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Examining the Impact Naming One’s Beliefs has on One’s Practice: The Journey of Three English Language Arts Teachers

Jessica Lynn Price
University of South Carolina

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EXAMINING THE IMPACT NAMING ONE’S BELIEFS HAS ON ONE’S PRACTICE: THE JOURNEY OF THREE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS

by

Jessica Lynn Price

Bachelor of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2007

Master of Education
Columbia College, 2009

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Accepted by:
Diane Stephens, Major Professor
Allison Anders, Committee Member
Diane DeFord, Committee Member
Yang Wang, Committee Member
Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
DEDICATION

To my family, you have been my biggest fans, loving and supporting me every step of the journey;

To my students, you are my motivation; and

To my participants, thank you for being willing; you taught me so much.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people accompanied me on this journey; it was the support of so many friends and family that got me to where I am today.

I first want to thank my family. In elementary school I decided I wanted to be a teacher; I would arrange my stuffed animals and teach them all I knew. Sometimes I got lucky and I had a real live student—my brother. Investing in my blooming passion for teaching and for learning, my parents bought me a classroom-size chalkboard that went all the way across a wall in my bedroom. First stroke of chalk on board, my decision was made—I was going to be a teacher. My parents continued to stand behind me while I chase my dreams. Mom, in the moments I thought the stress was unbearable, you were always a phone call away, with just the right words to pick me up and set me back on track. Papa, you were always eager to listen to my latest learning and read my newest writing, genuinely interested in what I had to say. Papa and Mom, thank you for loving me the way you do. Thank you for believing in me.

Stephen, you came in to my life in the midst of this crazy journey, and I am so happy you did. I am confident that you know just as much about my research topic as I do. You did not grow weary of hearing what I was learning; instead you encouraged my thinking and offered new insights. I could not have found a better match; we are two peas in a pod who love literature and love to learn. What a bright future we have!

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Thanks to every single one of you. I never felt alone on this journey; I had you all. Your unwavering love and support is what sustained me.
ABSTRACT

In this study, I sought to understand how naming one’s beliefs about teaching reading and writing impacted reading and writing practices. I used action research design (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Mills, 2011) to examine three teachers’ journeys as they gave name to their beliefs. I made audio recordings and transcriptions of small group sessions and interviews, observed teachers, asked for and collected teacher reflections, and kept a researcher’s journal. I used thematic analysis to identify patterns across data points. What I found varied for each participant, influenced by the degree that each participant was present and reflective throughout the process. One participant named her beliefs and doing so impacted her practices; another became consciously aware of the relationship between her beliefs and practices and fine-tuned her practices; and the third participant did not seem to distinguish beliefs from practices and maintained the same practices throughout the semester. Based on the data, I developed a theoretical model to show the impact naming beliefs has on practice. I concluded that the conditions needed to foster teacher agency and self-efficacy to enact change to practice are awareness, presence, reflection, and time.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I was an elementary school teacher for seven years and then, three years ago, made the big jump to middle school. When I did so, I realized there was sometimes a disconnect between my practices and the practices of the other English language arts teachers. I could not understand why they did what they did in their classrooms. During this time, I was taking courses for a Ph.D. in Language and Literacy. I became an intensely reflective teacher. I reflected on my practice and the way my students reacted. I became interested in why I made the decisions I made. I realized that I believed that learning is an active process, learning is a social process, learning is a reflective process, learning is contextual, learning in school involves learning academic discourse, the classroom needs to be a safe place, and students come to knowing by traveling a different path. I came to understand that my beliefs acted as a filtering system for the choices I made not only about instruction, but also about how I chose to interact and behave with my students. I hypothesized that the other teachers and I might have different beliefs about the way students learn.

To find out whether my beliefs led to practices that fostered growth in my students, I began to consider the origin of my beliefs and searched for research and theory (Bandura, 1977; Dewey, 1933/1938; Vygotsky, 1978; etc.) related to my beliefs. I then...
began doing the next important layer of this work, which was making sure my practice
aligned with my beliefs. While sitting at my desk, exhausted from a day of teaching,
looking out at 30 empty desks, I would reflect on what I felt were the successes for the
day and what I felt needed tweaking for tomorrow. I realized that I was not consistently
conferring with students, allowing students to independently read a choice book and write
on a choice topic, and providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively with
other students. My practices were not always aligned with my beliefs and this made me
uncomfortable.

Conferring is what allowed me to get to know each student on a more intimate
level. When I met with students one-on-one, the students and I got to talk about where
they were with their learning, and we got to figure out, together, what was the next step. I
found this was where growth happened; I could not touch each student, in this way,
during whole group instruction. I knew the benefits my students experienced when I put
my beliefs into action, and if I knew how to reach my students, I had to reach them. I
committed to making conferences part of what I did every day. I also began
incorporating more collaborative opportunities for my students and daily independent
reading and writing.

The tension I had experienced, vanished. Now, when I closed my classroom door
and turned to go home, I knew that I was doing what I knew to do to grow each student
academically, emotionally, and socially. My beliefs drove my practices. I discovered
when I made instructional decisions based on my beliefs; I created conditions that
optimized what my students learned. When I was not teaching or acting in a way that was
ture to my beliefs, the conditions I created were less supportive of learning. My journey
led me to wonder whether other teachers’ beliefs were driving the decisions they were making for their students. I knew that going through the complicated process of examining my beliefs helped me become a teacher who was much more reflective, responsive, and purposeful in my teaching. I wondered if this process could be beneficial to other teachers and, ultimately, to their students. Specifically, I sought to understand, “How does naming one’s beliefs about teaching reading and writing impact reading and writing practices?”

**Rationale**

Many researchers have found teachers’ beliefs are tied to practice (Aguirre & Speer, 1999; Brickhouse, 1990; Buchanan et al., 1998; Carter & Norwood, 1997; Charlesworth et al., 1991; Gales & Yan, 2001; Harvey et al., 1968; Incecay, 2011; Johnson, 1992; Love & Kruger, 2005;Muijs & Reynolds, 2002;Peabody, 2011; Polly et al., 2013; Richardson et al., 1991; Stipek et al., 2001;Zheng, 2013), while others found opposite results (Burke & Duffy, 1979; De Angelis, 2011; Haney & McArthur, 2002; Hos & Kekec, 2014; Judson, 2006; Uztosun, 2013). Researchers have also studied teachers’ beliefs as a critical factor in educational reform (Borg, 2011; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2013; Stephens et al., 2000; Stephens et al., 2011) and have experimented with a variety of methods to measure the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practice such as self-reported data from participants and by researcher observations. Borg (2011) asked teachers to name their beliefs and about the sources of those beliefs; however, none of the studies I found examined whether having teachers name and reflect on their beliefs resulted in changes in practice. The purpose of this research was to begin to fill this gap that existed in the literature.
Theoretical Framework

I hold a social constructivist view on learning. I believe knowledge is individually, socially, and culturally constructed (Bruner, 1986; Dewey, 1933/1938; Vygotsky, 1978). My theoretical orientation has been molded and formed over time. This lens through which I view the world, my teaching, and my research is not a permanent lens, but instead is fluid and changes as my experiences continue and my thinking evolves. My beliefs impact my life and therefore impacted the conditions I felt necessary for teachers to name their beliefs. The 7 beliefs that influence me the most are that (1) learning is an active process, (2) learning is a social process, (3) learning is a reflective process, (4) learning is contextual, (5) learning in school involves learning academic discourse, (6) the classroom needs to be a safe place, and (7) students come to knowing by traveling a different path.

Learning is an Active Process

Dewey (1938/1938), Vygotsky (1978), and Bruner (1986) contributed to my understanding that learning requires the learner being physically and mentally involved in the learning. Dewey (1933/1938) was the first to write about experiential learning, introducing the idea that learning happens through experience. Dewey explained “there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education” (p. 7); people learn best when they are personally involved through experience. Dewey helped me understand that in order for learning to have significant meaning and to impact behavior, it must be self-discovered.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the idea of knowledge first being a shared possession between the teacher and learner. The teacher and learner actively participate
in constructing knowledge through a variety of engagements. Both teacher and learner take an active stance. The learner takes risks and tries out new things, while the teacher monitors the learner’s decisions made and provides support when appropriate. Vygotsky helped me understand that through this process, a learner is able to construct new understandings.

Bruner (1986) helped me understand that learning is an active process in which learners construct knowledge by building from what they already know. He coined the term *scaffolding*, which is very similar to Vygotsky’s (1978) *zone of proximal development*. Bruner (1986) explained scaffolding as “the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill he/she is in the process of acquiring” (p. 19). A teacher can increase learning by connecting new learning to a learner’s past experiences and by providing support, through scaffolding, as the learner actively engages with the new learning.

Dewey (1933/1938), Vygotsky (1978), and Bruner (1986) have influenced my beliefs of how one learns and consequently influence my teaching. I believe all teachers should create an environment where students are active participants in the learning, not inactive bystanders. I incorporated this belief in my classroom and in the design of the study.

**Belief in classroom practice.** To put this belief in action, I set the conditions in which my sixth graders can uncover new knowledge and provide the space to let them steer learning in a direction that is meaningful to them. For example, I knew I wanted students to be able to use information from a text to support an argument. At the beginning of the year, I held conferences with students to get to know them as readers
and writers and as individuals. When I asked students what they saw themselves doing in the future, the majority mentioned working with animals. Knowing my students’ interests, I decided to use animals to teach the genre of argumentative writing. I first showed a few clips of Blackfish (Oteyza & Cowperthwaite, 2013), a documentary that shows how SeaWorld acquired its whales. We next read about zoos. My students began making connections between the two texts (film and print) and began looking for other texts that discussed the pros and cons of taking animals from their natural habitats. Some students were in favor of doing this and others were not. Both groups made strong cases, with a variety of evidence, to support their thinking. They had learned how to use information to support an argument via authentic, collaborative inquiry that used their prior knowledge as a stepping-stone to new knowledge.

**Learning is a Social Process**

Bandura (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) shaped my understanding that learning happens through social interactions. Bandura (1977) helped me understand that the world and a person’s behaviors influence one another. People learn through observation of others; a model performs a behavior and the observer pays attention to the action. The observer then remembers the observed behavior and tries to replicate what he/she has seen. The model may be unaware that he/she is modeling behaviors and the recipient may be unaware that he/she is learning. The observer must be motivated to imitate. For example, if the observer sees the model rewarded for the behavior, the observer is more likely to replicate what he/she has witnessed. Bandura showed me that people learn through modeling, observation, and imitation.
Vygotsky (1978) firmly believed that learning takes place through interaction with others. He explained that learning takes place first on a social plane and then on a psychological plane. Vygotsky coined the term *zone of proximal development* after coming to understand what happened when a child worked alongside a more capable other, someone who was able to perform a task just beyond what the child could currently do. The social interaction that took place created a space in which the child could first do something collaboratively that later he/she could do independently.

Bandura (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) taught me the importance of creating an environment that provides social interactions. Equally important, they taught me to be aware of the social environment I create. What I allow into the environment of my classroom and into the study influenced what was learned and also sent messages of what I privileged as important to learn.

**Belief in classroom practice.** If you walked into my classroom, you would instantly see that I believe learning is social. My desks are in groups. This allows my students to always be in position to bounce ideas off of someone nearby. I also make sure that my students are doing the majority of the talking in my classroom. I find it imperative to constantly assess who is doing the talking. If I find I am hearing myself more than I am hearing my students, I stop and make adjustments to my practice. I hold Socratic seminars (Adler, 1982) on a monthly basis that allows students to have an entire class period where I step back, and they debate their thinking with one another. I find this to be one of the most valuable learning experiences for my students.

I also mindfully create lesson plans that allow new learning to be modeled. For example, when teaching students how to write and perform monologues, I first modeled
what a monologue looked and sounded like. I showed the point-of-view in which a monologue is told, I used exaggerated body movements and facial expressions, and I used voice intonation to demonstrate the impact of pitch. By watching my performance, students were able to observe a monologue in action, which helped students imitate the new learning.

**Learning is a Reflective Process**

Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983/1987) have influenced my understanding of the importance of reflection. Dewey (1933) helped me understand reflection as a path to learning. He claimed that engaging in reflection moves a learner from the discomfort of confusion to the comfortable state of groundedness. Dewey argued that *reflective activity* (p. 257) is the act of processing an experience with an outcome of learning being produced. Reflective activity first begins with a problem then cycles through five phases of reflective thought: suggestion, intellectualization, guiding idea, reasoning, and testing and resolution. Dewey explained the phase of suggestion as the time in which the mind produces possible solutions to the problem. He described the stage of intellectualization when one internalizes the nature of the problem and solutions that could ease the discomfort of possessing a problem without a solution. Dewey explained that the guiding idea is the stage where a hypothesis is formed based on prior knowledge and observation. He described reasoning as the point in which one applies his/her knowledge to the hypothesis and mentally elaborates on the possibilities of outcomes. In the final stage, testing and resolution, Dewey suggested this is when the hypothesis is put in to action and one finds a solution or a new problem is revealed. Dewey believed teachers should introduce new material in a way that encourages reflective inquiry.
Schön (1983/1987) concentrated on the significance of reflection in relationship to practitioners. He described reflection as *knowing-in-action*. He suggested reflection as stepping back from the action and looking upon it in order to improve the action or learn from it; learning occurs within the action. Schön (1983) explained:

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation (p. 68).

Schön suggested that experience is actually what teaches individuals. Importance lies in being present within the experience to engage in reflection surrounding what is seen and what is felt. The act of dissecting and understanding the complexities of the experience has potential to construct new knowledge or to confirm what was already known.

Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983/1987) influenced my understanding of the conditions I create for my classroom and the conditions I created for the study in order for learning to take place. I purposely gave opportunities for uninterrupted reflection to take place on a personal level and for reflection to take place with others.

**Belief in classroom practice.** In my classroom, I provide ample time for reflection so that students can solidify the learning that is taking place. For example, during writing, I give students rubrics so they can reflect on the way they are applying what they are learning. I require my students to give evidence of how they met the requirements. I also emphasize reflection after I give graded rubrics back to students. I have students reflect and compare the grade I gave them with the grade they feel they
earned. I encourage students to engage in a conversation with me about any areas they feel they have applied the requirement, yet I did not give them the points they felt they earned. This helps students reflect further on their self-assessment.

**Learning is Contextual**

Dewey (1933), Rosenblatt (1978), and Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (2001) contributed to my understanding that learning is contextual. Dewey (1933) believed that learning should be tied to a child’s experiences and interests. He explained that teachers could do this by making connections to the diverse contexts that are represented in a classroom to students’ home life, community, and broader world. Dewey thought that teachers should allow students to search for meaning in relationships that make sense and were relevant to their world. When teachers teach in a way that privileges contextual learning, students no longer have to ask the question, “Why am I learning this?” Students notice that learning in school is related to their personal lives.

Rosenblatt (1978) argued that meaning takes place in the transaction between the reader and the text. Readers are not alone while reading. The text is interacting with the reader through language, and language is always attached to context (Halliday, 1973). When reading a text with students, it is important to help students make connections to the context of the text being read. This connection to prior understanding allows students to ground new learning in something known. If teachers allow conversations to take place around texts, students can also use others’ experiences to help construct connections to new contexts.

Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (2001) explained that each student comes to school with unique *funds of knowledge*. They used this term “to refer to the historically
accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual function and well-being” (p. 133). It is critical for teachers to be constant investigators of their students in order to deeply know the funds of knowledge each student brings to the classroom. Knowing and using students’ funds of knowledge allows teachers to best make learning relevant for each and every student. When a teacher does not invest in knowing his/her students inside and outside of school, trying to make learning relevant becomes a superficial endeavor.

Dewey (1933), Rosenblatt (1978), and Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (2001) have influenced the way I teach and the way I facilitated naming beliefs. I do not believe one can learn when what is being learned is separated from context; relevance and meaning is then lost.

**Belief in classroom practice.** This belief can be a challenge to put into practice. I have to constantly be alert to ways I can gain access into students’ everyday lives. One way that I strive to make learning contextual for my students is in writing. Through kid watching (Goodman, 1989), I noticed that outside of school my kids loved reading magazines. They see them at dentist offices, doctor offices, grocery checkout lines, and in the hands of family members. I knew I wanted my students to understand different structures in informational texts (cause and effect, problem and solution, compare and contrast, etc.) and features (captions, photographs, maps, etc.) because having this knowledge would help them be successful in and out of school. I gathered magazines that I knew would interest my students. We took an inquiry stance and explored the design of the articles and the magazines as a whole. My students then picked a topic they would enjoy reading about. They researched their topic and created a magazine that
incorporated articles using a variety of text structures and informational text features. By using an inquiry and project-based approach, I was able to erase the walls of my classroom, and extend the learning to their lived experiences outside of school. I set the conditions for students to learn in the same way they learn at home, by exploring and creating.

**Learning in School Involves Learning Academic Discourse**

Gee (2004) postulated that learning in school can be challenging because of the academic discourse that dominates classrooms. He considers this discourse to be “complex, technical, and initially alienating to many learners” (p. 3). Some students have been exposed to academic language at home and others have not. Because teachers are not always aware of the privilege that experience with academic language brings, they sometimes penalize students without these prior experiences. They do this by labeling students as having language delays or claiming that the students have no language – rather than celebrating the language students do have. Constructivists honor home discourse styles, which simultaneously helps students to learn academic discourse.

Gee (2004) taught me to use students’ language as a springboard to teaching academic discourse. I cannot assume that all students have the experiences needed to be successful with the language used in the school setting. This belief also influenced the language I used with teachers. I knew that my schooling influenced my academic language: therefore, I had to build upon the language teachers were familiar with instead of using my personal academic vocabulary.

**Belief in classroom practice.** This is another belief that I find difficult to always make visible in my practice. It does not come naturally; I have to think explicitly how I
am validating every voice present. I understand that the language I use to teach privileges some while limits the access to others. I address the academic language that may come as an obstacle to some. I use illustrations, skits, and multiple contacts with new vocabulary. I also find it helpful to use my students as resources for one another. Often students are able to say things in a way that is more comprehensible for students than the way I am attempting to say it and teach it. For example, because of the priority I place on relationships in my classroom, my students naturally fill in gaps for one another when there is a disconnect between learning and understanding. After teaching monologues, I noticed a child was having a difficult time creating their script. Without having to ask one of my stronger writers to be a mentor for a student experiencing difficulty with the task, they both showed up at lunch, asking to borrow our classroom for a space to work on the writing together. My student saw a need; his fellow peer needed help beyond what they received in the classroom from me, and stepped in and addressed the need on his own. The opportunity to hear the academic language that I was trying to expose the child to, from another child, helped the new concept become achievable.

The Classroom needs to be a Safe Place

Boostrom (1998), Clay (2001), and Johnston (2011) have contributed to my understanding of the importance of creating a safe learning environment. A classroom needs to be a safe place where children are respected, valued, and comfortable (Boostrom, 1998). It needs to be comfortable, emotionally and physically – a place students want to be, not a place they fear. Students need to feel that their answers and comments, whether right or wrong, will not be ridiculed, but valued. Mistakes need to be considered a part of the learning process and not something to fear. This allows students
to take risks, and risk-taking makes learning possible. To create this kind of space, teachers need to embed opportunities into the school day to allow friendships to be developed. When students have time to get to know one another on a personal level, they get to know and respect their similarities and differences. This promotes a space for students to feel safe to be who they are without the fear of being judged. It is also important, not only in opportunities for students to get to know one another, but for the teacher to get to know his/her students on a personal level.

Influenced by Clay’s (2001) work with beginning readers, I believe teachers also need to provide engagements in which they know the child will be successful. After a child becomes confident in his/her ability to face challenges with resilience, a teacher has the flexibility to increase the complexity of the task without the child backing down. A learning environment that celebrates attempts allows children to trust that they will be supported as they take steps in unfamiliar territory.

Johnston (2011) helped me think critically about the power of my language used in the classroom. My language sends various messages to my students such as what I think about each student, what I approve as the appropriate way to talk, and what I think a reader and writer should act like. The language I use has the power to nurture a sense of belonging and can give students the confidence in knowing that I believe they can learn; however, my language also has the power to leave students out of the community and can give individuals or groups of students the impression that I think learning is outside of their capability.

Boostrom (1998), Clay (2001), and Johnston (2011) have influenced the environment I create for my students and the environment I created for teachers. I am
acutely aware of purposely creating opportunities for relationships to be established and
nurtured so that students will take the risks that learning involves without fearing
humiliation and judgment. I make sure students have opportunities to taste success to
stimulate motivation for future learning. This same consideration I take in my classroom
each day, I took in creating a safe and encouraging environment for teachers.

Belief in classroom practice. In my classroom, I devote the first few weeks of
school showing my students that I feel it is important to get to know them and for each
student to get to know one another. I continue to do this throughout the year; I look for
ways our lives can connect. For example, I use many activities that require partnerships;
I like to keep groups small at first so that students are more prone to talk to each other
and not leave a third or fourth child out. I use creative ways to partner students such as
making a statement that is relative to students personally and if their answer is yes to the
statement, they stand up. For instance I might ask, “I am the oldest child in my family.”
I then partner the kids who are standing up. They learn what they have in common with
one another and can use that similarity as a springboard for conversation. I have noticed
that using creative partnerships at the beginning of the year allows students get to know
kids they may not have taken the time to get to know.

We also spend the first few minutes at the beginning of each class talking about
our lives. This sends a message that we care enough about one another to want to know
about lives outside of school. When someone is talking, we are turned toward that
person letting him/her know they have our full attention. In this way, I try to help my
students understand that every voice matters.
Students Come to Knowing by Traveling a Different Path

Clay (2001) and Paley (2005) provided me with the insight that students are not a one-size-fits-all; they each are unique in their needs and way of traveling to understanding. Traditional teaching assumes children all learn as Clay (2001) described, the lesson for the day, and they all move forward together (p. 17). Since this is not the case, it is important that teachers provide children multiple learning paths, involving multiple ways of knowing. Teachers can meet the individual needs of students by providing not just whole group but also more personal instruction in small groups or one-on-one. This allows teachers to customize instruction and ensure that all students are engaged. These differentiated experiences help every learner reach his/her potential.

Paley (2005) explained, “…children are not one-dimensional, nor does their development proceed along a well-defined path” (p. 72). It is essential for teachers to remember this and to understand that children do not learn in identical ways. The social context in which a child lives has a huge impact in which a child learns (Vygotsky, 1978). Understanding that every child’s social context is uniquely different requires a teacher to become a kid watcher (Goodman, 1989), looking for ways to connect learning to what the child already knows and understands. Every child is capable of learning; however, they may not take the path that is well traveled and familiar to the teacher and other learners in the classroom. Paley also warned that teachers have to be aware that there is not one possible interpretation when making child observations. The lens in which a teacher holds can limit the view in which he/she sees the child. Allowing for multiple interpretations helps a teacher better see what the child may need next.
Clay (2001) and Paley (2005) have influenced my optimism in believing every child can and will learn. It is up to me to discover what each child needs in order for learning to take place. I have to be invested in each child’s life to gain this awareness and understanding. This was also true for the teachers involved in the study. I had to gain entrance into their worlds, to know how to best serve their needs as learners new to the experience of naming beliefs.

**Belief in classroom practice.** One way that I ensure that this belief is put into practice is by constantly kid watching (Goodman, 1989). I watch my students all the time, jotting down notes about what I see, what I hear, questions I have, and ideas about where to lead them next. I do my best to give every child the most individualized education I can. I utilize small group instruction and conferences to ensure that I am meeting the unique needs of all my learners. For example, if I notice some students, but not all, are having a difficult time using punctuation, I pull aside this group of students and meet this specific need in a more intimate setting. It is not easy to meet the specific needs of all my students. It is a daily challenge and takes a lot of reflection. When I am intentional about incorporating my beliefs into my daily practice, it is obvious that my students are engaged and learning is evident.

**Conclusion**

My theoretical conceptions about knowledge are grounded in social constructivist philosophies. It is my understanding that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed; people create meaning through human interactions and the environment in which they are in (Dewey, 1938). Learning takes place when the learner is actively engaged with the learning rather than a passive bystander and more knowledgeable others
are available to take the learner just beyond where he/she could go alone (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978).

My beliefs about learning drive my practice and acted as a lens in which I designed the study and the way I interpreted the behaviors of the teachers involved in the study. Moreover, the beliefs I hold impacted the beliefs I helped teachers name because they are the beliefs, I have found, when put into practice will provide optimal conditions for learning.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I reviewed the literature on teacher beliefs and the relationship of beliefs to practice to broaden my knowledge base in this area. I found a synthesis by Frank Pajares (1992) that was particularly helpful as I started my investigation. I located and read all of the articles and studies that were cited in his article and then did a separate search of my own. As I began to search through the literature on this topic, I found ample research available. I used a variety of search engines such as: Education Source and ERIC, ERIC (EBSCO), Education Source, and Google Scholar. I used key words and phrases such as: relationship between beliefs and practice, teachers’ beliefs and teaching, teachers’ beliefs and practice, and relationship of teacher beliefs and practices. After reading through the studies available, I began identifying the studies that were most relevant to my topic of interest. I ended up with 42 studies that explored the relationship of teachers’ beliefs and practices.

