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A KINDERGARTEN TEACHER'S LITERACY IN PLAY
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
IN RELATION TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES
BASED ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

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ABSTRACT

The account of this kindergarten teacher offers a window into the thoughts and actions of a veteran who reflects on her practice for the purpose of continually growing as a professional. Over more than 20 years, Ms. D has learned to foster a community of learners by engaging children each day through songs, stories, personal connections, Author's Chair, and other means. After careful modeling, Ms. D encourages the children to take responsibility for daily classroom routines such as attendance and lunch count. The children are a part of the decision-making process in the workings of the classroom and are given power to make choices in much of their kindergarten work. They also have a strong voice in planning the play areas and choosing writing topics and reading selections based on what is happening in their lives.

This case study investigated this kindergarten teacher's practices and beliefs about literacy in play during the 2002-2003 school year. As a conscientious practitioner and life-long learner, Ms. D sought numerous professional development experiences to enhance her teaching practices. She shared her story of how she teaches literacy in her full day kindergarten class and what the role of play is in the teaching of literacy. Moreover, she reflected on changes in her beliefs and practices resulting from being challenged by professional development activities designed in the wake of the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB).

A phenomenology framework was used. The researcher focused on beliefs and practices as Ms. D's story emerged through data analysis of observations, journal entries, interviews, conversations, questionnaires, and children's artifacts. The data were

collected and processed through the 2002-2003 school year and were analyzed and interpreted in 2003-2004.

The main source of data collection came from Ms. D's ongoing journal writing and reflections during the 2002-2003 school year. She wrote frequently in her journal, noting her thoughts and explaining her practice decisions. The researcher also collected data through classroom observations via videotapes, audiotapes, notes and photographs and then matched the observations with the journal entries to connect her reflections to the observations. As questions arose, the researcher met with her in person or exchanged emails to clarify comments and coordinate observations with journal entries. Ms. D's journal responses encompassed more of her personal insight and covered more classroom time than did the observations, so much of the data analysis relied specifically on journal entries. Children's work and photos were collected to corroborate and support findings.

Major findings from this case study revealed considerable influences of professional development activities. Ms. D found that she was hasty to incorporate new professional development activities into her program. According to Cohen and Hill (2001), when professional development focuses on the expected changes in curriculum and assessment, teachers are more likely to change practice. Almost all of Ms. D's professional development activities during the year reflected the federal mandate's literacy requirements, specifically in curriculum and assessment aligned with the requirements within the classroom was present within the professional development workshops. As a result, Ms. D changed her practice, albeit temporarily.

From the beginning of this study it seemed that Ms. D's practices were generally consistent with her beliefs, supporting the use of play as an important component of

children's social and academic growth. She incorporated play into Choice Time during the last hour of the day, a time which provided little interruption for continuous child-directed activities. Ms. D acted as a facilitator to enhance play and made connections between curriculum topics and play to provide a cohesive atmosphere.

The children in her kindergarten class had a wide variety of instructional needs, including four of the class of 16 children who were considered to be special needs children. Although Ms. D has always had children with varying abilities in kindergarten, the needs of these four children were particularly unique and occupied her thoughts a great deal. In her concern for providing the best education for all children, she used information gleaned from her professional development experiences to find support especially for the needs of these four children. She was excited to implement the new strategies to aid her special needs children in literacy-learning.

In the wake of NCLB during the year of this study, the focus on literacy instruction was high. Accordingly, within the framework of these workshops, focus was on direct reading strategies to conduct with all children. Reflecting on these workshops, Ms. D accepted these new ideas in hopes of filling in the instructional gaps she may otherwise miss, particularly with her special needs children. However, since she felt a time constraint as to how to add the activities to her schedule, she reached out to include parent volunteers to offer specific activities planned for specific children. Parental assistance was twofold: it answered the parents' desire to be a part of their child's schooling, and also acted as 'extra hands' for Ms. D in providing the varied instructional activities to help each individual child in specific reading areas. The implementation of

the strategies was added to Choice Time because this period of time being at the end of the school day was most advantageous and convenient for parent participation.

Ms. D reported that the presentation of the activities in the workshops seemed powerful, offered as they were with directness and confidence by those in charge of these workshops. Being caught in the whirlwind of the kindergarten year moving along (where time flies by as the teacher meets the daily needs of 5 and 6 year old children), she had little time to reflect on how workshop ideas and suggestions might align with her existing general pedagogical beliefs. Ms. D implemented the new ideas to try to enhance her instruction without critical reflection. Because of this, there was an effect of these professional development experiences that represented a mismatch with her existing educational philosophy.

However, later on and after the completion of the study, Ms. D reported that she spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on how she changed her classroom as a result of the workshops. During the summer following the study she noted delayed concern that the play atmosphere had been disrupted because some of the children were not afforded the choice and freedom that was there earlier for them in the daily schedule, practices integral to her continuing beliefs. She made adaptations to her practices, keeping the strategies learned from the workshops that she found advantageous to young children, deleting or modifying those that were not satisfactory, and placing them in other areas of the schedule, such as the writing and reading workshops, mini-lessons, and the Morning Meeting, so as to no longer compromise children's play in the kindergarten. Hence, her long established professional disposition to be reflective, sooner or later, on her teaching practices helped her to eventually realign her practices to her beliefs.

Jalongo (1995) states that a reflective practitioner is able to view practice through experiential and foundational knowledge, as well as philosophical underpinnings to make informed decisions about practice. The findings in this case study support Jalongo's theory. After year-long use and written reflection of these strategies, Ms. D was better able to evaluate their importance and select those that enhanced her program and eliminate those that showed little value for her kindergarten children.

To conclude, this case study suggests that professional development can alter beliefs and practices in a seasoned teacher. The theoretical assumptions and restricted view of children provided in the workshops that Ms. D attended were based on a limited reading research foundation and did not address the whole child nor promote differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all children. Reflective practice and collegial discussions were not a part of the workshops so little time was given for participants to think about their beliefs and practices and realign with what they already know and do.

In this case study, then, Ms. D's experiences offer an instructive illustration as to how a teacher initially perceived the impact of professional development and its effects on practice, and then later realigned her beliefs and practices through reflection. This case study, in other words, shows how even an experienced teacher's classroom's practices can be affected, but only temporarily, by NCLB ideologically motivated professional development. Workshops aiming to foster changes in teacher behavior without sufficient attention to theories, values, and research, all of which underlie authentic teacher action and intentions—perhaps such workshops can be described as a form of teacher indoctrination—and, as such, perhaps will fail with seasoned, reflective practitioners. Unfortunately these workshops may be effective for those who accept new

ideas blindly, without thought and reflection, and who have little foundation for practices and beliefs.

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You, my children, are also life-long learners. Who knows where your zest for knowledge will take you!

DEDICATION

To the most important people in my life: Jason, Adam, and Megan.

It is for you I leave this legacy.

Life is a fantastic, amazing journey of growing, learning, and changing.

May your journey be your joy.

“Great discoveries are made by those who have the courage
to look beyond familiar harbors and venture into the unknown,
toward challenge and change...

Do not be afraid of change. Be afraid of not changing.”

-Jane-Elyse Pryor

This story was written to celebrate the everyday world of a dedicated, caring teacher and friend. Without our professional and personal commitment to children and each other, this story would not have transpired. For you, my dear friend Judy, I am eternally grateful. Our favorite quote: “Children don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” We lived by it. I will always treasure our kindergarten years together.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Puppet Show

There is a lot of activity around the puppet area. Chris, David, John and Sara are playing with puppets. Ms. D. joins them for awhile, and asks them if they would like to perform their play later today. When they enthusiastically say yes, she asks them, "How will you know your part?"

Sara replies: "We had better write it down!"

Ms. D spends another minute with them to answer any questions, then moves on to another play area. Soon the children gather paper and begin writing their lines. John leaves to go to the restroom, and calls back to the group, "Don't let Chris steal the shark!"

Chris answered, "I won't. How do you spell shark?" David, Chris and Sara collaborate: shark. They are full of excitement as each one writes down his/her part. When they are done, they each go around the room to gather an audience.

David: "Everybody in Blocks, we are ready to perform now!"

Sara to the Dramatic Play area, "We are ready for a performance."

Beth called, "Let's go watch the puppets."

The reader might suspect that a more typical kindergartener's response to Alyssa's statement would be, "But we don't know how to write." That is not the case in Ms. D's classroom because they have been writing since the first day of school. Integrating literacy into play and providing choice of play activities are some of the daily routines of her classroom practice.

The Impact of No Child Left Behind

Although this story occurred just two years ago, this freedom of choice in play and literacy may diminish with the entrenchment of the federal mandate No Child Left Behind, part of President Bush's plan for education reform (Bush, 2001). Since the new millennium, kindergarten classrooms have taken on a very different atmosphere. Kirn & Cole (2003) emphasize that our children are growing up in a different environment in regard to finding time for free choice. Statistics emphasize the seriousness of lack of free time: In 1981, according to Kim & Cole, University of Michigan researchers found that children had 40% of the day for free time (time left over after sleeping, eating, studying and engaging in organized activities). This decreased drastically by 1997, with only 25% of the day left for free time, instead of 40% (Kirn & Cole, 2003). I see the impact in my county, where this year, 2004, the schools in my area are removing recess from the daily schedule to fit in more academics.

According to Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck, & Taylor (2003), a standards-based and academic early childhood environment prevail, and play has become a "four-letter word". It is considered by many as an aimless activity, and children are often told to "finish your work before you play" (Fromberg, 2002, p.3). This attitude devalues play.

Fromberg contends that, unlike traditional education that follows a linear pattern, children make meaning through “nonlinear intellectual” experiences. When they are immersed in exploration and interaction with people, questions emerge providing opportunities for children’s learning and understanding to flourish. The skills the children use are directly related to the real-world experiences in which they are engaged. These intrinsically motivated activities are optimal for learning (Fromberg, 2002).

In today’s USA kindergarten classes the potential value of play in connection with learning is not often fully realized. The kitchen area may have papers piled on top and there is a void of blocks and sand tables. On May 4, 2004 Harwayne (a former principal of the Manhattan New School and a recently retired Superintendent of the New York City School System) commented on the lack of play in kindergarten classrooms during her presentation at the International Reading Association conference in Reno, NV. She attributed much of the previous high level math logic and problem-solving in the 4th grade at the Manhattan New school to the block and sand table explorations in kindergarten, and pondered as to what will happen in the near future as these important activities in kindergartens across the nation become obsolete (Harwayne, 2004).

In February 2004, when attending an in-service in Maryland for new kindergarten teachers, the presenters referred to the kindergarten teachers who incorporated centers to provide the play-literacy combination, as “old school.” The “new school’ of kindergarten teachers takes on a much more academic role, finding children less engaged in choices and active learning, and more engaged in paper/pencil tasks, including specific scripted literacy programs and intense phonics instruction (from notes taken at Maryland Model

for School Readiness Workshop, February 2004). This major shift in early childhood curriculum is a result of the new federal mandate No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002).

Sponseller urges that for the sake of the future of our children's intelligence and well-being, today's professionals must change their views of children and embrace "the play-oriented view of the child as self-motivated and self-directed." They must see the child as meaning-makers by assimilating new information through actual concrete experiences. Educators must develop "a strong foundation of play research in order to communicate to administrators, school boards, and parents the value of play in early childhood education" (1982, p. 232). Through experiential learning involving play and choice, dispositions for future learning experiences will be positive and healthy (Helm & Gronlund, 2000).

Furthermore, as the emphasis on accountability continues, it is imperative that young children are assessed in ways that is consistent with how young children demonstrate their knowledge and skills (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Helm & Gronlund, 2000). Traditional methods of assessment such as standardized tests and single-answer responses can put pressure on young learners, inhibiting their thinking processes (Jensen, 1998).

Despite research conducted by noted historians such as Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, Erikson, Froebel, et.al, and current theorists such as, Katz, Johnson, Roopnarine, Christie, and Roskos, play and free choice in the kindergarten classroom are further threatened as a result of continued pressure from the federal government for schools to follow standards and assessment requirements. In 1997 the National Reading Panel (NRP) was developed to study research on how children learn to read. There was no research included in the NRP's report on the connection between literacy and play.

The emphasis of the NRP was the examination of studies that were narrowly related to reading. Numerous studies on the teaching of reading were explored and recommendations were made as to how best to teach young children to read (See Report of the NRP, 2001). The subcommittee chair of Alphabetics, Linnea Ehri, and another NRP member S. J. Samuels, both agree that the findings do not conclude that a single method of teaching reading is better than any other (Garan 2002, p. 12-13). The NRP states that one size does not fit all (Report of the NRP: 2-95). The Panel further suggests that standardized scripts used to teach reading may reduce teachers' interest in the teaching process (Report of the NRP: 2-96). Additionally, the NRP concluded that teachers must be enthusiastic about what they are doing in order to be effective in the classroom (Report of the NRP: 2-7).

Yet in my geographical area, many schools have purchased and use reading series recommended by the federal government that provide a detailed plan that must be delivered in a specific order in a specific time frame, allowing no outside reading strategies to be implemented during that time. This is in direct contradiction with the findings of the NRP.

One of the results of the NRP was the phonics report. The panel reported that there were "insufficient data to draw any conclusions about the effects of phonics instruction with normally developing readers above first grade" (Report of the NRP: 2-117). The Summary Booklet reports a direct contradiction to this, stating that "...systematic phonics instruction...are indicative of what can be accomplished when explicit, systematic phonics are implemented in today's classrooms" (The Summary Booklet, p. 9). Furthermore, Yatvin, a member of the NRP, sites the phonics report as unreliable

evidence which is used widely to change reading instruction. “The phonics report became part of the full report of the NRP uncorrected, undeliberated, and unapproved.” She explained that due to time constraints, the completed phonics report of the subcommittee was given to the panel members for review four days prior to publication. There was not time for discussion, consensus, or even grammatical errors to be made (2002). The report was included without whole review and is now determining phonics practice throughout the United States (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

Not only were there contradictions between the NRP report and the NRP Summary Booklet, there was another issue to consider. One of the largest problems with the NRP and the research examined was the absence of the years of qualitative studies conducted in education, and specifically literacy. The Panel defined the research they would examine as “scientific”, being of *science* as knowledge without metaphysical abstraction or intuitive speculation. Science was to be differentiated from nonscience by being limited to beliefs that are empirically supported they are certain or positive. The methodological standards did not arise from the research but were a criteria established by the panel before they began to select research. Reading research that met these standards was very limited (Cunningham, 1999). Consequently, a wealth of research conducted over the last decades fell outside of these strict parameters and was consequently ignored. This NRP foundation of reading instruction, and of the professional development of teachers who support it, is accordingly based on a narrow field of research findings.

The downward push of curriculum is evident in many kindergartens across the country, a direct result from the federal mandate NCLB, requiring standardized testing in

schools to show improvement (or lack thereof). In North Carolina, kindergarteners must identify facts in nonfiction material. In California, they are learning about probability and statistics. In Illinois the teacher has a timer set as the child reads a list of prescribed words aloud. In Chicago, the teacher is teaching from the recommended lesson plan in the thick white binder, crammed with goals for each day and step-by-step questions given to her and the other 26,000 teachers at the start of the school year. There are no blocks, sand tables, paint easels, or other free exploration materials anywhere. The focus is on preparing kindergarteners for future tests. In NYC, kindergarteners at least still get recess. In a seven hour day they get 25 minutes free from academics (Ohanian, 2002). It is difficult to understand why this academic push in kindergarten has occurred since the actual studies selected to be included in the report by the NRP specifically related to kindergarten were minimal. For instance, only four studies examined the effects of phonics in kindergarten, and the emphasis was on at-risk children, and one study was based on comprehension in kindergarten (Garan, 2002, p. 51).

In 1998, in support of best practices for early childhood education, the International Reading Association (IRA) joined with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in developing a joint paper on Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) for helping young children learn to read and write (IRA/NAEYC, 1998). This position paper's major topics of discussion are:

- Age-appropriate engagement with print
- Strategies for reading aloud to young children
- Story-stretching projects for young learners
- Assisted instruction techniques

- The content and physical structure of a classroom library
- Scaffolding toward independent reading

Neuman and Bredekamp (2000) emphasize the need for immersion in print as a means to enhance reading and writing instruction in a DAP setting. They recognize the accepted theory that the most important activity to do with children in assisting their ability to learn to read is to ‘read to the child.’ This practice provides a solid foundation for reading, including vocabulary development and teaching them naturally about semantics and syntax in text.

The connection between federal legislation and state regulations tied to early literacy development illustrates some of the challenges teachers may face in a climate where politics influence how kindergarten teachers support the early literacy development of young children. Darling-Hammond (1997) says some think that “learning could be improved by ever more precise specification of teaching procedures: a more tightly prescribed curriculum, more teacher-proof texts, more extensive testing and more carefully constrained decision-making. The problem with this approach is that although policies must be uniform, students are not standardized in the pace and manner in which they learn. The tendency to prescribe practices thought to be desirable on statistical grounds has deflected attention from what works with particular children (19-20).”

It is clear to see that some of what is included in federal legislation and state regulations is in conflict with the theory and research of credible experts in early childhood education and early literacy development. The NCLB bill, PL 107-110, requires testing of schools for federal compliance. This is the only way any state will

receive federal monies to support education. Here is the catch: the tests are designed to reflect the mastery of Standards implemented in the states requesting federal monies. The Standards, and therefore tests, must meet the approval of the federal government who base their requirements on the results of the NRP, whose findings from the reading research are the foundation of the NCLB Act, which are questionable, at best. The stakes are high; test scores determine the future of the school, both financially and academically. The curriculum takes on the wording of the test. The journalist Peter Sacks, in his book *Standardized Minds* (2000) criticizes this push for federalized accountability:

“Common sense might further tell one that if teachers are teaching to the test via rote teaching styles, rushing through lots of drills and worksheets and practice tests...shortchanged are thinking, analyzing, synthesizing, performing, articulating, and other modes of in-depth learning. Call it the dumb down(p.130)...While the rhetoric is highly effective, remarkable little good evidence exists that there’s any educational substance behind the accountability and testing movement” (p. 155).

Past research shows that effective professional development results in leadership capacity, school community’s involvement, choice of changes, and time for reflection on practices as new strategies are explored (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Eisner, 2002; Guskey, 2003; Lieberman, 1995; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). Unfortunately, the professional development associated with NCLB presents the exact opposite picture.

The emphasis is on reading practices that include direct, explicit phonics instruction, rote memorization, and phonemic awareness instruction with scripted delivery procedures for all children.

In the K-3 Reading Instruction Program Implementation Framework (retrieved 5/15/2004), there is an extensive and detailed plan for implementing professional development. Nowhere is there choice involved, or time to reflect on practices and discuss innovations. The thread of this program is training; training state-wide, then region-wide, district-wide, school-wide, and finally K-3 teachers. The framework is developed by a group called *VoyagerU*, headed by Dr. Good, a psychologist. Upon examining his credentials, there is no reading background in his history. Yet he is the author of the school reform program for Pennsylvania and numerous other states that will ultimately strive to undermine the current reading instruction belief system to fit the constraints of NCLB. This professional development program follows the guidelines of time, peer coaching, discussion, but what is lacking is the choice of what is to be studied as well as the delivery of information. The teachers are all trained and the expectation is for them to change their thoughts on reading to comply with what is deemed 'best practice' by NCLB (2004).

