emphasis hers). . . It is this process of self-construction and self-discovery that gives narrative its uniqueness as a tool of reflective practice. (p. 19)

These characteristics of fluidity and self-construction are relevant to professional development, because they provide opportunities for teachers to examine their daily practice, discover who they are as teachers, and, seeking to improve their work with children, construct (or perhaps continue to construct) who they are as teachers.

**Research Design**

I have employed a narrative case study design in conducting this research. Stake (2000) described case study as simultaneously a process of inquiry and the product of that inquiry. The case being studied in this instance was a professional development course, which incorporated: a group of early childhood educators supporting their students as they developed knowledge, skills, and dispositions in early literacy; the teachers’ responses to readings on early literacy development; narratives they wrote concerning lessons the had implemented; the interactions of these teachers within the context of a community of practice, or more specific to this...
situation, a community of learning; and their reflections about the relationships among these aspects of their teaching and learning. In light of Stake's definition, this case study was the actual course, in which teachers engaged in a process of inquiry into their teaching; the product of the case is the narrative report that follows this chapter.

I chose to use case study as the research design for this study. The "case" was a professional development course in early literacy development for teachers of preschool, kindergarten, and first grade students. It was bounded by a limit of time (twelve weekly meetings) and place (a school library), which are essential features of a case study (Creswell, 1998). It is important to recognize several features of the study as they pertain to case study methodology. The course, as a setting for professional development, involved teachers as learners in a collaborative setting. My role in the case study was three-fold: I was the facilitator of the course; I used my knowledge as an early childhood practitioner to develop the course and participate in it; and I served as researcher of the case study. Case study methodology was useful in considering the social aspect of collaboration within a professional development context, as they are reflected in the teachers' writings.

The data I collected to study the case came from teachers' written narratives and reflections. I collected and analyzed these data to create a detailed description of the case and its context. Finally I reported my findings, describing the themes and conclusions that arose from the data.
Participants and Setting

This study was conducted within the context of a professional development course on early literacy, offered through the Hawai‘i State Department of Education’s Professional Development and Educational Research Institute. The course allowed a small group of public school teachers of children of ages 3-7 (both in general and special education settings) to examine components of early literacy development while using their stories and reflections as tools for learning about teaching, understanding other educators’ views, and growing together as a community of practitioners in early childhood education. Each participant was required to complete reflective journal entries, narratives from their own classroom experiences, and written responses to assigned readings to be compiled in a learning portfolio. The portfolio consisted of: 36 journal entries, incorporating personal reflections and written descriptions of critical incidents; ten lesson narratives, including descriptions of and thoughts concerning lessons that the participants had chosen and taught; and ten reading responses to assigned readings. I sought to encompass in this study what Rust (1999) described as the support for innovations, explorations of feelings and beliefs, and extension of the repertoire of skills. The course meetings were held weekly for two hours from March through May of 2004. Successful completion of the course resulted in the award of three professional development credits to each participant.
There were ten participants in the study; all of them were women.\textsuperscript{3} One was a first grade teacher; another was a special education teacher for K-3 children in a fully self-contained class. The remaining eight were preschool special education teachers. Of these eight, six were from inclusion classes;\textsuperscript{4} the other two were from fully self-contained classes. Four of the participants were Caucasian; six were Asian-Pacific Islander. One teacher was in the 41-50 age range; three were in the 31-40 age range; and six were in the 21-30 age range. Three of the participants were first year teachers; five of them had between three and ten years of experience; and two had more than 15 years of experience.

The participants for the study were self-selected; teachers who signed up for the course were offered the opportunity to be research participants; the enrollees were told that those who chose not to participate in the research would still be welcomed to complete the course. Prior to beginning the course, the participants were informed of the nature of the research study. The participants were given a waiver form (see Appendix C) protecting their privacy and asking their consent for the use of written reflections as research data. (The study was exempted from full review by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects since it was to be conducted in an established educational setting and involved normal educational practices.) I asked the participants to take the waiver with them, take time to consider their decision, and return the signed waiver, if they agree to participate, the following week. Several participants completed it immediately; the rest took it with

\textsuperscript{3} One teacher was unable to complete the course due to health problems. She did, however, complete a significant portion of the assignments, so the data from her assignments was included in the study.

\textsuperscript{4} An inclusion class is a setting wherein special education services are provided in concert with a program for children who are typical in their development.
them and returned it the following week. All of the course enrollees agreed to participate in the study. No questions arose during the duration of the course, or after it, concerning the waiver.

Role of the Researcher

It is necessary to examine the role of power that I held in two of my roles of facilitator and researcher. I realized that as the course facilitator, or teacher, I was in a position of power, whether I intended to be or not. I assured my participants that their contributions to the course were valued, that I did not view myself as an expert on literacy (or perhaps the only expert within the course), and that I would be joining them in discovering what is known and what is yet to be known (or known in specific contexts) about literacy. I believe that my role as an early childhood practitioner softened the position of power somewhat; the participants realized that I was presenting what I had read, implemented, and experienced in my own classroom. The climate of the course was one of collaboration, collegiality, and supportiveness.

Amabile and Stubbs (1982) identified three principles that address power issues having the potential to interfere with the collaboration I anticipated between the participants and me. I adapted and shared these principles with the participants during the first course meeting:

1. No one has all the answers. I have a valuable opportunity to learn from my colleagues; I cannot overlook that prospect in my role as facilitator of the course.
2. Every teacher has a measure of expertise through their own experience. My efforts to welcome teachers as experts will strengthen our relationship and the learning in which we are engaged.
Some questions have already been answered. Part of our goal for the course will be to examine information about early literacy and use it with our students. I am hopeful that my participants and I will take what we learn back to our schools and share it with our colleagues.

By embracing these principles, my role as practitioner in teaching and learning, gave credibility to my roles of facilitator, as I guided learning, and researcher, as I gathered information about learning. I believe the fact that I am a practitioner served to maintain balance between these other roles. The role of facilitator required me to maintain commitments I had made with PDERI concerning content and learning while fulfilling my commitment to those enrolled in the course; I also had to make best use of what I knew about adult learning pedagogy. The role of researcher required me to uphold the process of conducting research, including the protection of the participants in the study. The role of practitioner was based on my commitment to teacher quality and leadership within the early childhood community and that I sought to both add knowledge to the field and to broaden my own perspective. Each of the three roles continuously drove the other two. The beliefs I held, and the actions I took, in each of the three roles influenced my beliefs and actions in the other roles. Figure 1 shows the three aspects of the researcher’s role, and how they were interrelated within the context of this study.
Researcher
Observing and Listening
Using stories as data
Contribution new knowledge

Mentor
Facilitating learning
Eliciting stories
Teaching

Practitioner
Participating
Sharing my stories
Learning

Internal: beliefs
External: actions and practices

Figure 1. The Roles of the Researcher
Jones (1993) stated that in seeking to facilitate professional development one should consider the role, rather than a “fixer-upper” (from an authoritative, hierarchical standpoint) or a “star” (from a perspective of charismatic expertise), of a “storyteller” one who brings the knowledge of teachers, through their own stories, into the sphere of learning, creating a collaborative process where teachers’ stories are told back to them, and the facilitator becomes a partner in learning.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), researchers who engage in qualitative study must address issues relating to entry, reciprocity, and ethics. Attending to the issue of entry is rather straightforward: I offered the course as an early childhood educator, as an insider, not an outsider. Also, I had established a reputation, through my past facilitation of professional development experiences, of being trustworthy in collaborative contexts, knowledgeable of early childhood and adult learning pedagogies, and welcoming to the ideas of others. Concerning reciprocity, the participants received three professional development credits for completing the course, as well as building a community of practice in the context of early literacy development. Furthermore, there was neither tuition nor fees charged for the course. As a special motivation and to demonstrate the importance of access to literacy, I gave each participant one book for children to use in their own class after each session. At the end of the course, I also gave each participant one teacher resource book. Finally, to address ethical considerations, I complied with all institutional requirements of research involving human subjects. I also, as guided by

5 The preschool teachers received Teaching and learning in preschool (Venn & Jahn, 2004). The first grade teacher received Small-group reading instruction (Tyner, 2003); the K-3 special education teacher received Book clubs plus! (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, George, Hasty, & Highfield, 2004).
Creswell (1994), respected the rights, needs, values, and desires of all research participants.

To have a clear picture of my own impact on the study, I examined my biases relating to the professional development course and the study itself. I believe that narrative, the telling of stories about teaching practices and learning events, is a valuable and valid tool for teachers to use to communicate with parents and colleagues. Narrative allows teachers to openly express their perspective of what occurs in the classroom. Reflection is helpful to teachers as they reexamine those stories to determine what has taken place, what might result from it, and how a teacher’s practices might change as a result of this self-examination. When a teacher engages in narrative and reflection concurrently, she forms connections between actual events and potential responses, strategies for future use, and possible adaptations of successful teaching under circumstances that may arise later.

I have adopted a constructivist view of learning for both children and adults. I believe that since individuals have different learning styles, an array of different learning experiences, and unique personality traits, each person brings a different perspective to learning in a specific context. Based on that belief, I think that young children’s awareness of and engagement in literacy is emergent. They gradually become familiar with aspects of literacy and their purposes, and through exposure, experimentation, and input from others, begin to develop an ever-increasing sophistication in the uses of literacy that are meaningful to them. I believe that the best practice in teaching literacy embraces emergent learning; indeed, I also believe that teachers’ learning about early literacy development is also emergent in
character. Teachers of young children (including their parents) should be aware of opportunities for children to engage in literacy and allow them to experiment with letters, words, sounds, meaning, and more complex components of literacy. I think that too often, especially under the current approaches to literacy implemented in many schools today, educators limit the scope of children’s experience with literacy; they tend to get the message that certain things are done in certain ways and that there is very little room for variation. I believe that early childhood educators must assume a role of advocacy for young children, in order to ensure them a broad array of learning experiences relating to literacy. I also believe that professional development is one avenue to give teachers opportunities to become aware of their practice relating to literacy as well as maintaining a current knowledge of research in early literacy development.

By stating my biases, I have become more aware of what I believe as I approached this study. This awareness allowed me to recognize whether any of the participant’s views were different from mine. As I stated earlier, I was not the only expert in this course, and I benefited by having the opportunity to engage in examining early literacy development with my colleagues and learn from their wide-ranging experiences.

Methods of Data Collection

Clandinin and Connelly (1999) classified different types of narrative, including journal writing, teacher stories, autobiographical writing, field notes, as well as other writing, as field text. The field text for this study included the participants’ reflections, responses to assigned readings, lesson plans, and narrative
responses to their own lessons, as well as my own journal and field notes I made during course sessions.

To preserve confidentiality, each teacher was assigned a name code. (The name code, two randomly chosen letters of the alphabet different from that of either the participant’s first or last initials, was assigned in alphabetical order of last name.) I kept a master list of participant’s names and their assigned name codes in order to identify written artifacts to the individuals from whom these data originated; no one else had access to this information. Name codes were be used to identify data in the organization, analysis, and reporting of the data. To protect the privacy of teacher participants and any child mentioned during the course, references to individuals are reported using pseudonyms.

Data was collected from course assignments. I had originally intended to record discussions as a source of additional data; in fact, I did so for the first two sessions. Unexpectedly, the participants were hesitant to speak. As one participant stated when asked at what moment she felt most distanced, she wrote: “During big group discussion, there is silence” (SY – reflection 5). Due to this hesitancy, and since the setting did not support a decipherable rendering of the proceedings, the recording was discontinued.

During the first course session, I introduced the concept of critical incidents as one method of examining significant learning events. Although originally defined as a rare, pivotal occurrence in a person’s life, the meaning of a critical incident was

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6 One teacher random name code had to be changed; the random assignment resulted in a code for one teacher that was the same as another teacher’s initials.
expanded to include everyday classroom occurrences, and rather than being a life-
changing event, it has also been described as having to face the dilemma of
choosing between two dissimilar acts (Tripp, 1994), such as choosing between
sticking to a lesson plan or pursuing an opportunity for emergent learning. I used the
critical incident approach, drawing upon examples from my own experience and
from the literature, to establish how participants can begin to look at their teaching
practice or experiences from their own learning as a stepping stone toward journal
writing and other course work requiring reflection.

The participants kept reflective journals for the duration of the course. The
writing for these journals was usually open-ended and all-encompassing of their
experience: questions, feelings, ideas, discoveries, points of disagreement, and so
forth. Manley-Casimir and Wasserman (1989) stated:

[Journals serve as] a vehicle for making explicit those attitudes, sentiments
and values that form part of the writer. The journal is in some ways a mirror
−imperfect in reflection, yet reflecting and causing [the writers] to rethink
their experience, thoughts, feelings; to clarify their presuppositions and
decisions [allowing] the development of self-awareness, the recognition and
revelation of self in professional practice. (p. 290)

In essence, reflection requires thought on two levels: thinking about one’s actions
(in this venue, teaching practice) and contemplating the meaning of those actions
(exploring the effects of those actions on oneself and one’s students). It was my
intention that journal writing would capture some of these metacognitive thought
processes of the participants.

I also kept a journal during the course, noting my thoughts as course
facilitator and my observations as researcher through the lens of a practitioner in
early childhood education, thus incorporating my three roles into the case study. I used journal writing as an opportunity to render my personal account of the inquiry. My writing provided a means for me to examine “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices... [as well as to] clarify and correct mistakes or misunderstandings” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 123).

At least one written assignment, in response to the actual use of a literacy concept or strategy, was given for each course session. Once completed, some of these assignments were shared by the participants; shared stories and the resulting discussions helped us to construct what we understand about particular facets of literacy and provided data that I used to examine how narrative had an impact on professional development. These assignments demonstrated what participants learned, how new learning was put into practice, and what results were seen, through the participants’ responses to several questions:

- What early literacy learning experience did you provide for your students?
- Why did you select this particular experience?
- What happened as a result of the experience?
- How did you react to the students during this experience?
- Will you use this experience again? If so, what will you do in the same way? What will you do differently?
- Has what we learned in this class had an impact on your daily teaching practice? If so, what was the impact? How do you know of the impact?

Further discussion questions examined the source of new learning and how it was implemented. I asked these questions for that purpose:
• What have you discovered, through your own writing and learning that has had an impact on your teaching? What impact did it have and how have you used this new knowledge?
• What have you learned from your course mates that has had an impact on your teaching? What impact did it have and how have you used this new knowledge?
• What have you learned from the instructor that had an impact on your teaching? What impact did it have and how have you used this new knowledge?

I posed these questions to the participants during the sixth course session (approximately halfway through the course) and again at the end of the course. While the participants may have found that there was a balance in learning from themselves, from others, and from me as the course facilitator, I did not assume that this was true for all the participants. What the participants perceived about their learning was revealed by their responses to these questions as well as in what they wrote and said throughout the course.

Methods of Data Analysis

To capture the essence of a professional development course as a setting for teacher learning, I chose to use narrative inquiry within a case study as my methodology. Narrative inquiry aligns well with constructivist theory in that the principal function of narrative is to examine and describe the perspective of the individual (Bruner, 1988). It can be viewed as a way to construct life and what it means: “Life as led, is inseparable from life as told . . . life is not ‘how it was’ but
how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold" (Bruner, 1988, p. 582).

Teacher stories, the narrative in this study, lend themselves well to a constructivist paradigm, one could argue, since truth about teaching is constructed as multiple truths, not discovered as a single truth, by teachers themselves, and since no single reality of teaching exists that is independent of mental activity and symbolic language. Statements from the literature support my perspective that narrative serves as a tool for teachers to use to examine, test, and modify their beliefs and practices. Schwandt (1998) said that “we invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience” (p. 237). Sen (2002) claimed that “we can analyse our own ‘narratives’ and find a ‘voice’ with which to record our development” (p. 78). Creswell’s (1998) statement on knowledge is also significant to the issue of social construction of knowledge:

Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with individual biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied. (p. 19)

Polkinghorne (1995) described two types of narrative inquiry: “analysis of narrative” and “narrative analysis.” He stated that the distinction between the two has to do with modes of thought and the product resulting from such research. “Analysis of narrative” involves classification of information and takes the form of conceptual categories. “Narrative analysis” considers particular characteristics of people’s actions; it takes the form of a story. I have chosen to use both types of
narrative inquiry to examine the professional development course from different perspectives.

_Narrative Analysis_

In describing the professional development course, it made sense to use narrative analysis and approach it as a story, written as a sequential piece, revealing many of the aspects of the course: how the course was created and conducted; the challenges that were inherent therein; how the course progressed over time; what the participants experienced and learned; how they constructed knowledge within a social context; and how the course came to a close. Polkinghorne (1995) stated that the data components for this type of research are descriptions of events over time, including journal and other personal documents. He also said that in narrative analysis the researcher seeks to determine how or why an event occurred. In the instance of this study, teacher statements from their reflective journals and other writings served to describe and explain events occurring within a professional development course. For these reasons, I used a narrative analysis methodology to describe the course, incorporating entries from both my own journal as well as from the reflective journals of the participants. This approach allowed a rich description of the aforementioned course elements, as well as one of the themes arising from the data analysis, which was "impact on teacher knowledge." I chose to incorporate these two forms of narrative inquiry into the methodology because I felt they were complementary in telling the story of the course. Integrating statements from the teachers' reflections that described the participants' acquisition of new knowledge was appropriate to include because these statements were reported in a sequential
manner, providing significant contextual information to the description of the course as it unfolded. The aspect of narrative thought underpinning this approach was to consider the actions of the individuals and events that occurred within the framework of the course.

**Analysis of Narrative**

In describing teacher beliefs and values; teacher knowledge; teaching practice, and a sense of professionalism, I used an analysis of narrative methodology. In analysis of narrative, common themes are sought in the stories that have been collected; the data serves to provide information about the current situation or belief of a participant (Polkinghorne, 1995). Mishler (as cited in Polkinghorne, 1995) stated that data in an analysis of narrative is often in an autobiographical form, matching my participant’s reflective writing describing descriptions of occurrences related to the course. Since personal journals are suitable as data sources in analysis of narrative methodology (Berman as cited in Polkinghorne, 1995), I chose to use stories and statements from the participants as data to identify themes describing how they were affected by their participation in a professional development course. The classification of data into thematic categories follows Polkinghorne’s (1995) description of analysis of narrative methodology.

**Procedures**

Data analysis began simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation, and the writing of the final report, since qualitative research requires a reiterative approach to data analysis (Creswell, 1994). The data I examined and analyzed included the participants’ written lesson narratives, journals, and reading responses.
As the participants completed and submitted their assignments, I analyzed these documents to find themes that were present and then I assigned pieces of data to themes. To better understand the meaning of teacher stories, I asked for clarification of what participants said and wrote, either during course sessions or in their assignments. I accomplished this by asking questions during discussion, or writing my interpretations and passing them on to individual participants, who then affirmed or corrected what I had stated. The use of these memos throughout the process of data analysis allowed me to organize the data and begin to build connections between ideas.

To complete data analysis, I scanned each teacher artifact (reflections, lesson narratives, and response to assigned readings) into a word processing program. (These virtual artifacts are hereafter described as “documents.”) I had to type some documents since the original artifact had been written in longhand; others had to be retyped because my word processing program did not recognize some atypical fonts that had been used. I did not request that participants submit their artifacts on disks since there was not uniformity in the operating systems and associated word processing programs available to the participants. The documents were then organized by type (narrative, reflection, and response to reading assignment). Each document was then carefully identified using a participant’s two-letter name code, the document type, and a numerical code for the ordinal status of the document. For example, EB – reflection 33, DC – lesson narrative 1, and SY – text response 4, refer to participant EB’s thirty-third reflection, participant DC’s first lesson narrative, and participant SY’s response to the fourth reading assignment,
respectively. The documents were then placed in binders, one for each document type.

Once the binders were completed, I reread the documents twice. The first time, I read them to get an overall feel for what had happened during the course and what had been said by the participants. During the second reading I began to clarify themes that have previously been identified. I assigned color codes to emergent themes and highlighted passages (hereafter referred to as statements, unless otherwise noted) in the documents according to the color for a given theme. After the second rereading, I entered statements into a data analysis software package. I used Qualifiers (Speitel, 2003) to organize, manage, and code the data. This program helped me to align statements having specific themes. Statements were pasted into a data window and labeled with a code designating the relevance of the statement. Occasionally some statements, usually longer passages, were aligned with more than one code. Coding of statements in this fashion allowed me to complete an intermediate step of looking at the data, piece by piece, and gaining an overall understanding of what themes were present in the data. These intermediate codes included:

- Change;
- Values;
- Challenges;
- Validation;
- Observations on literacy;
- Learning in community;
- Discoveries;
- Student impact; and
- Teacher impact
The themes were derived by identifying frequently used words or thoughts, and patterns of thought that connected a participant to the context being referenced (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Initially I predicted that there would be eight to ten themes, with as many as three sub-themes for each, in the data analysis. As I examined the data, it revealed individual participant’s reactions to new information, descriptions of their attempts to use new strategies and activities, what they thought about particular aspects of the course, and their sense of becoming a part of a community of educators engaged in promoting early literacy. As these themes appeared, I considered whether they represented plausible explanations for what the teachers reported as evidence that the course had made an impact on them in specific way. Each of the themes met this criterion, so were selected as representing how the course made an impact on teachers: impact on teachers’ knowledge; impact on teachers’ beliefs and values; impact on teaching practice; and impact on teachers’ sense of professionalism. Some of the themes were divided into sub-themes. Some of the sub-themes were further separated into smaller groups of statements closely related to specific topics within the sub-theme.

The written report that follows in the next chapter is a descriptive text of the process of using narrative and reflection in a professional development course. As the researcher, I analyzed data, identified themes present therein, and interpreted their meaning. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1991), questions of meaning ultimately serve to shape the data through interpretation. The report also describes the themes found within the data and how these have served to answer the research questions.
Methods of Verification

Following Creswell (1998), I employed two forms of verification to confirm the trustworthiness of the research findings. The use of member checks, which involved seeking interpretation of the participants’ stories, was one aspect of verification. The participants’ input regarding the accuracy of my interpretations was central to my study. These member checks were used to check the accuracy of data collection. The use of rich, thick description in recounting the experiences of the participants also allows readers of the research to determine whether it can be transferable to other situations or settings.

The validity of my research is not necessarily based on what I, as narrator, say, but on the trustworthiness of my interpretations (Girden, 2001). I believe I have accomplished this trust by seeking and using clarifications from the participants to guide my interpretations. Since teachers’ inferences are drawn from their own experience (Sparks-Langer, 1992), a degree of validity was assured. In an effort to promote positive change, I encouraged the participants in my research to talk about what they “do” in their teaching practice, in addition to discussing aspects of early literacy development. Such discussion hopefully revealed some of the effects of their teaching upon their students’ learning.

Precautions and Limitations

I looked to the field of early childhood education to address ethical concerns that might have arisen in this study. The Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (Feeney & Kipnis, 1998) includes statements about ethical responsibilities not only to children and their families, but to colleagues as well: “In
a caring, cooperative workplace, human dignity is respected, professional satisfaction is promoted, and positive relationships are modeled” (p. 5). As I work with other early childhood educators in conducting my study, it is this standard that I worked toward in conducting my research. The community of learning model embraced in the study assured care, cooperation, and respect for and among participants and afforded professional satisfaction, derived from a better understanding of early literacy development, including, assessment, curriculum, environment, pedagogy, and other aspects.

To establish such a climate, several precautionary steps were taken. The first precaution was to provide confidentiality for the participants; while participating in this research study, the confidentiality of all participants was assured. This was accomplished by omitting participant names in reporting on the case study. This confidence will continue to be extended to the participants in any other documents used to disseminate the findings and conclusions of this study. It is customary to cite written excerpts of participants’ responses anonymously when using a “community of practice” methodology (see, for example, Perry et al., 1999). Any written comments made by the participants, or actions they took, were not and will not be attributed to them by name within the report of this research or in any other format, be it written or oral.

A second precaution was to reduce potential risk to the participants. Possible risks to the teachers who participated in this study were expected to be minimal; most of what might be considered risk would relate to the level of comfort of the teachers within the learning community. To avoid feelings of unease, I
incorporated community-building activities, which helped to identify commonalities (such as outside interests, mutual friends, or experiences) among the participants, building a foundation of trust and cooperation.

A third precaution was to address the need for informed consent of potential participants. I took time during the first group meeting to describe the process of the research and allowed for discussion and questions. The nature of the learning community further provided for revisiting the purpose of the group’s interactions, and questions or requests for clarification posed throughout the course of the study were welcomed.

A final precaution relates to the impact of the study upon children. To protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality, children described in teachers’ narratives were given pseudonyms.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Analysis of the data revealed four primary themes that provided evidence of impact of the professional development course:

1. impact on teacher knowledge;
2. impact on teacher beliefs and values;
3. impact on teaching practice; and
4. impact on teachers’ understanding of professionalism.

The collection of themes, as well as the sub-themes and sub-theme topics that grew from the themes, is described in Table 1; each theme and its attendant parts is described in the sections that follow. The section on teacher knowledge reveals what the teachers reported as having learned in the professional development course. (There were no sub-themes for teacher knowledge, as this theme was examined within the context of a narrative analysis of the course as a whole.)

The description of teacher beliefs and values discusses the teachers’ new or previously held beliefs and values concerning literacy development and the impact of those values and beliefs on their thoughts and actions related to the course. It also reveals how the course validated teachers’ beliefs and practices and describes their sense of identity within the group and the ways in which they learned from one another. In the account of the course’s impact on teaching practice, I discuss what the participants reported concerning teaching strategies that were meaningful within context of their classrooms to promote early literacy development in their students.
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<td>Impact on Teachers' Beliefs,</td>
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<td>Exposure and Exploration in Authentic Literacy Settings</td>
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<td>and Values</td>
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<td>A Sense of Community</td>
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<td>Learning from Others</td>
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<td>Impact on Teachers' Practices</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Individualized Instruction</td>
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<td>Social Climate</td>
<td>Language and Listening</td>
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<td>Assessment</td>
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<td>One Teacher's Journey through Change</td>
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<td>A Sense of Professionalism</td>
<td>Growth and Change through Professionalism</td>
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<td>Literacy Expectations</td>
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Some of the strategies described were new to the teachers who used them; other strategies were revised or revisited in a way that made sense to the teachers in relation to their students with specific regard for individual needs, strengths, and interests. The final section discusses what the teachers reported as influences from the course on their sense of professionalism in relation to external expectations of teachers and how they balanced this with their own expectations.