I divided the studies I found into three categories: (1) the relationship between beliefs to practice as determined by self-reported data (2) the relationship between beliefs to practice as determined by researcher observation, and (3) teachers’ beliefs as a critical factor in educational reform.
The Relationship Between Beliefs to Practice as Determined by Self-Reported Data

Much of the research on teachers’ beliefs in relation to practice is based on self-reported data from teacher participants. Research on teachers’ beliefs in relation to practice has been explored in areas such as developmentally appropriate practices, language learning, culturally relevant practices, and math (Buchanan et al., 1998; Carter & Norwood, 2010; Charlesworth et al., 1991; De Angelis, 2011; Gales & Yan, 2001; Love & Kruger, 2005; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002; Polly et al., 2013; Uztosun, 2013). Most research based on self-reported data has found that there is a positive relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices (Buchanan et al., 1998; Carter & Norwood, 1997; Charlesworth et al., 1991; Gales & Yan, 2001; Love & Kruger, 2005; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002; Polly et al., 2013). I divided this group of literature into sub-categories to get a better understanding of what has been explored on this topic. I created sub-categories to clarify the content area or non-content area the study used as a focal point.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Two studies examined developmentally appropriate practices and teachers’ practices (Buchanan et al., 1998; Charlesworth et al., 1991). Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1991) created a questionnaire that examined teachers’ beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education. They used the Publication of Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Early Childhood Education Practices published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1986) as the standard for developmentally appropriate practices.

The researchers created a 27-item self-report checklist that consisted of a teachers’ belief scale and an instructional activities scale. Charlesworth et al. gave the
questionnaire to 113 kindergarten teachers. They found a positive correlation between teachers’ self-reported beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices and their practices. They also found a positive correlation in participants’ self-reported developmentally inappropriate beliefs and practices.

Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, White, and Charlesworth (1998) examined the relationship between classroom and teacher characteristics and teachers’ self-reported beliefs and classroom practices. He described classroom characteristics as class size, grade level, number of students with disabilities, and number of students on free and reduced lunch. Buchanan et al. explained teacher characteristics as perceived relative influence and area of certification. Teachers involved in the study were first, second, and third grade teachers. They completed The Primary Teacher’s Beliefs and Practices Survey, which is a survey based on the developmentally appropriate standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1994). The researchers found that classroom and teacher characteristics predicted teacher beliefs and practices. For example, teachers that felt they had more influence on what went on in their classrooms than other sources, such as parents and administration, reported to have more agreement with developmentally appropriate practices. These findings were consistent with the findings of Charlesworth and colleagues (1991) who found that teachers who used more developmentally inappropriate practices believed that parents and administration had more influence over their practice than they (the teachers) did.

**Language Learning**

De Angelis (2011) and Uztosun (2013) studied teachers’ beliefs about language. De Angelis (2011) specifically examined (1) teachers’ beliefs about the role of prior
language knowledge in learning, (2) value of language in modern society, and (3) best practices to be used with multilingual students. The participants included 176 middle school teachers who taught in a variety of subject areas. Participants were from Austria, Italy, and Great Britain. De Angelis administered a 43-question, Likert-scale questionnaire developed by Lee and Oxelson (2006) that was designed to assess the attitudes of California K-12 teachers’ towards maintaining home language. The researcher modified the questionnaire to include statements that would reflect teachers’ belief about (1) the advantages and disadvantages of multilingualism, (2) how parents and students feel about home language maintenance, and (3) classroom practice relative to maintaining home language. De Angelis found that teachers from the three countries had similar views on some belief statements, yet differed on others in the three areas examined in the questionnaire. For example, the majority of participants agreed that students who know multiple languages will have more opportunities for success in their professional life, but there was a significant difference in the proportion of teachers who allowed students to speak their home language in class. De Angelis was concerned that teachers’ beliefs showed little understanding of the cognitive benefits of home language maintenance.

Uztosun (2013) conducted an interpretive study in Turkey with six teachers who taught English as an additional language at the elementary level. He interviewed teachers and asked them questions about effective ways of learning a language and teaching a language. Uztosun also asked them about their practices. He found inconsistencies between teachers’ beliefs and self-reported practices. For example, most of teachers said they believed that a new language is best taught by communication with others; however,
their self-reported practices predominately consisted of vocabulary and grammar teaching. Uztosun did not find a relationship between the teachers’ beliefs and practices after classroom observations.

Culturally Relevant Practice

Love and Kruger (2005) were interested in ways teachers’ beliefs influence student achievement; their focus was on at-risk populations. Love and Kruger created an assessment tool to measure teachers’ culturally relevant teaching beliefs. They gave the survey to 244 teachers who served African American students, in six different urban schools. Participants taught grades ranging from kindergarten through eighth grade. The researchers found that teachers identified with beliefs such as all students can succeed, teaching is a way to give back to the community, and the importance of students’ ethnicity. The same participants believed they were disseminators of knowledge, and that repetition, drill, and practice were effective teaching strategies. Love and Kruger found that teachers felt that direct instruction was simply needed at times and if they felt it was needed, this is the way in which they would deliver instruction to their students. The teachers that identified with these beliefs were correlated with high test scores.

Math

Carter and Norwood (1997) looked at seven fourth and fifth grade teachers’ beliefs about mathematics, and the influence teachers’ beliefs have on students’ beliefs about mathematics. They used the Beliefs about Mathematics survey, which was revised from an instrument developed by the National Center for Research on Teacher Education at Michigan University, to determine the teachers’ beliefs. Carter and Norwood also used a survey with students that was created by Nicholls, Cobb, Yackel, Wood, and Wheatley.
(1990) to determine beliefs about mathematics. Both surveys contained questions on a Likert scale. The researchers aligned the teachers’ beliefs with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Standards (1995).

The researchers found that teachers’ beliefs about how to teach mathematics and the way students learn mathematics impacted how students viewed mathematics. Teachers who held beliefs that were closely aligned with the NCTM standards engaged in practices that influenced students’ beliefs about mathematics in a positive way. For example, students of teachers who reported beliefs, which were aligned with NCTM, found greater pleasure in engaging in challenging mathematical problems and working hard to solve mathematical problems, and students of teachers who reported beliefs, which were not aligned, did not.

Polly, McGee, Wang, Lambert, Pugalee, and Johnson (2013), Gales and Yan (2001), and Muijs and Reynolds (2002) were not only interested in the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices but also in the relationship between teacher beliefs and student achievement. Polly et al. (2013) studied 35 teachers who taught kindergarten through fifth grade. All teachers were involved in a professional development program that focused on standards-based instruction. A teachers’ beliefs questionnaire, developed by Swan (2007), was used to examine teachers’ beliefs about mathematics, teaching mathematics, and student learning. A teachers’ practices questionnaire, also developed by Swan (2007), was used to examine participants’ instructional practices in relation to the teaching of mathematics. The researchers also measured each teacher’s content knowledge of mathematics by using the Mathematical Knowledge for Teaching Assessment and the Content Knowledge for Teaching Test
(Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005). To assess student achievement, Polly et al. used end-of-unit assessments from the Investigation in Number, Data and Space curricula (TERC, 2008) as pre- and post-tests. The assessments were scored using a rubric. The researchers found that teachers who reported they held teacher-centered beliefs reported that they taught in that manner. Teachers who reported they held more student-centered beliefs reported they taught in that way. Students in classrooms that teachers reported as being more teacher-centered showed smaller gains on the end-of-unit assessment than the students in classrooms that were more student-centered.

Gales and Yan (2001) examined the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices and their students’ achievement in mathematics. Participants were mathematics teachers from around the United States. The researchers used data from Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and questionnaires to examine whether teachers who identified as behaviorists teachers had different beliefs and practices as teachers who identified as constructivists teachers and also examined whether there was a difference in student learning based on the beliefs and practices of the students’ teachers. Gales and Yan found that teachers who identified with beliefs true to behaviorist pedagogy had different beliefs and practices of teachers who identified with beliefs true to constructivist pedagogy. A hierarchical linear regression analysis was run on the teachers’ beliefs and practices using students’ scores in mathematics as the dependent variable. The researchers found that the type of community in which students lived had an impact on student achievement; however, the impact of the community on student achievement disappeared whenever behaviorist teachers’ beliefs were taken into account. Gales and Yan also found that there was a negative relationship between
constructivist teachers’ beliefs that mathematics is a practical and structured guide for addressing real world circumstances and student achievement.

Muijs and Reynolds (2002) examined the relationship between teachers’ behaviors, beliefs, self-efficacy, and subject knowledge and student achievement in mathematics. The researchers identified teacher behaviors through observations. Teacher beliefs, self-efficacy, and teacher subject knowledge was identified by using a questionnaire that was created based on a study by Askew et al. (1997). Participants included teachers from 103 primary schools in the United Kingdom and 2,148 students. By using structural equation modeling, Muijs and Reynolds found that teacher behaviors, beliefs, self-efficacy, and subject knowledge all have a direct or indirect effect on student achievement. More proximal factors, such as teacher behaviors, had the strongest direct effect on student achievement, while more distal factors, such as teacher beliefs, had a more indirect effect.

The Relationship Between Self-reported Beliefs and Observed Practices

Researchers have also studied the relationship between teachers’ self-reported beliefs and observation of their practices (Aquirre & Speer, 2000; Brickhouse, 1990; Burke & Duffy, 1979; Haney & McArthur, 2002; Harvey et al., 1966; Harvey et al., 1968; Hos & Kekek, 2014; Incecay, 2011; Johnson, 1992; Judson, 2006; Peabody, 2011; Richardson et al., 1991; Stipek et al., 2001; Zheng, 2013). This research has been conducted with language learning, classroom environment, technology, mathematics, science, and reading. The researchers found overall consistency in the relationship between beliefs and practices based on self-reported data; however, there are several inconsistencies when self-reported beliefs are compared to observed practices. Some
researchers have found, through observations, that teachers’ self-reported beliefs are not consistently found in their practice (Burke & Duffy, 1979; Hos & Kekec, 2014; Judson, 2006). I divided this group of literature into sub-categories to clarify the focus of the study.

**Language Learning**

Four researchers conducted research that focused on teachers’ beliefs and practice in relationship to language (Hos and Kekec, 2014; Incecay, 2011; Johnson, 1992; Zheng, 2013). For example, Incecay (2011) studied the effects of pre-service teachers’ language learning beliefs on their practice. A male and female participant was randomly chosen to participate in the study, both volunteered for the study. The researcher determined pre-service teachers’ beliefs by asking participants to write philosophy statements about language learning in the following areas: an ideal language learner, an ideal language teacher, and an ideal language classroom. Then, Incecay interviewed participants asking questions about their written philosophy statements. Next, he observed pre-service teachers’ teaching to understand the effects of their language learning beliefs on their practice. In addition, Incecay had participants write a reflective paper about their teaching experiences to better understand their teaching experiences as perceived by them. The researcher found through coding analysis that language-learning beliefs of participants had an effect on their practice in the areas of creating a language-learning environment, roles of teacher and learner in a language-learning environment, and providing students with the needed strategies when they experienced difficulty. Incecay also found that not only did their beliefs affect their practice, but also external factors such as the level they
were teaching, the theories they knew, the number of students in the classroom, and the competencies the students needed.

Johnson (1992) studied 30 secondary English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers to determine what they believed about teaching ESL students and about them as learners. The researcher identified three methodological approaches (skill-based, rule-based, or function-based) and tried to match them to teachers. Johnson first had participants complete a Multidimensional TESL Theoretical Orientation Profile. This profile assessed a teacher’s theoretical beliefs about (1) optimal ESL environments, (2) appropriate lesson plans, and (3) each teacher’s theoretical beliefs about ESL learning and teaching. Next, Johnson used the Ideal Instructional Protocol (Kinzer, 1988b), in which participants described an ideal ESL classroom. Their responses were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded. She characterized teachers’ beliefs as skill-based, rule-based, or function-based. Johnson then used a Lesson Plan Analysis Task (Kinzer, 1988b). Participants were shown three different lesson plans teaching the same grammatical content; however, each lesson reflected a different methodological approach (skill-based, rule-based, function-based). Johnson explained a skill-based methodological approach as using pattern drills and pronunciation practice, a rule-based approach included materials that gave illustrations to explain grammatical rules and creative ways construct language, and a function-based approach used practices such as interactive communication and cooperative learning. Lastly, Johnson collected a Belief Inventory (Leu & Kinzer, 1991). The inventory consisted of 15 statements that reflected each of the methodological approaches.
After analyzing all sources of data, Johnson concluded that most participants held clear theoretical beliefs that were consistent with one methodological approach. She then wanted to know to what extent the participants’ theoretical orientation was consistent with their practice. Johnson chose three teachers who held different theoretical orientations, one from each methodological approach. She observed each ESL teacher eight times during literacy instruction. Johnson then coded the observations using Ideal Instructional Protocol (Kinzer, 1988). Johnson found that the participants’ instructional practices were consistent with their theoretical beliefs.

Zheng (2013) examined the relationship between Chinese English foreign language teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning and their practice within the context of the National Curriculum Reform in China. Zheng used an etic approach by examining his study through the framework of complexity theory. He explained, “Complexity theory looks at the world in ways which break with simple cause-and-effect models, linear predict-ability and a dissection approach to understanding phenomena, replacing them with organic, non-linear and holistic approaches in which relations within interconnected networks are seen to be paramount” (p. 194). Zheng used a case study approach focusing on six English foreign language (EFL) teachers in a secondary school in China. He interviewed teachers to understand their self-reported beliefs. To frame his questions, Zheng used Calderhead’s (1996) categorization of teachers’ beliefs about EFL, teaching EFL, and EFL learners and their way of learning. Zheng then used classroom observations to explore the relationship between teachers’ professed beliefs and how these beliefs were reflected in their practice. While doing classroom observations, Zheng paid attention to what he calls, “critical incidents” (p. 195), which are particular events
that may illuminate a time in which teachers are shifting beliefs. Lastly, he used stimulated recall by watching the recorded observations with each participant and stopping the video during particular episodes to let the participant explain what was happening. Zheng found EFL teachers’ core beliefs about EFL teaching and the learning process for EFLs influenced the practice of the teachers. For example, one teacher held a belief in the importance of teaching grammar and even though she felt that the curriculum she used no longer had a focus on grammar, she found ways to teach the rules of grammar within the lessons provided.

Hos and Kekec (2014) studied the beliefs of 60 Turkish teachers who taught English as an additional language at a School of Foreign Languages. Hos and Kekec first distributed an open-ended questionnaire to determine the teachers’ beliefs. The researchers then conducted classroom observations to observe whether teachers’ self-reported beliefs were present in the teachers’ practices. Unlike the studies above, Hos and Kekec did not find that teachers’ self-reported beliefs were always reflected in their practice. For example, teachers’ self-reported beliefs about how students best learn grammar did not always appear in their teaching; teachers reported to use both inductive and deductive teaching in their grammar lessons, but when observed, teachers did not use this method of teaching.

**Classroom Environment**

Harvey, White, Prather, Mish, Alter, and Hoffmeister (1966), Harvey, Prather, White, and Hoffmeister (1968), and Peabody (2011) were interested in teachers’ beliefs and the environment teachers create for their students. Harvey et al. (1966) studied 92 kindergarten teachers and 26 first grade teachers who taught at least one student who had
been in a Head Start Program. Participants were given the This I Believe Test (TIB) and the Conceptual Systems Test (CST). The results from the tests helped researchers identify which belief system each participant would be placed into: concreteness-oriented, abstractness-oriented, and in-between. The researchers found that teachers who held concrete belief systems and teachers who held abstract belief systems created significantly different environments for their students. Teachers who had concrete belief systems had firm ideas about right versus wrong and good versus bad, held opinions that were not susceptible to change, and formed judgment rather quickly. Harvey et al. concluded that teachers’ belief systems directly affected their classroom behaviors. For example, they found that teachers who identified with an abstract belief system were more in tune to students’ interests and needs and showed more warmth to students than teachers who identified with a concrete belief system.

Harvey, Prather, White, and Hoffmeister (1968) wanted to understand how different classroom environments affected student performance. The researchers studied 118 classrooms, 92 kindergarten classrooms, and 26 first grade classrooms. Harvey et al. used a teacher rating scale to categorize teachers’ resourcefulness, dictatorialness, and punitiveness and a student behavior scale to assess student behaviors such as independence, cooperation with classmates, and response to rules. The researchers predicted that teachers who held a concrete belief system would be less resourceful and more dictatorial and punitive, and teachers with an abstract belief system would be more resourceful and less dictatorial and punitive. Harvey et al. found their hypothesis to be true. Not only did teachers’ belief systems affect their practice, but it also affected student performance. Students of more abstract teachers were more engaged in classroom
activities, showed higher achievement, and were less concrete in their responses than students of teachers who held a concrete belief system.

Peabody (2011) wanted to understand the relationship between students being in a teacher-centered environment and a student-centered environment on students’ performance on the Florida Comprehensive Reading Assessment Test in tenth grade. This study was based off of Prosser and Trigwell’s (1998) assertion that teachers’ practice is based on two methods: teacher-centered and student-centered, also asserting that teachers’ beliefs are either teacher-centered or student-centered. Participants were teachers in four different schools who taught mostly at-risk students. Peabody interviewed teachers to understand their beliefs about teaching and then he observed their practice. Peabody found that students who had teachers that believed their classroom practice should be student-centered and taught in this way had higher-performing students. Teachers that believed their practice should be teacher-centered and taught in this manner had lower-performing students.

Technology

Judson (2006) wanted to know if there was a connection between teachers’ beliefs about learning and their use of technology in their classrooms. He studied 32 classroom teachers in primary, elementary, and secondary settings. Judson used the survey, The Conditions that Support Constructivist Uses of Technology (CSCUT) (Ravitz & Light, 2000), to understand teachers’ beliefs about instruction. The measurement tool included questions about teachers’ beliefs about quality instruction and the use of technology to enhance learning. Judson observed teachers using the protocol, Focusing on Integrated Technology: Classroom Observation Measurement (FIT: COM). A team created this
protocol based on educational technology standards (ISTE, 2000) and teaching standards from a variety of disciplines (National Council for Social Studies, 1994; National Council of Teachers of English, 2000; National Research Council, 1996; National Council of Mathematics, 2000). When comparing survey results to classroom observation, Judson found teachers who identified strongly with constructivist beliefs about teaching did not exhibit those beliefs in their instruction. For example, teachers who reported to believe in student-centered classrooms were observed giving lectures with lecture notes projected.

Math

Stipek, Givvin, Salmon, and MacGyvers (2001) studied 21 fourth through sixth grade teachers. The researchers used a survey to determine the teachers’ beliefs at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year in six different areas: (1) mathematics in general, (2) how students learn mathematics, (3) who should control students’ mathematic activity, (4) mathematical ability, (5) the value of students getting rewarded for engaging in mathematics, and (6) teachers’ confidence and enjoyment of mathematics and teaching mathematics. This survey, which used a Likert scale, consisted of 57 statements that were designed to determine the participants’ beliefs about mathematics and teaching mathematics. Stipek et al. observed and videotaped the participating teachers and then coded teachers’ practice. The researchers found that a significant number of teachers’ beliefs were visible in the teachers’ observed practices. Three beliefs: “…mathematics is a set of operations and procedures to be learned, that the teacher should be in complete control, and that extrinsic reinforcements are effective strategies for motivating students to engage in mathematics activities….“ (p.221) were positively related to classroom practices that were more concerned with drill,
memorization, and these types of student performances rather than an in-depth understanding. They had a negative relationship to teacher practices such as creating a safe environment, focusing on student understanding, and visible teacher enjoyment for mathematics.

Based on earlier studies (Aguirre, 1995; Speer, 1996), Aquirre and Speer (1999) argued that “Beliefs play an influential role in shaping the moment-to-moment practice of teaching” and “beliefs are most likely to be apparent when a shift in the teacher’s goals occurs” (p. 332). These researchers used the term “belief bundle” (p. 333) to explain how a collection of beliefs impact a formulation of a goal. The belief bundle has two characteristics: (1) it attaches certain beliefs with other beliefs from a teacher’s entire belief system, and (2) the activation of beliefs in the bundle can help explain how a teacher’s goals come to be. To validate the claims made and to examine the connection between a teacher’s beliefs and goals, Aquirre and Speer observed two secondary mathematics teachers while they were teaching an algebra lesson. In their qualitative study, they videotaped lessons and interviewed participants. The researchers identified moments when they believed goals shifted and a belief bundle impacted practice. For example, when a student asked for clarification, the teacher modified her lesson and paused further instruction to give the answer to the question asked. Instead of allowing an inquiry stance to be taken by the student, the teacher provided the answer. In another observed incident, a student was not using the algebraic formula that was taught that day. The teacher shifted her goals in order to help students use the formula being taught. These showed what the researchers consider a goal shift of making sure the student had the information the teacher wanted the student to have, which then showed a belief
bundle being constructed. Aguirre and Speer hypothesized that the belief bundle consisted of beliefs such as “Math is a collection of facts/skills,” ”Teacher should tell student how to do problem,” and “Students learn by listening to teacher” (p. 350).

Science

Brickhouse (1990) and Haney and McArthur (2002) examined teachers’ beliefs and practices in the content area of science. Brickhouse (1990) studied three science teachers to understand the connection between how they thought about science and their actions in the classroom. She interviewed the three participants and then conducted observations to determine whether self-reported beliefs were consistent with instruction. Brickhouse found that participants’ beliefs about science influenced the way they participant taught science. For example, one participant believed in making sense of observations, during experiments, by using scientific theories. In her classroom, she expected students to use scientific theories when they explained and constructed meaning of their observations.

Haney and McArthur (2002) wanted to know if pre-service science teachers’ beliefs held constructivist beliefs and, if so, whether these beliefs were visible in practice. They conducted case study research on four pre-service teachers by using the Classroom Learning Environment Survey (CLES), interviews, observations, and coursework. During observations, the researchers found that teachers’ practices did align to the self-reported constructivists beliefs; however, the belief that students should be a part of the decision making that goes on in a classroom was not observed in any of the classrooms in which the participants claimed to hold this belief. The researchers discussed that this may
be due to the fact that the participants were novice teachers and simply may have not known how to incorporate this belief into their practice

**Reading**

I found two studies on reading. Richardson, Anders, Tidewell, and Lloyd (1991) found there to be a relationship between beliefs and practices, while Burke and Duffy (1979) found contradicting results. Richardson et al. (1991) examined the relationship between teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading comprehension and their classroom practice. The participants were 39 teachers from grades fourth through sixth. The researchers interviewed the teachers and asked them questions they thought would reflect teachers’ beliefs about reading comprehension and how students learn to read. To understand, teachers’ beliefs-in-action, Richardson et al. asked questions about certain students. They then observed teachers when they were teaching reading comprehension. During the observations, the researchers focused on what the teacher was saying to the students as well as on student and teacher actions. Richardson et al. found that teachers’ beliefs about reading fit into three categories: (1) skills/words approach (sub skills should be taught before meaning making); (2) literary structuralist approach (students learn to read by reading, and (3) whole language approach (authentic text should be used to help make meaning). The researchers found that overall teachers’ self-reported beliefs about reading comprehension through the interviews were reflected in their teaching of reading.

Burke and Duffy (1979) studied 23 classroom teachers over a 2-year time period, in order to understand teachers’ beliefs about reading comprehension and the relationship that these beliefs had to teachers’ practice. They interviewed teachers using formal and informal interviews to determine the beliefs teachers held about reading. Burke and
Duffy then observed teachers during reading instruction. They took field notes on comments that were made to students during instruction and on the teachers’ reading practices.

The researchers found that teachers do hold beliefs about reading, but they do not clearly reflect theoretical positions. Instead, Burke and Duffy found that teachers hold multiple beliefs about reading and those beliefs are only sometimes reflected in their practice. Teachers’ beliefs about reading did not always explain instructional decisions. Teachers were influenced more by the context of the situation rather than by their beliefs.

**Teacher Beliefs as a Critical Factor in Educational Reform**

While researchers have generally concluded that there are consistencies between self-reported beliefs and practices and both consistencies and inconsistencies between self-reported beliefs and observed practices, they have found that targeting beliefs can be used to change practices (Borg, 2011; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2013; Stephens et al., 2000; Stephens et al., 2011).

Two out of the five studies used self-reported data to claim there was a change in beliefs by the end of the study. For example, Joram and Gabriele (1998) and Borg (2011) wanted to change teacher beliefs and relied on self-reported data to determine if they had done so. Before beginning their study, Joram and Gabriele (1998) identified pre-service elementary and secondary teachers’ beliefs about learning that they felt had the potential to be an obstacle to learning in a psychology course. Then they administered a questionnaire in which students defined learning and teaching and used the results to reconstruct the way they taught the content of the course. During the last week of class, Joram and Gabriele asked students to describe how their views of learning had changed.
or not changed as a result of the course. The researchers found that the majority of the participants had changed their views throughout the learning of the course. Joram and Gabriele argued that change occurred because they deliberately addressed prior beliefs and provided time for reflection before and after the course.