In Greenspan's book, *The Endangered Mind and the Endangered Origin of Intelligence* (1997), he explains that current brain research reveals insights as to how the mind develops. He offers some suggestions for the greatest effect on educational reform. As we look to improve our schools for the sake of the children, we must keep in mind the best way that children learn. First, according to most authorities, experiential learning is more advantageous to learning than is acquisition of specific information and skills

(Branscombe, et.al, 2003; Dewey, 1990; Hall, 2000; Helm & Gronlund, 2000; Katz & Chard, 2000; Pelligrini & Galda, 2000; Piaget, 1973; Wassermann, 2000). Children construct knowledge by interacting with others and with the world not by being told what to do (Jones & Reynolds, 1992). Greenspan (1997) supports interaction with others via small groups or one-on-one as crucial to growth. Additionally, he emphasizes the individual differences must always be taken into account, attending to numerous modes of learning to absorb information as well as embracing the histories the children bring with them to the classroom. Finally, he reminds the reader to never underestimate what a child can do and learn. Children are never too young to see print, be read to, and to begin interacting with the world.

Piaget (1973) is noted for his constructivist philosophy, the notion that children are not empty vessels to be filled, but come to us with structures on which to build. A constructivist teaching in early childhood education requires a facilitator to provide an educational environment in which the child explores and adjusts understanding with what is already there. Montessori (In Mooney, 2000), whose ideas are the foundations of early childhood beliefs, said, “The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, ‘The children are now working as if I did not exist’” (p. 21). “When children are interested and involved, they need teachers who respect this absorption with their work...” (Mooney, 2000, p. 73).

Previous to Piaget’s research, Dewey (1990) had formed a similar realization of how children learn:

“The statement so frequently made that education means

“drawing out” is excellent, if we mean simply to contrast it with

the process of pouring in. But after all, it is difficult to connect the idea of drawing out with the ordinary things of a child of three, four, seven, or eight years of age. He is already running over, spilling over, with activities of all kinds. He is not purely latent being whom the adult has to approach with great caution and skill in order to gradually draw out some hidden germ of activity. The child is already intensely active, and the question of education is the question of taking hold of his activities, of giving them direction. Through direction, through organized use, they tend toward valuable results, instead of scattering or being left to merely impulsive expression “(p. 36).

Under NCLB there is a current push to limit learning to reading and math, stating facts and following strict academic guidelines. Nevertheless, rather than following what NCLB has dictated, we need to give serious thought as to what is worth learning. Fromberg (1999) states that in early childhood development “play seems to be a cauldron in which...various proportions of cultural, social, cognitive, linguistic, creative, aesthetic, and emotional ingredients blend” (p.44). She emphasizes the probability that *metacognition*, one’s self-awareness of one’s own thinking, and imagery work together by connecting the brain’s hemispheres to strengthen one’s problem-solving ability. These integrative skills develop naturally in young children through play. “To use linear workbooks for these nonlinear functions...is to be irrelevant if not downright abusive...teachers of young children have an ethical responsibility to create situations that can help improve the conditions of learning and life in schools” (p.45).

Play

Theorists and researchers (Fromberg, 2002; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999) have a common list that distinguishes play from nonplay, encompassing children of all ages, cultures, and domains. Play has been defined in terms of the following characteristics:

1. intrinsically motivated and self-initiated
2. process oriented
3. non-literal and pleasurable
4. exploratory and active
5. rule-governed

For decades play has been considered the work of a child. Numerous researchers and theorists have supported the use of play as a learning tool for young children. A natural avenue for learning, play offers opportunities for young children to develop and practice literacy skills. Additionally, play offers a practical means of assisting the child in developing creativity and social sophistication (Fein & Schwartz, 1982).

Play is the medium that “frees young children’s embedded knowing” (Vygotsky, 1978, in Jones & Reynolds, p.119). When engaged in play, a child reaches beyond herself intellectually, imitating the role of adulthood. “Open-ended activities and questions support children’s cognitive development because they ask children to think. Instead of putting children in the position of being right or wrong, they put them in the position of inquiry, of finding out what the possibilities are...”(Mooney, 2000, p. 75).

When children play, they are both doers and learners. They seek mastery of play which will provide usefulness in life now as well as later (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Reynolds & Jones, 1997). Play does not always have immediacy to its purpose; it

contributes to future understandings. Even though play is thought to represent the child in the present, the actuality of play is the mastery of events to be utilized in the future. The benefits are most useful after childhood, with masterful use in adulthood (Vygotsky, 1978; Pellegrini & Galda, 2000).

Play in Learning

The concept of play as a foundational block in early childhood education (ECE) relies on its embeddedness in the developmental theory. Such theorists and practitioners as Dewey, Sprague Mitchell, Pratt, Erikson, Montessori, and Piaget have historically helped to define and hone the meaning of developmental learning. Developmental education holds the beliefs that children's learning is fluid and continually shifts as new knowledge is realized. Through interaction with the environment, children make sense of the world and lay the groundwork for complex learning. More recently, Vygotsky's influence broadened and solidified the social importance of child development (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000).

During the 1980s and 1990s Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) became the core of early childhood teacher education programs, early childhood conferences, professional early childhood organizations, published professional literature, and state initiatives. The largest early childhood organization in the United States, NAEYC was the leader in this movement, presenting information on the development of the whole child, encompassing the cognitive, social, emotional and physical well-being of children in a diverse society with a variety of abilities. They provided position statements and

professional literature to teach and guide professionals, parents, and communities (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Throughout the day effective DAP kindergarteners would engage in listening to and reading stories, learn about language, and write about authentic situations. The teacher planned the curriculum to provide balance in teacher-directed instruction with shared, interactive instruction involving the children, and opportunities for the children to practice the skills through free exploration. This choice time, often referred to as centers, provided opportunities for children to choose places to work to enhance their developing literacy knowledge. Centers invited children to engage in problem-solving and decision-making activities, often created by emulating adult roles.

In these DAP classrooms, the centers grew in intensity throughout the year as the growth of the children flourished. Through DAP, not isolated drill and paper/pencil tasks, nearly every child was reading and writing by the end of the school year. Furthermore, the children became invested, responsible learners, having been given time and respect for ongoing decision-making, use of critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and conflict resolution skills.

By connecting play with academics, a low-risk environment permeates the classroom. Children focus on play as a process and feel safe, thus taking risks in order to grow. By providing literacy tools and building structures within the centers, children immerse in academics in a natural, meaningful way. According to Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, centers offer a 'broad spectrum of learning opportunities' (p.317). Children enter the kindergarten classroom with a wide variety of interests and ability levels. Centers provided an opportunity for all children to learn different skills (1999).

Wood (1997) who works with the Northeast Foundation for Children, believes that DAP is the crux of education for all children. In his book *Yardsticks* he states,

“Children’s developmental needs should be the foundation for every choice we make in our classrooms and schools. They need to remain at the center of our decisions about school organization, policies, scheduling and everyday practices. Too often, our choices affect children negatively, interfering with growth and learning rather than encouraging it. If we understand children’s developmental needs more fully, we can change-and improve-our schools” (p.1).

Literacy in Play

A combination of literacy and play work effectively and are developmentally appropriate for a solid curricular base in literacy education. In a recent review of research on literacy in play, Roskos and Christie (2001) found that 12 out of 20 studies “supplied strong evidence that play can serve literacy by: (a) providing settings that promote literacy activity, skills, and strategies; (b) serving as a language experience that can build connections between oral and written modes of expression; and (c) providing opportunities to teach and learn literacy (p.32).” By combining play and literacy children are successful in becoming literate and meeting the current demand for academic rigors (Owocki, 1998). Piaget contends that children should engage in work themselves to create their own meaning. (Mooney, 2000). Unfortunately, play is often viewed negatively in many traditional school settings. Many teachers perceive work in school as

something under their control and play, self-selected by children, is a waste of time. Too often play is discouraged and literacy is taught through isolated practice. (Branscombe, et. al, 2003).

Conversation is the foundation of reading and writing. Play provides a vehicle for language development, which require scripts that develop between the players. As play proceeds, the children scaffold conversation, increasing their oral language skills and building the necessary skills to become readers and writers (Fromberg, 1999).

Reading and writing are directly connected, and in the world of the child symbols are made on paper and then read to peers during play. Through child's play, symbols are used as representation of thoughts and ideas. As the child develops, these symbols begin to develop and take on meaning of the written language. Vygotsky (1978) states, "(It indicates that symbolic representation in play is essentially a particular form of speech at an earlier stage, one which leads directly to written language" (p.111). Vygotsky (1978) further explains that in order for reading and writing to grow within the child, there must be a need. If the child learns these functions through mandatory motor skills rather than "a complex cultural activity" (p.118) they will soon bore the child and lose their meaning and purpose. "Writing must be relevant to life" (p.118), and intrinsically motivated. The appropriate teaching of reading and writing in an early childhood setting should be through play situations. As speech is learned through life experiences, so should reading and writing. "Natural methods of teaching reading and writing involve appropriate operations on the child's environment. Reading and writing should become necessary...in play...Children should be taught written language, not just the writing of letters" (p.118-119).

Providing opportunities for children to play in literacy-enriched kindergartens invites children to act as coaches through reading and writing interactions (Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2002). As children immerse in play, literacy is enhanced through demonstrations by children in book-sharing, writing, and spelling. Children share books they have read or have had read to them and also work together to spell and decode words (2002).

The Purpose of this Study

I have a grave concern of what will happen to teachers everywhere who have successful practices in the education of young children. With the influx of mandatory professional development based on the findings of the NRP from questionable research selections, how will it impact these teachers?

I have studied through observations, interviews, and journal entries a veteran kindergarten teacher through a year of her teaching career, describing her practices, beliefs, and professional development opportunities. I have directed special attention to obtaining her representation concerning how NCLB has influenced her and interfered with her behaviors, thoughts, and feelings about teaching young children in kindergarten. I have sought to describe positive, neutral, and negative effects of NCLB on this teacher.

It is also my goal to present the ways in which this teacher meets her curricular goals by connecting literacy activities and play. Through the teacher's and children's stories the reader will understand the strength of the child-centered learning environment and the impact it has in promoting literacy. This leads to a further purpose: to reflect on this teacher's experiences to draw out implications for educational policy, professional development, and teacher education.

Glossary of Terms

DAP: Developmentally appropriate practice is based on knowledge about how children develop and learn. To guide their decisions about practice, all early childhood teachers need to understand the developmental changes that typically occur in the years from birth through age 8 and beyond, variations in development that may occur, and how best to support children's learning and development during these years (NAEYC Position Statement, July 1996).

IRA: “International Reading Association, a professional membership organization dedicated to promoting high levels of literacy for all by improving the quality of reading instruction, disseminating research and information about reading, and encouraging the lifetime reading habit. Members include classroom teachers, reading specialists, consultants, administrators, supervisors, university faculty, researchers, psychologists, librarians, media specialists, and parents. With members and affiliates in 99 countries, the network extends to more than 300,000 people worldwide.” (International Reading Association, para.1)

NAEYC: “The National Association for the Education of Young Children exists for the purpose of leading and consolidating the efforts of individuals and groups working to achieve healthy development and constructive education for all young children. Primary attention is devoted to assuring the provision of high quality early childhood programs for young children.” (Mission Statement, National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1996, para. 1)

NCLB: No Child Left Behind, signed into law on January 8, 2002, is an act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind.

NCLB provides most of the funding and regulations for K-12 education. (U.S.

Department of Education, Elementary and Secondary Education Legislation, para. 2)

NRP: In 1997, Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to convene a national panel to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read.

For over two years, the NRP reviewed research-based knowledge on reading instruction and held open panel meetings in Washington, DC, and regional meetings across the United States. On April 13, 2000, the NRP concluded its work and submitted "The Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read," at a hearing before the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education.

The NRP has completed the research assessment of reading instruction approaches. The members no longer meet as a panel but continue to present the NRP findings at various conferences and organizational meetings. (About the National Reading Panel, Overview, para. 1,2,3.)

Pennsylvania Read to Succeed: In the state of Pennsylvania, legislation was passed in 1999 that provided grant monies to eligible schools, targeting reading instruction enhancement for children in grades K-3. "Read to Succeed combines the efforts of the

state, local school districts, parents and caregivers, family literacy programs and other community-based programs, preschools and libraries. The \$100 million grant program is aimed at ensuring Pennsylvania children can read by the time they finish 3rd grade.”

(Pennsylvania Read to Succeed, p. 1).

Report of the NRP: This report, 480 pages in length, contains details of the workings of the NRP. Each subgroup provides an extensive summary of their topic area, methodology and findings, as well as questions that arose during the process. The Panel subgroups were: (1) Alphabets, (2) Fluency, (3) Comprehension, (4) Teacher Education and Reading Instruction, and (5) Computer Technology and Reading Instruction.

Summary Report of the NRP: This summary booklet condenses into 35 pages the work of the National Reading Panel. Included within the Summary Report is an overview of the establishment of the NRP, the methodology used, and the findings of each of the Panel subgroups.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived effect of professional development activities connected with NCLB on the teaching strategies a kindergarten teacher is using to support the early literacy development of her students. Here I review research describing effective strategies to promote early literacy development with focus on play, the effect of professional development in general, and the influence of NCLB on teaching literacy.

Play in Kindergarten

Historically, play in kindergarten was introduced in the late 1800's by Froebel, a German who is responsible for the idea of nurturing play; he viewed play as a way children learn. His view on play as part of the curriculum was instrumental in connecting play to education. He based his philosophy on four basic principles: free expression, creativity, social participation, and motor expression. His work is known to be the first among those recognized in support of hands-on teaching (Sluss, 2005).

One of his students, Patty Smith Hill, developed a kindergarten program in the United States, beginning as a Froebelian but also adopted a scientific approach to studying children. She is responsible for adding unit blocks and songs such as Happy Birthday to the kindergarten programs. Until just recently, these programs were modeled throughout the United States (Sluss, 2005).

Play in kindergarten provided socialization and enculturation previous to the NCLB legislation. Paley, a noted present day kindergarten researcher, took the stories that children told in play and incorporated them into the curriculum. She addressed more than

academics, focusing on life issues such as social justice, fairness, and community-building (Paley, 1992).

In today's kindergarten, Hill's and Froebel's influences are disappearing as workbooks and academics replace play and Paley's model of kindergarten is fading away. The former held a philosophical rationale while today's model has an academic, cognitive-only emphasis. The push for academics by NCLB and the lack of research studied on the subject of play by the NRP together have helped to initiate the demise of play in kindergarten.

Literacy in Play

A review of the literature to evaluate practices that contribute to the early literacy development of young children may provide evidence suggesting the value of play and may yield knowledge and understanding of how young children develop and learn, including implications for the practice of teaching and curriculum.

There are many examples of quality learning environments for young children that promote early literacy development for young children. The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) developed a position statement emphasizing the role of play in a child-centered kindergarten class. Moyer (2001) emphasizes that play is essential and a mistake is being made today by those who believe that young children have outgrown the need to play and needs to be replaced by a greater emphasis on 'basic skills.' He also states that when (play is) viewed as a learning process, play becomes a vehicle for growth, and continues to be the most vital avenue of learning for kindergarteners. He believes that play involves not only the use of materials and equipment, but also words and ideas that promote literacy and develop thinking skills.

Consequently, play contributes not only to literacy development, but also promotes problem-solving, critical thinking, concept formation, and creativity skills. Social and emotional development also are enhanced through play.

Roskos and Christie describe the link between play and literacy as ‘Knowing in the Doing.’ They write that teachers need to look beyond the doing in play for evidence of children’s knowing- for the ‘knowing in the doing.’ Furthermore, they write, in the richly detailed context of play, children do not think, they act, as if planning their play in some sequential, deliberate way. Children’s play comes from the creative energy of the movement. The children’s personal experiences such as spelling words to invite friends to a birthday party tend to exact a fuller range of problem solving strategies than do more contrived situations (2002).

A literacy-rich play setting is a natural way to connect play and literacy. Vukelich, Christie and Enz state that children become invested in real-life situations through play and writing. Often children will teach each other the spelling of words to enhance dramatic play. “By making the tools of literacy available to the children, the children begin to incorporate print in very natural and real-world ways into dramatic play themes” (Vukelich, Christie, Enz, 2002, p. 10). When children explore written language, they play with the graphic features as they make sense of writing in their world (Clay, 1991). It is through these various playful literacy experiences that children become competent members of a literate society (Lu, 2000).

Time is an important factor in valuing play. Fromberg (Seefeldt, ed., 1999) suggests that children often create spontaneous opportunities for play at unplanned intervals and do not connect with the adult expectations involving time and play. (p. 43).

It is clear from the review of the literature that linking meaningful play experiences to early literacy development, contributes to the successful development of the young children as a literate person. Yet in today's society the use of play as a vehicle to learning has been greatly diminished. In the article entitled, *What Ever Happened to Play?* (Kirn, & Cole, 2001), it is stated that play is endangered due to busier households, less freedom for children to play unsupervised, less free places for children to play, and the intrusion of electronics. Children today are also engaged in numerous extra-curricular activities such as dance and sports. According to statistics from a University of Michigan study, researchers found that children in 1981 had 40% of the day for free time (hours left over after sleeping, eating, studying and engaging in organized activities). In 1997, there was only 25% left of the day for free time (Kirn and Cole, 2001). Brown, retired psychiatrist and along with Sutton-Smith, co-founder of the Institute for Play in Carmel Valley, CA states that too little play ("play deprivation") can lead to such disorders as depression, hostility, and "loss of things that make us human"(2001).

Studies have shown that by using play to enhance literacy, a positive result most likely will occur. In a chapter in the book *Play and Literacy in Early Childhood* co-edited by Roskos and Christie (2000), Sonnernschein, Basker, Serpell and Schmidt reported to have found that linking play and literacy is beneficial. When play and literacy are linked it may make the acquisition of early literacy skills entertaining and motivate the child to master the written language. Engaging in play and experiences of interest to the young children seem to be critical behaviors.

According to Hall (Christie, 1991), educators' perspective of play and literacy acquisition are often separate acts. Through his studies he found that educators saw play

as a natural occurrence and literacy as something that needed to be taught, the two totally unrelated. There is evidence from some countries, including the United States, that play is devalued in school, becoming more marginalized from the school curriculum (Partridge, 1988, cited in Christie, 1991). Children have power over play and the spontaneity of it was assumed, yet literacy was too crucial and must be structured to ensure proper delivery to the child (Christie, 1991).

Owocki, in her book entitled *Literacy Through Play* (1998), discusses the confusion often felt by early childhood educators in using play in the curriculum, uncertain about its effectiveness and its connectedness to literacy instruction.

“Even teachers who are comfortable using play and who understand its potential for facilitating learning worry that children will be unprepared for standardized tests or future academic experiences. Recent media reports criticizing holistic styles of teaching have many wondering whether developing a child-centered philosophy is worthwhile (p. 5).”

Owocki shares numerous case studies that show how a combination of literacy and play work effectively and developmentally appropriately for a solid curricular base in literacy education. Students are successful in becoming literate and meeting the current academic rigors.

Bodrova and Leong (2001) developed a curriculum, the “Tools of the Mind” as a result of the findings of international case studies conducted by Russian and American educational researchers. Based on the Vygotskian Approach, the studies researched the

use of sociodramatic play to foster literacy. In one study, a 2 ½ hour half day program engaged children in 50-60 minutes of teacher-supported sociodramatic play in one play center in a room filled with several options. This group scored higher in literacy skills than the control group of children. Bodrova and Leong concluded that play supported literacy development rather than detracted from it, and choosing and sticking to one play center fostered self-regulation.

Unfortunately, play is often overlooked as a tool to teaching literacy. Wassermann, in her book: *Serious Players in the Primary Classroom* (2000) says that even though early childhood educators talk of how important play is as a learning tool for literacy, it is only “lip service”.