I am reporting the study’s findings in two different forms. Since new knowledge was reported by the teachers in relation to the topics that were covered in the professional development course as it progressed, the findings for the theme of “impact of the course on teacher knowledge” are being presented chronologically. Incorporated within this portion of the findings are many of my own reflections about the course, taken from my journal. This first format, a narrative analysis, serves two purposes. First, it establishes the framework of the course, describing what happened, the sequence of what was discussed, what revelations occurred, what challenges were faced by the participants, the researcher, or the entire group, and what innovations were incorporated within the structure and learning strategies used in the course. Second, it begins to tell the story, in effect, of different characteristics of individual participants, as well as the group as a whole, in terms of where individual teachers were in the scope of their teaching career, what and how they learned, and why it was significant to them.

The remaining themes are reported through an analysis of narrative. The data from these themes are based on teachers’ thinking over time and thus they would not lend themselves to be reported in a chronological fashion. I chose to include
teachers' beliefs and values as the first theme that is described because, while the
participants stated these throughout the course, many of them wrote about them
early in the course. Statements concerning teacher practices were concentrated in
the middle and closing phases of the course while the participants completed their
narrative assignments, so this theme is reported next in sequence. Teachers did not
make statements about their practice in relation to all the course topics; this
demonstrates the difference between statements about knowledge and practice. The
theme of the participants' sense of professionalism comes last because the majority
of the statements in this section were made at the close of the course.

Reporting the findings in these two ways gives a multi-dimensional aspect to
the description of the professional development course and the ways it had an
impact on the participants. The chronological story gives a sense of the breadth of
the course: the topics covered and what the participants learned about these topics.
The descriptive stories of the course provide depth in understanding how the
participants expanded their learning about teaching and how they perceived
themselves as both learners and professional educators through what they learned
about early literacy development.

**Impact of the Course on Teachers' Knowledge**

In 2001, I designed a professional development course on authentic
assessment for teachers at my school. The process of creating and implementing the
course was relatively simple: (a) develop a course description; (b) indicate how the
course would meet the Hawai‘i Content and Performance Standards; and (c) obtain
the consent of a sponsor (in this case, the school principal). Since that time,
however, technology has advanced and the process has become more rigorous.

During the course development and approval stages for the course described in this study, there were several challenges, as described in my early journal entries:

I thought for a few minutes that I was finished before I started. I was reading on the PDERI (Professional Development and Educational Research Institute) website that there was an October 30th deadline for submitting course proposals, but when I called and spoke to a staff member, I was told that deadline is for external agencies. Folks within the department, like me, have to submit 30 days prior to the beginning of the course. What a relief! (January 8, 2004)

After rewriting the course description to incorporate additional information from the website, the course was approved by my principal and submitted to PDERI.

Today I attended an inclusion team meeting with Phyllis. I took copies of the course syllabus and distributed them in hopes of getting more enrollees. The response was really positive, even from the Head Start teachers who are not eligible to take PDERI courses. It’s too bad; I could have had a much larger group. (January 16, 2004)

I got a call from PDERI yesterday. They are approving the course, but only for three credits! I am surprised; I worked so hard to make sure it would be approved for six. I spoke to a friend of mine who works in Recruitment and Retention, which is closely affiliated with PDERI. She is currently teaching a 6 credit PD course and gave me some ideas of why mine was only approved for 3. I feel bad because I told the teachers at the inclusion meeting that the course would hopefully be worth six credits. Well, at least I told them that it had to be approved first. I will request that PDERI give me an additional week before starting so I can gather a few more participants, but I don’t foresee that being problem for them. (February 16, 2004)

The course finally began on March 1st, yet the difficulties continued:

I am ready to quit before I have started! I am sick with a very bad cold, not to mention anxious, even nervous. But there is no way to contact everyone to cancel my first class, which is just as well. If my cold were not enough trouble, some of the people who were interested had not yet signed up for the course, and once the beginning date arrived, the listing was automatically removed from the PDERI website. Now I will have to enroll some of the participants with my sponsor’s help. That is to say, I do not
know who is coming today, so I have no way of canceling the class session. This is one drawback of having a short turn-around on the course approval.

We were also at a disadvantage to be in the teacher's workroom for our first session. Our school had a book fair this week and the main room of the library was not available. It was cozy and cool. As it turned out, the session was fine, other than me needing to cough rather often. I didn't feel so good, but we got through it. Everyone was very nice, if quiet, and I got to meet some teachers I did not know yet. There were a couple of teachers from my own school present and several preschool teachers I already knew. It is good to be among friends, especially feeling as I did today.

It was a good idea to bring sushi. I think I will try to bring a snack every week. People were polite, but did indulge. One person even took the trouble to thank me for the sushi when she left. That reminds me of the questions concerning gender and power. Joanne stated that power would be a factor, even if I didn't want it to do so. There were a few people who were not able to make the first session, for one reason or another, but thus far, all the participants are women. I wasn't really surprised; I suppose it could be a limitation to the study, but considering the field of early childhood education, it is not one that was unexpected. (One man had made inquiries into the course, but due to scheduling problems he did not enroll.) I will be mindful of this aspect of the research setting.

Someone on the committee had said that location would be another limitation. While I agree, I think it would probably be a factor no matter where the course was held. If the course had been conducted in town, some of the people that are currently in the class would probably not have signed on.

I followed Stephanie's suggestion of using class time to do some of the reflections. Joanne had suggested that I reexamine Stephen Brookfield's critical incidence materials. I made a critical incidence questionnaire and the participants completed it at the end of the class. I will summarize it and share it with them next week. (March 3, 2004)

As I prepared the course, I knew it was unrealistic to think that teachers remember everything they were taught during their teacher preparation, just as it is to think that teachers learn everything they need to know about teaching prior to entering service. It was my intention to revisit the literature on pedagogy and content in order to recall what is essential in teaching as well as to be current in
educational research on early literacy development. Knowledge must continually be refreshed and replenished. As one teacher stated, “The reading was very interesting, good for reaffirmation of beliefs I already held, but good to hear again and again” (PW – reflection 3).

Collaboration was an essential component of this course in terms of gaining and sharing knowledge. After the very first reading assignment, the participants talked among themselves about early literacy concepts. One of the benefits of this occurrence was that some of them gained a sense of the scope of literacy development over time and how to address gaps that children experience in their literacy development:

I have very limited experience with children from birth to age four. So from what I read I gained much new information about these age levels. It will definitely help me understand how children’s histories affect them when they become elementary school aged. It helps me to understand why some children come to school ready to learn how to read and why others face challenges. (TN – text response 1)

This teacher later wrote two more reflections on the subject of the scope of literacy:

I have only worked with children in kindergarten and first grade. Some come to school with huge deficiencies in skills needed for reading. I can now understand what might be the cause. Maybe they were not exposed to literature and need some more time to develop the strategies. I’ll try to be more understanding. (TN – reflection 12)

Some come to kindergarten and first grade lacking some pre-reading skills or strategies. I now have some ideas about types of books to get these children started on to help them become excited about reading. I have been exposed to many exciting books that the children would enjoy. (TN – reflection 31)

Required and optional readings are listed in Appendix E.

“Growing Up to Read” from Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999).
During the second course session, I began to feel more comfortable about how the course was proceeding:

The critical incidence questionnaire was very helpful to me in seeing that the course was actually “taking off” and that the participants wanted to be part of it. The responses indicated that everyone was fairly happy to be there, although they were chagrinned to have so much work to do. I am already profoundly aware of how indebted I am to these fine people.

The discussion was rather formal and even stilted. I think that although everyone agreed to submit to audio-recording, they are reluctant to share under those circumstances. I certainly value their input and hopefully they will warm up to it.

While I was preparing for this session, I decided at the last minute that I should add an activity to make it more engaging. I collected several items from my classroom [a rhyming puzzle, a cash register and credit cards, a basket of multi-colored keys, a sequence puzzle, a tray of sensory (weighted) cylinders, two “crazy cubes” (with instructions to encourage creative movement), an animal atlas floor puzzle, some colored cube blocks, a gear set, and a selection of beads, wire, and tubes], and asked the teachers to select one and examine it for its potential for language development. I also asked them to think of two possible activities using the item: one could be obvious, but the other had to be “outside the box.” I was pleased that the participants were not only engaged in the activity, but that some of them shared how this part of the session made them reexamine their practice and discover how many opportunities there were to promote language development. This has also taught me to be sure to provide a variety of learning events in the course.

One of the factors that may influence the data is that eight of the eleven participants are preschool teachers, six of whom are in inclusion settings. (My advertisement at that inclusion meeting really paid off!) I mention this because there is a strong sense of direction and leadership due to the efforts of our district coordinator, Phyllis. Because of the professional development and teaching resources she has provided, many of the teachers have become aware of, and involved in, issues that are at the forefront of early childhood education, including preschool standards, authentic assessment, strategies for teachers of children with autism spectrum disorders, and so forth. I hope that what I have to share with this sector of the group does not sound like something they have heard too much of already. But even if it is, hopefully I will bring a new angle to it.

This evening I shared parts of the PDERI website on captions with the participants. It is something with which they still struggle. (For each item in their portfolio, the participants must identify, within a caption, what they have gained through the experience described in the portfolio entry.) I remember Stephanie saying something about metacognition. This must be...
what she meant. Thinking about and writing about your own thinking can be challenging. (March 8, 2004)

In response to the language development activity, several teachers commented on the connection between language and literacy. One said:

I think this activity has made me think about the things that I have in my classroom and what I can do to promote language among my children. Oral language is so important with the young children and it’s one of the most basic steps for them to grow and develop as young readers. I think when you start asking open-ended questions and answering their questions with more questions it gives them the opportunity to learn and grow more. It also shows them that in life there isn’t always one right way to do or look at things . . . it’s all about perspective. (QL – reflection 5)

Another teacher said, “When I had to come up with linking interesting activities to oral language, it showed me how many opportunities there are for language in everything we do” (GS – reflection 3).

The first grade teacher indicated that some of what she read in a particular assignment9 was new to her:

I didn’t realize how important verbal conversations are even to babies and children. I didn’t realize that reading to babies, who are a few weeks old will later help them prepare for actual reading. I can apply this new knowledge by engaging my students in meaningful conversations and discussions. (TN – text response 1)

The next week, my journal began to reveal that links were being made, including positive relationships between the participants and me, as well as connections between the participants and the course content:

I was so pleased when I offered copies of several articles to a preschool teacher who works with children who are deaf or hearing impaired; she accepted them with an expression of interest. The articles were related to research on literacy strategies for children with hearing impairments; I had used them in my comprehensive exam. I did not expect

9 “Becoming Real Readers” from Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999)
to need the articles any longer, but I decided to keep them a while, perhaps because I was still feeling so invested in that process and they contained a significant perspective regarding the needs of this group of children.

Since many of the teachers had made positive comments about the reading on developmentally appropriate practice that we read at the first session, I offered them copies of “Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children” (A joint position statement of NAEYC and IRA). Most of them asked for a copy, despite their earlier bemoaning the fact that there would be many readings. It reminds me of my own learning, the more I read, the more I feel the need to read and learn. It seems endless, yet helpful. This is life-long learning in the real world! (March 15, 2004)

In the third week, we reviewed the five core principles of early literacy created by Rema Shore. After considering these readings, one teacher stated:

I strongly agree with Shore’s principle that learning to read is a gradual process that starts long before a child enters school. It has a lot to do with cumulative experiences including language and vocabulary. Some of my children have a lower level of vocabulary understanding. I know the children with this level of understanding have not been exposed to many new vocabulary words. Maybe they could have been read to more as a child, or maybe just having more dialogue with their parents would have built a stronger foundation to help them contextualize when they encounter new words. The five principles all build upon each other. (TN – reflection 1)

That same week, we examined a variety of children’s books that explored culture. My journal stated:

To promote a discussion on the topic of culture in literacy, I brought in books relating to characters or settings in Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, the Pacific Islands, as well as some general books on culture, race, and diversity. I really enjoyed gathering the books; it was like planning a trip. The participants also took pleasure in examining the books and considering how they would use or have used them in the own classes. There were many useful and thoughtful ideas. I learned about some titles I had not heard of, so I am going to find them and read them to my students. (March 15, 2004)

After the reading on culturally responsive instruction, one teacher stated:

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10 International Reading Association and National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998)
11 from Shore (n.d.)
I did not realize the differences in questioning and answer styles in different settings. Children from middle class families tend to give answers which provide more contextual details. . . The reading brought cultural aspects to mind again. It made me stop and reevaluate the books in the library currently and put some new ones in. (DC – text response 2)

Other teachers noted the usefulness of parent stories, a concept from the reading, as a tool to link a child’s upbringing and her progress in school and also to know how best to give a parent feedback as to that progress (OE, EB, & TN – text response 2).

I chose to include access as a topic since, as Neuman, Celano, Greco, and Shue (2001) stated, access to good literature is essential for young children, not only because it draws their interest into and exposes them to the act of reading, but also since it helps them understand the sounds and meaning of language and build vocabulary. In the fourth session, the participants collaborated on a group reflection to share and then compare knowledge on several topics, including access to literature. My journal stated:

As an activity to continue the process of becoming better acquainted and to establish a sense of trust between the participants and me, I passed out "credit cards" (the type that are sent through the mail as advertisements). I told everyone they could buy three things and that there was no credit limit; Bill Gates could pick up the tab! One person asked whether the three things could be all the same. I told her that made me very curious. Many people wished for houses, cars, or travel. The teacher who wanted three of the same thing wanted three houses to establish financial independence. One teacher could only think of two things, so for her third item she said she would ask for a pair of shoes. It was a pleasant distraction for a few moments.

Since the large group discussions during the 3/8 and 3/15 sessions seemed so uncomfortable to everyone, I decided to change the format for discussions for the time being. I used small groups and had them record their responses. (Audio-recording two or more groups simultaneously would be difficult to manage and would probably not be of high quality anyway.) I told the participants that I would type up their responses and they could use

12 Edwards and Pleasants (1998)
it for one of their three weekly reflections; they were more than happy with the idea.

The reading on access to literature brought about a lively discussion on books in the classroom. There were many ideas about providing access to books through classroom, school, and community libraries, and ways to manage the lending process to make it simpler for teachers and more accessible for families. I shared with the group my decision to give a book to each child once a month and how easy it was using bonus points from the book clubs. Many of the participants are anxious to look for the multiple bonus point offer when they come out in the fall. I hope we all don’t bankrupt Scholastic, Inc.! (March 29, 2004)

In addition to using classroom, school, and lending libraries, the groups responded that they also provide access to books and other literature through: reading to children in small and large groups as well as individually, several daily independent book times (PW, GS, & IH\textsuperscript{13} reflection); book swaps among families, gift books for birthdays and holidays (DC, QL, & EB reflection); books in every classroom center, an outside book bin for early arrivals to school, and community reading programs, such as Reading is Fundamental (TN, XT, & OE reflection). Later in that session, the participants completed another group reflection in response to a reading on brain research. Afterwards, in their individual reflections, two teachers commented on the significance of their learning about brain research and its impact on the teaching of literacy:

I didn’t realize that reading and writing require all parts of the brain to be working together: from picking up the book (motor cortex), to looking at the words (occipital lobe), to deciphering words (temporal lobe), and thinking about what the words mean (frontal lobe). I didn’t realize that so much was required to read a book. No wonder some children have such difficulties. I also learned that experiences change the brain physiologically. Either new dendrites are formed or the myelin sheath becomes thicker. It’s exciting to think that what we are doing with the children is really shaping their brains. (TN – text response 3, emphasis hers)

\textsuperscript{13} This participant withdrew from the course midway due to time limitations.
I learned that the brain changes physiologically as a result of experience. It actually changes; new dendrites are formed linking new and old information. (SY — text response 3).

During the fifth week, we looked at book genres and how they can support early literacy development in young children:

We spent most of this afternoon’s session looking at different genres of books. I collected several hundred titles and grouped them at tables according to the type of book: non-fiction, counting, ABCs, fairy tales, predictable, concept, easy readers, songs, infant/toddler, commercial/media, and anthologies. It was a great deal of work gathering all the books even though they all belong to me. I had to go through every bin I own, but once I got started, I couldn’t stop until I had chosen a rich collection from each category. Each participant chose at least three categories to review. (Some stayed late and did more than three in order to complete extra reflections for their portfolio.) When they were finished, everyone shared one of the categories they had reviewed to contribute something of interest with the group that they had learned or experienced in their review.

The results were very exciting. I had at first considered that infant and toddler books might not be appropriate or useful for these teachers. But one of them, who teaches children with multiple handicaps, had selected one of these books. She said it was packed with sensory input and that it was perfect for one of her students who learned best from materials providing multi-sensory stimuli. The first grade teacher found a non-fiction/easy reading book that answered all the questions her students had raised in a discussion about eggs the week before. She showed us the photographs and talked about how she would use such a book to review the questions and support her students’ learning. She asked to borrow the book; I agreed, saying that I had forgotten to tell them to feel free to sign out books. Later, I told her to just keep it. Just as I have done with children in my class – once a month, I have been giving a book to each of the participants every week. I still have many bonus points from the book club, so the books are free. It is amusing to see how pleased they are to get a book each week. Many of them say, “Thanks for the book!” as they leave. It is all about access. I am glad to help my colleagues place books in their children’s hands. (March 5, 2004)

The first grade teacher also discovered predictable rebus books for beginning readers (TN — reflection 9). She further noted that some non-fiction books were suitable for her students since the “vocabulary and sentences are easy to read and
understand” (TN – reflection 7). When she found a specific title in the “beginning reader” genre, she was very excited:

We are learning about eggs this week. I would use *Eggs All Over*¹⁴ to read to the children so that they could gain new knowledge about eggs. We did a KWL chart today and many of the children’s wondering questions are answered in this book. In these stories, there was a lot of non-fiction information. The children can learn while reading independently – learn some non-fiction scientific information. I liked that the pages had more than 3 or 4 word sentences. The complexity of the sentences is gradual but yet not too challenging. (TN – reflection 8)

Another teacher also indicated her surprise at how appropriate some of the non-fiction titles were for preschoolers (XT – reflection 13). Positive comments were also made concerning the value in promoting literacy of counting books (XT – reflection 11; DC – reflection 7), books that incorporate songs (PW – reflection 7), and concept books (OE – reflection 2). The importance of the quality of books available to children rather than simply a large number of books was also mentioned (PW – text response 4).

For the sixth session, I wanted to demonstrate how complex comprehension can be for beginning readers:

Tonight, as an introduction to comprehension, I wanted the participants to become risk-takers and place themselves in a position of trying something they (hopefully) had not done before and had to comprehend as beginners. I brought my mah jong set and taught them to play. (My family has been playing this game for four generations.) Each person played two hands at one of the four walls. I introduced the instructions verbally with the exception of a visual translation of Chinese numerals from one to nine. We reluctantly left the game after everyone had their two turns; it took less than fifteen minutes. I think the activity was successful in that it demonstrated both how difficult it is to explain something that is new and intricate to an audience of learners, as well as how

¹⁴ Titles of all children’s books mentioned are found in Appendix F.
difficult it is to try to learn something with which you have no prior knowledge of or experience. It was purely “learn as you go.”

I have continued with the small group discussion format. Tonight’s groups discussed comprehension in both listening and reading. Many of the preschool teachers related that much of what they do concerning comprehension is in terms of listening. One teacher went so far as to say listening is a pre-reading skill. I agreed with her statement; I think it was a prime example of the continuum of literacy learning. There is no real beginning, just as there is not a definitive end. (April 12, 2004)

Several of the preschool teachers did not see comprehension as a particular area to be addressed, yet others drew parallels between comprehension skills for older students with particular tasks that younger children should be able to, and with support can, do. These teachers stated that making predictions, connecting new information with prior knowledge, making inferences, and summarizing were all things their students could do with support and practice (EB, XT, & DC – text response 10). The first grade teacher commented on the time framework described in the reading,15 consisting of blocks for language/word study, reading and independent work, and writing workshop. She stated that such a schedule would allow the teacher time for individual conferences with children (something she had been trying to work out on her own) and help the children see the important bond between reading and writing (SY – text response 5).

At the end of that session, the midpoint of the course, I asked the participants to complete a guided reflection to examine what they had learned from their own thinking and the reading and writing they had done for the course, from each other, and from me as the course facilitator. In the agenda for that session I stated:

15 Pinnel and Scharer (2003)
We’re halfway there – I need you to tell me how we are doing. I hope for us to get out early to have time for this. I want you to be candid. I am not fishing for compliments, so please give constructive criticisms, insights, epiphanies, questions, suggestions, and so forth, as you see fit. (Course agenda for 4/12/04)

Three participants stated that new knowledge they had gleaned from the readings had informed their teaching practice:

Access to [teaching] materials, the latest research, and position papers has made me stop, think, and evaluate my teaching and look for ways to improve. . . . I think I’ve also felt validated that I’m doing things right – that I have a good base, but can always expand and improve. (DC – reflection 10)

The readings Jonathan chooses are always interesting and full of valuable information that relate to what I do in my classroom every day. I feel I have gained so much practical information and great new ideas to use in my work every day. At the end of each class I feel inspired to do something a little bit better for my students, and that’s a great feeling. (PW – reflection 9)

The instructor has made me realize many different aspects of children’s literacy development that I needed (i.e., the readings of best practices, brain research, etc.) and caused me to reflect on my own methods. Again, this had a very positive effect on my class, as I begin to use more effective strategies for building my students’ literacy development. (EB – reflection 14)

Later that week two teachers demonstrated in their reflections that they were thinking beyond the bounds of what was being read and discussed in class. One preschool teacher had not noticed how seamlessly she had integrated literacy within her class routines over the years.

One of the things I learned through this course is how much of what we do is related to literacy. Until I took this class I wasn’t consciously aware that a lot of what goes on in the class is literacy-related. For example, when a student drew a rectangle and wrote his version of inventive spelling for rectangle. Also when children take to a book and want to read it to you in their own words after the teacher has read it aloud several times to the class. I find that I tend to do a lot more reinforcing of things children do that are related to literacy, even changing around our room to make it more conducive to learning. I think through my own journal writings and responses to the readings it all has had a positive impact on what I am doing.
in the classroom. Because I team teach, I always try to bring/introduce new ideas learned in my class and through readings and talk it over with our team to see if we could somehow incorporate it into our environment and learning for the children. (XT – reflection 14)

Another teacher examined the recently released Hawai‘i preschool content standards (School Readiness Task Force, 2004) as part of a reflection. She recognized the universality of literacy within these standards:

Every single standard had a strong correlation to literacy development. Language, motor, social skills are part of literacy development. The weakest correlation was with large muscle development, but the large muscles must develop before a child can be expected to develop eye hand and fine motor control. Large muscle development is one of the building blocks toward literacy development... This is another example of how literacy does not “get taught to children”, but is learning that occurs throughout the day. (DC – reflection 5)

The topic for the seventh week was assessment. The session proved to be an occasion for sharing knowledge with each other and considering it in new contexts:

The topic of assessment has been a regularly visited – by preschool teachers – in Windward district, so I thought it would be fitting to ask the participants to bring in and share literacy assessment tools that they had used and found effective. This turned out to be a very good idea as there were quite a variety of checklists, observation guides, rubrics, and actual assessment samples that were shared. The response from the participants upon seeing these was very positive. Of course, teachers are always happy when they have something useful, simple, and practical in hand. This particular phase of the session was a particularly significant one in terms of fortifying our community of learners. Nearly everyone brought something to share and everyone who shared gained confidence and credibility as an expert, within the context of their own approach to assessment.

I supplemented the items that were shared by distributing other samples of assessment tools from Christie, Enz, and Vukelich that I thought most of the teachers had not yet seen. These were also well received. Reflections on both sets of assessment tools resulted in many comments about how these assessment tools would be used by the participants in the future. (April 19, 2004)
Some of the teachers became aware of aspects of literacy assessment they had not previously considered. One teacher mentioned that she had learned about story retellings and writing folders: "I've seen another teacher who has her students write/draw in a journal every day. I think this would be great to monitor their progress and see growth over time" (EB – text response 6). Another stated that the reading reminded her to do more assessment and documentation of her students' learning (QL – text response 6). The first grade teacher commented that her understanding of assessment had grown. She said that in addition to doing miscue analyses, running records, and other skill assessments, next year she would also implement a reading portfolio, an idea she gathered from the reading, to document what books children were reading, whether they liked them, and the reasons for their opinions on such books (TN – text response 6).

In the eighth week we discussed the topic of balancing phonics and phonemic awareness with other aspects of literacy:

When I prepared to discuss phonological awareness, I was aware how my thinking about it had changed, and that I now recognize it as a part of literacy development. The issue we are presently facing is how to teach it.

I decided that a short lecture would be suitable way to approach the topic, so I talked about some of the research, reading selected sections of my response to the comprehensive exam question that addressed this topic. (One of the participants interrupted to ask what document I was citing, so I told them what it was.) I followed this by sharing excerpts from more recent literature on the subject, including articles from an issue of *Educational Leadership*\(^\text{16}\) devoted primarily to various perspectives on phonological awareness.

Afterwards we discussed some developmentally appropriate ways to incorporate the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics for our target population of students. I think the group as a whole realized after everyone

\(^{16}\) Scherer (2004)
shared that there are so many ways to teach these skills to young children in appropriate and meaningful ways; all of them had already been doing so, although some had not realized it. We talked about how important this knowledge was in defending the choices we make to parents, other teachers, and administrators.

We spent the rest of the period looking at a selection of children’s books I had gathered that featured rhyming words. We also looked at a variety of books that teach specific letter sounds and letter names. (April 26, 2004)

One teacher mentioned how my lecture about research on phonemic awareness and phonics lead to a revelation for her:

In the past I have taught phonics and phonemic awareness in isolation, however I now try to teach them in conjunction with other literacy skills such as writing, songs with rhymes, etc. . . . I finally know and understand why all these nursery rhymes, word games, reading aloud, predictable stories, etc., are so important and not just for fun. (QL – text response 7)

Another teacher made a discovery in one of the readings 17 on phonics:

One thing I found surprising was the fact that was stated throughout the article that what was important in instructional strategies that best foster children’s use of analogy between familiar and unfamiliar print words to pronounce unfamiliar print words was that “what develops is not the ability to make analogies but the number of print words from which children can make analogies” (p. 151). The more words they are exposed to the better off they are. (XT – text response 7)

Some of the teachers found the readings on phonological awareness difficult to follow due to their technical nature (PW & SY – text response 7). Others stated they had gained a real understanding of the importance of a variety of teaching methods for phonics and phonemic awareness (EB & QL – text response 7). One of surprises among the titles used to teach phonics and phonemic awareness was a book by Tomie dePaola entitled Andy: That’s my name. In the story, Andy brings out a wagon full of the letters; other children add more letters to make new groups of

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17 Moustafa (1998)
rhyming words. "I didn't know of any of the books that were based on a specific
type of word play (like the "ANDY" book). I thought it was great" (QL – reflection 9).

