

**Exploring the Impact of a Substitute Teacher's Passion for Literacy and Her Literacy Beliefs**

by

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## **Abstract**

This self-study examines the literacy beliefs of a substitute teacher and the role that those beliefs play in her pedagogical choices. The study also seeks to identify the participant's passion for literacy and how that is present in her interactions with her students. Data were gathered using field notes, journal entries, and artifacts or pictures from the classrooms where this study took place. Using these data sources, a number of key themes were identified, including evidence of literacy beliefs in my teaching, teaching against my beliefs, context influencing my beliefs, and resources impacting my beliefs. Based on my findings and experiences documented in my journal entry, the overwhelming conclusion was that teachers must be flexible with implementing literacy beliefs into their pedagogical choices.

## Chapter One: Introduction

While substitute teaching one day, I announced to the class, “Take out your choice books and begin reading.” Immediately, “awes” broke out in unison from the students. Even though it may not have been every one of them it sure seemed like that when it was time to read. The students took their precious time, to put away what they were working on, put their pencils down and take out their choice books. About ten students had to get up and get their books from somewhere else. Another few said they had finished their books and needed to spend time looking for another. Once they realized they might as well face the inevitable, students moved about the room and attempted to find a spot where I wouldn’t hear them or see what they were doing. Then there were others who had their heads turned toward the window, staring and daydreaming, wishing they could have been doing anything else, but reading. I tried to keep the students focused, “Please be respectful and stay quiet.” Another five minutes went by and I said, “Five more minutes and then we’ll be done.” I stayed calm, and tried not to resort to this battle it felt like we have whenever it comes time to do a literacy activity.

As I watched what was unfolding I thought to myself how happy I would have been to have had time in my life just to read for pleasure. Why don’t these students appreciate literacy as much as I do and how can I get them to feel the same way? All too often in the classrooms where I was substitute teaching, it seemed that the students were unengaged and unmotivated when it came to reading. Motivation comes from within and is not done to a child (Lyons, 2003). Somehow I needed to find a way to get them to find interest and motivation in literacy like I do. This is when I looked at my own interactions with my students and wondered if I am doing enough to get them excited and invested in literacy. According to Gomez, 60% of teachers indicated they enjoy reading for pleasure; however their literacy diaries showed that reading

served more of a functional role in their lives (2009). However, out of these teachers, most had positive experiences with literacy and continued to feel confident that they had strong literacy skills (Gomez, 2009). Without a change sparked in elementary schools, the number of people who do not read for pleasure will only increase over time. This is why I wanted to get my students to immerse themselves in literacy activities for pleasure at a young age; it can make a lasting impression on them.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Literacy is a huge component of education. If students do not spend enough time reading and writing then they will struggle in other content areas as well. In order to be better readers and writers, students need practice. When students are not engaged with reading or writing then they will not be spending time doing it, thus no practice is occurring. Often times students are less motivated or engaged because they think they're not good at reading or writing. Also, what they are asked to do does not appeal to them. As a whole, students will be more engaged when they participate in authentic reading and writing activities (Tompkins, 2010). Overall, students who are motivated are also more successful. Therefore, it was necessary to find out what activities I promoted in my own classroom practice and if these supported student engagement and motivation. Were my students unengaged because of what I was asking them to participate in in class? If so, I needed to determine what I could do to change this.

Teachers' "literate identities"- their sense of self as literate people, their beliefs and knowledge in regard to literacy, and their values toward literacy in and out of the classroom are likely to shape how teachers create contexts for becoming literate and connecting to literacy in the classroom (Gomez, 2009). Literate identities will vary between teachers. For example, some teachers will believe that students should do more independent reading than any other kind. Other teachers will believe that their students may need to do more buddy reading. The

teachers' literate identities have developed from their background, including experiences at home and their education. Students will also develop their own literate identities based on their experiences and their teacher. For example, students who have developed a strong belief that literacy is important would most likely come from having a teacher who has the same identity.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my study was to investigate if I was putting into practice what my beliefs are revolving around literacy. Going along with that, I learned if I was really providing my students with what I think are the best teaching practices to do this. I determined if my passion for literacy is transferring to my students in regard to their own feelings about literacy.

