

The Qualities of Effective Literacy Teachers: The Dynamics of Effective Teachers' Beliefs, Their Practices and Students' Responses

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Abstract

This study explores effective literacy teachers' beliefs, practices and students' responses in a reading program based on children's literature. Demanding and challenging classroom contexts in this century create a demand for effective teachers to meet the needs of students. This study illuminates the qualities of effective literacy teachers exploring what effective teachers believe about reading and teaching reading, how they reflect and implement their beliefs in their instruction and what impact their beliefs and practices make on students in their life long reading habits. Three effective teachers were the participants of this study. Data was collected through observations of teachers and students, interviews with teachers, teachers' responses to questionnaires, and videotaping of instructional practices. These effective teachers provided literacy instruction within varied contexts. Analysis of the data indicates that they share common qualities that might help teacher education programs to select more effective literacy programs and practices to include in their curriculum.

Keywords: effective teaching, effective teachers, beliefs and practices, reading, literacy

1. Introduction

Teacher quality has become the most important focus of our attention in education today (Goodlad, 1990; Blair et al., 2007). We need effective and high quality teachers for successful education as Pacheco (2000) says "Better teachers lead to better schools and better schools lead to better children" (8).

To be able to identify the qualities of effective teachers and their instruction, we need to understand teachers' behaviors in the classroom. Furthermore, we need to examine what teachers believe, and what content and pedagogical knowledge and attitudes they hold, and what instructional practices they use and how all affect students' learning outcomes (Pajares, 1992; Wayne and Youngs, 2003).

Many studies have been conducted examining the characteristics of effective teachers as well as the impact of teacher characteristics and practices on student success (Wray et al. 2000; Graves et al., 2004). One curriculum area that draws increasing attention is how we develop our children as readers (Copeland, 2011). Although teaching reading has been investigated focusing on what strategies work for the best results in the classroom, debate still continues about the best approaches to literacy teaching (Cantrell, 1999; Pressley et al., 2001; Blair, 2007). This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on effective teaching and reading instruction. It will present dynamic relationships of teachers' beliefs, their behavior and instructional practices as well as students' responses and behaviors in the literature based reading programs.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Teachers' Beliefs and their Instructional Practices

It is important to delve into beliefs, knowledge, behaviors and attitudes of teachers because they influence teachers' decision making and their instructional practices (Harste & Burke, 1977; Deford, 1985; Ashton and Web, 1986; Pajares, 1992; Fang, 1996; Soto, 2002; Donaghue, 2003; Wayne and Youngs, 2003; Yoon, 2005 and Scharlach, 2008; Barnyak & Paquette, 2010). Coherent relationships between beliefs and what practices are implemented in the classroom lead to successful and effective learning. The beliefs about teaching and learning that a teacher holds is one important aspect of effective teaching. There is some research on teachers' beliefs to see if their beliefs have positive effects on successful instructional practices; however, the link is still too weak to provide the nature of this relationship (Wray et al., 2002). Wray et al. (2002) specifically focused on this linkage and they found that coherent set of beliefs are in fact important to guide good selection of teaching practices that allow meaningful learning. Recent research (Shinde & Karekatti, 2012) confirms that beliefs on quality instruction affect the curriculum the teachers use, and effective teachers promote more meaningful educational experiences.

It seems more evident when whole language and phonics teaching are well coordinated and integrated. Effective reading teachers highly rate this collaboration and the importance of balanced theoretical orientation (Bingham and Kenyon, 2013).

Literature shows us dominant emerging elements that contribute to effective teaching. Teachers' knowledge, for example, is influential in guiding instructional practice. Content knowledge in reading is the most complex, as it includes various components such as literacy strategies, skills, phonemic awareness, phonics, print, comprehension, materials, and children's literature (Wray et al., 2002). Researchers have always been interested in the relationship between content knowledge and effective teaching. For example, Piasta et al. (2009) examined teachers' knowledge in reading, classroom practices and students' reading growth. Their results show that more knowledgeable teachers spend their explicit instruction more effectively and as a result, students gain a variety of reading skills. Another aspect that is very important for effective teaching is the knowledge of children's literature. Cunningham et al. (2004) used survey to see how much teachers know about popular children's books. Surprisingly, ninety percent of teachers were not familiar with the most common and popular children's books. In order to promote students' success and lifelong reading, effective teachers not only need to have the knowledge but also pedagogical skills to put all that knowledge into practice (Poulson et al., 2001; Darling-Hammond and Youngs, 2002; Rautzel and Clark, 2011).

Attention is naturally focused on pedagogical skills; what effective teachers do in the classroom, what behaviors they show, and what methods, approaches, and materials they use in the classroom. Pressley et al. (1997, 2001) conducted studies to understand what qualities make these teachers effective. Apart from skillfully combining the whole language approach with explicit teaching and infusion of children's literature, they found that the strengths of effective teachers are classroom management skills, positive outlook and encouragement for the students. Research shows that respecting children's voices will support students in their ownership of learning (Yoo, 2005; Flynn, 2007). In the supportive environment of effective teachers, students will be more motivated to engage in learning and become involved with instructional tasks (Blair, 2007).