In the ninth week, we considered how projects could engage children in the
authentic use of literacy:

During this session I took a big risk. I attempted to teach the
participants about the Project Approach by actually doing a compressed
version of a project in a little more than an hour! It was risky because it was
a new concept, the time was short, and I left many of the decisions to them.
(This last is a characteristic of the Project Approach I wanted to impress
upon them.)

I chose to assign them, in three groups, to create a way to use a
project as a literacy learning tool. There were three groups of three, one
person being absent. To make up for the limitations inherent in this
assignment, I gave them free access to many materials to document their
ideas and set out a number of articles about projects for them to peruse. I
answered questions that arose for groups and individuals. Someone asked
whether they could use a theme, as many early educators like to do, to
present their idea. Others heard the discussion and I agreed that it would be
helpful in generating ideas and getting them started; each group chose a
different theme and they began working in earnest. One group reported they
would use an ocean theme to employ specific activities to promote literacy
development. The second group used a zoo theme to discuss specific skill
areas for their intended population. The last group used a garden theme to
talk about the importance of social skills in setting a foundation for positive
literacy experiences. All three groups worked frantically, and complained
about not having enough time. I supported them by saying they should stick
to their central idea and not to get too elaborate. The display boards they
made were very creative and effectively demonstrated their ideas about
encouragement literacy. We were all surprised that the three groups had
completely different ideas of how to approach the assignment. We teased the
garden group because they had very carefully twisted green paper into a
pumpkin vine and were making leaves for it out of green masking tape up to
the bitter end of the time period. Other groups accused them of trying for
bonus points!

To reward them for their creativity and persistence, I invited
everyone to help themselves to the copies of Project Approach articles.
Several participants took at least one article. I think they all got enough of a
taste of it to know whether they might like to consider implementing a
project at some point in the future. I am satisfied with that, yet I hope I did the topic justice. (May 3, 2004)

Two of the participants linked what they learned about the Project Approach to prior knowledge concerning the need for children to have authentic, real-life situations in which to learn. One of them stated:

I think it totally makes sense to give students real life situations to learn and work in. I also like the idea of integrating academic content areas. It's like killing two birds with one stone! The project approach seems to address not only academic, but also social, communication, and thinking skills. (EB – text response 8).

Another participant associated the project approach to the use of a differentiated curriculum, wherein a range of learners can be involved in meaningful learning: “I like the concept of differentiating instruction. There is such a range of learners and this type of project allows the teacher to reach a gifted child and a struggling student” (SY – text response 8). One teacher stated that she would find the approach useful in that her students “would be excited to decide what topics they would like to learn about” (TN – text response 8).

Since literacy environments must be prepared with consideration for the physical, social, emotional, and academic needs of young children (Heald-Taylor, 2001), I selected environment as a topic that was essential for the course. During the tenth session, I was hopeful that there would be plenty of discussion pertaining to changes in access to literacy and how the learning environment supports the development of literacy. To enable that discussion and promote thinking about the learning environment, I scheduled the first half of the tenth course session in my own classroom. I did this, not because my room had an exemplary literacy
environment, but to provide a base for talking about what features early childhood educators often provide to support literacy in their classrooms and the reasons for those choices. During the second half of the session, I asked the participants to draw a map of their rooms as they were at the time, and another version with potential changes they might make in response to what they saw in my classroom or what they read in the assignment for the session.¹⁸ (This was by far the most popular reading assignment for the course; the participants asked for additional resources from this book.) In my journal I noted:

I took another risk with today's session. I thought it would be useful to actually examine a classroom environment and consider the evidence there of literacy instruction. I told my classroom colleagues that the participants would be coming to our classroom for the first half of the class session. They wanted to start adding things that we had done in the past or had talked about doing in the future, but I told them to leave it as is. I wanted it to be ordinary, not perfect. There were a number of things that probably should have been displayed but were not, for various reasons. I chose to do this because I saw it as another opportunity for the expertise to come from the participants. I was hopeful that some of them would share how that set up their classroom and would describe some of their literacy routines or artifacts that demonstrated authentic literacy learning. I also had set up a laptop computer with a PowerPoint presentation entitled "The Road to Literacy" that my partner and I had used for an early childhood conference presentation. Some of the preschool teachers in the course had already seen it, but I invited everyone who had not to take a few moments to scan through it.

Following these exhibitions, we returned to our regular spot at the school library. Each of the participants was given a large piece of paper and I asked them to map out their classroom literacy environment on one side and to also draw in the ultimate literacy environment they might create in consideration of their students' needs, the actual limitations of their classroom, and their teaching style or that of their team, for those in inclusion settings. I told them we would share when we were finished, but not to worry about the artistic quality of their work. (May 10, 2004)

Concerning the mapping activity, one teacher wrote:

¹⁸ "Organizing the Classroom" in Heald-Taylor (2001).
I like having the opportunity to visit other teachers' classrooms. I like being able to see how they have different areas and activities set up. It amazes me how teachers make such good use of the space they are limited to in their classroom. After visiting A-6 today at Ben Parker Elementary, I sat down and mapped out my own classroom. I thought about how I could set it up next year to better support literacy development. I think I would change some center areas around. I would surround the library area with quiet centers so that the children reading in the library won't be distracted by a noisy center near them. I would also move the gathering area to the back of the classroom. Right now it is near the door so whenever we are reading a story on the carpet and someone noisy walks by, it is a distraction for the children. Especially when we go home and their parents are talking outside, the children tend to pay more attention to what's happening outside. Overall, I enjoyed the opportunity to map out my current classroom setting and think about how I might change it next year. At the beginning of the year, you are so stressed out about setting everything up that you don't really have time to think about what environment would work best. It is nice to be able to sit down and thoughtfully think about how the classroom setting would affect literacy development. (TN – reflection 29)

In a corner of my room sits an old table, with seating for two. There is a small tape recorder with two headphones attached. Adjacent to the table is a book display with three outward-facing shelves and a storage area at the bottom for stacking books. All of the shelves and the storage area are full of books and matching audiotapes, stored together in large zip-loc bags. Apparently, this feature of my classroom captured the imaginations of several participants and resonated in their writings for the remainder of the course. Another section of the journal for that session stated:

I was surprised that several of the participants had taken note of the listening center in my classroom. They mentioned that they had had one, but for various reasons had eliminated it. Others shared significant, although not necessarily overwhelming, changes. They all viewed the exercise as a useful one in making immediate changes as well as potential changes in the future. (May 10, 2004)

One of the first-year teachers created a lesson and wrote a lesson narrative incorporating her listening center:
The good part of this lesson came as I worked individually with my students and recorded them reading this book independently. They all needed some prompting, but they all had the repetitive phrases down pretty good. I’ve even decided to use this as part of my portfolios for the end of the year! I think parents will be excited to hear their students reading! This has been especially a good activity for my students to help them with their speech needs because it gave them good practice with speaking in sentences and using multi-syllable phrases. I also like this lesson because it can be adapted for most repetitive books and is an inexpensive way to create books on tape to add to your listening center. (EB – lesson narrative 6)

Four of the more experienced teachers made statements about the listening center, some of them repeatedly. The first grade teacher noted its utility as a coaching device in reading:

I would like to get my listening center up and running again. I had it going at the beginning of the year and the children were just starting to be able to run it independently, but ants got to the tape recorder and now it’s out of commission. I know how much the children enjoyed this center. It promotes enjoying books and reading with expression. (TN – reflection 21)

One of the preschool teachers viewed the listening center not only as a means for enjoying literature, but extending the pleasure of reading by involving others in creating taped books for her students:

I would really love to add a listening area in my classroom where we would have books on tape that the children could go to listen to their favorite story. I would also like to incorporate having older peers record favorite books for our children instead of just using only commercial products. It may encourage them to use this area if they know they’re reading buddy recorded a book on tape. (XT – reflection 25; XT – text response 9)

This teacher mentioned the listening center three other times in later reflections, again citing a need for a listening center in her classroom (XT – reflection 3), noting it as a place where children could independently look at and listen to stories on their own (XT – reflection 28), and deciding how she should set it up (XT – reflection 30). Three other teachers included a listening center in a list of things they would
change in their classroom to promote literacy (QL – reflection 21; DC – reflection 19; UK – reflection 29).

The reading on literacy environments also provided the participants with information they could use in other parts of their learning environment. Learning centers of other types were also included in statements as areas in their classrooms needing change. One teacher saw a dictated story center as a place where children could be creative, practice their speech and language skills, and, through the questioning of an adult, develop higher level thinking skills (EB – text response 9). Music and drama centers were listed by another teacher as venues for literacy she would like to add to her classroom (PW – text response 3). A writing area was also considered (QL – text response 9). One of the preschool teachers added a writing center and noted that it was drawing some attention, although her students had not previously been interested in writing (UK – text response 9). The first grade teacher considered a dress-up area with a writing extension to draw from two purposeful, yet creative, activities at the same time to encourage literacy development (TN – text response 9). A preschool teacher bemoaned the fact that while she had centers for dictation, writing, art, and word study, they were all blended together. She planned to separate them more and add materials to each of them (DC – text response 9).

Some of the participants expressed a deeper understanding of literacy within the learning environment. One teacher stated:

I have learned about how important literacy is . . . I liked seeing how [the instructor’s] classroom was set up to support literacy. It’s given me new
ideas for next year. I will probably organize my classroom a little differently (TN – reflection 32).

The participants identified other new knowledge they had gained related to the literacy learning environment. Several of the teachers made lists of things or mentioned specific items in passing that they would like to add to their classrooms: a book shelf with book covers facing outwards, puppet hangers, letters on the table, bean bag chairs, a soft rug, paper trays [for writing], books in every center, letters on a wipe board, magnet picture/word cards, and more books on tape (EB – reflection 25);[19] large magnet letters (EB – reflection 29); work jobs and literacy games from which students may choose and a more inviting writing center (PW – reflection 15); individual journals, more displays with print, and name placards for meals (OE – reflection 12); a real phone book, a class-made phone book with children’s names and phone numbers, a sign-in sheet for attendance, and a set of Velcro-backed name cards to be used to check in and out of centers (DC – reflection 24); and, a roomier library, an assistant in the writing center to take dictation, and large letter and number stencils for the easel (SY – reflection 28).

One of the teachers demonstrated an unexpected learning opportunity for using the environment to teach letter names and usage in a story she called “That Dang ABC Puzzle”:

As a Special Education Preschool teacher, and a new one at that, I often find myself befuddled at the dumb requirements put on us by the “powers that be.” For example, I never could understand why there can’t be a thing above eye level—children’s eye level, that is—in my classroom. I had trouble understanding why anyone would want to put a clock on the schedule chart, because face it, most three and four year olds can’t tell time. But the kicker

[19] This participant noted that these additions were found in Bobys (2000).
was the strong suggestion that I have some kind of alphabet chart in the bathroom, because “we want our entire room to be print-rich.” As far as I’m concerned, the bathroom is a place to “go.” Stuff on the walls? That’s just unsanitary! But my partner teacher never bucks a direct order from above and proceeded to tack up an Alphabet Train Puzzle to the bathroom stall. Admittedly, I fumed about it, especially when I had to try and scrub pee off the letter “m,” because as fate would have it, “m” was directly behind the toilet. And the letters, being all at children’s eye level, caught their attention (and screwed up their aim.) Then came a new student, who wasn’t completely potty trained. That meant I spent a good deal of time with him in the bathroom with that dang ABC puzzle. But funny thing, the puzzle became a source of conversation for us. He hated being on the toilet and often needed a distraction to keep him there peacefully. So we’d find letters. The letters were pictured with animals or objects that had the same beginning letter. Soon we were saying, “L! Lion!” and “Z! Zebra!” He always had to pick out “K! Kalani! Me!” It wasn’t long before I no longer hated the puzzle. It kinda grew on me. They were right. It was a good suggestion. Of course, I don’t like admitting I’m wrong, so just to soothe my ego, I now strongly suggest that someone else scrub the pee off the letters.

In the last session, we examined how inclusive practices can support literacy development for children with special needs:

Since all of the participants except for one were special education teachers, we agreed to eliminate the last class session, combining the sessions for family literacy and inclusive practices, and use it to complete the remaining lesson narratives and “unguided” reflections that had to be submitted in their course portfolio. I chose to do this because two of the participants had come to me privately to say they didn’t think they would be able to finish the work and earn their credits. I decided that since we had already talked quite often about inclusive literacy practices and family literacy just from the experiences that had been shared, that it would be safe to combine these two topics into one session rather than have two separate ones. Everyone agreed that they were comfortable with the idea and that they needed more time; one participant even asked if she could come to the school library to work on her assignments. We asked her why she didn’t want to work at home; she replied that her children would interrupt and that she knew she would not finish. I told them all that I would be present in the library for the first bit of the last scheduled session in case she or anyone else wanted a cool, quiet place to work.

So, we opened today’s session as our last. Many of the participants shared stories about how they have encouraged literacy development in their students who have special needs. I brought a variety of family literacy
materials for browsing. Some were from Head Start; the remainder was from other community sources. Everyone seemed to find something useful. (May 17, 2004)

One of the first year teachers indicated that what she had learned about inclusive practices had been helpful and would continue to guide the teaching decisions she would make in the future that would support her students' literacy development:

As a special educator, I've always tried my best to help children learn at a level for which they are developmentally ready... This class has given me ideas with which I can apply my belief that all children can be taught to achieve their full potential, no matter how varied their potentials might be. I believe I have grown in this class and I hope to continue to grow with consistent application of the new knowledge I have acquired. (OE – reflection 14)

Access to quality literature is important for all young children, yet for children with disabilities, access sometimes means not only providing the appropriate physical environment to support their literacy learning, but also the means to actually use what is there or to express themselves in literate ways. After completing the reading on inclusive literacy practices, one special educator wrote:

One of my students does not speak, so when I ask him questions I use picture clues to help him answer. As I read this article, I thought about how some of the strategies mentioned could help him in the future. For example, the communication board and WriteOut:Loud and Co:Writer word-prediction software could help him more accurately respond and communicate.20 (EB – text response 10)

Another teacher was reminded to pair up students who are disabled with their typical peers for activities where the former will need some modeling or peer support; she also stated that she would remember to place a child's instructional goals at the forefront rather than the learning activity (QL – text response 10).

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20 From Don Johnston Developmental Equipment; see Koppenhaver, Spadorcia, and Erickson (1998) 128
In that same session, we also examined a reading on older children supporting the literacy development of younger siblings. One of the participants noted the parallel between such a scenario and asking her stronger readers to work with their peers who experienced challenges in their reading (TX – text response 10).

To close the course and as a final encouragement to the participants to continue learning about literacy development, I gave each of them a teacher resource book at the last course session to have and use in their classrooms. The books also provided an opportunity for new learning:

I got a new book! I’m so excited ‘cause my teacher-gave it to me! I have been looking through *Teaching and Learning in Preschool* by Venn and Jahn. There is a wealth of information in the book—lesson plans, checklists, volunteer instructions, and much more. I have just begun to read the book, but they talk about ZPD groups. They group children in groups with similar Zones of Proximal Development. This enables them to target specific skills for specific children. The actual zone of proximal development is between that which a child can do independently and that which requires assistance (Vygotsky). The authors go into the theoretical background for different theories of teaching literacy. The book is interesting, helpful and provides inspiration to try new things and lessons suggested. It is easy to read, and well-organized. I think this will be a favorite resource. (DC – reflection 29)

Some reflections were completed after the last session. This was because PDERI allowed a deadline for portfolio submittal two weeks after the end of the course. In their closing reflections, some teachers wrote about the knowledge they had gained during the course. One teacher stated how she thought she had already been aware of much of the course content, but had still gained new knowledge:

I have discovered that there are many aspects of literacy and that I’m doing quite a bit of it, but of course there is a lot more that I should do to further [the children’s] literacy development. Another thing that I have discovered and will want to explore more is looking at the non-printed literacy materials.
and activities (like doing listening games and visual discrimination) and fun, ‘out-of-the-box’ type of activities. I will definitely continue to look at and assess my literacy [practices]. (QL – reflection 27)

Finally, because of what she had learned, one teacher saw the need to incorporate literacy into the whole school day as a goal for the future:

I have discovered how I use literacy daily, not only during language arts time, but how it’s integrated across the curriculum. I will use this knowledge to help me continue to look for new activities and strategies that integrate literacy. (TN – reflection 32)

**Impact of the Course on Teachers’ Beliefs and Values**

The decisions that teachers make concerning choices for instruction are based upon their beliefs about the processes of literacy development (Islam, 1999). For this reason, it was essential in the context of this study to examine teachers’ beliefs and values as well as their practices as they reported them in relation to their professional development.

Teachers reported what they believed about literacy. These belief statements served to find a common ground on which to build a foundation for knowledge. They were also validated. This was important in recognizing individuals for their expertise. Teachers also expressed the value of specific aspects of early literacy development, particularly exposure to and exploration of literacy in authentic settings, and the efforts of families as literacy partners. Initially, the participants identified themselves as a group, recognizing the connections between individuals and the common thread of our work. Over time, a sense of community developed among all the participants; there was a free flow of ideas among them. This added a dimension of reciprocation in the context of professional development. The adage
that states, “all of us are smarter than one of us,” was demonstrated through this course.

**Impact of the Course on Teachers’ Beliefs**

Statements about teacher beliefs related to several topics, including teacher practices and teaching principles, family involvement, and how children learn and grow. Many of the statements expressing beliefs about teaching, learning, and literacy were made early in the course. Some were related to topics of discussion or readings; others were more personal declarations.

A belief in children’s background knowledge and exposure to new information was cited as essential (SY – reflection 1). Another teacher echoed this belief in background knowledge: “I have observed that the more experiences we give children, the better able they are to learn new material and build their vocabularies” (EB – reflection 1).

Four teachers responded to Shore’s core principles on early literacy (see Shore, undated). One agreed that intentionality is essential in the promotion of literacy development and that “assessment of progress needs to be monitored” (PW – reflection 1). Two teachers echoed the second principle concerning social and emotional development being precursors to learning to read (QL – reflection 1; UK – reflection 1).

One disagreed with Shore’s statement about intuitive teaching:

I somewhat disagree with the statement made in Shore’s article that “Teaching early literacy is not intuitive.” I believe that to some degree it is! As readers ourselves, I feel that we automatically try to teach our students what we know. As I observe my assistant (who doesn’t have a teaching degree) reading with our students, I can see how she just naturally asks
questions “at the lines,” “between the lines,” and “beyond the lines.” I think that if we are in tuned with our students, we know what they need. I will agree that some teacher strategies are more effective than others and to know these strategies is very beneficial. Yet I do not really believe that using such strategies is the only way you can teach a child to read. (EB – reflection 1)

Developmentally appropriate practice was also discussed during the first session. It was noted as a foundation for some of the beliefs expressed. Within the context of appropriate literacy instruction, one teacher stated: “Being knowledgeable of a variety of teaching methods, and knowing your students well enough to identify what method will work best for each student, is MOST important” (PW – reflection 12, emphasis hers). Another teacher offered her experience to support her belief in the use of developmentally appropriate practices while teaching literacy:

I read the 1998 joint IRA and NAEYC position statement, *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children.* As a long-time teacher, I have seen the confusion over what is considered developmentally appropriate, and have seen the pendulum swing regarding best practice. I have worked in early childhood settings where there were no ABC charts on the walls; and NO papers run off and made available to children. I have always felt DAP is based on individual children and each child’s desire and readiness to try new things (DC – reflection 3).

Another teacher said:

There is no single method for teaching literacy. You have to pick and choose what you feel will work best for each child. You have to really know your children and be very knowledgeable of a lot of different approaches. (XT – reflection 19)

The discussion concerning phonemic awareness as just one element of literacy development elicited a comment on how teachers should approach this

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21 International Reading Association, & National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998)
One method is not the end all answer to teaching reading . . . multiple methods are best" (EB – reflection 21). It was also stated that multiple modes and levels of engagement by children should be allowed during the early stages of literacy development (DC – reflection 31).

Finally, several participants stated their beliefs related to specific practices of literacy development. Responding to readings on phonological awareness a teacher wrote:

The newer research emphasizing a balanced approach to reading instruction was refreshing, yet we are moving rapidly toward direct instruction programs which are highly regimented. The research from Finland was interesting – the phonics instruction was devoid of meaning. The sound-letter correspondence mastery was high, but comprehension was an area of weakness (DC – reflection 7).

Impact of the Course in Validating Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices

It has always been my experience that teachers bring an abundance of knowledge and experience to professional development. It is valuable for teachers not only to learn about new issues concerning teaching, but to also to have what they already know validated, and see, through interaction with other teachers, how that same knowledge is played out in other contexts. Such was the case in my study: most of the participants felt that in at least one instance their beliefs about literacy development were validated either through a reading or discussion in the course or in relation to something they did related to the course. One explained that she didn’t realize that much of what she does is related to literacy (XT – reflection 14). She

22 “Considering the research” from Weaver (1998), and “Finding the balance” from Strickland (1998)
later stated that, “a lot of the readings helped to validate what I was doing and why I
was doing it” (XT – reflection 30).

A teacher indicated that her beliefs about teaching were validated by a
particular reading:23 “For me the article just brought everything I knew about early
childhood and literacy together. It confirmed and validated what I am doing in my
class - how things are structured; what I teach; how I teach them, etc.” (QL – text
response 3). Another teacher’s statement pointed out that a reading24 could serve
both to revisit important learning and to sustain practice:

Most of the information in the reading was not new to me. But I like how the
readings reiterate how children don’t just learn to read in school, but they
need to be exposed to literature from birth. Through this, children start to
acquire the skills they will need in school to learn how to read. The
information in the readings support and remind me how important it is to
play word games and sing songs. The kids enjoy it and it helps them acquire
phonemic awareness skills” (TN – text response 7).

Another teacher felt that a reading25 reminded her of and reaffirmed her belief in the
importance of assessments, even if they are informal (EB – text response 5).

Finally, one teacher felt validated in her beliefs about inclusion:

From the readings that we have been assigned, I got a sense of validation of
the work that I do with my children. Having an inclusion class was one of
the best things that I could have done for my students. Oral language is the
stepping stone for literacy and it’s so important for children with special
needs to be around others that are not disabled. The peer modeling (verbal
and physical) that goes on in our class is great and I strongly feel that any
adult would not be able to elicit that type of learning. There’s something
different about learning from your friends than “some old person,” namely,
the teacher. (QL – reflection 7)

24 “Considering the research” and “Reconceptualizing phonics instruction ” from Weaver (1998),
and “Finding the balance” from Strickland (1998)
25 “Assessment: Determining what children know and can do” from Christie, Enz, and Vukelich
(2003)
As a result of the spirit of collaboration established within the course, teachers also found validation through others, particularly their course mates. Much of this was a result of discussions on supporting literacy through the learning environment. In describing environmental changes she was contemplating, a teacher stated: “I noticed that someone else wanted to label everything, as I do (GS – reflection 13). Another said, “A lot of the peer-mates would make similar changes and it just reinforced my changes” (OE – reflection 12). A third said, “I noticed that many of my peers wanted to add or change many of the same things that I wanted to add or change . . . we were pretty much on the same wavelength” (QL – reflection 21). It was not uncommon to read statements demonstrating agreement in discussions of other topics:

I liked the comment about the reading. 26 “I wish we had these activities before I gave birth.” The other lady was going to xerox it for her sister who gave birth. This is so true, teachers have a different mentality, and it comes natural to us. Other parents may not be as knowledgeable about strategies and activities. (SY – reflection 5)

One teacher even gained a sense of validation through an experience in her own classroom. She had conducted an interactive literacy lesson that incorporated some new vocabulary and was observed by a school staff member:

When our speech pathologist came into my classroom to pick up some children for speech, she was impressed with what we were doing. She told me that a lot of the things we were doing were what she was doing in speech with the children. (QL – reflection 12)

It is not surprising that early childhood educators have a strong sense of the significance and urgency of early literacy development, particularly those who serve

26 “Growing Up to Read” from Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999).
children who are disabled. Indeed, those thoughts were expressed and affirmed by several of the participants. “This class also validated my philosophy of the importance of literacy at all ages . . . that literacy opens the door to so much more, like, behavior, skills, concepts, experiences, predicting, relating prior knowledge . . . and also the pure love of books” (SY – reflection 34).

*Impact of the Course on Teachers’ Values*

Some teachers described the value they placed upon exposure to and exploration of literacy within an authentic and/or individualized context as well as the value of partnerships with families in supporting a child’s literacy.

*Exposure and Exploration in Authentic Literacy Settings*

Teachers’ comments on the value of exposure to and exploration of literacy within an authentic context were related to meaningful, multicultural literature (OE – text response 2), real-life applications of literacy skills (OE – text response 8), and oral language as an essential part of literacy development. One preschool teacher wrote: “Applying a learned skill in authentic situations seems to be essential, especially for very young children like preschoolers. For them to become life-long lovers of learning, it is important for them to see the meaning of their activities” (PW – text response 8).