Most teachers “deep in their hearts, believe really counts: seatwork! Seatwork and other pencil-and-paper tasks seem to be the real stuff of classroom life. When that work is done, when the jobs have been completed to the teacher’s satisfaction, when the product is considered acceptable, the child may, if there is some time left over, play (p.15).”

She further states that teachers do not view play and work as compatible. Work, a productive activity, must represent ‘suffering’ and play, a waste of time, is what one does when the work is completed. If a teacher allows play to continue for too long, s/he feels guilty and unproductive. Wasserman feels that teachers are “products of their own extensive programming as pupils in the public school system have implicitly come to regard play as suspect (p. 16).”

This view described by Wassermann is no doubt the status-quo in terms of general consensus on play. Sutton-Smith (Bergen, Ed., 1998) contends that play that emerges naturally and ‘festively’ is not always welcome in schools. Festive play, marked by

spontaneity, laughing, and playful nonsense, although not encouraged in schools, may still occur. “While play can be educational in the school sense, we should never forget that its much more vital role in learning has to do with child culture, not with adult culture; and furthermore, it has a festive role to perform that is often the very antithesis of our own educational concerns (p. 34).”

Empowering children by allowing time for free play and choice of activities is an important component of child development. Meier (2000) views inquiry and exploration opportunities as developmentally appropriate practices that support the natural eagerness and curiosity of young children. Rather than developing classroom environments that represent “mastery” and “control”, the early childhood environment and curriculum should “stimulate children’s sense of self-discovery and satisfaction in their own learning (p.17).”

The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) has offered a position paper on a child-centered kindergarten class. This paper emphasizes that ‘play is essential’ (Moyer, 2001):

The pressure for academic achievement, coupled with the mistaken idea that today’s children have outgrown the need to play, have led to increased emphasis on ‘basic skills’ in kindergarten....When (play is) viewed as a learning process, play becomes a vehicle for growth, and it continues to be the most vital avenue of learning for kindergartners...Play

involves not only use of materials and equipment, but also words and ideas that promote literacy and develop thinking skills. Consequently, in addition to the three R's, play also promotes problem-solving, critical thinking, concept formation, and creativity skills. Social and emotional development also are enhanced through play (p. 163).

There is a two-way relationship between literacy and play. All areas of development are inter-related and must be considered to develop the whole child and there is no need to defend and support the use of play as a vehicle for learning. (Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004).

There is a cautionary note, however. Linking literacy and play, if done well, enhances the engagement and learning of young children. But educators must be careful not to override the play with literacy tools that are either unnatural or take the place of other necessary tools within that particular play setting. Roskos and Christie (2001) have concerns that although infusing planned literacy development into play may look attractive to the adult may undermine the very essence and purpose of play itself and turn it into literacy lessons instead (p.65).

Play makes the child reach toward higher levels. Vygotsky calls it the 'Zone of proximal development':

(P)lay creates a zone of proximal development in the child.

In play, the child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying

glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development ([1930-1935]1978, p. 102).

In Power of Play written by Fromberg in Seefeldt's edited book, *The Early Childhood Curriculum: Current Findings in Theory and Practice* (3rd ed.) (1999), Fromberg comments on the extreme differences in views of the role of play in early childhood education. She suggests,

“We need a more valid basis for developing curriculum than decision-making that is based solely on what children can learn, or what certain factions want them to learn, or what tradition has dictated. We need to consider what is worth learning....We might playfully entertain the notion that play serves to merge the hypothetical functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain...Play may well be the ultimate relativist integrator of development....The transformational potential of play in itself is a potent lever for making new connections in a rapidly changing world....”

She continues to stress the need to provide a quality of life in school that is conducive to how a child learns by combining authentic, meaningful academic situations and playfulness to ensure a quality learning environment.(pp.44-45).

A research project was conducted in Germany in the 1970s in the province of North

Rhein-Westphalia. Because of the rush for learning (academic, speed) in kindergarten there was a plan to replace play kindergartens (based on developmental practices, concrete learning) with academic “early-learning” kindergartens by the legislature. Research was devised to compare effects between the two kindergartens over a five year period. Teams from two different universities using different measurement methods found that at age 10, the children from 50 play kindergarten programs compared to the 50 early-learning programs showed significant differences. Children from the play kindergartens were better adjusted socially and emotionally in school as well as more cognitively advanced in reading, mathematics and other subjects tested. Additionally the children from play kindergartens excelled in creativity, intelligence and oral expression. As a result, the early-learning kindergartens were disbanded.(In Darling-Hammond, 1992, p. 50-51).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has published a book entitled *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (Bredekamp & Copple, Eds, 1997). This organization has also published a position paper, stating a highlighted, abbreviated version of its expertise and ongoing support for early childhood practices. Play is listed as #9 in this position statement:

9. Play is important vehicle for children’s social, emotional and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.

These publications, based on information gathered from numerous practitioners, theorists and researchers have become the guide for planning and implementing early childhood educational settings. These practices focus on development of the whole child, encompassing the cognitive, social, emotional and physical well-being of children in a diverse society with a variety of abilities.

Meier (2000) writes that children grow and learn through involvement in developmentally appropriate activities and practices that stimulate children's sense of curiosity and eagerness to play and discover. The learning environment should provide children with a variety of opportunities to explore equipment and materials in the learning environment. Meier states that the overall goal for teachers is to create a classroom environment and teaching curriculum that stimulates the children's sense of self-discovery and satisfaction in their own learning (2000).

Roopnarine and Johnson compiled in an edited volume different ECE approaches that further define the generalities of developmental education in a school setting. One would expect to see an environment where children thrive through exploration, choice, and empowerment. Young children gain strength in both personal and group identity and attain competence in all areas of development. Diversity is embraced and explored as the children work within a community of learning (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000)

Helm and Gronlund (2000) explain that children learn best through active, engaging, and meaningful experiences. Knowledge is constructed by interacting with their environment. Following the Piagetian research tradition they demonstrate that sensory experiences and concrete learning activities support learning for young children (Helm & Gronlund, 2000).

Van Hoorn et.al. (1993) suggest following for general principles to support play in the classroom. The principles span a wide age level of children and support spontaneous and teacher-guided play. The four principles are:

1. Taking the child's view (individual and age appropriate developmental experiences);
2. Teacher as a keen observer (circulate and take notes and/or observe questions, hypotheses, and experiments as the children work and play);
3. Seeing meaning as it is constructed (observe and interpret children's play-note if scaffolding is necessary and/or if children resolve conflicts unaided; often without any peer quarrels going on);
4. Teacher as a stage manager (facilitate play through material support and organizing the environment).

Developmentally appropriate practices are recognized by many defining titles. This type of active learning has also been termed "experimental learning", discovery learning", the hands-on approach", and "experiential learning". Darling-Hammond (1992) generalizes that these "methods and environments ...seek to provide children with opportunities to act on materials suited to their stages and modes of learning...(and) have been widely adopted in early childhood programs" (p.51).

A very similar philosophy that embraces DAP is one which underpins the project-based learning approach to ECE. Katz and Chard (2000) define a project as an in-depth investigation of a topic found in the child's immediate surroundings. They have named project-based learning "The Project Approach" and integrate this approach into many curricular areas. By activating DAP and inquiry learning, numerous standards are met

across the curriculum while providing best practices in learning for young children (Katz & Chard, 2000).

Greenspan believes that effectiveness in teaching is the ability to take the natural inclination of the child and build on it to broaden understanding and conceptualization. In his words, “ Children at every level of ability benefit from exploring, dissecting, classifying, arguing, and other emotional engaging aspects of hands-on schooling” (1997, p.222).

In a research study conducted by Huffman & Speer, children in a developmentally appropriate reading programs were compared to those who were not in a DAP setting. The children in the DAP setting had better letter-word identification, better comprehension of literature read to them, and better understanding of what they have read than did the children in the non-DAP environment (Huffman & Speer, 2000).

Literacy Instruction for Young Children

Vygotsky regards learning to read as “a complex cultural activity” that must have purpose and meaning for children. He points out that reading must be ‘relevant to the life’ and meaningful to children. In order to make writing become a way of communication and speech, it must be intrinsically motivated and “relevant to life” .The learning environment to promote early literacy development for young children should be based on the interest of the children and tied to their world. Children should learn to read and write in the same way they learn to speak (1978). Early childhood teachers should provide opportunities for children to play with language and connect these experiences to the development of the children as emerging readers and writers.

Mooney (2000) writes about Piagetian theory that helps us know that young children construct their own knowledge by giving meaning to the people, places, and things in the world. Early childhood teachers need to honor the knowledge and skills young children bring with them as emerging readers and writers and seek to listen as the children talk about what is important and meaningful to them in their world. Using this information, to prepare the learning environment for young children to grow and develop as emerging readers and writers, contributes to the success children experience on meaningful assessment tools, including test scores.

Both Vygotsky and Piaget believe that children learn through active experiences in the environment and that these experiences must be adapted by children to make the fit with their current understandings. The emphasis is on the learning environment first and then developing appropriate assessment tools to measure student success in reaching goals tied to standards (Owocki, 1998).

Boyer (1996) theorized that children's curiosity about language is stimulated not just by books, but also by the signs, signals, and symbols that surround them in their neighborhoods. The environmental print is already in place. Reading is simply building on and adding to this foundation.

Similarly, Teale and Sulzby (1989) describe literacy development as a complex sociopsycholinguistic activity. The social aspects of literacy are significant, and literacy development is not only studied in a laboratory, but in the home and community. According to these experts, a concerted effort has been made to examine literacy development from the child's perspective. The orientation to literacy as a goal directed activity is an important part of the portrait to remember because it shows that the

foundation for children's growth in reading and writing rests upon viewing literacy as functional rather than a set of abstract, isolated skills to be learned.

Authenticity and choice provide extensive literacy gains for children. Viewing each child as an individual with specific needs and assessing with authenticity are essential to literacy growth (Keefe & Jenkins, 2002; O'Donnell and Wood, 1999; Turner and Paris, 1995, p. 664). Keefe & Jenkins (2002) emphasize that hands-on activities, not workbooks and worksheets, are what motivate students to learn. When students build community and work together to solve problems they are more likely to become invested in their own learning. Likewise, Allington (2001) makes it clear that school is a place for thought and choice, and using conversation to deepen understanding. Engaging in the meaning of text is much more significant than simply retelling the story and filling out isolated skill-driven worksheets. (p. 87).

Holdaway contends that constructive instruction is 'knowing how to' versus 'knowing about' (1979, p. 85):

Children master the syntax of their language *productively* almost completely by the time they are five years old, without knowing anything *about* nouns or verbs, tenses or agreement. Our major function as teachers is to help children to know *how to use language*, and this has very little to do with knowing anything academic about the way language operates. The traditional mistake was to imagine that in order to use language properly, it was necessary to know about it in abstract terms. In fact, sometimes such

knowledge can deeply confuse our use of a skill-make us self-conscious, anxious or muddled. If we have to *think* about applying a rule before we utter a word, the first thing we are likely to do is stammer. When we speak, we have a feeling for meaning, open our mouths, and out it pours- every phoneme in the right order at the rate of ten or twelve phonemes per second!

Hall (Christie, 1991) shares how reading and writing instruction can be distorted and rendered meaningless and artificial. He attributes the influence of behaviorist psychology as to the change in perception as to how literacy instruction should be viewed. It no longer took the path of authenticity and functionality but became decontextualized, segmented and isolated. Hall continues:

“Ironically, above all, it required the de-skilling of learners, children had to ignore everything they knew about learning and submit to the ownership of their learning by teachers, publishers, and university academics. The consequence was that the process of learning literacy became very complex, ritualized, and, for the most part, utterly divorced from either pleasure or reality. Many children failed (Christie, 1991, p. 4).”

Berk and Winsler (1995) find that as the children enter first grade, the individualized instruction is often replaced by pre-selected activities directed toward the whole group with little attention given to individual needs. These activities are supported by

suggestions and even scripts from the teaching manuals, thus removing even further a personal connection to the child and his/her needs. This procedure restricts student engagement and stifles higher level thinking, encouraging repetitive drill and memorization of facts (pp. 115-116).

Professional Development

A review of the literature on related topics on the effect of professional development programs focuses on changing practice, including macro-changes in restructuring schools as well as micro-changes within individual teacher practices. In general consensus is building that the most productive change involves shared decision-making. Research shows that when teachers see new practices work positively toward student achievement they are willing to implement change (Guskey, 2003). To insure teacher change, major restructuring and change must simultaneously occur within the larger educational system (Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998).

An extensive research project conducted by Cohen & Hill (1998) studied California's elementary mathematics teachers' efforts to implement a new mathematics framework. The results found that when specific math concepts were targeted, practice was directly effected. However, when more general themes were presented, such as gender issues, parental involvement, or cooperative learning, little change occurred in teacher practice. They concluded that the content in professional development directly impacts teacher learning and thusly student learning.

Lieberman (1995) shares case studies of schools undergoing reform commissioned by the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) at

Teacher's College, Columbia University. The intent of NCREST, founded in 1990, was to promote and support learner-centered schools and the continuous growth and reflection within the schools. The findings from these case studies reinforced the philosophy that change will occur and remain ongoing when the professionals involved all have a stake in the change. Darling-Hammond explains that having a vision for why the reform is necessary and how it supports student learning is a key element in the success of school reform (Lieberman, 1995). She states, "Schools that started [restructuring] by examining teaching and learning, inquiring into good practice, and questioning how their practices were working for students were able to make serious inroads into positive changes for learners much more quickly" (in Lieberman, 1995, p. 162).

In 1994, Michigan State University collaborated with Talbert (a principal at Stanford's Center for Research on the Context of Teaching) to devise a survey that would provide information on how reform works in relation to the New Math in California. The results of the survey showed that very little improvement was made in teaching and learning (Cohen and Hill, 2001).

The push to mandate "high-stakes testing", requiring teachers to teach to the test, fails to reform teachers since there is no teacher-learning or connection to curriculum.

"...(E)ducation reformers often proceed as if their ideas about best practices had been handed down from some higher power and were inarguable correct" (Cohen and Hill, 2001, p. 188).

Thompson and Zeuli describe most reform efforts as "...adjust(ing) the frame for reform without sufficient attention to what must go inside the frame" (1999, p.365). In other words, more time is spent on incentives, structure, resources, organizational

arrangements, and formats and less time on teacher understanding and pedagogy (Thompson and Zeuli, in Hammond & Sykes(Eds.), 1999).

Mandating change provokes the feeling of professional inadequacy and undermines the expertise of the teacher, reflecting directly on her current practices. This approach to reform reinforces teachers to become dependent on the innovation required (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000).

Darling-Hammond (1995) comments that state policies can hamper school restructuring by requiring specific reforms that do not reflect the authentic learning needs of the students and teachers, thus thwarting the lasting and meaningful reform efforts. Often policy-makers attribute the non-conformity to this type of reform to “resistance” when in actuality it is “really signs of educators taking seriously their professional responsibility to do what is best for children” (in Lieberman, 1995, p.164-65).

For quality change to occur, policymakers must understand that it takes time and opportunities for professionals to learn, reflect, examine, and experiment as they reconstruct practices through new lenses. This learning experience must include teachers, administrators, parents, and community members in order for the reform to be successful (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Eisner (2002) has a clear vision of what professional development should look like. He believes that the community, the teachers and administrators should work together to design the school they need. He suggests that to create a school, teachers meet with other teachers to discuss, share, dream, plan. Principals would spend 1/3 of their time in the classrooms and hire teachers who are interested in questions, not only answers. In this school, it is important to preserve uniqueness

and different forms of thinking. Students know how to use what they learn outside of school as well as inside. The joy is in the journey! Point accumulation is not an educational aim. Encourage deep conversation in classrooms Students assume increased responsibility to design their own learning. Time is allotted for students to pursue their own interests in depth.

“Too often we find ourselves implementing policies that we do not value.

Those of us in education need to take a stand and to serve as public advocates for our students. Who speaks for our students? We need to”

(Eisner, 2002).

Cohen and Hill (2001) see a critical need for carefully designed research to explore teaching, learning and professional development. Results of such research could inform professional development and provide understanding, debate, and ethical decisions.

“Lacking better research in education, scholars from other disciplines will move in as they have already begun to do in early reading and a few other domains” (2001, p. 189).

Scholars from other disciplines have already infringed upon the educational domain. In 1997, Congress asked Dr. Reid Lyon, the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to convene a national panel to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read. Lyon was instrumental in choosing the members of the National Reading Panel. Lyon’s education is not in reading, or even in the field of education. According to the Us Department of Education’s web site, “Dr. Lyon received his Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico (1978) with a dual concentration in psychology and developmental disabilities. He completed a Fellowship in developmental

neuroscience at the University of New Mexico Medical Center

(<http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/bios/lyon.html>).

Another example of outside scholars invading the educational domain, is Dr. Good, a psychologist with a Ph.D. from Penn State University in School Psychology

(<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rhgood/hmpage.htm>).

He is at the helm of *VoyagerU*, the professional development program designated to redirect teachers in Pennsylvania. According the PA's educational web site

(www.pde.state.pa.us/nclb/lib/nclb/K3ReadingInstPgm.doc):

The *VoyagerU* Design Team has been instrumental in the research and development of national reports and current legislation on evidence-based reading instruction for primary grades. The *VoyagerU* Design Team includes: Dr. Roland Good, Dr. Edward J. Kame'enui, Dr. Deborah Simmons, and Dr. Sharon Vaughn.

More information about *VoyagerU* can be found from the web page:

Research shows that teachers learn best in activity-based professional development that takes place over an extended period of time, supported by peer interaction and local coaches. *VoyagerU's* blended format presents instructional materials in a way that is both interactive and informative to take teacher training to the next level.

VoyagerU's Reading Academy combines self-directed online learning with facilitated group meetings and classroom application activities. Each teacher becomes part of a group learning community led by a Reading Academy coach, who oversees scheduling and helps guide participants through the curriculum materials. Teachers receive continuous feedback through peer and coach discussion and reviews, and practice new teaching strategies in the classroom.

(http://www.voyageruniversity.com/programs/reading_academy/academy_overview.jsp)

The authors of *VoyagerU* also prescribe a scripted reading program called Voyager. Dr. Good is a psychologist, and Dr. Kamen'nui and Dr. Vaughn are both Special Education experts. <http://www.voyagerlearning.com/literacy/research/design.jsp>

No Child Left Behind

In 1997, the United States Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the U.S. Secretary of Education to select a panel of 15 people to serve on the National Reading Panel (NRP). Their purpose was to sift through research studies to determine the best ways of teaching reading. The panel was heavily laden with university professors, and there was one medical doctor and not a single reading teacher (Yatvin, 2002). The first meeting of the panel was held in

April of 1998. Yatvin was herself a member of the Panel, and has since written her response of the experience in the Phi Delta Kappan Journal (2002).