Scaffolding is a prominent term associated with effective teachers.

When comparing effective teachers with others who are not identified as effective, Wray et al. (2000) found out that effective teachers scaffold through "modeling, demonstration, explanations and exemplifications" (p. 83) and use a wide range of literacy activities. Successful teaching practices through various approaches and materials will lead to children's improved literacy outcomes (Louden et al., 2005; Scott et al., 2009).

2.2 The Role of Children's Literature and Reading Instruction

Over the years, the use of literature has become the cornerstone of reading instruction in many elementary classrooms (Serafini, 2011).

Many researchers, educators and parents believe that children's literature plays an important role in children's reading and offers many benefits to children in their literacy learning (Clay, 1991; Daoke, 1995; Galda, Cullinan & Strickland, 1993; Holdaway, 1979, Short, 1999; Kiefer, 2010). Children's literature provides lifelong motivation for reading. "Being able to read literature is one basic reason for becoming literate and for making reading a lifelong habit." (Galda & Cullinan, 1991, p. 534). Given the powerful contribution of children's literature to reading instruction, it has made sense to educators to design reading instruction to take maximum advantage of this great resource. Literature-based instruction has gained attention with the influence of whole language philosophy. Prior to that, for many years, basal reading programs dominated the classroom.

Many schools made a transition from basal reading to literature-based or literature driven programs (Cullinan, 1992; Goodman, 1992; Ruddell, 1992; Lehman and Sorensen, 1995; Short, 1999; Gipe and Richards, 1999). The growth of literature-based curriculum arises from successful instructional practices that place children's literature as a core element and from positive responses of children toward children's literature (Kiefer, 2010).

Reading teachers and reading programs have two goals to accomplish: one is to teach reading skills and the other is to promote a love of reading and lifelong learning (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Kiefer, 2010). Children's literature accommodates and enhances reading through students' interactions, explorations and connections with the books. Children search for meaning and seek out joy in books because of their nature and curiosity. Effective teachers provide opportunities for children to enjoy reading, appreciate books and the craft of good literature.

Through well-selected children's books, effective read-aloud, engaging activities, and purposeful and well-planned lessons, teachers will open the door to growth, not only in reading skills and but most importantly, in lifelong reading and learning. It is of utmost important that teachers need to have extensive knowledge of children's literature and effective skills to make learning natural for children and support children's growth in reading. Burgess, Sergent and Hill (2005) find in their recent research that teachers with extensive knowledge of children's literature tend to use best practices. McKool and Gespass (2009) discuss in their research that teachers who value reading and who read for pleasure use a greater number of best practices, connect with students through their personal reading, and motivate them effectively in developing their reading habits.

Teaching reading involves skills and knowledge of decoding and comprehension, but instilling life-long habits of reading is the most salient and more challenging part of teaching reading in the 21st century. Students' attitudes, interests, motivation and eagerness (Cremin et al., 2008) need to promote life-long reading habits. It is worth investigating how literature comes alive and functional in an integrated approach where teachers expand the role of literature and invest in lifelong learning, creativity and "reading to learn" (Short 1999), instead of learning to read.

3. The Present Study

This study will contribute to the literature, as it explores not only the beliefs of effective teachers but also their behaviors and instructional practices, the link between them, as well as students' responses toward reading and their gains in growing as life-long readers. The research questions in this study are presented below:

What are the qualities of effective literacy teachers using literature-based programs?

- (a) What is the knowledge and belief structure underlying the practice of effective teachers who teach through literature?
- (b) What are the characteristics of instruction in the classrooms of effective teachers? How do teachers' instructional behaviors as well as their instructional practices support reading instruction and lifelong-reading?
- (c) What are the relationships between teachers' knowledge and beliefs about reading instruction and their classroom practice?
- (d) What responses do students provide that shows their learning and attitudes toward reading in the process of becoming lifelong readers?

4. Methodology

Descriptive case studies were employed to provide in-depth information to explore effective teachers' beliefs, their instructional practices, student responses as well as the interrelationships among them.

4.1 The Research sites and Participants

The nature of the research questions demanded research sites with specific qualifications such as literature-based reading programs where it is possible to observe teachers' reading instruction that utilizes children's literature. Schools that have a literature-based reading curriculum were determined based on the information gathered from the district, observation of sites, and discussion with schools' principals about potential teachers to choose for this research. Based on information obtained by all these means, three effective reading teachers were chosen from three different schools with literature based reading programs. Reading teachers in this study were defined as effective teachers who successfully utilize children's literature in their reading programs and thus provide the environment that supports children in their journey to become interested and motivated lifelong readers. (Zarillo, 1986; Shannon, 1995). For the purposes of this study, an effective reading teacher was identified through the following means: 1) the teacher's teaching experience in reading instruction through children's literature, 2) overall quality of student reading and writing exhibited in the classroom, 3) test results of children's reading skill, 4) guidance of the principal of the school, 5) guidance of the reading specialist in the school (Zarillo, 1986), 6) years of experience in teaching reading through children's literature, 7) experience and knowledge of children's literature, 8) positive behaviors and attitudes of students toward children's literature and reading.