As part of my study, the students with whom I worked benefited as a result of me putting into practice what I believe are the best practices for teaching literacy. I evaluated and re-evaluated what works and the areas that I could improve. Then, hopefully the students became more eager to learn, more excited about reading and writing and in the end, more successful. There have been many studies conducted that have found a connection between teachers' theoretical beliefs and their practices. From these studies, one common finding was that all teachers bring some level of beliefs into their classroom that influence critical decision making (Yergian & Krepps, 2010). Therefore, it was important for me to explore my personal literacy beliefs and to determine if and where they are coming into play in my instruction. Other literature acknowledges that teacher beliefs can affect classroom interaction and instruction. Many first year teachers describe themselves as student centered, however their practice actually shows a teacher-centered approach (Yergian & Krepps, 2010). These personal beliefs and values help to guide their teaching practices (Yergian & Krepps, 2010). My beliefs will actually

contribute to my teaching. Through this study, I intended to answer the following research questions:

How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my literacy pedagogical choices?

How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my interactions with students in the classroom in which I substitute teach?

### **Study Approach**

My self-study took place in the classrooms in which I substitute taught over a six-week period. Throughout that time, I collected my data by journaling, taking field notes and collecting artifacts.

My journal was used to write about the teachers' lesson plans that I implemented when I was in their classrooms. I wrote field notes in regard to what I did in each school, comparing and contrasting what I did differently depending on the environment or the grade where I was working. I reflected on the decisions I made with the instruction, including whether I had students work independently, with a partner or in groups. While transcribing field notes, I also collected selected artifacts from the school. These artifacts were a representation of the resources that were available to me for my instruction and how those affected my instruction, such as teachers' manuals, computer programs and other forms of technology.

### **Rationale**

The main goal of this study was to target my personal beliefs of literacy teaching and learning and to determine if I transferred those beliefs into my teaching. I chose to study my literacy beliefs and interactions with students based on my observations in the many different classrooms I had been in while substituting. Although as an educator it's important to look at the

students' choices and progression, it's just as important to look at my own. I need to explore whether or not my instructional methods are benefiting my students. This needs to be done constantly in order to make changes when needed. By doing a study on myself, it allowed me to grow in all areas of my teaching.

One of my beliefs is that students need to have some form of choice in literacy. When students are able to read or write what they care about, they will be invested in what they're doing. I looked at whether or not I provided this choice to my students that I was teaching because it's necessary for them to have if I would like them to gain a passion for literacy like my own. Allowing students to choose what they read gives them power and buy-in (Miller, 2012).

In addition to choice, I looked at whether or not I was providing a safe environment for my students. I needed to ensure that all my students feel that their ideas, responses, and conversational styles were welcome (Fletcher, 2006).

Continuing on with the idea of a student-centered environment, I also determined if I was promoting that notion into my classroom. The social activity keeps the students engaged and they need collaboration with their peers. When students participate in discussion, they are sharing their viewpoints and it establishes a classroom culture which involves all students (Estepp & Shoulders, 2013).

### **Summary**

My experiences substitute teaching made me realize that many students do not have the same passion for literacy as I do. The literacy beliefs that I have will be transferred over to my teaching. As a result, I needed to study how I was implementing my beliefs into practice in order to generate more passionate students when it came to literacy. Students must have a comfortable

student-centered environment full of choice and socialization in order to become more engaged with literacy activities.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

In this chapter I have reviewed and synthesized literature related to my literacy beliefs and how teachers develop their own beliefs. I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the research that I have gathered surrounding teachers' beliefs, particularly where they come from and how they reflect in their instruction. Then I will move on to my beliefs about literacy. I will break the section up between my topics with the research I found to support my beliefs.

### **How Teachers Develop Their Beliefs**

Teachers' beliefs make up an important part of what has been described as a teacher's knowledge base (Fleming, Bangou & Fellus, 2011). A teacher's knowledge base is a result of the tensions between prior beliefs that are held and the knowledge gained through reflection, and the institutional contexts in which one works (Fleming et al., 2011). This means that teachers' beliefs can fluctuate as they reflect on their teaching and beliefs as well as the environment they're working in. Beliefs can be challenged as a teacher changes schools or even grade levels. Knowledge is gained by continuously reexamining one's own beliefs through reflective practice (Snook, 2007; Fleming et al., 2011). I will learn more as I'm focusing on my beliefs on a daily basis in my teaching.

### **Needs of Students**

One way that teachers develop their beliefs is from their students' needs. The students' academic and emotional needs require teachers to organize their classrooms and teach differently (Deal & White, 2005). For this reason, teachers' beliefs could fluctuate year after year because the needs of their students will change. A study following two teacher's beliefs, found that when one of the teacher's classes became more diverse it affected her literacy teaching because she

had to differentiate and modify a lot more (Deal & White, 2005). The beliefs will be represented in the teacher's classroom decisions. For example in the study, one of the teacher's classroom schedule and learning centers she created were examples of how her students' needs influenced her instructional choices (Deal & White, 2005). Her belief that her students' literacy needs were important to her instruction had been reflected in her practice.