“Exposure” was a term frequently used in discussion. One of the preschool teachers indicated her distaste for alphabet drills; she viewed meaningful exposure to components of literacy as much more valuable (OE – text response 9). This belief in exposure, within the context of the skill-based instructional approach that many
elementary teachers are currently required to use, was best summarized by one of the preschool teachers:

Over the past six years of teaching special education preschool I felt that it wasn’t developmentally appropriate to push reading and writing. I did feel that if a child was interested it was great for them to explore. As I’ve read and researched early literacy, I’ve come to the conclusion that allowing a child to explore literacy is important, but it is very necessary for me as the teacher to provide adequate materials for which a child can explore. If nothing is available to them they will not gain a love for literacy. I am very excited about creating centers for which more activities relating to literacy will be provided. (UK – reflection 33)

As evidenced by the numerous statements concerning changes that the participants had made or would make in their instruction, one might conclude that this group of early childhood educators has become ever watchful for learning experiences that are more engaging, more authentic, and that seek to integrate curriculum areas more wholly. One participant indicated why this is perhaps the case: not every great teaching practice works in every context. In response to a question concerning environmental features that would not work in her setting, and being mindful of the need to consider individual needs, strengths, and interests of all of her students, a teacher stated:

The dictated reading center would be a great center to implement, however it would be difficult because there would need to be an adult in that center during the entire center time. This adult would not be able to rotate to the different centers and by having one adult stationed at that center it may take away from the supervision of others. We have a very needy class (2 runners) and we need 3 adults supervising while one adult is at the art center daily. (SY – text response 9)

*The Importance of Family Involvement in Early Literacy Development*

Programs for young children are most successful in supporting early literacy learning when there is a strong connection between the home and the school.
They must also establish a culture of trust and acknowledge parents’ shared responsibility in helping their children learn (Mendoza, Katz, Robertson, & Rothenberg, 2003). Just as teachers recognized their own importance and impact on the literacy development of young children, they saw the significant role played by parents. Home involvement (EB – text response 1), communication with parents (GS – text response 2), teamwork among teachers, parents, and other caregivers in developing oral communication and other aspects of literacy (XT – reflection 4), and the potential for literacy development through learning activities at home (OE – text response 7) were indicated as valued aspects of partnerships with parents in providing literacy learning experiences for their children. As one teacher stated:

I’d like . . . parents see what I see about their kids. I also think it’s incredibly important for parents to realize what an incredible role they play in their children’s educations. Too many parents just leave it all up to the teachers. (OE – lesson narrative 6)

One teacher noted how challenging this partnership can be:

I know how difficult it can be to deal with everyday demands on our time. As a teacher, I understand how important early family literacy activities are to developing future readers. Parents need all the help they can get, and need to be empowered as teachers of their children. Parents need to realize the impact family has on literacy development. These brochures [featured in the session on family literacy] may help in a small way. (DC – reflection 30)

Several teachers agreed that this was an area that is challenging to them. In response to the same questions, 27 four teachers responded that parent participation was often difficult to evoke. They cited inconsistency (DC – reflection 27), lack of interest

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27 What do you see as the importance of family literacy activities? What challenges do you face in addressing this unique aspect of your teaching?
(QL – reflection 25), and lack of patience with a challenging child (UK – reflection 32). One teacher said, “I can see materials getting lost, bags not coming back . . . My families are very needy. They are not very knowledgeable in this area. They would need a lot of guidance and support in this area (SY – reflection 30). While this painted a rather bleak picture for the parents and children in this setting, the tale did not end at this point. The teacher later stated:

I had an idea about how to support family literacy. My families have a lot of outside stressors and baggage. They are not very knowledgeable about literacy environment in the home. We could hold a workshop for parents once a month. We can discuss parental concerns and involvement. We can give them ideas and suggestions about how to support literacy in the home: providing a daily routine of story time and conversations; the importance of valuing education and reading. Parents also have to model good reading behavior, so their children can see the importance of reading. We currently send home parent memos and literature. I think we can get the parents to physically do it and share with others. It would benefit everyone involved: parents, child, teacher, and younger siblings. It would be so worth it! (SY – reflection 33)

Communication is essential, however, regardless of circumstances when establishing and maintaining the partnership. One thing teachers can share with parents is that learning to read is a gradual process and that parents (as well as the general public) should be informed or reminded of this fact (TN – reflection 1).

*Impact of the Course on Teachers’ Sense of Community*

At the beginning of the course, I already knew that collaboration was so important to the majority of the participants (preschool teachers in inclusive settings) because of my observation of their involvement in prior professional development sessions in which I had also taken part. I was fairly sure they would continue to work together in a way that fostered partnerships among one another.
This quality became evident as interactions among and connections between the participants began early in the course. Collaboration and establishing common ground were essential parts of the course. These aspects were epitomized by one teacher’s statements:

I like to listen to the ideas and thoughts my course mates have. It’s good to have more than one brain thinking and coming up with ideas and perspectives on the information we’ve been given. I have turned some of the ideas shared into lesson plans and will try them out with my students. (QL – reflection 11)

She also stated: “My class is unique, but not as unique as I thought it was. Other teachers have similar classes and problems” (QL – reflection 4).

Statements regarding the ease of participation began early in the course. The participants: shared suggestions for language development activities (PW – reflection 3); were inspired by the exchange of thoughts (GS – reflection 3); found common beliefs about language development (SY – reflection 5); stated that the time flew due to the atmosphere of fun and collegiality (TN – reflection 5); and shared perspectives and experience (PW – reflection 9). Other teacher statements revealed a sense of group identity and the opportunity to learn from others within a community of learners.

A Group Identity

The statements concerning validation by others indicated that the participants valued one another for the expertise that they shared and understood that the knowledge each one brought demonstrated how different teaching contexts incorporated teaching knowledge in a variety of ways. Everyone was valued, too, since each member of the group was connected in to the rest of us in a meaningful
way. The group’s identity was quickly established and strengthened their reliance on each other for sharing of perspectives, experiences, and teaching practices.

Initially, I was worried that there would be someone who felt like an outsider: possibly participants who were new teachers, who were not preschool inclusion teachers, or others. Yet everyone was connected to the group in a significant way; there was no one who did not have a commonality with others, even at the beginning of the course. The only teacher from outside the Windward District, a potential outsider, had attended several preschool inclusion meetings and had previously met most of the preschool inclusion teachers. The only special education teacher who did not teach preschool worked at the same school as one of the other participants. I was concerned that the lone teacher from general education, a first grade teacher, would possibly be viewed as an outsider. But she was based at the same school as one of the preschool teachers, so she was brought into the group as “a friend of someone we already know.” She indicated her level of comfort, along with a new insight gained, by saying:

I have learned from my new friends more about how a preschool classroom works. I have learned about how important play is and how important conversing is. These two things definitely help children develop. Sometimes in first grade it seems like there’s never enough time, especially not for play. But I think my thinking has changed. I have a better understanding of how this helps children’s development. I will try to incorporate more drama or puppets into the classroom. (TN – reflection 12)

I continued to be concerned for the first grade teacher since she was the only one from general education; I was fearful that she might feel overrun by discussions on literacy primarily concerning preschool and special education. However, on
several occasions she indicated that the course content was meaningful to her. This is one of her statements:

I have learned about the types of activities that the students are being exposed to in the preschool setting to promote literacy and pre-reading skills. I have learned how important preschool is for a child’s development. I can use the activities that I have heard about to help the children who come to class performing way under grade level. I have a better understanding of what kind of experiences the children come to first grade with, those who went to preschool. (TN – reflection 32)

An unexpected benefit of having this teacher in the course was that she provided a broader understanding of the continuum of literacy development. One of the preschool teachers said: “I was exposed to what the upper grades (K/1) were doing and it helped to confirm what I was doing with the preschool-aged children in regards to literacy” (XT – reflection 30).

Later, I became concerned that the teachers who worked with children who were severely disabled might not feel they were part of the group. But, a participant, one of only two teachers working with children with severe disabilities, stated:

It is so wonderful to share ideas with others in the field. My course mates have had some great ideas that I wasn’t sure that children with more severe disabilities could handle. I feel encouraged to spread my wings and try new language arts ideas with my students. I really like one idea called “Reading the Room.” It helps children realize that their language can be written. I especially appreciate Jonathan for helping us get out of our comfort zone and stretch our imaginations. (UK – reflection 16)

At the end of the course, one of the first year teachers reflected on what she had learned and how it might change her daily practice:

I’ve learned so much! Many times I felt so inadequate and so not “on the ball” after listening to them and all the smart, creative, and interesting ways they incorporate literacy in their classrooms. It has motivated me more than anything to want to do better. I’ve learned to take book walks, use other
students as models, and to record them on tape for evidence. There are many ways they have impacted me and all for the better. (EB – reflection 28)

It became evident through the course that teachers can learn not only from each other’s successes, but also from our failures, and that while we work within the limits of four walls, we do have colleagues to help us. Two teachers reflected these truths:

I liked the experiences (good and bad) that my course mates have shared with me. I feel that these real life experiences not only helped me to understand more about literacy development of young children, but also that I’m not alone with some of my hardships that I go/went through. (QL – reflection 27)

My classmates were wonderful and full of great ideas. I especially gained some new ideas for activities that I will try in my class next year. It was also great to be able to share experiences. I don’t feel so alone in my struggles as a teacher. (UK – reflection 33)

This second statement came from a preschool teacher in a fully self-contained setting. It was significant that she also commented on another occasion that she looked to the inclusion teachers for ideas that might be appropriate for her students (UK – reflection 4).

*Learning from Others within the Learning Community*

Again, statements relating to this sub-theme began to appear early in the course. After the third session, a preschool teacher indicated that it was validating to “share opportunities to encourage language development, hearing everyone’s suggestions for two ways to use the materials they selected” (PW – reflection 3).

I expected that some of the new teachers would learn and gain insight from their more experienced colleagues. This did occur and was particularly evident in the statements made by two of the first-year teachers:
At our class on Monday some of my fellow teachers shared some strategies they use. Some examples are: asking the students to help find and point out something in the story (to help keep their attention), or using stories with repetitive phrases so the students can participate by reading along (i.e., *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?*; *In the Tall, Tall Grass*). I need something to gain and keep their attention! I could maybe also use some of these other ideas they gave: using puppets as props; assigning each student something to find in the story; do a “book walk” (looking at all the pictures before reading the story); do some pre-reading strategies like predicting; having discussions about who, what, when, where, why, how. I’m excited to try these strategies and see the improvements they will make! I’m confident that these strategies will make a difference; I just have to put them into practice! (EB – reflection 4)

[XT] gave me some great tools to help me collect and organize data. [DC] is such a wealth of experience and ideas for daily activities. I just love hearing bits and pieces of everyone’s day, as they share in the context of literacy. As a first year, this type of information was very helpful. (PW – reflection 18)

Another teacher commented on an insight she gained from a more experienced peer:

I learned new ideas, strategies, and activities from my course mates. We share each other’s laughter and frustration. I learned [from DC] that it’s good to read books 3X before you put it into your classroom library. (She is a master/veteran PS teacher.) That was a good idea and was similar to an activity in the reading, which was to read and re-read books in the class. It never dawned on me to reread books because there is just so little time. Preschoolers do like predictability and repetition. (SY – reflection 16)

Yet even the “master teachers” learned new strategies from their more youthful peers:

One neat idea I learned through my course mates had to do with anecdotal notes. I was given a good suggestion on how to take, organize, or keep anecdotal records. One teacher [QL] said she had a composition book for each child in the class and everyday each of the teachers and EAs29 would grab one book from the front of the stack and write in that particular child’s book. They would then put the book at the back of the stack and this way each child would have at least one anecdotal note written in his/her book per week. I think this sounds like a very organized way and no child is forgotten because you always pull from the front of the stack and when finished you

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28 Both teachers in this statement are veterans of more than 15 years.
29 An EA is an Educational Assistant.
put that child’s book at the back of the stack. I haven’t had a chance to try this method, but I would like to introduce it to my team. (XT – reflection 14)

The discussions related to readings or other assignments provided frequent opportunities for the community to flourish (TN – reflection 20; QL – reflection 12), but it was during the informal sharing times that most of the evidence of a community of learning was found.

After an assignment requiring the participants to sketch a map of their classrooms as they were at the present and as they would be if they could make changes to better support literacy development, I invited the participants to informally share their maps. The interplay of ideas was substantial. Two teachers decided they wanted to incorporate a listening center in their classrooms (XT – reflection 25; TN – reflection 21). Other teachers noticed that the changes they were considering also appeared on the maps of others (OE – reflection 12; QL – reflection 21). One of the new teachers wanted to rearrange her room completely (EB – reflection 25), while another teacher was struck by the “heavenliness” of a loft in another teacher’s map of her present classroom arrangement (DC – reflection 19). A teacher who was challenged by the space and storage limitations of her classroom learned from her peers that tubs would help her store books for easy student access (GS – reflection 8). Another commented on changes she was planning to improve her lending library and reading area, including an inflatable pool with pillows (EB – reflection 12).

The session on assessment also promoted a great deal of exchange among the participants. One of the preschool inclusion teachers had already shared some of
her assessment tools with others at an inclusion meeting. However, the newer
teachers had not been present and were delighted to get these useful tools. Others
also shared innovative informal assessment tools that were well received (PW –
reflection 10; EB – reflection 16; SY – reflection 31). Concerning new assessment
strategies, one teacher wrote:

My course mates bring a lot of cool ideas to the table. For example, I drew a
“blank” at good assessments and assessment strategies, but my course mates
had used things like anecdotal logs, which I never even thought I could use.
I’ve already put notebooks on my next year’s purchase orders. (OE –
reflection 5)

There were also statements that demonstrated teachers had shared other
literacy ideas with their colleagues: having children label their disposable water
cups each day (OE – lesson narrative 5); and asking children to recall a “lost”
playdough recipe from memory (PW – text response 8).

The statements in this section brought me to realize how gratifying it was for
me to be a part of this study, particularly because of the statements concerning the
opportunities for continued growth and cooperation. One of the first year teachers
wrote:

I see a brighter future for myself! I think I’ve learned some effective
strategies from the readings and a lot from my peers in this class. I’ve been
trying these strategies and finding success, which is really exciting! This
class has definitely made me more aware of things I can do to help my
students develop into readers! To sum it up, I can safely say I’m going to be
a better teacher because of the things I learned in this class. (EB – reflection
27)

Hopefully, the collegiality that was established among the participants will continue.

At least one teacher also felt the same way: “This class has also given me a great
networking resource that I can ask for help or give help” (QL – reflection 27).
Impact of the Course on Teaching Practices

Vartuli (1999) found that a teacher’s stated beliefs did not always match their teaching practices. For this reason, I thought it was important to examine teacher practices separately from teacher beliefs. Upon examination, the data concerning teacher practices revealed four sub-themes: physical environment, social setting, assessment, and pedagogy. Further topics within the sub-theme of pedagogy were evident: individualized instruction; language and listening; print awareness; letter recognition; phonemic awareness and phonics; responding to books and other print; and purposeful writing. Finally, the journey of a new teacher was examined as she reflected upon the changes in literacy instruction she perceived during her first year of teaching.

Numerous statements were made by the participants concerning changes in curriculum, strategies, and other teaching practices that support literacy. Two participants, both in their first year of teaching, made comments related to teaching overall; two other, more experienced teachers also commented on how their perspectives had changed concerning their teaching practices. These serve as an introduction to the participants’ thoughts on the changes they contemplated in their teaching.

I’ve learned about my strengths and weaknesses in the methods and strategies I use to teach my students. This has helped me to change and/or improve my strategies, which in turn make me a more effective teacher (EB – reflection 14).

For example, for story time each day I remember to have discussion before and after and to do higher level questioning. Also, I’ve been using more props, finding more, better quality, literature to add to my library center. (EB – reflection 28)
Some of the strategies I want to try are: making letter posters to have students paste their names/other labels on; making a big version of letters for them to walk around; and sorting objects that sound alike. (EB – text response 1)

I would like to implement a reading response journal to go along with my lending library to encourage student reflection and writing/drawing. I also know I need to use more questioning and give more time for discussions during story time. I also need to work on building my classroom library and putting topic books in all my centers. (EB – text response 3)

There are so many little things I am now cognizant of that I was not before. For example, the types of book I choose to read, the questions I ask about the story, checking for comprehension, being aware of improving my assessment tools. I do something different (better!) in my classroom every day because I am taking this class and that makes me feel good (PW – reflection 9, emphasis hers).

One of the new teachers also gained a better understanding of her philosophy of teaching as she responded to a reading assignment.30

This statement really made me think: “Teaching complex skills too soon may impede learning, and conversely, not teaching when they are ready may result in boredom and a lack of interest” [p. 30]. I had never really considered that teaching things too early could be a detriment. Also, I did not know that it is good to introduce young children to another language to help them learn it better in the future... Reading this article makes me realize that I must be aware of the age-appropriateness of what I teach. For example, I shouldn’t force my students to learn alphabets when they aren’t ready and especially not in isolation of a meaningful context. Also, this article has reinforced to me the concept that it is okay and even best for me to keep repeating activities, instead of always trying to do something “new and exciting.” For example, I should keep reading that book that Fred keeps asking me to read, over and over again, and I should do that same art activity again to help my students better understand the process and get better at it! (EB – text response 3)

A more experienced teacher also found aspects of her teaching she had examined and decided to change:

As I have read the material for class and listened and shared in the class discussions, I felt that a lot of what I’m doing with my preschool class is developmentally appropriate. There have been so many great ideas throughout the class. It has really motivated me to look at my curriculum and make some changes or additions to it for next year. I have started applying ideas this year to try them out. Good success. (UK – reflection 16)

Another teacher wrote about her lesson on creating individual books: “If it were not for this class, I don’t think I would have ever done this lesson and therefore wouldn’t have a better understanding of the capabilities of my children” (QL – lesson narrative 1).

The statements demonstrating this theme reveal how literacy development activities, both teacher-directed and child-directed, demonstrate the impact such activities have upon the literacy development of young children. While all of the activities did not originate within the boundaries of the course, it was never my intent to limit reflections and lesson narratives to only learning activities that had been discussed in course sessions, either in conducting the research or designing the course. I was hopeful that the participants in the study would develop a heightened awareness of instances of literacy development in individual children. Since a significant proportion of statements came from the lesson narratives that teachers wrote about the literacy lessons they conducted, I believe that the teachers did, indeed, become more aware of the impact of literacy upon their students.31 A reflection demonstrated this belief:

After reading the article, I was struck with the powerful feeling of my responsibility as a teacher to my students. I saw very clearly as I read this article, that the experiences and activities that I do or don’t do can have a

31 As the statements that demonstrate the theme of “teaching practice” are longer than previously cited statements and more narrative in nature, I sometimes refer to them hereafter as “stories.”
dramatic impact on my students future success as readers. It seems somewhat overwhelming to think of, but right at this moment, I’m feeling up to the task! (EB – reflection 5)

The Environment’s Effect on Early Literacy Development

The learning environment within a classroom establishes a structure that enables teachers to teach and children to learn (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002). In the case of literacy, creating the learning environment is important not only in terms of how materials that engage children in literacy, such as books, are made available, but also in terms of how literacy tools are featured to demonstrate their use.

A print-rich environment is often indicated as an important tool in supporting early literacy. Teachers often have a clear understanding of what print in the environment can accomplish, but not always:

In many of the readings, the term “print-rich environment” came up, and I found myself wondering, what is a print-rich environment, really? Is it a well-stocked library? Or word labels on every single object in the room, including the sink faucet and the toilet paper roll? . . . I think a print-rich environment is one where books are available, and children are read to daily. It’s one that has an adult willing to point out the letters on the already existing containers of Cheerios. It’s one where adults are willing to talk to children (instead of at or around them), period. (OE – reflection 17, emphasis hers)

Sometimes there are surprises concerning print in the environment, as the children help determine of what it consists:

One of my students uses a PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) book to communicate with those around her. The little cards have both a picture and the word on it so that the person she is communicating with can understand better what she needs. As a result of having the words written on the cards many of my students are able to read some of the cards with the assistance of the picture. They often are able to help this student with what she needs because they are reading too. As a result of this system
combined with lots of language around my student, she is beginning to say many clear words and even some short phrases. (UK – reflection 14)

This story is mirrored in other statements describing how young children made use of literacy in places not always considered by teachers to be of great interest to them (calendar: OE – reflection 28; daily schedule: OE – reflection 29).

Literacy happens in all corners of the early childhood classroom, sometimes in unexpected places. Children don’t seem to compartmentalize their learning as we often expect them to do. One teacher found literacy in both her writing and art centers:

While at the writing center during free choice centers, a boy was sitting at the table drawing a heart and writing letters on a piece of paper. When I asked what he was doing, he said he was writing a letter to his mom. He wrote the letters “PHTome” on the side of the heart and he asked me what it spelled. I sounded it out to him as best I could and he looked at me and said, “No, no, it says p, p, p” making the sound of the letter ‘p’. He then continued to say it spelled “I love you.” He then got a new paper to write on and wrote the letters “HPeToomp” and said it spelled “I love you.” (XT – reflection 9)

During free choice centers, a few children were clustered at a table cutting. One child was cutting a piece of paper with zigzag lines pre-drawn on it. After he cut out one of the lines, he said point to the remaining piece, “That’s my name.”

When I asked him what he meant, he said “that’s the letter M” and turned the paper to show me the M. Next he said he was going to cut out Makayla’s name (the second zigzag line on the paper). I never associated the zigzag lines as representing a letter but when he showed me what he meant, it made perfect sense. (XT – reflection 10)

In order for literacy to emerge, young children must have access to high-quality literature. This story demonstrates how access to good literature is an important part of creating an environment that supports literacy development:
I recently bought a set of Spot (the dog) books and have read them during story time. It tells a story, and gets them involved by having them lift the flaps and find out what’s underneath. It promotes language because students are excited to say what they have found under these flaps and describe where Spot is or what he is doing. Today for story time I read two of these Spot books and then gave my students some free time to read the books on their own... it was really neat to witness all five of my students simultaneously reading books! I watched and listened as some of them tried making up the story as they looked at the pictures... this is what teaching is all about! (EB – reflection 30)

But providing an environment with these literacy-rich characteristics is only part of the answer. Sometimes children need a little nudge to engage in literacy activities. This reflection demonstrates that sometimes a teacher must resort to “not-so-gentle” encouragement:

This is a funny story that happened earlier this year. One day during free centers time I had to close our home center down because there were too many children playing in there. They were not following the directions of the center and had more than the recommended amount, so after three warnings I had to close the center. The children were disappointed, but I gave them other options such as the art and writing center, blocks, music, or the science centers, but they weren’t interested in any of the other centers. I didn’t care where they went; I just needed them out of there. I was cleaning the home center up to close it down and my partner alerted me to look at all the children. When I looked up all the children were sitting on the carpet, lying on the little reading platform, or lying down reading books. None of children were at any of the other centers. We were so shocked! I had to take a picture of it! It was then that I realized how much impact we have on them. If they didn’t see us reading to them the two to three times we do a day they probably could care less about the books and what value they have. It lasted for only about five minutes, but that will be a memory I treasure for the rest of my teaching days. (QL – reflection 13)

The importance of books and access to them were mentioned numerous times by the teachers in their writings. One teacher’s reflections showed how small changes in her classroom library had a significant impact:

32 This series originated with Where's Spot?
At the beginning of this literacy course, my library sported three hard, plastic chairs, two open-faced book shelves, and a small square carpet. I kept it stocked with books from the public library, so I always thought it to be pretty adequate. However, as we talked about our library centers in class, I realized there was so much more that could be done with the center. So my partner teacher and I endeavored to change the center. She brought in an old toddler bed from her granddaughter and curtains to hang over the windows in our library area. The bed was covered with a simple brightly colored towel (in case of accidents—easy clean up) and four cheap, but pretty, throw pillows. I’ve wanted to build my classroom library, but I’m cheap. My instructor pointed me towards Scholastic Book Club specials that have 50 books for $49. I went online, ordered catalogs, and have recently purchased the book special. (I also would like to give these “dollar books” as gifts for holidays or birthdays to help build at-home libraries.) We added stuffed animals so the children could read to someone cuddly. It was amazing how the attractive change simply DREW the kids into the center. It used to be a pretty dead center in our room, but the comfortable additions made it popular. (OE – reflection 23, emphasis hers; OE – reflection 5)

A special education teacher echoed this desire for more books at low cost (GS – text response 3). A preschool teacher’s interest in expanding access to books for children was simultaneously multi-directional:

After our discussions and readings this week, I went on-line to find web sites to look for good books to add to the class collection for cultural literacy. Scholastic.com had some ideas. I also went to the public library website for books available in Kailua/Kaneohe for future use. I’m going to try either an index card box for good resources for different thematic units, and can also find books that are multicultural. I am motivated to try for a Good Idea Grant for funds for take home packs and a lending library for home use. I have a tendency to protect my books, and don’t want to put them out for the children! I need to get over that, and perhaps books not purchased through my personal funds is the way to go. I also need to get more books to put into the various centers- math and counting skills for math center, science books for science center, and an assortment for dramatic play. (DC – reflection 6)

This teacher also wrote a list of specific multicultural books she wanted to obtain for her class: The Land of Many Colors, We are all Alike . . . We are all Different, Two Eyes, a Nose, and a Mouth, Loving, We’re Going on a Lion Hunt, and Handa’s Surprise (DC – reflection 6). Two other teachers also stated that they wanted more
multicultural books (QL – text response 4; EB – reflection 6). More books that featured alphabet and letter sounds were mentioned as a needed addition to classroom collections (EB – reflection 7); a specific book *Some Smug Slug* was identified as a starting point to exploring the “s” sound (OE – reflection 10). More concept books were desired to address the learning goals of individual students (PW – reflection 6). More books in various centers was noted as one way to increase access and a “book swap” would allow families to bring books they did not use to the classroom to trade for books that other families had enjoyed (QL – text response 3).