Borg (2011) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study in the United Kingdom that explored English teachers’ beliefs during an in-service teacher education program. He used a questionnaire to understand teachers’ backgrounds, why they joined the course, and what they hoped to gain through the course. He also conducted semi-structured interviews. Borg asked questions such as, “Have you been required to focus much on your beliefs in the past two weeks?” and “Are you aware of any beliefs you hold now about effective ways of teaching and learning English that you did not have before the course?” (p. 380). Borg found that some participants reported changes in their prior beliefs.

The other three studies used researcher observation to claim there was a change in beliefs by the end of the study. For example, Riojas-Cortez and Flores (2013), Stephens, Boldt, Clark, Gaffney, Shelton, Story, and Weinzierl (2000), and Stephens, Morgan, DeFord, Donnelly, Hamel, Keith, and Leigh (2011) were also interested in teachers’ beliefs and determined changes based on observing teachers’ practices. Riojas-Cortez and Flores (2013) argued that reflection was a key component to change not only in beliefs but also in practice and so asked 5 pre-service teachers to participate in written and oral reflections throughout a graduate course. Riojas-Cortez and Flores also conducted focus groups, individual interviews, and observations at the beginning and end of the study. The researchers concluded that teachers changed both their beliefs and practice occurred
by the end of the semester. Riojas-Cortez and Flores felt they were able to identify four areas in which teachers felt tension: (1) epistemological beliefs, (2) developmentally appropriate practices, (3) playful learning, and (4) diversity integration. They used excerpts from the data to show evidence of these themes identified across data points. These excerpts showed that teachers discovered new ways to talk about the tension they were discovering and began reflecting upon and trying new ways to incorporate what they felt were newly discovered best practices in these areas. For example, participants could state that they believed play was an important part of active learning, however, had a difficult time creating the conditions in which purposeful play could happen. This process allowed participants to further reflect on this belief and how to effectively and consistently put it into practice.

Stephens et al. (2000) wanted to understand teachers as learners. For two years, they studied four teachers who were participating in course work in which they learned new information about Reading Recovery but were not expected to use that information in their classrooms. Stephens et al. interviewed teachers at the beginning and end of each year and after each of eight observations. At the end of the study, the researchers found two teachers had changed their beliefs about reading and teaching reading, and the change was reflected in their practice. Stephens et al. theorized that the two teachers who changed engaged in an inquiry process, using the new information they were learning to observe and reflect on the students in their classroom. The other two teachers did not change their beliefs or their practices.

Stephens, Morgan, DeFord, Donnelly, Hamel, Keith, and Leigh (2011) sought to understand if on-site literacy coaches could help teachers align beliefs and practices with
what the state department in South Carolina considered current best practices in the field of education. The literacy coaches were part of the South Carolina Reading Initiative, a multi-year state effort to build teachers’ knowledge of reading instruction. Literacy coaches took 27 graduate hours in reading while conducting study groups with teachers and assisting them in the classroom. The researchers used data from three surveys and conducted case study research on 39 representative teachers. Stephens et al. used Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) to determine teachers’ theoretical orientation. To understand if teachers’ beliefs aligned with the beliefs of the South Carolina Reading Initiative, Stephens et al. created the South Carolina Reading Profile survey (SCRP). The final survey the researchers used was a state department survey. The research team interviewed teachers at the beginning and end of each year and conducted six observations (beginning, middle and end of each year). Stephens et al. found that teachers began to align their beliefs and practices with what was being taught as best practices through the Reading Initiative. The research team concluded that large-scale professional development can positively impact teachers’ beliefs and practices when on-site literacy coaches help scaffold the learning process.

Conclusion

There has been considerable research done on the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices and a few studies about changes in teacher beliefs. Seventeen of the 23 studies on beliefs and practices suggest that teachers’ beliefs impact their practices (Aquirre and Speer, 2000; Brickhouse, 1990; Buchanan et al., 1998; Carter and Norwood, 1997; Charlesworth et al., 1991; Gales and Yan, 2001; Harvey, White, Prather, Mish, Alter & Hoffmeister, 1966; Harvey, Prather, White, & Hoffmeister, 1968; Incecay, 2011;
Six studies found that teachers’ beliefs do not match their practices (Burke and Duffy, 1979; De Angelis, 2011; Haney and McArthur, 2002; Hos & Kekec, 2014; Judson, 2006; Uztosun, 2013). Nine of the 23 relied on self-reported data from questionnaires and surveys to determine teachers’ beliefs. In six of the studies, researchers conducted interviews. In 19 of the 23 studies, researchers relied on self-reported data about beliefs. All but one of those studies claimed that there was a positive relationship between beliefs and practices. However, in fourteen of the studies, researchers observed teachers and found both consistencies and inconsistencies in the relationship between beliefs and practices. There were also five studies, which focused on changes in teachers’ beliefs. Two of them used self-reported data; the other three relied on researcher observation. Researchers found that addressing teachers’ beliefs can be used in teacher reform.

Looking across these studies, it becomes clear that (a) there were considerable differences between findings when researchers relied on self-report data and when they observed teachers, (b) only Borg (2011) and Stephens et al. (2000, 2011) asked teachers to think about their beliefs, and (c) teachers were consistently subjects being studied rather than individuals actively inquiring into the relationship between their beliefs and practices.

I designed this study to provide an opportunity for teachers to engage in self-study and help them examine the relationship between their beliefs and practices across a semester. Specifically, I conducted action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Mills,
2011) with three teachers to understand: “How does naming one’s beliefs about teaching reading and writing impact reading and writing practices?”
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I observed three teachers, and then facilitated a semester-long study group with them in which they inquired into their beliefs and the relationship between their beliefs and practices. We met once a week, from February 10th through May 25th, during their one-hour planning period. I also observed the teachers during, and after the study group and, collaboratively with them, examined whether the process of naming their beliefs impacted their practices.

Action Research

I chose action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Mills, 2011) in order to have a framework that allowed me to describe the process of naming beliefs and the impact naming beliefs had on teachers’ practices. Action research also enabled me to study my role within the group. As McNiff and Whitehead (2010) argued, action research should be used when wanting to analyze whether or not what you are doing is impacting the learning of others. As the facilitator of small group discussions centered on naming one’s beliefs, I was able to evaluate if the conditions I provided allowed teachers to name their beliefs and understand the relationship this process had on their practice. Action research was well suited to this study because it privileges the importance and significance of human experiences; which helped me value the unique experiences of each participant. By using action research, I had a framework for the discussion, decision, action,
evaluation and revision (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Mills, 2011; Stringer, 2014) that took place throughout the duration of the study.

There are two approaches one can take to a qualitative study: etic or emic (Fetterman, 2008). An etic approach means the researchers are coming to the study with an a priori theory, which serves as a lens to examine participants and data. An emic approach is an inductive approach, which means the researchers do not have theory that is guiding their study. Instead, the researchers put aside any prior theory or assumptions they have been exposed to and let the participants and data provide meaning to the study (Fetterman, 2008). I decided to take an emic approach due to its advantages that align with my theoretical lens in that I could approach the study understanding that multiple realities existed and were dependent on the social contexts of the study (Fetterman, 2008). An emic approach allowed me to welcome any theory that emerged as the study unraveled, instead of being limited to one predetermined theory. An emic approach also allowed me to contextualize my study without the intention of making any generalizations. It helped me make sense of teachers’ actions while not being limited to the constraints of looking at the data with one particular lens. An emic approach allowed me to discuss new insights by discovering the social reality of teachers naming their beliefs (Glesne, 2010). Moreover, it allowed me the potential to identify possible theory generation that became present through the coding process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

It is important to address the way researchers situate themselves inside or outside of the research being conducted because the position the researcher takes influences the research itself (Unleur, 2012). With this in mind, I positioned myself as an insider-researcher. I was an insider because I worked alongside the teachers on a daily basis;
however, I was also the facilitator of the small group sessions. Holding an insider-researcher position required me to be constantly aware of the potential for bias on data collection and analysis (Unleur, 2012). Even though I was aware of my position as an insider-researcher and took great effort to generate credible research, the findings are only applicable within the context of my study. The same study, in a different context, has the potential to generate different findings.

**Setting and Participants**

I conducted this study at the school in which I teach, Clear View Middle School. One advantage of this was that I had already built relationships with participants. A second advantage is that I could collect data daily during my planning period.

Clear View Middle School is located in a suburban area in a state in the southeast. The school serves sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. There are 1,107 students at Clear View Hill Middle School. The student population is 86% white, 6% black, 4% Hispanic, and 2% Asian. Two percent of the students self-identify as belonging to two or more races. Eighteen percent of the population participates in free or reduced lunch.

I decided to only involve three teachers because it was easier to establish trust and a close, collaborative learning community. With just four of us, I was able to provide rich descriptions of all participants’ experiences instead of a shallow description of many. All teachers were English language arts teachers. That is the subject area in which I am most knowledgeable and I am most interested in beliefs regarding reading and writing instruction. All three teachers were white, middle class females.

I used purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2013) to select teacher participants. Maxwell (2013) explained that purposeful sampling is a “strategy in which particular
settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information” (p. 70). Purposeful sampling allowed me to understand a phenomenon within a particular context. I asked participants to volunteer because the self-study was more beneficial to teachers who would be invested in the process of naming beliefs.

Meet Misty

Misty was a married European American woman in her late fifties. She had two daughters in their late twenties. Her husband was injured when she was pregnant with her second daughter and has suffered with chronic pain ever since. When the study began, Misty’s second daughter had recently given birth to a baby girl; this was Misty’s first grandchild. Misty loved to cook, read, and craft. She taught in a special education, fourth grade classroom for many years. When her daughters were born, she quit teaching, so that she could homeschool her daughters. She returned to teaching after eighteen years of staying home to raise her daughters because she needed health insurance. At the time of the study, she had been teaching seventh grade language arts for the ten years since her return. Misty had an undergraduate degree in education and a master’s degree in elementary education. She had taken classes to be certified in middle level English language arts. Misty decided to participate in the study because she felt it was important to continually grow in order to be a better teacher for her students.

Meet Jennifer

Jennifer was a married European American woman in her late twenties. She grew up with two brothers much older than her; therefore, she felt like an only child. Her parents wanted her to be successful. She remembered her parents said, “I want you to do better than I did. You’re going to go to college. You’re going to do more” (2.5.16). She
resisted going into teaching because she knew it would be hard; however, she was put into a teacher cadet class in high school and loved it. She earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s degree in language and literacy.

Meet Alice

Alice was a married European American woman in her mid forties. She had three children, two girls and a boy. She earned a bachelor’s degree and later earned a master’s in business administration. She worked in marketing before she decided to go back to school, earning a bachelor’s and master’s degree in special education and elementary education. Alice felt that having a sister that was deaf and a son who she was told had Aspergers influenced her to make a career change and go into special education.

Purpose of Study

This study had three purposes. The first and main purpose of this study was to understand the impact that naming beliefs has on teaching practices. My hope was when teachers thought explicitly about the beliefs they and others hold and began to think about the beliefs that undergird their practices, they would make changes in their practices in order to align their practice to their beliefs.

The second purpose of this study was to understand, within the context of Clear View Middle School, the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their practice. Not only did teachers think about beliefs during the small group sessions, but also I prompted and encouraged them to reflect on the way their beliefs were or were not evident in their decisions they made throughout the days in between study groups. Because I observed teachers before, during, and after small group sessions, I was able to understand the relationship of teachers’ beliefs and practices before they had explicitly discussed their
beliefs, during the time they did so, and after they had done so. This information helped me better understand the relationship between naming beliefs and practices and also whether or not teachers believed their beliefs were being reflected through their practice.

My third purpose was to understand how teachers reacted to the process of naming their beliefs within the conditions I provided as the study group facilitator. I constructed small group sessions in ways I believed could help teachers name their beliefs: I provided them with readings I thought would be helpful to them in the process and provided time for them to reflect and talk with each other. This study allowed me the opportunity to watch and examine how teachers reacted to the small group sessions. This information gave me direction for the future. It showed me what was/was not beneficial for teachers and helped me understand ways I can tweak the conditions to better facilitate the needs of teachers.

**Data Collection**

While doing the background work for my literature review, I found a variety of ways researchers attempted to measure or identify beliefs, such as using surveys, questionnaires, and observation. However, none of the researchers created conditions in which teachers have a space to examine and name their beliefs and study the impact of their beliefs on their practices. As a part of creating these conditions, I got to know the teachers via classroom observations and then they and I met once a week during our common planning period. To document this process, I videotaped classroom observations, was an insider-researcher in small group sessions I designed and facilitated, documented informal conversations, used stimulated recall interviews, kept a reflective
journal, and had participants document their beliefs and reflection on a shared Google document. Table 3.1 shows the data collection schedule.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Initial interviews, first classroom observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Second classroom observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small group session one-introductions, classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Small group session two-read BrianCambourne, classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Small group session three-read Donalyn Miller, classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Small group session four-read another chapter from Donalyn Miller,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Small group session five-read Fisher and Frey, classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Small group session six-read Linda Reif, classroom observations,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stimulated recall interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Small group session seven-participants read a reading of choice,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>classroom observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Small group session eight-demonstrated bundling beliefs, classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Small group session nine-gave Belief Reflection Sheet, classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Small group session ten-further refection on beliefs, classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Small group session eleven-closely examined practice in relationship to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Small group session twelve-gave out final questionnaires, classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Final interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations

After I identified three teachers who volunteered to be a part of the study, I began classroom observations. I observed each teacher two times before the small group
sessions began. Each visit lasted one hour. I also observed teachers’ classrooms for an hour, once a week, throughout the duration of the study. This allowed me to document changes in practice. I videotaped and audiotaped observations and took field notes.

**Small Group Sessions**

After two weeks of observations, I began holding one hour, small group sessions during the teachers’ planning period, which was in the middle of the school day. I had the same planning period as the teachers, which made meeting during this time feasible. Small group sessions were held once a week, for twelve weeks. During the small group sessions, I provided articles and copies of chapters from various books. We inferred the beliefs held by the authors in the texts we read. I asked teachers to think about and name their beliefs. We had various conversations about the texts we read, about classroom practice, about beliefs, and about our lives. I videotaped and audiotaped all sessions.

**Informal, Conversational Interviews**

I held an informal, conversational interview with each teacher before the small group sessions began. This allowed me to get to know each teacher on a more personal level and let each teacher get to know me. I also held an informal, conversational interview with each teacher after the small group sessions ended. During the last interview, I asked questions that gave me an idea of teachers’ interpretation of their journey.

**Stimulated Recall Interviews**

Benjamin Bloom (1953) first used the interview method later referred to as stimulated recall. In a stimulated recall interview, the researcher videotapes observations and then immediately afterwards shows the participant the tape and asks questions in
order to understand the participant’s perspective on events. I held one stimulated recall interview with each participant half way through the study. I conducted these after school the day the observation and video recording occurred. This type of interview allowed me to understand teachers’ perspectives about decisions they made.

**Researcher Journal**

I kept a journal in which I documented my experiences throughout the duration of the study. I wrote in this journal during the sessions while participants were working independently or with one another. I also wrote in this journal directly after most interactions with teachers. I used the journal as a means to work through all thinking I did throughout the study.

**What Matters Chart**

I created as a Google Document a Modified What Matters chart (Stephens, 1990) with a Thoughts section at the bottom of the chart. Teachers documented their beliefs and thinking throughout the study on the chart. I asked teachers to use the Modified What Matters Chart at specific times during the study group sessions and also asked teachers to document any thinking and ideas that occurred outside of the sessions. The chart was shared between teachers and me so that I could see their thinking throughout the study and also respond to them.

**Units of Analysis**

The unit of analysis examined was the process by which each teacher reflected on and named her beliefs and the impact of this on her practice. Instead of examining the entirety of the middle school teachers at Clear View Middle, I focused on three teachers. This allowed for a rich description of each journey.
Coding

Saldaña (2013) explained, “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). He explained that coding allows a researcher to capture the essence of what is being said or seen during the data collection process. Saldaña (2013) recommends a first cycle coding and a second cycle coding. The first cycle coding begins the process of capturing the salient moments in the data and the second cycle coding helps a researcher transition into the analysis stage by identifying categories, themes, and moving towards an interpretation of data.

Saldaña (2013) made clear that the coding methods used during first cycle coding should be chosen according to the nature of the questions being asked by the researcher and the answers that the researcher hopes to find. As I began first cycle coding, I used in vivo coding because of the nature of the questions I was asking. I also used in vivo coding to capture the voices of my participants. The literal meaning of in vivo is “in that which is alive” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). This helped me capture what teachers were saying even when I might not have heard. My goal throughout the study was to understand the experience through the eyes of the teachers. In vivo coding helped me stay in tune to how the teachers were navigating through the process and making meaning of naming their beliefs.

After I used in vivo coding, I used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2013) explained that descriptive coding allows a researcher to capture the topic that is being talked about or written about. I felt that descriptive coding allowed me to understand what it was teachers were bringing up and what was becoming important to
the teachers. This gave me insight to what meaning teachers were making of the experience.

The last first cycle coding method I applied was value coding (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña explained that value codes “reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 110). Understanding my participants’ values, attitudes, and beliefs was pertinent to my work. It was at the center of the questions I was asking. Value coding allowed me to understand what was important to each teacher. This gave me unique insight to better understand their lives as individuals and what impact their lives had on the beliefs they brought into the classroom.

**Analysis**

I began second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013) after completing first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). My goal moving into second cycle coding was “to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” (Saldaña, 2013, p.207) from my first cycle coding. I did this by using pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013). I used pattern coding to narrow down the expansive amounts of first cycle coding, and to begin to group it into a more “meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). I began by looking for relationships and patterns in codes for individual participants and then moved towards looking for relationships and patterns in codes across all teachers.

I then looked at the pattern codes (Saldaña, 2013) that emerged in relation to the research questions being asked. The patterns I identified helped me move into interpretation of data that is included in the findings section of my dissertation.
It was important to anticipate data points during the analysis stage in order to stay tuned to whether or not my research question was being targeted and answered by the data collections method I had chosen. All data sources I mentioned above became data points: videotaped and audiotaped observations, videotaped and audiotaped small group sessions, videotaped and audiotaped informal conversational interviews, videotaped and audiotaped stimulated recall interviews, What Matters Charts, and my researcher’s journal.

I used analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013) to document the choices I made during coding and analysis and also any reflection I did during that time. Analytic memos helped track my thinking and also helped me work through my thinking as I made decisions about my data.

**Positionality**

It is imperative when conducting research to take a look inward and understand your positionality in all aspects of the study. Sultana (2007) explained, “It is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in research processes in order to undertake ethical research” (p.380). Ethical work cannot be done without understanding the position I held within my research. Positionality has powerful influences that if go unaddressed can have tragic repercussions. As Denzin (1986) pointed out “Interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher” (p. 12). Every aspect of my research was influenced by my positionality and my epistemology and it was my responsibility to understand the influence my Self was having on the choices I made.
My positionality had the potential to influence my work in many ways. I am a young, white, middle-class female. My positionality influenced my research in the very fact that I chose what interested me for a dissertation study. Foote and Bartell (2011) said, “The positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretations of outcomes” (p. 46). Foote and Bartell explained that positionality had the potential to influence what I saw and did not see during observations, what I heard and did not hear during conversations and interviews with participants, and the way in which I interpreted the narratives of the participants I so desperately wanted to authentically tell.

My positionality influenced the people within the setting I was working and my relationships with participants. Working within the context that I teach provided pre-established relationships before the study begun. The teachers I worked with were seventh grade teachers; I did not work with sixth grade teachers because that is the grade level I teach and the relationships were too personal. I had little contact with the teachers in this study because of the design of the school, so the relationships were limited, but we were not strangers to one another. My position as a fellow teacher, yet researcher, had the potential to influence the relationship I had with participants. I anticipated the position I held could have a positive or negative influence. The fact that I am a fellow teacher and peer may have helped participants become comfortable with the process at a faster rate than if I did not have a former relationship with the teachers. The study demanded a high level of vulnerability and openness; therefore a pre-established relationship was beneficial. However, my position as a researcher may have caused participants not to
open up as much as they would have because of a fear of judgment or possibly a feeling of not knowing the “right” answers. I also anticipated my position as a doctoral student, researcher, and facilitator of the small group sessions might give my participants the feeling that I hold a certain level of power. This had the potential of becoming a place of tension because I had the highest level of education within the group; however, I had less experience and was younger than two of the participants. One participant was in her first semester of the same doctoral program in which I was currently enrolled. We had similar academic experiences that I did not share with the others.

Freire (2000) explained that a “dialectic relationship” (p. 50) exists between objectivity and subjectivity. He defined objectivity as “concrete reality” (p. 38). Freire explained that objectivity suggests “people without a world” (p.38) which simply is not possible. He explained that subjectivity is influenced by one’s experiences and is always present. I strived to remain objective through my study, but at the same time I acknowledge that this was not purely possible. Objectivity is not clean of subjectivity in research and as much as I tried to prevent this from happening, my positionality created subjectivity. This is why I relied heavily on analytic memos (Saldana, 2013) to continually question my positionality and its influence throughout the process of my research.

**Claims**

Yin (2014) explained that in order to make claims in research it is important to draw information and understanding from multiple sources of evidence. Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggested using data triangulation to collect information from a range of sources to come to the same finding. I used data triangulation to develop a convergence
of evidence (Yin, 2013). I conducted an analysis across data points to converge findings that were supported by all data sources. This provided construct validity within my study.

I established and maintained a chain of evidence to increase reliability (Yin, 2014). I documented everything from the date and time in which the evidence was collected to the date and time connections were made between data points. I documented when and how codes, categories, and patterns were established. I did this so my audience could trace my steps in order to recreate how I arrived at the findings portions of my study. A chain of evidence helped keep me organized and in tune to my past and current thinking. It also helped me keep an honest and open relationship with my audience.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) provided four guiding questions to help researchers establish trustworthiness in analytical interpretations of data.

1. What do you notice?
2. Why do you notice what you notice?
3. How can you interpret what you notice?
4. How can you know that your interpretation is the ‘right’ one? (p. 55)

I used these four questions as I moved towards analysis. Again, I used analytic memos (Saldaña, 2013) as a place to hold my responses to these questions. These questions reminded me to notice what I was not noticing, just as much as what I was noticing. This helped me stay in touch with my positionality and subjectivity. A continual identification of my own biases helped me produce interpretations with more trustworthiness (Glesne, 2006). I used member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which involved showing participants my interpretation and analysis of the data and getting feedback to verify that my interpretation was congruent with the experiences of my
participants. The question to my research could only be answered through the truth of my participants because of the contextual significance of their experiences. Member checking provided the accountability that was needed for me to tell someone else’s experiences. I sought to share teachers’ experiences in hope of conducting research that provides insight on how to support growth in teachers within the context of the study.

Participants supported my interpretation and analysis of the data and confirmed that my interpretation was congruent with their experiences. Misty enjoyed reading the story of her journey and was in awe at the growth she felt she experienced during our short time together. Misty reported she was intrigued by what I noticed and excited to get to experience it again, through my writing. Jennifer said she was impressed by how much I had noticed and pleased by my close observation of her practice and her dialogue inside the classroom and during small group sessions. Both of them said they learned even more about themselves after reading my analysis of the data. Alice told me she agreed with my analysis and said she could not wait to read my dissertation as a whole.

As a result of this study, I made claims about the experience of naming one’s beliefs, the beliefs held by my participants, and the impact naming their beliefs has on their practice, but only in reference to the participants of my study and in the context of the research site. I could not claim that teachers participating in similar engagements that my study provides would have the same or even similar experiences. Even though I hoped this study would provide the capacity to ignite similar questions in educators that I asked throughout this study, I did not make generalizable claims from the findings. I have very limited information for educators and researchers about the conditions in which support the process for teachers in naming their beliefs and examining the relationship it
has to their practice. The claims I made about these conditions are contextual on a small scale and these conditions have not been juxtaposed to other possible conditions. The conditions I provided were ones that I incorporated because of my own epistemological orientation to the way I believe learning is constructed and made possible.
CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT IN WHICH PARTICIPANTS LIVED

“Without context, words and actions have no meaning at all.” (Bateson, 1979, p.15)

Context plays a major role in qualitative research. The researcher therefore needs to acknowledge all variables that have potential to influence outcomes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In my study, I was responsible for the context of the study group in which the teachers participated. As I reflected and planned the framework for small group sessions, I filtered every decision through my own belief system. I knew that I aligned my beliefs and practice when writing instructional plans for my daily teaching; therefore, I felt the process of planning for small group sessions also should be congruent with my beliefs.

I made a list of the characteristics that I wanted: (a) a safe, conversational space (Boostrom, 1998; Clay, 2001; Johnston, 2011) in which participants could reflect on current thinking (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983/1987), name and document their beliefs and ground their beliefs and practices in research, (b) literature in which participants could identify beliefs others hold, could support their own beliefs and practices, and initiate conversation, (c) flexibility in which participants could raise topics and I could follow their lead.