Teachers who have a truly differentiated classroom create learners who are understood to be constantly growing and changing as they participate in a variety of literacy events (Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor & Dalhouse, 2012). Teachers have to constantly be working at creating this environment in order to meet the needs of their students. It is understood that children bring a range of valuable cultural and linguistic experiences that may be similar or dissimilar to the teacher or the other children in the classroom (Taffe et al., 2012). These experiences will show up in every unit or theme that the teachers teach. Therefore, the teachers need to really get to know their students and what they bring to the classroom and then instruct based on where their needs are. What teachers find works for their students' needs one year will not necessarily work for the next year. Every student learns differently and in order to meet the needs of their students, teachers' beliefs must be flexible.

Researchers closely observed two teachers' use of differentiated instruction in their own classrooms in order to meet the needs of their students. One of these teachers found that a specific strategy, making connections from the students' lives to the story, particularly benefited the ELLs in her classroom (Taffe et al., 2012). This idea demonstrated that the teacher knew her beliefs about learning are a result of her students' literacy needs. When this teacher chose how to group the students in her classroom it also came from where the students' needs are (Taffe et al., 2012). Teachers' beliefs that students work better on a certain activity with a whole group setting

as opposed to independently comes from their students. The teachers will have to constantly reflect and adapt their beliefs as a result.

In another article about teachers' beliefs, one example of a teacher's belief is that she needs to provide her students with opportunities to study things that are meaningful and relevant to their lives and interests (Jackson & Jackson, 2011). In order to carry out this belief, she needs to know each of her students' strengths as well as needs. For example, she knows her students learn better when she has them do hands on activities that are relevant to their lives (Jackson & Jackson, 2011). On the other hand, if she is expecting them to complete an activity that is not hands on, she will know to provide extra support in order to meet those needs. In addition, her beliefs about collaborative learning were also evident in the tasks she designed for her students (Jackson & Jackson, 2011). The teacher will carry out her beliefs in the classroom around her students. For example, if one student works better with a higher level student, she will adapt that into her instruction in order to meet the needs of her students and her beliefs about learning. In every classroom the students' needs vary and they will guide the teachers' beliefs about literacy and impact their instructional decisions.

### **Prior Experiences**

Reflecting on personal writing experiences allows pre-service teachers to examine their own attitudes and beliefs about writing and how those impact their pedagogical decisions (Hall & Brown, 2011). Teachers have many experiences and observations of examples of writing instruction which help shape their attitudes and beliefs of writing and often determine the pedagogical decisions made by new teachers with regard to writing instruction (Norman & Spencer, 2005; Street, 2003; Hall & Brown, 2011). Teachers who have positive past experiences

with writing and view themselves positively as writers will have a positive impact on their beliefs of writing and how they teach it.

Positive experiences with learning as a whole will impact teachers' beliefs as well. Teachers who have had past experiences that were positive will represent these experiences in their classrooms. One study that followed teachers and where their decisions come from, pointed out that one teacher had learned to read at an early age, she still loves to read and sees books and literature as essential to her students' learning (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). If this teacher had not had this kind of positive experience she may not hold the same beliefs about books and literature now. Although they may have been long ago, all the past experiences that teachers carry with them will impact and shape their beliefs. The same teacher also feels that students should be exposed to as many ideas as possible and as many different ways of expressing things as possible (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). The way to do this is in having multiple opportunities with literacy. As a result of the positive experiences that she had with literacy, she is able to see the value in it, particularly reading and writing. Thus, she will be able to show her students the value in literacy so that this belief is passed on to them as well.

In the same study, it was found that the teachers felt that their own personal experiences with students, teachers and their own children affected their teaching decisions (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). Many of the teachers talked about experiences they had when they were students that had an impact on the way they teach (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). These experiences could be from the early stages of learning how to read or write, but they may not always be. One of the teachers noted that she felt powerful in one of her college courses because of the activity the professor had her do (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). No matter if these experiences were more recent than others; all teachers take these types of feelings with them. Then they figure out how

to repeat these positive experiences and love for literacy with their own students. Their beliefs of the types of activities that may or may not spark a passion for literacy will come from their past experiences.

Teachers also found that their own past experiences have helped them understand their students' experiences and feelings (Sturtevant & Linek, 2003). This will more than likely shape their teaching beliefs because they have a better understanding of what works for students or what they should change in order to meet the needs of their students. They will not just be assuming that they know what their students need, they can directly relate.