4.1.1 Cases: Effective Teachers

Tina: Tina (pseudonym), 33 years old, had been teaching in elementary schools for twelve years, eight of which were in first grade or multi-age (combination of first and second grades) classrooms. She had taught one year in reading intervention, one year in pre-school and two years in kindergarten.

She graduated from a mid-western university and received her degree in Education. She was enrolled in a special teacher education program, which promotes a language-based, integrated way of teaching with a strong foundation of teaching with a strong foundation in children's literature. Prospective teachers were expected to demonstrate knowledge of children's learning processes and language and literacy acquisition as well as how to design classroom programs with strong content, integrated with literacy instruction, and maximum opportunities of students to talk, read, and write. She started working as an elementary school teacher. She decided to pursue a Masters of Art degree at a university program specializing in children's literature.

Joana: Joana, (pseudonym) 34 years old, had been teaching in elementary schools for eleven years. She taught to learning disabled (LD) children, K-6, for two years. She had taught in first and multi-group (first & second grades) for the last four years. She had been teaching in this school for the past nine years. Joana graduated from a mid-western college and received her degree in Elementary Education.

She also received a Master of Arts degree in children's literature program. Joana had attended conferences and workshops throughout her career as a teacher and researcher.

Patricia: Patricia (pseudonym), 51 years-old graduated from a mid-western university and received her degree in Elementary Education. She is continuing toward her Ph.D degree in a midwest university. She had been teaching Elementary school students for twenty-six years, working with first grade and multi-age group (first & second grades) for twelve years. She started teaching in an elementary school out of country. After returning to the United States, she started working in different elementary schools. She has been working in this school for the last thirteen years. She has been involved in workshops and projects in her school. She collaborated with teachers within her school as well as professors at the mid-western university where she had continued with her Ph.D. She was introduced to the concept of a literature-based program through workshops at the university and become a proponent of it and she has been actively teaching reading through children's literature since then.

Other participants were the students of these three teachers. I specifically chose 1st & 2nd graders to observe in order to see how transitional and beginning readers start shifting their attention to making sense of print and become active respondents, critical thinkers and at the same time how they experience their journey of becoming lifelong readers, show reading habits, interests and positive attitudes, and how children's literature helps in this process.

How do these promote reading habits, passion, motivation and interest in students reading books while teachers teach concepts of print, phonemic awareness and phonics. Most importantly, I wanted to explore how these teachers develop students' reading habits and positive attitude toward reading and children's books. How much progress children make with the help of children's literature can more easily be observed among young children because their behaviors are more overt and they are rapidly taking on new concepts.

4.2 Data Collection

The design of the research emerged from "the conceptual framework and research questions" (Merriam (1998, 2007, p. 136). Table 1 below provides an overview of the data design.

Table 1: Overview of Data Analysis

Conceptual framework: Social constructivism
Literacy development: Reading development
Reading instruction
Reading strategies
Methods Multiple Case Study
Site Three elementary schools with literature based programs
One first/second-grade classroom from each school
Data Sources Observations (total of 69)
Interviews (total of 25)
Videotaped observations (38 out of 69)
Videotaped observation interviews (12 out of 21)
Questionnaire (1 for each teacher)
Documents (lesson plans; follow-up activities; documents about teacher practice and anecdotal notes of students' behaviors and related students' work)

Data is drawn from classroom observations, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, videotapes, interviews of videotaped sessions with teachers and documents.

During observations, I tried to choose a wide variety of instructional activities in order to see these effective teachers' practices in different contexts such as interactive read aloud, guided reading, independent reading, book discussions, small group activities and games.

I also used semi-structured interviewing, which includes both pre-established questions and informal, open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview in this study provided “codable data to explain behavior within pre-established categories” and also provided understanding of “the complex behavior without prior categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366). I asked previously established questions (twenty seven questions in different question forms such as Likert type and multiple choice, adapted from Lehman, Freeman and Allen, 1994) to obtain information about teachers’ beliefs and perspectives on their instructional practices and how they see students as learners and readers. Selected observations of different instructional practices were recorded with the video camera. Instructional practices in this study are defined as methods, activities and tools that teachers use in the classroom for their teaching-learning purposes (Zarillo, 1989).

Individual videotaped session interviews using open-ended questions were conducted to obtain information specifically about these effective teachers’ instructional practices. Interviews of videotaped observations were held with each teacher in the school setting or in the home.

