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# Teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing

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Teachers' Literacy Beliefs and Their Students' Conceptions  
About Reading and Writing

by

Mildred Falcón-Huertas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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Teachers' Literacy Beliefs and Their Students' Conceptions About  
Reading and Writing

Mildred Falcón-Huertas

ABSTRACT

This investigation examined first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and practices and its relationship with their students' conceptions about reading and writing. For the first part of the study a sample of 76 first-grade teachers, from two school districts in Puerto Rico, completed the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS). The combined score of the LOS was calculated and used to categorize teachers according to their literacy beliefs and practices as constructivist, eclectic, or traditional. After matching by years of experience and educational level, a stratified random sample of six teachers, two from each literacy viewpoint (traditional, eclectic, and constructivist), and 48 first-grade students was selected to participate in the second part of the study. A simple random sample of eight students (four low-achieving readers and four high-achieving readers) was selected from the classrooms of each of the six teachers, who represented the three differing literacy beliefs. Individual interviews were conducted with the students, using Wing's (1989) interview protocol, in order to assess their conceptions of reading and writing. The results of this study regarding the nature of teachers' literacy beliefs indicated that most teachers appear to hold traditional



literacy beliefs and practices, whereas a very small number of the participant teachers seem to hold literacy beliefs and practices categorized as constructivist. A statistical significant association was found between teachers' literacy viewpoint and students' conceptions about reading and writing. First-grade students whose teachers held a constructivist literacy viewpoint seemed to have more holistic conceptions of literacy, whereas students whose teachers held a traditional or an eclectic literacy viewpoint seemed to have more skills or test-based conceptions of reading and writing. Results indicate that first-grade students' ideas regarding the purposes and nature of reading and writing appear to be compatible with their teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. No significant relationship was found between students' conceptions of reading and writing and their reading ability. Implications for literacy teaching, learning, and further research are discussed.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### *Background of the Study*

The prominence of literacy achievement is evident within today's educational discourse. The passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2002 has contributed to an enhanced public awareness of the importance of literacy instruction (Young & Draper, 2006). A major report of the National Research Council (1998) regarding the prevention of reading difficulties in young children highlights the value of teachers and teaching in promoting literacy achievement. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) characterize teaching as "the single best weapon against reading failure" (p. 343). Consequently, recent literature has focused on the impact of effective literacy teachers (Allington, 2002; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002; Wray, Medwell, Poulson, & Fox, 2002) on literacy learning.

In a recent study, Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, and Rodriguez (2002) analyzed the relationship between teachers' practices and students' growth in reading achievement. They identified particular teaching practices that seem to be related to students' improvement in reading. These practices include: promoting students' active involvement in literacy activities, higher level

questioning, and adopting a student-support stance (as opposed to a teacher-directed stance), among others. According to the researchers, their findings suggest that how teachers teach is as important as what they teach, “when seeking to make changes in reading instruction” (p. 278).

Some scholars and researchers are focusing on the teaching practices of outstanding or exemplary literacy teachers and their relationship to students’ achievement (Pressley, 2001; Poulson, Avramidis, Fox, Medwell, & Wray, 2001; Taylor et al., 2002). These studies are based on the underlying premise of the influential role of teachers’ practices and behavior toward reading and writing on students’ literacy learning. Reflecting on his experiences after many years of studying outstanding elementary classroom teachers, Allington (2002) asserts that “effective teachers matter much more than particular curriculum materials, pedagogical approaches, or ‘proven programs’” (p. 740).

Wray, Medwell, Poulson, and Fox (2002) examined the characteristics of a group of 228 primary teachers identified as effective teachers of literacy by school supervisors. The researchers also identified a validation sample of primary teachers not identified as “effective.” The findings of the study indicate that almost all effective teachers of literacy showed a tendency to “believe that it is important to make it explicit that the purpose of teaching literacy is to enable their pupils to create meaning using text” (p. 9). Also, these teachers centered their teaching of reading and writing around shared texts, emphasized to their students the functionality of what they were learning, possessed vast knowledge

about literacy and sound and had consistent philosophies about literacy teaching (Wray et al., 2002).

There is no doubt that teaching plays a crucial role in literacy learning. However, teaching involves various complex processes. In fact, a growing perception of teaching as a “professional activity” corresponds to the recognition of the cognitive nature of these processes (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002). Hativa and Goodyear (2002) point out that research has shifted from teachers’ observable classroom behaviors to more implicit and internal aspects of teaching. More recently, according to Fang (1996), and as a consequence of the influence of the cognitive psychology field, researchers have become particularly interested in teachers’ thinking.

Yero (2002) emphasizes how influential teachers’ thinking is on shaping the nature and course of education. According to her, teachers’ thinking about the definition of education, the nature of knowledge and learning, among other aspects, has an impact on what and how teachers teach. Fang (1996) concurs with the idea regarding the influential role of teachers’ metaphors and definitions of teaching. He concludes that “teachers’ thinking about their roles and the beliefs and values they hold help shape their pedagogy” (p. 53).

The assumption that “teacher behavior is substantially influenced and even determined by teachers’ thought processes” (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 255) highlights the importance of studying this domain. According to Clark and Peterson (1986) a better comprehension of the relationship between teachers’

thoughts and actions should provide a better understanding of how these components interact to facilitate or inhibit children's academic performance.

Interest in teachers' thought processes and the relationship with their practices has led to an increasing attention on the beliefs of teachers. According to Clark and Peterson (1986) teachers' beliefs constitute a major category of teachers' thought processes. Muijs and Reynolds (2001) notice that based on the assumption that teachers' beliefs are more important to teaching quality than immediately observable behavior, recent literature emphasizes the necessity to focus on teachers' own beliefs about teaching and the students they teach. Poulson, Avramidis, Fox, Medwell, and Wray (2001) agree and claim that teachers' beliefs represent an important feature of quality teaching that deserves consideration in any attempt to improve education.

According to Hativa and Goodyear (2002), research has pointed toward a strong, though not necessarily simple, link between teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their classroom practices and student achievement. Thompson (1992) concurs, indicating that the relationship between beliefs and practices is not a simple one, because it entails a dynamic reciprocal connection. On the other hand, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) described this relationship as a causal chain that proceeds from beliefs to attitudes to intentions and finally to behaviors. It appears that the exact nature of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices is still unclear and not always consistent. As Wray et al. (2002) indicate, stronger evidence is necessary regarding the ways beliefs link to practices.

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices has been discussed in the context of literacy instruction. According to Fang (1996) some studies indicate that teachers possess theoretical beliefs toward reading and writing and that these beliefs tend to shape the nature of their instructional practices. Burgess, Lundgreen, Lloyd, and Pianta (1999) conducted a study about preschool teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices toward literacy instruction. Their findings suggest that teachers' beliefs are internally consistent with their practices. In their study, Wray et al. (2002) hypothesized that effective teachers of literacy would have a coherent set of beliefs regarding the nature and learning of reading and writing. The research findings supported their hypothesis. Furthermore, according to them, effective literacy teachers were more coherent in their beliefs about reading and writing and tended to favor activities that corresponded to these beliefs.

The study of teachers' beliefs represents a provocative and interesting topic, considering the value of teachers and teaching in promoting literacy achievement, the impact of teachers' thinking on their pedagogy, and the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and their practices. Moreover, it is important to recognize that if, in effect, teachers' literacy beliefs are related to their practices, directly or indirectly, students are involved. In fact, teachers' beliefs have been linked to students' perceptions, conceptions, understandings, and performance regarding reading and writing, among other aspects (Fang, 1996; Harste & Burke, 1977; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). Thus, studying the impact of such beliefs on students' literacy learning constitutes a

logical and significant endeavor. This study will address, in particular, the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing.

*Teachers' Literacy Beliefs and Children's Conceptions of Reading and Writing:  
A Rationale*

It appears that teachers' beliefs can affect teaching and learning in different ways (Fang, 1996; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Yero, 2002). According to Fang (1996) some studies indicate that teachers possess theoretical beliefs toward reading and writing and that these beliefs tend to shape the nature of their instructional practices. Gove (1983) states that teachers hold implicit theories about learning to read and often they behave in ways that validate and correspond to these beliefs.

Harste and Burke (1977) suggest that teachers, whether they recognize it or not, are theoretical in their instructional approach to literacy. Teachers' theoretical orientation encompasses the particular assumptions, knowledge and beliefs held about teaching and learning (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Fink, 2002; Harste & Burke, 1977). According to Graham, Harris, MacArthur, and Fink (2002), the knowledge of teachers' theoretical orientations is significant in understanding the teaching process.

Teachers' literacy beliefs have been categorized by their theoretical orientation. These categories include different reading models (Duffy & Metheny, 1979); reading approaches such as phonics, skills or whole language (DeFord, 1985); and various theoretical points of view such as constructivist,

traditional or eclectic (Lenski, Wham, & Griffey, 1998). As Fang (1996) indicates, a substantial number of studies supports the notion that in effect teachers do possess theoretical beliefs related to literacy and that such beliefs tend to shape the nature of their educational practices.

Lenski, Wham, and Griffey (1998) delineated the roles and methods that characterize literacy instruction from a traditional, eclectic, and constructivist point of view. According to them, traditional teachers tend to use traditional reading methods, basal readers, skill-based approaches, and to rely mostly on direct instruction, whereas constructivist teachers draw on holistic approaches, whole texts, and integrated instruction. On the other hand, eclectic teachers tend to use some traditional and some constructivist reading methods, combining these two viewpoints regarding student learning.

Harste and Burke (1977) suggest a connection between teachers' beliefs about reading and their students' perspectives about this process. In fact, a few more recent studies have explored this connection (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). These studies have relied on qualitative research and small sample sizes. However, their results point toward a relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions of reading and writing.

Children's conceptions of reading and writing comprise their definition of what literacy is, its nature, its purpose, and an understanding of the relationship between the reader and the text, among other aspects (Melothe, Book, Putnam, & Sivan, 1989; Moller, 1999; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). According to



Moller (1999) researchers and scholars (Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1993; Cairney & Langbein, 1989; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996) have found that children's views, conceptions, and ideas about reading and writing seem to change across time and experience, frequently depending on their classroom and school environment and on the ideologies driving a particular teacher's instruction. In fact, some studies have suggested that in a certain way students' conceptions of reading and writing are a reflection of their teachers' literacy beliefs (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989).

Wing (1989) conducted a study with young children, examining the relationship between two programs' literacy orientation and their children's conceptions of reading and writing. Wing interviewed the directors, regarding their program's orientation toward reading and writing instruction, and ten children from each program: a Montessori school (with an emphasis on specific skills and text-based orientation) and a "constructivist" school (with an emphasis on exploration, experimentation, and manipulation of books, print, and writing materials). Three major themes emerged from children's responses to the interviews in relation to their literacy conceptions: the influence of children's home experiences, skills-test-based orientation, and holistic/reader-based orientation. Interestingly, the majority of responses from the children in the program with a constructivist orientation were more likely to view reading from a holistic point of view. On the other hand, children in the skills-oriented program were more likely to view reading from a skills-based viewpoint.

The nature and qualities of the activities and interactions about literacy seem to contribute to the children's construction of what literacy is and what it implies: a whole or pieces; something meaningful or irrelevant; functional or artificial; engaging or boring (Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999). According to Dahl and Freppon (1995) different learning contexts influence learner perceptions and conceptions about literacy. These perceptions consequently influence children's ideas about literacy (Moller, 1999). In light of the previous ideas, various researchers have emphasized that it is important to acknowledge children's conceptions about literacy and reflect about how the classroom context contributes to them (Dahl & Freppon, 1995; Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999; Turner & Meyer, 2000).

Nevertheless, both the literature and the research in this area are still sparse. Therefore, the connection between teachers' beliefs and students' literacy conceptions has yet to be systematically investigated (Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989).

### *The Purpose of the Study*

This study had two main purposes. The first purpose was to describe and examine first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs. Clark and Peterson (1986) point out that a better comprehension of the relationship between teachers' thoughts and actions should provide a better understanding of how these components interact to facilitate or inhibit students' performance.

The second purpose was to investigate the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions about reading and writing.

It appears that teachers' beliefs and instructional practices influence children's conceptions of literacy (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989).

### *Significance of the Study*

This study contributes to our understanding of teachers' literacy beliefs. As Pajares (1992) points out, attention to teachers' beliefs can inform educational practice. Researchers, therefore, must assess teachers' beliefs in order to obtain a better comprehension of the learning experience (Olson & Singer, 1994).

This study also enhances our understanding of the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing. Wing (1989) discusses the importance of studying this relationship; according to her, children's orientation toward reading and writing may influence how they view and approach these processes. Moreover, she claims that children whose conceptions of reading and writing are congruent with the orientations of the instructional experiences may be more likely to achieve the expected outcomes.

Furthermore, since this study includes statistical analysis of quantitative data, it provides additional evidence to validate the results of previous qualitative studies. As Hutchinson (as cited in Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) indicates, case study research can be used as the basis for quantitative research studies, which are more suitable for testing the generalizability of research findings. Besides, the fact that research in this area is scarce highlights the relevance and necessity for this study.

Since most of the studies regarding teachers' beliefs and children's literacy conceptions have been conducted in the United States, the fact that the

this study was conducted in Puerto Rico has certainly contributed to the generalizability of previous research findings. Moreover, this study was the first attempt to explore the beliefs about reading and writing of Puerto Rican teachers.

Finally, since first-grade represents for most children their first formal encounter with reading and writing, the results of this study have important implications for this educational level and for the fields of literacy and early childhood.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions addressed by this study are as follows:

1. What are the literacy beliefs of first-grade teachers?
2. To what extent are first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs aligned with their practices?
3. Are there demographic differences among teachers whose literacy beliefs correspond to a constructivist, an eclectic, or a traditional viewpoint?
4. To what extent are teachers' literacy beliefs related to children's conceptions about reading and writing?

The first three questions were concerned with the description of first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. The answers to these questions provide information about what teachers believe about literacy learning and what they do in their classrooms. Moreover, they show how closely teachers' literacy beliefs align with their practices, providing a sense of whether they tend to be traditional, eclectic, or constructivist teachers (Lenski et al., 1998).

The last question focused on the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions about reading and writing. Statistical analysis was conducted in order to determine differences in conceptions about reading and writing among children whose teachers hold differing literacy beliefs.

### *Definition of Terms*

There are some terms that are used frequently in the context of this study. The following constitute operational definitions for these terms.

- Teachers' literacy beliefs and practices: These terms were defined by the scores obtained in the Literacy Orientation Survey (Lenski et al., 1998). Based on the scores obtained in the Survey, teachers' literacy beliefs and practices were categorized as constructivist, eclectic or traditional.
- Children's conceptions about reading and writing: These terms were defined by children's responses to Wing's (1989) Interview about conceptions of reading and writing.
- Traditional teacher: This term was defined by the following characteristics delineated by Lenski et al. (1998): uses traditional reading methods as basal reading instruction, teaches using primarily direct instruction, and views students as "vessels to be filled."
- Eclectic teacher: This term was defined by the following characteristics delineated by Lenski et al. (1998): uses some traditional and some constructivist reading methods, frequently

“basalizes” literature selections, combines traditional and constructivist views about student learning, and unsure about how students learn.

- Constructivist teacher: This term was defined by the following characteristics delineated by Lenski et al. (1998): uses whole text and integrated instruction, teaches using primarily an inquiry approach, and views students as using prior knowledge to construct meaning to learn.

### *Limitations of the Study*

This study used a non-experimental design. Since this design looks at natural variations, there are many important variables that cannot be controlled. This constitutes a limitation and a threat to the internal validity of the study. As a consequence, inferences about causality on the basis of the collected data result are tentative (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). In addition, this study was conducted in the context of a particular educational level. Therefore, the generalizability of findings and inferences from this study are limited to this level.

Moreover, this study used categorizations delineated by previous research. Teachers’ beliefs were categorized according to the definitions of a traditional, eclectic, and constructivist teacher delineated by Lenski et al. (1998). Similarly, children’s conceptions about reading and writing were coded and classified using the categories previously identified by Wing (1989). Thus, the results are limited to these particular categories and their definitions.

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter has introduced the topic of teachers’ literacy beliefs and its relationship with the students’ conceptions of reading and writing. As previous

research has demonstrated (Fang, 1996; DeFord, 1985; Harste & Burke, 1977; Lenski et al., 1998), teachers possess particular beliefs regarding reading and writing instruction and these beliefs seem to influence their instruction. Moreover, some researchers have suggested a connection between teachers' literacy beliefs and the way their students' conceptualize reading and writing (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). This connection is fundamental to the present study since it described and examined teachers' literacy beliefs and its relationship with students' conceptions about reading and writing.

The chapter discussed the purpose, research questions, and significance of the study. Finally, it defined key terms that are used frequently in the context of this particular study, and examined the limitations of the proposed research.

The second chapter will review and discuss literature related to the construct of teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions about reading and writing. The chapter will examine and analyze previous research on these topics and their methodological implications for the present study.

The third chapter will explain how the present study was conducted. It will include the research context, a description of the population and participants, the data collection procedures, the instruments, and a description of the procedures used by the investigator in order to analyze the data.

Chapter 4 will present the results of the study. These results will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

An important body of research has acknowledged the relevance of teachers' beliefs and their impact on students' performance (Fang, 1996; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Mujis & Reynolds, 2001; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Yero, 2002; Wray et al., 2002). This chapter discusses the construct of teachers' beliefs and reviews literature regarding this construct in the literacy field. In addition, it discusses research on children's conceptions about reading and writing and their connection with teachers' literacy beliefs. The chapter also addresses methodological issues and implications related with previous research on these topics and the present study.

#### *Literacy as a Social Construction*

Literacy is surrounded and shaped by the permeating values and the social context (Richardson, 1998). Teachers and students have a significant role in the construction of literacy. Teachers' beliefs and values shape the classroom context and atmosphere (Yero, 2002). Students construct and reconstruct particular conceptions of reading and writing within the classroom as a result of the exchanges, interactions, and implicit values and purposes of the literacy tasks (Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999; Nolen, 2001; Turner, 1995). Thus, the



relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing and their significance might be better understood within the perspective of literacy as a social construction where teachers and students define what literacy is and what it means to be literate.

### *Literacy: Teaching and Learning*

Literacy has been studied from the perspective of many disciplines, fields, and theories. Traditional views of reading and writing interpret these processes as isolated events and as a matter of what goes on in the reader's or writer's mind (Gee, 1996). However as Bloome (1986) indicates, these views were challenged by the work of diverse fields such as psychology, anthropology, and sociology, among others. These disciplines have contributed to the development of alternative conceptions of reading and writing that emphasize "the active role of the reader or writer in constructing meaning and the inherently social nature of reading and writing" (Bloome, 1986, p. 71).

Bean (2001) notices a growing interest in social constructionist dimensions of school literacy learning. From this perspective, literacy is a social construction (Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Hruby, 2001) and the result of social negotiation (Bloome, 1986, 2000; Hruby, 2001; Nolen, 2001; Turner, 1995). According to Hruby (2001) the sense in which literacy is constructed includes how we define literacy and how we choose to teach it and assess it.

The work of Vygotsky (1978) has contributed also to the conceptualization of literacy as a social construction. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, cognition is a profoundly social phenomenon. From this perspective, social

experience shapes the ways of thinking and interpreting the world available to individuals (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Moreover, for Vygotsky, all higher mental functions are created through collaborative activity; only later do they become internal mental processes (Wertsch, 1985). Thus, literacy, as a high mental function, is originated in the social plane and situated in sociocultural contexts such as the family, the community, and the school.

The conception of literacy as a social construction relies on the primacy of social interaction (Palincsar, 1998; Richardson, 1998). According to Bloome (2000), every occurrence of reading and writing implicates social relationships among people. Social interaction between teachers and students appears to be fundamental in the social construction of reading and writing. As Hayden and Fagan (1995) indicate, “literacy within the school is usually shaped around the social relationships between teacher and student” (p. 260). According to Nolen (2001), “it is in the daily interaction of teachers and students that literacy is constructed in the classroom” (p. 96). Through these interactions, teachers communicate what literacy is, its importance, and how it works, among other things (Nolen, 2001). In the same way, from their conversations, interactions, and relationships with teachers, students derive information regarding the meaning, value, and functions of literacy (Au, 1990).

Research has shown that children discover and gain knowledge about written language through active engagement with their social and cultural worlds (Neuman & Roskos, 1997). The importance of the sociocultural setting is one of the implications of Vygotsky’s theory and one of the interests of literacy research

from the social constructivist perspective. From this perspective, “separating the individual from social influences is not regarded as possible” (Palincsar, 1998, p. 53).

Even though literacy learning cannot be merely equated with schooling (Richardson, 1998), it is a very influential force regarding literacy learning. As Lincoln (1995) states, “schooling is one of the powerful shapers of both learning and acquiring a world-view” (p. 89). Classrooms constitute an important part of children’s social and cultural worlds. Turner (2000) notes how classroom contexts have become critical for understanding educational processes and outcomes. The classroom context includes the beliefs, goals, values, perceptions, and behaviors that contribute to the participants’ understanding of the classroom (Turner, 1995), and consequently to their construction of literacy.

Bloome (1986) described the relationship between classrooms and literacy as inseparable. According to him, “in schools, students learn to use reading and writing in ways consistent with the classroom community” (p. 74). Following the same line of thought, Hammerberg (2004) explains that the learning environment of a classroom represents “a sociocultural context that sets forth the possible realm of appropriate literacy acts” (p. 650). Landis (1999) studied children’s stories about their reading education. According to him, through these stories children reveal their perceptions of how reading should be done and that “there is a right way and a wrong way to participate in reading” (Landis, 1999, p. 211). In other words, through their school experiences with literacy, children construct

their own notions and assumptions of what constitutes an “appropriate” literacy act.

Current research on classroom context and literacy, from a social constructivist perspective, has emphasized the influence of the classroom context on aspects such as children’s perceptions, beliefs, and conceptions about literacy (Michel, 1999; Nolen, 2001; Turner, 1995). In separate studies, Michel (1994) and Moller (1999) observed that in many cases children’s definitions of reading are descriptions of their literacy tasks in the school context.