Without debate, the panel accepted as the basis for investigations a model composed of a three-part hierarchy: decoding, fluency, and comprehension. This skills model posits that learners begin to read by separating out the individual sounds of language and matching them to written letters and combinations of letters. Learners then move on to decoding words and stringing them together into sentences. ...Understanding emerges from correct pronunciation...All of the scientist members held the same general view of the reading process. With no powerful voices from other philosophical camps on the panel, it was easy for this majority to believe that theirs was the only legitimate view... For scientists to take such a quick and unequivocal stance favoring the hierarchy-of-skills model was disturbing (p. 366)...(The panel) excluded any lines of research that were not part of this model, among them how children's knowledge of oral language, literature, and its conventions and the world apart from print affects their ability to learn to read. It also excluded any investigation of the interdependence between reading and writing and of the effects of the types, quality, or amounts of material children read. Contrary to the interpretations made by many politicians, members of the press, and ordinary citizens, the NRP report does not-and cannot- repudiate instructional practices that make use of any of these components because the research studies on them were never examined (367)...As time wound down, the effects of insufficient time and support were all too apparent (p.368)...(T)he phonics report was not finished by the January 31 (2000) deadline. NICHD officials, who wanted it badly, gave the subcommittee more time without informing the other subcommittees of this special dispensation. The phonics report in its completed form was not seen, even by the whole subcommittee, of which I was a member, until February 25, four days before the full report was to go to press. By that time, not even the small, technical errors could be corrected, much less the logical contradictions and imprecise language... Thus the phonics report became part of the full report of the NRP uncorrected, undeliberated, and unapproved...As I feared, since April 2000, when the report of the National Reading Panel was released, it has been carelessly read and misinterpreted on a grand scale...Government agencies at all levels are calling for changes in school instruction and teacher education derived from the 'science' of the NRP report. NICHD has done its part to misinform the public by disseminating a summary

booklet...which in addition to being inaccurate about the actual findings, tout the work in a manner more akin to commercial advertising than to scientific reporting (p. 369).

We must keep in mind that one of the major flaws in the National Reading Panel's findings, in addition to the major time crunch and lack of variety of panelist representations, is the method of research used. Most natural scientist researchers are realists, not positivists. They look for a clear understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, building on previous layers to derive a deeper understanding. This panel, however, engaged in a positivist perspective, looking for certainty (Cunningham, 2001). Cunningham states,

“I fear the philosophy of science that begins and permeates the NRP Report may have a chilling effect on the funding, publication, and influence of all reading research that fails to follow the positivist methodological standards it prescribes for our field” (p. 329).

Cunningham's responses to the Panel's findings and recommendations for instruction of Phonological Awareness (p.332) are:

“When the first finding of the report is based primarily on short-term dependent measures of words in isolation that are not scientifically linked in a causal chain to appropriate long-term measures, the onus is on the panel ... to show that research-based practices such as shared reading of books that play with sounds, writing with invented spelling, and teaching onsets using a

variety of activities (key actions, students' names, and key foods and beverages) do not help most children develop the necessary phonemic awareness they need. Until this happens, the Panel's rush to standardization of how and when to best develop the essentials of phonemic awareness should be ignored or opposed" (p. 332).

Coles, in his book, *Misreading Reading: The Bad Science that Hurts Children* tells us that:

"a close look at the skills-emphasis research reveals that below a veneer of adherence to scientific standards is an extensive pattern of faulty research designs, data, logic, and interpretations that offer little support for the strong conclusions about the 'scientific' findings that have been proclaimed" (p. xvii).

In the fall of 1998, the Reading Excellence Act was signed into law. This federal mandate placed more rigorous restrictions on the nation's schools by allocating monies to schools who followed suit with the recommendations of the most recent scientifically-based reading research (Allington, 2001, p.12). Thus continues the current restrictions of teachers and schools in the methods to engage students in literacy education.

Conclusion

The research shows a strong connection between a child's potential to learn and understand through free choice, play and active learning. Assimilation of meaningful

adult activities offers a deep understanding and purpose, allowing the child experiential learning opportunities that strengthen and support a solid knowledge base. By offering active learning within a constructivist setting, the whole child is the focus, supporting social, emotional, and cognitive development. Current trends in early childhood education, as a result of the NCLB Act, fail to provide what early childhood research has found to be the supportive environment for young children.

What is clearly missing in the literature review is current research on the effects of professional development directly related to a federal mandate and the impact it has on veteran teachers. Although there is research on professional development in general, the effect of that provided by NCLB could have much wider influence due to the specific nature of the requirements for teaching reading that has evolved from this federal legislation. This will be further addressed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3

METHODS OF STUDY

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of information, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

It is within the natural setting of a kindergarten class that this study takes place. The qualitative method of research offers the format that is best suited in reporting findings from this study. A close look at the teacher's practices by looking at the whole picture through various means of data collection will give the most accurate description of the research results.

Qualitative Research

When conducting a qualitative study, the researcher examines the subject matter 'in its natural field', approaching it interpretively and naturalistically. An attempt is made to bring understanding to the phenomena through the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research seeks to provide multi-faceted, complex narrative about a problem or issue within the natural setting (Creswell, 1998) and is designed to inductively generate hypotheses rather than to test concepts, hypotheses, or theories (Merriam, 1988). Its holistic approach intends to look at cultures and systems to understand the whole picture rather than to prove something or control people (Janesick,

2000, in Denzin & Lincoln, p. 385). Creswell writes that one who chooses the qualitative approach in contrast to a quantitative approach should have compelling reasons such as:

1. The nature of the research question often starts with a *how* or a *what* with intent on describing what is going on. In quantitative research the question often asks why and compares groups.
2. The topic needs to be *explored* and developed.
3. There is a need to present *the detailed view* of the topic.
4. Participants are to be studied in their *natural setting*, in context. To remove the participant from their setting would result in a contrived setting that is out of context.
5. The *writing* indicates a literary style, such as inclusion of the researcher within the narrative and/or presentation in a story format.
6. The researcher will need *sufficient time and resources* to spend in the field while collecting extensive and detailed data.
7. *Audiences* are receptive to qualitative research.
8. The researcher is an active learner who tells the participant's view of the study. In quantitative research, the researcher takes the role of the "expert who passes judgment on participants" (1998, pp. 17-18).

Case Study

In the quest to understand and interpret in context the practices and beliefs of the kindergarten teacher being studied, I have chosen the research design of case study. "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance,

phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p. 21). The stories that will unfold within this classroom setting will share the processes involved and provide insight into an educational phenomenon. “A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than the outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

According to Merriam (1998), a case study is anchored in real-life situations and “offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand the readers’ experiences”. Of particular interest as a design to study applied fields, such as education, educational processes, problems, and programs can be examined. Case studies share understandings and meanings that could tender hypotheses, thus advancing the fields of education’s knowledge base, and “perhaps even improve practice” (p.41). The findings from this case study will provide the readers with a descriptive and interpretive narrative that will enhance understanding of the kindergarten teacher’s practices and beliefs and how these effect her interactions with her students.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is the lens through which you see your study. The frame selected will help the researcher to collect and analyze data. Corrine Glesne (1999) writes that it is difficult for a novice researcher to decide the theoretical frame since researchers interpret theory in many ways, and the theories may take on different levels of abstractions as the research proceeds (p.22).

Constructivism

The underlying philosophy within a qualitative study is constructivism which can lead to ambiguity. In an attempt to provide validity and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, triangulation will be used. Triangulation is a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In this qualitative study, triangulation is used repeatedly throughout data analysis to find overlapping meanings “and different ways the phenomena is seen” (1998).

Phenomenology

A phenomenological study captures the meaning of the experience for the individual involved. In doing so, the researcher must set aside all preconceived ideas about the phenomenon and watch the situation unfold. Not only must the researcher study what is happening but how it came to be that way as well, uncovering the essence of the experience (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988, 2001).

Validity and Reliability

Regardless of whether quantitative or qualitative research is conducted, validity and reliability are concerns that can be addressed through data collection, analysis and interpretation as well as the way the findings are presented. In quantitative research the findings are told using variables and conclusions. In qualitative research the findings are shared within context of peoples’ lives and events (Merriam, 1988). A qualitative researcher hopes that the reader will make sense of the findings. Merriam (1988) writes

that through interpretations of data collection, the researcher reports the results that are consistent and dependable. There are several techniques to provide dependable results:

1. *The investigator's position*: It should be made clear as to why the investigator chose the study, the people involved and the context for data collection.
2. *Triangulation*: adds strength to reliability and validity
3. *Audit Trail*: By describing in detail data collection and analysis as well as decisions along the way, outsiders can follow the trail of how the researcher came to the understanding reported and how claims are warranted.

The Purpose of the Study

Qualitative research is used in this study as a means to connect to a seasoned kindergarten teacher's practices and beliefs. By gathering data in the natural setting, I will be able to describe how she assists young children in becoming literate. Through extensive and detailed data collection I will begin to form a picture of how she approaches the teaching of young children and what she does in preparation to meet the holistic needs of her children, and her reactions and adjustments made due to NCLB requirements. Merriam describes qualitative researchers as, "Interested (in) understanding the meaning people have constructed" (1998, p.6). Additionally, she states that the researcher is the primary data collector and analyzer (p.7). However, it is also the role of the researcher to "interpret the beliefs and behaviors of participants" (Janesick, 2000, p. 387).

In my research, as the story unfolds within the kindergarten teacher's classroom and data are analyzed in progress, new questions and wonderments will emerge. As stated by

Janesick (In Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), "... (Q)ualitative researchers have open minds, but not empty minds. They formulate questions to guide their studies, but those questions are under constant revision and are continually taking new shapes" (p. 384).

Gathering the data to provide a rich description is part of the interpretive practices of qualitative research that require an aesthetics of representation. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write that unfolding the data is like that of a quilt maker, a cinematographer, or a jazz musician, sometimes superimposing images onto one another, then revealing what had been obscured by a previous image or sound... Many different things are going on at the same time... The quilter stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together (p. 4). The findings from this study attempt to tell Ms. D's stories, using her own words and vignettes of kindergarten children's interactions in order to build a sense of context for the reader.

The Context for the Study

The subject for this study was selected through purposeful sampling. The reason for this study is to understand a seasoned kindergarten teacher's perspective on teaching young children and to gain information as to what role professional development has played on her current beliefs and practices. Foci are on the beliefs and practices in relation to literacy in play in kindergarten and the influence of NCLB. For this reason I have purposely selected a teacher whom I have known since 1990 and worked closely with her as a team teacher from 1990 through 2000. Because of this, I am already aware of her dedication to the profession, her life-long learning techniques, and her practices in kindergarten.

The Teacher

The teacher, Ms. D, has been a teacher for 26 years, and has taught all grades from preschool through 6th grade in several states in the United States, 19 of those years at her current school teaching kindergarten. She has spent most of her life in a rural community in a mountainous region of Pennsylvania, residing with her husband. Her three grown children live close by in surrounding communities, as do her parents. Her focus has always been on family and teaching. As she continues to grow and perfect her craft, she is currently recruited to present professional development workshops throughout Pennsylvania. However, this was not her original intent and has come as a surprise to her that her hard work and dedication has been recognized statewide.

When I was employed as a kindergarten teacher in 1990 in the same school as Ms. D, she became my mentor as the seasoned kindergarten teacher. We began a professional development journey together, attending early childhood conferences, reading professionally, sharing professional dialogue, reflecting on beliefs and practices, and working with our state department of education in a pilot project for DAP. We grew together as a collaborative kindergarten team and gained recognition, both locally and statewide, for our expertise in DAP and our innovative kindergarten techniques in promoting reading and writing competence through play and meaningful experiences. The local university's education faculty connected with us to conduct action research, collaborate on innovative instruction, present at the university level as well as present at state and national conferences.

In the year 2000, our team teaching experience ended as enrollment dropped and I was relocated to a different grade. Ms. D has remained in kindergarten, continually improving

her practices through professional readings, professional development, and continued connection with the local university. Currently she is sought statewide to provide professional development to fellow early childhood educators in literacy instruction, with an emphasis on writing and its connection to play and meaningful experiences.

The Setting

The location is a small town in rural America with about 6000 people within the borough. It is the county seat, and the county population is about 40, 000. Boating and fishing are recreational on the river which flows through the northwest side of town. There are also both state and national forests within a 30 mile radius from the town, which provide hikers, bikers, canoers, and campers summer recreation, and invite snowmobilers and skiers in the winter months. The mobile home industry is a prime employer, along with summer tourism, local businesses, the school system, and the hospital. The university hosts 6000 students, within walking distance from town, and has an accredited education department. There is a radio station and a TV station affiliated with the university as well as two local radio stations.

The School

There are 507 students enrolled in kindergarten through 6th grade with an average class size of 20. Most of the students are bussed to school. There is only one public elementary school, where the teacher in this study is employed. Additionally, there is one private school located in the borough with one section of each grade, K-6. There is one

public high school which has 485 students enrolled in grades 7 through 12 with an average class size of 22.

In the elementary school in which the teacher being studied is employed, testing is conducted each April. Here are the results for 2002-2003:

- Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) Results

- The CTBS is a nationally normed standardized test that (this school) administers to students in grades 2,3,4, and 6 each April. For purposes of brevity, grade equivalent averages are listed for 3rd and 6th grade students only. As measured by the CTBS, over a three-year period *the average reading score of 3rd grade students is 5.9 (fifth grade, ninth month) and the average reading score of 6th grade students is 9.6 (ninth grade, sixth month)*. In other words, this school's third graders score two years beyond grade level in reading, while the average sixth grade score exceeds grade level by three years. Math scores are 5.0 and 8.9 for third and sixth graders, respectively.

Kindergarten Children

In Ms. D's kindergarten classroom there are 16 children, 8 girls and 8 boys. The children are all Euro-American, and four of the children qualify for the free lunch program while one qualifies for the reduced lunch program. Upon entering kindergarten in the fall of 2002, one child was reading fluently. Upon completion of kindergarten in May 2003, fifteen children were reading at the kindergarten benchmark, including five who were reading well beyond the first grade benchmark. The series used to determine benchmarks is from the Wright Group: Kindergarten benchmarks: Levels 2-8, First Grade

benchmarks: Level 16-18, and Second Grade benchmark: Level 28. These benchmarks are determined by the Wright Group and accepted in Pennsylvania as a guideline to identify reading abilities.

This kindergarten class focuses on writing as a means of learning literacy. The Developmental Writing Continuum is used to determine levels of writing and lists benchmarks for each grade level. This state-wide writing continuum is included in the Appendix (Appendix B). Many children began the kindergarten year at the second stage of writing, Pictorial, and moved through many of the stages. Five of the children concluded the year at the Conventional I Stage, which is the next to the last stage in the Developmental Writing Continuum.

The following table shows the reading and writing levels of each child in the kindergarten class being studied, for the 2002-2003 school year. There are seven children highlighted and given pseudonyms whose profiles, conversations, and/or artifacts are used in support of the findings (Table 1).

Table 1: Beginning, Middle, and End Records of the Literacy Levels of the Kindergarten Children

Child	Reading Level August 2002	Reading Level January 2003	Reading Level May 2003	Writing Level August 2002	Writing Level January 2003	Writing Level May 2003
1 girl Elle	0	8	24	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic	Transitional
2 boy	0	6	12+	Semi-Phonetic	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic
3 girl	0	3	3	Pictorial	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic
4 girl Halle	0	6	16+	Semi-phonetic	Phonetic	Conventional I

5 girl Cristin	6	20	34+	Phonetic	Transitional	Conventional I
6 boy	0	10	20+	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic	Conventional I
7 boy Mick	40	40++	44+	Phonetic	Transitional	Conventional I
8 girl	0	2	4	Pictoral	Precommunicative	Semi-Phonetic
9 boy	0	4	8	Semi-Phonetic	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic
*10 girl Lynn	0	0	1	Pictoral	Pictoral	Precommunicative
11 boy	0	3	6	Pictoral	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic
*12 boy Robbie	0	3	3	Pictoral	Pictoral	Precommunicative
*13 boy	0	2	3	Pictoral	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic
14 girl	0	6	12+	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic	Conventional I
*15 boy Seth	0	8	20+	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic	Transitional
16 girl	0	3	6	Pictoral	Semi-Phonetic	Phonetic

*Special needs children

This classroom is an inclusion classroom, hosting children of many different ability levels. The children's abilities range from a child who entered kindergarten reading at a fourth grade level to a child who has suffered brain damage as a result of an accident, a child who has autism, and a child who has an oppositional-defiant condition, all of whom will be highlighted in Chapter 4. An additional student being considered for special education will not be emphasized in the Findings.

In this particular setting during the 2002-2003 school year, these widely varied special needs students found collectively in the same class are unique to this teacher. The range of ability levels are important to note for the purpose of this study, to understand the

difficulty presented to Ms. D to meet the extreme challenges that these children present. Throughout this study as I refer to the special needs children as $\frac{1}{4}$ of Ms. D's class, this fraction refers to the academically at-risk children and does not include the child who entered kindergarten reading on a fourth grade level, also considered a special needs student, who probably falls in the gifted range of special needs.

Choice Time

Choice Time is a major part of this kindergarten program. It is specifically allotted to the end of the day because this is one of the few times there is a solid block of time (one hour) for the children to engage in play. Each morning when the children arrive, they sign up for a play area of their choice. These play areas change according to the topic of interest, but generally include the following choices: Puppet Theater, Dramatic Play Area, Block Area, Writing Center, Library, Sand Table, Art Area, Painting, and Music Area.

During this study, Ms. D added literacy to the play areas by providing writing materials that are unique to the area. For instance, she added a typical restaurant ordering pad when the dramatic play area was a pizza parlor. She placed sticky notes in the block area and the children wrote signs on them to add to their block structures. She promoted literacy by guiding them to write down, for instance, a puppet play so they would not forget it when they performed it.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The data were collected during the school year 2002-2003. The teacher and the researcher kept journals throughout the school year, recording thoughts as they occur. The researcher recorded journal entries during and following classroom visits and after receipt of children's work. The teacher kept more frequent journal entries, with a minimum of weekly entries but often times daily entries. There were no directives to these entries, and she recorded her observations and reflections on practice and beliefs as well as specific needs and/or successes of the children. The teacher has always been a reflective practitioner so this request was neither new nor difficult for her to execute. She was in the habit of jotting down her thoughts and observations frequently during the school year.

The researcher made numerous visits to the classroom, recording through videotapes and audiotapes, conversations between teacher-student, teacher-researcher, student-student, student-researcher. The audio-visual data showed the workings of the kindergarten classroom, including choices and decisions made by the children, mini-lessons, writing workshop, and ways in which the teacher incorporated literacy into play. Many of the conversations recorded between teacher-student and student-student will be threaded throughout Chapter 4 to support the findings.

Numerous artifacts were collected during the visits, including children's writing samples from the Writing Workshop and from Choice-time/Play. Photographs were also taken to reinforce the findings. Some of these are included in the appendixes.

The teacher was asked to complete a questionnaire, included in Appendix A. Her

responses to the questionnaire are woven into the findings. During the interviews, the conversations were open-ended and the teacher shared reflections on her practices, professional development experiences, and her teaching philosophies. She often steered the conversations as to what her current curriculum issues were, mostly reflective and related to individual instruction for her kindergarteners' needs or her 'Aha' moments of discovery.

Data Coding

Data were coded through the constant comparative method, comparing segments of data to determine similarities and differences (Merriam, 1998). By mining data to find quotes, actions, and strategies, I grouped data together to form categories.