The interview questions were open-ended and emerged from the interview itself based on the instructional practice. The interview was designed to reveal 1) the reason for the choice of children’s literature, 2) the reason for the choice of the instructional practice, 3) the approach to coaching children, 4) the choice of instruction during the activity, 5) the approaches to meet the differing needs of specific children, 6) the choice of teaching strategies for students, 7) how students were nurtured in the development of reading process and in their attitudes and responses toward children’s literature. These questions enabled these effective teachers to present their thinking before, during and after teaching.

Decisions on videotaping and interviewing about videotaped sessions helped to capture the dynamics of: 1) what the teachers did, 2) why they performed as they did; and, 3) their detailed insights about their beliefs and instructional activities. Observing how children reacted and responded on the tape also provided insights as to children’s responses to teachers’ practices, children’s literature and literature-based activities and how they lead students to engaged and active reading in other contexts in the accumulation of their experience.

Lesson plans, instructional activities, field notes, and worksheets were gathered as documents. Observational notes on students’ attitudes, preferences, engagements and their work were useful to see how they moved toward becoming motivated and engaged readers.

4.3 Data Analysis

Analysis starts in collecting and documenting data, reading them, having insights, rereading, and revolving in and around the data. Coding allows analyzing the data to “look for patterns, make comparisons and produce explanations and build models” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 78). Different categories, subcategories and codes emerged inductively from through close analysis (Merriam, 1998). To be able to make sense of the data, among various types of qualitative analysis software programs applications, NUD*IST-Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing software program was chosen to provide coding and to facilitate the data analysis with this program’s code and retrieve system (Richards, 2005).

5. Results

5.1 Teachers’ Beliefs

Evidence from data presents that these effective literacy teachers have solid, well-grounded and strong beliefs that are linked to their instructional practices as well as students’ positive attitudes, reading habits and their responses. All three teachers value children’s literature because from literature children learn: a love of reading, development of a story, an understanding and sense of culture, skills in decoding words, nourishment for creativity, expansion of world knowledge, opportunity for meaning making, stimulus for critical thinking, experiences in social interaction, enjoyment, exposure to rich language, and knowledge of various genres. They are advocates of using children’s literature as the basis of a reading program.

Tina stated that “children’s literature is a natural and powerful step to move in to adult literature, which helps them become life-long readers and learners.” Joana mentioned that “students are much more engaged in books that are exciting, that they are interested in, which makes learning more natural and teaching easier.” Patricia believes that children’s literature is the best teaching material, which students can relate to, internalize, socialize and construct meaning.

They agree and believe that the children benefit from the inclusion of children’s literature in reading instruction as long as the selections are well-thought-out and go across genres and curriculum. The teachers in this study arrived at an understanding of the value of children’s literature in similar ways.

Being exposed to children’s books as children and seeing their value was the origin of their advocacy for children’s literature. They learned from their experiences with books as children and as teachers, through their collaboration with colleagues, academic work, and most importantly witnessing of their students’ growth as readers.

Reading occurs in meaningful contexts through social interaction and active communication. They share the same opinion that in order to succeed in creating a communicative and effective environment, all teachers plan and design their classrooms to allow constructive teaching and learning to happen through easy access, providing various genres of children’s literature in students’ learning and for their instructional practices.

Oral language development is a very important process for all three teachers. Since they all believe that language is functional and purposeful, they try to foster oral language development through functional and purposeful activities in the classroom and by providing social interaction. For these teachers, “play with language” facilitates oral language development. They actively work to help students engage with language, play with language and use language.

Teachers also talked about theorists such as Vygotsky and Piaget in the interview, including how much their philosophies and beliefs helped them to implement instructional practices in the light of these theories. They discuss how children learn best referring to theories and theorists such as Vygotsky, Piaget, Rogoff and Dewey and how their practices are drawn from their theories. All the teachers are inclined to adopt Vygotsky’s ideas regarding moving students ahead by stepping in and stretching them in their learning.

Tina thoroughly talks about and emphasizes Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1978). She believes that both efferent and aesthetic reading occur during the reading of literature. It is important for all these teachers to take an aesthetic stance in their teaching for the process of students’ life-long reading habits.

In addition to findings above, all the teachers stated that their own development as teachers was based on the following sources: being exposed to children’s literature as children; experience during their teaching years; academic work (BA, MA, Ph.D, training programs and projects); conferences; workshops and projects; collaboration in the school or within the district; interaction with colleagues; professional books; reading a wide variety of children’s books; experience in teaching through children’s literature; access to academic environments such as a university; access to the professors; and collaboration in projects with professors.

In order to provide prominent emergent themes and common beliefs among these teachers, Table 2 below presents a summary of teachers’ beliefs that are drawn from data.