Safe, Conversational Space

I first needed to create a space in which participants felt safe and comfortable. I knew the first step in creating a safe space was generating trust between participants
(Boostrum, 1998; Clay, 2001; Johnston, 2011). However, as I finalized participants for my study, I learned that the three teachers all knew and trusted each other; this gave me the flexibility to eliminate the multiple get-to-know-you activities I had originally planned. I decided though to keep one get-to-know-you activity for the first small group session:

Me: Before we get started, I think it’s important that we do a little get-to-know-you activity. You guys probably know each other better than…You’ve been together longer than I’ve been with you guys. I had a chance to meet with you beforehand, but I have some questions that I thought we could talk about before we get started. I made a little list and emailed it to you.

The first thing, I’ll let you think about it before we talk about it. What’s one thing that you feel that you do really well in your classroom, you think you’ve mastered, you’ve got it?

Misty: I think I make my students feel comfortable. I think they’re open to asking me questions. They know I’m not going to put them down or treat them sarcastically.

Me: I noticed that in your classroom.

Alice: I do feel like they’re comfortable.

Jennifer: I think building relationships. I feel like I’m pretty good at doing that with kids.

Alice: I feel like I really try to make my kids feel comfortable, especially because they are so socially aware of the implications of being in my class (2.10.16).
Another way I created a safe environment was by being purposeful in the language (Johnston, 2011) I used with the teachers; I tried to make participants feel that we were in a reciprocal relationship, learning from each other. One way I did this was by inviting teachers into my classroom. I knew teachers might feel uncomfortable with me being in their classrooms each week; therefore, I wanted teachers to have an open invitation to observe me.

Me: First of all, seriously, thank you from the bottom of my heart for doing this with me. I know it’s a lot to ask, but I really do appreciate it. It’s been really fun going into your classrooms. It’s sad that we don’t get to do that more often. Now that I’ve been in your classrooms, I wish that that happened more. So I want to open up my classroom to you guys. I know that you have a lot on your plate, but if you ever want to stop in, sometimes it seems unfair that I’m always in your rooms. If you want to stop in and watch us do our thing, I would love that. Always, my door is open, so feel free to do that.

It’s been neat, too, because I’ve seen you guys do things that I’ve already started in my own classrooms. That’s so helpful. You’ve already made me a better teacher. I appreciate that. I know it’s going to be crazy; however, I can make this more convenient for you guys, let me know. If something comes up, we’ll shift days or whatever we need to do (2.10.16).

I knew that my position as facilitator had potential to interfere with establishing a reciprocal relationship. Consequently, I participated in any engagement I asked of teachers and also shared my own vulnerabilities during small group sessions. I hoped this would help them view me more as a colleague rather than a facilitator. Teachers often
gave me advice whenever I openly shared struggles in my own practice. They continued
to provide support and suggestions to each other and to me, which made me feel a
reciprocal relationship had been established. For example in small group session five:

Me: When I give a grammar quiz, I should be looking over the kids who have
misconceptions that are still not getting it. I should be pulling that handful of kids
over and targeting what it is they do not understand. It’s just going too fast for me.
Misty: But you can use ILT also. You could pull kids from several class and say,
‘I need you in my class such-and-such morning’ and work with a small group
there.
Me: I need to figure out ILT too. I’ve created somewhat of a monster. My door is
open. I urge kids to come get help from me, but now I’ve created some kids—
they’re asking too much of me. They’re scared to be alone and to work alone. My
ILT is these same kids coming to me and just wanting that constant assurance.
Now my ILT has been…I have like 25 kids come to see me every day. What do I
do? Last year no one came.
Misty: Dot does a sign-up. You could do that. She has students sign up. ‘I’ve got
five slots for each day.’ I don’t think she allows students to sign up more than
once a week.
Me: I like that. I could say, ‘Monday, these kids are coming in to me to look
over.’ I can actually pull a couple kids from CP [college prep] if we’re all
working on a certain skill.
Jennifer: Like if you see that you have slots that are not filled, then you can fill them. Pick out those kids that you know probably need to come but are not going to sign up to come (3. 9.16).

It was important to create a safe and comfortable environment for the teachers. Since new knowledge is constructed through social interactions (Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky 1978) and learning is magnified when thinking is shared with others, I cultivated a conversational space that allowed participants to make meaning with other teachers of what was taking place during our time together. I hoped they would discuss strengths, struggles, thinking surrounding text I was bringing into the group, beliefs, practice, relationships they noticed between beliefs and practice, and connections. I wanted to establish conversation among teachers as a group norm. I felt this naturally happened due to teachers already having an established relationship and due to the measures I took to ensure a safe and comfortable environment.

**Reflection**

John Dewey (1933) argued that it is not the experience we learn from, but the reflection on the experience that causes learning to take place. Influenced by Dewey, I wanted teachers to have a consistent place in which they could reflect on current thinking. I therefore added a “Thoughts” section on the Modified What Matters chart. As a weekly ritual, I began every small group session asking teachers to reflect on what they did prior the week. I did this to stimulate reflection between beliefs they were naming and their day-to-day practices. Teachers used this section of the Modified What Matters chart to reflect on literature we were reading, their beliefs and practice, on old thinking and new thinking, and also as a place for back and forth conversation between themselves and
me so that I could probe deeper reflection. Teachers reflected in this space during small group sessions and also throughout the week when we were not physically together. For example, Misty documented her thinking on March 7th; a small group session was not held on this day. She also documented her thinking on March 9th; small group session five was held on this day:

**Week of March 7th, 2016**

I always thought I would have to give up my read aloud time if I allowed students time to read of their own. I don’t! I made sure my read aloud did not last more than 10 minutes first and then I starting having students read on their own for 10 minutes today (Miller, 2009).

Students have read on their own 3 times now. They seem to enjoy having time to do their own reading. It is difficult not to allow the students to use the time for other things.

Schoology [an online resource that provides teachers the ability to communicate with students] actually gives us the ability to scaffold. It provides a platform to talk with the students one on one or a way to “meet” with students in a group. Schoology can also help with scaffolding by having different students use different text (3.7.16).

**Week of March 9th, 2016**

My students have been reading independently each day and they have really enjoyed it. I’m planning to talk to our librarian about letting students come in small groups to the Learning Commons during ELA.
I have tried to be more aware of the gradual release method and to allow student
time to share their learning. I literally have to write it into my plans to remind
myself that this is an important step.
I also thought about background knowledge. Before reading the story *Three
Skeleton Key* (Toudouze, 1937), I gave the students background information about
lighthouses and their function. I also showed the students images of sea rats,
which are much different from the rats they may have pictured in their
minds. This made the story much more interesting for the students.

Trouble with small groups? Try different protocols to guide the small groups.

Different audiences—Some can be private—not looked at by the teacher.

Look at the different elements of writing and then use your own style. For
example, look at the elements of argument, look at different mentor texts to see
the different types of argument and then create your own writing. Get away from
the idea that everyone must write the same way.

Possibly explain reasons to write—Look back at *The Writer’s Notebook*.

Look at real reasons for writing so they can write for a real audience (3. 9. 16).

**Naming Beliefs**

I knew I needed a place for teachers to document beliefs they were naming. I
originally planned to create my own chart. After sharing my idea for the chart with Diane
Stephens, my advisor, she suggested I use a What Matters chart (Stephens, 1990). In this
framework, teachers identify their beliefs down the left hand column and across the top
list instructional practices and assessment tools. The purpose is for teachers to examine
the relationships among their beliefs, practices, and assessments. My advisor suggested I
start by asking the teachers, “What do you feel is important—what matters—when it comes to teaching reading and writing?” By asking this question, I could uncover what the teachers believed about the teaching of reading and writing.

I combined my ideas with Dr. Stephens and created a chart with three columns. In the first column, “What is Important When Teaching Reading and Writing,” I invited teachers to name their beliefs. In the second column, “What It Looks Like In My Practice,” teachers examined how they put their beliefs into practice. In the last column I included, “Is it happening? If not, why do you think this is so?” I felt this was at the core of my research question: “How does naming one’s beliefs about teaching reading and writing impact reading and writing practices?” If the answers was “no,” I wanted teachers to reflect on why they were not putting the belief in practice. I wanted teachers to put forth significant energy answering the three questions I included within the Modified What Matters chart because I felt each were necessary in guiding teachers in naming their beliefs and examining the impact their beliefs had on their practice.

**Literature**

I knew I wanted participants to be able to ground their beliefs and practice in research and literature. I selected five texts that I felt aligned with my overall goal. The literature I chose had three characteristics: (1) the authors’ beliefs were obvious so that I could use the text as a catalyst for identifying teachers’ beliefs, (2) the teachers’ needs I identified through initial interviews had to be explored in the text, and (3) the authors’ beliefs had to be parallel to my own.

- *Toward an Educationally Relevant Theory of Literacy Learning: Twenty Years of Inquiry* (Cambourne, 1995). Cambourne offers a comfortable
introduction to theory, while also providing practical suggestions for creating an effective classroom environment. Cambourne’s beliefs are visible throughout the article as he discusses conditions of learning with a focus on literacy instruction.

- *Better Learning: Through Structured Teaching* (Fisher & Frey, 2008) chapters one and three. Fisher and Frey also offer a comfortable introduction to theory. I chose chapter one because the chapter served as an overview of the Gradual Release Model, and I responsively chose chapter three due to guided instruction not being visible in teachers’ practice.

- *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) chapters three and six. Miller offers an inspirational and practical approach to incorporating independent reading as a daily norm. I chose this book in response to teachers claiming to value reading; however, none were putting independent reading into their daily practice.

- *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise Into Practice* (Beers, Probst, & Reif, 2007) specifically chapter thirteen *Writing: Common Sense Matters* (Reif, 2007). Reif offers practical suggestions for providing meaningful opportunities for students to write. I chose this chapter in response to teachers questioning how to provide choice and authentic audiences in writing.
Flexibility

I went into my study with a well thought-out agenda; however, I knew from the beginning that I wanted to be flexible so teachers could bring topics to conversation they needed to discuss. I wrote a scripted agenda because I knew I would be nervous and I wanted to ensure I was providing opportunities I felt teachers needed in order to name their beliefs. Even though I scripted each agenda, I left margin for teachers to lead the way. For example:

Small Group Session One Agenda

First of all, thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of this study. It has been such a pleasure, being in your classrooms this week. It is obvious that each one of you are passionate about teaching reading and writing, care about the growth in your students, and strive to be the best version of yourself for your students every day. Being in your classroom has motivated me and has aided in me becoming a better teacher, just in this short amount of time.

My purpose in us being here together, really is to simply have a space to deeply reflect on what is important and necessary for our students to become better readers and writers and to establish a love for reading and writing that will carry on well beyond our classrooms. I know that we are coming together, in the middle of our beautiful but often chaotic day, but my hope is for the hour we are together, we can open ourselves to one another, to ourselves, to the literature we will be reading, and consider what we believe to be best practice for our students and be reflective of how we are carrying out our beliefs, in our daily practice.

I’ve had the opportunity to get to know each of you on a more personal level, through our interviews, but I do want to take a few minutes to make sure that we all know each other here because we will be working closely with one another for the next 12 weeks. I have emailed you six questions. I want you to, please, open your email and spend a few minutes reflecting on the questions I gave you:

1. What is one thing you feel you do well in your classroom?
2. What is one thing you feel like you just haven’t quite figured out?
3. What is something you do in your classroom that gives you the most pleasure as a teacher?
4. What is something special about your family?
5. Describe your perfect Saturday.
6. What is one thing on your bucket list?
Take turns answering each question. (Make sure I answer too!)

I have also emailed you a chart that I would like you to open and save. On the left side I’d like you consider: What do I think is important when teaching reading and writing? In the middle, I want you to consider: What do I do in my practice to make this happen? (model it- then give teachers a few minutes)

We will be visiting this chart every week. On Wednesday, will begin our time together, first, by reading literature and considering what the authors believe to be important about teaching reading/writing and then we will identify how they make that happen through their practice. I will give you the chapter we are going to read the week before. I will also give you time to read when we come together so that it is fresh on your memory and you do not have to use time outside of our time together to read the articles and chapters.

After reading and talking, we will spend time with our “What Matters” chart to decide whether or not we want to add to it, tweak it, change it, rethink it, etc. As the week continues, I want you to be cognizant of your “What Matters” chart and notice if you see these things being carried out in your practice. I want us to consider how we make it happen, or possibly why it isn’t happening. If we come to find it is crucial to our students’ learning, I want us to have conversations about how we can help our beliefs align to our practice. I will be working right alongside you. This is something that I have found makes my practices the most beneficial to my students and I believe and trust in this process. I will be, also, relying on our conversations to help me become more accountable in making sure I am creating the most favorable conditions for my students to grow.

If at any point, you want to write in your journal about anything you feel is relevant to what we are doing here, please do. I will be asking you to share your journals with me at the end of our time together, if that is something you are comfortable with, or even throughout, if you would like. This will help me document what this process has been like for you and if I were to do it again, how I could do it better.

I will be staggering interview with you throughout the 12 weeks. I would like you to have the opportunity to watch your practice and to notice the decisions you make throughout your teaching. I want this to allow us the opportunity to reflect on where we see our beliefs being put into practice and where we may not see them. This, I feel, will help us figure out why we sometimes can name what is important for our teaching and for our students, yet it may not be consistently happening. For me, I know this is where I want your help. There are often days
that I don’t do what I know is best for my students, it’s not that I don’t want to, I just can’t seem to get it all in. I don’t have the answers, yet, on how to have independent reading and writing on a daily basis, confer with my students, hold small groups that target their individual needs, use assessments to drive my instruction, talk less and let my students talk more, etc. all these things I have come to believe is of utmost importance for my students to learn. These are the conversations I know that I need to help me be a better teacher for my students. I also think that there are powerful things that are happening in each of our classrooms that we can adopt from one another and all reap the benefits. For example, I was not incorporating Socratic seminar into my classroom practice until after talking with Jennifer but since then I have brought Socratic into my classroom, I truly feel it has revolutionized my teaching. This may not have happened if I did not have the opportunity to collaborate with Jennifer. This is what I want for us. I want each of us to walk away from these next 12 weeks, confident in what we are doing in our classroom, confident in what we believe in, confident that our practice is reflecting these beliefs, and more reflective on a daily basis (2.10.16).

I also allowed opportunities for flexibility through literature. For example, I chose each piece of literature with a vision of where the shared text might take us, but within this vision, I also knew as Rosenblatt (1978) argued, the meaning does not lie within the words on the page or within the reader alone; meaning lies in the interaction that takes place between the text and the reader. I predicted there would be overlapping connections made among teachers, but I also predicted there would be individual associations with the readings. I wanted new thinking to be prompted by others’ experiences and I wanted to follow, not lead, the conversation.

Another way I allowed flexibility is by providing a “Thoughts” section within the Modified What Matters chart (see Figure 4.1). By incorporating a thoughts section, teachers would have freedom to reflect on ideas not introduced in class and take thinking in places not specifically lead by me. For example, Jennifer wrote about getting a new student during a week we were meeting for a small group session. Jennifer shared during
the small group and in the Thoughts section of her Modified What Matters chart that she intended to examine her belief that learning is social, but did not get the opportunity to do so in the manner she had planned. She had intended to assign roles to each student as they discussed *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, 1947). Instead, that day Jennifer had a new student from Bulgaria join her classroom who did not speak English. She explained how students started creating a list of words they felt their new classmate would need to know while being at school such as *bathroom, library, teacher,* and *book.* They also began finding the Bulgarian form of the word by using an English to Bulgarian translator on their individual iPads. Her students demonstrated their young but complex understanding of the importance of language. Jennifer’s students worked together to make sure their new classmate could interact and survive in her new environment. They demonstrated the social nature of learning.

I never could have predicted the insights about the importance of language and the importance of learning being social that Jennifer would experience from this impromptu moment. I had asked all the teachers to intentionally plan a social event for their students and to sit back and watch how her students reacted to this particular belief in practice. I wanted teachers to document whether or not they were seeing benefits of their beliefs in practice. I wanted them to notice how their students reacted to a social environment. Thankfully she felt the freedom to share with me that she did not do as I had asked, but instead shared with me what had happened and what she had learned.
Example of Small Group Session

Small group session one served as an introduction as I explained my vision for our time together. In small group session two my envisioned curriculum played out in practice.

Small Group Session II, February 18, 2016

I arrive at Jennifer’s room, where we have agreed to meet each week. Jennifer and Misty are sitting at a group of four desks pushed together. As I sit down and say my hellos, the small talk turns to grammar:

Misty: But it sounds funny to say, ‘I’m well,’ That’s the one that I think….

Jennifer: It’s going good. Then it’s like, ‘I mean, it’s going well.’

Me: I’ve been doing these little grammar lessons. Sometimes they stump me.

Misty: Who and whom. I always have to think, ‘Does it come after a preposition?’

Then you put a preposition in there.

Me: Yeah, and some of it’s a little subjective, too, sometimes….

Alice walks in carrying an opened laptop, a notebook, and a half eaten lunch. She apologizes for being late. I assure her that she is fine. I ask teachers to please get out their Modified What Matters chart and reflect on their practice in the past week in the thoughts section:

Me: What I want to start off with, if you can open your charts, you probably already have it. In the thoughts section, I just want us to quickly reflect on what we have done this last week. What did your classroom practice look like in this last week? What are some activities you did? What were some conversations you had with the kids?
I give a few minutes for reflection. Each teacher has their laptops in front of them and begins typing. I also reflect on my teaching during this time.

As the others are reflecting, Misty starts talking:

Misty: I love using the read-aloud, so I started using that tying it into writing. For example, I know that on this next test we’re going to have to cite textual evidence, so I’ve started giving kids a quote and then having them write just a short passage. ‘Show me in this quote, how can you show that the character felt bad about what happened?’ It only takes a couple of minutes.

Misty’s remark during reflection time made me uncomfortable. I glanced down at my outline of what I wanted to cover and realized that my script did not give me the answers to unexpected conversation. I do not want to make Misty feel uncomfortable, so I respond, the best way I know how. I tell her that I have noticed that her read-alouds always have a strong purpose. I do not encourage further conversation because I want teachers to reflect independently. She then began talking about independent reading:

Misty: Having time for kids to enjoy reading on their own, I put in my chart. We were in a think tank session. People were going into rooms. They came back, and one person said they were reading on their own for 12 minutes. I remember an administrator saying, ‘Wow, that seems like that’s a big proportion of the class time to be reading on their own.’

Me: That’s what I do.

Misty: I heard negative feedback about this. I’m hesitant now to be having the kids read on their own for a longer time period and have an administrator come in, because they don’t see…
Jennifer: I would dare them.

Misty: They don’t seem to find this as useful. Now I have students reading on their own when they finish something. But I have not set aside…And I would like to. I almost feel like I need to have a sign on the door. If you walk into my room on a Tuesday or Thursday….

Jennifer: Uh-uh. You’ve got the research to back that up, and I will be more than happy to hand it to you.

Jennifer offers research to Misty defending the practice of independent reading. I frantically jot down in my notes that Misty is experiencing tension with a belief, while Jennifer seems to be confident in implementing the practice of independent reading. I know Jennifer has a Masters in Language and Literacy. I wonder if Jennifer’s schooling experience is what gives her the confidence that Misty does not have to implement independent reading. I make a note to probe more about this later in one-on-one interviews. I then guide conversation back towards the reading for the week:

Me: A few things to that. The reading for this week, after you’re done, put it in their [administration] hands. If they come in and have something negative to say, literally put this entire book in their hands.

We’re going to talk about some things, today, that maybe we feel are beliefs we initially held when we first began teaching. Cambourne mentions this, his beliefs that he initially held. He noticed that they [beliefs] are held by the majority, still to this day.

That was one question I was going to ask. Are there some things that people, the majority, seem to think is important or isn’t important that maybe we disagree
with. That would be a huge one right there. If the majority thinks that independent reading is a waste of time and we may feel strongly about…

I tried to direct attention to naming beliefs Cambourne (1995) shares he once held that were aligned with beliefs held by the majority, but with experience came a new way of thinking. His beliefs shifted and therefore he changed his practice to align with his beliefs. I wanted the conversation to lead to helping teachers identify beliefs held by Cambourne, which will hopefully assist them in identifying their own beliefs, but instead conversation focused on frustration with reading not being a focus across content areas. I had a difficult time being present in the conversation because I was overwhelmed with processing ideas for getting the conversation back to Cambourne’s beliefs:

Misty: But the reality is, if you look at the way science and social studies are set up now, they do guided notes. The students are given a set of notes with blanks, and they’re filling…I’m saying nothing wrong with that. What I’m saying is they’re not reading passages from a textbook anymore. It’s not like, ‘Pull out your textbook and read this section. Then let’s pull out what you think is important.’

Jennifer: What’s interesting is that Lisa was talking about that the other day. Lisa said, ‘I’m not doing that anymore next year.’ She said, ‘They should be reading more.’

Misty: Yes.

Jennifer: That’s exactly what Lisa said. Lisa said, ‘I’ll do some notes every now and then like that, but I want them to be reading more.’
Misty: Because they’re not, and they’re not doing it in science either. The teacher is choosing to pull out the specific information, because the books don’t line up with what we’re supposed to teach…

I was still nervous about the lack of focus on identifying Cambourne’s beliefs; however, I was also burning with excitement because I know the reading I chose for the following week, *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller (2009), is exactly what we need.

In my nervousness, I forgot I already attempted to open discussion on the reading for the week, so I asked teachers if they had a chance to finish jotting down what went on in their classrooms this week. This led to conversation about conferencing with students:

Misty: I think for CP I’m just going to park myself up front. I’ve got a desk. I’ve got a chair. You come to me. That way everybody knows that I can see them. That was something I did differently. I thought it had a real positive effect. I felt good about it. The kids are choosing their own topics for their argumentative writing.

It was interesting. Some of them have really chosen some interesting topics. Helping them change it into a claim, you’ve got to take a stand on it. You’ve got to get away from wishy-washy and make a clear stand. I really enjoyed doing this writing with them.

As Misty finished sharing a change she made in the way she conferences with students, I felt it was a good time to show how her reflection on conferencing may be associated with the work we are doing:

Me: You feel like conferencing, maybe, is becoming more important on your must-dos?
Misty: Yes. It takes the whole class period. The read-alouds I do with them are much shorter on these days. I want to keep the story going, but it may just be two pages that I’m doing. We’re not writing with the read-aloud. I am asking them to make some inferences, but it literally takes the whole class period to get to each student.

I tried to figure out if this was a practice Misty felt is a must, if it was, maybe it was related to a belief she is holding in reference to students traveling down different paths and it being the teacher’s responsibility to meet students where they are. I wanted teachers to feel that I am learning and growing with them, so I shared my own struggle with conferencing:

Me: I’ve noticed that both of you go to your students. They sign up to come to me because they know conferencing is something that we’re always doing. When they have something they need to discuss with me, they sign up, and I just go down the list. But what I need to be careful of…

Jennifer: The kids that aren’t signing up.

Me: Some kids always sign up. The same kids always sign up, and the same kids never sign up, so I need to do a mixture. I know that. I have them sign up, and I start going through my list. I say that as soon as I’m done with the list I’ll go approach other kids, but I never finish my list.

Jennifer: Exactly.

Me: So those kids never get touched. That’s something that I’m working out too. Both of you guys, as I watched this week, went to your kids. I thought that was neat. Cambourne, before I dive into it, is there anything that stood out to you?
As I finished talking and I still had the attention of the teachers, I steered the conversation back to Cambourne. I looked down at my lesson plan and saw that I put a note to myself to first ask teachers what they thought of the article. I was happy I put this in my script because I wanted to minimize my influence and maximize the voices of the teachers. I was excited by the direction Misty took us:

Misty: His analogy between things that kids can do like in sports, things they can remember. They can remember this dance. I’m doing that hip-hop class, and oh my goodness. I am sorry, that’s beyond me. You’ve got these kids that do a dance once and remember it, but they can’t remember what a noun is from one day to the next. His reasons, possibly, for why.

I did like the idea of using talking, but I also didn’t because you’re immersed in talking all the time. You’re not immersed in language arts all the time. You’re not immersed in math all the time, which I guess makes our teaching that much more difficult. You have to learn how to talk. You don’t have to learn what a noun is.

You don’t have to learn how to write an argument. You can say, “Hey, that’s not important. I’m going to learn it.” But talking, in some way, you’ve got to learn how to do.

Jennifer: Which is why I think his talking about engagement was such a huge piece of it.

I felt there was valuable information about Misty and Jennifer through this exchange. I made a note to go back to this part of the conversation once I had the transcription. Next, I purposely brought the conversation to back to Cambourne’s beliefs:
Me: That’s something that I definitely want to get to in a second, that engagement part. On page 183, did you notice, when he started talking about his theory of learning, did you connect that to what we’re doing in here? I feel like there’s a lot of synonyms people use. I call it beliefs. He calls it theory of learning. You may have heard of epistemology, the way one constructs knowledge. I just happen to call it beliefs, or what’s important, what do we believe is important? Page 183. What were his [Cambourne] beliefs when he first began teaching? Did any of these connect with you?

Misty: I’ve always thought break down the learning into small bits to help students. I don’t know if y’all were taught reading with phonetics. Teachers continued to discuss their personal experiences with learning to read.