Nolen (2001) conducted an ethnographic study to explore the developing concepts of reading and writing of kindergarten children and their relation to their teachers’ instructional goals, classroom norms, and task structure. The researcher purposely selected four kindergarten teachers. These teachers approached literacy instruction in very diverse ways. The first teacher emphasized literature, related art projects, and reading aloud. The second teacher stressed journal writing and reading aloud. The third teacher focused on worksheet activities and art activities related to letters, whereas the fourth teacher put more emphasis on the connections between literacy or literature and life (Nolen, 2001). The researcher collected data regarding the instructional literacy contexts and the students’ concepts of reading and writing through observations and interviews over the course of a year. Results of the analysis revealed that students’ responses about their literacy concepts and motivation reflected their teachers’ most frequent reading and writing activities (Nolen, 2001). For instance, students from classrooms that emphasized activities such

as drawing to accompany words and letters, tended to talk of writing as drawing more frequently than students from classrooms that emphasized journal and story writing. The researcher concluded that, “students’ notions of reading and writing seemed to be shaped by the most frequent literacy activities in each classroom” (Nolen, 2001, p.106). Moreover, Nolen (2001) states that the amount of time spent in different activities communicates and demonstrates to children which kinds of literacy are most important for teachers.

Even though important variables in the development of students’ literacy perspectives and concepts, such as students’ home experiences and socioeconomic status (Freppon, 1989), were not controlled in Nolen’s study, the findings are still relevant. The results of this study illustrate a connection between literacy instruction and young children’s ideas about the nature and functions of literacy. As Cook-Gumperz (1986) points out, “literacy learning takes place in a social environment through interactional exchanges in which what is to be learnt is to some extent a joint construction of teacher and student” (p. 8).

Certainly, teaching and teachers play an important role in the construction of literacy. Moreover, the nature of teaching and the teacher’s own construction of literacy appear to be critical in such exchanges. Research has shown that teachers conceptualize literacy learning in different ways (DeFord, 1985; Duffy & Metheny, 1979; Gove, 1983; Harste & Burke, 1977; Lenski et al., 1998; Wray et al., 2002). As Dadds (1999) notes, “literacy can mean very different things to different teachers –even those working in similar environments and with similar aims and approaches” (p.10). Moreover, according to Landis (1999), “the

classroom teacher promotes certain definitions of readers and reading” (p. 214). These definitions are embedded in the instructional tasks and methods selected by teachers and in the nature and qualities of the activities and interactions around literacy in a particular classroom context (Moller, 1999; Nolen, 2001). These tasks, methods, and interactions seem to shape students’ construction of what it means to be literate.

The conception of literacy as a social construction entails the collaboration and social exchanges of both students and teachers (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). However, whether we acknowledge it or not, teachers represent the more expert literate partners and the ultimate power source in the classroom context. Therefore, even though students are active participants in the construction of literacy, teachers have control over the way literacy is defined and over the events and tools that shape the construction of reading and writing in a particular classroom context. As Cambourne (2002) asserts, teachers have executive power to create the roles, routines, and relationships that permeate their classroom settings. The roles, routines, and relationships implemented by teachers set the tone for the negotiation of literacy between students and teachers.

“Literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon” (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 1). From this perspective, every classroom represents a particular culture, which determines how literacy is defined and ultimately perceived by the members of that culture (Bloome, 1986). This implies that literacy construction is never neutral. In fact, “reading and writing take on meaning and social

importance through their uses within the classroom culture” (Nolen, 2001, p. 99). Students, in the classroom context, are not only learning to use literacy strategies, they are also defining themselves as literate beings (Landis, 1999).

### *The Construct of Teachers’ Beliefs*

Research on teacher thinking and beliefs has increased in volume in the last two decades (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002). Rimm-Kaufman and Sawyer (2004) point out that because of the current complexity and challenge that teachers face, the topic of teachers’ beliefs has become one of national relevance. Furthermore, as Richardson (2003) noticed, “teacher education has become highly cognitive in focus” (p. 1). Consequently, the interest in beliefs, as a form of cognition, has increased also (Richardson, 2003). Table 1 presents a timeline regarding significant events and research in the study of teachers’ beliefs. According to Yero (2002), “many studies have shown that the individual beliefs and values of teachers play a vital role in shaping the objectives, goals, curriculum and instructional methods of schools” (p. 1).

Pajares (1992) reports an extensive review of literature related to the concept of beliefs, asserting that researchers have demonstrated beliefs influencing knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task definition and selection, interpretation of course content, and comprehension monitoring. Moreover, he concluded that the investigation of teachers’ beliefs is a necessary and valuable avenue of educational inquiry.

Table 1

*The Study of Teachers' Beliefs: Timeline*

Period	Implications for the study of teachers' beliefs
Prior to the mid-1970's	Research emphasis on external and observable aspects of teaching.
1975	Lortie published <i>Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study</i> , discussing the important role of private experiences in teachers' perceptions, dispositions, and ideas about teaching.
Mid-1980's to early 1990's	Dissemination of constructivist learning theories and the influence of cognitive psychology contributed to an increased interest in teachers' thinking.
1985	Shulman refers to the absence of research on more implicit and internal aspects of teaching as "the missing paradigm".
1986	Clark and Peterson, in a seminal article, emphasized the significant role of teachers' thought processes in instruction, and categorized teachers' beliefs as a major category of teachers' thought processes.
1992	Pajares published a comprehensive and important review regarding the construct of teachers' beliefs and educational research, stressing the critical role of beliefs in education and their potential to inform educational practice.
Mid 1990's to 2000	Literature on teachers' beliefs has increased substantially as a result of a renewed focus on quality teachers and teaching in an era of critical reflection, a highly cognitive focus to teacher education, and research-based practices.



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The construct of beliefs has been defined in different contexts and ways. Stone (1993) indicates that the term belief has been defined as "some form of internal representation of external reality" (p. 24). According to Yero (2002), "beliefs are generalizations about things such as causality or the meaning of specific actions" (p. 21). From her perspective, the concept of beliefs comprises the judgments and evaluations that we make about ourselves, about others, and about the world surrounding us.

Pajares (1992) draws attention to the fact that beliefs have been studied in diverse fields and have resulted in different meanings. Richardson (2003), who has extensively studied the topic of teachers' beliefs, indicates that despite various meanings, there is significant agreement pertaining to the definition of beliefs as "psychologically held understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (p. 2).

Research has provided converging evidence about the nature of beliefs. Beliefs appear to be created through a process of social construction and are embedded in experience (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992, Richardson, 2003; Yero, 2002). As Yero (2002) explains, all the experiences in our life, especially during

childhood, contribute to the development of our beliefs. Thus, a person may develop a generalization and, consequently, adopt a belief through the result of one particular experience (Yero, 2002).

Various investigators suggest that beliefs are often implicit, and generally represent unconscious views about the world (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1999; Yero, 2002). They could drive people's behavior automatically. Moreover, beliefs could affect individual perception and attention focus (Yero, 2002). As an example, Yero (2002) states that if a teacher believes a program he/she has been told to use is based on a solid foundation, and if it corresponds to his/her beliefs, he/she will notice ways in which the program works. On the other hand, if the teacher believes the program does not work or is useless, he/she will notice evidence supporting that belief.

An interesting dynamic concerning teachers' beliefs about school, teaching, and learning stem from their own experiences as students. As Yero (2002) explains, teachers "have formed impressions about themselves and their abilities, about the nature of knowledge, and about how knowledge is acquired or learned" (p. 22). Similarly, Richardson (2003) suggests that teacher candidates possess strong beliefs about teaching and schooling that are rooted in their previous experience with schooling and instruction. After reviewing various studies regarding teacher beliefs Fang (1996) highlights several factors that seem to shape teachers' beliefs: the influence of discipline subculture, the quality of pre-service experience in the classroom, and the opportunity for reflection on the pre-service experience.

Yero (2002) delineated four particular aspects (related to education) embedded in teachers' beliefs. First, teachers' beliefs include a personal definition of education that shapes and circumscribes what the teacher decides to do and not to do. Second, each teacher has a set of beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how students acquire it. Third, each teacher has a set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of learning. Fourth, each teacher has a set of values that determine the priorities in the classroom. Thus, Yero suggests that the way in which teachers define and conceive education, the nature of knowledge as well as teaching and learning, is highly influenced by their beliefs.

According to Hativa and Goodyear (2002), there is consistent research evidence, suggesting that teachers' theories about teaching and learning strongly affect classroom behavior. Medwell, Wray, Poulson and Fox (1998), claim that teachers' belief systems influence their selection of approaches to teaching. Hativa and Goodyear also noticed that teachers frequently tend to adopt an approach to teaching, which is congruent with their conceptions of learning. In fact, teachers' practices and behaviors have been conceptualized as a result of teachers' beliefs.

Because beliefs are not observable behaviors, most research on teachers' beliefs have relied on inferences about what these teachers say, intend, and do (Pajares, 1992). Various researchers have addressed this issue, pointing out that even though teachers' beliefs are often implicit they are frequently evidenced in the form of instructional decisions and behaviors (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer,

2004; Wray et al., 2002; Yero, 2002). Other investigators (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Richardson, 2003) concur and claim that beliefs guide teacher's thoughts, actions, planning, and decision-making.

However, it is important to note that in some studies the relationship between beliefs and instructional practices varies or is inconsistent (Schraw & Olafson, 2002). According to Fang (1996), some studies have suggested that because of the constraints of classroom life and social realities, many teachers' instruction is not consistent with their beliefs.

### *Teachers' Beliefs about Literacy*

Researchers became more interested in studying the connection between teachers' beliefs and literacy in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Muchmore, 2001). Such interest relied on the assumption that teachers' beliefs guided teaching action (Richardson, 2003). From this view, teachers' beliefs about literacy are of critical importance in determining how teachers teach reading and writing. Research has revealed that, in effect, teachers hold subject specific and identifiable beliefs concerning literacy (DeFord, 1985; Duffy & Metheny, 1979; Olson & Singer, 1994; Pajares, 1992; Wray et al., 2002).

Harste and Burke (1977) hypothesized that teaching reading and learning to read are theoretically based. In fact, they operationally defined the construct of teacher's theoretical orientation as a "particular knowledge and belief system about reading which strongly influences critical decision making related to both the teaching and learning of reading" (p. 34). Harste and Burke suggested that teachers' theoretical orientation has an impact on particular decisions and

aspects regarding reading instruction, such as the goals of the program, what teachers perceive as appropriate reading behavior, the materials selected and employed for instruction, and the criteria used to determine progress in reading. The construct of teacher's theoretical orientation certainly had a major influence on later research related to the study of teachers' thought and beliefs (Braithwaite, 1999; DeFord, 1985; Duffy & Metheny, 1979; Feng & Etheridge, 1993; Graham et al., 2001; Gove, 1982; Grisham, 2000).

Research has demonstrated also that teachers conceptualize literacy in different ways (DeFord, 1985; Harste & Burke, 1977; Lensky et al., 1998; Wray et al., 2002). If teachers' beliefs are the result of their own experiences, observations, as well as their personal and professional knowledge (Grisham, 2000; Richardson, 2003; Yero, 2002), such differences are plausible. According to Dadds (1999), even teachers with similar aims and approaches define and understand literacy differently.

Some researchers (Braithwaite, 1999; Madison & Speaker, 1996; Tidwell & Steele, 1992) propose that teachers' differing views and beliefs about literacy are part of a continuum. At one extreme of the continuum teachers "subscribe to the view that literacy education requires students to master hierarchies of subskills... and at the other [extreme] are those teachers who view literacy learning in a holistic way" (Braithwaite, p. 1). The view of literacy as a set of subskills is associated with traditional approaches of reading and writing instruction, whereas the view of literacy as a holistic process is associated with constructivist and progressive approaches of literacy instruction.

Furthermore, these differing views or orientations toward literacy seem to be congruent with particular instructional approaches or methods selected by teachers in order to teach reading and writing. Schirmer and Casbon (1997) claim that teachers' beliefs about learning are reflected in the models and strategies employed by teachers in order to help children become readers and writers. Other researchers (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Yero, 2002) have also noticed that teachers tend to favor instructional approaches that are compatible with their beliefs. Indeed, evidence from various studies indicates that most teachers implement literacy approaches that are in harmony with their beliefs about reading and writing instruction (DeFord, 1985; Feng & Etheridge, 1993; Gove, 1982; Poulson et al., 2001).

#### *Research on Teachers' Literacy Beliefs*

As Grisham (2000) indicates, the study of the beliefs held by teachers about literacy and their implications for instruction have been studied for the last two decades and continue to be the focus of current investigation. From the research regarding teachers' beliefs about literacy, it is possible to identify various purposes: to know and learn what teachers believe about teaching and learning to read and write; to explore and document the relationship between teachers' beliefs about literacy and their practices; and to explore how teachers' beliefs influence literacy learning and learners.

*The earlier research.* The work of Duffy and Metheny (1979) marked a first attempt in conceptualizing and assessing teachers' beliefs about reading. They developed an instrument (Proposition Inventory), which categorizes

teachers' beliefs about reading in terms of standard models such as basal text, linear skills, natural language, interest-based, and integrated curriculum models. According to the researchers, their instrument was the first "efficient and reliable means" in assessing teachers' beliefs about reading (p. 6). They recognized also the significance of studying teachers' beliefs in the field of reading and potential uses for instruments like the Proposition Inventory. According to Duffy and Metheny, identifying teachers' beliefs about reading and their demographic characteristics could help researchers investigate the relationship between teachers' particular beliefs and certain characteristics. As they explain, this might "provide descriptive and predictive knowledge about how teachers' characteristics are related to conceptions" (p. 7).

DeFord (1985) reported a comprehensive and important study about teachers' beliefs in reading instruction. Like Duffy and Metheny, (1979), DeFord developed an instrument, Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), in order to determine teachers' beliefs about practices in reading instruction and to validate the construct of theoretical orientation. The instrument classifies teachers' beliefs into three categories of theoretical orientation: phonics (isolation of phonemes/ emphasis on decoding), skills (isolation of skills/emphasis on word recognition), and whole language (emphasis on developing sense of story and text). In order to evaluate the reliability of the instrument, it was first administered to 90 teachers (30 of each category of theoretical orientation). Second, teachers' responses were compared by three judges in terms of their correspondence to the profiles expected from each

orientation. Third, 14 teachers were asked to respond to TORP and were observed in their classrooms. Based on these observations, the trained observers predicted teachers' responses to the instrument. Teachers' and observers' responses were analyzed, using a Spearman Rho correlation procedure in order to determine their degree of congruence. Research results supported the validity of the construct of theoretical orientation and TORP reliability ( $r=.98$ ). DeFord (1985) concluded that "teachers of known theoretical orientation responded in consistent, predictable patterns to statements about practices in reading instruction" (p. 363).

DeFord's (1985) study provided an instrument that results in reliable scores that were useful in identifying teachers' beliefs about specific practices in reading instruction. Furthermore, the results of this particular study point toward a relationship between what teachers believe about reading instruction and what they actually do in their classrooms. However, with respect to the study of teachers' beliefs about literacy, TORP focuses only on particular practices of reading instruction. Thus, TORP does not provide access to gaining understanding about how teachers conceive literacy learning from a broader perspective, including its nature and purposes.

Furthermore, the earlier instruments to assess teachers' beliefs, such as TORP and Proposition Inventory, focused exclusively on reading. However, more current research on teachers' beliefs and the literacy field (Braithwaite, 1999; Burgess et al., 1999; Lenski et al., 1998; Linek, Nelson, & Sampson, 1999; Madison & Speaker, 1996; Wray et al., 2002) comprises teachers' beliefs about



reading and writing, labeled as literacy beliefs. Moreover, since research in the literacy field (especially during the early years) points out the dynamic relationship among reading and writing (Morrow, 2001), the study of teachers' beliefs about literacy calls for the consideration of both processes.

*Beliefs and practices.* Researchers have explored connections pertaining to DeFord's (1985) research and the assumption that teachers' beliefs about reading and writing are related to their practices. Feng and Etheridge (1993) conducted a descriptive study with first-grade teachers in order to determine their theoretical orientation to reading and its correspondence with their instructional practices. Data on 259 teachers' beliefs about reading were collected using TORP (DeFord). Teachers were classified, in accordance with their responses, as having phonics, skills, or whole language orientation to reading.

To assess teachers' practices, the researchers selected a stratified sample of 15 teachers (5 from each orientation). The 15 teachers were observed during reading instruction, and their practices were assessed using the Moss Classroom Analysis of Teachers' Theoretical Orientation to Reading (CATTOR). Teachers were also interviewed regarding their "criteria used for selecting their reading program and materials and the factors which have influenced their beliefs about reading and reading instruction" (p. 9).

According to the researchers, 60% of the teachers demonstrated they taught reading in a manner consistent with their beliefs and as measured by TORP. Feng and Etheridge (1993) concluded, "most teachers do adhere to their theoretical orientations when teaching reading" (p. 26). However, since 40% of

teachers did not teach in accordance with their beliefs, the researchers suggest that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices is a more complex one.

Through a multiple case study design, drawing on field observations and interviews, Maxson (1996) also studied the congruencies between teachers' literacy beliefs and their practices. Five teachers of "at- risk" first graders were observed and interviewed for a year. Teachers in Maxson's study highlighted the significance of their "convictions" in their decision making as well as strong beliefs regarding "the instructional paradigms within which they operated, the diverse student population, and the environments they created for their students" (p. 10). According to Maxson, the analysis of the data revealed "a direct relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice" (p. 10). However, the description of the results does not incorporate explicit depictions of these teachers' thoughts and beliefs. Thus, it is not clear to which specific beliefs regarding environments or instructional paradigms these teachers adhere. Moreover, the discussion does not incorporate precise explanations of the association of particular beliefs with particular practices when illustrating such relationships.

More recently, Poulson et al. (2001) used also TORP (DeFord, 1985) to explore the theoretical beliefs of 225 British primary school teachers, identified as effective teachers of literacy by school supervisors. Since TORP does not address writing instruction, the researchers included additional statements related to the teaching of writing. Teachers were also asked to rate a list of 12

teaching literacy activities (representing the different theoretical viewpoints) in terms of their usefulness in reading and writing instruction.

The effective teachers were compared with a validation sample taken from the same schools as the effective teachers, or from similar schools in the same local areas (Poulson et al., 2001). The validation sample consisted of 71 teachers, not identified as “effective”. The researchers computed correlations between scores representing a theoretical orientation and teaching activities intended to correspond to these orientations. According to the investigators, the findings suggest significant levels of consistency between the reported beliefs of effective teachers and their evaluation pertaining to teaching activities. The results suggest that the effective teachers were more coherent than the teachers in the validation group regarding their beliefs about literacy and the teaching practices associated with these beliefs. Moreover, the effective teachers were also more oriented to holistic theoretical positions than the validation sample. The researchers concluded that “the theoretical orientation of effective teachers of literacy appeared in many respects to be constructivist: prioritizing pupils’ ability to make sense of, and produce, written texts in a range of contexts and for authentic purposes” (p. 288).

Focusing on beliefs that teachers hold about writing instruction, Graham et al. (2001) similarly developed an instrument to measure teachers’ orientations to the teaching of writing in primary grades. The Writing Orientation Scale was developed to determine teachers’ beliefs concerning two orientations in the teaching of writing: the natural learning approach (emphasis on incidental

learning and the process approach) and the skills-based approach (emphasis on explicit and systematic instruction and performance). A group of 153 first- to third-grade United States elementary school teachers completed the Scale. The teachers were asked also to answer a questionnaire regarding how often their students participate in particular writing activities and how frequently they employ specific instructional practices.

The researchers computed correlations between teachers' scores for the Writing Orientation Scale (assessing teachers' beliefs) and their reported classroom practices. The results indicated that teachers' beliefs associated with the natural learning orientation were positively and significantly related to the frequent use of those activities characterized within this approach (conferences, mini-lessons, shared writing, etc.). In contrast, teachers' beliefs associated with the skills-based orientation were positively and significantly related to "how often grammar and handwriting/spelling were taught". According to the researchers, teachers' beliefs about writing instruction were congruent with their reported practices. However, the validity of these results is limited by the fact that they are based on self-reported data. Thus, in order to increase the meaningfulness of these findings, teachers' reported beliefs and practices should be corroborated with interviews or observations.

According to Squires and Bliss (2004), "all teachers bring to the classroom some level of beliefs that influence their critical daily decision making" (p. 756). This statement is certainly based on an important body of research and literature (Braithwaite, 1999; Burgess et al., 1999; Clark & Peterson, 1986; DeFord, 1985;

Feng & Etheridge, 1993; Graham et al., 2001; Maxson, 1996; Poulson et al., 2001) that points toward a certain degree of congruency between teachers' beliefs about reading and writing and their instructional practices. However, some researchers have reported discrepancies between what teachers believe and what they actually do in their classrooms (Bawden, Buike, & Duffy, 1979; Lenski et al., 1998; Schraw & Olafson, 2002).

In a study related to teachers' epistemological views and educational practices, Schraw and Olafson (2002) noted discrepancies between the view of teaching adopted by most teachers in their classrooms and the one that they supported in theory. The researchers attributed this discrepancy to factors such as inexperience, restricted time for instruction, administrative constraints, and lack of support. Similarly, in a study related to teachers' conceptions of reading and their instructional practices, Bawden, Buike, and Duffy (1979) pointed out that even though teachers' beliefs are reflected in classroom practices, there are other external factors that influence teachers' decisions. The influence of these factors result in conflicting practices in relation to teachers' stated beliefs.

Lenski et al. (1998) noticed also that teachers' beliefs and practices are not always aligned. An example of incongruent beliefs and practices might occur when teachers are in the process of changing beliefs. The researchers explain that a "shift in beliefs may precede actual changes in practice" (p. 7). Moreover, teachers may learn and agree with certain theory regarding literacy but ignore how to put its principles in practice. In this case, teachers' beliefs and their practices may be inconsistent as well.

Taking into consideration the premise that teachers' beliefs and practices may not be congruent, Lenski et al. (1998) developed the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS), an instrument that assesses teachers' beliefs and practices about literacy. The LOS classifies teachers' literacy beliefs and classroom practices in three categories: constructivist, traditional, and eclectic. These categories seem to range along a continuum that provides "a picture of the degree to which the teachers' beliefs and practices are consistent with constructivist philosophy" (p. 16).