Table 2: A Summary of Teachers' beliefs

Teachers' Beliefs

Theoretical Area: Development of Reading Process

- Children learn to read through reading.
- Learning reading should be connected to child's life and real life.
- Real life experiences should be included in the teaching and learning.
- Quality books with good instruction support growth of the reading process.
- Reading process should occur through social interaction.
- Life-long reading habits should be emphasized.
- Students' engagement should be prioritized encouraged.
- Reading is complex process which involves many elements.
- Background knowledge is the bridge to constructing meaning from the new knowledge.
- Aesthetic and efferent experiences occur before, during and after reading.

Theoretical Area: Language Development

- Children grow in different ways and are always at different developmental levels.
- Language development occurs at different rates for each child.
- Reading teachers should have knowledge of language development as well as how children learn language.
- Oral language development is very important and should be promoted strongly.
- Play with language should be valued for its learning potentials.
- Language development occurs through interaction.
- Language development should be supported through various language art activities.

Teachers' beliefs (Cont-)

Theoretical Area: Children's Literature

- Children's literature plays an important role in learning to read, to construct meaning, to understand literary aspect, to enjoy writers' and illustrators' craft and to promote pleasure of reading as lifelong reading habit.
 - Quality literature should be foundational to teaching and be the primary components of a reading program.
 - Children should be exposed to wide variety of children's books from all genres and teachers should be knowledgeable to provide books in the class.
 - Art, illustrations and craft of the books should be emphasized and used for instructional and literacy purposes. Children should be encouraged to construct meaning from pictures and construct meaningful art from texts.
 - Children's literature is fun, authentic and engaging for children in reading and serves as an authentic vehicle for life-long learning.
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Theoretical Area: Children's Literature

- Phonics instruction should occur in mini lessons and be incorporated into literature based reading.
 - Reading instruction should be implemented in an interactive way within a social context.
 - An engaging classroom context is very important in reading instruction.
 - Helping children choose good quality book is crucial, and they learn to read outside of the classroom for their own learning and enjoyment.
 - Instruction should incorporate meaningful and purposeful reading.
 - Reading teachers should utilize all sources including quality children's books.
 - Hands-on teaching approach is essential in reading instruction.
 - Scaffolding through modeling, teachable moments, and different modes of reading such as read aloud, guided reading and engaging activities are natural parts of the reading instruction process.
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There are many similarities among these teachers regarding their beliefs but some differences also occurred. Across cases, Tina tends to prefer more theoretical books. She also explains that she likes reading books on observing students; that's why she likes, for example, Vivian Paley, who talks about how to be reflective on her teaching and how a teacher can learn from a child's responses.

Joana prefers reading more about how to teach balanced literacy. She explained that she prefers to see how teachers skillfully incorporate phonics teaching into a literature-based reading program. However, all teachers keep certain professional books to read and turn to for guidance.

Furthermore, as opposed to Joana and Patricia, Tina believes that students sometimes should be challenged through books that might be above their levels. She, however, cautions that how the teacher presents the material to the child and engages him with the challenging book is an important key.

She chooses materials that are appropriate for children's reading levels in guided reading; but, she tries to choose more varied and challenging books to read aloud and for one to one reading so that students would see they could handle sophisticated discussion. Joana and Patricia support the idea of providing students with appropriate level books or "just right books" so that they could read independently.

5.2 Teachers' Instructional Practices and Behaviors

All three teachers had a designated curriculum, driven by their districts. The district determined the content themes they were required to teach. They had the freedom to choose materials and use them for instruction. They all believe that lesson plans are important guides for their instruction. The amount of detail depends upon the book and the instructional practice. They write detailed lesson plans with pages to stop for discussion and questions to ask when reading a new book.

All these teachers' main and essential instructional material is children's books. They highly value children's literature and the important role children's literature brings to their classroom practices. Evidence from interviews and observations indicates that teachers choose children's books according to 1) the purpose of the reading activity; 2) descriptive language; 3) rich language; 4) writing styles; 5) story development (plot); 6) high quality illustrations; 7) quality example of genre; 8) students' needs; and, 9) students' interests. Although they attend to curricular needs, their book choices are based mainly on the quality of literature, their teaching purpose and students' interests.

All teachers read aloud at least twice each day in their classes. Read aloud practice is top priority for all of them. Teachers use similar techniques in read aloud sessions, including brainstorming, questioning, eliciting, expressive reading, prediction, drama, role play, rewriting, retelling, constructing the story from the illustrations, constructing predictions, and making meaning and connections from texts through illustrations.

Table 3 below presents a brief outline of what common instructional practices these teachers use.

Table 3: Common Practices Teachers Share

Instructional practices	Teachers' Strategies	Student grouping
Read aloud	Mini Lessons	Groups based on reading level
Shared Reading	Discussion	Group based on interests
Guided Reading	Questioning	Group based on lesson purpose
Independent Reading	Activating prior knowledge	Group based on needs
Buddy Reading	Picture/text walk	Pair work
Book Talk	Clarifying	Team work
Conferencing	Observing	
Drama,	Response	
Puppetry	Sharing	
Games		
Visual art		

Table 4 below summarizes commonly observed and emerged themes as practices in their classes with sample evidence from the data.