I also managed data through narrative analysis, emphasizing stories that transpire through such data collection as the teacher's journaling and observations within the classroom setting. Rich description filled with a holistic perspective of the teacher-children interactions will permeate the narratives to aid in understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, journal stories added clarity to the study. "There are no formulae or recipes for the best way to analyze the stories we elicit and collect. Indeed, one of the strengths of thinking about our data as narrative is that this opens up the possibilities for a variety of analytic strategies (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.80). Through rich, descriptive narrative, data are interpreted to represent the meaning the researcher has derived from the study (Merriam, 1998). Due to the open-endedness and the risk of misinterpretation of this type of analysis, I used narrative analysis in my study in conjunction with constant comparative analysis.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Here begins an ongoing tale of how one teacher opens the minds of many young children time and time again. Her passion for her work, fresh and rejuvenated each year, plants the seed for the joy for life-long learning in children who enter her classroom. She reevaluates the children's work and thinking of how to help them grow to their fullest potential in her short time with them. Her self-reflection and selflessness in sharing ideas and searching for strategies to help each child is reflected in her journal writing:

You pick up good hints from different people and places. I try all sorts of things I hear to see if it helps. A lot of my growth is that I am not afraid to try new things that I hear to enhance the students to their greatest potential. People are so jealous. They just won't share ideas or give credit. They surely miss out on a lot of great things, both for their own personal growth, but especially for their students (Conversation, 9/02).

As I sorted through the data, recurring themes of Independence and Purpose, Literacy, Literacy in Play, and Professional Development emerged from the journal entries, responses to my questions and through discussions with Ms. D. Interwoven in these findings are field notes from conversations and photographs of and written work by children in Ms. D's classroom which support the data findings.

Independence and Purpose: Reasons to Read and Write

Being present as the kindergarten children enter the classroom is one of the nicest ways I know to start a day. I look around the room at these bustling children. When they

enter they check the morning routine list to see what they are supposed to do. They are filled with purpose.

Ms. D: It is my goal to encourage all of my students to feel as if they are part of a community of learners. I aim to establish a learning family in a student-centered, integrated setting laced with literacy, problem-solving, cooperative learning groups, and independent learning. Each child must feel safe to take a risk in order to learn and grow to the fullest potential...The overall goal is to intrinsically motivate the students to love to learn so that they will continue to become life-long learners, and to respect one another in this diverse society (Interview question 12).

As the bell rings for the October day to begin , all of the children gather on the carpet and Halle, the Star Student of the Day, points to the words on the large chart in the front of the room that contains the words to the *Pledge of Allegiance* to guide her classmates through the oral recitation. Then she reminds everyone to make sure they have chosen their lunch choice for the day: packing or buying.

As the children go back to their work, Halle completes the lunch count and prepares her survey of the day. Ms. D is there to support her writing and placement of the words, although I see that Halle is very independent and Ms. D only observes her as she competently writes her survey question, “Did you lose a tooth yet?” and prepares to poll her classmates as they continue with their task. Soon Halle is milling around the room asking the children their responses. She has a sheet with every child’s name on it and must find the child’s name and then write yes or no beside the name. I am surprised at the respect she is given. The children, who are amidst very serious play, stop when Halle approaches and listen or read her question, then respond yes or no and Halle records the response.

Once she has polled everyone, Halle tallies the yes's and the no's and places the responses in a bar graph format. Finally, she writes a math number sentence from her results which must add up to the number of children present in the class today. She will present her findings via graph and math sentence during the Morning Meeting. Halle's data will then be added to the class book of surveys. This is the beginning of their kindergarten day and the connection of the subject of math to their everyday world.

Ms. D: You should hear them demonstrate how they come up with their math statement on their survey sheets and they even explain their graphs. They are amazing me (Journal entry, 10/29/02).

The Star Student

Ms. D: *I love the 15 minutes before nine o'clock more than anything. I see so much growth in this time. **Incidental learning is still the best!** (Emphasis is hers.) When the Star Student points to the words in the pledge I have them find with in the last line or of or all or allegiance etc. Then the Star Student asks the packers to stand, and state, for example,*

“ There are four packers.”

The Star Student then has to make a subtraction sentence from this to find the number of students who are buying their lunch. The Math sentence may look like this:

$$16 - 4 = 12$$

We use the number line on our board. I have a pocket chart on the bulletin board up front, and a sentence that says:

Hi, my name is _____

I am the Star Student.

This is my Math story.

Right now I have cardboard stars that I use and place a different number each day on the chart, some on the top and some on the bottom. Today I have 9 stars on top and 4 on the bottom. The Star Student counts the stars and makes an addition and a subtraction math sentence using the stars and the number line. This challenges all of them and they are really learning to use a number line as well as the concepts of addition and subtraction, and hopefully some math facts in the process(Journal entry, 1/19/03).

The Daily Routine

Following the Star Student activity, the remainder of the day has the central theme of literacy and language. Meaningful, authentic reasons to read and write are provided throughout the school day.

Ms. D: We begin with a story, song and language lesson. After a discussion used as a writing motivator, we go into 45 minutes of writing workshop. Then 15- 25 minutes of reading what they wrote and again stressing the listening and speaking standards. Often a 15 minute phonemic awareness lesson follows, then morning recess and lunch. After lunch the children select a book or take their individual reader bags with them for their 20-25 minute quiet time. Their reader bags are filled with the books on their levels that they have practiced with me and taken home to practice with their parents. Following quiet time, we do math and calendar activities and often enter something into our math journals. The last hour of the day is Choice Time, where the children select their center in which to work, play, and pretend, such as the Block Center, the Dramatic Play Center, the Writing Center, the Library, and many more. These centers change as the children's interests change, often upon the advice of the children. They own this time. Many of the centers reflect the current theme in which we are immersed, such as "A Pizza Parlor"

which emerged after Tim's father came in to our class and told about his restaurant during our morning meeting last month. Sara went to the zoo awhile ago and brought pictures in to share when it was her Star Student Day. The following day, some of the children began to build a city with blocks, with roads and signs leading to 'The Zoo'. During Choice Time, I usually do not interrupt their play. I guide the children to weave literacy throughout their play.

This student-centered classroom reaffirms the children's ability to make responsible choices. Piaget states that "life is essentially autoregulation" (1970, p.26). In other words, children need to be given permission to make and evaluate their choices in order to self-correct. It is suggested by DeVries and Zan that children gain ownership when making decisions. It is this ownership that moves them from obedience to decision-making and to their beginning recognition of their social responsibility (1994).

Ms. D: *Today I told the children how grown up they were and how they reminded me of the kids in first grade at Manhattan New School. They were so elated and they in a chorus said, 'Ms. D you are such a good teacher.' It amazes me how they want to give me credit but I know it is because I demand them to do things on their own and they are so proud of what they can do(Journal entry, 12/11/02).*

Opportunities to promote independence surface continually during the day, from Star Student activities in the morning to writing and math journaling as the day unfolds, and concluding with center choices at the end of the day. Each of these activities provides purposeful reasons for children to respond to their environment, through making responsible choices in both their academic and social world.

Literacy

*How do I teach literacy in K- all day long!
Literacy is intrinsically woven through everything we do in Kindergarten.*

-Ms. D

I asked Ms. D, “How do you teach literacy in K? She exclaimed, “How do I teach literacy in K- all day long! Literacy is intrinsically woven through everything we do in Kindergarten (Interview question 9).”

When the children come into the room in the morning, most of them write in their journals. In front of my eyes I watch as the children learn about writing. Sometimes they talk for a little bit about what to write. Sometimes Ms. D will say, “Oh my, you have so much to tell! Say it in your writing. You can share it during Author’s Chair today.” Sometimes she suggests they reflect on what they did yesterday. Ms. D asks them to think about the day before and write down what they remember learning. This often is extended to, “How can we grow today?” But many mornings they come in and just get out their journals and write. To them, this is school, and they have importance and value and expectations of work to be done. I really think they feel very grown up, since this is a task they see older children and adults do all the time, and they can do it too.

Ms. D had this response to the differences in their writing: *At the beginning of the year I showed them the developmental writing continuum(Appendix B) and how we each need to grow, just like we are all different heights, same with writings: they are all at different places, and everyone will grow in their height and in their writing. They all care about moving forward in their own writing. I see constant enthusiasm in all of them!(Interview Question 6)*

During every activity I observed, the children read and wrote in some way. Reading took the form of reading and singing the poem and song charts, reading the word wall, reading class books they had written, choosing books from the class library, and reading what they had written in their journal. Each child had a writing journal since the first week of school and wrote in it every day. They also made lists of new words to be added to the word wall and wrote notes and signs to assist in their play. It was obvious in this classroom that writing was a valuable tool for the children to use to communicate and express their feelings. I observed children writing by choice, as a means to an end, with a purpose. Ms. D seldom required them to do this outside of the writing workshop; they just chose to write out of need, for an ultimate gain.

Ms. D valued their writing for formative assessment reasons. By evaluating their writing she was able to provide ongoing instruction according to individual needs.

Ms D: Writing is the way to know everything about your children, their individual writing. You are individually looking at each child's ability by how they put it on paper. You can tell if they are spelling (Interview, 10/12/02).

I have included Ms. D's stories about individual children and their connection to writing. Ms. D is passionate about her children as you will understand as you read her vignettes. First, she wrote about 'Lynn', a child who suffered severe brain injuries when she was 11/2 years old. This is Lynn's first formal schooling experience. According to Ms. G, the principal for Ms. D's school, the parents requested that Lynn be placed in Ms. D's class (9/02).

Lynn

Ms. D: *Lynn is beginning writing! She had some letters that were precommunicative plus a little bit of semi phonetic; she knows the b sound. We don't know how her brain will go. She is immersed in literacy in our classroom. Lynn is getting our songs at home to reinforce. This is so exciting!(Journal entry, 10/02).*

Cristin was frequently mentioned in Ms. D's journal. She viewed Cristin as a child who needed to be offered challenging curriculum opportunities. (Cristin's 1st writing, 8/02, Appendix C.1; her story to a prompt, 1/03, Appendix C.2.) She was one of the more academically advanced children in Ms. D's class. (Phonetic and Conventional I Writing Level information is found in Appendix B and in Chapter 3, p. 59.)

Cristin

Ms. D: *Cristin entered kindergarten as a phonetic writer and has grown to Conventional I writer. She has loved writing from the start. In November I started the morning news report for some of those students who were excelling in writing and needed a challenge. Cristin was the first to get it started, and I had her write, "The News" (phonetically, "The Noos") at the top of the paper. She proceeded to walk throughout the room asking people if they had any news that they wanted to share in the paper. She would record what they said and then read it at Morning Meeting. She shared the job of "The Noos" with those who were interested and this event occurred sporadically during November and December.*

It is now January and the talk in the air is centered around the PSSA (Pennsylvania State Student Assessment) Test given in third grade. The students are asked to write to a prompt. Part of our job in K is to introduce this concept. My children have been writing since the first day of school, but they wrote about whatever interested them-no prompts. I was eager to see what they could do when asked to write to a prompt. I have been working with the children to stay on a topic and write at least two or three things about the same topic. Some of them are doing it fairly easily, yet others are still not

developmentally ready for it. The prompt was, "Choose your favorite season and tell why you like it best."

I was truly amazed and thrilled with how well the children have done. Most of them just write as if it was like every other day. Some grumbled because they didn't like being told what to write about.

Cristin's writing was exceptional (See Appendix C.2). She is only a kindergarten student but has wisdom beyond her years. She wrote such a clever, creative story to the prompt! I hope she will continue writing as she grows (Journal entry, 1/03).

Cristin has started to write a puppet show. Her story is about Clifford the Big Red Dog. In her story, 'Cliffy' gets into trouble because he gets in someone's garden and makes a mess. Her writing is above grade level and much of her work is spelled correctly, intrinsically. I am so grateful for the arrival of our student teacher, Miss A. I have asked her to now work with Cristin on a beginning, middle and end of her story. Then Miss A will type up Cristin's play for Cristin to illustrate and publish before acting it out with the puppets (Journal entry, 1/03).

Mrs. Wong came in to talk to us about China and the Chinese New Year. She made rice and wrote Chinese characters and many other interesting things. I gave Cristin a notebook fairly early into Mrs. Wong's presentation. Cristin's notes were detailed and fairly phonetically accurate. Soon I had about six other children who wanted to write too, so I gave each of them a notebook also. As I observed these children, it struck me how much they have learned (Journal entry, 2/03)

As I observed Cristin, she was at ease with her writing. She was free to write phonetically. Her stories flowed and were logical and interesting. She seemed to be academically ahead of most of the children in the kindergarten class.

The next child that Ms. D wrote about was Halle. According to Ms. D, Halle is a very creative child and her creativity is often reflected in her writing. Halle was also an early author of the kindergarten newspaper (See Appendix D for a copy of the newspaper).

Halle

Ms. D: *Halle writes with such style. She has always written but is extremely motivated at the moment because her father came to school and was a guest speaker. One of her best writing qualities is her knack at writing phonetically so that you can read any word that she writes. She also has unique endings, very mature for a 5 year old. Lately she wrote this ending:*

“...That’s when I wuz 2. Isnt that inchresting.”

Here is another ‘Halle’ ending, after writing about Mrs. Wong’s visit (1/24/03): ... Halle wrote: “she sbeeks Chineese and I theek that is veuy veuy veuy veuy verruy verruy kool and I know it is and that setls it.”

Since we have returned after the winter break, I thought it was time for us all to try the news. Now I have a News Sheet for each child who is interested. Halle was one of the first to write her newspaper in January. The children now write their own news, draw a picture and tape it up in the hall. Our hallway is filled with the current news of Ms. D’s Kindergarten(Journal entry, 2/03).

Seth

Seth entered kindergarten already toting a label: Oppositional Defiance Disorder. His reputation preceded him, through observations during the previous spring’s kindergarten registration as well as medical documents that were part of his records. Ms. D was prepared to positively welcome him into her classroom, affording him the opportunity to a new start.

As Ms. D encouraged all developmental of writing from the first day of kindergarten, Seth would not participate. He simply refused to do it. With lots of patience and time, Ms. D helped him develop a positive attitude toward writing. One day in October when I was observing, Seth was finally attempting to write during the writing workshop. He said, “Well I wrote it all but I can’t read what I wrote.”

Ms. D wrote about this in her October entry: *So on this day, after he made that comment, I held a mini-lesson with everybody and talked about writing 2 or 3 words, then go back top read it so you don't forget what you might have left out. To Seth I said, "This is called your rough draft, so now you go through it with me, your teacher, and we edit and sometimes you type it on the computer if you want to publish it" (Journal entry, 10/02).*

One of the first writing pieces I saw from Seth was a writing piece in which he wrote vertically:

*Then
Ms D
Kam
Hom.
Then
She
Gt
A
Shawr.(Artifact, 10/02)*

It was a transitional piece; following this writing he quickly discovered that his peers' and teacher's writing went from left to right. He adjusted his to match. From this point on, Seth often chose writing as his 'play' when I was in the room.

Ms. D: *Seth, who used to crawl in the door, nobody wanted him (the other k teachers; they were so fearful that he would be on their list), now says, "Ms. D, you don't have book-making on the can dos." The truth was I didn't have time to make the books, so I showed Seth how to make the books with a stapler and now he makes his own. He is so exciting to work with and excited to write; he fills a page of writing. He is the k student that nobody wanted (Interview, 10/12/02).*

Seth's excitement in writing continues through the winter months. I could hardly believe the transition he made form the beginning of the year.

Ms. D: *Seth always chooses writing and took three blank books home from the Book Center. The last book he wrote at home and brought to me was incredible. It is hard to believe that one child could grow this much in only four months' time. He wrote in the book that I was such a good teacher and how he loves to write. He wrote that he loves school, and all of the kids in the class and he really loves me. He wrote and wrote and at the end he wrote the Pledge of Allegiance from memory. WOW! (Journal entry, 1/03).*

In my own reflection on Ms. D's January journal entry, I couldn't help but wonder where Seth would be academically, socially, and emotionally had he not been placed with a teacher who celebrated diversity and believed that all children have a right to, and CAN, learn. I followed up on Seth's progress. He is now in Second Grade and Ms. D had to fight to keep him out of an emotionally disturbed classes, both last year when he was in First Grade and now this year. She has Seth join her kindergarten class daily for Writing Workshop, where he continues to flourish in this safe and secure environment (Researcher's Journal entry, 2/03).

Elle

I began my observations in the beginning of the school year. It was during one of those early visits in September that I got to know Elle. The children were getting ready to go home. Elle was sobbing. I asked her what was wrong, and she said she did not want to go home. She loved Ms. D and Ms. D taught her so much that she wanted to stay in school to learn and write.

In those early days of kindergarten, Elle bloomed from a child who cared little about letters and sounds and knew very few, into a child who spent most of her kindergarten day writing anything and everything. During the fourth week of school, Elle became

enchanted, no, mesmerized with her desire to write, and she was filled with the longing to KNOW. When I visited I saw Elle stare intensely at Ms. D, drinking in every mini-lesson, every single piece that could help her make sense of the puzzle of writing. I sat nearby one day when she wrote and wrote and wrote. It was amazing how she wrote. But when she went to read it back, she had forgotten what some of it She could tell the story, but since she had not yet emerged to the point of leaving spaces, the phonetic spelling often ran together. Unfortunately, some of Elle's wonderful stories were lost. She wrote so fast as her thoughts flowed, but if she found no one to retell it to immediately, she forgot some of the details. One of Ms. D's first mini-lessons with Elle was to learn how to leave spaces, and to stop frequently to go back and read what she had written so far to help her remember. These are tools that Elle wanted and needed.

Shortly thereafter Elle became a master 5-year-old writer, moving from the pre-communicative stage to the phonetic stage in a few months. She authored numerous stories One day in November when I observed, as soon as she entered the classroom Elle asked if she could go to the writing center to work on her story. She quickly hung up her coat and headed to work. I watched her intense expression as she gathered her portfolio from the pouch behind her chair and headed to the writing center. In seconds she was recording her thoughts as her story flowed. I walked back to the writing center to see what she was writing. She quickly showed me but immediately went back to work.

I looked forward to return visits to the classroom to follow Elle's writing journey. On my visit during the month of January Elle walked by me on her way to the writing center. She said seriously and with an air of importance, "*Mrs. Dean, I'm writing today.*"

I answered her by asking, "*Oh! Will there be anything that I can keep?*"

Her response: “Weeeelll, I’m writing a *BOOK!*”

I asked her to explain how she plans her books, and she told me: “*Well, first I write on the front, and then I write on the back. I write small so I have more room because I have so much to say.*” (*Conversation with Elle, 1/03*)

Here is a poem that Elle authored in April 2003:

*Flowers Prid hines Four the Bez
Folwers Giv Soo soo Muck four Aus
Flowres Soo A Mazing
I Wodd Saw Soo fowors
The giv soo Much
I rell jus Wodre hOW Muck Thay gost
hoW Muck it rell jus gost
I like Flowes
They Are Soo great They Are good
I Love flowers They Are good
I like flowers
They Are good prviding
I Love you floweres
I Love fowes*

By Elle in April

Elle’s story helps to paint the picture of how writing impacts these young children. Ms. D provides a safe, secure learning environment for all children to flourish at their individual developmental pace. The previous vignettes share with the reader how writing is an integral part of the children’s lives in Ms. D’s kindergarten. The environment provides the children with purposeful reasons to write and encourages independence and ownership of the writing by the child.

Writing Workshop and Mini-lessons

Each day, Writing Workshop occurred right after the Morning Meeting. Ms. D has a group discussion prior to the writing workshop.

Ms. D: *Before they write, I love how we talk about what they are going to work on today. They only develop as fast as they develop. They sometimes talk about what they will do but their writing doesn't reflect it. So if they are just not there they don't do it. They can see it when the whole group talks about it and they know where they are headed, but when they are on their own, if they are not developmentally ready to do that particular skill, it just doesn't happen. I am very relaxed about this because the kids are so tuned in that if they could, they would, so I give them space to work and learn and grow. What's wonderful about writing in K is that there are no grades for it. It's good to ease the parents' worries about it, since they don't have to worry about a grade (Journal entry, 10/02).*

During the writing workshop, Ms. D would have mini-lessons as she saw a need. Some mini-lessons were individual, but most were brief whole group meetings teaching the children something that she saw and wanted to share. During the early part of the year, mini-lessons were used to call attention to proper handwriting.