A panel of experts established the content validity of the instrument. In order to determine the reliability of the LOS, 30 teachers were asked to complete the Survey. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for the instrument was .93. As part of a pilot study, the LOS was administered to a new sample of 95 teachers. The statements concerning teachers' beliefs and practices were correlated. According to the researchers, even though the analysis points to a positive correlation between beliefs and practices (.65), this also demonstrated that "these aspects (beliefs and practices) are not always aligned" (p. 14).

It appears that there are some inconsistencies regarding the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices. This fact underlines the necessity to extend the study of this domain, particularly because, as Tidwell and Stele (1992) aptly stated, "the whole notion of examining teacher beliefs stems from investigations which focused on the connection between a teachers' stated beliefs and that teacher's instruction in the classroom" (p. 2).

*Teachers' beliefs and students' literacy learning.* Teachers' beliefs about literacy seem to affect their classroom environments. An important function of teachers is creating classroom environments that encourage students' literacy. Teachers plan, organize, and implement the routines, activities, and conditions for literacy instruction.

Bruning and Horn (2000) emphasize the pivotal role of teachers' beliefs in creating positive motivational conditions for their students' writing. They claim that teachers' decisions about the way they position writing in the curriculum and their reactions to students' writing is based on their own experiences and beliefs about the nature and functions of writing. Teachers' beliefs are reflected in their classroom motivational conditions for writing, which in turn influence students' ideas about writing and their motivation to write (Bruning & Horn, 2000).

Nielsen and Monson (1996) studied different literacy environments and their implications for children's literacy development. They found that literacy environments (physical environment of the classroom, routines and nature of the literacy activities) tend to reflect the teacher's ideas and views about literacy development. Similarly, in a study of exemplary literacy instruction, Morrow, Tracey, Gee Woo, and Pressley (1999) noticed how the physical classroom environment, the type of reading and writing experiences, and classroom management were based on the teacher's assumptions about how children learn. Moreover, these particular characteristics of the literacy environment apparently affect students' "understandings about meanings, forms and uses of literacy" (Turner, 1995, p. 410).

Some researchers have explored the relationship between teachers' beliefs about literacy and their students' conceptions of reading and writing (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). According to Wing (1989) teachers' theoretical beliefs about literacy development, influence their instructional practices and also shape children's perceptions of the nature and uses of reading and writing.

The following sections will review literature and research regarding the meaning and significance of children's literacy conceptions and its relationship with teachers' practices and beliefs about reading and writing.

### *Children's Literacy Conceptions*

Various educators and researchers have emphasized the impact of children's ideas and understandings on literacy development (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Bradley, 2001; Hutson & Gove, 1978; Long, Manning, & Manning, 1986; Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999; Rasinski & DeFord, 1985; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996). It appears that these ideas and understandings could define and affect children's later thinking and behavior as readers and writers (Rasinski & DeFord, 1985). Michel (1994) considers that an understanding of the child's perspective is critical to comprehend how children become literate. In addition, children's ideas and understanding about reading and writing have the potential to inform researchers' and teachers' practices (Bradley, 2001; Long, Manning, & Manning, 1985; Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999; Rasinski & DeFord, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1989).

Literature and research regarding children's literacy conceptions exhibit an absence of specific and consistent definitions of this construct. Furth (1980)



defines children's conceptions in a general sense. According to him, they include images, ideas, and theories constructed by children. Rasinski and DeFord (1985) define children's literacy conceptions as their ideas about literacy, particularly about the nature of reading and writing. Borko and Eisenhart (1986) describe students' conceptions of reading as understandings of the process of learning to read. Thus, children's literacy conceptions could be defined as children's ideas and understandings about the nature, purposes, and processes involved in reading and writing.

Henk and Melnick (1998) go beyond a definition, providing a description of the nature of these conceptions. They noted that literacy conceptions appear to be driven by children's personal sense of the nature of the literacy process and by their contextual observations of the instructional emphases and practices in the classroom.

The study of children's conceptions of reading and writing is not a new endeavor. Research on this topic includes studies related to conceptions about reading (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Bondy, 1990; Burns-Paterson, 1991; Dahlgren & Olson, 1986; Freppon, 1989; Hutson & Gove, 1978; Johns, 1974; Johns & Ellis, 1975; Knapp, 2002; Long et al., 1985; Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999; Reid, 1966; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996), studies which address conceptions related to both reading and writing (Dahlgren & Olson, 1986; Rasinski & DeFord, 1985; Wing, 1989), and some studies focused on writing conceptions (Bradley, 2001; Fang, 1996; Shook, Marrion, & Ollila, 1989). According to Rasinski and DeFord

(1985), even though the interest on this topic has been prevalent for several years, the research efforts have not been intense.

The topic of children's literacy conceptions has become more relevant since the 1970s, as researchers have engaged in a more intense study of children's intuitive and explicit concepts about the nature and functions of reading and writing (Goodman, 1986). Moreover, other fields such as psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology, and sociolinguistics have influenced the study of reading and writing. As a consequence of the psycholinguistic perspective, reading was defined as a constructive process (Pearson & Stephens, 1994). The cognitive psychology field emphasized the important role of aspects such as intention, attitude, and motivation in literacy learning (Pearson & Stephens, 1994). Psychologists were also interested in how children came to understand what literacy is (Goodman, 1986). Equally important, the sociolinguistic perspective demonstrated the social nature of literacy and the fact that this process is not "context free" (Pearson & Stephens, 1994). Thus, the confluence and impact of these fields certainly contributed to the study of children's conceptions about the nature, purposes, and processes involved in reading and writing.

*Young children and beginning readers and writers.* One of the earliest research efforts to study young children's ideas about literacy was conducted by Reid (1966) in Scotland. One of the purposes of her study was to explore five-year-old students' perceptions or interpretations of the reading process. Reid randomly selected and interviewed 12 students. According to her, these students demonstrated very vague ideas about the nature of reading. Reid

indicated that most students were not even able to differentiate whether one reads the pictures or letters on the page. She used the metaphor of “mysterious activity” to describe these students’ vague notions about reading.

Downing (1970) replicated Reid’s study. He expanded the method, introducing pictures (e.g., picture of a person reading) as stimuli. However, his conclusions were similar to Reid’s. Downing’s results indicated students had difficulty in determining the purpose of reading and had vague ideas regarding how people read.

Denny and Weintraub (1963) conducted interviews with 111 first-grade students representing different socioeconomic backgrounds. The students responded to three questions: Do you want to learn how to read? Why? What must you do to learn to read in first grade? Students’ responses were taped, analyzed, and classified into previously identified categories. Denny and Weintraub concluded, “a third of these children had no idea how reading was accomplished” (p. 447).

A large study related to children’s reading conceptions was conducted by Johns and Ellis (1975). The researchers were interested in determining if children were acquiring adequate concepts and understandings of reading through their reading instruction. They were also interested in knowing if older children, like younger ones, lack an appropriate understanding of the reading process. The sample consisted of 1655 children from grade one through eight. Individual interviews were conducted in order to gather responses to the following questions, “What is reading? What do you do when you read? And, if

someone didn't know how to read, what would you tell him/her that he/she would need to learn?" Students' responses were recorded, transcribed, and classified into five categories: no response or irrelevant responses, responses related to classroom procedures or the educational value of reading, responses related to decoding or word recognition procedures, responses that defined reading as understanding, and responses that referred to decoding and understanding.

The results indicated that 69% of the students provided "meaningless" responses to the first question (What is reading?). With respect to the second question (What do you do when you read?), 57% of the responses were categorized as meaningless. Finally, 36% of students' responses to the third question (If someone did not know how to read, what would you tell him/her that he/she would need to learn?) were categorized as meaningless. However, just 8% of the responses to the third question referred to aspects such as comprehension or understanding. Based on these results, Johns and Ellis concluded that most children exhibit a lack of understanding of the reading process. They pointed out that "most of the meaningful responses described reading as a decoding process" (p. 12). However, the results also indicated that older children possessed a better understanding of reading. Since most children perceived reading just as a classroom activity, the researchers described children's view of reading as "restricted".

The Johns and Ellis study was significant, considering its large sample size. However, it has some limitations. First, as with all the previous studies based on interviews, there is a possibility that students' responses were limited

by their ability to comprehend the questions employed. As Perlmutter, Bloome, Rose, and Rogers (1997) point out “children may understand and respond too far more than they could articulate in these interviews” (p. 68). Johns (1986) also noted the possibility of a “warm-up” effect for the three questions used during the interviews. Based on the fact that the number of irrelevant responses dropped from question to question, it was possible that students’ actual conceptions about reading were underestimated (Johns, 1986). Moreover, Johns and Ellis did not report the use of a pilot study to test the interview questions. Conducting a pilot study could have helped to reduce the possibility of the “warm-up” effect. In addition, even though participants were selected from several public and middle schools, the analysis did not take into consideration important variables, such as the instructional settings and the nature of literacy experiences in these schools. More recent studies (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Burns-Paterson, 1991; Freppon, 1989; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989) point toward a relationship between these variables and children’s literacy conceptions.

Certainly, early research (Denny & Weintraub, 1963; Downing, 1970; Johns & Ellis, 1975; Reid, 1966) related to literacy conceptions suggested that young children and beginning readers failed to see reading as a meaning-related activity and have a limited view and restricted understanding of literacy (Michel, 1994). However, more current research on this topic points toward a different direction.

Dahlgren and Olsson (1986) conducted a qualitative study about preschool children’s conceptions of the usefulness of reading and of the reading

process. The participants of the study were 80 children from seven different preschools in Sweden. The schools were selected from four districts administered by the “municipal social services”. Direct observations and children interviews were conducted. The interview protocol included questions such as: Can you read? What can reading be useful for? How is reading done? What must you do to learn how to read? When will you learn to read? Children were also asked to show “where” and “what” you read in books and how to write names and short words. After one year (at the end of grade 1), the researchers conducted a follow-up study with 53 of the 61 preschoolers who originally participated in the study. During the follow-up study, the researchers administered standardized tests (for Swedish children) of reading performance, reading speed and type of reading errors, and for measuring vocabulary and reading comprehension. The researchers analyzed the interviews and classified children’s responses related to the function of reading in two ways: as a possibility (reading is described as useful for the reader) and as a demand (the usefulness of reading is based on external demands from teachers, peers, etc.). Children’s responses related to conceptions of the reading process were classified in four different ways: contextual (reading is guided by things external to the text), textual (reading as a textual construction based on graphic or phonetic aspects), interactive (reading as a reflection of the text), and bodily (reading is described by references to the body parts and movements involved in reading).

Results of the analysis revealed that most young children were able to answer questions about reading and writing. The researchers pointed out that “children are interested in and think a great deal about reading well before they have started school and acquired some reading competence” (p. 18). Furthermore, 40% of the preschool children emphasized the communicative nature of reading and writing. On the other hand, children in grade one (who were able to read) “express less possibilities of using reading and writing as a means for communication than do preschool children” (p. 11). In the particular context of this study, the conception of reading and writing as communicative acts seemed to decrease from preschool to first grade.

Unlike previous research, this study suggests that young children have and are capable of articulating rich conceptions about the nature and functions of literacy. The result that indicates a decrease in the conception of reading and writing as communication acts is very interesting. One could hypothesize that the instruction provided to first-graders could be related to the dramatic change in children’s conceptions reported by the researchers. However, the study does not provide explicit details or descriptions of the participating schools and their instructional approaches and settings. Thick descriptions constitute important criteria in this kind of research (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Certainly, it could lead to richer interpretations and increase the transferability of the results. Moreover, recognizing the social and cultural nature of literacy, information regarding cultural practices related to reading and writing, the school system, and

their instructional settings might contribute to a better understanding of the origin and development of children's literacy conceptions.

Other researchers and educators concur with Dahlgren and Olsson (1986) with respect to young children's ability to understand and verbalize appropriate conceptions of the nature, purposes, and processes involved in reading and writing. After interviewing her group of 24 kindergarten students, Edwards (1994) concluded that, although in a simple language, young children are able to explain complex aspects of literacy. Edwards's students demonstrated their attention to meaning and understanding in their responses to questions such as: What is reading? What do you do when you read? Similarly, Weiss and Hagen (1988) interviewed 110 kindergarten children about the reasons for reading. The results indicated that 41% of the responses demonstrated understanding of the connection between reading and acquiring information and 32% of the responses described reading as a source of pleasure. Kita (1979) also interviewed 20 kindergarten children in order to explore their conceptions of reading and writing. The first part of the interview consisted of questions related to children's conceptions of reading. In the second part of the interview, children were asked to complete a "writing sample" on a topic of their choice. Kita concluded that the participants' conceptions of the purposes of reading, in practical situations, were explicit and appropriate. However, purposes for reading books were classified as vague. In addition, according to Kita, children's responses with respect to the nature and purpose of writing were specific and implied understanding of writing as a means of communication.



Some studies have focused specifically on children's conceptions about writing (Bradley, 2001; Fang, 1996; Shook, Marrion, & Olilla, 1989). Most of these studies have been conducted with beginning writers. Bradley (2001) interviewed sixty nine first-graders in order to explore young writers' understandings about writing. Children responded to questions such as: What is writing? How can you tell if someone has done a good job writing something? According to Bradley, 84% of the children provided an appropriate definition of writing and could articulate their ideas and understanding about writing. Similarly, Shook et al. (1989) explored first-graders' conceptions about the purposes of writing through interviews. According to the researchers, the data indicated that first-graders are capable of understanding the communicative nature of the writing process.

In light of more recent research, it is important to acknowledge that young children and beginning readers and writers are able to develop and articulate complex and appropriate conceptions of what literacy is for and how it operates in literate cultures (Bradley, 2001; Dahlgren & Olsson, 1986; Edwards, 1994; Kita, 1979; Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999). These conceptions are not only possible during the early years, they also seem to be an important step in becoming lifelong and efficient readers and writers.

Some studies have suggested a relationship between children's literacy conceptions and their reading abilities (Bondy, 1990; Johns, 1974; Johns & Ellis, 1975; Long, Manning, & Manning, 1985). These studies support the importance of children's literacy conceptions based on the results of investigations

comparing good and poor readers. Johns (1974) interviewed 53 fourth and fifth-grade children. The researcher administered the McGinitie reading comprehension subtest to the students. Based on the test scores, students were classified into groups of good and poor readers. Johns was interested in how good and poor readers viewed the reading process. Each student responded to the question: What is reading? The researcher classified children's responses using the following categories: no response or irrelevant responses, responses related to classroom procedures or the educational value of reading, responses related to decoding or word recognition procedures, and responses that defined reading as understanding, responses that referred to decoding and understanding. The results indicated consistently that good readers had "better-developed understandings" of reading than poor readers. Hutson and Gove (1978) reported similar results after a reanalysis of Johns and Ellis' (1975) data. In order to determine the relationship between reading skill and the complexity of reading definition, the researchers conducted a Chi-Square analysis. The analysis revealed a relationship between reading skill and the complexity of reading definition. Results indicated that among the children who provided responses considered as "immature" reading definitions, 72% had reading scores below fourth grade.

Long, Manning and Manning (1985) interviewed seventy high and low achieving first-grade readers (the five highest and five lowest readers from seven first-grade classrooms) with respect to their ideas about the reading process. The responses of both groups were compared and reported in terms of their raw

score relative to the total group. Even though the researchers reported some overlapping between the responses of both groups, there were also some differences. Particularly, the results indicated variation with respect to the question: Why do people read? According to the results, the high achievers provided more “functional” responses whereas the low achievers provided answers related to school reasons or no answers at all.

Similarly, Bondy (1990) was interested in determining if there were differences between children from low and high reading groups in terms of their reading definitions. She observed and interviewed six high-group children and nine low-group children in one first-grade classroom. Data collection focused on children’s statements about reading, their reading-related behavior, and their use of reading materials. Bondy identified six different reading definitions constructed and used by the children. The following reading definitions were common among the low-group children: reading is saying words correctly, reading is schoolwork, and reading is a sort of status. In essence, low-group children constructed reading definitions based on a conception of reading as an “externally imposed task”. This definition of reading coincides with the one described by Knapp (2002) in the case of Joshua, an at-risk reader. On the other hand, the high-group defined reading as: a social activity, a way to learn things, and as a private pleasure.

On the whole, research comparing high and low readers’ conceptions of reading suggests that good readers have more complex, meaningful, and functional conceptions of literacy. This might imply a relationship between

children's literacy conceptions and their reading and writing abilities. However, the exact nature and direction of this relationship remains an open question. Since most of these studies (Bondy, 1990; Johns, 1974; Long, et al., 1985) have been of a qualitative nature, causal-comparative studies will be necessary in order to provide additional evidence to validate this apparent relationship. Even stronger conclusions about this relationship would require experimental studies.

### *Shaping Literacy Conceptions*

As Pearson and Stephens (1994) assert, "we no longer think of literacy as an independent, isolated event" (p. 37). From a social constructivist viewpoint, classrooms are sociocultural settings and literacy is a social construction (Bloome, 1986; Cook-Gumperz, 1986). According to Turner (1995), the classroom context influences students' developing conceptions of literacy and their engagement in literacy behavior. In fact, the results of various studies (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Burns-Paterson, 1991; Freppon, 1989; Rasinski & DeFord, 1985; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989) suggest that classrooms' instructional settings and approaches have a powerful impact on children's conceptions about literacy.

*The influence of instruction.* Similar to the studies discussed in the previous section, Borko and Eisenhart (1986) examined the conceptions of reading held by low and high reading groups in second grade classrooms. However, Borko and Eisenhart were also interested in the connection of the students' reading conceptions with their reading experiences in the classroom. The researchers conducted interviews to obtain information about students'

conceptions of reading and observed reading lessons for each ability group. The results were analyzed using ethnographic procedures. The results indicated that, in effect, high-group and low-group students had different conceptions of reading. High-group students' responses focused on reading skills and a holistic orientation toward reading, whereas low-group students' responses focused more on behavioral aspects (reading-appropriate behavior) and on materials and procedures (related to instructional aspects). Moreover, the researchers concluded that some patterns in their data suggested a relationship between these students' conceptions of reading and their classroom reading experiences. Borko and Eisenhart noted differences in the nature of the reading experiences of high and low groups. In the low-group reading activities, teachers tended to focus more on decoding skills, student behavior, and instructional procedures. In contrast, in the high-group activities, teachers focused more on global reading, reading discussions, and independent reading.

Bondy (1990) reported similar differences with respect to the nature of the reading experiences provided for low and high reading groups. In her study, the high-group reading activities focused on reading, discussing stories, and working independently in workbooks. However, the low-group reading activities emphasized explicit lessons on letter sounds, practice on words from a basal, and practice on reading words in isolation. Bondy found that the low-group children's reading definitions (reading is saying words correctly, reading is schoolwork) were congruent with their reading instruction. Thus, both

investigations suggest that students' conceptions of reading reflect, to some extent, certain aspects of their reading instruction.

Studies with average beginning readers have also revealed differences on children's literacy conceptions, which seem to be connected to their instructional literacy approaches (Burns-Paterson, 1991; Freppon, 1989; Rasinski & DeFord, 1985). Rasinski and DeFord (1985) addressed conceptions related to both reading and writing. They were interested in how children's conceptions about reading and writing might be associated with and influenced by the instruction provided. They studied three separate first-grade classrooms, each based on a different approach of literacy instruction: a content-centered mastery learning program (instruction based on particular sounds or segments of target words); a traditional and eclectic basal reading program (instruction based on teaching letters and sounds, the use of basal series, workbooks and some trade books); and a literature-based program (integrated instruction based on authentic literature incorporated through thematic units). Children were asked three questions: What is reading? What is writing? What do you do when you read and write? Children's responses were transcribed and scored on a seven-point scale, with one corresponding to a response related to decoding and seven to a meaning-based or holistic response. The students of the literature-based program obtained the highest scores, associated with the holistic or meaning-based conceptions. On the other hand, the students from the mastery learning program obtained the lowest scores, associated with the most superficial conceptions. The scores of the students from the basal reading program fell in

the middle of the scale. As a conclusion, Rasinski and DeFord pointed out that, “the type of instruction and the context for instruction affect significantly and powerfully the way that first-grade children perceive literacy and literacy activities” (p. 14).

Subsequently, other researchers (Burns-Paterson, 1991; Freppon, 1989) have compared different instructional approaches in order to determine if students’ reading conceptions differ according to instruction. Burns-Paterson (1991) and Freppon (1989) have documented specific differences on first-graders’ reading conceptions, which seem to be congruent with their instructional settings and literacy approaches.

Overall, the preceding studies illustrate how instruction can be related to alternative conceptions of reading and writing (Rasinski & DeFord, 1988). However, despite the temptation to conclude that instructional programs are the cause of the nature and depth of children’s literacy conceptions, it is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of literacy and the multiple factors that influence its development.

Furthermore, it is also important to take into account that most of the cited studies were not designed for determining a causal relationship. Significant intervening variables such as: socioeconomic status, gender, and home experiences, among others, were not controlled. Most of these variables are known to affect the development of reading concepts (Freppon, 1989). Therefore, since studies on children’s literacy conceptions and their connection with instruction are looking at natural variations, statistical procedures could be

necessary in order to control for these variables and increase the internal validity of such studies.

In addition, most of the cited studies involved comparisons between groups, classrooms, and schools. Consequently, data can be analyzed at multiple levels: groups within classrooms, classrooms within schools, and schools within districts, among others (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Thus, it is important to decide the levels to be incorporated in a study in order to collect and analyze the data appropriately (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

*Teachers' beliefs and children's literacy conceptions.* In general, the findings of research concerning literacy instruction and students' literacy conceptions tend to associate the nature of literacy instruction with the way children define and understand the nature and purposes of literacy. Researchers relying on such a relationship have also addressed the possible connections between teachers' beliefs about literacy and their students' conceptions about reading and writing (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989).

In what is described as an initial empirical study, Reutzel and Sabey (1996) investigated possible connections between teachers' beliefs about reading instruction and first grade students' concepts of reading as a result of these beliefs. The researchers selected three teachers from each of three different theoretical viewpoints: subskills/decoding, skills, and whole language (based on DeFord's TORP) and a total of 36 first-grade students (4 from each class, 17 girls, and 19 boys) were randomly selected and interviewed about their



attitudes toward reading, concepts about the reading process, and the strategies used during reading.