Again, I directed our focus back to Cambourne:

Me: He reflected back on his original theory of learning and realized they still weren’t learning with the conditions he was setting in his classroom. Then that’s what brought on this entire inquiry. This research.

Looking back on your first couple years teaching, do you feel like there’s things you originally thought were important or true about teaching reading and writing and maybe that’s not so true anymore after your experiences have shown you otherwise? Or do you feel like most of those things that you originally started off thinking were important have proven to continue to be important?

Misty: His thing here that I liked said, ‘Inappropriate responses are incipient bad habits and must be extinguished before they firm up and become fixed.’ When I
first taught I probably was more along those lines, and now I would allow more discovery.

Right now we’re writing the arguments in the same way that you’re doing. We’re showing them a way to lay it out; here is a format you can use, but also trying to let them know this isn’t the only way. But we’d like you to learn this format first and then possibly experiment. Even some of the accelerated, you can see they’re already…I imagine you’re seeing it too.

Within each paragraph they’ve got their claim, evidence, opposing claim, and counter claim. They’re writing it beautifully. You can point out to them, ‘Look, the change is how you’re writing. Here is the original model. Look at what you’re doing with it. This is still correct.’ It’s letting go of there isn’t one right way and letting students start to lead the way or change. ‘You didn’t follow my rubric. You don’t have this here. You don’t have this here.’ Being able to say, ‘Okay, you’ve done it a little bit differently. You’ve still fulfilled what I asked you to do, and look at how creatively you did this. Here is this part, here is this part, but you still got your point across.’

While Misty was talking, I was thinking about the research I had read about the difficulty in shifting beliefs (Pajares, 1992; Pierce, 1877). I probed Misty to see if she can name what caused the shift in her thinking:

Me: What do you think caused that shift and change for you? Being able to realize that, see that, and being able to change what you used to do to what you now find to be more beneficial?
Misty: I think just probably the reality of interaction with kids, their kind of confusion over, ‘But I did what you asked.’ And realizing this is beautifully written. I’m not going to give you full credit just because you didn’t follow what I asked you to do point by point?

Me: So just noticing and reflecting on the fact that it was benefiting your students doing it another way.

Misty: Or just the creativity of the students or the fact that, ‘Oh my goodness, look at this. I wouldn’t have thought of doing it this way.’ Why do I want to stifle that creative way of writing? Part of our writing is to let the students find their own voice. If I’m making them fulfill exactly my mechanical way of doing something, then I’m taking that away from them.

Jennifer also shares an example of a shift in what she once felt was important:

Jennifer: I think one of the things that shifted for me with writing was format versus form. I think before, my first couple years of teaching, I was just trying to teach a format. Five-paragraph essay, this is how we’re going to write, kind of thing. Then through my classes and stuff like that it shifted to more, ‘I’m going to teach you form of writing. Here’s a good form that we use, and there’s lots of different forms.’

Five-paragraph essay is not realistic. It’s just not how we write. If you think about real-world writing, hardly do you come across a five-paragraph essay. It’s just not true. Shifting from you have to have this many paragraphs to, ‘I don’t care how many paragraphs you have. I don’t care how many words. I don’t care how many pages.’

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Misty: You might have a paragraph that only has two sentences in it. You may have another that has ten.

Jennifer: That’s been a huge shift. When I first started teaching it was, ‘You have to have five sentences in this paragraph. You need to have five paragraphs.’ I’ve completely abandoned all of that.

Misty: Don’t your kids look confused when they say, ‘Five sentences in each paragraph?’ and you say, ‘Well, it kind of depends.’

Me: I was going to say, ‘How do your kids respond to that?’

Misty: Can you get the point across? Some kids get really…Sometimes you can have a paragraph that’s all one sentence.

Jennifer: I think something that’s helped with their response to that is looking at various mentor texts, looking at all different kinds of mentor text and seeing published pieces that don’t follow that format. Making it explicit, I think, helps too, just showing them.

I was really enjoying the conversation. I asked Jennifer how she was able to stand firm on her practice when her students were going to be scored by people holding a different belief. I was trying to show a clear relationship between Jennifer’s example and Cambourne’s text:

Me: What allows you to stay firm knowing that beliefs may be different for people grading their writing at the end of the year?

Misty: We ask, ‘Who’s your audience?’ That’s what I do. Who is your audience?

Jennifer: I always tell them. I’m so upfront with them. I tell them, ‘There is real world writing, and there is testing writing. Unfortunately, when it comes to
testing, they want you to do a certain format.’ I tell them, ‘Guys, we know what
good writing is. I’ve taught you what good writing is all year. If you just do
whatever we’ve been doing, you’ll be fine.’

Misty: I just say, ‘Who’s your audience.’ They go, ‘The people grading the test.’
‘What are they going to expect to see?’

Me: So basically teaching them to code switch in the right moments. As long as
they’ve been introduced and exposed to all…

Jennifer: You’ve got to give them what they’re expecting to see.

I brought Cambourne back into the conversation:

Me: Let’s go back to that. You talked about the fact that even our administrators
may think that independent reading is not beneficial for big chunks, large chunks
of time. Do you think there are any other beliefs that we may not agree with that
the majority might hold, that we might have to come into confrontation with?

Misty: I think, like we’ve said, the time period for ELA. If we’re supposed to be
teaching the reading, the writing, and all of the different things that we’d like to
put in.

Jennifer then discussed how she believed teaching students to speak is important,
but we leave speaking out of the curriculum. She shared that she heard a speaker speak
on this and she has thought about the importance of speaking ever since then.

I glance down at my outline for the small group session and I see that I wanted to
bring to the teachers’ attention the conditions Cambourne believes are important in a
learning environment. My thinking aligned with Cambourne’s and I wanted to know if
they agreed with his ideas, so I brought up Cambourne’s conditions for learning:
Me: When he says ‘the existence of,’ he’s talking about the conditions, the availability of the environmental factors and/or conditions that we’re creating in our classroom. I think that’s huge. What are your thoughts on that? The fact that our classroom, the environment, the conditions that we get to create, as being the person in charge, can promote learning or not.

In my excitement to talk about the importance of engagement, I answered my own question before giving teachers a long enough wait time to gather their thoughts. Jennifer mentioned engagement earlier, and I could wait to talk about it in more depth:

Me: It says, ‘Engagement also depends on active participation by the learner.’ I’m struggling with how do I make sure this is happening. I want to add that, I want to add that to my beliefs, because that’s something, after reading this, yes, I think that’s important. They have to be active in the process, and that’s what I’m noticing. If they [students] didn’t’ do well on a summative or on a formative, I’m starting to go back to, ‘Were they active in the process?’ A lot of them aren’t. If I believe that’s important, how do I ensure that they are actively engaging in the learning?

The teachers engaged in a lengthy conversation about summative and formative assessments. Jennifer and Misty were passionate in their belief that formatives should be opportunities for students to grow their skills before taking a summative assessment, but that is not how formatives are being used. Sensing the ardor both participants have towards grading formatives, I asked them to get out their Modified What Matters chart and consider what belief they may hold that is making them feel this way about formative assessments. I was delighted in the rich conversation, but I began getting nervous about
getting back to my classroom in time for fifth period. I began bringing our small group session to a close:

Me: Let’s go to our chart. Look at the statements you said to be most important, ‘what matters’ statements that we made last week. You jotted down when we first got here, what practices took place in the last week since we met. Were you able to put those beliefs into practice? If not, I really want the thoughts section at the bottom to be a place where you’re able to discuss that with yourself. Why didn’t this happen? We said this last week. Is it something that maybe isn’t that important? Or is it? What do I do about that? Do I need to, maybe, do some self-exploration on if this is even important? Is it something we want to talk about as a group? Can we maybe read something on it? Is it something that you just need to play with in your classroom to see if it’s actually beneficial for the kids? Please, start thinking that out at the bottom.

Jennifer: I did all of mine, except there was one engaging multiple opportunities for reading and writing, I said yes. Several of these happen, but not necessarily the way that I wanted them to. I guess that’s something that I could talk about.

Me: Yes, if that’s something you want to happen, what changes can you start to make to allow for it? If it’s a time thing and you really don’t’ know how, then let’s make this a space for that.

I gave participants time for reflection. I ended the session with introducing the reading for the following week. Misty shared that she is enjoying the reading, which made me so happy to hear. I was constantly thinking of the valuable time they are giving
to our group, time that I know they have little of, so to hear that Misty is enjoying the reading, I was pleased:

Misty: To find things worthy of reading takes time. So to have someone else find something for me and say, ‘This is really worthy of reading,’ it’s like, ‘Okay, good.’

It was nice to end the session with positivity towards what I was asking teachers to do when they were already so busy. Positivity towards small group sessions remained throughout the duration of our twelve weeks together. Small group sessions became the highlight of my week.

**Reflection: Envisioned Curriculum Versus Enacted Curriculum**

I realized through constant reflection there were differences in the curriculum I envisioned and the curriculum in which I enacted. These differences required attention and became important to the overall context in which my study took place. There were three major differences between my envisioned curriculum and my enacted curriculum: (1) I found I had to be responsive to teachers’ individual needs, which resulted in tweaking my agenda each week, (2) I found there was a co-construction of context influenced not just by me but also by participants, and (3) I found small group sessions had a direct impact on me, which resulted in change to my own practice.

**Being Responsive**

Individuals travel a unique path as they construct knowledge and understanding of the world around them (Clay, 2001; Paley, 2005); therefore, it was important for me to know each participant as an individual, a teacher, and a learner. The journal I kept helped identify teachers’ needs throughout the study. I used ongoing reflection to guide planning of future small group sessions and individual interaction with each teacher. I noticed
many instances in which I made responsive decisions throughout the study to meet the
unique needs of each teacher. I found I was responsive in the literature I chose each
week, by scaffolding when needed, and by giving specific feedback to participants.

**Responsive literature.** I had created an outline of professional literature I wanted
to use during small group sessions before sessions began; however, initial interviews and
observations as well as interviews and observations throughout the study helped me
determine which of the texts to use for the upcoming week. I found myself, more than
once, using a different chapter than I had planned when I saw opportunity to probe
further thinking on topics teachers were bringing to the table. For example, during the
initial interview with Misty, before small group sessions started, Misty shared her
comments about independent reading:

Misty: You’re going to find Jennifer and Ryan [a teacher on Misty and Jennifer’s
team] do that [independent reading] some. I don’t because I think if I’m doing the
read-aloud I’m taking up that time. I guess I just saw during independent
reading…I just feel like for accelerated they need to be doing that on their own.

For CP students, usually a kid will go look at the bookshelf, pick out a book, read
one or two pages. It just seemed to be lost time (1.28.16).

I noticed during the first interview with Misty that she was questioning whether or
not independent reading was a beneficial practice; moreover, she seemed to hold the
read-aloud in a higher esteem and felt that she only had time for one or the other. I also
noticed during both observations that took place before small group sessions began,
neither Jennifer nor Alice were incorporating independent reading into their practice. I
hold the belief learning is an active process, and I feel strongly about this belief in
relationship to reading. I believe students must be given time throughout the school day to read if teachers want to strengthen reading skills and instill a love for reading in students. After reflecting on my own belief, initial interviews, observations, and the first small group session, I felt it was imperative to read the first chapter of *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009). Miller puts forth a strong argument for including independent reading in classroom practice. She is able to steal multiple opportunities throughout the school day for independent reading. I wanted to see how teachers would respond to the text. I hoped to notice connections made between Miller’s practice and their own. I also was curious if teachers would investigate their beliefs in relationship to independent reading after engaging with a text strongly encouraging independent reading.

**Responsive scaffolding.** Another way I found myself being responsive to needs of teachers was scaffolding participants throughout the process of naming beliefs. I found during the first five small group sessions teachers were honing in on practice only. They did not seem to recognize a distinction between belief and practice. I did not anticipate teachers confusing the two. I also felt they might be naming certain beliefs because we were reading professional literature by experts in the field; therefore, if experts say it is a good practice, it must be a good practice. As I observed teachers Modified What Matters charts, participants were naming practices as beliefs (see Figure 4.2).

After expressing my thinking and concerns with my advisor, I decided I needed teachers to go deeper in thinking about beliefs. Below is an excerpt from my journal:

I met with Dr. Stephens about my research. Here is my thinking after our conversation. This group is becoming what I was calling an “accountability group.” We discuss the practices that we have coined good practices and we
discuss how we can put them into practice. We are honest about what we are finding time for and what we are not. We discuss our vulnerabilities and how we strive to be better. Dr. Stephens suggested that instead of accountability, it’s more of a responsibility. Once we share what it is we would like to happen in our practice, we then have a sense of responsibility to make it happen. None of this is a bad thing, however, teachers may not continue this sort of reflection after our small group is over and we are no longer reading and talking. Dr. Stephens suggested I help the teachers go deeper with their thinking about each belief.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Matters</th>
<th>What it Looks Like in my Practice</th>
<th>Is it Happening? If Not, Why do You Think this is So?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allowing students to have choice</td>
<td>2/9: ACCL students were given three articles to choose from.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing students to have their voices heard</td>
<td>2/8 and 2/10: Students engaged in a fishbowl discussion. 2/10: ACCL students participated in small group discussions based on their chosen articles.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in multiple opportunities for reading and writing (including independent)</td>
<td>-Independent reading -Argumentative Writing -Summary Writing</td>
<td>Yes, I believe these things happened, but not necessarily the way that I wanted them to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing specific feedback to encourage individual growth</td>
<td>-Conferring with students about formative drafts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need to see me reading and writing with them (Book Whisperer-Ch 3.)</td>
<td>-Reading independently myself as students also read independently. -Write an essay, story, etc. along with my students.</td>
<td>This is a work in progress. I have tried to do more of this starting this week (week of 3/4/16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to have more conversations with my students about their reading lives (Book Whisperer-Ch 3.)</td>
<td>-Hold individual, quick conversations about the books students are reading. -Help students find books they might be interested in. -Allow students to talk in small groups and with the whole class about the books they are reading.</td>
<td>This is a work in progress. I have tried to do more of this starting this week (week of 3/4/16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not kill or stifle a child’s love of reading by pointless tasks (Book Whisperer-Ch 6.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1: Modified What Matters Chart
Right now, it seems that teachers are claiming belief statements because the author’s we’ve read have said these practices are good practices. I want teachers to begin deep reflection as to what makes these beliefs good practices. I’m going to have each participant choose one statement they have added to their What Matters chart. I’m going to have them reflect on the following questions: What makes a practice a good practice? How do you know your students benefit? Where did that idea come from? Did you always believe it? Did you experiment with it? I love the example Dr. Stephens gave to me. She said if we used inquiry to confirm each of our beliefs we would never get anything done. If we had to test the floor we walked on everywhere we went instead of believing this floor will hold me, we would be a mess. Some beliefs are simply fixated because it’s a belief we’ve always held—maybe our parents believed the same thing; maybe it’s a cultural belief, etc. I want my participants to examine why they think the statement they have written down is important, and I want the response to be more than, I read it somewhere (3.14.16).

To progress teachers’ thinking in relevance to beliefs, I decided to give them a chart I made when I first started identifying beliefs I felt teachers were holding through my observation of their practice and from conversation. I added to this chart weekly. Below is an example of a portion of the belief chart I gave to Misty:
## Belief: Learning is a Reflective Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief Statements</th>
<th>Observed in Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Checking for understanding, throughout a read aloud, is important.</td>
<td>• 2/1 Observation: Asks questions throughout the reading of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2/1 Observation (me)</td>
<td>• 2/16 Observation: Asks questions throughout the read aloud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 2/29 Observation: MB is reading read aloud from chapter book. Stops to discuss character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students need time to think deeply.</td>
<td>• 2/16 Observation: MB pushed students to think about what they are learning in class throughout the read aloud. She prompts through heavy questioning. Making connections. (listen to audio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2/10 What Matters Chart (MB)</td>
<td>• 3/14 Observation: Think for a minute. One thing I said I was going to have you do is to rate the book. Kids are thinking about what they would rate the book. They are holding up their fingers. People who rated it around a 6 or so, what would you have liked more? Passing around list of character names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 3/14 Observation: Deep thinking observed during socratic seminar (many notes on actual dialogue in observation notes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I thought the belief and practices charts would act as a model demonstrating the difference between a belief and practice. I asked teachers to choose one belief from either the chart I gave them or choose a belief they wanted to further explore from their Modified What Matters chart. I then asked them to reflect on the following questions regarding the belief they chose to further reflect upon, “What makes it a good belief? How do you know your students benefit? Where did the belief come from? Have you always believed this? Have you experimented with putting this belief in practice?”

**Figure 4.3: Portion of Belief and Practices Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief Statements</th>
<th>Observed in Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read a louds unite students.</td>
<td>• 2/1 Observation: Reading aloud to students from chapter book from observation notes: MB asks, “What if it was... “Class went crazy over this character. It is clear they all enjoy this book. ***Go back in and add from obs.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 1/28 First Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for students to feel comfortable in order to learn.</td>
<td>• 2/16 Observation: Shows video of her grandchild to the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2/10 First Small Group Session</td>
<td>• 2/22 from observation: Guys burst out laughing. MB says, “Guys we're going to be respectful.” (not sure what they were laughing at?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationship with students is important.</td>
<td>• 2/29 Observation Notes: “I need eyes up here. Thanks.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2/16 Observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to treat students with respect.</td>
<td>MB approaches a girl (who to me seems to be purposely not doing her work and being a distraction) and asks her if she has her anticipation guide. She doesn’t, so MB says that she will give her a paper copy. She then says she doesn’t have a pencil. MB says, “Sweetie, do you need to borrow one?” B does not let the girl noticeably get to her, even though the girl is crying. Leads students to read, “Meet the Writer.” Asks students to read on their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2/10 First Small Group Session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
asked teachers to record their thinking in the Thoughts section of their Modified What Matters chart for homework throughout the week.

Teachers were still confusing beliefs and practices. I decided to model what I called a “Big Bold Belief” and “Bundling Practices”. I asked Jennifer if I could use her belief statements as an example. She agreed. I wrote down four belief statements Jennifer claimed to hold:

1. Teachers should use a workshop style classroom
2. Student voices need to be heard.
3. Students need multiple opportunities to engage in reading and writing
4. Reading involves thinking.

I then drew an umbrella over the four beliefs. In the umbrella I wrote, “In order for students to learn they must do/Learning is an active process.” I demonstrated how under the umbrella were practices that put this belief in to action. This demonstration was the most influential in helping teachers distinguish the difference between beliefs and practices. I then asked them to practice what I had modeled for homework.

I strongly desired teachers to understand where the beliefs they held came from and I wanted teachers to examine the influence their beliefs might be having on their practice. I felt teachers would potentially challenge the beliefs they were claiming to hold now that they were actually identifying beliefs and not practices, so consequently I created a “Belief Reflection”. I purposely put a section on the Belief Reflection that asked teachers to name activities they were incorporating into their practice that put the belief into action to encourage them to notice the distinction between beliefs and practice and to notice how they are related but not the same (see Figure 4.4).
Responsive feedback. At this point in the study, I found myself becoming responsive to individual needs by conversations through Google Documents where they kept their Modified What Matters charts. Teachers responded in a variety of ways. Misty answered each question more closely and thoughtfully than the others; we corresponded back and forth throughout the duration of the study. I continually asked her questions to deepen her thinking about beliefs she named. She diligently responded to my comments and questions. Here is an example of me probing Misty to consider the root of the belief she chose to further investigate: Read-alouds have an important place in the classroom:
Misty: My first statement I would like to address if my belief that the read aloud has an important place in the ELA classroom. Many of my students have not read a complete novel on their own and have never followed different characters to note the changes. Recognizing theme statements and having students identify with the theme statements and how they relate to real life is an exciting part of the read aloud. When completing a graduate class, I wrote a paper defending the use of a read aloud in the middle school classroom. I found a lot of evidence to support the validity of using time for a read aloud. How do I know it works? When the first question a student asks after they have been absent is- ‘What happened in the book yesterday,’ or a student calls back as they are leaving for the bathroom, “Don’t start reading without me!” I know I have their attention. It is also so easy to slip mini lessons in the read aloud that address skills I don’t have time for: figurative language, conflict, words is context…

Me: Wow, I love the way you have dissected this belief that you hold. I especially respect the evidence that you have found that supports this belief of yours. I bet the paper that you wrote has impacted your thinking majorly seeing that you were able to find in literature the research that backs up this classroom practice. But, not only that, you have watched your students diligently and have noticed the impact that the read alouds are having on your students on a daily basis. This to me is the best kind of evidence we can have to support our daily practice in our classrooms. I want to ask you a few more questions in reference to this belief: When do you think this belief first took hold? Were you read aloud to as a child? Do you think this belief took hold in that graduate class as you completed the
paper on the topic? Were you read aloud to in your days as a student and found it helpful, meaningful, and enjoyable?

Misty: My love of the read aloud goes back to 3rd grade. Mrs. Bryson- she was a terrifying old teacher who would walk around the classroom muttering, ‘I’ll shake you until your eyeballs rattle.’ However, every day after lunch she read to us. It was when she was reading *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink, 2006) that the magic happened. As Mrs. Bryson read about Caddie being spanked by her adoring father for the first time, she actually teared up and had to stop reading. The fact that the words on the page could affect my teacher so profoundly was astounding to me. In addition, Mrs. Bryson was actually human when she read to us. We could ask questions and even act a little silly.

I will continue allowing time for both the read aloud and the silent reading. Today, when students were taking the MAP test, I had some complaining about how long some of the passages were. I was able to point out that they read much more than that on their own during independent reading. It made the test seem a little less daunting. I’ve also seen some of my students suggest books to each other and even get excited about going to the library to find another book. I really thought my students would just play around during this time, but most of them have surprised me and actually settled into a book.

Me: What are your current thoughts about the place of the read aloud and the place of independent reading in your classroom? I know that you are taking the time for independent reading now, so I was wondering how you are feeling about its importance. Do you think you will continue to make time for both? If yes,
what can you contribute to this change in your practice and possibly belief(s) (3.16.16)?

I took significant measures to be responsive to the unique needs of each teacher. I had to be diligent about reflecting upon every hint and insight I received from listening and observing teachers. I hoped my responsiveness would provide the support needed to successfully identify and name beliefs held and also observe the impact these beliefs have on teachers’ practice.

**Co-Created Context**

In my envisioned curriculum, I assumed context would be constructed by me. Surprisingly, I found there to be a co-construction of context influenced not just by me but also by teachers in my enacted curriculum. Teachers and I co-constructed context by the relationships that were built between individuals and by the relationship built as a whole. The camaraderie that developed among us became a major contribution to the process of naming beliefs. The teachers and I became a team who shared struggles, offered new ideas, provided support, and inquired into one another’s practice throughout the journey.

**Shared struggles.** Small group sessions became a safe place to share struggles. After reading chapter one of *The Book Whisperer* (Miller, 2009) Jennifer felt her practice did not align with her beliefs:

> Me: Anybody want to share anything? Either something you’ve read and you’ve thought you felt was important and would use in your classroom but you haven’t and you’re wondering why or things you are doing?
Jennifer: I said students need to see me reading and writing with them, and I need to have more conversations with my students about their reading lives. In thoughts about the week I put I found myself feeling guilty about not giving them true independent reading time as much as I used to. Not even saying, ‘You can read or you can finish this.’ I’m trying to pull myself away from doing that and just saying, ‘Just read. If you didn’t finish this on your own time, that’s on you.’ I’m not going to sacrifice that reading time anymore. That has to be important. I started yesterday with my classes trying to, as they were reading independently; I would read my own book independently. We started a little thing in our notebook where we would write down sentences that stood out to us for whatever reason. I would share with them what I wrote, and they would talk about it with their group. They’d share and all that kind of stuff just trying to have more conversations about reading. It’s a work in progress (3. 4.16).

Offered new ideas. Often when a teacher shared a struggle, a solution was provided by teachers suggesting an alternative to the practice or by teachers sharing their own practice as a means of helping one another brainstorm new ideas:

Misty: For me I struggled with I want so much to have control of what they’re reading. They’re writing stuff down, but it’s so much against…It just takes away the joy of reading, but I’d still like some way to connect. I’d love to use it somehow to get to know them better. I like your [Jennifer] idea of pulling out maybe a quote that spoke to them during the reading. That wouldn’t be that difficult to do.
Jennifer: I prefaced it with saying how much I love words and I love quotes. I think words can be so powerful. When I read I like to find those things. I told them, ‘There are some days I might read and I don’t find it.’ But every now and then I see that golden line, and I want to write it down so I don’t lose it. I just tried to take the pressure off, ‘Oh my gosh, I’ve got to write something every time.’

Misty: That would be kind of interesting for me. I could give them a blank page, and this could just be their book at the top and then a page of quotes and creatively, however they’d like to write, something that just strikes you. Just put it somewhere on the page. I like the idea of collage. I have to be careful with different colors and stuff, because also they have…What was the bit here about any activity that does not involve reading, writing, and discussion may be an extra that takes away from students’ development. I have some students that would get all into the color-coding.