Ms. D: *I think that mini-lessons are one of the most effective teaching strategies... I use a mini-lesson a lot to teach how to make certain letters...when I see some backwards Ns I call them up front and show them how to fix it. Mini lessons solve so many problems(Journal entry, 9/02).*

To assist the reader in understanding how a mini-lesson is conducted and how its purpose is expressed within both individual and small groups of children, I will describe several vignettes that I observed in Ms. D's classroom.

Cristin

During one of my morning visits in November I watched Ms. D conduct a mini-lesson. Cristin was writing a lot but kept writing ‘aer’ for *are*. Ms. D told her how well she was writing and that she was ready to learn how to spell *are* correctly. She had the student write *are* correctly in her writing journal, and from then on I saw the girl use the correct spelling. The sound between *are* and *our* are very similar, so this student spelled both of them *are*. Ms. D waited for awhile, allowing the student to grasp ‘*are*’ and then shared the correct spelling and highlighted the different meaning of ‘*our*.’

Seth

On another visit in early January I saw how mini-lessons had progressed. On this day Seth continued to write in a way that appears as though his letters all run together. Ms. D held a mini-lesson today with four children. They brought their chairs right up front near the white board so they could work. Ms. D showed them about Spaghetti and Meatballs and writing. The children each had a white board and she used the easel. As they wrote each of their names, they put imaginary spaghetti between each letter, and at the end of the sentence they added the meatball. Seth made a big open circle on his paper for the meatball. Ms. D reminded him it was only pretend and they just imagined the meatball was there. It is really a tiny period and a space, but it is big enough for a meatball! The children laughed at the game and couldn’t wait to go back to their writing to try out this new writing tool.

Mick

During my visit on September 20, 2002, Writing Workshop was in progress. Mick, who entered kindergarten reading on a 4th grade level, was writing a detective story about a true mystery that happened in this class. He was trying to spell investigate and looked perplexed. Ms. D walked over and talked to him, so she decided to have a mini-lesson.

I observed Ms. D call, “Excuse me, children, could you stop for a minute and come to the carpet?” They joined on the carpet and found words on the Word Wall. Ashley found a word she might need, *is*, then someone found *I like*, then someone read all of the m words...*me, my, mom, Mr., Mrs., and Mexico*.

Ms. D told them that Mick was writing about the class mystery and needed help to spell *investigate*. “Who would like to come to the white board and give it a shot?” A few hands shot up and Ms. D let the first one she saw come and try. This person wrote a *v*. The next volunteer wrote *nyskt*. Ms. D had everyone say it and stretch it and the kids pulled their hands apart and said **in vees sstti iigga ate** and then they clapped their hands and said **investigate!** Then another child wrote and while writing the kids clapped their hands for each syllable: in ves ti gate. This child wrote *invsduat*. And Chad proceeded to talk about investigating the mystery of the bathroom light being off. “Who did it? We must solve the problem.” The children return to their seats to resume writing (Observation, 9/20/02).

This specific phonemic awareness strategy of stretching the word to hear all of the parts was learned by Ms. D through professional development activities. In the summer of 2002, she attended two PA Governor’s Institutes on literacy, and she wrote about

learning this strategy during these week-long institutes (Interview Questions 13-15). It is important to note that she has now incorporated it as part of her literacy instruction and she uses it to enhance a mini-lesson for the whole class.

Through the use of mini-lessons, Ms. D addressed the needs of the children at their individual academic level. Each child was provided scaffolding in his/her *Zone of Proximal Development* (Vygotsky, 1975) to move to a higher independent level. By providing a meaningful and purposeful reason to write, the children are invested in their work (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The mini-lesson is used as a tool that teaches them what they need at that time to continue to grow. Because their writing is based on individual interests and needs, Ms. D finds little need for guidance from the teacher's manual.

Ms. D: Through the mini-lessons you can teach anything. I have a rough time picking up the reading manual. The writing leads to reading and reading is better than ever before. I attribute it to the strength in writing in the class. There is so much to be done, just give them blank paper. They write and then they can read, too. Read to write and write to read. Words have a purpose, to write information and to get information. It is all mixed together. I would say they don't think of "I know what that letter is," but they think, "I need to write this...I want to read that..." The need is communication, and the tools are using letters and sounds to allow this to happen (Journal entry, 12/02).

Dewey expresses that kindergarteners are persons who learn through action and movement, and by making connections through 'story-forms', the holding together of meaning through people and the real world. He further suggests that gathering information through isolation 'neither appeals nor satisfies' the young child (Dewey,

1990, p. 140). This theory is reflected in Ms. D's comments as to how she perceived her kindergarteners' responses to writing.

Word Walls and Alphabets

Ms. D has covered the front blackboard with yellow paper and on it has constructed a *Word Wall* from the first day of school in August 2002. The board is divided into 26 sections, each one representing a letter of the alphabet. Each child's first and last name is listed under the correct letter, written with all capitals and then again in Capital and lower case. Additionally, the word wall has numerous high frequency words on it for the children's use when they write. Some of them use it as a writing tool often. Others use it when it is part of a mini-lesson or whole group instruction, depending on their developmental level. During the writing center time, some children walk up front with their writing material to copy a word. Laminated duplications of the word wall are at their tables, and word file boxes, and word family houses are on the walls throughout the room. Another Name Wall is placed by the door, with each child's name listed alphabetically.

Ms. D: The word walls are an immense help for beginning writers. They learn high frequency words because they check the word walls so often. This helps those writers...who were afraid of making mistakes. They can get started by using the word walls. I have changed my approach to word walls over the last three years as I read more about how to make them most effective for use in reading and writing instruction (Interview Question 5).

Individual Differences

In the current climate of teacher accountability, individual differences are sometimes hard to address due to mandated curriculum imposed in some school districts. According to Darling-Hammond, “increasingly prescriptive policies created through political processes in the name of public accountability are reducing even further the schools’ responsiveness to the needs of the students...(1997, p. 65).”

Ms. D has a variety of ability ranges in this kindergarten class, from Mick who entered kindergarten reading on a fourth grade level to Lynn who received a brain injury when she was eighteen months old and whose ability level is yet to be determined. Seth entered kindergarten with the label of Oppositional Defiance Disorder, and Robbie has a form of autism. Yet Ms. D is responsible for the academic growth and achievement of each student in her class. If she was required to use a scripted literacy program, as many school systems do as a result of the NCLB Act, then these students may not have been given the differentiation in instruction that is crucial to their developmental growth.

Since her school is not labeled as a low-achieving school and has not adopted a scripted approach to teaching literacy, Ms. D is still afforded the opportunity to design the instruction for her class as she sees the need. Therefore, she does not address, for example, ‘The Letter of the Week’ through daily whole group instruction, but works individually with specific needs of each child. Mick, who is reading on a fourth grade level needs different literacy instruction than Lynn and Seth who are still learning to recognize the letters of the alphabet.

Ms. D: Individual differences are provided for in journal writing. This is an outstanding way to take care of my students who are already fluently reading. At first I had children

who didn't even know 1 letter and another who was fluently reading on the 4th grade level.

I use the Word Wall during Morning Meeting and in some of my mini-lessons to provide a visual aid and to individualize instruction. Also, mini-lessons during writing workshop help me call out small groups to individualize...I group children in many different ways and for many different reasons. At all times though I do group them according to specific needs. When their small group is called out I adjust the lesson according to the individual needs of the group. The same lessons are turned up a notch or down a notch according to individual needs and of course it is flexible grouping...The surveys, kindergarten newspapers, book writing, journaling, reader bags, literacy in play-these are all things that keep all the children learning and growing at their individual levels (Interview Question 6).

In the following vignettes, I focus on children with extreme differences in ability levels to show how this teacher manages to meet the needs of such diverse students housed within the same classroom. She continuously monitors their growth and modifies instruction to meet their needs.

Seth

Seth entered kindergarten labeled as a child with Oppositional Defiance Disorder. He was one of the children observed by Ms. D's colleagues the spring before during kindergarten registration. The other kindergarten teachers had fretted about having Seth (or Lynn, Mick, Robbie, or a fifth child who is being tested for special education) on their class list in the fall. When these children were all placed in Ms. D's room, her colleagues were relieved. As the year progressed and Ms. D's children began to make great gains academically (See Table in Chapter 3, p.59), socially and emotionally (Ms. D's journal reflections10/02), her colleagues attributed the changes in behavior and academic growth

of Ms. D's class to the assumption that Ms. D had been given such a smart group of children (noted in a conversation with 2 of the 3 colleagues and myself in October 2002).

Yet when Ms. D was not around, some of Seth's initial behavior problems would resurface. He did very well with Ms. D, but had difficulty on the playground, at lunch, and in special classes.

Ms. D: He gets in trouble a lot outside of this room. Ms. G (my principal) brought him in the other day from the cafeteria and said he was 'making bad choices.' She asked me how he was in the classroom, and I told her he was delightful and always writing! I showed her one of his books, and she was surprised that this was the same child whom she saw act out in the cafeteria.

Seth is very smart. He needs challenged. I worry about both he and Mick next year. They both had a negative reputation preceding their entry into this k classroom. Will they have enough to challenge them next year? Will they be provided differentiated instruction? (Journal entry, 2/03).

Lynn

When I was observing during a mini-lesson in the fourth week of school, all of the children were sitting on the carpet at the front of the room and focusing on the Word Wall. I watched Lynn find a B on the word wall. Lynn suffers from brain damage due to an accident when she was eighteen months old. No one knows how much she is able to learn and Ms. D is trying numerous strategies to find out what may work. Lynn's speech is also delayed which makes communication more difficult. Ms. D thought that Lynn knew some of the letters but wasn't sure. So when Ms. D asked Lynn to find a B, I saw Lynn look at the B, then point to an L, a T, an H, an S, and the students and Ms. D would

say “Keep trying!” Ms. D thought it was a game on Lynn’s part but wasn’t sure, so she said, “Who can come up and show Lynn the B?”

Immediately Lynn took the pointer and moved it to a B and gave a huge grin. Everyone clapped for her in celebration, and then Ms. D said to Lynn, “You may need the B if you are writing about your brother Brett. B for brother and Brett.” (Observation, 9/02)

Ms. D told me that Lynn has a great sense of humor, and that was how she guessed that she may be playing a trick on Ms. D about the letters. Ms. D responded in a playful way to see if she could in return fool Lynn into finding the letter, and it worked.

Ms. D: It is important to connect with the children. I work hard at building community and trust with each child and with the whole group. My favorite saying is, ‘Children don’t care how much you know until you know how much they care.’ Yesterday, Lynn was sitting by her aide, Ms. M, who works with her during different times on different days. She laughed and whispered something to Ms. M. Later I asked Ms. M what she said and Ms. M said, “She said, ‘Ms. D likes me!’” That made me feel so good, and I do, I really do! And I also know this is important for Lynn to grow to her fullest potential. She also did her neatest writing paper the other day. It was just letters around the paper but soOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO (emphasis hers) good for Lynn(Journal entry, 11/06/02).

Ms. D also made a class alphabet book for Lynn and the rest of the children, hoping that this strategy might engage Lynn in more literacy. In this photograph alphabet book, Ms. D thought this would help Lynn learn the names of the other children when she had her turn as Star Student. All of the children in the class have his/her picture listed with his/her name in the book under the correct letter. Other classroom-oriented words are

added so that each alphabet letter is represented, such as F for Flag, B for Boys, with a photograph of the eight boys in the class, and G for girls, with the eight girls' photo.

Ms. D: *Lynn came knowing 1 letter-the letter 'O' and the number '1'. Now she knows all but the letters G and V for the capitals and the letters g, h, and v for the lower case. She cannot give the sounds. When she started school she could not count; now she counts to 23. I think that she misses the incidental learning in my classroom (when she leaves to go for special help) but I cannot reach the others when I have to concern myself with Robbie (a child with autism) and her. I think if she were in my room listening to the 'Sound Song' and writing with us with an aide beside her she would know some sounds by now (Journal entry, 10/02).*

Throughout the year, with the help of an aide and with Ms. D's various strategies, Lynn has learned to recognize many of the letters in the alphabet. Lynn's parents are eager to help with Lynn's academic progress as well. They reinforce the songs and chants at home to give Lynn extra support. In January, Ms. D welcomed a student teacher into her classroom, excited for additional help in teaching this diverse group of children.

Ms. D: ***Finally! A student teacher!*** *I am excited to see what can happen now that I have a student teacher. In one day I can see such a difference in... Lynn. Lynn is writing! She now knows the sounds of 7 letters. I know she will go far now that I have some help. In just one day there was such progress. Lynn has such a sense of humor and good common sense. I am so hopeful that we can now make progress on her cognitive skills. ..This was such a good day!(Journal entry, 1/03)*

Mick

In an observation visit in October, I watched Ms. D walk around the room, observing the progress of the writers during the writing workshop. She saw Mick struggling with a word. Mick, who is reading on a fourth grade level, had a lot to learn about writing. He

could read and he knew all of the letter sounds but when he wrote he left no spaces and ended no sentences and it was very difficult for him to share his writing. He and all the children learned that everyone must work at something, and although Mick was an outstanding reader, he needed to work at writing. As a result of this struggle, Mick did not like to write. Ms. D gently eased him into writing by not putting major emphasis on his work as of yet. It will come, she says.

Ms D: *Mick is reading at a 4th grade level but he still cannot leave spaces and cannot spell well and is still using capital letters. He has none of the conventions of writing, yet is reading on the 4th grade level.*

I told Mick the other day that he needs to work on his writing. He can read almost anything he wants to, yet he writes only a few sentences. I told him that wasn't acceptable for a child with his ability. He told me, "I don't really like to write. I can't think of anything to write about."

I thought a minute and said, "I can help you with that! Hold up your hand. Now remember the 5 W's: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. If you think about those words, they will give you lots of ideas to write."

Mick thought about it and agreed to give it a try. I am anxious to watch and see if that helps to spur him on (Interview, 10/12/02).

In her journal entry the following month, Ms. D wrote: *These kids are on so many different levels. Ms. G [principal of the elementary school] came in and was amazed because we had just visited the farm and I had Mick reading a picture book to the othersshow the pictures..... and then ask the children a question related to the text on the page. It was remarkable. Here is one of his questions after reading:*

"What were the field mice busy doing?"

"Why?"

I kept reminding the children that he was practicing the Reading and Speaking Standard while they were attending to the Listening Standard. It was improving Mick's reading as he can read anything but can't rephrase it to tell someone what he read. This was keeping him working with his classmates, but still extending his learning by causing him to comprehend and rephrase what he read into a question for his peers to answer. Ms. G just stood by the door watching and then before she left she said she never saw a child able to do that before. I don't think it singled him out because they all think they can read and do read books that they can read to the class.

I am not favoring Mick. It is just that I finally found out how to help a child with his extensive ability by challenging him to grow from where he is, yet to remain a learner within the class and with his peers. I guess I look at him as an extreme case (very positively!) and a constant challenge for me to provide him with developmentally appropriate learning tools while remaining within the community of learners in which he is a part (Journal entry, 11/06/02).

Today Mick said at snack time to me, "I have got to teach the kids what undefeated means." So he stood up and (such an improvement for the kid who used to talk under his breath when explaining) he taught it loud and clear and with an unbelievably clear explanation, in depth.

He said, "Undefeated means when you play nine games you win them all .Undefeated is opposite of defeated.....When you are defeated it means you lost.... 9 and zero means you have 9 wins and zero losses but zero and 9 would mean the team lost all their games, zero wins, 9 losses."

Then he asked if there were any questions. Oh my goodness, what growth he has made!(Journal entry, 10/29/02).

These findings reinforce that Ms. D is conscious of the varied abilities of her students and continually reflects on her practice to improve instruction. She approaches the cognitive and social needs of each child individually and structures the learning opportunities accordingly.

Using Standards and the Author's Chair to Enhance Differentiated Instruction

In an earlier vignette, Ms D. used some of the Speaking and Listening Standards to encourage the children to focus on their responsibilities during the Author's Chair. Incorporating the use of Standards as instructional strategies is a result of the professional development experiences received during the 1999 PA Governor's Institute on the Project Approach (Interview Questions 13-15).

Ms. D: Standards have been emphasized in the curriculum over the last 4 years. At times they are helpful. Referring to the Speaking and Listening Standards has provided for individual differences because some of my poorer writers are my best speakers and my very best reader was my poorest speaker. Everyone is trying to improve in their specific areas of need (Interview Question 5).

One day in October when I was observing, Ms. D was inviting the children to read what they wrote in the Author's Chair, a practice used by Ms. D which invites children to present their work to the class. She emphasized to the students to remember about the Speaking and Listening Standards. The children became very attentive as they listened to a story written by Mick.

Ms. D: The writing from the onset has made Mick a normal child in the classroom. He does not shine in all areas, although he is exceptional in reading. Right now in writing he is just another child trying to grow in an area. The writing has made the children truly understand their uniqueness, and allows me to see their developmental stage and ability.

At 10 o'clock we sit around the carpet on the parameter, and we take turns getting up and sharing our writing and showing what we have learned. I remind the children as they begin. "You must remember the Speaking Standard and the Listening Standard. You have

to speak so the others can hear and you must listen to the speaker.” I do not elaborate on the exact words within the Standards, but I am glad that they are aware of them and give a purpose to their behavior and to learning.

Mick gets up to read ...he can decipher any word, but he can't read his own writing because he does not leave spaces. I helped him read his work and then asked him how he can grow. He said, “ I have to leave spaces so I can read what I wrote.”

Mick has difficulty listening to the children during sharing time, yet when he got up to speak, the kids couldn't listen to his long page of writing. So I said, “Mick, you don't like it when they can't listen to you, just like it is hard for you. So all of you must learn the Listening Standard.”

Mick can make a narrative speech and informative writing but he does not have the conventions of spaces, periods. He has a lot to work on. He would be bored to death if he was getting “a letter a week”. Now he has much to work on so he is continually growing. His mom said he has shown no boredom at all from his school experiences, and terrific growth.

When each child gets up to read in the Author's Chair I sometimes ask, “What did you do today to improve your writing?”

Today Mick answered, “I remembered spaces, but I only did it the first two lines.”

I said, “That's a good start Mick, you can work on that more tomorrow.”(Interview, 10/12/02).

Lynn

Ms. D: “Who wants to be first? Lynn. She wrote in pre-phonetic all over the paper, but not together. She stood up and read the whole page, making it all up as she went. It was the best she ever talked. Normally you cannot understand Lynn in conversation, yet this day she was so very articulate and looked wonderful. She excelled in the eyes of her peers. She had the best voice; she projected to meet the speaking standard, unlike the others who actually were trying to read what they wrote. They weren't as effective because they had to have their nose in the book to see and discern their sound spelling. Lynn loves it now. She loves sharing her stories (Journal entry, 10/02).

Literacy in Play

With full day kindergarten we can practice what we have learned in a playful way-writing is more of a tool now which can be used freely in play. The children are more relaxed to use their sounds in phonetic spelling. We are not rushed.