Although the researchers discovered many similarities in students' conceptions of reading across the groups, the results indicated differences. According to Reutzel and Sabey (1996), the findings of the study showed that in many respects teachers' beliefs regarding reading instruction were similar to their students' concepts about reading. For instance, teachers with a whole language orientation to reading tend to emphasize book reading activities and the development of a sense of story and text (DeFord, 1985). Similarly, in this study, students from teachers whose beliefs were congruent with a whole language orientation tended to consistently consider their ability to read books as an indication of their reading aptitude. Thus, their self-perception regarding reading skills was mostly based on their capacity to read books. In contrast, students from teachers whose beliefs were congruent with a skills orientation tended to base their perceptions on reading skills according to their acquisition of "sight words", "accurate reading", and even a "general sense of being smart". These responses are compatible with a skills orientation that emphasizes accuracy on word recognition (DeFord, 1985). Moreover, whole language orientation students were able to articulate 40 to 50 percent more reading strategies and ideas about how children learn to read than students of teachers whose beliefs corresponded to a different reading orientation. The researchers concluded that teachers' instructional orientation to reading might differentially

influence some very specific aspects of students' concepts about reading and becoming a reader.

Reutzel and Sabey's (1996) study was replicated by D'Amico's (1997) obtaining similar results. Students from a whole language orientation were more capable of describing and speaking about the reading process, incorporating a wider range of reading strategies than the students from the other groups (D'Amico). Moreover, whole language students showed a tendency to perceive themselves and their classmates as "expert readers". In contrast, the students from traditional orientations considered their teachers as the "expert readers". These results might be associated with particular characteristics of a whole language orientation, such as a rich language and literacy environment, shared reading and writing experiences, an emphasis on meaningful communication, and the recognition of children as capable readers and writers.

Through a case study, Fang (1996) investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs about writing and their fourth grade students' conceptions of "good writing". The researcher conducted interviews with the teacher and 15 students about their perceptions of good writing. After analyzing the data, the researcher found that students' ideas about what characterizes good writing were "highly correlated" with their teacher's beliefs about good writing. Students' and teachers' excerpts about their definition of good writing showed noticeable similarity. Fang, therefore, concluded that the teacher's beliefs impact students' conceptions of literacy.

The results of the previous studies (D'Amico, 1997; Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996) suggest that teachers' beliefs seem to be related to their particular students' conceptions of reading and writing. However, these results are limited by the small sample sizes and the lack of statistical analysis (Reutzel & Sabey, 1996).

The fact that research on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' conceptions about literacy is scarce and exploratory in nature underlines the importance of studying this topic. The present study extends the previous research findings. In order to accomplish that purpose, it is important to analyze the methodological implications related to the assessment of teachers' beliefs about reading and writing and students' literacy conceptions.

#### *Assessing Teachers' Beliefs about Literacy*

Recent literature in the literacy field suggests an increasing interest concerning teachers' beliefs (Graham et al., 2001; Muchmore, 2001; Poulson et al., 2001; Richards, 2001; Squires & Bliss, 2004). Certainly, educational cognitive focus and today's attention to teachers' accountability and their influential role in students' performance, have contributed to a renewed interest in this topic. Nevertheless, the study of teachers' beliefs about literacy presumes important methodological considerations.

Teachers' beliefs about literacy have been studied using different research approaches. Although earlier studies (Deford, 1985; Duffy & Metheny, 1979) relied on quantitative approaches, more recent studies have employed qualitative methods as well (Fang, 1996; Grisham, 2000; Linek et al., 1999; Muchmore,

2001). In fact, the most appropriate method in assessing teachers' beliefs is still a matter of disagreement. Nevertheless, as Pajares (1992) aptly notes while discussing this particular issue, "the choice of a quantitative or qualitative approach will of course, ultimately depend on what researchers wish to know and how they wish to know it." (p. 327)

Based on the importance of considering the personal and situational context of teachers' beliefs, various investigators (Muchmore, 2001; Squires & Bliss, 2004) in the literacy field advocate for the use of qualitative methods in studying this domain. They claim that through a qualitative approach it is possible to gain a more accurate and complete understanding of this phenomenon. Certainly, qualitative studies concerning teachers' beliefs about literacy provide rich descriptions about the participants, their personal histories, and their actual context. These detailed descriptions and their respective analysis and interpretation (Muchmore, 2001; Squires & Bliss, 2004) have revealed interesting patterns regarding the nature, relevance, and role of such beliefs.

On the other hand, qualitative research related to teachers' beliefs about literacy has particular limitations. This approach has relied on single case studies or small sample sizes, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. Moreover, the very specific nature of the teacher's context (his/her unique reality) also limits the possibility of making comparisons and generalizations.

Although earlier research was based on self-report instruments and belief inventories to assess and measure teachers' literacy beliefs, the use of these instruments represents another methodological issue. As Pajares (1992)

noticed, for some researchers these measures cannot encompass the variety of contexts under which specific beliefs emerge. Moreover, some researchers argue that it is possible that teachers may respond to the inventories as they think effective teachers should answer (Olson & Stinger, 1994). In considering the limitations, concerning the use of self-report measures, Pajares suggests including additional measures, such as open-ended interviews and observations of behavior in order to make richer and more accurate inferences about teachers' beliefs. In fact, more recently, researchers interested in the study of teachers' literacy beliefs (Graham et al., 2002; Poulson et al., 2001) have incorporated or recommended the use of additional measures such as observations and interviews in order to corroborate and supplement the data collected through self-report instruments.

The present study uses a quantitative approach to study teachers' literacy beliefs. The purposes of this study include the description of the beliefs of a population of first-grade teachers. Thus, the use of a survey as an initial way to explore this phenomenon is appropriate. Moreover, since this population consisted of a large number of teachers, the use of a quantitative approach facilitated the collection and analysis of the data. Nevertheless, considering the limitations of self-report instruments, additional measures were incorporated in order to confirm teachers' reported beliefs.

#### *Accessing and Assessing Students' Literacy Conceptions*

Literature on children's literacy conceptions is not extensive. Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) suggest that children's views have been neglected in educational

research. Lewis and Lindsay (2000) concur and describe researching children's perspective as an "underdeveloped task". However, even though assessing young children's perspectives is not an easy task, it is certainly possible and also valuable.

According to Dockrell, Lewis, and Lindsay (2000) there are various ways to assess children's perspectives. Direct or indirect measures can be used. As Dockrell et al. explain "direct measures involve asking the child or significant other, about the child's views and understandings of a situation or getting the child to solve a task that is known to address certain key developmental achievements" (p. 49). Indirect measures include the use of particular methods and techniques in order to measure the variable of interest. The use of indirect measures requires a high degree of inference and interpretation of the instruments and techniques employed which implies a greater risk of misinterpreting the collected data (Dockrell et al., 2000).

Interviews figure among prominent direct measures of children's perspectives (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). This method can be useful, particularly with young children who are not fluent readers and writers. Michel (1994) points out that by listening carefully to what children say about literacy, we can understand things that we cannot learn in other ways. However, there are some concerns with respect to the validity and reliability of children's responses to interviews (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Thus, researchers need to take into account the practical difficulties and implications involved in conducting and using children's interviews to assess children's ideas and understandings.

There are important considerations regarding the appropriate examination of children's perspectives through interviews. The interview format is very important, especially with young children (Dockrell et al., 2000). Thus, it should be carefully planned. In considering the most effective ways in which to put questions to children, Dockrell et al. emphasize: to use open-ended questions, to avoid yes/no questions, and to use appropriate language.

The use of open-ended questions allows young children to answer in their own terms (Oakley, 2000) and to extend their responses (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Closed questions (yes/no questions) tend to inhibit children's full expression, which is crucial to obtain valid responses about their understandings and ideas (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Moreover, an appropriate wording of the interview questions, congruent with the child's developmental level, would contribute to the validity of the information provided through the interview.

Another consideration related to the validity of young children's responses is the interviewer. Lewis and Lindsay (2002) describe the appropriate role of the interviewer as "facilitative and non-intrusive". This is particularly relevant in the case of young children. Children have demonstrated a tendency to agree with the interviewer and to be very vulnerable to leading questions or comments and to recurrent probing for details (Dockrell et al., 2000).

Certainly, a valid and reliable interview is critical in assessing children's ideas and understandings. Therefore, piloting interviews is a necessary condition to obtain "reasonably unbiased data" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). By piloting interviews it is possible to test both questions and procedures. Among

other things, researchers should be alert to: communication problems, the wording of the questions, evidence of inadequate motivation of the participants, ambiguous questions or statements, and questions that can be interpreted differently by different participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

Previous research on children's literacy conceptions has relied on interviews. In fact, the present study uses this method as an appropriate means to assess and evaluate these conceptions. However, interview protocols should be evaluated individually in order to determine the validity and reliability of these instruments. Moreover, interviews to be conducted with young children have to be carefully planned and tested considering aspects such as the nature of the questions, the complexity and structure of the language employed, the appropriate role of the interviewer, and the developmental characteristics of young children.

Finally, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations involved in research based on children's perspectives. Lewis (2002) states: "accessing children's views can never be achieved 'perfectly'. However, the researcher has a responsibility to check that the views expressed seem to be a fair and typical response" (p. 115).

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter discussed the construct of teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions about reading and writing. The discussion is framed within the conception of literacy as a socially constructed phenomenon. The conception of literacy as a social construction entails the collaboration and social



exchanges of both students and teachers (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Through these exchanges teachers communicate what literacy is, its importance, and how it works (Nolen, 2001). In the same way, from their conversations, interactions, and relationships with teachers, students derive information regarding the meaning, value, and functions of literacy.

As Pajares (1992) claims, all teachers hold beliefs, however defined and labeled, about their work, their students, their subject matter, and their roles and responsibilities. The literacy field or domain is not an exception. Research has demonstrated that teachers have identifiable beliefs about literacy (Olson & Stinger, 1994). These beliefs seem to be related to young children's views and conceptions of literacy (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). These conceptions involve the way in which children define and understand the nature and purposes of literacy (Melothe, Book, Putnam, & Sivan, 1989; Moller, 1999; Wing, 1989). Nevertheless, since few studies have been conducted in this area, additional evidence is necessary in order to validate previous results and obtain a better understanding of this relationship.

## Chapter 3

### Method

This chapter explains the methodology of the study. It outlines the research questions, design of the study, study population and participants, data collection procedures, instruments, and procedures used in data analysis.

#### *The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions*

This study had two main purposes. The first purpose was to examine and describe first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. First-grade was chosen because it represents the starting point of formal instruction. The pertinent research questions were as follows: (1) What are the literacy beliefs of first-grade teachers? (2) To what extent are first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs aligned with their practices? (3) Are there demographic differences among teachers whose literacy beliefs correspond to a constructivist, an eclectic, or a traditional viewpoint?

The second purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions about reading and writing. The research questions related to this purpose were as follows: (1) To what extent are teachers' literacy beliefs related to children's conceptions about reading and writing? (2) Are there any differences in conceptions about reading and writing among children whose teachers hold differing literacy beliefs?

### *Design of the Study*

The first purpose of this study was concerned with the examination and description of first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs. This relied upon descriptive research, which involves making careful descriptions of educational phenomena in order to understand their form, actions, changes over time, and similarities with other phenomena (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). In this study, descriptive research provided information related to what teachers believe about literacy learning, what they do in their classrooms, and whether in effect, what they do in their classroom practice aligns with their literacy beliefs.

The second purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions about reading and writing. The researcher was interested, particularly, in differences in conceptions about reading and writing among children whose teachers hold differing literacy beliefs and practices. The study used a non-experimental design to investigate the stated problem since the study described an existing phenomenon and looked at natural variations.

### *Research Context*

This study was conducted in Puerto Rico. The educational system in Puerto Rico consists of public and private schools. The Department of Education of Puerto Rico (DEP) provides public education from kindergarten to grade 12. The school term in public schools begins in August and runs through late May. Instruction is conducted in Spanish and English is taught as a second language.

Teachers are required to hold a bachelor's degree in education from an accredited university in order to teach in public schools.

The study was conducted with first-grade teachers and students from two public school districts. First-grade teachers are required to possess an early childhood specialization and be certified as early childhood teachers. Most first-grade teachers provide instruction in all academic subjects: Spanish, arithmetic, science, and social studies. However, reading and writing is the core of instruction in first-grade.

The Department of Education of Puerto Rico, in the Spanish curriculum (Instituto Nacional para el Desarrollo Curricular, 2003), proposes a constructivist and holistic approach regarding literacy and its instruction. The Spanish curriculum is based on principles such as the student as an active apprentice in the construction of his or her own learning, the relevance of functional and meaningful learning, the teacher as a guide, and the significance of integrated instruction and curriculum (Instituto Nacional para el Desarrollo Curricular, 2003).

However, actual reading and writing instruction in most Puerto Rican first-grade classrooms could be described by an informed observer as traditional. Literacy instruction in most first-grade classrooms is characterized by direct and whole group instruction, a curriculum and full day schedule divided into separate subjects, traditional reading methods, the use of textbooks (provided by the Department of Education) and worksheets, and an emphasis on the form of writing rather than the process. At the end of the school year, first-grade

students are expected to be independent readers (Instituto Nacional para el Desarrollo Curricular, 2003).

### *Participants*

*Participating teachers.* For the first part of this study, the population consisted of 101 first-grade teachers who were teaching in two large urban school districts, in the north region of the island. These districts contain a total of 41 primary schools. Statistical data from the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (2004-2005) indicate that from the population of first-grade students in these two districts, approximately 80% of students are below the poverty level, defined by a yearly income of \$3,500 or less.

Each district has a Spanish supervisor who serves as a liaison between schools, directors, teachers, and the Spanish Program of the Department of Education. The main function of district supervisors is to facilitate and support teachers' and curriculum development. However, intervention of district supervisors in schools needs to be requested by a teacher or a school director. Thus, district supervisors do not have frequent contact with teachers. Teachers in schools are directly supervised by their school directors. However, teachers are not selected by school directors. The Department of Education of Puerto Rico is in charge of the selection of teachers from an ordered list of eligible candidates.

First-grade teachers from the two districts were approached and asked to complete the Literacy Orientation Survey. The final sample was comprised of 76 teachers (75%) who completed the LOS. A stratified random sample of 12

teachers, four from each literacy viewpoint (constructivist, eclectic, and traditional), were selected. These teachers were selected as a sample of potential participants. Teachers were matched by years of experience and educational level (bachelor level, master level, doctoral level). In order to facilitate matching teachers' years of experience, the following categories were used: 1 to 3 years, 4 to 6 years, 7 to 9 years, and 10 or more years.

Once matched by years of experience and educational level, six teachers, two from each literacy viewpoint (constructivist, eclectic, and traditional) were purposively selected to participate in the second part of the study. Participating teachers' age group, years of experience, and educational level are summarized in Table 2.

Each teacher in each group was teaching in a different school and represented a different literacy viewpoint: constructivist, eclectic, or traditional, as defined and categorized by the LOS. These categories were not related to teachers' developmental or career stages.

*Table 2*

*Participating Teachers' Demographics*

Demographics	Traditional	Eclectic	Constructivist
<i>Age group</i>			
37-40	1	1	1
45-48	1	1	1
<i>Educational level</i>			
Bachelor	2	2	2
<i>Teaching Experience</i>			
7-9 years	1	1	1
10 + years	1	1	1

*Participating students.* A total of 48 first-grade students (18 girls and 30 boys) participated in the second part of the study. Participating students' age ranged from 6.5 to 7.5 years old. A simple random sample of 8 students was selected from the classrooms of each one of the six teachers, who represented the three differing literacy beliefs, which correspond to a constructivist, an eclectic or traditional viewpoint.

In view of the fact that some studies (Bondy, 1990; Johns, 1974; John & Ellis, 1975; Manning & Manning, 1985) have suggested differences in literacy conceptions between low and high achieving readers the sample was stratified by reading ability: four low achieving readers and four high achieving readers. High achieving readers were defined as students reading above their expected level. Low achieving readers were defined as students reading below their expected level. Students' reading ability was first established based on the teachers' judgment. After that, running records were taken by the researcher in order to verify teachers' assessment and select the participating students. The running record is a method introduced by Clay (1991) for determining a child's reading competence at a given moment in time with a specific level text (Shea, 2000). This method uses a specific set of codes to record, on a copy of the text, the reader's behaviors, competencies, and accuracy during a read-aloud event. As evidence of its validity, Ross (2004) notes that running records correlate with other literacy measures and have been recommended as an effective assessment by national curriculum authorities.

Prior to taking the running records, the researcher requested teachers' feedback and recommendations in order to select the running record material appropriate for the group of low achieving readers and the group of high achieving readers. Various Spanish leveled texts were considered, taking into account the following criteria: text and print features, vocabulary, sentence complexity, content, text structure, language, theme, and literary features (Clay, 1996). Teachers' agreement regarding the appropriateness of the text material was established in order to select instructional texts for the reading records. Students were introduced, by the researcher, to the running record text the preceding day. Therefore, they had to some extent familiarized themselves with the message and meanings of the story, but were required to apply reading work and problem solving to read the text at 90% or above of accuracy level (Clay, 1996). The researcher obtained running records and calculated results. In the analysis 96% of the running record's results were consistent with teachers' judgment. As a result of two cases of inconsistency between teachers' judgment and the running record's results, two additional students (high achieving readers) were selected and assessed in order to participate in the study. Students with inconsistent results were not included in the sample.

### *Instruments*

*Teachers' literacy beliefs.* Teachers' literacy beliefs and practices were assessed by the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS). This instrument is a 30-item measure entailing 15 belief statements and 15 practice statements, which employs a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (see Table 3).



Contrary to earlier instruments for assessing teachers' literacy beliefs (Proposition Inventory, 1979; TORP, 1985), the LOS comprises beliefs concerning both reading and writing processes. This is relevant considering the interrelationship between these processes during the early years. Furthermore, the LOS can be used to determine how much teachers' beliefs and practices about literacy correspond to constructivism (Lenski et al., 1998). The LOS was conceptually congruent with the theoretical framework of this study because the conception of literacy as a social construction relies substantially on principles and implications of constructivism.

During the original development of the LOS, the reported Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the instrument was .93 (Lenski et al., 1998). The validity of the instrument was assessed using a "process verification protocol" to determine the congruency between teachers' responses regarding their practices and their actual way of operating in the classroom. A group of 42 teachers was observed and interviewed. Based on these observations and interviews the teachers were classified as traditional, eclectic or constructivist. Then, the LOS was administered to these teachers. An Analysis of Variance was conducted to compare LOS scores. The results of the analysis were significant ( $F=66.01$ ,  $p<.01$ ), suggesting the validity of the LOS in predicting actual classroom practice (Lenski et al., 1998).

According to Lenski et al. (1998) individual scores of beliefs and practices can show how closely teachers' beliefs align with their practices. If the score for beliefs is closest to 51, these beliefs are similar to a traditional teacher. A score

closest to 61 corresponds to beliefs similar to an eclectic teacher, and a score closest to 69 corresponds to beliefs similar to a constructivist teacher. The LOS employs a similar interpretation of scores for teachers' practices. If the score for practices is closest to 51, these practices are similar to a traditional teacher. A score closest to 56 corresponds to practices similar to an eclectic teacher, and a score closest to 63 corresponds to practices similar to a constructivist teacher.

The combined score of the survey was used to categorize teachers as constructivist, eclectic, or traditional with regard to their literacy beliefs and practices. In accordance with the LOS, a teacher's score in the 90-110 range is categorized as a traditional teacher, a score in the 111-125 range is categorized as eclectic, and a score in the 126-145 range is categorized as constructivist.

Since the participants of the study were Spanish-speaking teachers, an available and previously employed Spanish translation of the instrument (Weber, 2003) was used. Weber (2003) administered this version of the instrument, translated by two linguists, to inservice and preservice teachers in Peru. A panel of experts read and edited it before it was distributed. The Panel had found 10 translation issues. These issues were discussed with and addressed by the researcher. Weber conducted a pilot study with the translated instrument. The researcher reported no problems associated with the use of the instrument. However, there is no additional data related to the reliability and validity of the instrument once translated to Spanish.

Table 3

*Beliefs and Practices Included in the Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS)*

Belief Statements	Practice Statements
1. The purpose of reading instruction is to teach children to recognize words and to pronounce them correctly.	1. When students read text, I ask them questions such as "What does it mean?"
2. Reading and writing are unrelated processes.	2. When planning instruction, I take into account the needs of children by including activities that meet their social, emotional, physical and affective needs.
3. Students should be treated as individual learners rather than as a group.	3. I schedule time every day for self-selected reading and writing experiences.
4. Students should use "fix-up strategies" such as rereading when text meaning is unclear.	4. I encourage my students to monitor their comprehension as they read.
5. Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis.	5. I use a variety of prereading strategies with my students.
6. It is not necessary for students to write texts on a daily basis.	6. I hold parent workshops or send home newsletters with ideas about how parents can help their children with school.
7. Students should be encouraged to sound out all unknown words.	7. I organize my classroom so that my students have an opportunity to write in at least one subject every day.
8. The purpose of reading is to understand print.	8. I ask parents of my students to share their time, knowledge, and expertise in my classroom.
9. Reading instruction should always be delivered to the whole class at the same time.	9. Writers in my classroom generally move through the processes of prewriting, drafting, and revising.
10. Grouping for reading instruction should always be based on ability.	10. In my class, I organize reading, writing, speaking, and listening around key concepts.
11. Subjects should be integrated across the curriculum.	11. I teach using themes or integrated units.
12. Students need to write for a variety of purposes.	12. I use a variety of grouping patterns to teach reading such as skill groups, interest groups, whole group, and individual instruction.
13. Parents' attitudes toward literacy affect my students' progress.	13. I take advantage of opportunities to learn about teaching by attending professional conferences and/ or graduate classes and by reading professional journals.
14. The major purpose of reading assessment is to determine a student's placement in the basal reader.	14. I assess my students' reading progress primarily by teacher-made and/or book tests.
15. Parental reading habits in the home affect their children's attitudes toward reading.	15. At the end of the day, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.

*Pilot study.* In the present study the translated version of the instrument and the original instrument were presented to a panel of 3 bilingual experts in order to assess any translation issues. The panel found 4 language issues due to linguistic differences from the Peruvian teachers for whom it was first translated.