Do this word in this color. They would end up being more creative instead of just reading, but I kind of like that idea of a quote page. I think I may try to do something like that. Kids that you know aren’t reading, it’s so tempting to zero in on that child instead of modeling reading yourself because you’re so frustrated. Then the comment you had about asking students to have books instead of reading on the iPad, I agree. I have students…some can do it, and some can’t. You see them flipping around. They’re not reading the book.

Jennifer: I think it’s the way of handling that situation. Sometimes I’ll go back and try to find a book back here and just take it to them. ‘Hey, have you read this?
Have you thought about this? I saw that you were reading that, so this looks like…’ (2. 24.16)

**Provided support.** Teachers and I offered support to one another in understanding student behaviors related to enacted practices. We also offered one another support through small group conversations and I offered support through ongoing conversation in the thoughts section of teachers’ weekly Modified What Matters charts:

Misty: I did the protocol where each child had a quote, and they responded to their quote. Then they passed it around to the others. While I did have some who were doing some serious thinking, I had a lot that were clowning around. They were really taking away from the experience. It didn’t go like I had hoped it would. It made me think that maybe for this class, expecting them to write as a group wasn’t…I was real discouraged at first, but you helped encourage me with your response.

Jessica: I did?

Misty: Yes. I thought there are many different ways to do things in a group. I thought maybe next time, especially when we’re working with *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967), I might try to find something that fits their personality better. It’s not a real serious group of kids. Maybe I did something that resulted in making a poster and allowed them to talk and pay attention to what they’re saying, that perhaps in that context they would do some deeper thinking while they’re also being allowed to play around some.

At the end when they were looking, some of them agreed that it caused their thinking to go deeper. But those that were just a bit too immature, maybe it was
something…I didn’t feel like what I came up with fit that group well, that I needed to do a better job of finding a group activity that fit the group well. Even being discouraged, I even thought back later that as a group when we’re doing the read-aloud, the deep thinking they do then, bouncing off of each other.

Then I started thinking maybe deep thinking is not something you can force to happen. It just happens naturally, and if it happens, woohoo! If it doesn’t, not to be discouraged that it didn’t happen. You’re not ever quite sure when that’s going to happen. I have decided I don’t want to give up doing group work with this group, but I think I’ll look for something that allows a little more of their immaturity to be acceptable (4.21.16).

**Inquired into practice of one another.** Teachers often inquired into the practice of the others hoping to find new ideas for their own practice:

Misty: I appreciate when the writing allows students to express themselves. I do believe that is true, and I know I don’t spend enough time just for them to come up with a thought or a belief, to give them time to write. Then I wondered, too, if you’re asking them to do stuff like this, to examine their deep beliefs, feelings, and thoughts, do you read it? Or do you tell the student, ‘This is just yours, and I’m respecting your privacy?’ How do you handle that? You do a lot of writing. Do you give them the option of what they want to share and what they don’t want to share with you?

Jennifer: There are some things that I tell them…Like the found poems, for example, I tell them, ‘This is going to be for an audience. It’s not just for me.'
You’re writing for others as well.’ Then there are some things I just say, ‘You’re writing for you.’ I think it’s okay to have different audiences. That’s just realistic.

Misty: Sure, but do you read when they’re writing for them? Do you tell them you’ll be reading it? You don’t? Is it still kept in their notebook though? They keep their notebooks with them all the time?

Jennifer: I don’t really look at their notebooks. If there’s something that I have to have from there, then it gets published (3.16.16).

Small group sessions provided a space for teachers to share personal struggles, offer solutions, support one another, and ask questions about what works in other teachers’ classrooms to gather new possibilities for their own practice. Each teacher benefited from strengths of the others.

**Influence on Me**

As I continued to reflect on my enacted curriculum and the co-construction of context that was being built, I began to notice the direct influence teachers were having on me. On February 26th, I wrote in my journal about this influence:

I’ve been thinking about how much my study has influenced my own teaching. I didn’t realize how much I, myself, was going to enact change to my own practice. I thought that I was a reflective teacher at all times who was always aware of the beliefs I hold. However, what I’ve realized is that I am aware of the beliefs I hold, but I make excuses as to why I can’t put my beliefs into action. And that’s an inexcusable behavior. The conversation that I am having with my participants and being in their rooms while they are teaching has been such a huge encouragement to me. Together we are figuring out how to overcome the obstacles that we face
on a daily basis. We’re doing this by letting the authors we’re reading give us ideas and then we run with them in our own ways! The beauty is we are making changes for the better! I have started every day with independent reading and writing! Why have I not done this earlier? I am such a happier teacher and so are my students. I don’t believe this would have happened without the conversations that have stemmed from my small group sessions and the readings I have chosen. With the support group I have built with my participants, I feel like I can conquer more! This experience has been truly exciting. I am a better teacher because of it (2.26.16).

Small group sessions became a place where I could share my own struggles as a teacher trying to align my practice with my beliefs. I found it comforting to know other teachers shared similar frustrations. Each reading fueled me with new ideas for my classroom and stimulated conversations about practice with the other teachers. The camaraderie that grew between us rejuvenated and inspired me to put my knowledge I held into practice. For example, I spoke of the importance of students being active participants in learning, yet my students were not actively engaged in the learning every day. I justified in my own mind why this was not happening; I used my lack of time with students or student behavior as reasons for why I was directing the learning the majority of the time. Once small group sessions started, the conversation over the readings, teachers sharing what they do in their own practice, and teachers brainstorming new ideas for my practice became solutions to my current classroom struggles. I began implementing change such as starting each day with independent reading and writing and
conferring with students before school started to ensure I was meeting their individual needs.

I thought I was going into my study as a reflective teacher who was already aligning her beliefs with her practice, but I learned that I, too, had room for growth and small group sessions gave me the agency I needed to make positive change happen. I continued to examine the differences between my envisioned curriculum and my enacted curriculum. I was excited about the change that was occurring in teachers and me as we implemented practices that were more aligned with our beliefs, and I did not want this growth to cease when our time together came to an end.

**Ongoing Reflection, Inquiry, and Self-Pursuit of Theory, Research, and Literature**

I decided to give name to what I felt teachers needed from me in order to keep up the work we were doing long after we no longer met for our weekly small group sessions. I went back to the beginning of my journey in naming my own beliefs. I grounded my beliefs and practice in reflection, self-inquiry, and theory; therefore, I am confident I am doing what I know to be best for my students. I realized I wanted teachers to leave the study with the necessary tools to be in self-pursuit of answers when faced with pedagogical questions; therefore, I incorporated reflection, inquiry, and theory, research, and professional literature into our weekly routines.

**Encouraged Ongoing Reflection**

I wanted teachers to leave the study experiencing the necessity of reflection. I did this by modeling reflection (Bandura, 1977/1986) and making it an integral component of small group sessions. Dewey (1933) explained reflective thinking as an active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge, of the grounds that
support that knowledge, and the further conclusions to which that knowledge leads. Reflection is at the core of my work. Teachers and I engaged in constant reflection. I encouraged reflection as a ritual at the beginning of each session by having teachers reflect on their practice the week prior. Teachers and I then engaged in reflection surrounding the shared text for the week. After reflecting on the shared text, they reflected on any connections they made with the text, conversation, and their own beliefs. Throughout the week I encouraged teachers to reflect on the effect of their beliefs in practice on students. I incorporated reflection into everything we did in hopes of reflection becoming a daily routine long after my work was done.

**Encouraged Ongoing Inquiry**

I also wanted teachers to leave the study experiencing the necessity of inquiry as a means of constructing knowledge about teaching. There were two driving forces behind my decision to incorporate inquiry: the philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce’s (Pierce, 1877/1955) suggestion of the power of inquiry and my constructivist view on the way one learns. Pierce found inquiry to be one of the four ways one fixates a belief. Interestingly, he found inquiry to be the only method of fixating a belief to be generative. Using Pierce’s understanding of the way individuals can construct new knowledge; I used inquiry as a means for teachers to explore beliefs they felt they held. I encouraged them to determine practices they felt supported the belief being examined. I then asked teachers to implement the practices while observing the way students respond to the belief in practice.

My understanding of the fixation of beliefs (Pierce, 1877/1955) and my agreement with constructivist views, both, which hold inquiry in high regards, influenced
my decision to use inquiry as a major component to my small group sessions as a means to demonstrate to teachers its power and its place in practice. I knew I did not want teachers to only use inquiry during our time together to validate or challenge their beliefs but also to use inquiry as a means to pursue answers to uncertainty and to also use in practice long after our time together was done.

**Encouraged Self-Pursuit of Theory, Research, and Professional Literature**

Lastly, I wanted teachers to leave the study understanding the necessity of reading theory, research, and professional literature as a means to find answers to pedagogical uncertainties, to support beliefs and practices, and to encourage ongoing learning about the art of teaching. I did this by modeling the use of theory, research, and professional literature in small group sessions one through six. I explained to teachers why I chose the text and where I got the text. Half way through the small group sessions, I taught teachers how to use Google Scholar and encouraged and supported teachers in finding research and articles that discussed pedagogical philosophies and practices in which they were questioning. I hoped this modeling and support would encourage teachers to be in constant self-pursuit of answers and new ways of thinking.

**Conclusion**

Without understanding the context, it is impossible to make meaning of the experiences of teachers as they named their beliefs and examined the impact their beliefs had on their practice. The context I created based on my own experiences and my understanding of how individuals construct knowledge influenced the design of the study, and as a result, influenced teachers’ experiences of naming their beliefs. Each teacher experienced this context and therefore responded in very different ways.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Misty, Jennifer, and Alice all attended our study group; however each of them responded differently across small group sessions and outside of our time together. The impact on practice of naming beliefs also varied. Misty named her beliefs and doing so impacted her practices; Jennifer became consciously aware of the relationship between her beliefs and practices and fine-tuned her practices; and Alice did not seem to distinguish beliefs from practices and maintained the same practices throughout the semester.

**Misty**

**During Small Group Sessions**

Misty talked about what was going well in her practice. She also brainstormed ideas for change whenever she felt change was needed. Misty contributed to the camaraderie among the teachers by providing new ideas when they shared a struggle in their practice.

**Explained what she did well.** Misty felt that she made her students feel comfortable, “I think they’re open to asking me questions. They know I’m not going to put them down or treat them sarcastically” (2.10.16). Misty often talked positively about her use of a read aloud. She shared:
I love using the read-aloud, so I started using that tying it into writing. For example, I know that on this next test we’re going to have to cite textual evidence, so I’ve started giving kids a quote and then having them write just a short passage. ‘Show me in this quote, how can you show that the character felt bad about what happened’ (2.18.16)?

When we read about the disadvantages of using popcorn reading, calling on students at random to read without previously being exposed to the text, Misty shared, “I have always given students a chance to look over the text before reading it out loud in a group.” She also shared when reflecting on the belief all kids can learn, “I do believe students have the ability to learn. I am available before school and through e-mail for my students that need help (3.4.16).

Misty brought up the benefits of using a read aloud again and explained that she thought using a read aloud to demonstrate reading skills in context was a practice that was working and beneficial. Misty read Oliver Twist (Dickens, 1838) to her students for the first ten minutes of class until the book was finished. Misty shared how she used the book to help students notice the way authors use description to create new worlds for their audience:

Today when I was reading Oliver Twist ….I asked them to look at how their author did description. Did they go down to the last detail, or did they just breeze over it, get back in to the action? From that, we realized that most fantasy has a lot of description. We thought about it. It’s because they’re creating a whole new world. You’ve got to be able to see that world for your reader (3.16.16).
**Brainstormed ideas for change.** After Misty implemented independent reading, she realized she still wanted a way to connect with her students during this time:

But I’d like to have some sort of connection with them. I even thought about, every once in a while, just having a written dialogue for them to write what’s your book about, me to be able to respond to them, and for them to be able to respond back and forth informally. That would also let me know are students able to pick a book and stay with a book or are they just jumping from book to book? Maybe through dialogue I could encourage them to stick to a book (2.24.16).

Misty also talked about how doing independent reading at the beginning of class was not working for her and her students:

For me, I’m thinking I’m going to do it near the end of class. Then I can have students transition into this independent reading time. Maybe I can catch the few that are still struggling.

At the beginning of class I find it so abrupt. ‘Okay, put it up.’ I’d rather have the bell tell them their independent reading is over than for me, ‘Put your books, put your books up. We’ve got to do this, we’ve got to do this.’ I’d rather at the end of class, ‘Okay, now settle into your book.’ The last few minutes of class give me a chance to catch, maybe, a few students, like I said, that needed help with something. I probably will do it that way (2.24.16).

Similarly, Misty talked about ways to implement more meaningful writing experiences for her students:

I wonder, too, if we could, as adults, brainstorm reasons why we write as adults and explain that to them [students]. Get them to do those kinds of things so that
it’s real. Sometimes you tell kids to write, and they don’t know what they’re supposed to write. She’s [Linda Reif] saying give them a purpose, but also give them, ‘This is real. This is stuff I do in real life’ (3.16.16).

**Provided new ideas to others.** After reading chapter three in Donalyn Miller’s (2009) book, the teachers talked about wanting to take students to the library on a regular basis. They wondered though about what to do with students who did not need to check out books. Misty suggested:

>You could every once in a while say, ‘Hey, we’re going to do our independent reading time tomorrow in the learning commons, so be ready to transition to there if you need to check out a book or check one in. If not, we’re just going to sit in the comfy chairs in there and do our reading during that time’ (2. 24.16).

Alice shared that she wished teachers had more time to teach reading and writing. Misty recommended using homeroom time to encourage reading:

Alice: I wish we could have 50 minutes on the ELA period, because reading touches everything.

Misty: If nothing else, if we’re going to have the ILT time, maybe we could work with others to turn this into a ‘if you’re not studying, you’re reading.’ We have to get everybody on board (3. 4. 16).

Misty also made suggestions to me. One day, I explained that after reading another chapter by Donalyn Miller (2009), I had been thinking about doing something in my classroom to celebrate when students finish a book. Jennifer shared that she had been thinking about that also. Misty had an idea to get the school librarian involved by letting students put their name in a drawing for a prize after completing a book. Misty suggested:
‘I bet we could get Mrs. Blankenship [librarian] to work on something for next year. You know how they do a drawing? You could put the book in that you read. She does drawings now and then’ (3.9.16).

Another time, I said I felt guilty because I was not putting students in small groups based on their needs:

Right now what I’m feeling guilty of, I think I need to take their assessments and see the kids who are still…Instead of just moving on, taking the kids who are still struggling and make sure I’m meeting them right there, clearing up those misconceptions, and giving them more practice.

This exchange then took place:

Misty: Do you retest?
Me: We do.

Misty: Do you make them do something before they can retest?
Me: I do, but I feel like it’s more just protocol. Something about when I get to touch them and talk to them, I feel like it’s more successful. I don’t know. I try to make the task meaningful that I give them for retake.

Misty: Maybe you could require it before you retest. ‘You must conference with me.’

Me: That’s what I’ve been doing, and it has to have a signature. You must highlight the ones that are still giving you trouble and talk with me. That’s what I’m saying. When I do that, I notice the difference in it. Why am I not doing that all the time?

Misty: Are you trying to do it during class?
Me: Mm-hmm.

Misty: How about during ILT before school (3.16.16)?

Outside of Small Group Sessions

Misty consistently documented her thinking outside of small group sessions. This allowed for many ongoing written conversations between Misty and me. In this way, we stayed connected and the thinking we had been doing in our small group sessions extended throughout the week. For example, I asked teachers to look through their belief statements and pick three statements that they felt strongly about. I asked teachers to ask themselves, “What makes it a good practice? How do you know your students benefit? Where did this idea come from? Have you always believed this? Did you experiment with it?” Misty and I had an ongoing written conversation centered on these questions and her responses throughout the week:

Misty: My first statement I would like to address is my belief that the read aloud has an important place in the ELA classroom. Many of my students have not read a complete novel on their own and have never followed different characters to note the changes. Recognizing theme statements and having students identify with the theme statements and how they relate to real life is an exciting part of the read aloud. When completing a graduate class, I wrote a paper defending the use of a read aloud in the middle school classroom. I found a lot of evidence to support the validity of using time for a read aloud. How do I know it works? When the first question a student asks after they have been absent is—‘What happened in the book yesterday,’ or a student calls back as they are leaving for the bathroom, ‘Don’t start reading without me!’ I know I have their
attention. It is also so easy to slip mini lessons in the read aloud that address skills I don’t have time for: figurative language, conflict, words in context…

Me: Wow, I love the way you have dissected this belief that you hold. I especially respect the evidence that you have found that supports this belief of yours. I bet the paper that you wrote has impacted your thinking majorly seeing that you were able to find in literature the research that backs up this classroom practice. But, not only that, you have watched your students diligently and have noticed the impact that the read alouds are having on your students on a daily basis. This to me is the best kind of evidence we can have to support our daily practice in our classrooms (3.16.16).

I then asked Misty multiple follow-up questions to encourage further examination of when and how she first came to believe that using a read aloud was an important practice. Each time I asked a question, Misty responded. This allowed for continuous reflection outside of our time together.

Outside of the sessions, Misty also reflected on her change in thinking about independent reading.

Misty: My second statement is ‘There is no time for independent reading within a 52 minute block schedule.’ After reading Miller’s article concerning independent reading, I decided to make time for independent reading. I had no idea how much the students would look forward to this time. It is really hard as a teacher not to try to do something more with this time.

Me: What I want you to think about here is if you think it is true that students learn by being active participants in the learning- in order to learn we must
actually do. I see the read aloud as a social experience and a modeling experience. 
As you said, it unites students, they have a common ground to stand on and can 
use this commonality to talk and share. The read aloud is also an opportunity for 
students to watch an experienced reader. Independent reading is the opportunity 
for students to put into action what they are learning and seeing you do. They 
need opportunities to transfer these skills to their own reading to see if they can 
manage these skills alone. You check this by conferencing (3.16.16). 
Throughout our conversations, Misty would ask me questions and I had the 
opportunity to share my own teaching experience, what I had read in literature, or what I 
had learned from my schooling:

Misty: What do I do if they are not actually reading?
Me: Talk with these kids. Ask why they are not reading. If they are having a hard 
time finding a book they like I either suggest a book I’ve read so that I can talk 
with them about it (Prisoner B-3087 by Alan Gratz is great for this- everyone 
loves this book! - and it’s about the Holocaust) or I tell my students that I always 
have a huge list of books I’m ready to read waiting on me because I only read 
books that people suggest to me. It’s just what I do because if someone has 
suggested it to me, at least one person thinks it’s a great book! I explain that I ask 
people for book suggestions that have similar interests as I do. This is usually a 
flawless way of finding a good book! Then you have to follow up and check on 
this kid.
Misty: I kept coming back to Miller’s words...calm down. Don’t make reading a 
burden for the child. Let it be a pleasurable experience. I have constructed an
area in my room where students can share quotes and theme statements from the books they are reading. Right now I am enjoying reading with them. Eventually I’ll start conferencing with students about their reading to find out what they enjoy and to encourage them to try some more difficult text. Me: I’ve realized that the more young adult literature I have read, the more I am able to help my students fall in love with this independent reading time. It’s all about being able to talk with students about their books… (3.16.16).

After I modeled how to bundle belief statements into three overarching beliefs in small group session seven, I asked teachers to share their thinking with me in the thoughts section of their Modified What Matters charts, so that I could continue to probe further reflection throughout the process. Misty was the only participant in which I had an ongoing conversation outside of the sessions:

Misty: I don’t have this explicitly in my belief statements, but I do feel it’s an undercurrent of all I do. That is- be respectful. My students come from different backgrounds and all have different things they are struggling with. I do try to treat them as I would like to be treated. When you take away the respect, you take away the safety. Students that do not feel respected are not going to take risks.

Me: Amen. Amen. Amen. What I hear you saying is that the classroom has to be a safe place. I knew you held this belief on day one as I entered your classroom. Your practice most definitely matches this belief of yours. I personally feel this belief has to be in practice full force before any learning can take place! (3. 23.16)
Naming Beliefs

Misty did not originally name beliefs as beliefs; she began small group session one naming practices as beliefs. She continued to name practices as beliefs in small group session one through six. Misty began to make a distinction between beliefs and practices during our stimulated recall interview and made a clear distinction during small group session seven.

Transformation from naming practices as beliefs to naming beliefs as beliefs.

Misty stated as a belief after reading a chapter from Donalyn Miller’s (2009) book, “Select one theme or concept that students are expected to understand, gather a wide range of texts on this topic, and form book groups.” Misty subsequently expanded on this in writing:

Right now we are teaching to the theme—hysteria. We just finished reading The Monsters are Due on Maple Street (Sterling, 1960) and we will be reading a play based on Anne Frank in a few weeks. While we are reading the play, we will also look at other texts on the topic of the Holocaust (3.4.16).

Before our third meeting, I did a stimulated recall interview with Misty. We watched clips of her teaching and I stopped the video periodically to ask Misty questions.

Me: Say you’re watching this with another teacher. What are some beliefs that you would feel this teacher had about teaching reading?

Misty: I’d say that she wants the students to make a connection with the reading, that she wants them to make inferences with the reading. Then she’s trying to pull the figurative language or different things in the text for them in hopes that later they’ll start to see them as they read.
Me: Is that something that you do feel is important?

Misty: Yeah, I do feel that. I really enjoy it when the kids connect with the story.

Me: As I sit here and watch now, I was just thinking it seems you believe that teaching these reading skills, terms, or whatever you want to call it, through reading in context is important to you, not teaching these reading skills in isolation. When I see this, I believe that’s important to you.

Misty: It’s just more fun in context than it is just to teach a term.

Me: It’s much more real, just like we’re talking here. We can introduce random vocabulary words, but this is how it really happens. Anything else that you saw?

Misty: Just a love of sharing a book. I love the way the kids unite. It’s the kids against the bully in the book or the kids for the character and the idea of uniting a class around something. Give them a sense of unity.

Me: That takes me back to what we read last week. I think the author that we read, she held the belief if the teacher is excited it influences the excitement of students. I see that throughout your entire day of teaching. Your voice, your intonation, reflects excitement (2. 24.16).

This conversation seemed to be a turning point for Misty relative to thinking about the difference and the relationship between beliefs and practice, but Misty did not make a clear distinction until I modeled bundling belief statements in session seven.

In Misty’s Modified What Matters chart for the week, she had made a distinction between a belief she held, what it looked like in practice, and the benefits of the belief in practice:

Misty: I am starting to see some trends in my belief statements:
1. As a group we can learn more than we can on our own.

I’m always amazed when my students make a remark that I’d never thought of. After the read aloud yesterday, students were making connections with a time they had been terrified but tried to pretend they were not. I found myself looking at the clock and trying to determine how many more I would allow to speak before moving on. Then I thought, “What am I doing? This IS what it’s all about- sharing and learning. I quit looking at the clock and enjoyed the stories and the interaction (3.23.16).

Three weeks later, it was evident that Misty understood the difference between beliefs and practice and the relationship between the two in her reflection she documented outside of our session. Misty reflected on a book she was reading after I had asked teachers to find literature or research related to their beliefs. In her reflection, Misty brainstormed new ideas for her practice. While doing so, Misty realized that the practice she was considering was a great way to give students opportunities to engage in reflection, which was a belief she had recently given name to:

I also liked the chapter titled First Five Minutes/Last Five Minutes (Berger, Strasser & Woodfin, 2015). I often feel like my students leave my class after a whirlwind of activity but there is no closure or recap about what was learned. Giving students an opportunity to reflect could help solidify their learning. I could use the discussion board or other apps that allow the class to post their thoughts. Ooooooooh! Learning is reflective! What a great way to put this belief in action (4. 21.16)!
**Changed Practice**

Misty began to change her practices in order to resolve tension. After she made the distinction between beliefs and practices; Misty continued to align her practices with her named beliefs.

**Resolved tension by making curricular change.** There were six occasions in which Misty shared tensions she was experiencing.

1. Felt she needed to incorporate a workshop style classroom
2. Felt formatives should not be graded
3. Felt she did not have enough time built in to allow students to write in different forms
4. Felt independent reading was not a practice administration valued
5. Felt she needed to model her own thinking more
6. Felt she needed to be more purposeful with group work

For example, in session one, Misty identified, “Having time to enjoy reading on their own” as a belief. In small group session two, Misty shared the story of administration not supporting independent reading; as a result she was reluctant to give students time to read on their own. As she explained: “I heard negative feedback about this [independent reading] and am hesitant to allow long periods of time” (2.18.16).

Misty resolved tension by making curricular change. The following week, she wrote:

This last week I decided to do something, since I had in mind that I thought it was important for students to have time to enjoy reading on their own. So today all of my kids are going to the learning commons. Ms. Blankenship [librarian] is
reviewing how to look up a book, how to check out an e-book, how the learning commons is laid out.

Then I’m giving students time to check out a book. Also, we’re going on the field trip tomorrow. I’ve told them, ‘If you don’t want to watch a movie, then you can have a book to read while you’re on the field trip.’ I have reassured them, ‘I’m not going to ask you to do a book report. If you want to pick out a really thick book, don’t worry about that. I’d rather have you reading something you’d like to read’ (2.24.16).