Table 4: Commonly Observed Practices with Data Evidences

Teachers' selected shared practices
Classroom context (management, discourse, communication)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create classroom design that allows optimum function and best use of classroom. • Form rules and routines through children's literature to create community in the class. • Use positive, encouraging and inviting classroom discourse.
Teachers' selected shared practices

Table 4 (Cont-)

- Classroom context (management, discourse, communication)**
- Have great listening skills and encourage and nurture students' response effort using supportive language and positive feedback.
 - Create a nurturing environment in which every student is respected and each student's voice is heard.
 - See each student as an individual with her/his own unique needs.
 - Know each student very well cognitively and affectively such as where they are in their reading, writing levels, comprehension, their likes, dislikes, interests and attitudes toward school, learning and reading.
 - Provide clear expectations and purposes for their instruction.
 - Have skills and knowledge to select quality books, plan a wide range of activities that are meaningful, fun interesting and tailored according to students' needs.
 - Prioritize engagement and pleasure in choosing books, and creating lessons.

Evidence from the data

- My classroom's physical arrangement reflects my personal understanding of the teaching and learning I want to happen in the classroom. My arrangement should provide efficient implementation of instructional practices, meet students' needs, interest and create an accessible environment both for me and my students. I actually walk around and try how it feels to be in this setting and how efficient it feels (Tina, interview note).
- In the first week Joana introduced the classroom library and talked about the way it was organized and what types of books are available. Then she asked them to think about what books they want to see in this library. She said she wanted to make sure their interest and preferences are acknowledged and appreciated (Observation and interview notes).
- I love the book *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni and I always read it at the beginning of the year. It serves the purpose of building community. I spend a lot of time reading books that will bring the class together and make them feel as one. Kindness and caring are very important in my class (Patricia, Interview).
- Tina held one of the books from the pile of books she brought from the library and gave it to Linda (pseudonym) and said, "I thought of you when I saw this book and thought that you might be interested in. I know that you like horses" (Tina, Field note, Book Talk).
- If I share my personal life, they would share their stories too. It is a good way to make a conversation. I want them to know me. I want them to trust me.
I want them to be comfortable with me. This is very important to engage students into conversations (Interview, Patricia).

Teachers' selected shared practices**Table 4 (Cont-)****Children's Literature**

- Expose students to quality children's books and teach author's style, plot, perspective and other elements such as illustration and art.
- Share about their favorite books, authors and responses enthusiastically. Show excitement when introducing new books for the unit they start.
- Use class, school and public library to bring books from different genres and to exhibit and use them for different reading modes.
- Choosing a quality book is crucial for them. Therefore they look at the purpose of their instruction, what students will take away from it, students' interest, curriculum needs, unit relations, their reading levels, and the topics/themes in the books.
- Create a link from literacy to other aspects of the curriculum (across curriculum).

Evidence from data

- When I go to the library I have a lot of different things in my mind. I am looking for a good 30 high quality mixed fiction non-fiction that are based around theme and content area of study and of course interest of students. (Interview, Tina)
- Children's literature is a must. I don't know how I would do without children's books in the class. Quality books get to the heart of the children. I always share my favorites because I want them to see how much I enjoy books. This is the way I try to reach my kids to have motivation for books (Joana, Interview).
- Children should know some specific authors. They need to know how authors create their books, what styles they use and how these authors introduce themselves to children. For example, Leo Lionni, Eric Carle, Tana Hoban, Patricia Polacco, Pat Hutchins, Eric Hill and Mark Brown are all great authors that students shouldn't miss (Interview, Patricia).

Teachers' selected shared practices**Table 4 (Cont-)****Reading Instruction (Instructional practices and teacher behaviors)**

- Engage students in activities and tasks through effective discussions, higher order thinking and communication, questioning, and innovative approaches such as drama and various modes of reading, especially interactive read aloud.
- Plan the read aloud in detail especially if the book is being used for the first time by the teacher.
- Set aside time and space and plan and promote independent and sustained silent reading exposing students to various books in different genres.
- Provide scaffolding extensively depending on what students need. Modeling is the teachers' strongest asset.
- Skillfully combine explicit teaching and literature based approach with contextual, authentic, meaningful, engaging and real-life purpose related activities. Instruction is embedded in real reading activities.
- Provide different types of instructional grouping depending on needs, interests, and content.
- Model and share the love and the passion of reading through book talk.
- Provide constructive support and enough praise to motivate students them to move forward. Teachers are attentive to their pace and support students in every

Evidence from data

- For 4-5 years, I have been stretching myself in drama, and thinking about how children use literacy through drama – so I read a lot of Dorothy Heatcote and Brian Edminston. I can use drama to take the literacy even further for some meaning and purpose (Tina, interview notes).
- After the teacher read *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins (1986) she put them into groups and provided them papers and materials that she prepared before. Groups used art materials to recreate the story changing the setting. All students were on task and engaged. They kept their work for school exhibition (Joana, field observation notes).
- The teacher brought a soccer ball and let students touch and talk about it. She said they were asking about soccer yesterday so she brought a book about soccer as a read aloud. Before she started her read aloud she showed them a video clip on playing soccer. Then students paired up and discussed about the rules and what they know about it. She set the purpose for listening and continued with reading (Patricia, read loud observation note).