These issues were discussed and resolved with the researcher. Consequently, some terminology was substituted with equivalent terms more familiar to Puerto Rican teachers.

The researcher conducted a pilot study in which the instrument was administered to a sample of 15 first-grade teachers in order to detect any problems related to the instrument and its use. The instrument was administered to a sample of 15 first-grade teachers. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient ( $\alpha=0.83$ ) revealed good internal consistency (Field, 2005; Mujis, 2004; Nardi, 2003).

As part of the pilot study, the instrument allowed participants to make recommendations or observations concerning the use of the instrument (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). However, participants did not indicate any recommendations or observations. In order to explore participants' reactions to the issue of anonymity versus confidentiality of their responses, the following question was also included: "Would it affect your responses if your identity was coded with numbers for later identification?" All the participants provided a negative response; that is, 100% indicated that it would not affect their responses if their identity were coded for later identification.

*Students' conceptions of reading and writing.* Students' conceptions of reading and writing were assessed through individual interviews using Wing's (1989) interview protocol. The protocol consists of 11 semistructured questions about children's conceptions of reading and writing. Wing's protocol encompasses open-ended questions allowing young children to answer in their

own terms and to extend their responses (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). This interview protocol was originally developed to assess young children's conceptions about reading and writing. The interview questions are concerned with the purposes and nature of reading and writing.

*Pilot study.* The researcher translated and submitted the interview protocol to a panel of bilingual experts for evaluation. A pilot study tested the interview protocol and the questions. A sample of six first-grade students was interviewed using the protocol. Students' responses were tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded by the researcher as a way to test the protocol and data collection procedures. An expert with a doctoral degree in childhood literacy education used a sample of the transcribed interviews to assess the Protocol. Some probing questions were recommended and included in the protocol to elicit more students' responses and dialogue. The interview questions and examples of the probing questions are listed in Table 4.

Students' answers to each question were classified into the three major categories delineated by Wing (1989). Responses were coded as holistic/reader based (WH) if they referred to units larger than a word, functions of reading and writing, or incidental learning. Responses were coded as specific skills/test-based (ST) if they referred to words, letters, sounding out, direct instruction, practicing, or copying. Responses regarding family or other events outside of school were coded as influence of home and other experiences (HO). To provide a measure of reliability, a second coder, with a specialization in language arts, also analyzed the results. The researcher calculated inter-rater reliability, the

number of agreements divided by the total number of observations, as 95% of agreement.

### *Procedures and Data Collection*

The first part of this study was descriptive employing surveys of teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. In order to conduct the study, the researcher requested and obtained authorization from the Research Division of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico. The study was also reviewed and authorized by an Institutional Review Board of a metropolitan research university in the United States.

The researcher employed a group of school contacts to distribute and recover the Surveys. The school contacts were instructed regarding the data collection procedures. The researcher explained the information related to the study to participating teachers through the Spanish version of an IRB-approved consent form (see Appendix C). Researcher's school contacts distributed the LOS to the teachers with the consent form and a cover letter. Participating teachers were asked to return the surveys to their school contacts after a week. Surveys were coded in order to identify the participating teachers to participate in the second part of the study. The researcher kept a record of the coded surveys and the participating teachers' information was kept by the researcher.

Table 4

*Students' Interview Protocol*

Wing's Interview Protocol	Probing Questions
1. What is your favorite book?	*Why? What do you like about it? How do you get the book? Does anyone read it to you? How often?
2. Do you do any reading in school? When?	
3. Do you do any writing in school? When?	*Do you ever write your name? Do you ever write letter or numbers? Do you copy words that you see around you? When you play do you ever write? Does your teacher write/read?
4. What do you think reading is?	
5. What do you think writing is?	*When you hear someone reading/writing, how do they do it? What do they do first, second, etc. What happens in their head? What happens in their head to help make writing?
6. How old do you have to be to learn how to read?	*Why?
7. How old do you have to be to learn how to write?	*Why?
8. How does a person learn how to read?	
9. How does a person learn how to write?	
10. Do you know anybody who can read?	* Is he/she a good reader? How does she/he do that?
11. How do you know they can read?	
	*Could you write something for me? *Tell me about it.

*Note.* Wing (1989).

After responding to the survey, teachers returned them to their school contacts and each contact returned the surveys to the researcher. A total of 61

surveys (60%) were recovered. After the contacts made several requests to the remaining teachers, they returned 16 additional surveys. The remaining percentage of teachers (25%) did not to complete or return the survey. The response rate for this study reached an adequate percentage of 75, since a response rate over 70% is considered good in survey research (Nardi, 2003).

Information contained in the surveys was transferred to a computer program (SPSS 14.0). The researcher calculated each survey's combined score and categorized it by teacher's viewpoint (constructivist, eclectic, or traditional). The researcher also calculated individual scores of beliefs and practices.

From the sample of 76 teachers, the researcher selected a stratified random sample of 12 potential participants (4 from each literacy viewpoint) for the second part of the study. Potential participants were matched by years of teaching experience and educational level. After that, 6 teachers (2 from each literacy viewpoint: constructivist, eclectic, and traditional) were purposively selected to participate in the second part of the study.

The researcher contacted the individual teachers and each school's principal in order to confirm their availability to participate in the second part of the study. As a measure to provide additional evidence about the teachers' literacy viewpoint and congruence of their literacy beliefs and practices, the researcher scheduled and conducted interviews and classroom observations with the teachers. The researcher used Wing's (1989) interview protocol designed for teachers and directors. The protocol consisted of five semistructured questions about their beliefs and practices regarding literacy teaching and learning. The



interview probed the following issues: teachers' perspective on literacy teaching and learning, the nature of the reading and writing activities in their classrooms, and the uses and functions of literacy in their instructional settings. The interview protocol included the following questions:

1. In your professional opinion how do children learn how to read and write?
2. What do you believe are the most important things that help children learn how to read and write? Why?
3. What are the signs that a child is ready to read and write? Why?
4. What types of activities do you provide to promote reading and writing? Why?
5. What is the schedule of the day?

In addition to the interviews, the researcher conducted an average of four consecutive hours of observation of each teacher, during literacy instruction, in order to corroborate and supplement the data collected through the self-report instrument. Observations of literacy instruction were registered in a form elaborated by the researcher, based on the format of an instrument, designed by Olson and Singer (1994) to record classroom observations (see Figure 1). The instrument focused on particular aspects of literacy instruction embedded in the LOS. The researcher analyzed teachers' observations and responses to the interview questions based on the definitions of teaching practices delineated by Lenski et al. (1998) (see Table 5).

Observation Instrument

Teacher Code \_\_\_\_\_ Observation # \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Categories:

1) Units of language emphasized (letter/sounds/words/etc.)

2) Reading and writing materials

3) Nature of literacy activities/tasks

4) Uses/functions of literacy

5) Instructional methods and strategies

6) Teacher's role

7) Students' role

8) Social structure of literate activity (large group/  
small groups/independent work)

UNITS OF LANGUAGE	MATERIALS	NATURE OF ACTIVITIES	USES/FUNCTIONS
METHODS, STRATEGIES	TEACHER'S ROLE	STUDENTS' ROLE	SOCIAL STRUCTURE

*Figure 1. Observation Instrument*

The researcher analyzed and coded teachers' responses to the interview questions and classroom observations as traditional, eclectic, or constructivist. As a measure to check for reliability, a second "coder" with a specialization in language arts, also analyzed and coded the responses. A prevalence of codes in traditional, eclectic, or constructivist viewpoints established each teacher's consistency or inconsistency with the self-reported literacy orientation. The researcher interviewed and observed a total of seven teachers, from the sample of potential participants in order to select the six teachers for the second part of the study. Since one of the teachers who was categorized as eclectic based on the LOS, did not correspond to her own reported literacy viewpoint another teacher from the remaining sample of potential participants was selected.

Once the group of six participating teachers (two from each literacy viewpoint) was established, the researcher selected the participating students.

The researcher explained the study to students' parents and obtained their permission through the Spanish version of an IRB-approved parental informed consent form (see Appendix D).

Each teacher's list was used to select a stratified random sample of eight students: four low ability readers and four high ability readers. Reading ability was first established based on each teacher's judgment and verified by the researcher using running records as an assessment procedure.

*Table 5*

*Lenski's Definitions of Teaching Practices*

Teacher's Viewpoint	Characteristics
Traditional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses traditional reading methods such as basal reading instruction.</li> <li>• Teaches using primarily direct instruction.</li> <li>• Think of students as "blank slates".</li> </ul>
Eclectic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses some traditional methods and some constructivist practices.</li> <li>• Uses conflicting instructional methods.</li> <li>• Unsure about how students learn.</li> </ul>
Constructivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses whole texts and integrated instruction.</li> <li>• Teaches using primarily an inquiry approach.</li> <li>• Views students as using prior knowledge to construct meaning.</li> </ul>

Once participating students were selected, the researcher scheduled individual interviews with the students. Before conducting each interview, the researcher requested the student's assent to participate in the study. The researcher explained the instructions to the students and conducted the individual interviews. Students' responses were recorded on audiotape and the researcher took brief field notes in some instances.

After finishing the interviews, the researcher transcribed students' responses from the audio recordings. Answers to each question were classified into the three major categories delineated by Wing (1989): (1) holistic/reader based orientation; (2) specific skills/test-based orientation; and (3) influence of children's homes and other experiences. Students' responses were coded as holistic/reader based (WH) if they refer to units larger than a word, relate to the functions of reading and writing, or refer to incidental learning. Responses were coded as specific skills/test-based (ST) if they refer to words, letters, sounding out, direct instruction, practicing, or copying. Responses regarding family or other events outside of school were coded as influence of home and other experiences (HO). In the case of answers with multiple parts, more than one code was used. The prevalence of codes in WH, ST, or HO was used to categorize students' conceptions of reading and writing.

### *Data Analysis*

The research questions concerned with the first part of the study were: (1) What are the literacy beliefs of first-grade teachers? (2) To what extent are first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs aligned with their practices? (3) Are there demographic differences among teachers whose beliefs correspond to a constructivist, an eclectic, or traditional viewpoint? In order to answer these questions the researcher analyzed teachers' responses to the LOS using SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), Version 14.0.

*Question 1.* Information on the surveys was transferred to a computer program (SPSS). The combined score of the LOS was calculated and used to categorize teachers according to their literacy beliefs and practices as constructivist, eclectic, or traditional (90-110 traditional, 111-125 eclectic, and 126-145 constructivist). Mean scores, frequency, and percentage of teachers by theoretical viewpoint were also calculated in order to describe the nature of first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs.

*Question 2.* The researcher also calculated individual scores for beliefs and practices in each survey. In accordance with the LOS, scores for the belief and practice statements are compared to check whether teachers' literacy beliefs and practices are aligned or correspond to the same viewpoint, as categorized by the LOS. If the score for beliefs is closest to 51, these beliefs are categorized as traditional, a score closest to 61 is categorized as eclectic, and a score closest to 69 is categorized as constructivist. Similarly, if the score for practices is closest

to 51, these practices are categorized as traditional, a score closest to 56 is categorized as eclectic, and a score closest to 63 is categorized as constructivist.

However, in the present study, due to the possibility of scores on beliefs and practices equally close to more than one viewpoint, a paired t-test was conducted in order to determine alignment between teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. Since the difference between belief and practice scores should be small in order to be congruent, a statistically significant difference in means (for belief and practice scores) would suggest a lack of alignment between beliefs and practices.

Observational data were also used to address whether there was congruence in teachers' self-reported literacy beliefs and practices. The researcher interviewed and observed a subset of the sample of participating teachers. Teachers' observations and interviews were analyzed in light of the definitions of teaching practices delineated by Lenski et al. (1998).

*Question 3.* The researcher calculated and summarized frequencies and percentages of teachers' age, experience, and educational level. In order to address demographic differences among teachers whose literacy beliefs correspond to a constructivist, eclectic, or traditional viewpoint the researcher used a multiple regression analysis to explore relationships between teachers' LOS total scores (used to categorize teachers' viewpoint) and teachers' age, educational level, and teaching experience.

The second part of this study focused on investigating the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and children's conceptions of reading and

writing. The research questions related to this purpose were: (1) To what extent are teachers' literacy beliefs related to children's conceptions about reading and writing? (2) Are there any differences in conceptions about reading and writing among children whose teachers hold differing literacy beliefs?

*Questions 1 and 2.* The researcher conducted a chi-square test to determine differences in conceptions about reading and writing among children whose teachers hold differing literacy beliefs. Since the data were categorical (teacher's literacy beliefs were classified as: constructivist, eclectic or traditional and children's conceptions about literacy were classified as holistic/reader based, specific skills/test based, or influenced by children's home/other experiences) a chi-square test was appropriate. The chi-square test "is used to analyze data that are reported in categories" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996, p. 220). The data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, Version 14.0.

Frequencies of the students' coded responses were calculated and students' conceptions of reading and writing were categorized according to the appropriate codes. The researcher generated a cross-tabulation with the expected and observed frequencies for students' conceptions about reading and writing by teacher's literacy viewpoint. A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine differences in conceptions among students whose teachers held differing theoretical viewpoint.

Similarly, the researcher calculated expected and observed frequencies for students' conceptions of reading and writing by reading ability. A chi-square analysis also served to examine the relationship between students' conceptions of reading and writing and their reading ability.

This chapter has explained the methods used in this study. The next chapter presents the results obtained by those methods.



## Chapter 4

### Results

As stated in the first chapter, the study reported here had two main purposes. The first was to examine and describe first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. The second purpose was to investigate the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing.

This chapter reports the results of the present study. The chapter is organized in terms of the specific research questions concerned with these purposes.

#### *Teachers' Literacy Beliefs and Practices*

The first part of the study was concerned with the examination and description of first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs. The pertinent research questions were as follows: (1) What are the literacy beliefs of first-grade teachers? (2) To what extent are first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs aligned with their practices? (3) Are there demographic differences among teachers whose literacy beliefs correspond to a constructivist, an eclectic, or a traditional viewpoint?

The first question focused on the description of first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs. A total of 76 first-grade teachers (75%) completed the Survey. Participants had an average of 10 or more years teaching experience and were

an average of 45-48 years old. All participants held a Bachelor's degree and 20% held a Masters degree.

In order to answer the first question, the combined score (scores for the 15 belief statements and the 15 practice statements) of the LOS was calculated and used to categorize teachers according to their literacy beliefs and practices as constructivist, eclectic, or traditional. The results of the respondents' surveys are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6

*LOS Score Mean, Frequency and Percentage of Teachers by Theoretical Viewpoint*

Theoretical Viewpoint	N	M	SD	%
<i>Traditional</i>	38	103.13	6.763	50.0
<i>Eclectic</i>	34	117.62	3.962	44.7
<i>Constructivist</i>	4	131.50	2.38	5.3
Total	76	111.11	10.165	100

As shown in Table 6, the largest number of teachers (n= 38, 50%) corresponded to a traditional viewpoint, according to the LOS total scores. A large number (n=34, 44.7%) indicated an eclectic viewpoint, and the smallest number of teachers (n= 4, 5.3%) corresponded to a constructivist viewpoint.

The second question addressed whether there was congruence in teachers' self-reported literacy beliefs and practices. The relationship between teachers' scores for beliefs and practices, as measured by the LOS, was explored using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The results of

the analysis indicated a relationship between teachers' scores for beliefs and practices ( $r=.56$ ,  $n=76$ ). Table 7 provides descriptive statistics for teachers' scores for beliefs and practices .

*Table 7*

*Teachers' Scores for Beliefs and Practices: Descriptive Statistics (N=76)*

	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Beliefs	56.50	4.646	43	66	-.227	-.179
Practices	55.42	9.804	31	99	.824	4.476
Total	111.11	10.165	81	135	-.319	.657

A paired t-test was also conducted on teachers' beliefs scores and practices scores to determine if there was any significant difference. The results of the paired t- test (see Table 8) did not indicate any significant difference between teachers' self-reported literacy beliefs and practices,  $t(75) = .882$ ,  $p > .05$ , which suggests that first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs were congruent with their practices.

*Table 8*

*Paired T-Test of Teachers' Self Reported Literacy Beliefs and Practices*

	M	SD	SE	t	p
Beliefs	56.50	4.64	.533		
Practices	55.42	9.80	1.12		
Beliefs- Practices	1.079	10.66	1.22	.882	.381

However, a subset of potential participants was observed and interviewed in order to select a sample of six first-grade teachers for the second part of the study. Observational data were used to categorize teachers as congruent or incongruent with their self-reported literacy beliefs. As a result, 86% of the teachers observed and interviewed were found to be congruent with their self-reported literacy beliefs, as assessed by the LOS.

The remaining 14% corresponded to one of the potential participants, categorized as eclectic based on the LOS. However, after analyzing observational data, the researcher determined the teacher's reported literacy orientation inconsistent with the observed practices. Teacher's observational data revealed an instructional approach compatible with a traditional literacy viewpoint characterized by an emphasis on phonics, skills, and the use of phonics exercises as prevailing materials for literacy instruction. Table 9 shows the number of teachers observed, teaching in ways congruent and incongruent with their self-reported literacy beliefs. This finding suggests that teachers' literacy beliefs and practices are not always aligned.

*Table 9*

*Number of Teachers Observed as Congruent and Incongruent with their Self-Reported Beliefs*

	Traditional	Eclectic	Constructivist	Total
Consistent	2	2	2	6
Inconsistent		1		1
Total	2	3	2	7

Teachers' observations and interviews were analyzed in light of the definitions of teaching practices delineated by Lenski et al. (1998). The observed practices described in Table 10 were the result of the observations and interviews conducted with participating teachers that were found congruent with their self-reported literacy beliefs. Sample quotes from teachers' interviews are presented in Table 11.

*Table 10*

*Observed Literacy Practices of Participating Teachers by Theoretical Viewpoint*

Teachers' Theoretical Viewpoint	Observed Practices
Traditional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on phonics and skills</li> <li>• Emphasis on memory and repetition of sounds, letters, and words</li> <li>• Focus on decoding, handwriting, and copying</li> <li>• Reading and writing are taught as separate subjects</li> <li>• Direct instruction and large group activities most of the time</li> </ul>
Eclectic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use trade books as means to introduce and emphasize particular sounds, letters, and words</li> <li>• Writing activities consists of copying (words, sentences, etc.)</li> <li>• A reading center is available for students to use after completing a task or during recess</li> <li>• Classroom is arranged in small groups or work stations, but students work individually</li> </ul>
Constructivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade books and children's literature are a main component of literacy instruction</li> <li>• Emphasis on reading comprehension (reading aloud, discussion of the stories and illustrations, story retelling and rewriting)</li> <li>• Writing activities included students' responses to stories, experience charts, etc.</li> <li>• Whole group instruction, small group instruction and one-to-one instruction</li> <li>• Reading materials are available and used by students during different periods</li> <li>• Content areas are taught through thematic units in an integrated fashion</li> </ul>

Table 11

*Illustrative Quotes from Participating Teachers' Interviews*

Teachers' Literacy Viewpoint	Question: <i>In your professional opinion, how do children learn how to read and write?</i>	Question: <i>What do you believe are the most important things that help children learn how to read and write?</i>	Question: <i>What type of activities do you provide to promote reading and writing?</i>
Traditional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "They have to learn the letters, all the vowels and then the consonants."</li> <li>• "Learning the sounds."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "To learn the letters and sounds."</li> <li>• "Repetition and practice."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Dictation tests, charts, and workbooks."</li> <li>• "To practice 'today's sound', the alphabet, identifying the letter that each picture begins with, etc."</li> </ul>
Eclectic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "They begin recognizing letters and sight words in different contexts."</li> <li>• "From whole to parts. For instance, they need to know that words are made by letters and then to recognize the letters."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Child's maturity and a structured routine to practice reading and writing every day."</li> <li>• "A variety of materials: flash cards, books, experience charts, and worksheets."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I like to use big books. First, I introduce the new words, we read the story and then we work on comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar."</li> <li>• "We review the alphabet emphasizing the sounds, we practice reading with flashcards and charts, and read books for comprehension."</li> </ul>
Constructivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It is a natural process, they learn through their life-experiences."</li> <li>• "First of all, they need to be motivated to read, they learn through interesting activities, they learn as they play with language."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Interesting books and stories, and their home experiences."</li> <li>• "Concrete experiences and their parents' help."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "We read aloud a book and talk about it. Sometimes we make books and art activities related to the stories."</li> <li>• "We use word-games, we read and retell stories, we talk about the pictures, sometimes they write or make drawings about the story."</li> </ul>

Literacy practices of traditional teachers were based on a synthetic method that emphasized isolated units of language (sounds/letters), and instruction was focused on “mechanical” aspects of reading and writing. In the case of eclectic teachers, they combined elements associated with traditional approaches and some constructivist practices such as the use of children’s books during instruction but with a skill-based orientation. On the other hand, constructivist teachers demonstrated more holistic practices, since whole texts and the construction of meaning were focal components of literacy instruction. However, even though the observed teachers showed fundamental differences regarding their theoretical viewpoint, they also exhibited some parallel practices. All teachers seemed to provide more time and attention to reading over writing instruction. Even teachers categorized as constructivist, in this study, devoted less time and effort to writing instruction.

The third question of the study addressed whether there were demographic differences among teachers whose literacy beliefs correspond to a constructivist, an eclectic, or a traditional viewpoint. Table 12 shows and summarizes participants’ demographic information on age, teaching experience, and educational level. In order to look at the bivariate relationships between teachers’ theoretical viewpoint and their age and teaching experience, the researcher conducted two separate ANOVA. The analysis showed no statistically significant difference in teachers’ age ( $F(2, 58)=.401, p>.05$ ) and years of teaching experience ( $F(2, 69)=.29, p>.05$ ) by teachers’ literacy viewpoint.

The relationship between teachers' theoretical viewpoint and their educational level was examined by Chi-square analysis. The results indicated no significant relationship between teachers' literacy viewpoint and their educational level ( $\chi^2 (2) = 2.27, p > .05$ ).