Misty also desired to give students time to write in different forms. Misty brainstormed ways to ease this tension during independent reading by incorporating different forms of writing:

I’ve also been thinking about my read aloud time and how I can connect it with writing. As I’m sharing quotes, themes, or conflicts from the read aloud with the students, I’m asking them to find examples in their own reading and it to share it through writing on postcards we are posting throughout the room. I’d like to take it further next year. I am currently doing the Found Poetry I saw Jenny do in her classroom and my kids are loving it. I think it’s great to show kids the zillion ways that reading and writing are connected (4.29.16).

**Changed practices to align with beliefs.** Misty spent time trying to figure out how to align her practices to three beliefs she identified during our time together:

- Students should be treated with respect and the classroom should be a safe place for students to make mistakes
- Learning is an active process and learning is collaborative
• You can learn about yourself through reflective writing

For example, Misty wrote about her first effort to align her practice with her belief about learning being active and collaborative. Her first attempt did not have the effect she desired. Misty put students in groups of four and gave each student a quote from *Anne Frank* (Frank, 1947), the book they were reading as a class. She asked students to reflect, in writing, on what the quote meant to them, whether they agreed or disagreed with the quote, and if they have an example of the quote in their own life. After giving students time to reflect and write, they passed the quote to the next person in the group and continued the process with the new quote, building from what their partners wrote. Afterwards, she reflected on the experience:

My students completed the activity during 7th period. While I did believe they gained something overall, I was not impressed considering the time it took to set up the activity and complete the activity vs. the overall output. I was impressed that many students did take the task seriously. I also wasn’t sure what to do when a student’s absence caused one group to only have three participants. At first I thought I could be the 4th person, but then I realized if I took that role I would not be able to watch the group dynamics. There was also some immature behavior that took away from the overall outcome. Maybe an activity that uses more movement would be more beneficial to this group.

I have realized, however, that this group of students make some very insightful comments during the read aloud or when engaged in other activities. Right now we are reading the play *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Frank, 1947) and I’m excited about some of the inferences and connections students are making about
Anne. Maybe students don’t have to be in small groups to learn from each other. Maybe a larger, collaborative group is just fine. Maybe I should be more attuned to times this learning is taking place and be more mindful in pointing out what they are learning from each other. It’s like the difference between trying to make something happen or allowing something to happen on its own. (4.17.16).
Misty subsequently attempted a new practice that she felt put her belief in practice in a way that better suited the needs of the students:

I’m so excited. I tried a group activity with my 7th period class that allowed them to move around while sharing ideas and they did so well…
The students were assured that no answer was incorrect as long as they could defend their choice with content from the book. After each character was presented, students moved to one of the conflicts. Next students were asked to talk to each other about why they chose that conflict for that character. That’s when the magic started to happen. I heard my students defending their choices, listening to the thinking of others, and even changing their initial decision after listening to their group discussion. I was really impressed with some thinking by my students that challenged my initial decision. It was so much fun.
I did have some clowning around but it was easily corrected when I praised the students doing what I asked them to do. My students looked proud of themselves when I praised them for their work. I was so frustrated after trying a group activity that required the students to work silently and share ideas through writing. All I needed to do was to find the group activity that fit this group of students (5. 2.16).
Conclusion

Misty ended the study firmly believing the classroom needs to be a safe space, learning is an active process, and learning is collaborative. Giving name to these beliefs and deeply reflecting on each, resulted in keeping old practices such as speaking softly and kindly to students and using a read aloud to unite students and to teach reading skills in context, but also resulted in implementing new practices such as group activities and independent reading. Misty felt that naming her beliefs, impacted her practices:

Learning about my beliefs has definitely impacted my practice. Next year, I will find ways to incorporate different types of writing that allow the students to explore who they are. I will also start the year creating some group norms that reflect my belief my classroom is a safe place where each individual is respected. Finally, I will be listening for learning and seeing each classroom as a different identity. What works for one classroom will not work for all of them (5.23.16).

Jennifer

Jennifer’s participation in naming her beliefs about the teaching of reading and writing resulted in her becoming consciously aware of the relationship between her beliefs and practices. The awareness allowed her to fine-tune her practice to ensure alignment with her beliefs.

Like Misty, during small group sessions, Jennifer often reflected on what was going well in her practice. She also contributed to the camaraderie built between participants by providing support and offering suggestions; she did this by sharing her own practice. Jennifer consistently shared her thinking during small group sessions.
Jennifer’s beliefs and practices were already theoretically aligned; however, Jennifer’s participation made her mindful of the alignment and resulted in her closely examining and tweaking her practices to better reflect her beliefs.

**During Small Group Sessions**

Throughout small group sessions Jennifer often shared what was working well in her practice, offered support and provided suggestions to participants by sharing her own practice, and consistently shared her thinking.

**Explained what she did well.** During small group sessions, Jennifer often reflected on what was working in her practice. For example, she wrote about the benefits she noticed from implementing independent reading on a daily basis:

I’ve been excited about how much some of my students have been reading and talking about their reading. I still have some that I need to work on, but I have a few students who usually label themselves as ‘non-readers’ and they are actually reading. It is also really exciting to celebrate students as they finish a book. It truly feels like an accomplishment for some students. I have also enjoyed having students share their favorite lines they have been keeping track of as they are reading (3.9.16).

While reading Brian Cambourne (1995) we discussed beliefs we held in the past, but had a shift in our thinking as we gained more experience in the classroom. Jennifer shared a shift she experienced when teaching writing and felt that her practice was now more beneficial to her students than before:

I think one of the things that shifted for me with writing was format versus form. I think before, my first couple years of teaching, I was just trying to teach a format.
Five-paragraph essay, this is how we’re going to write kind of thing. Then through my classes it shifted to more, ‘I’m going to teach you form of writing. Here’s a good form that we use, and there’s lots of different forms.’

Five-paragraph essay is not realistic. It’s just not how we write. If you think about real-world writing, hardly ever do you come across a five-paragraph essay. It’s just not true. Shifting from you have to have this many paragraphs to, ‘I don’t care how many paragraphs you have. I don’t care how many words. I don’t care how many pages.’

I always tell them. I’m so upfront with them. I tell them, ‘There is real world writing, and there is testing writing. Unfortunately, when it comes to testing, they want you to do a certain format.’ I tell them, ‘Guys, we know what good writing is. I’ve taught you what good writing is all year. If you just do whatever we’ve been doing, you’ll be fine.’

Jennifer was confident in her use of the Writer’s Notebook (Fletcher, 1996). She felt that she had a good balance between what students had to turn in for a grade and what students wrote for their own desire. She let students know that their Writer’s Notebook was their place to pursue their own interests. One day, Misty inquired into Jennifer’s use of the Writer’s Notebook and Jennifer shared what was working for her and her students:

Jennifer: There are some things that I tell them…Like the found poems, for example, I tell them, ‘This is going to be for an audience. It’s not just for me. You’re writing for others as well.’ Then there are some things I just say, ‘You’re writing for you.’ I think it’s okay to have different audiences. That’s just realistic.
Misty: Sure, but do you read when they’re writing for them? Do you tell them you’ll be reading it? You don’t? Is it still kept in their notebook though? They keep their notebooks with them all the time?

Jennifer: I don’t really look at their notebooks. If there’s something that I have to have from there, then it gets published. That’s their place. That notebook is theirs. I’m not going to take it from them. I’m not going to read through it. It’s theirs.

What I read gets published. If they want me to look at it, I’ll look at it (3.16.16).

Provided support to others. Jennifer provided support to the other participants and to me during each small group session. Most of her comments were in response to other participants and she often shared her own practices. Jennifer had an M.Ed. in Language and Literacy and used what she had learned to support the other participants during small group sessions. Indeed, Jennifer’s knowledgebase and familiarity with the topics I brought to the group for discussion allowed Jennifer to take the role of a co-facilitator during discussion rather than a participant. For example, Misty shared a struggle with wanting to connect with her students during independent reading, but she could not think of a way that was meaningful. Jennifer offered support by sharing her own practice:

Misty: …I struggled with I want so much to have control of what they’re [students] reading. They’re writing stuff down, but it’s so much against…It just takes away the joy of reading, but I’d still like some way to connect. I’d love to use it somehow to get to know them better. I like your idea of pulling out maybe a quote that spoke to them during the reading. That wouldn’t be that difficult to do.
Jennifer: I prefaced it with saying how much I love words and I love quotes. I think words can be so powerful. When I read I like to find those things. I told them, ‘There are some days I might read and I don’t find it.’ But every now and then I see that golden line, and I want to write it down so I don’t lose it. I just tried to take the pressure off, ‘Oh my gosh, I’ve got to write something every time’ (3.4.16).

Another time, Misty talked about her experience of trying to incorporate more group work into her practice. She shared that she did not notice the benefits she thought she would notice from letting her students have opportunities to learn from one another. Jennifer offered support:

You can’t do it one time and then like, ‘Oh, it doesn’t work.’ Group work takes a long time. It honestly is something you have to teach at the beginning of the school year. It’s a procedure that has to be taught. I don’t think that we can just say, ‘I tried this one time, it didn’t work. I’m not going to do any more group work.’ I don’t think we can toss that out that quickly.

I think, too, for me having them in groups all year, they stay like this all year until testing time. I feel like at the beginning of the year they start to learn, ‘This is my group. I can talk to them whenever if the time allows.’ I guess it’s learning when is it appropriate to talk to my group mates. I don’t know. I just don’t think we can throw that out so quickly (4.21.16).

Jennifer also provided support to me. In our tenth sessions, for example, I shared with participants a connection I made between a student I was currently struggling to reach
and research that I had currently read. Jennifer provided support to the tension I was experiencing:

Me: I struggle because I think that he’s trying to get kicked out of my room, but I don’t want to give him what he wants. I’ve told him I’m not giving up on him. If I take him out, does he feel like I’m giving up on him? But I’ve got to care about my other kids who are no longer learning because this is going on.

I read this. It’s research that someone did. They said that one of the teachers said that in the very beginning of the year she lets her students know that if your behavior is impacting the learning that is going to take place in this classroom, you are not allowed in here. I’ve been conflicted with that, but that’s actually a good message. I care about you so much, and you know that I love you because you’ve built that relationship from the beginning. I care about you so much, and I’m not going to let you…

Jennifer: It’s hurting him anyway whether he’s in there or he’s out of the room. He’s not learning. I think kids, too, at this age, they’ve got to have some serious consequences. Not necessarily serious, but concrete consequences. If you do this, this will happen.

Me: That’s the word I’m looking for, the consequences are clear.

Jennifer: They keep testing those boundaries to see how far they can push you.

We can’t give into them. We have to stay firm with that. If I say this at the beginning of the year and it happens, then that’s what I have to do. Which, in turn, is showing, ‘I’m not giving up on you. I’m trying to help you’ (4.21.16).
**Shared thinking.** Jennifer actively listened and contributed to the group discussions by sharing her thinking. She seemed to share anytime she felt she could contribute to the conversation. When I asked questions, she would often respond. For example, after reading Brian Cambourne’s (1995) article, I asked participants if they felt they held a belief that might be different from what the majority believed about teaching reading and writing. Jennifer mentioned that she believed that speaking should be taught

I feel like that gets abandoned a lot of times. The conference I went to in the end of January for the Council of Teachers of English or whatever, they had this speaker there. He specifically does speaking. He has a book about it and all this kind of stuff.

He was saying how speaking is the water. He was talking about a fish bowl. He said speaking is the water. It’s what we’re around all the time, but it never gets taught. People just expect kids to know how to speak well, and they’re never taught how to speak well. It just gets ignored. He was talking about the specific things that you should be doing to actually teach speaking.

It’s so obvious, I guess, that we just forget to do it. I feel like there are a lot of people who don’t value speaking. I feel like all the time you hear people talking about reading and writing (2.18.16).

Reading Fisher and Frey (2008), participants and I discussed the difficulties we experience when implementing group work opportunities for our students. Jennifer shared how she struggled with behavior management when her students were collaborating with other students:
I think the problem is that I struggle with the management of it in some of my classes. In some of my classes I feel really confident about letting them go and do that kind of stuff, but there are other ones where I don’t. I feel like if I do it gets too loud, they’re off task, and they’re not really working on it. There are definitely a lot of times where I feel bad because I’m trying to figure out what am I not doing. ‘Is my management not good enough to allow them…?’ You know what I mean (3.16.16)?

As Jennifer continued to share her struggle with management during group work she realized a difference in the productivity of the group work when she incorporated unstructured versus structured group work: “I can do fish bowl with any of my classes and it’s fine. It’s more of, I guess, things that aren’t as structured. Maybe something that would be helpful would be to have other protocols for group work” (3.16.16).

**Naming Beliefs**

Jennifer did not originally name beliefs as beliefs; she began small group session one naming practices as beliefs. She continued to name practices as beliefs in small group session one through six. Jennifer made a clear distinction between beliefs and practices during our stimulated recall interview.

**Transformation from naming practices as beliefs to naming beliefs as beliefs.**

Jennifer had a similar educational background as mine, which made her familiar with topics I brought up for discussion; however she had never given thought to naming her beliefs. Consequently, she named practices as beliefs. For example, Jennifer stated as a belief, “Do not kill or stifle a child’s love of reading by pointless task.” Jennifer’s belief
statement was a practice and influenced by a chapter in Donalyn Miller’s (2009) text we had read for the week. Jennifer reflected on ways she put this belief in practice:

I allow students to just spend time immersed in their reading without having some kind or arduous task to do that will keep them from wanting to read. I don’t feel as though I am hurting students’ love of writing. I guess I should be asking my kids (3. 4. 16)!

Jennifer began to make a distinction between beliefs and practice during a stimulated recall interview before small group session seven. During the interview we watched a video clip of her practice and I stopped the video periodically to ask questions about the decisions she made throughout the lesson. As Jennifer discussed the reasoning behind her instructional decisions, I gave name to beliefs I felt she held. Jennifer showed an awareness of the relationship between her beliefs and practice during the conversation:

Me: Can you think of what drives you to do that with them, to make those connections, figure out what they know, build on from that, and then to relate it to their own?

Jennifer: I think it’s just coming from me being in school and learning. They have to have that background information. You have that background knowledge. Also the whole importance of meeting them where they’re at. If I notice that they’re not understanding what suspense is, then I know I’m going to have to retrace my steps. I’m going to have to spend time talking about what it is before we can move forward.

Me: You said when you were in school. Do you mean…. 
Jennifer: When I was in school to be a teacher, you’re taught you have to have prior knowledge. You need to build on those things. I think it was ingrained even in undergrad. I remember in undergrad we had specific lesson plan templates we needed to use, and there was always a section on activating prior knowledge. I think that was just ingrained in me even then.

Me: Do you feel that’s the way you learn? Do you remember that being an important component in your classrooms growing up?

Jennifer: No.

Me: Something more you grabbed onto in college?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Me: When I hear you talk it seems you may hold a belief where maybe to assimilate new knowledge you have to build from something that’s already there. I think you have a strong belief in motivation. When you’re tying in their own personal books, that’s making the learning…You’re contextualizing it. That’s another belief I think you hold. It has to be relevant to them in some way. That’s where they see the meaning in wanting to learn or make sense of it. They’re seeing it in their own real world. I think all those things are coming into play in this one small clip when instructionally you’re making these decisions to question it, to connect. When you really look at it, it’s pretty neat to see how all that comes into play.

Jennifer: The thing, too, that’s funny about that is I’m not thinking about that in my mind. I know this is what’s right. I know this is what I’m supposed to do, so I just do it. But there are things impacting me. It’s very subconscious I guess.
Me: Exactly. That’s the whole point of my study, because you hold these beliefs whether you are conscious of it or not. That’s why I think it’s important. A lot of times we don’t even realize why we’re doing it. It’s just we know we’re supposed to do it. Taking the time to unpack why it is we’re doing what we’re doing. After we discussed some beliefs that seem to be present in your instructional decision in your practice, do you feel these are beliefs that you do identify with holding?

Jennifer: I think so.

Me: They’re beliefs that you think that you think, ‘Yeah, to me they’re good beliefs and I would be proud to hold those,’ or, ‘Those are what I want to guide my instruction.’”

Jennifer: Yeah, building on prior knowledge, making it real for them, yeah, definitely.

Me: Before our time together, do you feel like you already realized that? We kind of unfolded that in our conversation. Do you think it’s becoming more present to you through our conversations that we’re having?

Jennifer: I definitely think there are a lot of days now where I am thinking about it more, just like with the whole trying to incorporate more independent reading and things like that, doing the found poems and talking to kids about having a real audience. I knew those things, but now I’m becoming more intentional of it because of the text that we’re reading, the conversations we’re having, things like that. I feel like I’m thinking about it more (3.18.16).
After I modeled how to bundle belief statements in small group session seven, Jennifer made a distinction between beliefs and practice. She wrote in the thoughts section of her Modified What Matters chart:

Category One: Students must be active participants in their learning (In order to learn, you must DO).
- Students should have choice.
- Students should have their voices heard.
- Students need to engage in multiple opportunities to read and write.
- Students need multiple opportunities to practice a task before doing it on their own.

Category Two: Language development does not occur in isolation.
- Relationships with students are key to furthering their growth as a learner.
- Vocabulary should be taught in context.
- Conferencing/Feedback is important.
- Learning should be relevant.
- Reading and writing is important across all content areas.
- New knowledge is often enhanced by connecting it to prior knowledge (3.23.16).

**Changing Practices**

Jennifer’s new awareness of the relationship between her beliefs and practices resulted in her fine-tuning her practices to ensure alignment with her beliefs.

**Fine-tuned practice.** After Jennifer made the connection that her beliefs were related to the decisions she made in her practice, she began to fine-tune her practice to
assure that she aligned her beliefs and practice. For example, Jennifer shared with the group that she had a new student from Bulgaria. Her students wanted to communicate with the new students but she did not speak English. Jennifer explained that since she had given name to her belief learning is social, she realized the importance of communication between her former students and new student:

Jennifer: …I was going to say about social learners…With my third period today, actually, with the fact that we have the new girl in there, yesterday while I had some that were working on testing, I had two students come over here away from everyone else. It was a boy and a girl.

I said, ‘I want you guys to work together to come up with a list of words that you think she needs to know for here at school.’ Then once other kids started realizing what they were doing, they flocked over here. They started doing it too. I had some that started drawing pictures of things for her.

Kind of on the spot I said, ‘Here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to work on a group project as a class. We’re going to make learning cards for her.’

They’re doing it in Keynote. They started today. I took the list that they came up with yesterday, that they started, and I broke them into groups and wrote down words that they got from here. Each kid picked which one they wanted to do. They’re going through, and they’re making little slides where they have the English word, a picture of that word, and then the Bulgarian for it. They’re so excited.
They are so happy to be doing that. Just to see how it started with two kids and everyone flocked in and started doing it together and wanting to help her. They want to talk to her. It’s been kind of cool (4.14.16).

During our 8th session, I asked participants to intentionally put one of their beliefs in practice throughout the week, and sit back and watch the effect the practice had on their students. Jennifer had planned to do a new group activity that she had not before tried in her classroom. She shared with the group that she ended up fine-tuning a practice that she implemented on a regular basis. She realized that she was already putting the belief in her practice; therefore she chose to reflect on the effect of the practice on her students instead of implementing a new practice:

Jenny: I didn’t do the [inaudible]. I didn’t do all that stuff. I felt almost like that was unnatural for me, because I don’t do that. I just went to, “What do I do all the time?” What do I do all the time? I just let them talk. I let them be social in their groups. With all of my classes we did Scene 1 together, but the question we did together I held their hands through it, that kind of thing, doing the gradual release part.

Then when we got to Scene 2 question for CP [college prep], with accelerated they had another question for Scene 1…I helped them get started. Then I turned it over to them and said, ‘You can use your group as a resource too.’ I thought it worked out well, especially with the accelerated classes, because I had kids coming back from that trip. They were clueless. They had no idea what was going on.
Instead of coming to me they went to the person beside them. I was like, ‘Thank God.’ For one thing, it’s a weight off of me that they will go to someone else, but it also was good that they felt comfortable, I guess, just asking the person beside them, ‘What am I doing? What’s going on?’ or whatever.

I watched them in those interactions. I always walk around and listen to what they’re doing, but I tried to be more intentional of trying to figure out how is it benefiting them. Not just listening to what they’re saying but listening to what they’re saying and trying to figure out at the same time, me allowing them to do this, what is it helping them to become? Is it helping them to become independent learners? Are they starting to figure out that there are other places they can go besides just their teacher every time? Stuff like that (4.6.16).

Jennifer shared with me during her final interview that she had been using class novels but now she was seeking more literature on the topic to decide what was best for her students. She wanted to make sure the practice of using class novels aligned with her beliefs:

I can’t remember the specific text or author now, but there was a text we read where the author did not encourage class novels. I have also read things by Kylene Beers that touches on this issue as well. That is an area where I am still trying to figure out the best thing to do (5.20.16).

Conclusion

Jennifer ended the study giving name to five beliefs: learning is social, language development does not occur in isolation, building relationships with students is key, students need choice, and students need to be allowed to have their voices heard (final
interview, 5.20.16). In Jennifer’s final interview she shared the impact naming her beliefs had on her practice:

Naming my beliefs has made me more conscious of the way I teach. As I’m teaching, I often think to myself, ‘Does this match any of my beliefs?’ If not, I begin to question why I am doing it. Is there a legitimate reason or am I doing it because of convenience? Naming my beliefs has forced me to really consider what’s important (5.20.16).

Alice

Alice’s participation in naming her beliefs about the teaching of reading and writing did not impact Alice’s reading and writing practices.

During small group sessions, Alice contributed to the camaraderie built between participants by providing affirmation. Alice summarized what was said during small group sessions in her Modified What Matters chart.

Alice showed some signs of beginning to distinguish the difference between beliefs and practices, however, never showed a clear distinction between the two.

During Small Group Sessions

Throughout small group sessions Alice provided affirmation to the other teachers and to me. She also often summarized what was discussed during the small group sessions in her Modified What Matters chart.

Provided affirmation. Alice complimented me on my decision to create our small group and also praised other participants for the decisions they made in their practices. During our third session, for example, Alice thanked me for the work we were doing together because she had been able to make connections between what we were
discussing and what she was discussing in a Reading for Success class: “I’m seeing a lot of connections between what we’re doing and the Reading for Success class I’m taking. It’s been really cool to put this insight into that. I just wanted to tell you thank you” (2.24.16).

Another day, Misty and Jennifer were taking about whether a novel study was a beneficial practice or not. Alice provided affirmation to their current practice of using novel studies:

But I think the way that you all did that that respected what the reading was, you did the double-entry journals. They’re not time consuming. I thought a big takeaway was the activity shouldn’t be longer than the reading of the book. Y’all center on the reading of the book, which, I think, is not…I think y’all are doing it right (3.4.16).

Later in the semester, after Jennifer shared the story about her students helping their new student from Bulgaria learn English words so that they could communicate with her, Alice praised Jennifer for the way she handled the situation: “That’s so [inaudible] that you have come up with…I respect that so much. I love the way you’re handling that” (4. 14.16).

**Summarized small group sessions.** I gave teachers time to reflect during the last five to ten minutes of each small group session. They put their thoughts in the thoughts section of their Modified What Matters chart. Alice often summarized what was discussed during the small group session and/or reflected on what was working in her practice. Alice made her first entry at the end of our third session:

Thoughts this week…
Discussed Camborne reading. How to set up appropriate books. Having students set expectations. This week I have tried to implement the free reading (having a book at their desks). Practice what you preach. The beliefs are practice what you preach. Independent reading is the number one contributor to success. Teach procedure of using books at any interruptions. Making sure you get to the library (2.24.16).

During our fourth session, she wrote:

I have been implementing time for free reading every day. I have also been trying to do different outputs after reading besides questions. I have been requiring students to have a book for independent reading in class. I want to have students keep a quote board of important words when they read. In chapter 6, the author talks about book talks. The book pass was a good idea. Popcorn reading. It is a good idea to have students read over before the reading, so you can practice reading (3. 4. 16).

During small group session five:

Learning through the interactions of others. I have also started to have my third period students read for the first ten minutes of class. All of the students I have come into my classroom this period. It has been exciting having students share their books with me. Students are more engaged in reading.

I really like the idea of putting students into discussion groups in class. We talked about a reward outside of classrooms to show that students have completed book. We may ask our media specialists to help us pick out a poster. We do not want robots, we want life-long learners.
Guided reading groups. Schoology is a good way to conference with students. It is a good way to conference. This is easy for me to do because my students are in small groups.

In gradual release, make sure we are cycling all of the lessons (3.9.16).

**Naming Beliefs**

Like Misty and Jennifer, Alice did not originally name beliefs as beliefs; she began small group session one naming practices as beliefs. She continued to name practices as beliefs in small group session one through six. Alice began showing signs of making a distinction between beliefs and practices during small group session seven but never showed evidence of a clear distinction between the two.

**Transformation from naming practices as beliefs to naming some beliefs as beliefs.** Alice identified practices as beliefs in her What Matters Chart throughout the duration of the study. For example, in February and March, Alice wrote as beliefs: “time,” “student talk,” “quiet reading,” “journaling,” “I must be a leader in reading and writing”.