Teachers' selected shared practices**Table 4 (Cont-)****Assessment**

- Strong in assessing and using an array of assessment tools and are able to analyze, and understand the data gathered from multiple assessment tools, which teachers extensively use to design their future lessons.
- Monitor students' progress and needs through keeping detailed records and assess students' needs through various informal assessment tools and teach and reteach until they reach every student in the class. Make decisions on what and how to teach next considering each student's needs.

Evidence from data

- My strongest assessment tool is observing/watching my students constantly. I pay attention to each student and keep records of my observations. I even observe them in their independent reading. I want to know who they are as independent readers and what they prefer to do with it. I let them share with me. In my book talk I want them to think about the books when I introduce them and then I put the books out and listen to what they are saying about the books. Sometimes I go from there when I plan my read aloud. (Tina, video interview notes) Children's literature is a must. I don't know how I would do without children's books in the class.

Quality books get to the heart of the children. I always share my favorites because I want them to see how much I enjoy books. This is the way I try to reach my kids to have motivation for books (Joana, Interview).

- I want to know what they can do visually. I want to know their creativity along with it, the imaginary response, what is going on, how they interacting with the text, how they are interacting with each other while they are interacting with the text(Interview, Tina).
- The whole year I can see my students' behaviors. At the beginning it is a challenge not all the students are open to help you know them better. I have very quiet students too. But, after a while you learn to read the behaviors as well. Now, I can tell every student of mine about from his or her progress to his or her interests and needs (Joana, Interview note).
- I evaluate their reading with various means. I look at the quality of work they create, their motivational levels at work, also their responses during sessions (Patricia, Interview).

There are also some differences in how these teachers use their practices. Joana prefers creating extension activities after read aloud, shared and independent reading. However, Tina believes in using children's literature for the sake of exposing children to good quality books, and she rarely plans extension activities for the books and instructional practices. She does not approve of tearing a good children's literature book apart for specific content or instructional activities after every read aloud or other modes of reading. Instead, she lets children develop what they need or want to do on their own, simply responding to books in various ways. She provides options for the ways students would like to respond. This can be drama, journal writing or creative work. Of all these teachers, Tina spends a longer amount of time in pre-reading discussions and in story reading. She talks about the cover pages, front pages and end pages. She draws students' attention to specific points and creates discussions among students. Patricia and Joana spend more time on questioning in their discussion.

Drama, role-play and art are used in Tina's practice more than in those of Joana and Patricia. Tina prepares fewer extension activities after she reads aloud. She strongly uses discussions and group oral activities to respond to literature. Both Joana and Patricia use teacher-made extension activities almost after all their read aloud practice with students. Tina lets students decide what to write and what to illustrate- basically what activity they would like to connect to the read aloud sessions. Her effective classroom management becomes beneficial and allows her to offer choices to students as she models well and monitors students regarding what work they choose to be engaged in.

5.3 Impact of Tina's Divergent Beliefs and Practices on Students' Reading

Tina's deeper knowledge of theory and her divergent instructional practices and behaviors have a different impact on students in the classroom from the two other teachers. Tina talks more about setting future goals for her students, not only as readers but good citizens. Her future expectations for her students may come from her clear and well- stated goals. Her students seem to naturally get into discussion that is deeper and they have more to say. They choose more challenging books especially when they do buddy reading. Students seem to set higher expectations for themselves. They seem to create ideas easily as to what they want to work on for the day. They bring books to share and suggest books to their peers that they have read.

When observing their comments and discussion, their responses are more detailed and go deeper than literal interpretations of text. I observed that this may come from Tina's effective modeling of these reading and responding behaviors. Moreover these students are more social and can think out of the box. In brief, as opposed to other teachers Tina has clear goal setting, giving students greater autonomy in choosing books and activities, as well as providing more challenging texts, setting higher expectations for students, and providing greater opportunities for students to engage in accountable talk, rich discussion, and questioning.