One teacher who did not have a lending library wanted to create one (DC – text response 4). Another teacher who did loan out books encountered a unique problem:

I attempted to provide the children with the experience of advertising a book they enjoyed. I chose the activity because it would help me to assess their retelling skills, as well as address some oral-communication standards. I wanted the children to have an activity they could do with their parents in order to help the families bond at home. I’d like to see parents see what I see about their kids. I also think it’s incredibly important for parents to realize what an incredible role they play in their children’s education. Too many parents just leave it all up to the teachers. I just began this activity; so far, we’ve only had two book talks at share time. But as a result, all the students want to be chosen to share their art and talk about their book. The two books “advertised” at share time by the kids were inevitably the most sought after books in the lending library and I had to deal with many tears and tantrums from students who wanted to borrow the books advertised but couldn’t because someone else already borrowed them. Already I can see where I need to improve the activity. For one, I’ll need multiple copies of books in the lending library. For another, I need to work out some sort of chart that shows when each child will get to share, because the children that aren’t chosen to share get really huffy about it. I think a visual chart will ease some of that upset. Up until taking this literacy course, I’d never even considered having a book talk. However, so many of the readings suggested it, that I
thought I ought to give it a try. Who knew it’d turn out to be such a success? (OE – lesson narrative 6)

Awareness of change in the classroom was not always evident to teachers. One described how subtle the changes were:

I don’t really see all the changes that are happening in my classroom, but when there are other people that come in and help in the classroom, they see the changes. That’s when I step back and think about how it was before and how much it has grown and changed. (QL – reflection 23)

Early Literacy Development in a Social Climate

In describing the social aspect of a classroom, I look beyond the physical surroundings and consider how the people, both children and adults, interact within and use their physical environment. The social climate of the early childhood classroom helps to set the tone for literacy development; it has an enormous impact on how young children approach literacy activities. When children have access to books, other meaningful print, and materials that support engagement in literacy, the modeling of literacy engagement by peers and adults encourages them to begin to explore literacy in ways that are meaningful. The statements within this sub-theme incorporate all of these literacy supports. Here is such an example:

Mark came to be in my class just before Christmas break. His mom had switched jobs, so he moved into my Head Start program from another program. From the start, it was obvious he was incredibly bright and someone at home worked with him often. He had a vast vocabulary and a healthy curiosity about everything in the classroom. However, if not adequately stimulated, Mark got into trouble, and fast. So we had to figure out quickly how to keep him busy. He was already writing his name with upper case letters, so we started him practicing his name with lower case letters after the initial “M” and soon after, he was writing his last name as well. His interest in literacy was already there, so we just tried to keep providing him opportunities to explore it. For instance, we gave him a bucket of sidewalk chalk so he could write his name in huge letters outside, and we taught him how to make “books” by stapling paper together. He
would draw pictures and then come up to a teacher to dictate his story so we could copy it down. He was provided with letter stencils so he could stencil his name and the names of his friends or parents. He often utilized the writing center and library center and displayed very good participation in morning circle activities that addressed letter-sounds and letter recognition. While he came to us already recognizing his alphabets and writing his name, in reflecting on his portfolio, we could see some growth. Given the multiple opportunities we attempted to provide for him in literacy, we felt that our program had the right idea. As we analyze our literacy program based on what I’ve been learning through this class, we can see that our program is improving. We’ve also seen that the more gifted students in our class have forced us to improve by raising the bar. Mark may have been a huge challenge for us, but I’m sincerely thankful he joined our class. He’s proof that students are often a teacher’s best teacher! (OE – reflection 16)

Modeling is an important part of literacy learning. In settings where appropriate modeling occurs, literacy development is more likely to happen:

I’d like to reflect on a gifted student in my class. He is the youngest of four children, which probably explains why he relates so much better with older children than with peers his own age. On the flip side, his IQ (which I’ll bet is a good few points higher than my own) might be what’s holding back his social skills with his age-mates. He can often be found completely alone, lurking in the writing center or sitting near a teacher, trying to talk to adults. My goal in life was to see him playing like the other kids do. His mom swears that he plays at home all the time. His older sister likes to “play school” and she’s always the teacher, while Kaipo is the student. But in school, nada. That is, until I gained a special needs student named Jalen. Jalen was among my biggest challenges. He had difficulties with recall and was slow to understand concepts. He was incredibly impulsive and wiggled incessantly. He always seemed to be in the thick of mischief. And funny enough, it was Jalen who took to Kaipo with a zeal that seriously scared the usually lonely boy. But Kaipo never complained, he merely put Jalen to work. What I mean is, Kaipo “played school” with Jalen. And as the teacher, he directed Jalen to copy titles of books onto paper in the writing center, to read aloud in the library center, to count numbers from the calendar at our morning circle carpet. And Jalen, who had trouble remembering anything I told him, was retaining information from Kaipo. Jalen, who had absolutely no letter recognition, was legibly copying the title No, David! off of Kaipo’s paper. Kaipo was teaching, I mean really teaching, literacy to his peers. I was amazed; I still am, actually. It’s fascinating to watch peers teach peers. It only solidifies my belief that kids learn from social interactions with their peers so much more than we give them credit for. (OE – reflection 30)
Children use or adapt literacy skills that have been modeled for them in ways that are useful tools in their environment:

We have one child who loves to go into the home area and he seems to always miss the opportunity of going in, being we only allow four students in this area at one time. He decided to take matters in his own hands and devised a sign up sheet so he would not be overlooked when someone left the home area. (Home area is a popular center but usually students come and go and this student feels he doesn’t get to go in as often as he would like.) He went to get a paper to attach to our clipboard in the area and created a sign in sheet so if someone leaves, the person who left will call the next person on the list. He seems to be happy because he is now able to get into home area and everyone seems to have followed in his footsteps by signing in also. (XT – reflection 31)

Other statements described the impact of modeling on literacy: gripping a pencil (UK – reflection 34); and modeling of book use by children for a new student (EB – reflection 23).

**Literacy Assessment**

As Roskos (2004) stated: “Assessment is the necessary means for systematically collecting and analyzing information on children’s literacy development” (p. 92). The observations and other assessments made by teachers within the constructivist, social world of emergent literacy provide a rich collection of data that describes the learning and development of young children (Salinger, 2001). Statements related to the theme of assessment were primarily focused on incorporating a more consistent, more authentic, or more carefully documented approach in determining children’s growth in literacy development or implementing new assessment tools. One teacher stated that she already documented children’s progress over time, but wanted to begin to “customize instruction to meet each student’s needs” (PW – text response 6). This statement identifies an important
purpose of assessment: that it serves to guide a teacher in designing instruction that meets students’ needs. Another teacher further clarified this purpose of assessment:

A lot of the information presented in this article helped me to understand how teaching and assessment are complementary processes. My assessments consist of the informal or authentic methods. One way to assess that I discovered through this reading is keeping in mind to always focus on what children are actually doing as they read and write as I take anecdotal notes. One thing I would like to add to my anecdotal assessments is to be sure to include more observable behaviors. I really liked the chart in Figure A where they listed the main areas you could assess and listed the observable behaviors you would look for. A lot of the observable behaviors are things you do look for when you assess students, but it just really helped me to see it laid out in print form. (XT – text response 6)

Assessing at the end of each quarter was found to be insufficient by one preschool teacher. She decided to do more informal assessments throughout the year to make the process of rating a child’s progress easier (QL – reflection 11); she also stated that rather than always sending things home, she needed to carefully select and save work samples that could show growth over time (QL – text response 6). Another preschool teacher felt the same way, indicating that she would try to better organize her anecdotal notes using a flip chart model that had been discussed in the course (EB – reflection 15). A third preschool teacher indicated that she needed to simplify the task of assessment to become more consistent (UK – reflection 19). Better organization with assessment documents was also mentioned by another teacher (DC – reflection 12); she said that she needed to be more vigilant in encouraging problem solving and higher-level thinking skills and appropriate methods to document the children’s progress in these areas (DC – text response 3).

Several of the participants stated that they would implement the use of assessment tools that had been introduced in the course either by other participants or by me: pre-academic skills chart and language literacy chart (EB – reflection 16); more anecdotal notes and the new HELP chart (OE – reflection 7); a parent literacy survey (SY – reflection 20); a flip chart for organizing anecdotal records and a parent literacy survey (QL – reflection 17); webbing and anecdotal journals (XT – reflection 16; XT – reflection 17).

The first grade teacher, who had experienced standardized testing of her students on a regular basis, indicated she had gained a new outlook concerning such tests (TN – reflection 13). She said:

I think my views on assessment have changed a little. I think assessment is important but daily performance should also be taken into consideration. Some people don’t perform well on standardized or formal assessment. There are many things that we do daily that could serve as a type of informal assessment. I would like to try having a reading portfolio next year. I like the idea of having a portfolio entry slip where the children say if they like the book or if the don’t like the book. I learned about this assessment through the readings. I would like to use more authentic assessment because I think it puts less pressure on the children. I see the importance of formal, standardized assessments but for first graders it can be stressful, overwhelming, and ultimately not very accurate. (TN – reflection 13; TN – text response 6; TN – reflection 14)

The Pedagogy of Early Literacy Development

Pedagogy encompasses a deliberate approach to several areas, including curriculum (specifically the content of teaching), the methods used, and socialization techniques used to engage children in their learning and foster development within specific contexts (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). This

34 HELP for preschoolers charts [Hawaii Early Learning Profile] (VORT Corp., 1995)
deliberateness of method that teachers of young children must use extends even to their manner of speaking to their students. Words that guide without correcting must be chosen carefully to allow children to discover for themselves what each learning opportunity holds. The following story demonstrates the deliberate gentleness that is essential in guiding children as they explore literacy and develop literacy skills in their environments:

In class on Wednesday, March 10, 2004, I had an interesting . . . interaction with a 4 year old boy. As one of our work jobs in our writing center, we provide a write on and wipe off board. The children are able to use it however they choose to (e.g., writing their name, drawing pictures, etc.). This boy came up to me with the board in his hand and told me he drew a rectangle and wrote the word rectangle underneath his drawing. [A rendering of the drawing and text is shown below.]

[Embedded image of a drawing with the word "rectangle" and a boy holding the board]

As I was looking at his work, he then said, “Rectangle starts with the letter T.” I told him he did a great job drawing a rectangle with 2 short sides and 2 long sides and spelling the name out. I then asked him to listen to how rectangle sounded when I said it and he said, “Oh! It starts with the letter r.” and proceeded to erase only the letter T and write an R in its place. (XT – reflection 5)

A deliberate approach also applies to how a teacher selects from a wide repertoire of teaching strategies and chooses one that best fits an individual child in a specific context. One teacher stated her agreement with this concept:

being knowledgeable of a variety of teaching methods, and knowing your students well enough to identify what method will work best for each student, is the MOST important. [I will] continue with my eclectic approach . . . trying to fit my teaching to my students, not the other way around. (PW – reflection 12, emphasis hers)
While there were numerous statements made about specific reading assignments, or the readings in general, an optional reading moved several teachers, to write reflections about how literacy instruction is approached:

Of all the articles we have read during this course, this is definitely one of my favorites! I learned so much from the awesome story of this teacher’s classroom and I’m excited to follow in her footsteps and put the theory into practice! (EB – reflection 32)

I also found the idea that the article relayed of creating an experience story to be very helpful. I like the idea of taking an experience, writing it down with the kids in story format with the students as “characters.” I like how it teaches sequencing of a story, as well as traditional story starters and finishers. There are so many vocabulary opportunities in experience stories, too. I can’t wait to try such an activity with my students. (OE – reflection 27)

The article described a kindergarten classroom, teacher, and curriculum that were wonderful examples of putting literacy theory into practice. The students were exposed to a print rich, literacy rich environment, where children were engaged in meaningful activities. As I read the article, I thought of ways I could provide similar opportunities for my young students. I have already become much more aware of the many opportunities we have to turn an experience into a literacy activity. I have been doing experience stories with my 3-4 year olds, but we haven’t gone back to then sequence their dictation into a meaningful, connected story. I will definitely take the time to do that. (DC – reflection 25)

Teachers of young children offer a myriad of literacy experiences to their students. Sometimes instruction is direct, explicit, and structured; at other times it is indirect and the child determines his level of engagement. As evidence of this variety of approaches to learning, this sub-theme is further separated into smaller topics that reveal the numerous ways that the participants report that their teaching practices were affected during the course.

35 "What does emerging literacy look like?" (Bobys, 2000)
The Significance of Individualized Instruction in Early Literacy Development

Knowledge of individual children and their development is essential for establishing the practice of a teacher of young children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). A teacher possesses unique avenues for providing growth and experience to a child, not only in terms of literacy, but in overall learning, when she is observant and takes the time to know a child’s interests and style of learning. This story demonstrates how one teacher acquired such knowledge:

We’ve been learning about animals that live in the ocean this month so I thought it would be a great idea to have each child make a book about their favorite sea animals copying the format of Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? I was going through the lesson and could tell which students were really into it (most of the older children) and, of course, those that weren’t (mostly the younger children with shorter attention spans). There was one child in particular that just loved the lesson so much that he did not want to stop his work until he was finished. Although he rushed through with his book, he went back to it and added to the details of the book. One thing that really stood out was his behavior. Usually, this child’s behavior is not what it should be - he’s very active and gets into everyone else’s business (bothering them, trying to get their attention, etc.), however, with this lesson, he was concentrating so much on what he was doing that he bothered no one and nothing bothered him. This child was so meticulous that he wanted his book to be as realistic as possible. He drew a box with some letters inside (he did this on two of his books with the same letters) mimicking how some books have their emblem on the back cover. Noticing what he was doing, I gave him a book and he turned it over and saw a bar code so he included it on the back cover of his book. Some people may argue that my lesson didn’t turn out very well because not every child completed their book, but I would say that it turned out better than I would have ever expected; my students have learned more than what I thought I was teaching them. (QL – reflection 15)

Other teachers also observed individual children in literacy activities and other arenas, including pre-writing at the chalkboard (UK – reflection 21); using predictable books to help a child with speech needs (EB – lesson narrative 6); becoming aware of a child spending time with an incarcerated parent as a trigger for
challenging behavior (OE – text response 2); and using a child’s birthday as an individual language and writing activity (QL – text response 2).

A preschool teacher gained a better understanding of her students’ capabilities through exposure to a dramatic extension of her story-reading:

They really enjoy dressing up and pretending. Some of the students needed prompting to participate but they were successful with the activity. I found later that many of my students continued to act out the story with each other. That to me shows some success. As they acted it out they tried to say the lines of the story. In the future I want to do this activity more using a variety of stories. It is definitely something that many of my students are capable of.

(UK – lesson narrative 7)

Language and Listening

Oral language serves as the foundation for a young child’s literacy development (Strickland, 2004). As a child’s language develops, her facility to meaningfully engage in literacy also grows. One of the participants, a preschool teacher from a fully self-contained setting, regularly takes her class to visit a Head Start class. She noticed that when the children were presented with a pre-recorded story that had integrated gross-motor movement, they were thoroughly engaged, repeating the words and asking to have the story again later. She stated that her goal was to include more stories that integrate language and movement in her teaching (UK – reflection 20). A reading prompted this thought from another teacher concerning language and literacy:

What I learned from this article will definitely change how I work with the children in preparation of future reading skills. Brain research shows that the brain looks for patterns and we can do activities like looking for patterns in words, sentences, or stories to help children develop language skills. I currently don’t do this regularly – only when it happens to pop up. I think I

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may plan these kinds of language practice in our daily routine. (OE – text response 3)

Responding to the reading on access, one teacher relayed her desire to use more oral language, especially to help children who were shy (QL – text response 3).

After reading an assigned chapter, another participant wrote:

The article states that as children grow older they should . . . be able to grasp the meaning of language they hear spoken in everyday conversation as well as in book narratives. An activity they listed to promote this was to have children listen to audio recordings of a book on tape. They can either look at the book simultaneously or just listen to the tape alone. After they have done this, ask the children to draw a picture of their favorite part of the story and then talk to them about it. I would also like to include dictating what they said at the bottom of their drawing. We do have some tapes and story books children can independently choose as one of our centers in our classroom, but we have not followed through with having children draw a favorite part of the story after listening to the story. (XT – text response 1)

Listening is also vital to literacy development. In response to the same reading mentioned above, a teacher noted the utility of listening and how it encourages language growth:

One strategy I think that would be appropriate for my 3-year-olds is the listening game where you call out directions for them to follow or use a call-and response song such as “Follow the Leader.” I think this strategy will be great for building their knowledge of concepts (i.e., up, down, behind, under, above, etc), as well as their listening skills. (EB – text response 5)

Print Awareness

An early step in literacy development for young children is the awareness of what print is and how it works (Invernizzi, 2003). A print-rich environment is important in the early childhood classroom since some children may not otherwise have access to such print (Neuman, 2004). Katch (2004) found that preschool

37 Neuman, Celano, Greco, & Shue (2001).
38 “Becoming Real Readers” from Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999).
children who have access to meaningful words in print, such as lists of word cards that they have created, can begin to understand letter-form relationships. One teacher’s story described a lesson that presented print as a meaningful literacy tool within the context of a book about a child who is continually scolded:

I used this lesson to try and teach print concepts to my students. I wanted them to see that the words go from left to right, and that they say something about the page. I also hoped to expose them to the sight word “no,” as it is repeated throughout the whole story. The result of this experience was that *No, David!* is now the class favorite, and we can read it a hundred times, and the kids still love it. It was a brand new book when we got it, and in a matter of just a couple of weeks in our class library, it looks like the oldest and most “bus-up” book in there. Some kids are copying words out of *No, David!* in our writing center and one even made his own *No, David!* book. However, the most heartwarming for me was the reaction from my little Kalani. He is the most challenging student in my class. He is only about 20% intelligible in conversational speech and displays a lot of PDD-type behaviors. Most of my goals for him are speech and behavior related. I’d love for him to “get” the academics, but I don’t count on it happening at this time. And yet he surprises me from time to time. Most times, in circle he ignores the group entirely and wiggles or arches his back. I didn’t think he even saw me pointing at each word as I read them aloud from the book. But during center time, he came up to me holding the *No, David!* book and indicated for me to sit down so he could read to me. He pointed (somewhat inaccurately, but he pointed all the same) to words on each page and said, “No, David!” It excites me to think that he is picking up on what I’m doing, and that somewhere, it’s making a connection. I will do this lesson again. I hope to find another book as attractive and easy to read as *No, David!* (OE - lesson narrative 4; OE - reflection 14)

Another teacher told a similar story with regard to the predictable book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* that was reread by one child to other children in her class (UK - reflection 26). Additional statements reflected the significance of print awareness in a variety of ways: using name cards for the first time in a greeting song (UK - reflection 24); a child on a walking trip reading a stop sign and a road sign that had

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39 Pervasive developmental delay is one element of autism spectrum disorders.
the name of their school (UK - reflection 27); a print-finding game in the classroom (QL - lesson narrative 6); a child who asked an adult to go back to read “missed” print that was not part of the text but was in the illustration (XT - reflection 18); and a child noticing the word “door” inside the restroom and associating it with a peer whose name started with “D” (XT - reflection 26).

**Letter Recognition**

There are a variety of ways to introduce individual letters, letter-sound relationships, and the purpose of letters to young children. This story is but one example:

The early literacy learning experience that I provided to my children in this lesson was letter identification. They had to look for the letters that were in their name and write their name underneath the letter. They also had to show that they knew which letter was in focus by circling it their name. I decided to try this lesson out because I saw something similar to it in another classroom and wondered if my children would be able to do it. I also wanted to see if my students would be able to identify the letters in their name. As a result of this learning experience I found out that more than half of my children are able to do the activity. I think I’ll allow them to do it again so that those that had difficulty with it this time around might be more comfortable doing it. I think I would also allow the students to write other names and words on the paper (as long as they still had the focused letter in them). I was very pleased to see that my students enjoyed themselves and hopefully learned a little more about their names. I feel that they are more aware of letters around them because I hear them saying, “I have that letter” or “That’s my letter.” I’m glad I had the opportunity to visit another preschool inclusion classroom and try out the activities and lessons that I’ve seen. I think my children are happy too because they get to try these new activities and lessons. (QL - lesson narrative 5)

Other statements described activities promoting letter awareness, including a “Guess the Mystery Word” game for first graders using individual letters and dry-erase boards (TN - reflection 25); a child who substituted ‘H’ for ‘h’ because he couldn’t

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40 adapted from “Becoming Real Readers” from Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999)
write the lower case letter, but knew the two were the same letter (XT – reflection 6); a boy who critiqued the writing of his capital ‘B’ with a large lower loop, saying he had to “squat” it to make it be correct (XT – reflection 8); children choosing correct letters while making a zoo book (EB – reflection 29); children writing letters, as prompted, in applesauce (SY – lesson narrative 6); naming letters around the room while waiting for sleep to come at nap time (UK – reflection 30); making name puzzles with individual letters (QL – lesson narrative 4); letter recognition integrated with gross motor movement and music (QL – lesson narrative 8); and an individualized, gross-motor, dinosaur, letter matching game (XT – lesson narrative 9).

One teacher highlighted how her students demonstrated the emergent character of letter recognition:

At the beginning of the school year, I asked my students to sit with me and try to pick out letters they recognized from an alphabet chart. We went backwards through the chart (so they couldn’t trick me and sing me the ABC song) and I circled the letters they identified correctly. There weren’t a whole lot of letters. Now that it’s the end of the year, I pulled my students aside and did the letter chart once more. Some gained very little over the year. Some knew just about every letter, backwards and forwards. But a couple of the students stumped me. When I pointed to the letter k,” they didn’t tell me “kay,” they said, “That’s Kalani’s letter K-K-Kalani!” They had the sound, they knew who it belonged to, and they recognized its shape . . . so did they have letter recognition? Is it only recognition if they say “kay” for the letter “k”? To my way of thinking, it was letter recognition. But not TOTAL recognition. So, instead of circling the letter, I semi-circled it, took the charts home to my husband, and laughed at how three-and four-year-olds can still really stump me. (OE – reflection 19, emphasis hers)

*Phonemic Awareness and Phonics*

The term “phonological awareness” is defined as “the channel through which children discriminate the sounds of language and integrate them into
meaningful print” (Venn & Jahn, 2004, p. 71). It includes such concepts as phonics, phonemic awareness, and the alphabetic principle. Just as phonics and phonemic awareness are emphasized in many commercial reading programs that are intended to improve student achievement, there is also a high expectation upon teachers to push children to do well in this area of literacy. Several of the participants’ statements revealed that they would add strategies and activities that develop these aspects of phonological awareness to their practice. Some of the participants identified games designed to utilize skills related to letter-sound associations, rhyming, and letter names as useful in teaching these skills to preschool children (EB – text response 4, QL – text response 3, PW – text response 4, EB – lesson narrative 8, and PW – lesson narrative 8).

One teacher, when asked about the ways she has taught phonics and phonemic awareness skills, responded:

I have taught these skills through singing word games and alphabet drills. Expectations of parents and other teachers affect how I use the techniques. Parents want their children to have fun and learn how to read. Teachers want the children reading proficiently too so that when they move up to second grade, the children won’t be behind. These expectations really put pressure on getting children to read. (TN – text response 7)

Another teacher asked her students to go around the classroom finding objects that began with the ‘T’ sound (GS – lesson narrative 1).

Rhyming is a skill that supports the learning of letter sounds within words. One teacher read a rhyming book, *Tumble Bumble*. She then reread it and asked her students to look at and help her say the rhyming words (XT – lesson narrative 8).

Another teacher used picture cues to help children say rhyming words in *Dinosaur*
Roar (DC – lesson narrative 6). She also created a game to develop onset awareness and auditory discrimination skills for two children with special needs (DC – lesson narrative 3).

Responding to Books and Other Print

While there are numerous children’s books that are excellent resources for teaching literacy concepts, there is nothing to match a book made by a group of young children and their teacher as a motivating, authentic, exciting piece of literature.

Class books (those created by the children with the support of their teacher) were mentioned repeatedly in teacher stories. After a trip to Sea Life Park, one teacher used pictures of sea animals to make a class book similar to Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? (OE – lesson narrative 8), and another book of food and movie logos to teach words to her students (OE – lesson narrative 9). Another teacher created one book to represent the children’s version of the song, “Slippery Fish” (QL – lesson narrative 2) and another book with everyone’s name in it cut from magazine letters (QL – lesson narrative 3). A third teacher also used the “Brown Bear” motif, incorporating photographs of the children and their names (DC – lesson narrative 8). All of these teachers reported that the class books made available for daily use in the classroom and were repeatedly “read” by individuals and small groups with varying degrees of accuracy. One teacher reported, “I think I’m beginning to catch on to the idea that the children see themselves more as authors when their books are the ones displayed for reading in our library center” (OE – lesson narrative 8).
Response to literature takes many forms; a response can arise from the mind of a child or may be directed by a teacher. One teacher assigned homework to accompany books from the class lending library; she reported that some of the parents had done the work, but felt that it was still an example of exposure to literacy that would benefit the children (EB – reflection 19). Another method of book response that was used was repetition of the story in one form or another. Simple retelling of a story by a child, as reported by the first grade teacher, was described as a comprehension tool (TN – reflection 11). Another teacher used dramatization to get her students involved as more active listeners:

The early literacy learning experience that I provided to my children in this lesson was enhancing a story with dramatic play and encouraging children to participate and pay attention to the story. I decided to try this lesson out because I’ve noticed that my children don’t like to just sit and listen to stories being read. They enjoyed the books on tape (probably because there’s music and other exciting sounds) and I thought that this could be a way to get them interested in books that are not on tape. As a result of this learning experience, I’ve noticed that my children are choosing the books that we’ve “acted out” or “played with” more than the others. They want more stories read to them and enjoy story time more than ever. They enjoyed being a part of the story and their attention was kept on the story so that they could be called up to help with it. I am definitely going to continue to use story time readings and will hopefully get my children “hooked” on reading and the experiences they can get out from it. (QL – lesson narrative 9)

Another teacher encountered similar results using a familiar story, “The Little Red Hen” (XT – reflection 27). The repetitiveness of stories that lends itself to dramatization also makes the text predictable and more accessible to young children. After repeated readings of Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?, a preschool teacher made audiotape recordings of her students “reading” the book to
include in their progress portfolio. Perhaps the best response to a good book, however, is simply to relax and enjoy it:

The best moments are the ones where the kids pick the books to read. It's nice to hold a child on your lap and read aloud to them. They lean back, smile, twirl your shirt sleeve around their fingers, and hopefully, they remember forever how nice reading is. (OE—reflection 18)

As a preschool teacher, I know it is easy to fall into a rut while sharing books with young children. One can read the story, show the pictures, and have the characters use amusing voices. The children enjoy all those things. Yet there is so much more to books than just entertainment. Sometimes we forget to take the extra effort to explain and model how print can be used. One teacher's story about non-fiction materials illustrated this point:

... the kids picked up the non-fiction books in our library and started asking us questions about the pictures they were looking at. Up until this point, the pictures in the non-fiction books were just “pretty pictures.” Now they realized that the words that accompanied the photographs told interesting bits of information about the pictured animal, and they were curious to know what the words said about the octopus, or the whale. I felt really good about this activity. It was like a light switch in my own head, seeing that the kids just needed some guidance in understanding what the non-fiction genre in our classroom library was. It helped me to see that I couldn’t just throw books out there without explaining what the books were, and how to use them. I will use this experience again, but for my next lesson, I think I’ll use magazines. Or recipe books, telephone books, brochures . . . (OE – lesson narrative 2)

Other methods that teachers mentioned they would include in their teaching to extend and involve children in stories included modeling (EB – lesson narrative 9); props (EB – lesson narrative 1, EB – lesson narrative 2), and dramatization (QL – text response 4). Specific contextualized strategies were mentioned as additions that teachers would be making to improve their literacy instruction: a variety of types of
books to engage children in literacy (EB – reflection 12, GS – reflection 8); repeated readings of favorite books (SY – text response 4, EB – reflection 1); pre-reading strategies such as predicting, ‘book reports,’ retelling, and sounding out words, and pointing to words (OE – reflection 3, OE – reflection 5, EB – text response 6, EB – text response 7); and “read alouds” by students (SY – text response 1). One teacher told a story of her new awareness of how much children notice when she read to them:

Mrs. Elmore’s Dino-Sized Mistake\
I teach special education preschool in an inclusion-type setting. The majority of my class is young and will be attending preschool for one more year. Many of them have the attention span of a flea and bounce around with similar energy. I find myself skimming passages in books to shorten them, or substituting new words with more familiar ones during morning circle just to keep them attentive and sitting on the carpet for circle time. This being my habit, I read aloud to the students a book titled Dinosaur Roar. Each page had a dinosaur opposite like “dinosaur roar, dinosaur squeak, dinosaur fierce, dinosaur meek.” A few pages into the book, the children were already chanting out the opposite. I would read, “dinosaur short—” and they’d cut in with “dinosaur LONG!” Thus, I came to the page “dinosaur clean, dinosaur slimy—” slimy . . . Slimy? I knew the students were expecting “dirty? Heck, I expected “dirty.” Not only that, “slimy” would lead to questions like, “What is ‘slimy?’” Who wants interruptions like that? I read aloud, “dinosaur clean, dinosaur dirty.” Immediately, a little hand popped up. A boy I have secretly dubbed “my genius boy” because while he’s never been tested, his IQ is probably higher than my own, asked, “What’s the s-word say?” “S-word?” “Yeah, on the page. S-L-I-M-Y,” he replied.