In March, she added, as a belief, “A guided lesson should be 15 minutes to show them how to do it”. That week we had read a chapter by Fisher and Frey (2008) on the gradual release model. Alice wrote:

In ELA there is a lot of building. We reteach and refine a concept. We tend to present new ideas versus new concepts. As a group we discussed that we are talking too much as teachers. We would like to be more purposeful. We have to teach our students how to think more often (3.9.16).
During the stimulated recall interview with Alice, I brought to her attention that she might believe: Motivation is a key component to learning and learning is an active process. This is the first time I implicitly made a distinction between beliefs and practice with Alice one-on-one. As Alice and I watched a clip of her teaching, I stopped the video to ask about her decision to get her students up and moving during the lesson:

Me: They were up and moving.

Alice: We try and do that every day.

Me: That’s one thing I’m really noticing through your comments, that movement seems to be important for you. Is that something you think critically about when you plan, how you can get them up?

Alice: Yes. Just getting movement, anything to get that bodily kinesthetic. That’s really important. We do a walking conference on Mondays and Fridays. I saw you doing that. I love that. You do so many great things.

Me: What else do you think goes into play with this instructional practice?

Alice: Some of our stuff is really dry, so just anything to make it come alive and get buy-in from the kids. A lot of the stuff we get, you could sit there and give them the worksheet. Anything to help it come alive, anything to spark interest because they’re struggling. Anything exciting.

Me: I see motivation.

Alice: Motivation is a big…

Me: You seem to believe that when kids are motivated, and, as a teacher, you can have an effect on whether or not they’re motivated. I see that through the way you speak to them.
Alice: Oh, thank you.

Me: Their activities, getting them up. You make things personal for them, which I think adds the motivation. You’re always using them in the stories that you’re teaching, and you bring them into it. I see that as being a huge belief that you hold. Then another thing that I see in this is just the belief that we learn by doing. It’s not us just feeding our students our knowledge. It’s the act and the process of constructing knowledge together. Learning is active.

Alice: I’m writing it down, because I might use it for…

Me: [laughs] Your classroom?

Alice: No, for our feedback. I want to remember.

Me: What do you think? Do you think that goes through your mind as you’re…?

Alice: Yes, that’s true. I just don’t want to be stale. Some days, like yesterday when you came in I was not the most organized because we were South Carolina testing. I had a meeting, and I came back like five minutes before that. I can’t let it affect them, but it helps it be a little bit more interesting to teach it, too (3.18.16).

I demonstrated bundling belief statements the week after the stimulated recall interview with Alice. After bundling her belief statements, Alice shared in the Thoughts section of her Modified What Matters chart, “I feel that my beliefs fall under the category of a child-centered classroom” (3.22.16).

During the next small group session, I asked participants to take each belief they identified after bundling their belief statements and answer the questions from the belief investigation sheet I gave them. Alice wrote:
My number one belief is the class has to be a fun, safe and interactive place. My first part of this has to build relationships with students. My parents were not interactive and involved in education. In 6th grade, Miss Triarsi took interest in my education. She really cared and therefore I really cared. A name for it is connect and care. I want to connect with my students and care about who they are. The evidence that I do this is making sure that I have time to connect with kids. I write down questions I want to ask my students, so I can make sure I am making personal connections everyday. I feel that making the personal connections serve as motivation for students to do well and feel safe in the classroom. My current practice is to check in everyday at ILT [independent learning time]. Make sure that I am a positive force on my students. I feel that if students make those connections, you become an important part of their life and they want to impact you. I make sure I write question down that I know are important to students. I also feel that it is important to have a student-centered classroom. I ask students what they want to study given select choices; what works best for them (4.6.16).

I responded in writing and told Alice that I thought her belief, “The classroom should be a fun, safe, and interactive place,” was actually three beliefs:

Alice- So above you said the classroom should be a fun, safe, and interactive place. I feel like these are three separate HUGE beliefs:

1. Learning should be fun.

2. A classroom should be a safe place.

3. Learning is an active process. (interactive-child centered) (4.7.16)
I continued to scaffold Alice with naming beliefs and guiding her in seeing the relationship between beliefs and practice. By the final interview, I still felt that Alice did not fully understand the distinction between beliefs and practice; therefore, she seemed to have very little awareness of the relationship between the two. However, she did share that she thought more about implementing her beliefs and now had exposure to how her peers implement similar beliefs due to the study:

2. **Now that our time together has come to an end, what beliefs are you positive you hold?** I am positive that I want the classroom to be a safe place. I think learning should be fun. I want our students to ‘buy-into’ lifelong learning.

3. **How has naming your beliefs impacted your practice?** I think more about how I am implementing those beliefs. This has made me reflect and observe myself. In addition, because of being a teacher of students with special needs, it has given me the opportunity to see how my peers implement those beliefs. I can question myself as to what I can do better. I have observed that I can quickly lose momentum on practices that I try, if they do not work right away. I have had to think about ways to be patient and consistent (5.18.16).

**Conclusion**

Alice ended the study firmly believing the classroom needs to be a safe space and learning should be fun. In Alice’s final interview she shared, “This experience made me think about what my beliefs were, honoring those beliefs in the classroom every day, observing myself and reflecting” (5.23.16)
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

When I moved from elementary to middle school, I realized there was sometimes a disconnect between my practices and the practices of the other English language arts teachers. I could not understand why they did what they did in their classrooms, and hypothesized that they and I might have different beliefs about the way our students learn.

This study began as a personal inquiry. In my graduate course work, I had begun to name my beliefs and noticed that this naming impacted my practices. I wanted to understand the impact naming beliefs would have on other teachers. I ended up with not only a theory about the impact of naming beliefs; I also came to understand the importance of designing professional development that allows teachers a context in which they can identify and name beliefs they hold about teaching. This process should be designed to increase teacher agency and self-efficacy. I ended the study with questions about how to achieve the ideal professional development for assisting teachers in naming their beliefs.

Theory of the Impact of Naming Beliefs on Practice

The model below illustrates the impact naming beliefs about reading and writing had on reading and writing practices of the teachers who participated in the study (see Figure 6.1).
Figure 6.1 Theoretical Model of the Impact of Naming Beliefs on Practice

**Context**

The context I created was based on my desire to create the conditions in which teachers could give name to the beliefs they hold. I did this by creating a safe, conversational space; bringing in literature which allowed teachers to identify beliefs held by others and also initiate conversation about their own beliefs and practices; providing a place for teachers to document the beliefs they were naming; providing a consistent space for teachers to reflect; and by being flexible to teachers’ needs throughout the process. I decided on these conditions based on my knowledge and understanding of beliefs. I have come to understand beliefs guide our actions passively (Pierce, 1877), which is why I wanted teachers to investigate the beliefs that were guiding
their instructional and relational decisions in the classroom. I hoped to create awareness and understanding of the power of teachers’ beliefs on teachers’ decision making, provide teachers an opportunity to ground their beliefs in literature and experience, but also create doubt, and I hoped to observe teachers’ doubt lead to inquiry. From Peirce (1877), I have come to understand inquiry as a process that is induced from the aggravation of doubt. Doubt is an undesirable state, which would lead teachers to seek a resolution, and hopefully lead teachers to resolve doubt through inquiry/reflection.

The context ended up having the characteristics I intended, but was also influenced by external factors and camaraderie built between teachers and myself. Some of the external factors were those I predicted and brought in myself (e.g. the readings), but there were also external factors brought in by teachers. For example, teachers brought in their own experiences that were shared and discussed. Jennifer brought her background in language and literacy, Misty brought her years of experience, and Alice brought her background in working with students with special needs. This is simplifying the external factors that were a major component of the context teachers were a part of, but nonetheless, explains the variety of influences teachers experienced.

Camaraderie also became an important part of the context. Teachers supported, encouraged, helped brainstorm new ideas, and inquired into one another’s practice. This contributed to the safe and comfortable environment I desired for teachers. It allowed teachers to take risks in their thinking and openly reflect on their practice and later on their beliefs.
Reflection on Practice

Teachers were not familiar with beliefs they held about the teaching of reading and writing, but they were familiar with what practices they felt were important when teaching reading and writing. Due to the familiarity and comfort of the practices they used on a daily basis, they gravitated towards reflecting on practice. This originally took me by surprise until I recalled Dewey (1913): “What [an individual] has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument in understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow” (p. 44). Because teachers were using their past experiences to make sense of the new experience of identifying beliefs they held about teaching, they initially reflected on their practices, not on their beliefs.

As we read literature written by influential people in the field of education, teachers made connections from the authors’ beliefs and to their own instructional practice. Even though I situated the text as a means to notice and name beliefs held by others, the teachers initially used it as a means to compare the ideas of the authors with their classroom experiences. Some ideas were questioned or dismissed and some ideas from the texts we read became teachers’ newly acclaimed beliefs. For example, while reading about Miller’s (2009) disproval of using a class novel, Misty and Jennifer used their personal experience to questions Miller’s ideas:

Misty: She was very much against whole class novels.

Jennifer: That broke my heart. [laughs]

Misty: Some of the points she made about it were true. Remember, we struggled that one year that it lasted…When we were doing Animal Farm (Orwell, 1945) it lasted forever. Then the next year we tried having them do the reading outside of
class and discuss. That did not work because the kids didn’t read. But this last time when we had you read one and we read one in class to them, they never got too far behind. They at least had some idea of what’s going on. That was the best yet.

Jennifer: I have some kids still asking me, ‘Ms. Powell, will you read another [inaudible]?’  

Misty: We’re just doing the two. We’re not doing it all the time. The one year we had the themes. Every year we’ve come up with something good; they’ve changed our standards.  

I hated that she was so against the whole class novels because I do think there is a place for it.  

I think you have to be careful how you’re teaching them. I do think we hit upon probably one of the best ways. We’ll read a chapter, you read a chapter alone. Then coming back, we read a chapter in class. Nobody ever got so far behind they were completely lost.  

Jennifer: I just thought it was fun having that common ground to talk about…(3.4.16).  

Most often teachers agreed with the ideas of the authors, which resulted in teachers naming beliefs about practice. For example, in a chapter we read by Rief (2007), the author shared her experience of having reluctant writers even though she did all that she knew to get students excited about writing. While attending a conference, Rief heard Roger Essley, an artist, speak of his frustration as a student because his teachers would not let him draw and drawing was the way he made sense of the world around him. He
encouraged teachers at the conference to think of drawing as a way of thinking. After reading and discussing Rief’s chapter, Alice stated as a belief: “Drawing can inspire writing” (3.16.16).

**Tension**

When Misty and Jennifer reflected on their practices, stimulated by the readings, conversations, and the statements they were naming as beliefs, the reflection sometimes led to tension. This is the tension I desired teachers to experience because it is a path, which has the potential to initiate inquiry in order to obtain new knowledge to settle tension (Pierce, 1877). Misty and Jennifer open-mindedly considered the tension, engaged in reflection, and explored multiple interpretations of the tension. The reflection surrounding the tension led to a change in practice. For example, Misty reflected about the tension she was feeling about independent reading. She considered her experience with administrators disapproving of time allotted to independent reading, her own classroom experience, her peers’ thoughts and experiences, and the ideas of the authors we were reading. After exploring multiple interpretations of the tension, she was able to brainstorm alternatives to what had been an either/or situation (to allow or not allow independent reading).

Misty also watched and thought about the way her students reacted to the changes in her practice. Misty’s reflection on the effect the practice had on students, caused more tensions, and more changes to practice, and finally led to incorporating independent reading in a way that aligned with her beliefs and allowed Misty to put her tensions to rest. Tension led to change in practice, if tension was not experienced, practice remained the same.
Reflection on the Relationship Between Practices and Beliefs

Reflection on the relationship between beliefs and practices only happened after there was a reflection on practice. Once Misty and Jennifer made a distinction between beliefs and practice and gave name to beliefs they held, they began reflecting on the relationship between their beliefs and practices. Alice did not vocalize or write about her practices. Misty and Jennifer reflected orally and in writing about their practices and, around week seven began to distinguish between practices and beliefs and on the relationship between them. When they felt there was an alignment between their beliefs and practice, Misty and Jennifer worked on fine-tuning their practice to continue to find ways to put their beliefs in practice. If they felt there was not an alignment, Misty and Jennifer felt tension and enacted a change in practice to align their practices with their beliefs.

Implications

What I have learned from this personal inquiry has implications for professional development in creating a space and way for teachers to name and reflect on the beliefs they hold and the relationship between their beliefs and practice. This type of professional development can promote teacher agency and self-efficacy. The conditions needed to foster teacher agency and self-efficacy are awareness, presence, reflection, and time.

Teacher Agency and Self-Efficacy

The three teachers I worked with did not recall ever naming the beliefs they held as teachers of reading and writing. They taught each day knowing the expectations bestowed upon them: administrators relayed expectations from the district office, and
enforced required state standards. The teachers also did not ever recall being asked about their beliefs, e.g. to their knowledge no one had ever asked them, professionals who had invested in teaching students for a number of years, “What do you know to be important when teaching students how to read or write?” For two of the three teachers, being asked and answering this question, led to changes in practice that Dewey (1933) would consider educative, and for one teacher, it did not.

Misty, for example, began one meeting explaining that she did not incorporate independent reading because of a comment an administrator made about the lack of value in independent reading. Because of the power placed in who made the judgment, Misty did not question the administrator’s reasoning for disapproving independent reading; he was in a place of authority over her, so consequently she dismissed independent reading. As Misty reflected, read, discussed, inquired, and began to experiment with independent reading during our time together, Misty no longer dismissed independent reading because an administrator did not understand its purpose, Misty implemented independent reading because she came to understand that learning is an active process. Therefore in order to become better readers, —her students must actually read.

**Importance of awareness.** Teachers’ hectic schedules often leave little time for reflection. Jackson (1990) found that elementary teachers have 200 to 300 exchanges with students every hour, they are continuously making decisions that they are often unaware they are making. When I asked teachers to name what it is they believed was important about teaching students to learn to read and write and they started documenting these beliefs, this simple, yet complex question triggered an awareness for two of the three teachers as to why they made the instructional decisions they made. Once teachers
began to ground their newly named beliefs by exploring the root of the beliefs they held, exploring literature and research that discussed the beliefs, and by observing the effects of their beliefs in practice, two of the three teachers became aware of the importance of putting their beliefs in practice. The awareness was two fold.

1. They became aware that they made the decisions they made for a reason.

2. They became aware of the importance in aligning their beliefs and practices.

The new awareness seemed to make teachers reflect more intensely on the instructional decisions they made and brought a sense of responsibility to be purposeful in their daily planning ensuring they were creating the conditions they had discovered to be most cohesive for learning. This awareness is crucial in leading to teacher agency and self-efficacy.

**Importance of presence.** Teachers’ presence during and outside of our meetings had a strong influence on the outcome of each teacher’s journey. Two of the three teachers whom actively participated during and outside of the meetings enacted change to their practices to ensure an alignment between named beliefs and practice. Their active participation also resulted in a continuation of fine-tuning practice to ensure students were in an environment that supported the beliefs of the teacher. In retrospect, I think it was unrealistic of me to expect teachers to let go of the demands coming at them in the middle of their school day and to then be fully present to the process of reflecting and naming their beliefs about the teaching of reading and writing. I know now that the middle of the school day is not the time to ask teachers to shut out the outside noise and engage in rigorous, deliberate reflection. Professional development that has the capability to lead to teacher agency and self-efficacy requires teachers to be fully present
throughout the entirety of the journey and that requires a context more removed from day-to-day events.

**Importance of reflection.** Teachers’ reflections seemed to serve as a means of transportation through the complex layers of the work we did together; and I discovered two of the three engaged in reflection and one did not. Rodgers’ (2008) summarized Dewey’s thoughts on reflection and, in so doing, provided me with a way to distinguish among teachers’ reflective and non-reflective responses.

...reflection requires cognitive discipline, it also calls upon an individual’s emotional discipline. As much as possible one must remain engaged in the experience as it is happening, in an undistracted way, so that data can be gathered through observation, (whole heartedness and directness). One must also remain open-minded, entertaining many interpretations of his or her experiences so that one does not limit one’s understanding and the actions that flow from it. Finally one must accept that a shift in understanding of an experience may call for an entire shift in outlook. And responsibility demands that action—practice—line up with outlook—theory. (p. 863)

Reflection is not accidental—it is a rigorous and deliberate way of thinking (Dewey, 1933). I could not force teachers to reflect; I could only create a context, which encouraged reflection. Across the study, two of the teachers were reflective and one was not. The two teachers who engaged in reflective behavior, made deliberate changes in their practices; the other teacher did not. Implications suggest that teachers must engage in reflection during the professional development in order to gain agency and self-efficacy as an end result.
**Importance of time.** For all three teachers, there seemed to be a relationship between the amount of reflection they shared with me and the amount of time they had to do so. Misty, for example, spent a considerable amount of time reflecting outside of small group sessions. She reflected throughout the week, on various days. Misty would document her thinking on her What Matters Chart, which was shared with me on Google Docs. Misty and I had ongoing conversations due to her constantly documenting her thinking. Misty even continued to reflect after the study ended. When teachers returned after summer break, Misty approached me and talked with me about what she had been thinking about over the break. She discussed with me further changes she wanted to implement in her practice the upcoming school year. Misty’s had grown children that no longer lived with her, and her one grandchild did not live nearby. She commented to me that she had ample time for reflection.

Jennifer utilized the time within small group sessions to engage in reflection and fine-tune her practice. She did not share any of the thinking she did outside of class. Jennifer was the youngest teacher and had the fewest years of teaching experiences. She was in graduate school, taking an evening class during the duration of the study. She had less time for oral and written reflection than did Misty.

Alice did not seem to have the time in her schedule needed for reflection. Alice came into small group sessions with her laptop and lunch. During the small group sessions she was often answering emails and eating the remains of her lunch. Alice did not always get a planning period because of the responsibilities that come with teaching special education students. She taught all grade levels and other teachers or her students
were often in need of her attention. Alice had three young children; time at home was dedicated to her family.

For all three teachers, time became a critical condition that either did or did not allow for reflection; participants with multiple agendas during small group sessions and outside of our time together had limited time, which was necessary, for reflection to occur. Implications suggest that teachers need uninterrupted time allotted for reflection throughout the duration of the professional development in order for teacher agency and self-efficacy to be gained and maintained.

Limitations

In qualitative research, researchers make decisions about what they include and what they exclude as they tell the story of their research. Every researcher brings his/her own subjectivities, perceptions, and conceptualizations to the research, which has the potential to limit what is made known to his/her audience. While I was thoughtful and deliberate about what I chose to include and exclude as I told the story of my research, I understand that my interpretation is due to the lens in which I see and understand the world around me, and impacts my representation of the data.

Future Research

This study was my initial attempt to understand the impact naming beliefs has on one’s practice. As the study developed, I found myself arriving at new questions to further my understanding of how to create the ideal conditions for professional development that creates a space and way for teachers to name their beliefs and reflect on the relationship between their beliefs and practices:
1. Is there a better time of the year to implement this type of professional development?

2. Is there a certain length of time in which the small group sessions should continue and discontinue?

3. Is it reasonable to expect every teacher to engage in reflection?

4. Is it possible to teach reflection, and if so, what does it sound and look like?

**When to Implement Professional Development**

Teachers’ commitment to being present influenced the outcome of each teacher’s experience and seemed to initiate further inquiry on practices that supported teachers’ beliefs. Due to the importance of presence, further research is needed to explore what time of the year and what time of the day would be most beneficial to support teacher presence throughout the experience. While my attempt involved teachers meeting during their planning period, once a week, it was obvious that the demands on teachers during the school day do now allow teachers to disconnect from the outside noise and engage in rigorous reflection surrounding their beliefs. In future attempts, I would try holding small group sessions during the summer so that teachers would have fewer distractions and can be fully present to the process.

**Length of Professional Development**

Further research is also needed in the length of time in which small group sessions should continue throughout the school year. Again, meeting during the school day was not ideal; therefore, I would suggest experimenting with conducting meetings after school to not interfere with the rush of the school day. I would also suggest meeting once a
month, throughout the duration of the school year to continue the reflection and camaraderie that is needed.

**Expectation of Reflection**

As my study progressed, I also became more perplexed by the complexity of reflection. I found when I asked teachers to reflect, not all of them did so. I would like to understand the practicality of expecting every teacher to engage in reflection. A deeper understanding is needed in what constrains reflection. As I learned through Dewey (1938) it could be that teachers were using past experiences to make sense of the new experience of reflecting on beliefs held and because of a lack of reflection in the past, they did not have the means to now do so. Schön (1984) argues “as practice becomes more repetitive and routine, the practitioner may miss important opportunities to think about what he is doing…” (p. 61). Maybe teachers had been operating by habit for so long, it was difficult to now reflect on their practices. Reflection is an important component to the process of naming beliefs and understanding the practicality in expecting every teacher to reflect can help facilitators plan ahead for knowing what to try or do when teachers do not engage in reflection during the professional development.

**Teaching Reflection**

Furthermore, if teachers seem to not engage in reflection, what would it take to teach teachers how to be reflective? As a teacher I tend to gravitate towards the epistemological belief that anything can be learned with accurate modeling, scaffolding, and ample practice. I felt I modeled, scaffolded, and allowed practice yet still reflection did not always happen. Further research is needed in understanding how to teach reflection. I suggest asking teachers in the beginning of the professional development
what reflection means to them. Knowing the way teachers defined reflection would have helped me understand their thinking relative to my request to reflect.

I would include more modeling of reflection by thinking out loud during small group sessions, showing the way I engage in reflection. I would also spend more time demonstrating how I have come to support my beliefs. My belief investigation sheet was my attempt in prompting teachers in doing this, but my efforts fell short when I underestimated the amount of uninterrupted time it takes for one to reflect on beliefs that had never before been challenged.

**My Journey Continues**

I am proud to be working alongside teachers every day, doing what I love most—working with students, having the privilege of being a part of so many children’s lives, getting to discover the unique conditions that each need in order to grow and flourish as a person and as a learner. While the findings to this study are not generalizable, I have created a theoretical model that represents the impact I have come to find the impact naming beliefs has on a teacher’s practice. I will use my new understanding as I work alongside teachers, being a teacher leader, growing with them, encouraging teachers to examine and reflect on what they believe is important for their classroom and the students they serve, in hopes of contributing to a school that teaches with a purpose every single day and advocates for students that deserve the very best. I will dedicate time and effort in tweaking and molding my theoretical model as my experiences bring me new insights and further understanding, striving to be more knowledgeable in my area in which I feel I can make a beneficial contribution to education—for it is my calling, it is my purpose.
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APPENDIX A
CONSENT LETTER

January, 2016

Dear Teacher,

My name is Jessica Price. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Language and Literacy the University of South Carolina. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting in partial fulfillment of the requirements of my doctoral program. The title of the study is Examining the impact naming one’s beliefs has on one’s practice: The journey of three English language arts teachers as they examine their beliefs and practices.

The purpose of my proposed study is to provide an opportunity for you to engage in self-study and help you document the relationship between your beliefs and practices across a semester. I will observe your classroom, initially, and share notes I take with you to ensure that what I have observed is being accurately reflected through my notes. I will then conduct study groups, in which we will read about literacy learning and teaching, watch videos of teachers in practice, we will think deeply about the beliefs we hold as teachers of reading and writing, and work through the process of naming these beliefs. During the small group sessions, I will observe your classroom practices, and explore with you, through conversations, how naming your beliefs did or did not impact your practices. The findings of this study will add to the limited body of literature on this topic.

Study group sessions will be audio and video recorded so that I can accurately reflect on our time together. The recordings will only be reviewed by myself and members of my dissertation committee. I will analyze the data I collect throughout the study and always give you the opportunity to look over what I have documented during our time together and the findings I have concluded. I will use pseudonyms when writing about my findings to protect your confidentiality.

Study information will be kept in a secure and password-protected location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also withdraw from being in the study at any time.
I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. If you have questions you may contact me at 803-513-0630 or jlprice@lexington1.net, or my faculty advisor, Dr. Diane Stephens, at stephens.diane@gmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration. Please sign the attached consent form and enclose it in the provided envelope. Please do not write your name or any other information on the outside of the envelope.

With kind regards,

Jessica Price
803-513-0630
jlprice@lexington1.net

Consent Form

I have read and understood the letter of invitation from Jessica Price describing the study titled, *Examining the impact that naming one’s beliefs has on one’s practice: The journey of three English language arts teachers as they examine their beliefs and practices.* I have read and understood the details of the study and the following ethical considerations:

- There are no risks associated with participation in the study.
- Participation in the study is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time.
- I can refuse to participate in any part of the study.
- All data will be coded to ensure confidentiality (using pseudonyms).
- Data will be accessible to the researcher and her committee only.
- Data will be stored securely by Jessica Hanko via password protection.
- The findings from this study will be disseminated to the academic community through publication as a doctoral dissertation, publication in refereed academic journals and presentations at conferences.

_____ I consent to participate in the above study.

_____ I do NOT wish to participate in the above study.

____________________________________________________________________________

Printed Name

____________________________________________________________________________

Signature Date