-Ms.D (Journal entry, 9/02)

According to Vygotsky imaginative play frees the child's embedded knowledge. It falls within the 'Zone of Proximal Development' where children can perform "a head taller" than they are capable of under normal circumstances because they are operating within appropriate forms of childhood knowing" (Jones & Reynolds, 1992, p.119). Therefore, play is a natural vehicle for using and needing literacy. Ms. D artfully weaves literacy into play through purposeful reasons to write. The play is collaborative and imaginative in this room. Part of the magic of Ms. D is her ability to guide the children into literacy activities that are meaningful to them. The children begin to see the need to read and write and engage in literacy as a useful "life" tool. As a result the writing produced by these kindergarten children is rich and full of heart, and ultimately leads the children into reading their written work and that of others out of necessity and desire in their playful learning environment.

Ms. D: *My philosophy in using play in kindergarten-Play is a vital part of kindergarten. It can be the vehicle through which children put into use their newly acquired skills. It affords the opportunities for them to learn teamwork, to problem-solve, take on various social roles, and to learn to understand their world. The best play is when it is child-initiated and teacher-supported.*

In my kindergarten classroom play is incorporated in various ways. Choice time is specifically from 2:P.M.-2:50 P.M. At this time I post a list of choices which I frequently change as our theme changes. I incorporate literacy in the centers. Some of the centers have included Puppetry, Playing Restaurant, Playing Library, Playing School, Block City,

Play Dough, Sign Making, Book Making, Playing Store, Toys, Painting, Sand Table, Water Table, Letter Writing, Science Center, Games, and Puzzles. Book making is constant. The children constantly write and write and write in their play. I supply the props and take some time [with the students] to brainstorm how to play at the various centers. I also get a project going that was initiated from a child's idea. [Last year, we had] the Animal Museum in the hallway which grew out of a child's idea to write and draw about lots of animals so that people could visit our museum. This ends up being a play area (Interview Question 8).

Some children prefer standard play choices during Choice Time. There are some who prefer changes in the play offerings. Ms. D keeps the play environment fresh by keeping the standard choices such as blocks, water and sand table, play dough, puppet area, and writing while adding additional play ideas that are generated by the children, sometimes through conversations or through sharing personal stories and interests. This provides an atmosphere of numerous choices for play, from the standard choices to new play ideas such as the Pizza Restaurant (following a parent visit to the Morning Meeting), the Animal Museum, and the Library (following the visit to Morning Meeting by the school librarian). Ms. D demonstrates play ideas or has a child demonstrate it when the idea comes specifically from that child for new areas incorporated during Choice time. However, the children decide in which area they wish to play. The choice is theirs. Much of her time during Choice Time is spent as an observer. Ms. D sometimes acts as a facilitator to scaffold play when she sees an opportunity

I asked Ms. D how she handles conflicts during Choice Time. She told me that when altercations arise within the play areas, she gives it time to be resolved by the children involved. If the altercation escalates or does not dissipate, she intervenes in a teaching way to review the tools to use to resolve conflict. A few times she must remove the child

(or children) from the situation and speak to him/her (or them) privately to resolve the issue and prevent further incidents of a similar nature (Conversation, January 2003).

Block Play and Sign Making

Today in the block area, 3 boys are making a movie theater to show Spider Man.

There is one sign that says: *100%*. I asked them to tell me about their theater.

Seth: *Look at the sign. That's how much the movie costs-100%! And we are adding the movie theater near the airport so people can come to the movie theater from anywhere. There are lots of shows playing right now (Observation, 12/02).*

Two more children joined them. Here are some additional signs added over a two-day Choice Time period and taped to the movie theater:

Moovy TheDer. (Movie Theater)
Strwrse 1 (Star Wars 1)
Cod Spiter-manTwo (Called Spiderman Two)
IT. (Inspector Gadget)
Evree Buty vell (Everybodyville)
To Story two and one (Toy Story II and I)
100 Diner Mooves (100 Diner Movies)
Dr. Il. (Dr. Invisible)
Super Man Three
Stwer 2 (Star Wars 2)
Stop
Ded End
Muveay feay (Movie Theater)
Sperit (Spirit)
Erport → (Airport...)
15000 (\$ 15, 000)
 (Artifact, 12/02)

A week later, the Movie Theater has been transformed into a Pittsburgh Steeler Stadium: *The Pis Prg Situm*, “*Pits Brg Pirt Stadium*”, “*The Pis Brg Playing Tonit*”, “*Home Run*,” *Do Not tucsh*” and “*Prking Lit.*” (See Appendix E. 1)

Ms. D: *Today the children who were at the block center automatically needed markers, paper tape etc. to write numerous signs. The signs are precious and since we started out this way the children just think that writing automatically goes hand in hand with block play. They never think of blocks without signs (Journal entry, 12/02).*

Dramatic Play Area

During one visit in March, 2003, Halle, Cristin, and Mick are preparing for a “Food Fest” in the Dramatic Play Center. They are creating all kinds of food with play dough and making labels to go with all of the food. One of their signs say, “*this is a Fud Fest one of the best everf*”(See Appendix E.3,E.4). Some of the labels read, *choklit chip cookes*, *Pessa*, *Pie*, *a good oranj cookey*, *chez*, *Fish Kashrl* and *Chinese Fud* (Fish Casserole and Chinese Food) and *lostr pena* (*lobster penne*).

During a subsequent visit in March, the children were creating something new in the Dramatic Play center. There is now a restaurant, and Ashley is making the sign to show what food will be served at *Wendy’s Rstront*, such as *fRoot*, *is KreM* (Ice Cream), *PNSE* (pepsi), and *Hot ChoKLit* (See Appendix E.2). A boy is there with a notepad, taking an order from a ‘customer’. A new sign has been hung to encourage customers:

Pizza Hut
\$2 for drinx
\$16 for 1 Pizza.
We SaL for Les.

*I HoPe you Biy**Sum.**Hlp wanted (Artifact, 3/03)*Library Center

Another group of children are in the ‘Library’, the book center which has been turned into a library. Ms. D invited the librarian to their room to model for the children what a librarian might do. Then Ms. D provided the stampers and stamp pads, books, papers and pencils, note cards and card file so they would have what they needed to role play. The children played the roles of librarian and student; the ‘librarian’ wrote the title of the book on the note card, the ‘student’ signed his/her name, then the librarian stamped the date that it was due on the note card and filed the card alphabetically in the card file provided by Ms. D.

General observations of Literacy in Play

Literacy in Play thrives in Ms. D’s kindergarten. Content is given during mini-lessons and Morning Meeting. Practice in reading and writing is then threaded throughout the day in the reading and writing workshops, and within Choice Time at the end of the day.

During my observations in Ms. D’s classroom during Choice Time, I observed that literacy, in general, was led by the play of choice. As an example, when the students created a ‘Pizza Restaurant’, they first decided to play ‘restaurant’, then proceeded in making store signs, menus, placemats, and taking orders on a note pad. In the various

play areas, choice of play preceded the writing, but in all of the instances that I observed, writing was an integral part of the play.

I observed the Choice Time in Ms. D's room fourteen times through the course of the 2002-2003 school year. In these observations I saw a mixture of boys and girls playing together in all of the areas with no one gender more predominant than another in any area except the block area. Although both boys and girls played in the block area, it was often led by a core group of three boys during my winter observations. At the time of my visits, the boys worked on major projects, returning to them during each Choice Time until they generated a new idea. At varying times, other small groups of children, non-specific in gender dominance, would gather to build and play there, but they usually chose to develop their own plan apart from the daily group of boys and did not return to the block area regularly.

Professional Development

As part of the interview questions, I asked Ms. D as to what professional development activities she has participated in over the last few years.

Ms. D: In 1999 I voluntarily chose to attend The Project Approach Workshop which was a week long conference at Gannon University during the summer (Governor's Institute for Early Childhood Education in Erie, Pa in August of 1999), which focused on Sylvia Chard's work with the Project Approach and also introduced the new PA Standards. Through this 6 day experience I was validated in my use of project work as a means of integrating curriculum, providing ownership for the child, and promoting reasons to read and write, and I also learned how to use the new Standards to support what I already do.

Then in 2000 I attended the Read to Succeed Institute at the University of Pitt at

Johnstown. I attended a week long session- Integrating Technology into the Classroom (Professional development for Faculty and K-12 teachers) July 17-21 2000.

In 2001, I taught two week long graduate courses. I also taught a Writing workshop to the Dubois Area Teachers in February 2002.

In the summer of 2002 I asked to attend two Governor's Institutes- -The Pa Governor's Institute for Early Childhood Education at Villanova, Pa July 7-14 2002, and the Governor's Institute for Education(Partnership on Reading) at the Westin Convention Center in Pittsburgh, Pa July14-19 2002.

I also attended the PAFPC conference and presented in 2001 and presented at KSRA in 2002. Both presentations were on Early Literacy.

I requested to go each time. I currently am being trained in Autism Spectrum Disorders and I attend these conferences throughout the year at our Intermediate Unit. On all these occasions I have requested the training.

I learned a lot from these trainings, especially about phonemic awareness and phonological awareness during the summer 2002 workshops. Much of what I was exposed to I already incorporated in my teaching ,like phonics and retelling favorite stories, but learning new ideas about phonemes was something I had only marginally addressed previously . As I met my new kindergarteners with their multiple academic needs, I realized that these new phonemic awareness strategies seemed as though they would help my special needs students. The workshops, however, emphasized that all children could benefit from these activities, so I sought ways to provide the strategies to everyone. There were some literacy strategies that I had not previously used, like stretching the words to help children hear all of the parts and other listening activities to stress phonemic awareness. After these workshops I felt a responsibility to add these skills to my teaching to make sure I was providing the best instruction I could (Interview Questions, 13-15).

The school at which Ms. D teaches is considered Proficient and there does not appear to be a major threat to be forced to adhere to the NCLB mandate in the near future due to the above level scores of the students in her school (See Chapter 3, p. 58). As a result,

there is considerable freedom as to what professional development activities the teachers choose to attend. This is important to note for the purposes of this study in determining the effects of NCLB on her beliefs and practices. NCLB has specific guidelines to follow if your school is not proficient. Since this does not affect her school, there is no major curriculum shift at this time, allowing freedom within her elementary school for academic choices. The administration in her school decided to not make major curricular changes at that time (Conversation with Ms. G, elementary school principal 9/02).

PA Governor's Institutes

Ms. D: I feel like I am more knowledgeable in the teaching of reading by the numerous opportunities I have had to attend Governor's Institutes and follow up sessions. The professional development has made teaching beginning readers and writers more second nature to me. I now know how to teach phonemic awareness. I am more astute at using formative assessments to alter my teaching and prevent children from falling through the cracks. I also feel that some of the differences are due to the longer day- we always wanted to do more than we had time for. We were not able to fit it all in, in such a relaxed manner. Now with full-day K there is more time.

I feel that in this classroom there is no child left behind. That part is unusual. With little training in teaching the child with special academic and/or emotional, social needs, I used to worry so about helping children like Lynn and Robbie (the child with autism in my class. But the training I have received, such as stretching the words, including the vowels, and adding phonemic awareness, have all added to my expertise to reach all children. It has been easy to meet the needs of the regular and advanced students, but now I also have tools to reach the special needs child (Interview Question 4).

Ms. D wrote about her concern with the academic growth of each child in response to an interview question. There is a broad spectrum of abilities in her class, and as a regular elementary education teacher, she was not trained in Special Education. Three of her

students fall into this category. In her journal writing she reflected on how helpful the academic training was in providing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all of her diverse learners.

Ms. D: I have learned many new strategies for teaching phonemic awareness and decoding skills etc. that I have been able to incorporate into my curriculum. I do this at the end of the day, four days a week, about a week a month, from 2:00 to 3:00 using a parent helper. This is a free choice time for children but on some days I invite parent helpers in during this hour. On these occasions I call groups out for mini lessons or guided reading (ten minute sessions) while the parent calls small groups out for a phonemic awareness or skills review lessons during this time, lessons that I had prepared for the needs of specific children. I was able to plan this action plan as a result of a Governor's Institute on reading I took last summer. Without the whole day schedule and the training I wouldn't be incorporating this valuable plan in my classroom.

I have more time to do formative assessments and then to alter my lessons to teach what needs to be retaught. I think my program is becoming stronger. No child should be slipping through the cracks...I find that even the low income children and ones who have repeated are becoming successful readers.*

Next year it should only become more full proof. I want to gain new ideas to keep Kindergarten playful, full of choice and active learning, and yet not allow any learner to fall through the cracks (Interview Question5, 6).

These findings show that, from Ms. D's perspective, the professional development activities that she experienced were rooted in academic gains for all children.

*Unfortunately, in teacher discourse, the low income children are often viewed as historically at risk, thus identified by Ms. D as such inclusively. Ms. D's reaction to the recommendation that phonemic awareness activities be used for all children was apparent

in her decision to use it with Mick, the child reading on a 4th grade or higher level, during Choice Time. This was her response:

Mick also goes through the phonemic awareness activities...his mother wants him to, so I support the parent's request. I gear it up as much as I can to meet his higher academic ability, but he likes the activities and the attention, and feeling like one of the group (Phone interview, 4/03).

This supports the findings that she put practices into place as a result of professional development activities that were contrary to her beliefs. Ms. D did not record in her journal any training/teaching about how to keep play intact while promoting literacy. She perceived the focus of the workshops as an academic approach to teaching literacy and was quick to embrace the ideas put forth.

As a former teacher myself, I know this is not unusual for the topic of play to be omitted in professional development workshops. Many of the workshops I attended over my teaching career were aimed at K-6 elementary teachers and did not include play as a vital part of the curriculum. The workshops where play was an integral part were those specific to kindergarten and DAP, or specific to the integration of play. Ms. D's and my emphasis on the inclusion of play in our practice came from our professional readings, our educational backgrounds, and our foundations and roots in early childhood education. Together we sought specific workshops relating to play during the 1990's for validation of including play in our curriculum.

In the past when Ms. D and I worked as a kindergarten team, we sought workshops supporting play and when we attended workshops where play was marginalized we were able to infuse strategies that we considered valuable while keeping our emphasis on play

intact. During this case study, however, Ms. D worked independently with no colleague with whom to confer on practice decisions. Her reflection on practice at that time seemed to center around the needs of the special needs children. As a result, she used the Choice Time hour to add some of the new strategies and invited parents to join during Choice Time to act as aides.

It appears that the grave literacy needs of her students led her to accepting academic changes in practice without aligning them with her beliefs. In her reflections she does not seem concerned about the invasion of academics during the designated playtime. It appears that she lost sight of her belief of the importance of play in the kindergarten curriculum and that the overwhelming emphasis on academics and phonemic awareness strategies during the professional development activities combined with the serious needs of her students took precedence over the play activities. Her practice was not coinciding with her beliefs.

Read to Succeed, a Pennsylvania Department of Education Early Reading Grant

Ms D's school was involved with Pennsylvania's Read to Succeed Grant which started in 1999. This 4 year grant provided funding for professional development opportunities to support emergent literacy strategies and for the purchase of emergent literacy materials. Ms. D's school wrote and was awarded a small grant that provided both professional development and resources. The professional development focused on performance assessment tools to measure emergent literacy needs. Resources were

purchased, such as benchmark books to determine reading levels (See Chapter 3, p. 58 for more detailed information). Many professional development opportunities in emergent literacy and authentic assessment were offered to the early childhood teachers at this school. Ms. D attended and found that many of the strategies suggested fit into her schema and teaching philosophy. From this experience she formed a DRA, Developmental Reading Assessment, where she recorded the benchmark reading level and developmental writing and spelling level for each child. The DRA is to be passed to the next teacher to allow continual literacy growth of the child.

Ms. D: Do you know how much kindergarten can learn? As part of my long range plan from the Read to Succeed Institute, I designed a picture rubric for k for writing, with all 5 domains. Josh shared his writing and his conventions were as good as they can get for k.

*“ I LKE TO JUMP. I LIKE MY MOM. I LIKE MY DAD.
I LIKE ALF.”*

I said, “Now Josh, you have the conventions correct, but now you have 3 different ideas there. In grown up writing you include more sentences in one thing, like ‘I like my mom.’ Then you need to tell why...tell 2 or 3 things that tell about that. Like if you are reading a book about spiders, you wouldn’t want the second sentence to be about flies. You would be reading to learn about spiders.” Josh understood, and wrote more about the first part of his sentence, “I like to jump.”

Aren’t kids growing? They can learn so much. I think what I intend to do, is to slice off 1 domain at a time, like one month you talk about conventions, and do that a month, then later on the next one, style, and focus on style. When they focus on style, since you’ve already done conventions, you will still talk about it, like if they don’t leave spaces when working on style, you ask them what they need to work on and they can still see they need the conventions, like tools. These assessments are a direct result of the Read to Succeed Professional Development (Interview Question 11).

Her reflections continue to focus on the academics. There is no evidence that the professional development activities supported play in any way. Ms. D continues with the Choice Time in her classroom as part of her former curriculum plan and due to her beliefs, but not because of any teachings or encouragement to support play from professional development activities.

Ms. D's response to play and her professional development experiences: *Play is not mentioned during these workshops on literacy, so I assume it is used as usual, as a vehicle to support literacy. I will keep it (play) in, but no one mentioned it during the workshops. I know how important it is! (Conversation 4/03).*

Overall experience of Professional Development

Ms. D: *The professional development experiences have affected my practices, but not my beliefs. I still have the same philosophy and core beliefs. The professional development helped me to pick and choose strategies that I have been looking for to help the struggling student in literacy. I knew I needed more but couldn't quite put my hands on the tools I needed. The current professional development helped answer these questions for me.*

I feel that the opportunity to receive this training at no cost has been a wonderful opportunity for me and I do feel that I am a better teacher because of the training. This year, with such a diverse group of learners with extreme literacy differences, I am searching for ways to help them grow. There were times I just did not know what to do to help them. Now I know more about beginning reading, I am more conscious of each individual learner and their uniquenesses and I am more equipped with ways to help each learner on his or her individual level. Most of my prior practice is still very effective and I am thrilled to enhance my program with these new tools (Interview Question 15).

Through Ms. D's reflections in her journal and her changes in Choice Time, it appears that she has a new focus on literacy development and achievement. Her predominant

topics of interest are new ways to teach literacy to all children. She attributes this emphasis on literacy to the accented need for differentiated instruction due to the extreme academic differences in her class. Although she uses play to support literacy in her kindergarten, her new training, void of support for play, does not include play as a literacy tool. Fortunately, Ms. D still embraces play; unfortunately, she has reduced some of the play time for the children in lieu of new literacy strategies learned through her professional development experiences.

Follow-Up

It has been 1 ½ years since I have been in Ms. D's classroom. I felt it necessary to open a new and recent dialogue with her to see how her literacy practices have evolved since I spent the 2002-2003 school year immersed with her and her kindergarten children. She continues to teach full day kindergarten and she emphasizes writing as she previously did.

One of the most interesting pieces of our conversation was how she continues to use play to teach literacy, discarding some of her new practices that she had added during the year of my study. She said that she thought a lot about two questions I asked at the end of the 2002-2003 school year. First I had questioned why Mick was being instructed in phonemic awareness when he was already reading. She reported that at that time the parents had requested it (Ch. 4, p. 102). My second comment questioned her interruption of play to add instruction and include parents. She had replied that she needed to help her special needs children and there were so many parents eager to get in the classroom, so that combination led to changing Choice Time for a short period each month.

Over the summer months of 2003, however, she added that she reflected on my questions and on the changes that she had made in Choice Time during the previous school year. She attributed her decision to add these academic strategies to the professional development experiences. She stated that at that time, she could not see clearly how to add more academics into her program due to time constraints. The most obvious place to her was during Choice Time, mainly because the parents would be more available at the end of the day, a convenient time within work schedules and also an opportune time for retrieving their child at the end of the school day.