Great. Caught by the literacy Gestapo. He would have to notice I changed the word on him AGAIN. So, I ended up having to do what I was trying to avoid. And wouldn’t you know it, the reading time was still manageable, and the kids actually learned something new, as well. As lazy as I’ve gotten over time, it amazed me how poorly I felt about my teaching practices at that particular moment. I mean, I am here to teach, after all. A good teacher would never have been so reluctant to expose the students to a new and

41 A pseudonym was used.
interesting word. All I could think was, "It's a wonder my kids learn a thing from me! I'm a substandard teacher!" The incident hung around in the back of my mind for weeks, and came brightly into focus when I read from the article *Access for All: Closing the Book Gap for Children in Early Education*. The article stated that "children's books contain 50% more rare words than adult prime-time television or the conversation of college graduates." 50 percent. 50 percent! Boy, don't I look like a shmuck? These children could be absorbing more from the stories I read them than they'd ever hear spoken at school and home combined. Yet there I was, changing all the new words into words they already knew. You can bet I won't catch myself making that same dumb mistake again!

Dinosaur clean, dinosaur slimy.

Thank goodness for tiny, little, four-year-old muses that remind us of what we're supposed to be doing in the first place. (OE – reflection 6, emphasis hers)

*Purposeful Writing*

The opportunities for writing in the classroom, even with young children, are endless. Several of the participants discovered new ways to incorporate writing activities into their classroom routines. Using labeling and dictation to expose children to more words (UK – reflection 31), writing “experience stories” (OE – reflection 27), creating a picture dictionary for emergent writers (OE – text response 10, OE – reflection 22), celebrating children as authors (PW – lesson narrative 9), and using a “chit-chat” journal for first graders (TN – text response 4), were just a few examples of new writing strategies that teachers said they would be adding.

One teacher developed a new routine wherein the children help write the items served at breakfast and then read the list back during the day; she stated this helped them develop letter-sound associations (OE – lesson narrative 10). She also

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42 Neuman, Celano, Greco, & Shue (2001)
43 (Cunningham & Stanovich, as cited in Neuman, Celano, Greco, & Shue, 2001, p. 6)
44 From “Becoming Real Readers” from Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999)
commented on the variety of times when writing was appearing in and around her classroom:

The instructor revealed the many ways absolutely ANY lesson or routine can be made into a literacy related activity.45 His examples and pictures of his own classroom added lots of new ideas to my lesson plan book. My students now write their names on water cups daily so they may reuse the same cup throughout the day (cup conservation/literacy!). They write letters, names, and symbols on the ground in chalk outside (free choice art activity/literacy!). (OE – reflection 33, emphasis hers)

Children become aware of, and sometimes engage in, writing at a young age. While fine-motor development may not permit every child with an ease of forming letters, children often try anyway. Even for those children who cannot mediate the grasping and movement of a writing implement, modeled writing is an important strategy in the process of literacy development. It may be something as ordinary as labeling your belongings, such as a water cup (OE – lesson narrative 5), or writing a thank-you letter to someone who has extended a kindness to you (DC – lesson narrative 4).

Another teacher indicated that she had used a resource I had provided to her to create a writing activity:

I decided to try this lesson [using blanks for words and filling them in as dictated or encouraging the child to write the word] because I read it in the book titled, Teaching and Learning in Preschool.46 I saw that they had done this with preschoolers (I must say that they were advanced preschoolers and I thought it would be a nice experience to see how my children would do). As a result of this learning experience my children have shown me that I really need to do more writing with them. I wanted them to try and experiment writing on their own using letters, numerals, symbols, etc., but they were scared of doing it on their own. They wanted me to write it down for them and they would copy it. I just think that they are used to copying

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45 Gillentine (2003)
46 Venn and Jahn (2004)
what they see and are not confident with writing. I was very pleased that there were a few children that tried it out without hesitation. I know that if I continue to do more activities involving the scaffolded writing they’ll get used to it. It’s just something different and they’re a little cautious. I’m sure the next time I’ll have more children writing more on their own. (QL – lesson narrative 10)

This teacher later indicated that she planned to use that resource for future literacy lessons.

The participants used various creative methods to engage young children in writing. The first grade teacher, who works with many military families, guided her students in writing a newsletter about May Day and its importance in island culture; she decided to have them make a newsletter on a regular basis since her students had responded so positively to the experience (TN – reflection 26). One of the preschool teachers asked her children to help make a “reverse” menu, naming and/or writing the things that they found on their breakfast tray (QL – lesson narrative 10). Another preschool teacher found that children looked forward to “Circle Time Journal,” their daily writing experience (UK – lesson narrative 2). Children also wrote or dictated their interpretation of rules (DC – lesson narrative 2). Before Mother’s Day, one of the teachers decided to encourage writing by making cards for the moms. Her story described how the experience went beyond the bounds of what she had intended:

As a result of the activity, the students began making their own cards out of the art materials and writing materials in our art and writing centers. Our supply of envelopes got completely used up, and I received about a dozen cards from various students. I simply loved to see what was happening in my room. The kids really seemed to take to the idea that they can “tell” you their feelings in a “written” message! I will use the experience again, especially since there are so many occasions in which writing and sending a card is appropriate. In the future, I could even develop the idea further by talking
about postal workers as community helpers and visit the post office. The students could mail their cards and really get a kick out of seeing their cards arrive by mail at their homes! (OE – lesson narrative 1)

A teacher observed growth in students through their interest in writing:

Several of the children also had papers they carried around the room, asking adults and friends to spell their names and writing a list of people. I remember a few months ago, when these same children would bring paper to adults and have us write our names for them. I was impressed at how far they had come. This observation reaffirmed my beliefs that children thrive in a literacy rich environment. They have had opportunities presented throughout the year to explore sounds and print, and have benefited greatly from it. (DC – reflection 31, emphasis added)

One Teacher’s Journey through Change

One of the first year teachers changed her view of how she used “story time” as revealed through many of her statements over the duration of the course. She frequently struggled with story time and cited it as the main focus of her effort to engage her students in literacy. During the second week, she wrote:

I’m feeling very frustrated with Story Time. Most of my students are constantly standing up and walking around. My E.A. has been doing the reading and trying her best, but I think it’s time for me to take over and start using the strategies I’m learning in my new Early Literacy class. (EB – reflection 4)

After a few short weeks, she made a change in her approach to reading to children:

I decided to change . . . the type of books I read, which we talked about in class this week. Instead of using only books related to our theme (which usually meant books that were not very interesting or child-friendly). I scoured our school library and found books appropriate for preschoolers that had rhyming, engaging pictures, that were predictable, or simply those I thought they could relate to and interact with. These two qualities seem to be the “sure pleasers.” My kids are now more focused and interested in Story Time. I’m finding that going beyond and behind (back tracking to past thematic related stories) helps prepare my students for new topics, as well as reminding them of those we’ve already covered, keeping the information fresh in their minds! My Story Time woes are subdued for now. (EB – reflection 12)
Yet the next entry showed a renewed conflict:

Story Time today was a struggle too! I thought I had a really appropriate book and I was using questioning and predicting strategies as I read the story, but the kids still weren’t completely with me. Maybe I’m expecting too much from 3 year olds. I don’t know! I really love Story Time . . . I just wish I felt like my students were getting more out of it. Today I just feel very tired, drained, and very unsuccessful as a teacher. (EB – reflection 13)

Still, she forged on:

Since school has been in session again and we’ve returned from Spring Break, I’ve noticed that my story time is improving! I’ve been implementing some of the suggested strategies like prediction and discussion after reading. Also, I’ve changed the mood or setting of story time to be a more relaxed and informal time. Now I lay out a beach mat (our theme this month is “Under the Sea”) for them to sit on wherever they want, instead of sitting on their names (like in circle time). Now my problem is that my students get really excited and want to point at all the pictures they know and name them while I’m in the middle of reading the story. I need to set up a better system for letting them participate during Story Time, while being able to get through the story without the whole class lying across my lap pointing at pictures. I think what I’ll try next is to lay out the ground rules before I start reading so they know what to do and when to do it. I’m going to tell them that first I’m going to read the words on the page, and then when I give the signal (maybe a “thumbs up” sign) they can share what they want. We’ll see how this goes . . . (EB – reflection 17)

Along the way, she found some inspiration in a reading47:

It makes me feel like, “Hey this can happen; everything I’ve read about can actually be done by a single person in a single classroom!” It was really inspirational to me and made me feel excited to make changes in my own classroom. I really liked the strategies Gwen is using in her classroom like “BEAR”48 and having students create their own dictionaries. I also really loved the idea of using fourth-grade partners to read to students as well as write with students. This is a great idea that I’m really interested in trying next school year! Along with all the wonderful strategies she’s using, I liked the fact that this teacher starts out slow with only a certain amount of time, but then gradually increases the time as the school year progresses. This is also a practical idea I can implement and use with other preschool activities.

47 Bobys (2000)
48 Be Excited About Reading – a form of sustained silent reading that encourages and values reading.
that we do, like circle time, and center time. I think it is hard for students to come into a classroom setting and be expected to do certain things (i.e. sit for circle, listen to a story) without any previous exposure. (EB – reflection 32)

Toward the end of the course, she seemed to put some of the pieces of her solution together:

There is one aspect of story time that I’ve been thinking a lot about for a month or so now, and it’s how to make story time inviting for my students, but also structured enough so that they will focus and stay seated. I guess to figure this out, I have to go back to the purpose of story time. In my mind, story time is supposed to be a time for the teacher to model concepts of print, promote phonemic awareness, and to help students gain a love for books and reading. This said, one can safely assume that students will not be able to obtain a love for reading and books if the teacher is always yelling at them to “Sit down and zip your lips.” Yet, a student can not learn about concepts of print and other reading skills if they are constantly standing up and walking away from the group, or stopping the teacher at every page to point at something in the book, and blocking the others view in the meantime. Herein lies my dilemma ... how do I keep my antsy students focused, yet maintain a quiet and inviting environment? The answer continues to elude me. Perhaps I haven’t really focused on the true purpose of reading aloud to students, in that I haven’t taken into full consideration the developmental levels present in my classroom. My students range in age from 3-4 years old with varying degrees of attention spans and comprehension levels. Maybe I am expecting too much of the younger ones. Maybe I should try reading 2 different books to the class. One for the younger ones with shorter attention spans, and one for the older ones who can focus longer and can answer higher leveled questions. I can excuse the younger ones to pick their own books to read after I read the first book and then read the second book to the older students. It is amazing that these ideas have only come to me at this very moment as I’m writing this journal ... reflecting on your teaching strategies really can help you figure out how to improve! No wonder they encourage us to do it ... DUH! (EB – reflection 31, emphasis hers)

In two of the lessons she submitted (EB – lesson narratives 5 and 7), she described how she had begun to find more success, and was able to identify areas where she could extend the lesson or adapt it to meet the needs of individual students. For example:
The things I would change next time I do this lesson are to collect the animals and cards after each child has had a turn, and then excuse them to go and draw the picture for their sentence right away. We ran out of time and had to illustrate the next day and so I had restless students who became disruptive with their animals after their turn was over. (EB – lesson narrative 7)

One of her statements indicated growth in how she saw that reflective practice requires the willingness to examine one’s teaching and look for ways to improve it:

The things I would do differently next time are to have them do some kind of activity with alphabets right after reading this book.\footnote{Chicka Chicka Boom Boom} For example, they could have made a letter collage, or I could have written the letters on the board and had them choose a magnetic letter and then place that letter on top of the matching written letter. This would have been a great way to reinforce letter recognition. I’ll have to try this for sure! Wow, it’s amazing the great ideas that come to you after-the-fact! But at least they come! (EB – lesson narrative 8)

I am hopeful that this teacher has made significant progress; I believe she has. This chapter of her story as a teacher closed in this manner:

School ends in two days and as I reflect back on this school year, I can’t help but think about how far we’ve come, but also how much further I have to go. Looking back on my lesson plans and at old journals I’ve written for this class, I realize that I have really missed a crucial element about literacy development. For most of the year I have been focusing on our story time as the primary time for teaching literacy and giving my students literacy experiences. Now I realize that all day long I create these experiences and should give my students opportunities to learn about reading and writing. With this in mind, I feel more confident about next year and am making big plans to make major changes in the way I address literacy development in my classroom. It has taken me awhile to digest all of the information and strategies this course has given me, but now I feel like I really get it! I don’t mean that I feel like I completely understand how to go about it all, but what I do get is the importance of my role as the teacher and my responsibility to my students. This is what will help me and motivate me to learn and put into practice all of these things I’ve read in the articles these past 2 1/2 months. (EB – reflection 33)
The Impact of the Course on Teachers' Sense of Professionalism

It is vital for teachers to see themselves and the work they do from the perspective of professionalism, yet developing that characteristic is a continuous process throughout a teacher's career, particularly with regard to Fromberg's (1997) definition of professionalism, in terms of the development of expertise, a body of knowledge, and autonomy of practice.

Professional development is a key component in establishing and maintaining professionalism among teachers (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). Yet a willingness to engage in professional development is not the sole quality of a professional educator. Other characteristics include: reflection on and adjustment of teaching activities to meet learner needs and working collaboratively with other professionals (Hawai’i Teacher Standards Board, 1998). Teachers are member of learning communities and they should think systematically about their teaching and learn from experiences (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001). These characteristics of a professional educator demonstrate that the process of professional development is continuous and cyclical. Statements from the participants revealed two sub-themes in this area: growth and change through professionalism; and facing literacy expectations.

Growth and Change through Professionalism

Several of the participants made statements concerning their views of their own professionalism in terms of growth, change, or continued learning after the course ended. It is sometimes necessary for teachers to go back to the conceptual level to consider their practice. As one teacher stated: “I . . . feel that Jonathan has
tried and has been successful in showing me that literacy is more than just what we see as print. He has opened my mind and thinking about literacy development.”

(QL – reflection 27)

Professional development is a continuous process. The most experienced teacher in the course also noted growth in herself and her students, which she related to the course; yet she identified areas in which she still wanted to improve:

This course and portfolio have been exhausting, invigorating! I have learned so much from my readings and read far more than required for the course. The readings have inspired me to do more, do better, and to focus on literacy. I can see changes in my teaching and assessment. I can see changes in the students as a result of even small changes in strategy (i.e. multiple readings of books). Granted, the children are maturing and changing anyway, but explicit teaching of skills, in an authentic manner, yields results. I still need to find more-ways to involve and empower families to take a greater role in literacy development. . . I will take my learning beyond this course, and continue to work on improving the literacy environment in my classroom. (DC – reflection 33)

Changes in their creative approach to literacy teaching were noted by several participants as evidence of their professional growth. “I found that I can be more creative than I think I am at times.” (EB – reflection 24) Another teacher said:

I used to concentrate so much on the skill that I couldn’t get out the creative ideas/ways I could teach them the skill or have them practice it. After taking this class I feel better about thinking “out of the box” to achieve the same target skill or goal. (QL – reflection 26)

Revisiting one’s teaching practice is an important step in providing appropriate literacy experiences to young children. One of the more experienced teachers in the course issued a personal challenge to herself after completing an optional reading assignment.50 She wrote:

The Hofstra students... compared direct instruction programs which used rigid, regimented instruction with no time to play with sounds and writing and art. One case study included a child who wrote his name boldly, with large letters that represented the emphasis as it was spoken in his native language. After being in school and confined to staying between the lines and tracing the lines of writing on his own and asks for help. As teachers, we need to be sure that we don’t take away meaningful parts of our students lives, and replace them with isolated meaningless tasks... I think about our 4-5 year olds, who are given dots to print their name correctly, and smaller papers to fit on. I’ll need to think more about this practice, and decide whether it is something to continue. (DC – reflection 20)

She was inspired to continue her learning beyond the bounds of the course, seeking resources similar to those that were examined during one of the course sessions:

After our discussions and readings this week, I went on-line to find web sites to look for good books to add to the class collection for cultural literacy. Scholastic.com had some ideas. I also went to the public library website for books available in Kailua or Kaneohe for future use. I’m going to try an index card box for good resources for different thematic units, and can also find books which are multicultural. I am motivated to try for a Good Idea Grant for funds for take home packs and a lending library for home use. (DC – reflection 6)

Asking questions about literacy teaching practices is another important step in developing as a professional educator within the context of this study. One participant, in her first year of teaching, raised a question that was pertinent to her teaching in reaction to a reading response prompt:

I always enjoy getting new ideas, new strategies on how to do the same thing differently next week. I got a lot of new ideas from the Balance article. A lot of this is far above the Pre-K level of literacy I am involved in, but it gave me new ideas to think about and ‘chew on’ for awhile. I am always very interested in learning more about phonemic awareness and its effect on reading abilities. Because my students are deaf and hard of hearing, the significance of phonemic awareness is a hot issue. Almost all of my students will be successful with oral language, but what does this mean for those that will not. Is there a ‘voice in the head’ when reading that needs to be aware of phonics, or will the whole English language be a list of sight words to

memorize? It’s hard for me to wrap my brain around that! (PW – text response 7)

While it was never my intention to serve as a model for other teachers, I have always been willing to share what I have learned through reading, my teaching experiences, and my university courses. My role as the instructor was noted as a valued source for articles on literacy and as a role model for teaching:

The readings have been excellent . . . We are very fortunate to have an instructor select articles that are so pertinent to what we do everyday. The articles have been a wonderful tool for me to fine tune my classroom and activities, remind me of the significance and importance of certain issues. The instructor is very professional and motivated to continue to learn to be the best teacher he can be. I hear other people say “I like teaching preschool because I can play all day!” Our instructor has so much depth to his teaching; he is an excellent role model for the kind of teacher I want to become. (PW – reflection 18, emphasis hers)

Another teacher commented on my perspective of the importance of literacy. She said:

The thing that I’ve most gained from the instructor is the passion surrounding early literacy. I really appreciated all the wonderful insights and ideas that he shared with us. I have a new perspective on early literacy and the importance it plays on future development. (UK – reflection 33)

Part of my role was to reveal the array and usefulness of resources that are available to teachers. One participant noted:

Jonathan has been a prime example that it can be done! I learned that there are many resources out there to aid me in literacy development and that everything we do in the classroom can be linked to this. With this knowledge I have become a better storyteller, have a keener eye for good literature, and have seen the “big picture” of why teaching children to read is the cornerstone of education. (EB – reflection 28)

One teacher in particular struggled throughout the course with balancing what was required of her by a very prescriptive reading program being used at her
school with what she had already learned, in addition to what she was learning in
the course, concerning early literacy development. This is evident in one of her very
early statements:

Something I already knew that was reignited through the reading is that
children learn through play. I do have centers (drama, art, building), but they
are not as defined as they could be and I do not give my students enough
time to use the centers on a daily basis. I focus on more structured lessons.
(GS – text response 1)

In later statements (GS – lesson narratives 1 and 2; GS – text responses 3, 4, 8, and
10) this teacher explored these beliefs by trying to incorporate authentic learning
experiences into her highly structured, prescriptive literacy curriculum.

Some statements were made concerning inclusion, not only as a positive
setting for young children, but as a positive team teaching experience. Inclusion as
an optimal model for literacy development in young children was noted as an
opportunity to develop a greater sense of professionalism since, “good team-mates
in the group of adults that influence the program directly” were supportive of a
“quality preschool program” in general, and literacy development specifically (OE –
text response 1). This teacher also identified an inclusive setting as the best support
for her students in developing literacy:

The reading really helped me to see that teaching special needs students in
an inclusive setting might be a lot of work, but it makes me a better
“thinker.” I need to look at the learner outcomes and find alternate routes to
get there. I need to decide what is important – my comfortable activity that I
already had planned, or the actual education of my kids. (OE – text response
10, emphasis hers)
Collaborating with colleagues was identified as a valued part of developing as a professional. Meeting regularly with mentors became a goal for one of the first-year teachers:

At my school, there are three different preschools. The two other preschool teachers have definitely been mentors to me. I think I can learn even more than I have been, though. I want to meet with them at least once a month to and get new ideas and feedback from them. I am grateful for this wonderful resource I have and I need to put it into greater use! As for career development, this course I’m taking right now directly addresses that. I have been learning new strategies and learning from peers here in this class as well. I’m really excited to be taking this class, and I hope that from it I will learn how to meet the expectations expressed in this article.52 (EB – reflection 5)

At the end of the course she stated:

Now I know why they stress the importance of continued career development! Without this class, I would have had to stumble through many strategies and it would have taken me a lot longer to realize what I’ve come to realize in my first year of teaching. (EB – reflection 33)

*Literacy Expectations*

For the one teacher in the study who taught first grade, standardized testing was identified as a concern. During the session on assessment, we discussed many examples of authentic assessment, both formal and informal in character. Yet standardized testing is a fact in the public school arena, one that will not soon change. The teacher stated:

Now it is toward the end of the year and the children will soon be taking this same test to see how much they have grown. Today the children took the first part which consisted of 40 questions. I can’t help but wonder if this type of test is really appropriate for these first graders. Many of them started the test off strong and were excited to be trying this new activity. But I noticed towards the middle of the tests, the children seemed to get tired and kind of lost interest. At the end of the test, it seemed that many of the children

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52 "Growing Up to Read" from Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999)
wanted to just get it over with and bubble in anything just so they could hurry to finish. I was somewhat disappointed because I don’t think the children were reading all four choices. But instead they were rushing and selecting the first close answer. I kept reminding them to make sure they were reading all the choices before marking their answers. (Next year I need to stress this more so the children will be more effective test takers.) It made me wonder how accurate this type of test is. Are we really measuring how much the children know or are we measuring how much the children can withstand?? I am not completely convinced that this type of test is appropriate for first graders. (TN – reflection 15 & TN – reflection 16)

The expectations placed upon teachers and their students with regard to literacy, particularly in the area of reading, are often controversial. A teacher found that she gained new foresight by examining her own expectations of her students:

This is my second year of preschool and this class has helped me utilize developmentally appropriate practices. Coming from upper grades, I expected too much from my little ones. This new knowledge helped me understand early literacy and development. I adjusted a lot of my lessons to make them more developmentally appropriate. This class has really enlightened my understanding of preschool. (SY – reflection 16)

One of the preschool teachers came to a realization concerning assessment and accountability: “Daily assessment is the foundation of good assessment. A standardized test cannot possibly describe a child’s strengths and needs the way daily observations can” (OE – text response 5).

Teachers continuously make decisions concerning their practice. One decision facing the teachers in this study related to their response to expectations within the current sociopolitical climate with regard to educational reform: the heavy, system-wide reliance on code-based reading instruction programs. One newer teacher raised a question concerning the appropriateness of this approach for her severely handicapped students:
What other supplements to Direct Instruction and Reading Mastery [are there]? My students are so low; I use [the school’s reading program] because the research has shown it increases phonemic awareness. I also read daily. But the two strategies seem disconnected. [Are there] any other programs that address both for my low functioning students? (GS – reflection 2)

When an experienced teacher was asked whether anything she read would lead her to change the way she teaches phonological awareness skills, she wrote: "There were a lot of interesting things posed in the articles, but I think because there is so much pressure coming from our kindergarten teachers, I would not really change the way I teach these skills" (XT – text response 7).
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The participants in this study were engaged in a twelve-week professional development course in early literacy development. My role was not only as researcher, but also as both facilitator for the course and as an early childhood practitioner in a preschool inclusion setting. The course focused on elements of literacy development within a supportive, engaging, and collaborative setting. A variety of readings related to early literacy were assigned. In addition to writing responses to these readings, the participants in the study also wrote reflections (some were guided and others were on topics of the participants’ own choosing), and narrative descriptions of literacy lessons they had implemented in their own classes. These writings served as the data for this study. I analyzed these writings to identify themes relating to the impact of the course upon teachers’ beliefs and values, their knowledge, their teaching practices, and their sense of professionalism. A summary of the findings, as they relate to each research questions, is found in a separate table.

Research Question 1

The first research question was: in a professional development course for teachers, incorporating a supportive, collaborative learning environment for teachers, and using the tools of narrative and reflection, what did teachers report as influences upon their sense of self as professionals, in terms of their beliefs and values concerning their teaching?
Table 2. Summary of Findings for Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Validation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Established a common ground upon which to build learning</td>
<td>• Validation of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identified developmentally appropriate practice and individualized</td>
<td>• Recognition of shared knowledge as a source of validation</td>
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<tr>
<td>instruction as vital to early literacy development</td>
<td>• Validation by others was noted and appreciated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Exposure is a beginning for literacy learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Authentic engagement and exploration of literacy is essential</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Early literacy development as an emergent process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Positive relationships with families are vital in promoting early</td>
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<td>literacy development</td>
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Teachers' Beliefs

It was essential to examine what teachers believe about early literacy because, with teachers of different levels of experience, it was necessary to establish common ground upon which additional knowledge could be constructed. Through discussions on children's background knowledge, the participants saw the links between experience, social development, language, assessment, and literacy development. Even when teachers disagree about what reading is and what evidence of reading achievement consists of, conversations about what we believe help us to find a common ground upon which we can move forward (Gill, 2005). A belief in developmentally appropriate practice was also a part of that common base from which all the participants could examine a variety of teaching
strategies and learning activities that would address individualized instruction in meaningful ways. It was notable that despite there being nine special education teachers in the course, they all advocated developmentally appropriate practice. For the eight preschool teachers, I attribute much of this philosophy to the influence of Phyllis Ida, a district coordinator for preschool programs. Her efforts to promote developmentally appropriate practice by being a mentor and providing teacher reference materials has had an extensive impact on how preschool teachers in her district approach their task of providing individualized instruction to children with special needs.