### **Teaching Experience**

Another influence on teachers' beliefs is school context, including curriculum and the teaching team (Deal & White, 2005). In Deal and White's 2005 study, they found that a number of curriculum issues brought new challenges. New curriculum programs will impact the choices teachers will (or must) make. Their beliefs will change as the programs play out in their classrooms. They will be exposed to new programs and will quickly figure out what they do or do not favor about how this program is used for instruction. For example, before using a new curriculum, a teacher might not believe that vocabulary instruction deserves a significant amount of her time. However, if they are mandated to use a new curriculum that devotes a lot of time to vocabulary instruction and they see the benefits it has in their students' learning than they may change their beliefs in regards to literacy instruction.

Beliefs also come from experiences. Beliefs may come from upbringing or program experiences (Caudle & Moran, 2012). In Caudle and Moran's study, participants illustrated that there was no clear line which claims that a certain belief comes from one experience and another

belief comes from another experience. In their second study, participants realized it is a compilation of experiences which impact their beliefs (Caudle & Moran, 2012). The more experiences teachers have and the more teaching they have under their belts, will result in the more experiences they must compile together to form their beliefs. Each of the experiences will influence them in a different manner. As a result, not only do their beliefs impact their practices, but their practices impact their beliefs.

In a study done on ESL program candidates, it was found that all the candidates who had prior teaching experience based their beliefs on that (Flemming et al., 2011). For those who did not have teaching experiences, they linked their opinions exclusively to their own language-learning experiences (Flemming et al., 2011). Therefore, the new teachers in a school will base their beliefs more on their own background, which can vary from person to person. On the other hand, teachers with more experience will inform their beliefs based on the experiences they've had in their classrooms. Putting your beliefs into practice is the ultimate test.

### **Interactions with Peers**

As part of Fleming, Bangou & Fellus' study on ESL teacher candidates, the teacher candidates were to blog in a discussion board with their classmates. The classmates bounced their opinions (beliefs) off of one another and supported those opinions with personal examples from their own lives. What was significant is that participants modified their opinions as a direct result of participating in a debate in the blog (Fleming et al., 2011). The researchers hypothesize that the students must have come to terms with what their classmates were saying and it made sense. As a result, their prior beliefs had changed because of the discussion.

Another aspect of the Fleming et al. (2011) study is that they looked at students' practicum experiences. One student pointed out that when she first started working in the

classroom she followed along the same teaching practices as the other teachers in the room (Fleming et al., 2011). This may very well be a similar occurrence for teacher-candidates and inexperienced teachers because they don't want to question those other colleagues in the classroom who have more experience. This can not only happen in a bachelor degree program, but in a school as well with colleagues. Colleagues often team-teach together or observe their colleagues for model behavior, and beliefs are formed as a result. On the other hand, beliefs can differ among colleagues so instead of debate, somebody accepts the other persons' viewpoints in order to create a peaceful classroom.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

Most researchers in the field have taken the position that prior beliefs form the basis of what teacher candidates learn in bachelor of education programs (Freeman & Richard, 1993; Pajares, 1992; Fleming et al., 2011). Teacher candidates come to school with personal experiences of literacy which have shaped their own beliefs. When they are learning about what the best teaching practices are in their teacher preparation programs they don't forget about how they were taught. They may believe the best way to teach reading is by reading aloud because that's what they were exposed to. They may believe that buddy reading is not as effective because they never did that when they were a student. Therefore, the beliefs in teacher preparation programs that match theirs will be strengthened. As for the beliefs that do not match theirs they will essentially be ignored and they will maintain their prior beliefs.

### **Textbooks**

The textbooks that teacher-candidates read during their teacher preparation program have an impact on their beliefs. One participant in the ESL teacher-candidates study specifically indicated that the content in her course textbook formed the basis of her beliefs (Flemming et al.,

2011). In addition, another teacher candidate made frequent references to her text and the theorists that were cited throughout the course (Flemming et al., 2011). Results from the study also found that the content of lectures from professors influenced their students which they noted from course discussions and presentations (Flemming et al., 2011). Textbooks and lectures are all part of the teacher preparation program for the teacher candidate. Yon and Passe (1990) found that there is a strong relationship between social studies methods courses and student teacher beliefs about teaching social studies (Doppen, 2007). Context determined whether the participants believed their field experiences influenced their beliefs (Doppen, 2007).