*Table 12*

*Teachers' Age, Experience, and Educational Level by Theoretical Viewpoint*

<i>Theoretical Viewpoint</i>	<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Traditional	Age		
	21-24	0	
	25-28	2	6.3
	29-32	2	12.5
	33-36	4	25.0
	37-40	6	43.8
	41-44	4	56.3
	45-48+	14	100
	Missing Data	6	
	Total	38	
	Experience		
	1-3	2	5.4
	4-6	5	18.9
	7-9	5	32.4
	10+	25	100
	Missing Data	1	
	Total	38	
	Educational Level		
	Bachelors	33	86.8
	Masters	5	100
	Ph.D.	0	
	Missing Data	0	
	Total	38	
Eclectic	Age		
	21-24	0	
	25-28	2	7.7
	29-32	3	19.2
	33-36	4	34.6
	37-40	4	50.0
	41-44	8	80.8
	45-48+	5	100
	Missing Data	8	
	Total	34	
	Experience		
	1-3	0	
	4-6	1	3.2
	7-9	7	25.8
	10+	23	100
	Missing Data	3	
	Total	34	
	Educational Level		
	Bachelors	24	72.7
	Masters	9	100
	Ph.D.	0	
	Missing Data	1	
	Total	34	



Table 12 (Continued).

<i>Theoretical Viewpoint</i>	<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Constructivist	Age		
	21-24	0	
	25-28	0	
	29-32	0	
	33-36	0	
	37-40	1	33.3
	41-44	1	66.7
	45-48+	1	100
	Missing Data	1	
	Total	4	
	Experience		
	1-3	0	
	4-6	0	
	7-9		
	10+		
	Missing Data		
	Total	1	25.0
	Educational Level	3	100
	Bachelors	0	
	Masters	4	
	Ph.D.		
	Missing Data	3	75.0
	Total	1	100
		0	
		0	
		4	

The survey responses were also examined using a multiple regression analysis to examine relationships between teachers' LOS total scores (which categorized teachers by theoretical viewpoint) and teachers' age, educational level, and teaching experience. The assumptions of normality and multicollinearity were considered. Data screenings suggested that the assumption of normality did not appear to be violated. In order test for multicollinearity, intercorrelations between the predictor variables were examined. No intercorrelations of .90 or above were found, indicating that the independent variables were not correlated with one another (Muijs, 2004). Outliers were screened for using standardized residuals. Outliers are defined as cases that have standardized residual values above 3.0 or below -3.0 (Pallant,

2005). The results indicated one case with a residual value of -3.008. However, this case represents less than 10 percent of the sample which is considered unproblematic (Mujis, 2004). The results of the multiple regression, shown in Table 13, indicate that no statistically significant relationship was found between teachers' LOS scores and their age, educational level, and teaching experience.

*Table 13*

*Multiple Regression Analysis for Teachers' LOS Total Scores Related to Age, Educational Level and Teaching Experience (N=76)*

	B	SE B	$\beta$
Constant	107.09	2.83	
Age	3.66	4.34	.17
Educational Level	7.06	3.46	.28
Experience	-.005	4.34	.00

*Note.*  $R^2 = .08$  ( $ps < .001$ ).

#### *Teachers' Beliefs and their Students' Conceptions of Reading and Writing*

The second part of this study focused on investigating the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing. The research questions related to this purpose were as follows:

(1) To what extent are teachers' literacy beliefs related to children's conceptions about reading and writing? (2) Are there any differences in conceptions about reading among children whose teachers hold differing literacy beliefs?

A total of six first-grade teachers (two from each literacy viewpoint), matched by years of experience and educational level, participated in the second

part of the study. Participating teachers were selected from a stratified random sample of 12 potential participants (four from each literacy viewpoint: traditional, eclectic, or constructivist).

A total of 48 first-grade students participated in the second part of the study. A simple random sample of 8 students, stratified by reading ability (high achieving readers and low achieving readers) was selected from the classrooms of each of the six teachers who represented the three differing literacy beliefs. Students' responses to the interview protocol were transcribed and coded as holistic/reader-based (WH), skills/test-based (ST), or influence of home and other experiences (HO). Frequencies of the coded responses were calculated and students' conceptions about reading and writing were categorized according to their prevalent codes.

Most of the first-grade students' conceptions about reading and writing were categorized as ST (68.8%), whereas a smaller number of conceptions were categorized as WH (31.3%). Even though several students' responses were coded as HO, this category was not prevalent for any of the participants. Sample quotes from students' interviews are presented in Table 14 in order to illustrate each category of students' conceptions about reading and writing.

Table 14

*Participants' Reading and Writing Conceptions Categories with Sample Quotes*

Reading and Writing Conceptions Categories	Sample Quotes
Skills/test-based (ST)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"You have to look at the letters and say the letters."</i></li> <li>• <i>"You have to practice reading. First, you make the sounds very slowly."</i></li> <li>• <i>"You have to repeat what the teacher says."</i></li> </ul>
Holistic/reader-based (WH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"You have to think things about the story."</i></li> <li>• <i>"When I write, I take my pencil first and I write, then I make drawings and paintings."</i></li> <li>• <i>"I just take a book and open the book and begin to read."</i></li> </ul>
Home and other experiences (HO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Sometimes, I ask my sister to help me. She tells me the words and I write them."</i></li> <li>• <i>"My uncle and my grandmother read a lot, they go to church and read many stories."</i></li> <li>• <i>"When I was five years-old I wrote 'I love you' to my mom."</i></li> </ul>

Table 15 presents a cross-tabulation with the expected and observed frequencies for the students' conceptions about reading and writing by teacher's literacy viewpoint. Interestingly, the observed frequencies of skills/test-based and holistic/reader-based literacy conceptions among students whose teachers held a traditional and eclectic literacy viewpoint were equal. However, students whose teachers held a constructivist point of view exhibited fewer frequencies of skills/test-based conceptions and more frequencies of holistic/reader-based conceptions than the students whose teachers held a traditional or an eclectic literacy viewpoint.

Table 15

*Expected and Observed Frequencies for Students' Literacy Conceptions by Teacher's Viewpoint (N=48)*

			Teacher's Viewpoint			Total
			Traditional	Eclectic	Constructivist	
Literacy Conceptions	ST	Count	13	13	7	33
		Expected Count	11.0	11.0	11.0	33.0
		% within Literacy Conceptions	39.4%	39.4%	21.2%	100.0%
		% within Teacher's Viewpoint	81.3%	81.3%	43.8%	68.8%
		% of Total	27.1%	27.1%	14.6%	68.8%
	WH	Count	3	3	9	15
		Expected Count	5.0	5.0	5.0	15.0
		% within Literacy Conceptions	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100.0%
		% within Teacher's Viewpoint	18.8%	18.8%	56.3%	31.3%
		% of Total	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	31.3%
Total			Count	16	16	48
			Expected Count	16.0	16.0	48.0
			% within Literacy Conceptions	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
			% within Teacher's Viewpoint	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
			% of Total	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine differences in conceptions about reading and writing among children whose teachers held differing theoretical viewpoints. The results of the analysis indicated a statistically significant association between teacher's literacy viewpoint and students' conceptions about reading and writing ( $\chi^2 (2) = 6.98, p < .05$ ). First-grade students whose teachers held a constructivist literacy viewpoint seemed to have more holistic/reader-based conceptions of reading and writing, whereas

students whose teachers held a traditional or an eclectic literacy viewpoint seemed to have more skills/test-based conceptions of reading and writing. Table 16 presents quotes from the participants' interviews that illustrate differences among first-grade students' conceptions about reading and writing by teachers' literacy viewpoint.

Illustrative quotes, included in Table 16, are representative of the observed differences in conceptions about reading and writing among first-grade students whose teachers hold differing literacy beliefs. Students whose teachers hold a traditional literacy viewpoint tended to focus their definitions of reading and writing on isolated skills and small units of language such as letters or words. Similarly, students with eclectic teachers also emphasized skills and small units of language; defining reading and writing as mechanized activities or drills. These responses were categorized as reading and writing conceptions with a skills/test-based orientation. On the other hand, students whose teachers hold a constructivist literacy viewpoint showed more holistic responses, emphasizing book reading, texts, functions of reading and writing, and the construction of meaning. These types of responses were categorized as reading and writing conceptions with a holistic/reader-based orientation.

Students' quotes included in Table 15 represent segments of the students' responses to the interview. Even though students' definitions of reading such as *"To practice the book"* and *"To open a book and look at it"* might seem similar, they had different connotations that were evident through the course of the interviews. Definitions such as "practicing the book" or "practicing the words" were related to classroom

activities were students read aloud passages from a book as a mechanical exercise, emphasizing fluency and accuracy but overlooking the construction of meaning. On the other hand, a response such as *"To open a book and look at it"* was followed by the student's comments regarding the story and the pictures of the book; demonstrating a conception of reading as a meaningful activity and books as meaningful material.

*Table 16*

*Students' Quotes about the Nature of Reading and Writing by Teachers' Literacy*

*Viewpoint*

Teachers' Literacy Viewpoint	Conceptions about the Nature of Reading: Students' Quotes (What do you think reading is?)	Conceptions about the Nature of Writing: Students' Quotes (What do you think writing is?)
Traditional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "To look at the letters."</li> <li>• "To say the letters."</li> <li>• "To study for the test."</li> <li>• "To practice the words."</li> <li>• "You have to recognize the letters and you have to be aware so you do not make a mistake."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "To write on the line."</li> <li>• "Moving the pencil and doing all the work."</li> <li>• "To make letters with your hands."</li> <li>• "To copy the words that the teacher says."</li> <li>• "To write letters and numbers."</li> </ul>
Eclectic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "To learn the letters."</li> <li>• "To study the words."</li> <li>• "To practice the book."</li> <li>• "To practice the words."</li> <li>• "To look at the words and say the words."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "To make a list of words."</li> <li>• "To do homework."</li> <li>• "To write what the book says."</li> <li>• "To copy the topic and the homework."</li> <li>• "If the teacher writes something on the board you have to write it too."</li> </ul>
Constructivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "To open a book and look at it."</li> <li>• "To think about the story."</li> <li>• "To read a story to someone and look at the pictures."</li> <li>• "It is nice because you read about adventures."</li> <li>• "It is fun and it helps you to know what you have to do."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "You have to think about what you are going to write about and then you do it."</li> <li>• "Sometimes you have to think something about the story that you read."</li> <li>• "You look at things, like trees, and you write about them."</li> <li>• "To write and then to draw lions, flowers, and children."</li> <li>• "To write the title of the story that you read."</li> </ul>

Despite the differences in conceptions about reading and writing among students whose teachers hold differing beliefs, the analysis of the results also indicated some similarities. Most of the students referred to peers and family members as examples of readers and good readers; demonstrated more ability to articulate their conceptions of reading than writing; and appeared to conceptualize literacy learning as a function of school instruction.

Students' conceptions of reading and writing with regard to their reading ability were also examined by chi-square analysis. The results indicated no significant relationship between students' conceptions of reading and writing and their reading ability group ( $\chi^2 (1) = 0.87, p > .05$ ). Table 17 shows a cross-tabulation with the expected and observed frequencies for students' literacy conceptions by reading ability.

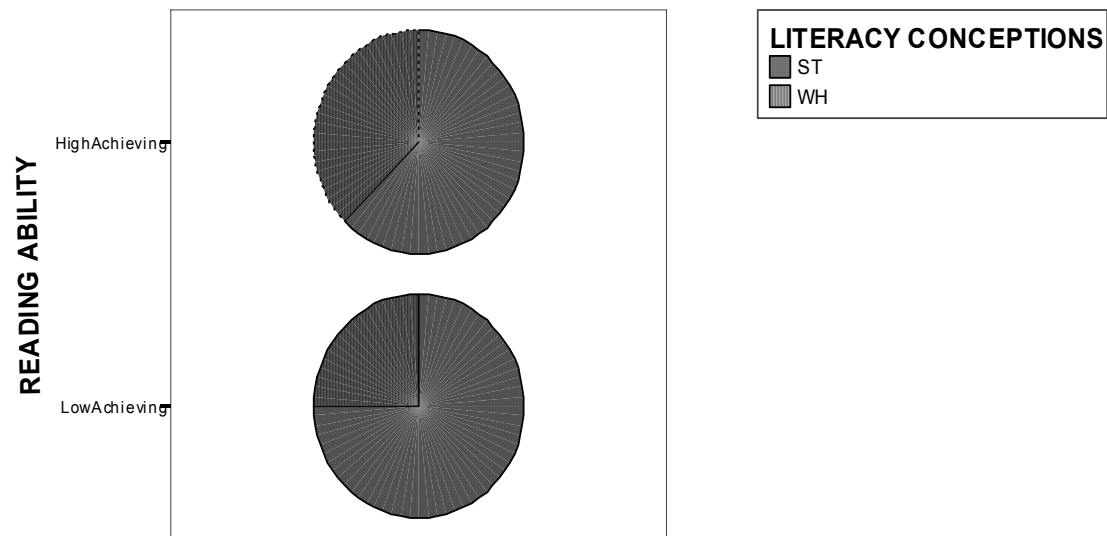
Even though no significant relationship was found, there is an interesting trend evident (see Figure 2). First-grade students categorized as low achieving readers exhibited more frequencies for skills/test-based literacy conceptions and fewer frequencies for holistic/reader-based conceptions than students categorized as high achieving readers. In contrast, high achieving readers tended to exhibit a smaller number of frequencies for skills/test-based literacy conceptions and more frequencies for holistic/reader-based literacy conceptions than students low achieving readers.



Table 17

*Expected and Observed Frequencies for Students' Literacy Conceptions by Reading Ability (N=48)*

			Reading Ability		Total
Literacy Conceptions	ST	Count	Low Achieving 18	High Achieving 15	33
		Expected Count	16.5	16.5	33.0
		% within Literacy Conceptions	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
		% within Ability Group	75.0%	62.5%	68.8%
		% of Total	37.5%	31.3%	68.8%
	WH	Count	6	9	15
		Expected Count	7.5	7.5	15.0
		% within Literacy Conceptions	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
		% within Ability Group	25.0%	37.5%	31.3%
		% of Total	12.5%	18.8%	31.3%
	Total	Count	24	24	48
		Expected Count	24.0	24.0	48.0
		% within Literacy Conceptions	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Ability Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%



*Figure 2. Literacy Conceptions by Reading Ability.*

This chapter presented the results of the study. The next and final chapter discusses the research findings and their relationship with previous investigations. In addition, the final chapter discusses the implications of these findings for literacy teaching and learning in early childhood.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

This chapter presents an overview of the present study and a summary of the results. The findings of the study, its relationship to previous research, and their implications for early childhood and for literacy teaching and learning are discussed.

#### *Overview*

The prominence of literacy achievement is evident within today's educational discourse. The passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2002 has contributed to an enhanced public awareness of the importance of literacy instruction (Young & Draper, 2006). Linked to No Child Left Behind were initiatives to improve literacy learning and teaching, an emphasis on the accountability of both schools and teachers, and research-based instructional interventions (Shapiro, 2006). Consequently, increasing attention has been given to the teacher's role in effective literacy instruction (Allington, 2002; Pressley, 2001; Poulson & Avramidis, 2003; Poulson et al., 2001; Seung-Yoeun, 2005; Taylor et al., 2002; Wray et al., 2002).

Some studies have focused on the practices of outstanding or exemplary literacy teachers and their relationship to student achievement (Pressley, 2001; Poulson et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2002). Research on literacy teachers has revealed that effective teachers own vast knowledge about literacy and

consistent philosophies about literacy teaching (Wray, et al., 2002). Teachers' philosophies include particular beliefs about the nature and learning of reading and writing that seem to be internally consistent with their practices (Burgess et al., 1999; Wray et al., 2002). It appears that teachers' literacy beliefs play a role in quality teaching (Poulson et al., 2001).

Research on teachers' beliefs has shown that teachers conceptualize literacy learning in different ways (DeFord, 1985; Duffy & Metheny, 1979; Fang, 1996; Harste & Burke, 1977; Lenski et al., 1998; Wray et al., 2002). Teachers' literacy beliefs have been categorized by their theoretical orientation including different reading models (Duffy & Metheny, 1979); reading approaches, such as phonics skills, or whole language (DeFord, 1985); and various theoretical points of view such as constructivist, traditional or eclectic (Lenski et al., 1998).

The influence of teachers' beliefs in literacy instruction has been emphasized and documented by various studies and researchers (Braithwaite, 1999; DeFord, 1985; Duffy & Metheny, 1979; Feng & Etheridge, 1993; Gove, 1982; Lenski et al., 1998; Maxson, 1996; Richards, 2001; Wray et al., 2002). It appears that teachers' beliefs are related to the way teachers define and conceptualize literacy, the manner in which they construct their literacy learning environments, and their choice of instructional approaches or methods for literacy instruction. However, it is important to recognize that the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices is not always consistent. Therefore, stronger evidence is necessary regarding the ways that their beliefs link to practice (Wray et al., 2002).

Teachers' beliefs about literacy have been linked to students' perceptions, conceptions, understandings, and performance regarding reading and writing (Fang, 1996; Harste & Burke, 1977; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). Children's conceptions of reading and writing comprise their definition of what literacy is, its nature, its purpose, and an understanding of the relationship between the reader and the text (Melothe, Book, Putnam, & Sivan, 1989; Moller, 1999; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). Research suggests that these ideas and understandings could define and affect children's later thinking and behavior as readers and writers (Rasinski & DeFord, 1985). Moreover, some studies suggest a connection between teachers' literacy beliefs and the way their students' conceptualize reading and writing (Fang, 1996; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989). Nevertheless, both the literature and the research in this area are still sparse.

The study of teachers' beliefs represents a provocative and interesting topic, considering the significance of teachers in promoting literacy achievement, the impact of teachers' thinking on their pedagogy, and the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs, their practices, and their students' ideas and perspectives about reading and writing. Thus, the present study was conducted in order to examine and describe first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and practices and to investigate the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions of reading and writing.

This study consisted of two parts. For the first part of this study, a sample of 76 first-grade teachers, from two school districts, completed the Literacy

Orientation Survey (LOS). The combined score of the LOS was calculated and used to categorize teachers according to their literacy beliefs and practices as constructivist, eclectic, or traditional (90-110, traditional; 111-125, eclectic; 126-145, constructivist). A multiple regression analysis was used to explore relationships between teachers' LOS total scores and teacher age, educational level, and teaching experience. The researcher also calculated individual scores for beliefs and practices in each survey. A paired t-test was conducted in order to determine alignment between teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. Observational data were also used to address whether there was congruence in teachers' self-reported literacy beliefs and practices.

After matching by years of experience and educational level, a stratified random sample of six teachers, two from each literacy viewpoint (traditional, eclectic, and constructivist), and 48 first-grade students was selected to participate in the second part of the study. A simple random sample of eight students (four low-achieving readers and four high-achieving readers) was selected from the classrooms of each of the six teachers, who represented the three differing literacy beliefs. The researcher conducted individual interviews with the students, using Wing's (1989) interview protocol, in order to assess their conceptions of reading and writing. A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine differences in conceptions about reading and writing among children whose teachers held differing literacy beliefs. A chi-square analysis was also used to examine the relationship between students' conceptions of reading and writing and their reading ability.

### *Findings of the Study*

*Teachers' literacy beliefs and practices.* The first purpose of this study was to examine and describe first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs. As a primary finding, the results of the LOS, administered to the participating teachers, showed that most teachers' reported literacy beliefs were consistent with a traditional viewpoint. A large number of teachers' reported beliefs were consistent with an eclectic viewpoint, and the smallest number of teachers reported literacy beliefs were compatible with a constructivist viewpoint.

A second finding was that, based on the results of the LOS, most teachers' literacy beliefs seemed to be congruent with their practices. However, observational data, on a subset of the sample of participating teachers, showed that beliefs and practices were not always aligned.

Finally, as a third finding concerned with the nature of teachers' literacy beliefs, no relationships were found between teachers' literacy viewpoint and their age, educational level, and teaching experience. Thus, no demographic differences were found among teachers whose literacy beliefs corresponded to a constructivist, eclectic, or traditional viewpoint.

*Students' conceptions of reading and writing.* The second purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing. The major finding related to this purpose was that a significant association was found between teachers' literacy viewpoint and their students' conceptions about reading and writing. First-grade students whose teachers held a constructivist literacy viewpoint

seemed to have more holistic conceptions of literacy, whereas students whose teachers held a traditional or an eclectic literacy viewpoint seemed to have more skills or test-based conceptions of reading and writing. Thus, first-grade students' ideas regarding the purposes and nature of reading and writing appear to be compatible with their teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. This finding may have important implications for literacy teaching and learning in early childhood.

As an additional finding, no significant relationship was found between students' conceptions of reading and writing and their reading ability. However, low-achieving readers exhibited more skills or test-based conceptions and fewer holistic-based conceptions than high-achieving readers. In contrast, high-achieving readers tended to exhibit fewer skills or test-based conceptions and more holistic-based conceptions than low-achieving readers.

#### *Relationship of the Current Study to Prior Research*

*Teachers' literacy beliefs.* This study was an initial attempt to examine and describe first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs in Puerto Rico. The results of this study indicated that most teachers' appear to hold traditional literacy beliefs and practices, whereas a very small number of the participant teachers seem to hold literacy beliefs and practices categorized as constructivist. This means that literacy instruction for the majority of the participant teachers is characterized by traditional reading methods, direct instruction, and the assumption that literacy learning is the result of mastering particular skills (Lenski et al., 1998). In contrast, a holistic view of literacy and literacy instruction is held by a reduced number of teachers. These results were similar to the findings of previous



research (Feng & Etheridge, 1993) describing first-grade teachers' theoretical orientation toward reading. In the study conducted by Feng and Etheridge (1993), the majority of surveyed teachers reported a skills-based orientation to reading, which corresponds to a traditional literacy viewpoint; whereas the smallest number of teachers held a whole language theoretical orientation, which is compatible with a constructivist literacy viewpoint. Thus, despite the current conception of literacy as a construction, linked to social practices and functional competencies (Bloome, 1986, 2000; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Hruby, 2001; Nolen, 2001; Turner, 1995), for most participating teachers in this study, literacy still appears to be a set of discrete skills that presumes a mechanical approach to teaching and learning.