It was significant that at least one participant spoke up against direct instruction programs, citing scientifically-based research, as failing to produce the results she would have expected, in terms of reader interest and reading comprehension. This evidence supported her belief that these areas of literacy must also be considered in evaluating how it is taught.

Validations

Validation took several forms. One teacher wrote that she realized that much of her work was closely tied to literacy; she expressed a bit of surprise at that realization, but also felt validated that she was doing what was best for her students. Other teachers felt that their practice was validated by what they read in assigned articles and chapters. During discussions, the participants recognized that the same learning activity in the hands of different teachers would result in different results because of the individual traits of children and the unique ways that different teachers approach their work. This demonstrated the usefulness of reexamining
teachers' knowledge, both in terms of reminding all of us in the course what we should be doing, but also in sharing what we know and examining different ways to teach particular aspects of literacy while understanding how, and why, they were similar.

Validation through other participants was also noted. In redesigning classroom literacy environments, teachers expressed validation in the changes they were considering since others were considering the same, or similar, changes. Having that opportunity to air potential changes with others facing the same decision was a valuable opportunity for the participants in seeing that their choices were not only legitimate, but also possible to carry out.

*Teachers' Values*

Expressing common beliefs and validation of those beliefs led to talking about what the participants valued in their teaching of literacy. The teachers stated that they valued exposing children to literacy and allowing children to explore literacy in authentic ways; they also valued the partnership with families in providing early literacy experiences for young children. The term “exposure” was often used to describe why teachers chose to present particular literacy activities to their students: “They need to be exposed to it first, if they are going use it later when they learn to read.” Many of the teachers mentioned their awareness of developmentally inappropriate ways to approach literacy (see, for example, OE – text response 9). This awareness, I believe, influenced the value they placed on authentic engagement in and exploration of literacy. One teacher described the influence that such values had, not only on how her students approached literacy
learning, but also on her own excitement and creativity in presenting authentic literacy learning events (UK – reflection 33).

The teachers in the study valued exposure and exploration in authentic settings because they were aware that early literacy development is an emergent process; the teachers knew, or grew to understand more fully that, these characteristics speak to the emergent nature of literacy development in young children. Authentic literacy is also empowering to young children (Powell & Davidson, 2005). The discussion of this value was important during the course because, as one participant observed, not all literacy activities are successful with all children. It was important for the participants to recognize that their efforts in providing a variety of literacy experiences served to individualize instruction, matching learning activities presented to learner needs, styles, and intelligences.

There are numerous ways that parents can support literacy development at home (Darling, 2005). Teachers’ noted the value of establishing and maintaining positive relationships with families, even when such efforts are challenging. As one teacher stated (OE – lesson narrative 6), it is essential for parents to see themselves as their child’s first teacher. It was important that teachers’ shared their feelings about relationships with parents, since it is sometimes difficult to get parents to become literacy partners: there is not enough time, materials get lost, they are not sure what to do, or they would rather leave teaching to the teacher. One participant who mentioned such challenges, later decided to try a different approach. I think having the opportunity to talk about what she hoped to accomplish, what her challenges were, and hearing from other teachers how they established partnerships...
with parents helped her look for new possibilities in making a connection with some of the parents of her students. Finally, one teacher’s comments highlighted an important role for early childhood educators: informing parents of best practices in early literacy development. Teachers should help parents to understand how some approaches to early literacy development are inappropriate and do not reflect what we know about how children develop and learn. Our capacity as professionals is strengthened when we share our knowledge with the public we serve.

**Research Question 2**

The second question was: in a professional development course for teachers, what effects on teacher knowledge and teaching practices did teachers report? The participants in the study reported effects on their literacy teaching practices primarily in four themes: physical learning environment; social climate; assessment; and pedagogy. The sub-theme of pedagogy was further divided into seven topics: individualization of instruction; language and listening; print awareness; letter recognition; phonemic awareness and phonics; responding to books and other print; and purposeful writing. Additionally, I examined one teacher’s experience of reflecting upon one aspect of her teaching and her efforts to improve it. Her statements, over the duration of the course, revealed a passage through the process of change, specifically modifying the focus of and strategies implemented in large group instruction in her classroom.

**Teachers’ Knowledge**

Since the course participants were in-service teachers, I worked from the assumption that they already had some knowledge of early literacy development and
how to support it through instruction. I knew at the beginning of the course that some of the participants had already experienced some of the topics we were to discuss. However, I also knew it was important to revisit these topics.

Discussions at the beginning of the course about developmentally appropriate practice and Shore's core principles of literacy provided an opportunity for teachers to talk about what they believe is important when considering literacy instruction for young children. Many of the teachers had previously become familiar with the concept of developmentally appropriate practice. It was noted as a foundation for some of the teachers' beliefs.

Table 3. Summary of Findings for Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers' Knowledge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Willingness of teachers to embrace new knowledge and use it in their own teaching contexts</td>
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<td>• Knowledge was relevant as it related to individual needs of teachers</td>
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<th>Teachers' Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The importance of environment, social setting, and authentic assessment were recognized in early literacy development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aspects of pedagogy were examined:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- individualized instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>- language and listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>- print awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>- letter recognition</td>
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<td>- phonemic awareness</td>
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<td>- phonics</td>
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<tr>
<td>- responding to print</td>
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<td>- purposeful writing</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Process of Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Examining instruction practice in a large group setting, trying different approaches, and reaching some satisfaction in meeting children’s needs</td>
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</table>

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New, experienced, and veteran teachers (PW – reflection 12; XT – reflection 19, and DC – reflection 3, respectively) recognized the importance of knowing the unique characteristics of individual children to best meet their learning needs. I believe that this observation is noteworthy because the opportunity to discuss fundamental topics provided the course participants a starting place to build their community of learning by sharing knowledge. As Dooley (2005) noted, a “well-defined, informed pedagogy [serves] as a means for decision making. . . . for each student’s instruction” (p. 184).

A willingness to embrace new knowledge was also evident in our session on literacy learning environments. I presented my classroom, a collection of digital photographs of literacy events, and a rich reading assignment as suggestions for the participants to consider in contemplating how they might review their learning environments. The response was overwhelming. I was particularly surprised at the level of interest in my listening center – a table rescued from the termites, a small audio cassette player, two small chairs, and a shelf full of prerecorded audiotapes and books. I had always viewed this center as not especially significant in my class, although I had used it to record students’ stories on occasion, as well as in its traditional use. More than half the class saw this humble corner and was inspired to create, or resurrect, a listening center in their classrooms. One teacher mentioned the listening center four different times in her writings! This demonstrated to me that one cannot assume to know what teachers might need to examine through professional development. Just as young children have individual interests that are worth learning about, so do their teachers. The lesson in that instance was clear - the
learners should own what is to be learned. The fact that the participants in professional development activities are adults should not mean that they must abdicate their learning needs and interests.

*Teaching Practices*

Thinking about the physical environment in which children engage in literacy served to help teachers make decisions about how they featured literacy in their classrooms and how their students experienced the literacy environment. A large part of that environment had to do with access to children's books. Teachers considered their classroom libraries and other venues of access to books and improve them, or create more access, if it were insufficient. Some of the teachers expressed a renewed awareness of how children experience print in the environment; they noted that children were most interested in print that was meaningful to them. These observations guided those teachers to reexamine how they presented environmental print. Print that was displayed simply for the sake of exposure to print was not enough. They learned that it had to be interesting to children or explained to them in a way they would find useful.

As the course participants considered the impact of a classroom's social climate, it was revealed that modeling and inclusivity were important practices. One teacher reported a child using literacy to solve a problem. Additionally, it was found that a child could use literacy to solve social problems, such as gaining access to a favored learning area in the classroom. What was significant in the instance reported was that the child expressed his desires in a form of writing that was both socially appropriate and that was honored by his peers, not only in terms of calling
him for a turn in that part of the classroom, but in using the system he created to also gain access for themselves. This teacher’s awareness of the emergent, constructivist use of literacy helped her understand that somehow this child was experiencing literacy in ways that he could not only understand, but adapt and use for himself to meet his own learning needs. It also served to remind her to facilitate such use of literacy through her practice. Another teacher’s story about two of her students in an inclusion setting and their engagement in literacy that was meaningful to each of them, despite the difference in their levels of development (OE – reflection 30). This incident validated not only her belief in the practice of inclusion, but in the power of literacy lessons that one child had learned, both at home and at school, and his desire to pass on that knowledge to a peer with less experience. She renewed her inclusive practice through this event.

It was found that assessment of the literacy achievement of young children takes many forms. Many teachers saw assessment as a crucial complement to their instruction. They also noted the importance in their daily practice of organizing assessment data, determining the appropriate frequency of assessment, and selecting items for documentation of the children’s progress in literacy development. One teacher indicated the need to supplement standardized test data with a reading portfolio for her first grade students. I am hopeful that this teacher can share this discovery with her students’ parents and with her colleagues to help them understand that the growth that children experience is much more than a test score.

In providing authentic literacy experiences to young children, there must be a deliberate effort to encompass many aspects of pedagogy for early literacy.
development. Teachers stated that individualization of instruction was an important practice for supporting early literacy development. Other areas of pedagogy described in the findings were indicated as useful in making individualization possible. Teachers described how print was meaningful to young children in ways that were sometimes surprising. I believe that these instances taught them that they should expect new (and even unexpected) discoveries in their classrooms.

Letter recognition was revealed as an emergent skill. The teachers learned that they should provide a variety of experiences with letters, with repetition for children who find that engaging. It also demonstrated the importance of having many different ways to introduce aspects of literacy, such as letter names, to encourage all children to be involved in exploring letters in the environment. Many of the teachers described a wide array of engaging and developmentally appropriate ways to teach phonics and phonemic awareness skills to young children. This showed that there are other means beside meaningless, decontextualized drills and scripted teaching to introduce these literacy skills.

The participants described the importance of authentic texts to which children can relate (including non-fiction, even for preschoolers) and the joy that comes from reading. The best moments with books and young, as one teacher described them, are comfortable, pleasant, and memorable. Many teachers described their efforts to make books with their students. These events demonstrate the importance for children of ownership of their interaction with, and their response to, books and other print. I found that many of the teachers broadened their perspective
of how children can respond to books and print and also how they can be presented to children.

Some of the teachers in the course discovered how important it was for children to see the usefulness of writing. This was significant for many reasons. Children discovered that by labeling items with their name, they claimed ownership of those items. Teachers observed that children can express themselves through writing, even if such writing is merely marks upon a paper. Perhaps the most important lesson was that they saw children finding a voice and a sense of themselves through writing.

It should be noted that all of the findings related to teacher knowledge were revealed through statements if preschool teachers. The significance of this observation is supported by Stanford professor Michael Kamil: “elementary reading instruction is getting better and that a growing preschool focus on literacy is helping to address the issue” (Allen, 2005, p. 1). This demonstrates the importance of dialogue between preschool and primary grade teachers in sharing what they know about early literacy development.

Finally, one teacher frequently examined her use of large group instruction for her students. On nine different occasions this teacher wrote about her experience, frustration, renewed efforts, temporary setbacks, discoveries, and review of her progress in making changes in her large group instruction. This teacher’s passage demonstrated that for those who are willing to look at their teaching practice, they will find not only success, but opportunities to grow. I found
this collection of reflections to be very inspiring since she was a first year teacher and the foundation she built would carry her through her entire teaching career.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question contained two parts: Did the professional development course in this study have an impact on teacher's sense of professionalism, balancing external expectations for literacy instruction and one’s own expectations? If so, in what ways was this impact manifested? This question examined the status of teachers within the present sociopolitical climate of calls for reform, including more accountability of the public school system, higher teacher quality, and measurable signs of improved student performance.

**Table 4. Summary of Findings for Question 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth and Change through Professionalism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Developing a greater understanding of literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognizing professional development as a lifelong pursuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exercising creativity in teaching and learning tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rethinking past literacy practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implementing new ideas for literacy instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning through one’s own questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Embracing collaboration and inclusive practices</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Expectations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Frustration with reliance on standardized testing and the expectations of teachers of older students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Importance of evaluating one’s own expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frustration with mismatch of recommended programs and needs of children with multiple disabilities</td>
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</table>
The teachers indicated that, indeed, they did gain a sense of themselves as professionals while considering external expectations of what they should be accomplishing. They found that it developed as they learned about their own understanding of their beliefs, values, knowledge, and practices. This observation confirms Elliott’s (2004) observation that collaboration, reflection, and dialogue serve to enhance teaching practice and learning opportunities in the early childhood setting.

This sense of professionalism was also revealed in the ways they described their role in meeting expectations placed upon them by the many requirements of the public education system. The teachers showed how they balance the expectations of the public education system concerning the development of literacy in young children with their own philosophies on teaching and learning, particularly when the two paradigms do not match. In these instances, the teachers were holding fast to their own beliefs, asking questions, and developing creativity in their teaching so that students could achieve targeted skills through meaningful learning experiences.

For the preschool teachers in the study, federal mandates related to literacy instruction did not presently appear to be a serious concern. This may be due to the low level of impact, comparatively, upon preschool teachers and their students at this time. The two teachers who had students in kindergarten or first grade did acknowledge their frustration with the reliance of schools upon restrictive reading programs and standardized tests. Both of them indicated that they were seeking ways to address what they thought should be taught in reading and how it should be
taught. I believe this shows a measure of professionalism in that they are balancing the mandates with what all of the participants know about teaching and learning. What was vital for them to maintain this balance, and to work toward continued support for their students was having time to talk with other teachers in a collaborative setting. This occurrence, an established time to talk and plan with colleagues, is a necessary condition for teacher leadership that promotes school success (Chrisman, 2005).

The lessons learned concerning professionalism sometimes were related to a teacher’s level of experience. Some of the veteran teachers explained that, for them, there is still much more to learn about teaching, and that our profession embraces a belief in lifelong learning, not only for our students, but for ourselves as well. Like Ackerman (2004), I hope that professional development, indeed teaching, is seen as an exercise in lifelong learning. A less experienced teacher raised questions about literacy within the context of her own teaching. This desire to learn and think about their teaching, sometimes beyond the bounds of the course, demonstrates the commitment of the participants to their development of a sense of professionalism. This was an important result of the professional development course.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth question asked: was the design of the course effective in determining the impact of the course on teachers? Were the essential components of the course, including reflection, narrative, and a learning community useful as learning tools for teachers? The study showed that reflection and narrative were significant reasons for the impact upon teachers’ beliefs, values, knowledge, and
practice. The study also revealed that collaboration, dialogue, the role of the researcher, and the recognition of each teacher's expertise, within a course based on a constructivist framework, were the basis for the effectiveness of the course.

**Table 5. Summary of Findings for Question 4**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reflection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reveals a wide array of choices for teaching practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Helps to determine suitability of choices being considered</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Insightful for teachers in examining learning events</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Provides an opportunity to critically examine practice</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Learning Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establishing a group identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promotes dialogue</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dialogue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reveals a willingness to share knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establishes a sense of empowerment in the group</td>
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<tr>
<th>Researcher's Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Combination of peer and expert</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Uses scaffolding to address each participant’s learning needs</td>
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<tr>
<th>Constructivist Framework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflection and narrative allowed teachers to examine their own challenges and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interaction provided possible answers to questions</td>
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**Reflection**

Reflection was found to be a useful learning tool within a professional development setting; however, it did not occur without encouragement. I believe that the support and collaboration in the course provided the necessary climate for reflection by the
participants. As Risko, Vukelich, and Roskos (2002) observed, reflection is guided and perpetuated through engagement with peers.

I think that the opportunity to reflect had a particular strong influence on the three first-year teachers in the course. They observed strengths and weaknesses in their teaching. They also identified new teaching strategies they were using, or planned to use in the future. One of them shared that every day felt like an improvement upon what she had done before and how successful that made her feel. This statement supports what Glover (1997) observed about reflection:

Our best moments come when we have quiet moments to consider thoughts, questions, and possibilities. Out of silence and time spent listening to our inner voices emerges intuition. . . . Intuition is a built-in mentor who, when I am quiet enough to pay attention, shows what is next. The more I am able to listen, the stronger the voice of intuition becomes. (p. 122)

Additionally, I observed two general benefits for the participants of engaging in reflection that demonstrate what Dewey (as cited in Loughran, 1996) described as two attitudes of reflection: open-mindedness and responsibility. The first benefit, which is aligned with open-mindedness, was that reflection let them see the wide array of choices available to them (whether they were strategies that the teachers already possessed or were newly discovered within the course). The broader the spectrum of teaching strategies that one has, the better she is prepared to face the myriad of learner needs, interests, and preferences. The second benefit, which demonstrates Dewey’s attitude of responsibility, was that in considering their teaching practice, the participants could determine whether the choices they made in teaching were suitable given the circumstances of their teaching. If a choice were suitable, hopefully reflection would allow some understanding of why it was so. If
the choice were not appropriate, a teacher might determine other options, being more prepared for the next time such circumstances arose.

Narrative

Narrative was also significant in its impact on teacher practice. Initially, when a teacher tells a story it is usually a solitary effort; however, a good story invites reflection and discourse, which are fundamental to reflective practice (Jalongo et al., 1995). This strong connection between narrative and reflection was an important component of this study, in that it demonstrated how the two practices are intertwined in a mutually supportive relationship. The stories that teachers wrote and shared permitted a cognitive re-enactment of classroom events that a teacher could use in considering how to improve practice. Quintero (2004) believed that narrative allows us to identify and examine ways that personalize literacy. One teacher in particular used stories to explore how literacy was personalized in her preschool inclusion class. “Mrs. Elmore’s” stories about “that dang ABC puzzle,” Mark, Kaipo and Jalen, and the dino-sized mistake revealed how insightful these stories can be. I believe that Mrs. Elmore gained a great deal of understanding about how her expectations, interactions, and choices have an impact on her students and their learning. While not all of the participants used narrative to the extent that Mrs. Elmore did, this evidence does demonstrate how narrative can be useful in gaining new insights for teaching practices. Yet this finding confirms what Picard (2005) observed in the capacity of narrative to describe the important and useful impact that teachers have when they collaboratively endeavor to solve the problems of young readers.
Since the stories we tell also reveal what teaching and learning in specific contexts are, we can engage in conversation, as professional educators, to seek to renew our efforts to do the best we can for children. In effect: “telling stories has the potential for changing individual practice and the culture of our schools” (Hole & McEntee, 1999, p. 36). I would venture to say that “Mrs. Elmore” and some of the other teachers have a greater understanding of how to best support their students as they engage in literacy. Some of “Mrs. Elmore’s” stories demonstrate the characteristic of narrative that Novinger and Compton-Lilly (2005) described: it reveals the children’s perspective of what reading is and how it should be approached, as well as how these perspectives contradict NCLB mandates.

Even as a new teacher, “Mrs. Elmore” has established a strong foundation in critically examining her practice through the use of stories. I am hopeful that she, and teachers like her who are willing to explore their teaching through stories, will have a significant impact on school culture, particularly in how the teaching of literacy is approached the teaching.

A Collaborative Learning Community

The impact on the participants of establishing a community of learning was significant. At many points in the course, teachers commented about commonalities with other teachers and how at ease they felt being in the group. Some of those feelings I ascribe to the willingness of individuals to take risks within a group of people they only saw occasionally prior to the course. But these feelings can also be attributed to the course. Teachers commented that the opportunities to share their perspectives on literacy were important, not only because they wanted to hear what
others had to say, but also because they felt they had something to offer to others. As Carver (2004) observed, a community of learners offers sustained opportunities for educators to learn from one another.

Although each teacher had experienced different children, facilities, and preparation, they saw each other as colleagues who faced many of the same questions. I was deliberate in telling the participants that they were all experts. Their statements about their beliefs, I think, helped them not only recognize their own expertise, but the expertise of everyone in the course. This demonstrates the transformation of a teacher’s knowledge base that Langer and Colton (2005) attributed to collaborative inquiry of teachers.

In designing the course to allow collaboration in a supportive environment, I believe there was a positive impact on how teachers felt about their teaching within the larger network of professional educators. Part of this came from a sense of group identity. The participants grew to value one another’s ideas, suggestions, and opinions. I think my recognition of each participant’s expertise served to provide some of that cohesiveness. Any feeling of being an outsider quickly faded as the course began. The sense of connectedness served to strengthen not only the bonds between individuals, but also motivated them all to remain committed to the course and learning as much as they could through it. Although one teacher told me in private that she did not think she would be able to complete all the required work, she persevered and did finish. As the course progressed, a community of learners was established.
By providing opportunities for teachers to share ideas for teaching literacy, I helped to reveal the credibility they had beyond being not just learners, but as teachers, each with a different array of experiences and knowledge. Teachers at three different stages in their careers (see EB – reflection 4 [new teacher]; SY – reflection 16 [experienced teacher]; and XT – reflection 14 [veteran teacher]) all mentioned how they had learned important strategies from other course participants. These statements support what I was trying to accomplish in creating a professional development venue that allowed multidirectional exchange of information, rather than from a single expert to a group of practitioners. The course’s impact on collegiality, I believe, will serve to benefit not only the participants, but their students. As DuFour (2004) noted, a characteristic of a community of learners is that, through the work that is done within the community, student learning will improve.

*Dialogue*

An important aspect of professional development is that it helps to provide a common knowledge base and philosophy among teachers; these common views are maintained through continuing teacher dialogue (Miles, Stegle, Hubbs, Henk, & Mallette, 2004). Teachers in the course willingly completed their assignments, but also shared information, resources, and their experiences with each other. That willingness allowed valuable dialogue to continue throughout the course and new knowledge was acquired in each of the topics covered in the course. I believe this was a significant accomplishment, since I knew that the preschool inclusion teachers in the course were already quite knowledgeable about a number of early childhood
topics. This was particularly evident during the session on assessment. Most of the inclusion teachers brought assessment tools they had used in their classes and shared them willingly. The response was very positive; everyone was talking about ways they would use the new knowledge they had gained about assessment.

A significant effect of the course relating to knowledge was that the participants saw themselves as a community of learners, not simply a collection of individuals taking the same class. A sense of identity formed within the group, engendering a sense of group expertise of which each member could partake, as a result of the teacher knowledge she possessed and shared, specific to the setting of her teaching. Beyond developing collegiality, dialogue among teachers also serves to promote student achievement (Hall, 2005). The impact on student learning was not examined, but is indicated as an area requiring further investigation.

An additional aspect of this community was that learning was not only occurring because of my input as the course facilitator, but that the participants learned from one another as a direct result of their collaboration, shared reflections and narratives, and the sense of support built by each of us.

Role of the Researcher and the Recognition of Expertise

Just as Norton-Meier (2005) examined an experience, expressed in narrative, through the lenses of a teacher, a learner, and a teacher educator, there was much for me to learn in examining the roles I assumed in this study. As a researcher, I did not have much experience and hoped I would have something to offer to the field. As a practitioner, I had ten years of experience, but knew there was much more for me to learn. As I prepared to facilitate the professional development course, I wanted to
share what I had learned with other early childhood practitioners. I did not expect my colleagues to see me as a model. My intentions were more of a collaborative nature. I was interested in hearing what other early childhood educators had to say about early literacy development, both to improve my own teaching and learning about literacy, but to add knowledge to what we know about this aspect of teaching. Nonetheless, for reasons I do not yet fully understand, some of the course participants saw me as a model for them as professionals. This may be due to my achievement of certification as an early childhood generalist by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It may be that my desire to complete doctoral study influenced them. It could simply have been that I chose to facilitate a professional development course on a topic of interest to them. As I was analyzing the data, I was uncomfortable reading some of the statements that praised my efforts, but now that the course is finished, I feel differently. As a peer and a colleague, I understand their recognition of someone who has made an effort to improve the profession. In my own experience as an inclusion teacher, I have learned valuable lessons from my own colleagues in collaborative professional development settings and I make it a point to celebrate those who share their experience, knowledge, and perspective with other teachers. In that light, I accept their comments and acknowledge these teachers for their own role as models to each other and to me. I am also beginning to see expertise as both relative and contextual. It is relative in that there is no such thing as an absolute expert; there is always something to learn, just as there are many contexts in which to learn something new. Expertise is also contextual, since each teacher has a deep understanding of their
students, the classroom, the school community in which they work, and the families they serve. One teacher cannot have that depth of expertise in another teacher’s classroom regardless of their depth of experience. Each of us is an expert in our own setting because of specific knowledge we possess. These points serve to support what York-Barr and Duke (2004) stated concerning teacher leaders: teacher leaders do not always move to full-time positions of leadership; sometimes they remain in the classroom while also serving in leadership roles.

Perhaps a suitable analogy for my relationship with the participants could best be explained by Vygotsky. If young children required the support of scaffolding along zones of proximal development (Berk & Winsler, 1995), perhaps their teachers do also as they engage in learning about teaching. In such a scenario, as the teachers were engaged in constructing what they knew about teaching, I provided scaffolding to support their learning through the collaborative social setting that engaged them in the construction. Over time, they continued to build, using the scaffolding to support them and their learning. At times, we stopped to examine the expertise that was being developed. Then, we continued on in our task of completing the course, continuing in the interchange that also allowed some of the teachers to provide scaffolding, through their own expertise, to other teachers.

A noteworthy attribute of my role is that I was both peer and expert; I believe that it is highly unusual for someone facilitating professional development to possess both of these attributes. As a peer of the participants, I was familiar, trustworthy, and engaged on a daily basis as the participants did in efforts to promote early literacy development. As an expert, I was able to provide access to
important readings, recent research, and teacher resources that the participants found useful.

This recognition of expertise was extended, not only to me, but also to the participants. Some commented that recognizing such expertise within the course was helpful in seeing themselves as part of the teaching profession. I also see it as an important reason why the course was successful: it established trust. The participants trusted me to share what I knew and they felt safe in sharing their own experiences. This relationship of trust between the participants and me expanded as they began to trust each other in terms of the stories and knowledge they shared with one another. These trusting relationships allowed all of us to strengthen our teaching of literacy. As one teacher stated, these learning opportunities served to move us beyond what is comfortable and usual to what is best for children. That is perhaps the essence of what it means for a teacher to be a professional.