She now realizes that for a brief time she lost sight of the value of play and choice in her classroom but has since rectified this, returning to a child-centered Choice Time and adding the literacy strategies elsewhere in her kindergarten schedule. She also realized that Mick did not need phonemic awareness instruction and she returned to her core beliefs about following the individual needs of each child.

As a result, she decided from then on to invite parents in to work with small groups of children during reading and writing workshop instead of Choice Time. She acknowledged that this may limit the availability of some of the parents but at least it would allow her to return to her belief system of putting the needs of the children first. The parents who can attend only assist a few times a month, and she finds it to be very successful, both in helping children with their specific areas of literacy needs and also in welcoming the parents in becoming active in their children's school lives.

Therefore, I learned that Choice Time has been given back to the children, and once again Ms. D serves as a facilitator and ongoing advocate of combining literacy and play in her kindergarten classroom. She was unaware of the conflict with her belief system

and her practices until she took the time to critically evaluate her program and the effects of the conflict between the professional development workshops she had attended and their use in her program. When she had time to think and reflect, she realized that she had compromised her general philosophy in the wake of NCLB's push for academics and its disregard for play. But she has rectified her decisions so that her practices now reflect her beliefs (Phone conversation, 11/04).

To conclude, it would seem that being passionate about her profession is what drove Mrs. D during the time frame of this investigation and is what probably continues to drive her toward being or becoming the best she can be. Ms. D's commitment to educating all young children and her concerns for her special needs children led her to put professional development experiences into practice, even though not required to do so. That same motive drove her to immediately add what she thought was 'new' best practices to provide the best learning environment for all of her kindergarten children. As she reexamined those new practices and reflected on her core beliefs, however, she altered the practices to re-align them with her general convictions about the foundation as to what constitutes best practice. As a life-long learner Mrs. D made some professional changes in her practices but returned them to be in accord with her belief system. Her practices seem built on a rock solid foundation. A lot of thought and critical thinking over time would seem to be required before Mrs. D would permanently alter her pedagogical belief system and teaching practices.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of NCLB, literacy learning for young children is often the main focus in current school curriculum. Schools are carefully scrutinizing how literacy is taught and measuring the results through tests prepared by each state to meet the requirements of the law. In some cases this new intensity in literacy instruction is positive for children and funds from the federal government have provided much needed materials to support literacy instruction. A limited curricular or instructional change is expected in schools determined proficient, such as the school from which this case study is derived, in which children's academic scores on state tests are in the acceptable range.

Unfortunately, there can also a negative impact from the federal mandate. Rather than view our nation's young readers in a positive light, the NCLB Act focuses on our nation's children as having a 'reading deficit,' proposing stringent guidelines to be followed by those schools determined by state testing results to be not proficient. Scripted reading and math programs permeate the curriculum, and teachers are being monitored to guarantee that they follow the lessons intact, with no additions of their own (Garan, 2004; Ohanian, 2002). This can lead to our teachers losing enthusiasm, energy and purpose and our children performing rotely in unmotivating settings with no choice or voice.

In this case study, Ms. D was a faculty member in a proficient school. Required curricular and instructional changes directly related to NCLB were minimal. Therefore, the changes that she undertook came from her own decisions and experiential knowledge. According to Ms. D the recommendations of most of the workshops she attended

proposed changes similar to those recommended for the schools at risk, focusing on reading techniques and direct instruction models. She had been and is a strong proponent of play which she considers necessary in educating the whole child. However, the underlying current of the professional development workshops that she attended did not focus or even mention the place for play in kindergarten. This is no doubt due to the fact that the effects of play were not researched by the NRP and are thusly not a part of our federal government's backed and enforced plan for curriculum change.

When I observed her Choice Time during the beginning of the school year of this study, the children playing, creating, and writing were the highlight of the day for Ms. D. She saw it as the time for children to practice all that they learned during the day, noting more than once that she could watch them using their skills to communicate and to socialize together in meaningful activities. When Ms. D wrote about her philosophy of teaching, she emphasized incorporating play in kindergarten; she called it a 'vital part' of her program. She wrote:

I believe that play is a vital part of kindergarten. It can be the vehicle through which children put into use their newly acquired skills. It affords the opportunities for them to learn teamwork, to problem-solve, take on various social roles, and to learn to understand their world. Play is best when it is child-initiated and teacher-supported (Journal entry, 9/02).

Yet in all of the workshops in which Ms. D participated, any messages or recommendations for support of the use of play in kindergarten was absent. When asked in May 2003, she did not recall the mention of play in any of the professional development workshops. However, Ms. D seemed not to notice the narrow definition of

theory and practice and the lack of recommendation for play in kindergarten. She did not understand how ideological it was due to the limited research examination of the panel.

Without mandated curriculum changes from NCLB forced upon her classroom practices, when she attended the professional development workshops she was perhaps naive and unprepared to be wary. She apparently failed to view workshop content with a critical eye based on her strong pro-play beliefs and attitudes that she possessed upon entering these workshops. Her receptivity to learning about new techniques for teaching literacy and for skills needed ‘*to prevent children from falling through the cracks*’ (Interview Question 11) may have clouded her vision. She subsequently embraced and implemented workshop suggestions such as numerous phonemic and phonological awareness activities that placed the importance of play a distant second to literacy instruction.

Most of the workshops presented a specific procedure in the use of strategies as if following marching orders. Teachers were no longer the decision-makers, and implementation of the strategies was not through creative and innovative techniques nor was it differentiated for each child. The direct instruction techniques were to be delivered to all children. Omitted from most of the workshops was information on using multiple ways to address the numerous learning styles of children, including the importance of incorporating play as an avenue to support learning and attain goals compatible with her philosophy.

This impact of her professional development experiences is evident in the changes she made during Choice Time during the latter part of the year. She stated in her journal that she invited parents to help in academic areas with small groups of children during the

last hour of the day, Choice Time. For one week per month, parents joined the class and worked with children in areas of need in literacy instruction. Since this occurred following her professional development experiences there would seem to be a connection between the two; she acted in a way that reduced the importance of play and child choice in her classroom. Was this due to the lack of support or emphasis on the use of play in her professional development experiences? It seems so.

Ms. D's changes in Choice Time for a week each month to include the parents and infuse academics deemphasized the importance of play and choice for the children. As the adults descended into the classroom, the children must have wondered what caused this difference in their choice time. When the parents were in the room the emphasis shifted from free choice and play for all children to a variety of activities occurring, from play continuing for some children but academics enforced upon others. Some of the children would wonder why this change occurred in the classroom routine. They might wonder what was the criteria for allowing some to continue with play while others were selected for specific small group instruction. Another inference one can reasonably make is that since the change in Choice Time occurred when the parents were present, the children viewed academics to be more important than play.

Herein lies grave concern as to the impact from content provided in her professional development experiences. If a teacher who professes to support play in kindergarten changes her practices to support more literacy instruction and less play, then the result of professional development has clear impact on teachers' practices. Ms. D is a reflective practitioner and I observed her as an open-minded, life-long learner. She was vulnerable during the 2002-2003 school year due to having nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of her class fall into the

category of special needs children for whom she was concerned with providing differentiated instruction to meet their needs and interests. Since she felt she was not as knowledgeable as she should be in special education she sought opportunities that would teach her strategies to support the teaching of literacy for all children, including, and especially, her differently-abled children. Her vulnerability, in my informed judgment based on the data from this study, played an important role in her squeezing out the play time and infusing more skill instruction during this time.

Through changes in routines and additions of academic strategies as a result of professional development experiences, paradoxically it must be noted that Ms. D's general philosophy seemed to remain the same. Her practices were altered, marching to orders without thinking, but her beliefs were unchanged. Thus lies the dangers of professional development activities that are based on behavioral changes without a thorough investigation of underlying theories. In the case of Ms. D, her experiences did affect her practices and she was unaware of the discrepancies with her beliefs. Having little training in teaching special education children, she was willing to make changes in practices to provide literacy instruction to meet their needs. Her vulnerability added to the ease of enculturation of the strategies she was instructed to incorporate during the NCLB literacy workshops.

It took her a year of practice and reflection to come to this discovery, reevaluate her changes in practices that occurred following her professional development experiences, and once again match her practices to her beliefs. Yet she is a seasoned teacher with over 20 years of experience and student success to use as the foundation of her decisions and reflections. The concerns lie with less seasoned teachers who are more vulnerable to

professional development experiences that could alter both practices and newly-forming philosophies.

According to Cohen and Hill (2001), professional development is most likely to lead to a change in teaching practice when it is directly connected to the curriculum to be taught and the assessment to be used. “Under such circumstances, educational policy can be an instrument for improving teaching and learning (p.150).” In my informed opinion, the enforcement of such educational policy may change teacher practice but if the content of the professional development is not sound, then the results of the teacher change will also not be sound. In the case of parts of NCLB where the basis for some specific changes in reading instruction have been criticized, the professional activities emanating from it may lead to some teachers changing practice that is not supportive of experiential and historical knowledge of how children learn.

In the case of Ms. D, her initial reaction to the professional development activities was that of a willingness to try the new strategies. It has been noted that she is always seeking ways in which to teach all children to learn (See Ch.4, p. 65), so it was not out of character for her to accept these new ideas to try with the children. She embraced enthusiastically new techniques that she was taught that purportedly led to better readers, mainly through phonemic awareness activities. Her plan was to enhance literacy instruction for her special needs students.

However, the professional development activities were presented as necessary for all children. This is where Ms. D’s newly added practices collided with her belief system. As the reader reads through Chapter 4, Ms. D’s actions show how she continually looked at the needs of the individual child and designed school experiences to support the

individual. However, as a result of professional development experiences during the year of this case study, she came to feel the need to use the same or highly similar strategies with everyone, as for example by imposing phonemic awareness drills even on children who did not need it (Chapter 4, p.102). The purpose of phonemic awareness is to ensure reading success (Snow, 1998; Clay, 1991). Once the child has mastered reading, the need for phonemic awareness subsides; such is the case with Mick discussed in the previous chapter.

As a reflective practitioner, over a period of time Ms. D began to rethink and reflect on the new strategies, aligning herself with her foundational knowledge, her philosophy, and her successful teaching practices, and making informed decisions as to which techniques from the professional development experiences to use and which to discard or adapt within her practice. As Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) note, “Reflective teachers do not act blindly on impulse or rely on routine and tradition. Instead they carefully consider and reconsider their beliefs and practices to reconstruct and reorganize their experience (p. 76).”

We know that NCLB is based on research examined by the NRP. Many experts call for further research and evidence-based practice before we can be sure that the new reforms mandated are best practice. According to Cohen and Hill (2001), such reforms based on limited research should be considered experiments “on teachers and other people’s children (p.189)” and used to further the study, not to be used as conclusive practice. In the case of NCLB, the federal government is not treating it as experimental but, at least for the time being, set firmly in place and expected to be adhered to by schools facing a ‘reading deficit.’

Suggestions for Research and Policy

There are some limitations of my own research. The perspective examined is from the teacher's point of view, but it would be helpful to this study to hear the voices of the children and of the parents. It would have been a richer study had I known and included the child's view of literacy in play and the response to changes that were incurred when the parents came to school each month to infuse academics into the Choice Time. The voices of the parents would have helped to broaden the scope to include their thoughts on the changes in Choice Time and their inclusion in the instructional procedures. In future research of this type, interviews with parents and the children would alleviate the need for some assumptions and wonderings on my part as to their perceptions of and conclusions about some of the events that occurred within the framework of this study.

There is a need to further study the infusion of other disciplines into educational research and practice. Cohen and Hill (2001) have suggested the need for more research in how workshop learning affects teaching through professional development. They fear the encroachment of other experts from other professions taking on this task and undermining what educators deem best practices.

Examining the participants in the NRP, this is already happening. Dr. Lyon, who serves as the head of the committee, was himself not an educator, but a research psychologist. Only two teachers were on the NRP out of fifteen members, and none were experts in emergent literacy, the area where the strongest recommendations were made in teacher practice. Additionally, NCLB is supporting the use of the DIBELS assessment tool which allegedly measures literacy development in young children. DIBELS was

designed by Dr. Good, a psychologist, not an educator. His assessment tool includes the requirement for children to read a list of nonsense words to verify knowledge of the rules of the English language. No context clues or information are present to assist the child in knowing if the words are correct. The impact of reading instruction in the United States has been highly influenced by these two individuals, both psychologists. Where are the reading experts?

Further research needs to be conducted on professional development issues, such as who designs the professional development and how effective is it on teachers' practices on a larger scale. Possibly more care should be given to the researchers' credentials and credibility. Perhaps teams with researchers and practitioners and administrators should be formed to plan in service programs.

More research is needed to look into the value of including play in teaching literacy. The clear expression of literacy in play I observed in Ms. D's kindergarten would not seem commonplace in other kindergartens. Yet her success in incorporating play as a valuable literacy learning tool while supporting the need for play in kindergarten is evident as exemplified in the children's work samples illustrated in this dissertation. Further research should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of this alternative approach to counter the NCLB arguments.

Research in the area of time management is another area to be explored. With NCLB's push for academics, time is one of the major factors leading to disregarding play in lieu of literacy instruction. As reported in this study, following her professional development experiences, Ms. D attempted to save time by infusing the new academic strategies into the choice time. Upon reflection of her practices one year later, she found a way to move

the new strategies to other areas of her program, keeping the choice time intact and remaining within the time constraints. Ms. D's literacy in play combination saves time while supporting the needs and interests of both the teacher and the child. More research regarding time issues would help us learn more about a variety of curriculum and instruction opportunities and their consequences for learning and child behavior.

As noted, an extension of a study like this one could focus on the voices of the children, exploring their perspectives on parent participation, and examining their point of view on literacy in play and learning to read and write. Moreover, it would be relevant and beneficial to study cultural differences within the classroom that influence literacy in play, and how those differences are received and perceived by the teacher and other children.

Research is needed to explore and clarify the tensions between two educational communities: the Early Childhood Education Community, along with NAEYC versus their literacy pedagogical conflict with NRP and NCLB recommendations. NRP did not use any descriptive, naturalistic studies in their report. It would be helpful to conduct research in a more quantitative, systematic way to compare kindergartens similar to Ms. D's kindergarten with the academic, scripted models suggested by NCLB to help determine benefits of these programs.

The climate in education today pushes paper and pencil tasks and structured lessons to teach literacy to young children. Yet do we know it is working, or that it is better than providing a play and literacy climate in which children use literacy as a purposeful means of communication? For these serious issues, a variety of research studies should be conducted, including qualitative ones, which previously were not recognized by the NRP.

NCLB recognizes only quantitative, scientifically based research, which follows the medical model (*i.e.*, experimental) for research on intervention effectiveness.

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Practices: http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/dap1.htm

National Reading Panel: http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/NRPAbout/about_nrp.htm

No Child Left Behind: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/edpicks.jhtml?src=ln>

Read to Succeed:

http://www.ecs.org/dbsearches/Search_Info/Literacy_ProgramProfile.asp?ProgID=45

Report of the National Reading Panel:

<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/subgroups.htm>

Summary Report of the National Reading Panel:

<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/summary>.

Appendix A

Initial interview questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching kindergarten?
2. How long have you worked in this school?
3. How long have you worked as an all-day kindergarten teacher?
4. Has all day K effected your practice? Explain:
5. How has your practices changed over the last 10 years? The last 3 years?
Last year?
6. How do you foresee change for next year?
7. What is your philosophy in using play in kindergarten?
8. Describe the different types of play offered in your classroom and how you see their use in kindergarten.
9. How do you teach literacy in kindergarten?
10. How do you provide for individual differences in your kindergarten classroom?
11. How do you assess and measure growth of children?
12. Describe your overall educational philosophy.
13. What professional development have you participated in over the last 3 years?
14. Did you request to go, or were you asked to go by administration (refer to each professional development activity.)
15. Has the professional development impacted your practices and beliefs? Explain
16. What do you hope to gain from this study?

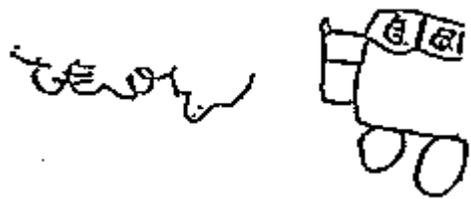
Appendix B

Developmental Writing Continuum

School District of Philadelphia - Draft/July 6, 1999



Level I: Emerging



Level II: Pictorial

+ clay S 10 P +
B e P 27 14 P 10 P +
S 1 M A P L O W N I O W N
E V E R E T H I N G W A M

Level III: Pre-Communicative

I N M Y M O M F M K E
N I K W + M Y F H
(I asked my mom if my friend
and I could walk to my friend's
house)

Level IV: Semi-Phonetic

Appendix C.1
Cristin's beginning writing 8/02

AUG 27, 2002
 AUG 27 2:17
 CALLIE I LICUW
 SOLW AND
 MS BROMR AND I LIC MX
 HS AND I LIC RENIN
 AND ILC DOLS

Appendix C.2
Cristin's response to a writing prompt, 1/03

1-8-03

I like wintr. I get to
 swim in sid and sleding too. I
 like samr but I dot like the
 bees. samr and wintrtr are fun
 a lot. You can make snow agals
 and snow ball fits and making snow
 mens. We wear cotes and glufs and
 snowpans and scarfs and hats and
 erem. uts too. I like to dring k
 I like hot coco and I like
 making cookes for wintr. We
 make choklit cookes and coconut
 cookes and simain cookes and
 nopron cookes and springcool cookes
 and jeley cookes and peach cookes
 and pentr butter cookes and appled
 cookes. wintr is very very
 very very very very very
 very very very very
 very very very very
 Fun. that is why I like wintr

Appendix D
Halle's Newspaper, 1/03

Girls ReProt
by Hannah
Kdr gradin nus papr

Allie was home sik.

Adrianna sprad her akl.

Nichole said she brit

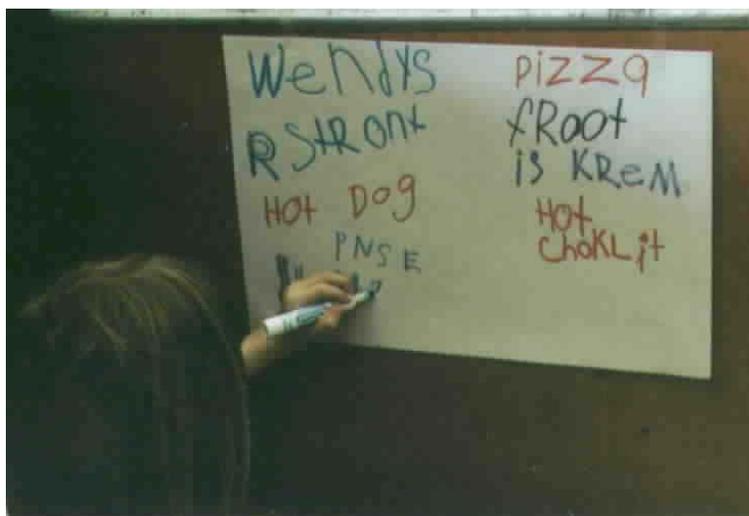
Jale to the dotr.
Alexis is going to
git a pupe.

Madison's fish did.

Appendix E.1
Pittsburgh Stadium



Appendix E.2
Wendy's Restaurant



VITA

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PUBLICATIONS:

Dean, P. K. & Caropreso, E. (2001). *Culture Nights: Students, Teachers and Families Learning Together*, American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences Journal.

PRESENTATIONS:

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PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

International Reading Association (IRA)
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE)
National Council for the Teachers of English (NCTE)
Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)