This study was also concerned with the congruency of teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. Even though the statistical analysis of the teachers' self-reported literacy beliefs and practices scores did not show significant differences, observational data suggest that these aspects are not always congruent. This finding is consistent with previous research showing inconsistency between teachers' literacy beliefs and practices (Feng & Etheridge, 1993; Foote, Smith, & Ellis, 2004; Lenski et al., 1998). Therefore, the findings of the current investigation support the notion suggested by previous research about the complexity of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices (Feng & Etheridge, 1993; Nelson, 1999).

The lack of alignment between teachers' beliefs and practices could be explained in light of factors such as teacher's inexperience, lack of support,

restricted time for instruction, administrative and classroom life constraints, social realities (Fang, 1996; Schawn & Olafson, 2002), and the imbalance caused by a shift in beliefs (Lenski et al., 1998). Moreover, the use of self-report instruments to assess teachers' literacy beliefs and practices, such as the LOS used in the first part of the current study, might be another factor related to inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices. That is, some teachers may have responded to these instruments as they think effective teachers should answer (Olson & Stinger, 1994), the inconsistency may be a function of their knowledge rather than their beliefs, since beliefs appear to be less receptive to external evaluation or critical analysis than knowledge (Nespor, 1987). Thus, the results of the current study regarding the congruency of teachers' beliefs and practices confirm the importance of incorporating the use of supplementary measures to verify and substantiate the results obtained from self-report measures.

In the present study no significant demographic differences were found among teachers whose literacy beliefs corresponded to constructivist, eclectic, or traditional viewpoints. However, previous descriptive studies addressing this relationship (Feng & Etheridge, 1993; Poulson et al., 2001; Seung-Yoeun, 2005) have shown mixed results. In the study conducted by Feng and Etheridge (1993), results indicated that older teachers tended to have more traditional orientations to reading (phonics) whereas younger teachers tended to approach a holistic orientation (whole language); nevertheless, no differences were found between teachers' reading orientation and their educational level. In contrast, in a similar study conducted in England, Poulson et al. (2001) found that younger age

and less experienced teachers tended to agree more with a phonics orientation than older age and more experienced teachers. According to the researchers, even though no significant differences were found between teachers' theoretical orientation and their educational level, teachers with the highest education appeared to be more disapproving of phonics orientation and more positive toward the whole language orientation. More recently, in a study conducted in Korea, Seung-Yoeun (2005) also examined teachers' literacy beliefs and their relationship with teacher age, educational degree, and years of teaching. The results indicated that educational degree was the only variable that appeared to be related to teachers' literacy beliefs. However, it is important to consider that, in Seung-Yoeun's study, teachers' educational level varied from a high school diploma to a masters degree, whereas, in the current investigation, the level varied from a bachelors to a masters degree. Thus, the broader range of differences in educational levels among the Korean teachers might have contributed to a more significant relationship between these teachers' beliefs and their educational level.

The inconsistent results regarding the relationship of teachers' beliefs and their age, educational level, and teaching experience suggest the possibility that differences in teachers' beliefs might be associated with other factors. As discussed in Chapter 2, several scholars and investigators support the idea that teachers' beliefs are the result of their own experience as students (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Raths, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Yero, 2002). In view of that assertion, one could hypothesize that the nature of the teacher's instruction, as a

student, might be more related to his or her literacy beliefs than age or teaching experience. Thus, there is a need to extend the study of this domain.

*Teachers' beliefs and students' conceptions of reading and writing.* The results of the present study revealed a significant association between first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing. This implies that first-grade students' ideas and perspectives regarding the nature and purposes of reading and writing appeared to be compatible with their teachers' literacy beliefs and practices.

In this study, first-grade students whose teachers held constructivist literacy beliefs demonstrated more holistic conceptions about reading and writing. A significant number of student responses about understanding the nature of literacy emphasized the construction of meaning in reading and writing (*"To think about a story."* *"You have to think about what you are going to write about and then you do it."* *"You have to think things about the story"*). These responses also denoted a conception of reading and writing as processes that involve thinking which might suggest a level of metacognitive awareness that was not evident in the case of students with traditional and eclectic teachers. According to Garner (1994) a reader's focus on making sense of the text rather than decoding is indicative of metacognition.

On the other hand, most of the responses of students with eclectic and traditional teachers demonstrated reading and writing conceptions focused on skills and isolated units of language (*"You need to observe the letters."* *"You have to look at the letters and then say the letters."* *"You have to look at the*

*words that your teacher writes on the board.*”). The marked emphasis on letters, words, and decoding denotes a restricted and limited conception of literacy as a mechanical and meaningless activity. This focus on mechanical aspects of reading and writing appear to be congruent with the emphasis on decoding and skills of traditional and eclectic teachers in this study.

The substantial differences in conceptions of reading and writing among students of teachers who held differing literacy viewpoints, as previously discussed, are consistent with the results of prior qualitative research (Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Rasinski & DeFord, 1985, 1988). In these investigations, students whose teachers held traditional literacy orientations demonstrated literacy conceptions characterized by an emphasis on superficial aspects of reading and writing, such as letter-sound relationships, recognizing words in isolation, drilling, and practicing, as opposed to students with whole language teachers, whose literacy conceptions were more oriented toward meaning and books.

The focus on the construction of meaning for the students with constructivist teachers was also extended to visual dimensions of the text, such as the pictures (*“When I read a story to someone I read it and then I show them the pictures.” “You have to read the title of the book, then you read the letters and look at the pictures.” “When I write, I take my pencil first and I write, then I make drawings and paintings.”*). It appears that these students recognized the visual and verbal nature of texts and picture books. This might imply a certain level of awareness and understanding of the dialogical relationship between words and images in books (Arzipe & Styles, 2003), which could be associated

with social practices around literacy in the context of purposeful tasks (Millard & Marsh, 2001) such as discussing stories and illustrations. Certainly, for the students with constructivist teachers, this implies the development of a broader view of literacy that includes the ability to read visual images and interpret visual texts.

Most of the responses, of students with constructivist teachers regarding literacy learning or how does someone learns to read and write focused on experiences with books or whole texts. Thus, these students seemed to conceptualize books as mediating tools in literacy learning. This might also suggest the underlying idea of whole texts as a necessary condition for reading or, as Strommen and Fowles (1997) assert, the notion that readers read meaningful material. The significant role of books in literacy learning was also evident in their ideas of who a good reader is and what good readers do (*"My friend, she is reading a story right now."* *"My uncle and my grandmother, because they read a lot of stories and the Bible."* *"My sister, because she took a book and read it to me."*).

In contrast, most students with traditional and eclectic teachers qualified reading and good readers in terms of their ability to be fast and accurate (*"My cousin, he is in second grade and he reads very fast."* *"When we have a new letter, Carlos always says it very fast."* *"She says the words without making any mistake."*). These findings in the current study are also consistent with those of Reutzel and Sabey (1996), which indicated that students of whole language teachers relied significantly more on reading books and their experiences with

books as key resources in learning and as indicators of someone's literacy ability in comparison with students whose teachers held traditional orientations to reading.

In this study, the students with traditional teachers exhibited a particular trend concerning their conceptions of literacy learning or of how does someone learns to read and write. More than half of their responses seemed to conceptualize literacy learning as a function of behavioral aspects (*"You have to do what the teacher says."* *"You have to be quiet."* *"You need to pay attention to the teacher."* *"You have to look at the words that your teacher write on the board and when you finish you need to put your head down."*). These responses stressed a behavioral conception of literacy that appears to be congruent with the traditional teachers' literacy viewpoint that included a passive conception of the learner, emphasis on direct instruction, little support for student's autonomy, and beliefs and practices of literacy as observable behaviors (handwriting, decoding). This finding is consistent with those of Borko and Eisenhart (1986) who found that students with teachers that focused more on decoding skills, student behavior, and instructional procedures tended to articulate conceptions of reading that relied on reading-appropriate behavior and on the materials and procedures related to their instruction.

However, despite the differences in conceptions about reading and writing among students whose teachers held differing literacy beliefs, the results of this study also indicated some similarities. First, almost all students referred to peers and family members as examples of readers and good readers. This finding

concurred with the results of the exploratory study conducted by Reutzel and Sabey (1996), who indicated that first-grade students tended to identify parents and peers as models of good reading.

Second, all students, regardless their teachers' literacy viewpoint, demonstrated more ability to articulate their conceptions of reading than writing. This common element seems to be compatible with the fact that every teacher, in the current study, appeared to provide more time and attention to reading instruction in relation to writing. This issue has been addressed by Elbow (2004) who argues that there is a general conception of learning that relies primarily on reading; consequently, in most schools writing instruction is less crucial. Thus, the lack of equal time and effort devoted to writing instruction by the teachers in this study might be related to their students' lack of ability in conveying their conceptions about writing or in developing appropriate writing conceptions.

Finally, in this study, most first-grade students across teachers' literacy viewpoints appeared to conceptualize literacy learning as a function of school instruction. The majority of the students' conceptions concerning literacy learning and their definitions of reading and writing emphasized classroom activities, materials, and peers. This finding is consistent with those of Moller (1999) and Michel (1994), who observed that, in many cases, children's definitions of literacy are descriptions of their tasks in the school context. Moreover, it validates a central assumption of the present investigation; i.e., school experiences as influential forces in the construction of notions, ideas, and assumptions of what literacy is and what it means to be literate (Bloome, 1986;



Hammerberg, 2004; Landis, 1999; Michel, 1994; Moller, 1999; Nolen, 2001; Turner, 2000).

*Implications for Practice: Literacy Teaching and Learning*

The current study suggests important implications for literacy teaching and learning, particularly within an educational climate extremely focused on literacy achievement and high-quality instruction (Young & Draper, 2006). According to Allington (2002), in order to improve literacy achievement, we must focus on developing effective teachers. This contention was, in fact, an underlying assumption of this study.

The results of the current study have certainly highlighted the importance of studying teachers and their critical role in literacy learning. If, in effect, as indicated in this study and prior investigations (Rasinski & DeFord, 1988; Reutzel & Sabey, 1996; Wing, 1989), students' ideas about the nature, purposes, and definitions of literacy are related to their teachers' literacy beliefs and practices, teachers are not only teaching them how to read and write; they are also shaping their notions regarding what it means to read and write, why people need to read and write, and even under what circumstances. The lack of meaning-oriented and comprehensive conceptions of literacy, evident in students with traditional and eclectic teachers in this study, must be a major concern for educators and the literacy field; considering that current perspectives on literacy achievement require students to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate a diversity of texts (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996). However, these standards may be difficult to achieve by students

who define and understand literacy as simple school-based skills or as meaningless pieces.

Moreover, if, in fact, children's ideas and definitions of reading and writing determine in some way their approach to literacy tasks (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Hutson & Gove, 1978; Knapp, 2002; Nolen, 2001; Rasinski & DeFord, 1985); students with simplistic and superficial ideas about reading and writing-such as "saying the words" "looking at the letters" or simply "to be quiet"-might not be able to focus on constructing meaning of spoken, written, and visual language, adopt a critical stance as readers and writers, or read for personal fulfillment in other contexts different from school. These ideas and understandings seem to affect the individual orientation toward literacy. Dyson (2000) stresses the significance of children's understandings and ideas about literacy, as she states "children not only build on what they know, they build with it" (p.354). Thus, if students' conceptions about reading and writing constitute part of "what they know" about literacy, these conceptions will contribute to shape future literacy tasks and events.

Teachers also need to examine and understand their students' conceptions about reading and writing. A better comprehension of the way their students define, understand, and interpret literacy and their literacy tasks have implications for the way teachers plan, and approach literacy instruction. Students' conceptions about reading and writing could inform teachers' practice in order to support and encourage the development of appropriate and positive

literacy conceptions that are congruent with the ultimate outcome of literacy education: to contribute to the development of lifelong readers and writers.

The fact that almost the majority of the students in this study referred to peers and family members as examples of readers and good readers might be a warning sign about the teacher's ability to portray a good reader and demonstrate what readers and writers do. This fact might be associated to the lack of read aloud events that was evident in most of the observed classrooms. When teachers do not read aloud they fail in demonstrating what good readers do, the purposes of reading, and the process of constructing and reconstructing meaning from the text. As Cambourne (1987) states, "the way teachers approach reading and writing demonstrate their attitude toward literacy: whether they like to read and write and whether they think reading and writing are hard or easy" (p.67). Thus, teachers must reflect on their literacy practices, particularly on what kind of statements about literacy these practices are conveying to their students.

An important implication of the current study is concerned with the significant role of teachers' beliefs in literacy instruction. In this study, teachers' literacy beliefs seemed to be related to their instructional practices, even though this relationship was not always consistent. The results of this study indicating that most teachers reported traditional literacy beliefs and practices, requires serious thought, particularly considering that these teachers are supposed to subscribe to a constructivist theoretical framework that proposes a holistic approach to literacy and its instruction (Instituto Nacional para el Desarrollo

Curricular, 2003). Thus, this clearly poses a challenge for the Department of Education in Puerto Rico, and indicates a distinct mismatch between its theoretical approach to literacy and the actual classroom approach in practice.

Additionally the large number of teachers in this study who reported eclectic beliefs and practices might indicate the existence of conflicting beliefs and practices in many teachers. This could be the result of the teacher's lack of a strong theoretical base or knowledge regarding how to implement constructivist principles in practice (Lenski et al., 1998) or the product of the primacy of beliefs over knowledge (Foote et al., 2004). Therefore, teachers' literacy beliefs need to be acknowledged and considered in any attempt to improve literacy instruction.

The significance of literacy beliefs implies the need for inservice and preservice teachers to examine and reflect on their own dispositions and assumptions about teaching and learning to read and write, what literacy is, and what constitutes its ultimate goal. Teachers need to understand the powerful role of beliefs in shaping their educational practices (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004) and their students' views and perspectives about literacy. Teacher educators need to recognize that future teachers enter to their preparation programs with particular and well established beliefs about literacy instruction (Murphy, et al., 2004; Rath, 2001; Yero, 2002). Teacher education programs need to address preservice teachers' beliefs providing time and space for their ongoing examination and reflection, in order to be able to provoke genuine changes of shifts in teachers' thinking.

Even though the LOS, used in the present study, was designed to measure inservice teachers' literacy beliefs and classroom practices, the subscale of the instrument focused on literacy beliefs might be used by preservice teachers as a quantitative measure to assess and compare over time their beliefs about literacy teaching and learning. Similarly, other instruments such as the Literacy Acquisition Perception Profile (LAPP) (McMahon, Richmond, & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998) and the Philosophical Orientation to Literacy Learning (POLL) (Linek, Nelson, & Sampson, 1999) might be used to explore preservice teachers' literacy beliefs. Other methods to examine preservice teachers' literacy beliefs include the use of autobiographies (Norman & Spencer, 2005) and students' stories about literacy education in order to promote their reflection about themselves as readers and writers and their interpretation of teaching and learning in light of those beliefs.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

As discussed in the first chapter, even though the topic of teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing has been previously studied, research efforts have been limited. In fact, the current study was an attempt to extend previous investigations through the inclusion of statistical analysis and by adding a different social and cultural research context. The results of the current study have provided additional evidence to validate the findings of previous qualitative studies. However, there is still a need for additional studies addressing the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing, in particular, studies

employing complementary research methods in order to provide richer and broader descriptions of teachers' beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing.

Even though the current study used a non-experimental design, which implies that many important variables cannot be controlled, future research on students' conceptions about reading and writing may choose to consider intervening variables such as socioeconomic status, gender, and home experiences. Additionally, future studies should take into consideration the need for larger sample sizes, given that most of the research on this topic has relied on small numbers of participants. Certainly, an increase in the number of participants (teachers and students) will contribute to the generalizability of previous findings.

Finally, further study of teachers' literacy beliefs should focus on what factors and influences, in addition to teacher age, educational level, and experience, contribute to particular literacy beliefs. In future studies, researchers might take into consideration the nature of teachers' instruction and their own experiences as students, which may offer insight into the role of these experiences in teachers' beliefs and practices. Moreover, since research findings regarding the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and their practices are inconsistent, there is also a need to continuing studying this domain.

#### *Limitations and Reflections*

During the course of this investigation it was evident for the researcher an absence of a "research culture" for most teachers and the school context where

this study was conducted. Even though the response rate for the first part of this study was adequate (75%), it was the result of many efforts and contacts with these teachers and school directors. The level of difficulty concerning teachers' participation increased during the second part of the study due to the need to conduct observations and interviews, which seemed to be intimidating for several teachers and directors. Moreover, the IRB's requirements concerning the form and content of the consent forms for teachers and students' parents, in this study, appeared to have an intimidating effect for some participants. In fact, for some parents the parental permission form resulted difficult to understand and the statements regarding the risks of being part of the study was a cause of concern. Certainly, these factors need to be considered and addressed in future investigations.

As noted in the first chapter, the present study relied on categorizations delineated by previous research. Teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing were categorized according to particular categories and definitions. Certainly, this represents a limitation for the current study and a challenge for next investigations addressing the nature of teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions of reading and writing.

### *Conclusion*

The current study had two main purposes. First, it examined and described first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs in Puerto Rico. The second purpose was to investigate the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing. The results of this study

indicated that most teachers possess literacy beliefs compatible with a traditional orientation, even though the theoretical framework of the Department of Education in Puerto Rico subscribes to a constructivist perspective. A large number of teachers' beliefs in this study were compatible with an eclectic literacy viewpoint, whereas a small number of teachers indicated beliefs compatible with a constructivist viewpoint. For most of these teachers, their literacy beliefs appeared to be congruent with their practices.

Certainly, the nature of these findings poses many challenges for literacy instruction, the educational system, and teacher preparation programs since, even though the current professional discourse embraces comprehensive and constructivist approaches to literacy, most teachers are at the other extreme of the continuum. However, the study of teachers' literacy beliefs also represents a first step in understanding these teachers' premises or propositions about literacy instruction and how they are related to their practice, certainly a necessary condition in order to make changes or reforms.

With regard to the relationship between teachers' literacy beliefs and students' conceptions about reading and writing, the results of this study confirmed and extended the findings of previous research indicating that students' ideas and perspectives on the nature and purposes of reading and writing appear to be compatible with their teachers' literacy beliefs and practices. Students with constructivist teachers demonstrated more holistic and meaning-oriented conceptions about reading and writing, whereas students with traditional and eclectic teachers focused on skills and isolated units of language.



The results of the current study validate the conception of literacy as a social construction. Teachers and students, in this study, demonstrated how alternative definitions of literacy are constructed through their daily interactions, conversations, and literacy tasks. Some definitions may support a comprehensive perspective of literacy, whereas other definitions may promote simplistic and limited views of reading and writing. Thus, it is the belief of this researcher that, in effect, literacy teaching and learning are never neutral.

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## Appendix A: Literacy Orientation Survey

### Literacy Orientation Survey (LOS)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Read the following statements, and circle the response that indicates your feelings or behaviors regarding literacy and literacy instruction.

1. The purpose of reading instruction is to teach children to recognize words and to pronounce them correctly.  
strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree
2. When students read text, I ask them questions such as "What does it mean?"  
never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always
3. Reading and writing are unrelated processes.  
strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree
4. When planning instruction, I take into account the needs of children by including activities that meet their social, emotional, physical, and affective needs.  
never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always
5. Students should be treated as individual learners rather than as a group.  
strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree
6. I schedule time every day for self-selected reading and writing experiences.  
never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always
7. Students should use "fix-up strategies" such as rereading when text meaning is unclear.  
strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree

## Appendix A: (Continued)

8. Teachers should read aloud to students on a daily basis.
- strongly disagree strongly agree  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
9. I encourage my students to monitor their comprehension as they read.
- never always  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
10. I use a variety of prereading strategies with my students.
- never always  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
11. It is not necessary for students to write text on a daily basis.
- strongly disagree strongly agree  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
12. Students should be encouraged to sound out all unknown words.
- strongly disagree strongly agree  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
13. The purpose of reading is to understand print.
- strongly disagree strongly agree  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
14. I hold parent workshops or send home newsletters with ideas about how parents can help their children with school.
- never always  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
15. I organize my classroom so that my students have an opportunity to write in at least one subject every day.
- never always  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
16. I ask the parents of my students to share their time, knowledge, and expertise in my classroom.
- never always  
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

# Appendix A: (Continued)

17. Writers in my classroom generally move through the processes of prewriting, drafting, and revising.
- never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always
18. In my class, I organize reading, writing, speaking, and listening around key concepts.
- never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always
19. Reading instruction should always be delivered to the whole class at the same time.
- strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree
20. I teach using themes or integrated units.
- never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always
21. Grouping for reading instruction should always be based on ability.
- strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree
22. Subjects should be integrated across the curriculum.
- strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree
23. I use a variety of grouping patterns to teach reading such as skill groups, interest groups, whole group, and individual instruction.
- never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always
24. Students need to write for a variety of purposes.
- strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 strongly agree
25. I take advantage of opportunities to learn about teaching by attending professional conferences and/or graduate classes and by reading professional journals.
- never 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 always

Appendix A: (Continued)

26. Parents attitudes toward literacy affect my students' progress.

strongly  
disagree  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
strongly  
agree

27. The major purpose of reading assessment is to determine a student's placement in the basal reader.

strongly  
disagree  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
strongly  
agree

28. I assess my students' reading progress primarily by teacher-made and/or book tests.

never  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
always

29. Parental reading habits in the home affect their children's attitudes toward reading.

strongly  
disagree  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
strongly  
agree

30. At the end of each day, I reflect on the effectiveness of my instructional decisions.

never  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
always

## Appendix B: LOS-Spanish Version

Código \_\_\_\_\_

Femenino \_\_\_\_\_ Masculino \_\_\_\_\_ Distrito Escolar \_\_\_\_\_

Edad: 21-24 25-28 29-32 33-36 37-40 41-44 45-48+

Preparación Académica: Bachillerato \_\_\_\_\_ Maestría \_\_\_\_\_ Doctorado \_\_\_\_\_

Años de experiencia como maestro: 1-3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4-6 \_\_\_\_\_ 7-9 \_\_\_\_\_ 10 ó más \_\_\_\_\_

A continuación aparecen varios planteamientos sobre la enseñanza de la lectura y la escritura. Circule el número que corresponde a sus formas de pensar o actuar respecto a la enseñanza de la lectura y la escritura.