5.4 Students' Responses

The emerging themes in the findings show that students' positive responses, attitudes and reading habits are linked to teachers' beliefs, behaviors and their instructional practices in the classroom. Certain criteria emerged as having the strongest effect on students' positive reading journey: 1) teachers' positive attitude, passion, enthusiasm about books and reading, 2) knowledge of various genres, 3) knowledge of personal taste and reading level of each student, 4) classroom discourse, 5) book talk, and 6) use of read aloud and independent reading. Students' behaviors and response to children's literature and literature based activities were observed and similar behaviors in the classrooms of these three teachers were recorded. In all three classrooms students responded to instructional activities and children's books in the following ways: 1) drawing the teacher's attention to specific points in the book, 2) showing interest by getting closer to the book to see, 3) sharing their experiences related to the story, 4) talking about characters and story lines in the book, 5) listening to read aloud and answering questions from students or the teacher 6) asking further questions to understand, clarify or confirm what they are getting from the books, 7) participating in rhyming, or reading with the teacher, 8) bringing ideas for books to the instructional activities, 9) engaging in constructing texts from illustrations and constructing illustrations from text, 10) talking about books, characters, and stories, 11) engaging with the content, 12) being willing to read independently in and outside of the classroom, 13) sharing what they had read with their peers, 14) modeling and imitating teacher reading, 15) reading with other students, 16) engaging in writing stories, 17) engaging in extension activities such as games, drama, role play, and, 18) showing enthusiasm for books, book choice and activities.

All three teachers indicated that students' interest in books and instructional activities vary by individual. Some students were more comfortable with one-to-one work and some students were more active and showed more positive attitudes in read aloud. The extent to which they engaged in and responded positively to books and activities depended on their comfort levels with activities and their interest in the books. Some books were more motivating than other books.

6. Discussion

This study reveals the complexity of teachers' (Block et al., 2002) decision making, which is a multidimensional process where thinking, reasoning, analysis and synthesis take place. Throughout each day, these effective teachers make decisions based on their strong belief systems. In addition, they are equipped with deep content and theoretical knowledge, comprehensive and positive beliefs and attitudes about reading and reading instruction, a vast repertoire of best practices, excellent management skills, along with passion, interest and care and motivation in students' reading.

The results of this study show that these teachers have qualities, skills, understanding, dispositions, abilities and traits that label them as effective teachers.

This study also points out how important it is to have extensive knowledge of reading instruction, to know what theory supports best practices, as well as to have skills regarding how to turn beliefs and theories into effective practice.

The strongest trait these teachers share in this study is the ability to be reflective. The belief they hold that they are life-long learners motivates them to learn and to reflect on their teaching and learning. In other words, they examine what they think, believe and do in the classroom. Furthermore, they not only focus on what they know, but also give much thought to how they can improve themselves so that they fulfill their expectations in teaching. They all believe in children and see the best in them. Believing in children shaped these teachers' attitudes positively in the classrooms and contributed to the students' lifelong reading process. The teachers have the ability to create an effective teaching and learning environment for each child in the classroom.

Most importantly, by providing students with rich experiences, they attempt to create a love of reading as well as to teach strategies in the hope that children will become life-long readers and learners. In short, they view themselves as learners and are models and help their children become life-long learners as well.

It has been obvious to see that effective literacy teachers in this study have a common vision and mission where they believe their students are life-long learners and they invest their instruction for long-term expectations and literacy achievement. They believe and see learning as a constructive process where they take the role of preparing their students for life, helping their students recognize the value of learning, fostering critical thinking, and supporting them in finding enjoyment through reading and learning.

Children's literature plays a major role in these effective teachers' instruction. These teachers are passionate about children's books, believe in the positive impact of children's literature on students' lifelong literacy learning, and have the knowledge and repertoire of what outstanding literature they can bring into the class and use to benefit students during literacy teaching and learning. Their beliefs about the power of children's literature in reading development were confirmed by the rich variety of children's books in varied genres that they provided in classrooms. Teachers reported that they would not simply fill the shelves with children's books and place them around for children to read but would scaffold, model, share, cherish books and foster students' learning and interest in reading through the use of children's books in their instruction.

7. Educational Implications

The results of this study lead to the important question: how do we, as teacher educators, nurture the kinds of dispositions and abilities that these teachers demonstrated? In order to seek a response, it is helpful to look at the professional experiences these teachers have in common, for, even though as teacher educators we cannot control personal factors, we can provide professional experiences to nurture the abilities and habits of mind and heart that these teachers demonstrated. Some of the common experiences these teachers have are their relationships with an academic community such as a university, collaborations with professors and educators, involvement in research studies, and freedom in their material selections and teaching practices. Attention can be drawn to teacher education programs, as they hold an important place in raising effective teachers.

Although limited to three teachers and despite these teachers' instructional practices varying in some ways, the results of this study suggest that these common experiences can be considered as enlightening points and insights for teachers, educators and administrators in their design of professional development and teacher training projects.

This in-depth study intended to show not only what these effective reading teachers believe and how they practice but also their rationales for their instructional decisions. Findings in this study will enlighten teacher educators to seek for developing the kinds of experiences that should be provided to pre-service and in-service teachers.

This study confirms that beliefs influence instructional practices; therefore it is worth exploring teacher candidates' beliefs and providing various methods to expose them to different theories that will lead to effective instructional practices in reading instruction.

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