*A Constructivist Framework for Professional Development and Teaching*

I believe that teacher knowledge was supported through a constructivist framework for developing and conducting the course. A constructivist approach makes several assumptions about both learning and teaching. Bullard (2003) stated that learning, as seen through a constructivist lens, allows interpretation from the learner’s perspective, is active and personal, and requires interaction within a physical and social world that is influenced by socio-political forces. This was evident in the frequent exchange of information between teachers, including what was documented in their written statements. This study also demonstrates what
Ackerman (2004) observed about the need for professional development to be individualized to meet the needs of each teacher that participates.

Since teachers who adopt a constructivist attitude to their work provide the scaffolding that empowers young children to pursue their own answers to questions they encounter rather than giving them a singular, correct answer (Owocki, 1998), the constructivist approach used in the study may have some future impact on how the participants interact with their students. Some of the teachers revealed this in their statements, demonstrating specific ways that they scaffolded learning for individual students. This application of learning into actual practice serves to signify the value of professional development as a means for teacher growth (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005).

The importance of exploring and learning in authentic contexts was noted in many teacher statements. As Cobb (2004) noted, in our interactions with peers, we develop deeper understanding, through the social construction of learning, of how to support literacy development. The teacher statements reflect constructivist thought in terms of how learning was perceived. These perceptions are important since they also have an impact on teaching and whether it occurs in order to meet the needs of individual children or fulfill a mandated curriculum. Smith (2003b) noted that in school settings that do not encourage, or forbid outright, the adoption of constructivism, teachers may feel they have to create things to do to teach children rather than arrange situations where the children can discover and learn what is intended, in ways that are their own. I believe that this course serves to demonstrate that the latter is worth achieving and offers a possible means to do so.
Implications for Practice in Professional Development

There are several ways I think the course on early literacy development could be improved by:

- providing more comments to teachers on their writing;
- encouraging emergent learning by allowing teachers to offer topics for study; and
- extending the course and reducing the number of reflections required per week.

Since I was conducting research in conjunction with the course, much of my spare time was taken in collecting the data, preparing it for analysis, and beginning the coding of the data. Without these tasks, I would have had time to provide more comments to teachers about their writing. Added feedback would promote deeper thinking on the course topics and might encourage extended dialogue on topics of interest, or areas of challenge to the course enrollees.

Another change I would make would be to add the opportunity for teachers to present their own topics of interest as part of the course. Discussion of relevant teaching issues would provide a measure of authenticity and ownership to the professional development experience.

Finally, I would increase the number of course sessions to allow more time to discuss other pertinent research not covered in the original course as well as areas of teacher interest. By reducing the number of reflections required each week, I believe that teachers would see the importance of quality rather than quantity in their writing about teaching. Particularly for teachers new to the discipline of writing about practice, I think it would be important to help them develop the habit
of writing regularly, but not overwhelm them and make it nothing more than a course requirement and a chore.

In addition to making improvements in the course, I have also learned about the important role professional development plays in the lives of teachers with regard to:

- respect for teachers' knowledge;
- professionalism;
- reflection;
- teachers as facilitators of professional development; and
- teacher retention.

I believe that professional development opportunities should be founded on respect for teachers and the knowledge and commitment that they continually demonstrate in their learning and teaching. We must also allow teachers a broader voice in educational policy, if we believe that what they know about teaching and learning is important. In the face of pressure to force academic learning in inappropriate ways upon young children, professional development can assist teachers in exploring ways to meet literacy expectations in ways that consider and meet the needs of young learners. Through collaboration, teachers begin to understand the wealth of their expertise, both individual and collective. We must honor both what teachers know and also what the profession has to say corporately about its work.

There are many characteristics of professionalism that can, and should, be supported and encouraged through professional development. Hyson (2003) said that, in addressing what is best for young children, early education programs must include, not only appropriate academic content, but also appropriate instructional
strategies, partnerships between families and teachers, efforts to promote social and emotional competence, appropriate assessment methods, and teachers who are well-educated and continue to receive professional development. Teachers who are able to encompass these important aspects of early childhood education into their daily practice are surely becoming the highly qualified professionals that society desires for its youngest citizens. We must continue to allow teachers, within professional development settings, to revisit and refine their work if it is to truly benefit children.

I believe that teachers are capable of engaging in reflection. Although they should have support and be provided the time to do so, I must agree with Fendler (2003), who suggested that the assumption that teachers are incapable of reflection without directions from experts is flawed. Such a belief moves us to examine how research has an impact upon professional development. This study stands as evidence that reflection, used within a supportive professional development model, not only informs research, but also addresses issues related to literacy under the requirements of NCLB. Our stories serve us and the children who live in them to help us to examine our relationships with young children as they explore literacy in their world. The same applies to narrative as it also informs our teaching and our development as professionals. It is important for us to build opportunities for the use of reflection and narrative within professional development if we intend to improve teaching practice.

Who should serve to facilitate professional development? I believe that classroom practitioners who have demonstrated a certain level of expertise in a particular area of their teaching should be encouraged to accept this role. As
Hawai'i's pool of National Board Certified Teachers grows, these individuals should be encouraged to share both their experiences in the classroom and also their experience in the certification process, as it is a powerful professional development event. Yet there are many knowledgeable teachers, however, who are not NBCTs; the role of facilitator should also be extended to them. Such a role should not be viewed just as a symbol of professionalism, but as part of the journey toward that end. Therefore, leadership opportunities should be extended to both teachers who have achieved national board certification and those who have not chosen to pursue that path (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005).

I am particularly grateful to the teachers who participated in my study, not only because they contributed to the research, but because I have learned so much about teaching from them. That is the essence of professionalism for educators: there is always something to learn. We must commit ourselves to the task of living up to the goal we set for those we teach in becoming lifelong learners. In so doing, we become better teachers.

There is an important consideration for future professional development that I have not previously mentioned, but is quite significant, particularly in this time of teacher shortages: teacher retention. It is essential, in considering how to best provide professional development opportunities, to ensure that teachers feel valued for knowledge they possess and the effort they extend in improving their teaching. We must reexamine the requirements of NCLB and recognize the result of failing to value teachers or of leading teachers in directions they are not prepared to follow. One must ask: What happens when teachers are not permitted to do what they know,
and feel, is best for children, or are forced to do otherwise? They leave the profession (Ohanian, 2002). Then what will happen to our children?

Implications for Future Research

Considering the findings that resulted from this study, several questions come to mind regarding future research in the context of professional development:

- How do factors such as brain development, family involvement, and a child’s disability affect early literacy development? How might these areas be addressed in professional development?
- How do collaborative professional development and the use of reflection and narrative affect students’ literacy achievement?
- How do integrated roles of researcher, practitioner, and professional development facilitator affect the experiences of teachers engaged in professional development? In what ways do these roles merge smoothly? In what ways do the roles clash?
- In a study such as the one I conducted, what are the long-term effects toward change in the participants teaching practices? Did the learning community continue to exist without my support?
- Does a teacher’s use of reflection and narrative have any effect on the attitudes of their students toward learning?
- How do inclusive practices affect the beliefs and values of special education teachers? How are they different from the values and beliefs of teachers in self-contained settings?
- Would additional training in observation, reflecting, or narrative writing be needed for teachers who did not have the level of experience those in this course did in order for them to successfully engage in reflection and narrative?
- How are the beliefs and values of kindergarten and first grade teachers affected by NCLB requirements? How can professional development address potential concerns?
- What does reflection on reflection reveal?
- How can reflection, narrative, and collaborative professional development be used to improve teaching in curriculum areas other than literacy?

Several research trends, including brain development, family involvement in literacy, and early literacy development were not included in the review of literature for this study. I chose to limit my review to those areas that were primary factors of
school reform and school accountability as described in the problem statement. Yet these issues are important and significant to early literacy development. Future research considering the impact of these factors on early literacy development would be both compelling and instructive to the education community. The consideration of how discussion of these factors would be incorporated into professional development courses could also be examined.

Gallagher (1998) claimed that there is not enough known about the impact of teacher knowledge upon student learning. The same could be said concerning the impact of professional development's influence on student achievement. This study did not examine what the impact of professional development upon students was, beyond the episodes that were reported in teacher stories; this was decidedly a limitation of the study.

In designing the course, facilitating it, and examining it as a case study, I took my three roles of practitioner, facilitator, and researcher at face value. It is possible that there is much to be learned by examining the interaction of these roles, particularly when they are embodied in one person, and how they affect the experiences of those who participate in a professional development course.

A follow-up to this study could examine how the course participants perceived any changes they made after completing it. Such a study would add a dimension to this one by looking at the impact of collaborative professional development and the use of reflection and narrative or determine whether the learning community continued over an extended period of time. It would be of interest to me to know whether the participants experienced any long-term change in
their teaching and whether they continued to use reflection and narrative to examine
their teaching practice.

I would find it of interest if there were some way to examine whether a
relationship between a teacher’s use of reflection and narrative had an impact on
changes in student’s perceptions or attitudes toward their learning and if so, how
those changes might be expressed and in what areas of learning.

It was significant that more than half of the course participants consisted of
preschool inclusion teachers. A possible avenue of research could be in examining
how the inclusion setting affected these teachers’ beliefs about professional
development or about literacy development for children who are disabled. Since
these teachers also work with typically developing children on a daily basis, I think
that their perspective would be different from a preschool teacher in a full self-
contained setting. Such a study might serve to examine the impact of inclusion on
teachers and their sense of best practices in early literacy development.

Many of the teachers in the course had already had extensive experience in
observation; that experience may have facilitated their use of the tools of reflection
and narrative. It might be helpful to examine whether teachers without as much
experience in this area would be successful in using reflection and narrative without
additional training in observation or whether training in reflection and narrative
writing would be necessary for them to use these tools.

There were few comments by the teachers in their written statements about
the requirements of NCLB. I believe that had there been more kindergarten and first
grade teachers in the course, there might have been more. A replication of this study
with a group of first grade teachers might reveal more about such participants’ concerns with literacy mandates imposed by NCLB.

After having had the experience of using reflection as a professional development tool, it might be useful to examine what teachers thought about the reflection process, or to reflect on reflection. Examination of what was learned, what questions were raised, and what challenges were encountered would add a new facet to the knowledge we have about reflection.

This study was limited in its scope by only examining the topic of literacy. Future research might examine the use of reflection and narrative in settings where science, math, the arts, or other subject matter is being considered.

**Conclusion**

As professionals, teachers are faced with expectations that their students will achieve literacy benchmarks. These expectations come from parents, administrators, the tax-paying public, and from teachers themselves. Some of the teachers in the course sought ways in which they could show the literacy achievement of their students that were both effective and meaningful. Others found the challenge too formidable, feeling the pressure of expectations that their students would be able to achieve the literacy skills that would face them in the years to come. I believe that in creating a sense of professionalism for teachers and engaging in dialogue, we can begin to explore alternatives to standardized testing as the only means of determining student achievement in literacy in the wider arena of our public education system.
Pearson (2003) stated that in the sphere of education, we cannot rely on a marketplace model of providing teachers that allows all who are interested into the classroom and weeds out those who do not perform; we must embrace a professional growth model that expects continued growth throughout a teacher's career. I believe that the teaching profession has not yet advanced to its fullest potential, but given a chance, I believe we can have a greater impact in our professionalism. Schools must not rely on external circumstances to lay blame for their challenges; the solutions to those challenges are within the school, in those that we embrace as leaders (Cobb, 2005).

From what I have experienced in the context of this study, I am confident that as professional development opportunities are provided to teachers that are meaningful, supportive, and encourage use of reflection and narrative as learning tools, teachers will continue to realize their own professionalism. I believe this because I have seen the impact of teachers who have used these tools and understand the meanings at which they have arrived. I know that those who engage in professional development that supports them as teachers and learners will become better able to examine their teaching to determine ways to improve it that will be of benefit to children. If we aspire to attain a stronger status as professionals, we must continue to learn about our practice, and the craft of teaching, and strengthen them. As Sarason (2004) stated:

[Teachers] are special in the sense that they had a conception of what children needed and wanted that obliged them to use themselves in ways consistent with that conception. . . . Teaching is not a science, it is an art fusing ideas, obligations, the personal and the interpersonal. The chemistry
of that fusion determines whether or how subject matter matters to the student. (p. 199)

The reason I chose literacy as the topic for the course in this study was because of the impact the NCLB is having upon the teaching of literacy by early childhood educators. Many of my colleagues have expressed their desire to develop a better working knowledge of how federal mandates might dictate specific teaching strategies or how recommended curricula or strategies will affect their daily teaching practice. Some teachers of preschool, kindergarten, and first grade students have, up to the advent of this law, relied more heavily upon constructivist teaching practices and child-centered curriculum; they have been unsure of how to address what is required of them in a manner they feel best meets the needs of their students.

We, as a society, cannot afford to cling to a “back to basics” philosophy for our public education system; we have learned too much about the teaching profession and our children have so very much to lose if we succumb to persistent calls for reform that only draw us backward. As Pearson (2003) observed that we must:

accept greater accountability for knowledge in return for greater prerogative in responding to diversity . . . [and] document the claim that teachers teach better and students learn more when teachers and students have more choices. (p. 15)

We must speak of what we know: about literacy, about children, particularly the young ones, and about teaching and learning. Our collective voice can serve to advocate for children.

It is already evident that the impact of NCLB is the opposite of what it was supposed to accomplish. Children, and their teachers, in my school have expressed
the pressure and stress they feel as a result of mandated tests and the required levels of achievement on these tests (Martin, 2005). Nationwide, children who have the most difficulty in scoring high enough on the required tests (usually children of poverty and color) are isolated in tutoring sessions that not only interfere with their interactions with their peers and teachers during the school day, but after school and on weekends (Bomer, 2005). Because of the influence of NCLB, the trend has been to use such reading programs as Open Court and Direct Instruction, but these seem to promote “a particular set of compliant roles for the working class” (Jordan, 2005). Despite these circumstances, criticisms against public education continue. Under NCLB, when American society points toward public schools with the ever-present descriptor, “failing,” on their collective lips, we, as professional educators, must continue to examine the reasoning in that judgment.

Comparisons of what schools accomplished in the past are problematic, since widespread access to education, particularly for our poorest citizens, has only been a recent development in our history (Kantor & Lowe, 2004). We must also examine the motives of business (Bracey, 2004; Emery & Ohanian, 2004; Strauss, 2001), and organized religion (Edelsky, 1998) as they push for reforms in the name of what they believe is best for our nation’s children. We need to develop an awareness of how ideology, in the form of statements made by authors of policies dictating literacy instruction, influences the decisions that take form in those policies (Edmondson, 2004).

Under NCLB, we have tended to ignore the essence of relationships and interactions between teachers and their students. If we are to address teacher quality,
we must continue to examine how engaging in reflection and telling stories about their work helps teachers improve instruction, learning, and student achievement. In this study, using reflection and narrative in a collaborative setting were helpful for teachers to examine these aspects of their teaching. While I cannot make broad generalizations concerning these results, I am able to say that the issue bears further investigation. We need to know more about how teachers have an impact on learning. Test scores really do not tell us much about what a teacher does in the classroom.

Engaging in this study has taught me that teachers need opportunities to listen to their own voices; reflection provides them that opportunity. They must also listen to the voices of young children that live in the stories we tell about them. Finally, teachers must listen to their voice as a profession in teaching the public the best ways to support early literacy development. Within supportive, collaborative communities of learning, teachers can begin to bind what they know about literacy in their teaching context with the knowledge of other teachers and begin to share that broad knowledge in our communities, one parent at a time, so that the best use is made of that knowledge and it informs public policies in education.

Gill (2004) created ten commandments of professionalism for teachers. I would address the last two: “Thou shalt grow in your profession” and “Be Thyself.” I believe that if teachers will continue to demonstrate growth as professionals, through such avenues as professional development, they will find whatever means they need to overcome unrealistic and inappropriate expectations that they encounter. To the last commandment, I would add “... and know yourself.” It is in
knowing, for ourselves, who we are as teachers, what we are called to do, and how to best accomplish our work, that our profession will survive, and the children we teach will flourish.
# Appendix A
## Course Syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name:</th>
<th>Early Literacy Development (PDERI #552)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor:</td>
<td>Jonathan Gillentine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Jonathan_Gillentine@notes.k12.hi.us">Jonathan_Gillentine@notes.k12.hi.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications:</td>
<td>M. Ed.; National Board Certified Teacher – Early Childhood Generalist; Doctoral Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Activity:</td>
<td>To provide teachers with research-based strategies supporting early literacy development in children ages 4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Objectives:</td>
<td>Participants will develop an understanding of and demonstrate how the following topics are essential in helping young children become literate learners. (Reading assignments are indicated in parentheses.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Experience and language – understand and demonstrate how experiential learning is a meaningful approach to literacy development; relates to oral communication content standard 2 (Growing Up to Read in Starting Out Right; National Research Council, 1999)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Oral language, including cultural factors and language diversity, and its impact on reading – understand and demonstrate how language and literacy development are related and how cultural and family factors affect learning; relates to oral communication and reading &amp; literature content standards 5 &amp; 6 (readings from Children Achieving; Neuman &amp; Roskos, 1998)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The brain and literacy development – understand and demonstrate how brain development affects literacy acquisition; relates to reading &amp; literature and oral communication content standard 1 (Shaping the learning environment: Connecting developmentally appropriate practices to brain research; Rushton &amp; Larkin, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Literature and its role in literacy development – understand and demonstrate how children’s literature must be relevant, of high quality, and appealing to young children; relates to reading &amp; literature content standards 1 &amp; 2 (reading from Access for All; Neuman, Celano, Greco, &amp; Shue, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Books – understand and demonstrate how predictability and the use of different genres support literacy development; relates to reading &amp; literature content standards 1, 4, &amp; 5 (Types of Text in Learning to Read and Write; Neuman, Copple, &amp; Bredekamp, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reading to children – understand and demonstrate how strategies and settings support children’s literacy development; relates to reading &amp; literature content standards 1, 2, 3, &amp; 5 (Growing Up to Read in Starting Out Right; National Research Council, 1999; Sharing Literature with Children in Teaching Language &amp; Literacy; Christie, Enz, &amp; Vukelich, 2003)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Reading with a purpose - understand and demonstrate how print</td>
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</table>
motivates children to become literate; relates to reading and literature
content standards 1, 2, & 4 (Teaching for Comprehension in Reading; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003)

8. The relationship between reading and writing - understand and
demonstrate the relationship between the two and how instruction
should address this bond; relates to reading and literature content
standards 1, 2, & 4 and writing content standards 1, 2, 4, & 5 (Ensuring
Children’s Reading and Writing Success in Learning to Read and
Write; Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2001)

9. Sounds & Symbols – understand and demonstrate how phonemic
awareness and the alphabetic principle are essential to literacy
development and what research says about their use for young learners;
relates to content standards 3 for reading & literature and writing
(readings from Reconsidering a Balanced Approach to Reading;
Weaver, 1998, and Teaching Phonics Today; Strickland, 1998)

10. Purposeful writing - understand and demonstrate how writing with a
purpose supports print understanding and reading acquisition; relates to
writing content standards 1-5 (Learning Skills through Projects in
Project-Based Learning; Diffity & Sassman, 2002)

11. Literacy environments - understand and demonstrate how a classroom
environment can support literacy development for young learners;
relates to reading and literature content standards 1, 2, 4, 5 and writing
content standard 1, 2, 5, 6 (Organizing the Classroom from The
Beginning Reading Handbook; Heald-Taylor, 2001)

12. Literacy assessment - understand and demonstrate how authentic
literacy assessment can augment mandated testing in documenting
learning; relates to process (#2) content standards in each of the three
language arts components (Assessment: Determining What Children
Know and Can Do in Teaching Language & Literacy; Christie, Enz, &
Vukelich, 2003)

13. Meeting the needs of all learners - understand and demonstrate how
adapting and modifying instruction can support a diverse learners;
relates to all three process (#2) and conventions & skills (#3) content
standards in each of the three language arts components (Inclusive
Early Literacy Instruction in Children Achieving; Neuman & Roskos,
1998)

14. Literacy alive – understand and demonstrate how literacy learning
with families and the community are part of a classroom teacher’s
responsibility; relates to response & rhetoric (#4) and attitudes &
engagement (#5) content standards in each of the three language arts
components (What Hannah Taught Emma and Why It Matters in
Literacy and Young Children; Barone & Morrow, 2003)

Activities to Participants will:
Achieve
Objectives:
- Attend at least 9 of 12 course sessions
- Read assigned articles and chapters

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### Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>March 1, 8, 15, 29, April 5, 12, 19, 26, May 3, 10, 17, 24</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio is due on June 7 (no course session).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Contents of Learning Portfolio:

- Participate in course discussions related to teaching practices in early literacy
- Share their own teaching practice as it applies to early literacy development
- Continually reflect on their teaching practices and critical incidents that may occur in their classrooms
- Write regularly in a reflective, professional journal
- Complete written assignments related to course readings, discussion, journals, and classroom practices
- Use new knowledge for classroom instruction; observe and note effects of instruction
- Compile a portfolio of written work that demonstrates understanding and application of course content; purposeful reflection on teaching practices; narrative examples of how teacher learning has affected student learning

The learning portfolio will include:

- At least 36 journal entries, demonstrating reflective consideration of course assignments, discussion topics, and early literacy instruction in the classroom
- Written responses to weekly reading assignments, including descriptions of how the material was implemented in the classroom, and how this had an impact on student learning
- Ten lesson plans that include a strategy or approach that was learned in the course and used in the classroom
- Ten teacher narratives that demonstrate how the above lessons had a positive impact on student learning

Each portfolio entry will contain a caption, describing what the document is, what learning it provides evidence of; and why it is evidence.

### Additional Information:

Teachers who enroll will be asked to participate in the instructor’s doctoral research on the use of reflection and narrative in professional development. A written waiver (as required by the University of Hawai‘i for research conducted under its authority) will be obtained from those enrollees who chose to participate. Enrollees who chose not to participate will be allowed to complete the course; no penalties will be levied against them.
### Appendix B

**Types and Samples of Balanced Literacy Experiences for Young Children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading and Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabet books</td>
<td>Rhoten and Lane (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word webs</td>
<td>Schwartz (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing for emergent readers</td>
<td>Oken-Wright (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning letters from children’s names</td>
<td>Wasik (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for reading choices</td>
<td>Miels (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy embedded in meaningful acts</td>
<td>Gronlund (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing workshop</td>
<td>Burchfield (1996); Chapman (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book bragging</td>
<td>Bobys (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy tools in play environments</td>
<td>Roskos &amp; Christie (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children as writing critics</td>
<td>Beach (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written messages to friends and family</td>
<td>Bodrova, Leong &amp; Paynter (1999); Manning, Manning, &amp; Morrison (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-fiction books</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociodramatic play</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading as a family routine</td>
<td>Roskos, Christie, &amp; Richels (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overnight books</td>
<td>Weinberger (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(lending libraries for home reading)</td>
<td>Dragan (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful language in transitions</td>
<td>Petersen (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role playing</td>
<td>Howard, Shaughnessy, Sanger, &amp; Hux (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wondering aloud</td>
<td>Williams (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic maps</td>
<td>Bayman (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look/listen and look/talk approaches</td>
<td>Decker-Collins &amp; Schaeffer (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literature</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play making</td>
<td>Cline &amp; Ingerson (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative dramatics based on literature</td>
<td>Schwartz (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storymaking</td>
<td>Clemens (1983)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Sample Guided Reflection

Guided reflection
A Literacy Environment

Part I: Please share your observations about A6. What was present in the learning environment that meets literacy needs? What was absent? What do you think should be changed? Please give reasons for your choices.

Part II A. Briefly summarize what changes you might make in your literacy environment. (These potential changes may be in relation to what you saw in A6, what you read in Heald-Taylor, or just from your own musings concerning your classroom.) Again, please give reasons for changes.

B. What did you notice about changes in the literacy environment that other people considered? Would their sharing change any of your ideas? Why?
Appendix D

Agreement to Participate

Principal Investigator:
Jonathan Gillentine
46-217 Koaena PL.
Kaneohe, HI 96744
235-2872

Participants in this research project will examine how teacher stories affect their growth in professional development. The participants will consist of up to 15 public school teachers of preschool, kindergarten, or first grade students and will examine and discuss best practices in early literacy development. Participants will be asked to write narratives and journals about their teaching and share them with the group. Course sessions will be recorded on audiotape as part of data collection. The course of this study will last for twelve weeks; the participants will meet with the investigator weekly.

While participating in this research study, the confidentiality of all participants is assured. Any comments made by the participants, that might be recorded or written, or actions that they take, will not be attributed to them by name within the report of this research or in any other format, be it written or oral. Participants may withdraw from this study voluntarily at any time without fear of reprisal.

It is hoped that those who participate in this research will benefit, both from their own stories and input, as well as from the input of others, as they examine ways to improve how we encourage and support early literacy development in young children. Dissemination of the research report will benefit the participants directly and potentially benefit other teachers who are struggling with the dilemma of providing best practices in early literacy to young children and meeting system expectations for the success of their students.

Statement of Consent

I certify that I have read and that I understand the foregoing, that I have been given satisfactory answers to my inquiries concerning the project procedures and other matters and that I have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time without prejudice.

I herewith give my consent to participate in this project with the understanding that such consent does not waive any of my legal rights, nor does it release the principal investigator or the University of Hawai‘i or any employee or agent thereof from liability for negligence.

__________________________________________          __________
Signature of individual participant                      Date
(or authorized legal representative, if appropriate)

(If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions or have comments or complaints about your treatment in this study, contact: Committee on Human Studies, University of Hawai‘i, 2540 Maile Way, Honolulu, HI 96822. Phone: (808) 956-5007.)

C: signed copy to participant

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Appendix E
Sources for Assigned and Optional Readings


Appendix F
Children's Book References


Cheltenham Elementary School Kindergartners. (1991). We are all Alike... We are all Different. New York: Scholastic.


References


Franklin, J. (2002, Fall). Thinking outside the classroom: Family literacy programs help students and parents achieve. *Curriculum Update, 4-5*.


Greenberg, P. (1998b). Thinking about goals for grown-ups and young children while we teach writing, reading, and spelling (and a few thoughts about the "J" word) [Part 3]. Young Children, 53(6), 31-42.


Harris, P. (2002). What is effective professional development? The Council Chronicle, 12(2), 1; 4-5.


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Littky, D., & Grabelle, S. (2004). If we love our children more than we love our schools, the system must change. *Educational Horizons, 82*, 284-289.


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