1. El propósito de enseñar a leer y a escribir es capacitar a los niños para reconocer las palabras y pronunciarlas correctamente.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	2	3	4	5

2. Cuando los estudiantes leen el texto, les hago preguntas (como por ejemplo: "¿Qué quiere decir...?")

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1	2	3	4	5

3. Leer y escribir son procesos que no están relacionados.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	2	3	4	5

4. Cuando planifico las actividades educativas tomo en cuenta las necesidades de los niños, incluyendo actividades para satisfacer sus necesidades sociales, emocionales, físicas y afectivas.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1	2	3	4	5

5. Los estudiantes deben ser tratados como aprendices individuales, en lugar de como un grupo.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1	2	3	4	5



## Appendix B: (Continued)

6. Programo un periodo diario en el que los estudiantes tienen la oportunidad de participar en actividades de lectura y escritura seleccionadas por ellos mismos.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

7. Los estudiantes deberían aplicar "estrategias de corrección", como releer cuando el significado del texto no es claro.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

8. Los maestros deben leer en voz alta a sus estudiantes diariamente.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

9. Estimulo a mis estudiantes a monitorear el nivel de comprensión que están logrando al leer algo.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

10. Empleo una variedad de estrategias de prelectura (antes de la lectura de un texto) con mis estudiantes.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

11. No es necesario que los estudiantes escriban diariamente.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

12. Se debe animar a los estudiantes a pronunciar todas las palabras desconocidas.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

13. El propósito de la lectura es la comprensión del lenguaje escrito.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

## Appendix B: (Continued)

14. Realizo talleres con los padres o envío boletines o cartas con ideas sobre cómo los padres pueden ayudar a sus hijos en sus estudios.

Nunca                      Pocas veces                      Regularmente                      Muchas veces                      Siempre  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

15. Organizo la rutina de mi salón de clases de forma que los estudiantes tengan la oportunidad de escribir, al menos en una asignatura o materia, diariamente.

Nunca                      Pocas veces                      Regularmente                      Muchas veces                      Siempre  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

16. Pido a los padres y madres de mis estudiantes que colaboren en el salón de clases contribuyendo con su tiempo, al compartir sus conocimientos y habilidades particulares.

Nunca                      Pocas veces                      Regularmente                      Muchas veces                      Siempre  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

17. Generalmente, al escribir, los estudiantes en mi salón de clases pasan por tres etapas: la preparación (antes de escribir), escritura de un borrador y la revisión del texto.

Nunca                      Pocas veces                      Regularmente                      Muchas veces                      Siempre  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

18. En mi salón de clases organizo la lectura, la escritura, el hablar y el escuchar en torno a conceptos clave.

Nunca                      Pocas veces                      Regularmente                      Muchas veces                      Siempre  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

19. La enseñanza de la lectura siempre debe llevarse a cabo con el grupo entero (todo el grupo a la vez).

Totalmente en desacuerdo                      En desacuerdo                      No hay opinión                      De acuerdo                      Totalmente de acuerdo  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

20. Enseño utilizando temas o unidades integradas.

Nunca                      Pocas veces                      Regularmente                      Muchas veces                      Siempre  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

21. La práctica de agrupar a los estudiantes para la instrucción de la lectura, debe basarse siempre en el grado o nivel de habilidad de éstos.

Totalmente en desacuerdo                      En desacuerdo                      No hay opinión                      De acuerdo                      Totalmente de acuerdo  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5

## Appendix B: (Continued)

22. Se debe integrar las materias o asignaturas a través del currículo.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

23. Utilizo una variedad de patrones para agrupar a los estudiantes durante la instrucción de la lectura, tales como: grupos de habilidad o dominio de destrezas, grupos de interés, grupo entero y enseñanza individual.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

24. Los estudiantes necesitan escribir con una variedad de propósitos.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

25. Aprovecho las oportunidades para aprender más sobre la enseñanza, asistiendo a conferencias, tomando cursos graduados y leyendo artículos de revistas profesionales.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

26. Las actitudes de los padres hacia la lectura y la escritura afectan el progreso de mis estudiantes.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

27. El propósito principal de la evaluación de la lectura es determinar la ubicación o nivel de lectura del estudiante respecto a los textos empleados en la instrucción.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

28. Evalúo el progreso de mis estudiantes en cuanto a la lectura utilizando principalmente exámenes que yo (como maestro) preparo o usando exámenes que encuentro en manuales y libros.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

29. Los hábitos de lectura de los padres en el hogar afectan la actitud que tienen los niños hacia la lectura.

Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	No hay opinión	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

## Appendix B: (Continued)

30. Al terminar el día reflexiono sobre la efectividad de las decisiones que he tomado respecto al proceso de enseñanza.

Nunca	Pocas veces	Regularmente	Muchas veces	Siempre
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

## Appendix C: IRB-approved Consent Form

### Informed Consent

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
University of South Florida

103975

10-12-2005

10-11-2006

#### Information for People Who Take Part in Research Studies

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The following information is being presented to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in a minimal risk research study. Please read this carefully. If you do not understand anything, ask the person in charge of the study.

**Title of Study:** Teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing

**Principal Investigator:** Mildred Falcón-Huertas

**Study Location(s):** primary schools in Bayamón's public school districts

You are being asked to participate because we are interested in studying first-grade teachers' beliefs and practices regarding literacy instruction.

#### General Information about the Research Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine and describe first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and its relationship with their students' conceptions about reading and writing.

#### Plan of Study

You will be asked to answer, on your own, a 30-item questionnaire about your beliefs and practices regarding literacy instruction. The total estimated amount of time to complete the instrument is 15 minutes. After completing the survey, the principal investigator might ask your permission to conduct observations and interviews in your classroom regarding literacy teaching and learning. The estimated amount of time to complete the interviews is 20 minutes and the minimum estimated time for observations is 3 hours. Interview sessions will be audiotaped.

#### Payment for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

## Appendix C: (Continued)

### **Benefits of Being a Part of this Research Study**

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. However, by taking part in this research you will contribute to our understanding of teachers' thought processes particularly regarding reading and writing instruction.

### **Risks of Being a Part of this Research Study**

The estimated level of risk to you is minimal. You could potentially experience some discomfort associated with increased awareness of potentially dissimilar perceptions of actual and ideal practices in literacy instruction.

### **Confidentiality of Your Records**

Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, and the USF Institutional Review Board, and its staff, and any other individuals acting on behalf of USF, may inspect the records from this research project.

The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from you will be combined with data from others in the publication. The published results will not include your name or any other information that would personally identify you in any way.

You will be assigned a code number so that your individual confidentiality is assured. Your information will be kept securely in locked files and only the Research staff will have access to your data.

### **Volunteering to Be Part of this Research Study**

Your decision to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to participate in this research study or to withdraw at any time. Your decision to participate in this study (or not to participate) will in no way affect your job/teaching status. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive, if you stop taking part in the study.

### **Questions and Contacts**

- If you have any questions about this research study, contact Mildred Falcón at (787) 459-5532.
- If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a research study, you may contact the Division of Research Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.

## Appendix C: (Continued)

### **Benefits of Being a Part of this Research Study**

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. However, by taking part in this research you will contribute to our understanding of teachers' thought processes particularly regarding reading and writing instruction.

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The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from you will be combined with data from others in the publication. The published results will not include your name or any other information that would personally identify you in any way.

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## Appendix D: Spanish Version of IRB-approved Consent Form

### Forma de Consentimiento

Ciencias Sociales y de la Conducta  
Universidad de South Florida

#### Información para Personas que Toman Parte en Investigaciones

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La siguiente información se le presenta a usted para ayudarlo a decidir si desea tomar parte en una investigación de riesgo mínimo. Por favor, lea esta información cuidadosamente. De no comprender algo, pregunte a la persona a cargo del estudio.

**Título del Estudio:** Teachers' literacy beliefs and their students' conceptions about reading and writing

**Investigador Principal:** Mildred Falcón-Huertas

**Localización del Estudio:** Escuelas públicas primarias de distritos escolares de Bayamón

A usted se le ha solicitado participar porque estamos interesados en estudiar las creencias y prácticas educativas de los maestros de primer grado en torno a la instrucción de la lectura y la escritura.

#### Información General sobre el Estudio de Investigación

El propósito de esta investigación es examinar y describir las creencias en torno a la lectura y la escritura que poseen los maestros de primer grado, así como la relación de éstas con las concepciones de sus estudiantes sobre los procesos de leer y escribir.



## Appendix D: (Continued)

### **Plan del Estudio**

Se le solicitará contestar, individualmente, un cuestionario de 30 ítemes sobre sus creencias y prácticas educativas en torno a la instrucción de la lectura y la escritura. El total estimado de tiempo para completar el instrumento es de 15 minutos. Luego de completar y entregar el cuestionario, el investigador principal podría solicitarle su permiso para conducir observaciones y entrevistas en su salón de clases en relación al proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de la lectura y la escritura. La cantidad estimada de tiempo de estas entrevistas es de aproximadamente 20 minutos y el mínimo estimado de tiempo para las observaciones es de 3 horas. Las sesiones de entrevistas serán grabadas en cinta de audio.

### **Pago por Participación**

Usted no recibirá compensación económica alguna por su participación en este estudio.

### **Beneficios de Participar en este Estudio de Investigación**

Usted no se beneficiará directamente de la participación en este estudio. Sin embargo, al tomar parte en este estudio usted contribuirá a adelantar conocimiento sobre la comprensión sobre los procesos mentales y cognitivos de los educadores, particularmente en lo relacionado a la instrucción de la lectura y la escritura.

### **Riesgos de Participar en este Estudio de Investigación**

El riesgo de participación estimado en este tipo de investigación es mínimo. Usted podría sentir potencialmente alguna incomodidad como resultado de su reflexión y conciencia en torno a una posible incongruencia entre sus prácticas actuales y las prácticas ideales en la instrucción de la lectura y la escritura.

### **Confidencialidad de sus Datos**

Su privacidad y la de sus datos se mantendrá confidencial en toda la extensión de la ley. El personal de investigación autorizado, empleados del Departamento de Salud y Servicios Humanos (de la Universidad de South Florida), el "Institucional Review Board" y su personal, así como otros individuos que actúen a nombre de la Universidad de South Florida, pueden inspeccionar los datos y registros de este proyecto de investigación.

Los resultados de este estudio pueden ser publicados. Sin embargo, para efectos de la publicación, sus datos se combinarán con datos de otros participantes. Los resultados publicados no incluirán su nombre o cualquier otra información que pueda identificarlo a usted en alguna forma.

A usted se le asignará un código numérico, de modo que se asegure su confidencialidad. Su información se mantendrá segura guardada bajo llave y sólo el personal que labora en esta investigación podrá tener acceso a sus datos.

### **Participación Voluntaria en este Estudio de Investigación**

Su decisión de participar en esta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Usted está libre de participar o retirarse de este estudio en cualquier momento. Su decisión de participar en este estudio (o no participar) no afectará de ninguna manera el estatus de su trabajo. No habrá penalidad alguna, de usted decidir detener su participación en este estudio.

## Appendix D: (Continued)

### Preguntas y Contactos

- Si usted tiene alguna pregunta relacionada con este estudio, comuníquese con Mildred Falcón al (787) 459-5532.
- Si usted tiene alguna pregunta relacionada con sus derechos como una persona que toma parte en un estudio de investigación puede comunicarse a Division of Research Compliance of the University of South Florida al (813) 974-5638.

### Consentimiento para Tomar Parte en este Estudio de Investigación

Al firmar esta forma, estoy de acuerdo con que:

- Yo he leído o se me ha leído y explicado completamente esta forma de consentimiento describiendo este estudio de investigación.
- Yo he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas a la persona a cargo de esta investigación y he recibido respuestas satisfactorias.
- Yo entiendo que se me ha solicitado participar en este estudio. Yo entiendo los riesgos y beneficios y libremente doy mi consentimiento para participar en el proyecto de investigación presentado en esta forma, bajo las condiciones indicadas en ésta.
- Se me ha entregado una copia firmada de esta forma de consentimiento, la cual es mía para conservar.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre Impreso del Participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

### Declaración del Investigador

Yo le he explicado cuidadosamente al sujeto la naturaleza del estudio de investigación, antes expuesto. Yo certifico que, a mi mejor entendimiento, el sujeto que firma esta forma de consentimiento entiende la naturaleza, demandas, riesgos y beneficios involucrados en la participación en este estudio.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Investigador o  
investigador autorizado designado  
por el Investigador Principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre Impreso del Investigador

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## Appendix E: IRB-approved Parental Informed Consent

### Parental Permission (Parental Consent)

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
University of South Florida

103975

10-12-2005

10-11-2006

### Information for Parents who are being asked to allow their child to take part in a research study

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The following information is being presented to help you decide whether or not you want to allow your child to be a part of a research study. Please read this carefully. If you do not understand anything, ask the person in charge of the study or the person obtaining your consent.

**Title of research study:** Teachers' Literacy Beliefs and their Students' Conceptions about Reading and Writing

**Person in charge of study:** Mildred Falcón-Huertas

**Where the study will be done:** Primary schools in Bayamón's public school districts

#### General Information about the Research Study

The purpose of this research study is to examine and describe first-grade teachers' literacy beliefs and its relationship with their students' conceptions about reading and writing.

Your child is being asked to participate because we are interested in first-grade students' ideas and understandings about the purposes and processes involved in reading and writing and their relationship with teachers' literacy beliefs.

#### Plan of Study

Your child will be asked voluntarily to participate in this study. Your child's classroom will be observed in order to obtain information related with the instruction of reading and writing. However, children will not be observed. These observations will focus on the teachers and their instructional practices. Your child's participation will consist of meeting with an interviewer in the school and answer some questions regarding their ideas and understandings about reading and writing. The total amount of time to answer the questions is 15 minutes.

#### Payment for Participation

You or your child will not be paid for your child's participation in this study.

## Appendix E: (Continued)

### **Potential Benefits of Taking Part in this Research Study**

Your child will not directly benefit from participating in this study. However, by him/her taking part in this research study, your child may help increase our overall knowledge of how children construct knowledge about reading and writing.

### **Risks of Being a Part of this Research Study**

The estimated level of risk of being part of this research study is minimal. Your child could experience some uncertainty and nervousness associated with an unfamiliar situation (the interview) and person (the interviewer). The investigator will try to help your child to feel comfortable during the interview. However, in the case of intense nervousness, the interviewer will stop the interview and offer the opportunity for your child to retire from the interview and the study.

### **Confidentiality of Your Child's Records**

We will keep the records of this study private by maintaining your child's record confidential.

However, certain people may need to see your child's study records. By law, anyone who looks at your child's records must keep them confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The Research staff.
- People who make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also make sure that we protect your child's rights and safety:
  - A. USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and their staff
  - B. Others may include:
    - People at USF who oversee research;
    - Florida Department of Health; and the
    - United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from your child will be combined with data from other children in the publication. The published results will not include your child's name or any other information that would personally identify your child in any way.

Your child will be assigned a code name so that his/her confidentiality is assured. The data from your child will be kept securely in locked files and only the Research staff will have access to your child's data.

### **Volunteering to Take Part in this Research Study**

Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research study must be completely voluntary. You are free to allow your child to participate in this research study or to him/her at any time. Your decision to allow your child to participate in this study (or not to participate in this study) will in no way affect his/her status at school. If you choose not to allow your child to participate or if you remove your child from the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits that you or your child are entitled to receive.

## Appendix E: (Continued)

### Questions and Contacts

- If you have any questions about this research study, contact Mildred Falcón-Huertas at (787)459-5532.
- If you have questions about your child's rights as a person taking part in a research study, you may contact the Division of Research Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-9343.

### Consent for Child to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my permission to let my child take part in this study. I understand that this is research. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent  
of child taking part in study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person  
obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of person  
obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent:

I certify that participants have been provided with an informed consent form that has been approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board and that explains the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study. I further certify that a phone number has been provided in the event of additional questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person  
obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of person  
obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F: Spanish Version of IRB-approved Parental Informed Consent

103975

10-12-2005

10-11-2006

### Permiso de Padres o Encargados

Ciencias Sociales y de la Conducta  
Universidad de South Florida

#### Información para los padres a los que se les solicita permiso para que su niño(a) tome parte en un estudio de investigación

La siguiente información se le presenta para ayudarle a decidir si usted desea o no que su niño(a) tome parte de un estudio de investigación. Por favor, lea este documento cuidadosamente. De no comprender algo, pregúntele a la persona encargada del estudio o a la persona que está solicitando su consentimiento.

**Título del estudio de investigación:** Las creencias de alfabetización de los maestros y las concepciones de sus estudiantes sobre la lectura y la escritura

**Persona a cargo del estudio:** Mildred Falcón-Huertas

**Dónde se llevará a cabo el estudio:** Escuelas públicas primarias de distritos de Bayamón

#### Información General sobre el Estudio de Investigación

El propósito de este estudio de investigación es examinar y describir las creencias de alfabetización que poseen los maestros de primer grado y su relación con las concepciones que poseen sus estudiantes sobre los procesos de lectura y escritura.

A su niño(a) se le ha solicitado participar porque estamos interesados en las ideas que tienen los niños de primer grado sobre los procesos de lectura y escritura y cómo éstos se relacionan con las creencias de alfabetización que poseen sus maestros.

#### Plan del Estudio

A su niño(a) se le solicitará participar voluntariamente en este estudio. El salón de clases de su niño(a) se observará con el fin de obtener información relacionada con la instrucción de la lectura y la escritura. Sin embargo, los niños no serán observados. Estas observaciones enfocarán en los maestros y el proceso de enseñanza. La participación de su niño(a) consistirá en reunirse con un entrevistador, que visitará su salón de clases, para contestar varias preguntas relacionadas con sus ideas y opiniones respecto a la lectura y la escritura. La cantidad total de tiempo para contestar estas preguntas es aproximadamente 15 minutos.

## Appendix F: (Continued)

### **Pago por Participación**

A usted o su niño(a) no se le pagará por participar en este estudio.

### **Beneficios potenciales de Tomar Parte en este Estudio de Investigación**

Su niño(a) no se beneficiará directamente de su participación en este estudio. Sin embargo, al tomar parte en este estudio, su niño(a) nos ayudará a aumentar nuestro conocimiento general sobre el pensamiento de los niños en torno a los procesos de lectura y escritura.

### **Riesgos de Tomar Parte en este Estudio de Investigación**

El nivel estimado de riesgo por participar en este estudio es mínimo. Su niño(a) podría sentir cierto nerviosismo o ansiedad relacionado con una situación (la entrevista) o persona (el entrevistador) poco familiar para ellos. El investigador tratará de ayudar a su niño a sentirse lo más cómodo posible durante la entrevista. Sin embargo, en el caso de nerviosismo o ansiedad intensa, el investigador detendrá la entrevista y le ofrecerá a su niño(a) la oportunidad de retirarse de la entrevista y del estudio.

### **Confidencialidad de los Datos de su Niño(a)**

La información relacionada con su niño(a) se mantendrá de forma privada y confidencial.

Sin embargo, ciertas personas podrían necesitar ver la información de su niño. Por ley, cualquier persona que examine los datos de su niño tiene que mantener esta información confidencial. Las únicas personas a las que se les permitirá ver estos datos son

- El personal de investigación
- Personas que se aseguran de que estemos llevando a cabo el estudio en la manera correcta. Estos se asegurarán también de que protegeremos los derechos y seguridad de su niño(a):
  - A. USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) y su personal
  - B. Otros pueden incluir:
    - People at USF who oversee research;
    - Florida Department of Health; y
    - United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

Los resultados de este estudio pueden ser publicados. Sin embargo, los datos obtenidos de su niño(a) serán combinados con datos de otros niños en la publicación. Los resultados publicados no incluirán el nombre de su niño o cualquier otra información que pudiera identificarlo personalmente de alguna forma.

A su niño(a) se le asignará un código o nombre sustituto, de modo que se asegure su confidencialidad individual. Los datos de su niño(a) se mantendrán guardados de manera segura en archivos cerrados y sólo el personal de investigación tendrá acceso a los datos de su niño(a).

## Appendix F: (Continued)

### Participación Voluntaria en este Estudio de Investigación

Su decisión de permitir a su niño(a) participar en esta investigación tiene que ser completamente voluntaria. Usted es libre de permitir a su niño participar en este estudio o retirar su participación en cualquier momento. Su decisión de permitir a su niño(a) participar en este estudio (o no participar en este estudio) no afectará de ninguna manera su estatus en la escuela. Si usted decide no permitir la participación de su niño o retirarlo del estudio, no habrá penalidad alguna.

### Preguntas y Contactos

- Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio, puede comunicarse con Mildred Falcón-Huertas al (787)459-5532.
- Si usted tiene preguntas sobre los derechos de su niño, como una persona que participa en una investigación, puede comunicarse a Division of Research Compliance de la Universidad de South Florida al (813) 974-9343.

### Consentimiento para que un Niño Tome Parte en un Estudio de Investigación

**Yo, libremente otorgo mi permiso para permitir a mi niño tomar parte en este estudio. Yo entiendo que se trata de una investigación. Yo he recibido una copia de esta forma de consentimiento.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Padre del niño tomando  
parte en el estudio

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre Impreso del Padre

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de persona  
obteniendo consentimiento

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre Impreso de persona  
obteniendo consentimiento

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

### Declaración de Persona que Obtiene el Consentimiento:

Yo certifico que a los participantes se les ha provisto de una forma de consentimiento informado que ha sido aprobado por el Institutional Review Board de la Universidad de South Florida y que explica la naturaleza, demandas, riesgos y beneficios asociados a la participación en este estudio. Yo certifico que se ha provisto un número telefónico en la eventualidad de preguntas adicionales.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma de la persona  
obteniendo consentimiento

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre Impreso de la persona  
obteniendo consentimiento

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha



### About the Author

Mildred Falcón-Huertas received a Bachelor's Degree in Preschool and Elementary Education in 1991 and a M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education in 1996 from the University of Puerto Rico. She worked, as an early childhood teacher, for the Department of Education of Puerto Rico and since 1996 she has been a faculty member of the University of Puerto Rico, Bayamón Campus. In 2001, she moved to Tampa, Florida in order to pursue a doctoral degree. After finishing her doctoral coursework, she returned to Puerto Rico where she continues teaching.