Another staple in the teacher-candidate program is practicum experiences. This is the one part of the teacher preparation program which will vary among students. According to Fleming et al. (2011), one student pointed out that it was common to see things happening in her practicum placement that were exactly what students were told not to do. This challenges the student to reflect on her own beliefs and question the basis of them. In another study, (Doppen, 2007) noted that most participants felt their student teaching experience influenced their beliefs. Another finding from Doppen's study found that a teacher preparation program can make a difference in their beliefs (Doppen, 2007). Teacher educators can influence the beliefs pre-service teachers hold about teaching and learning social studies (Doppen, 2007). These experiences occur for most teacher-candidates right before they head off into their own classrooms so these are the beliefs that shape the choices they make in their first classroom.

Angell (1998) argues that the impact of what the students believe depends on the degree of overlap in the messages that are conveyed in the program and the individual's willingness to consider change (Doppen, 2007). Angell (1998) also suggests that pre-service social studies teachers often accept the evidence which confirms their pre-existing beliefs and ignore the ones

that go against them (Doppen, 2007). This means that if students are exposed to ideas which they agree with, they will solidify their beliefs. If the students do not agree with the ideas that go against their beliefs, they will not consider them or change their beliefs which are already set in place.

### **Summary**

Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) describe a strong chain of connections which show the evolution of beliefs to attitudes, attitudes to intentions, and intentions to actions (Hall & Brown, 2011). Essentially, beliefs will have a direct link to teachers' instructional decisions. Teachers' beliefs come from the needs of their students and from interactions with their peers. They are constantly reflecting on what's working and not working in their classrooms and their beliefs are changing, therefore instruction is changing, in order to always be moving forward. Beliefs also come from teachers' personal experiences. These can be from their experiences as students in grade school up through their teacher preparation programs. Positive and negative experiences from their lives will impact their beliefs about how teachers should teach literacy. In addition, teachers' beliefs come from their own teaching experience. The more years they have under their belt and the more they see in regards to how their teaching practices play out, will shape their beliefs about the best way to teach.

### **Beliefs about Literacy**

My personal beliefs about literacy play a key role in the instructional decisions I make as a teacher. It's crucial that I have a clear understanding of my beliefs and what they look like so that I can determine if and how these beliefs are present in my own practices in the classrooms in which I substitute teach. In the next section I will further explore my literacy beliefs and the research that supports them.

## **Modeling**

Painter (2006) points out that I should model for my students. If I ask them to do something they need to see that I've done it. Painter notes that it's important for the students to see that I am talking from experience. Students will look at me as a reader or writer. McCracken and McCracken (1978) underscored the importance of the teacher as a model and came to the key notion that all adults in the classroom have to read or Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) does not work (McCracken & McCracken, 1978). Otherwise, students will not see the importance of it. If they see their teacher is not reading than they wonder why should I? A child will follow the beliefs and behaviors of an adult perceived to be important. Additionally, if the teacher presents the activity with enthusiasm, indicating that it is worthwhile, the student is more likely to adopt the same attitude. The attitudes, good or bad, rub off on one another in the classroom. If students see the teacher enjoying reading then they are more likely to as well, and it reinforces the value of the activity.

Teacher modeling is important, but it's been shown to be even more important with low achieving readers (Loh, 2009). These students don't have good reading habits already established and therefore need someone to model those for them. In addition, modeling for struggling readers will allow students to hear what proficient reading sounds like. They will have an easier time putting into practice what they should be doing after hearing and following along with their teacher. Also, teachers will be able to demonstrate reading strategies for the struggling readers to follow along with. This will give them a model to look at before they move onto putting some of these strategies into practice independently. When students hear the text read aloud it will allow students to comprehend more easily without having to worry about decoding (Hurst & Pearman, 2013).

Teachers write aloud to model their composing process which allows students to witness how their teachers draw upon knowledge from books and personal experiences (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Writing aloud, like reading aloud or thinking aloud, invites the student into the teacher's mind (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

Students get firsthand experience of the composing and editing process that a skilled writer uses (Fisher & Frey, 2012). After students are exposed to this and begin writing on their own, they draw on the modeling that their teachers have provided as well as the thinking processes demonstrated for them (Fisher & Frey, 2012). This will make them stronger writers over time. Then, they will be able to pick up on the skills that they have been shown and eventually do them on their own without needing the modeling.

### **Choice**

Encouraging students to write about topics they care about will allow them to have more freedom in their writing and more enjoyment (Fletcher, 2006). I will be able to get more out of them because they will be more willing to put the effort in. In addition, they will be more cooperative. Fletcher (2006) also claims that students will be more engaged when they can bring their passions into literacy.

Teachers often spend weeks to put together the perfect novel units, taking time to select interesting texts and putting together meaningful activities, to discover students are not interested (Miller, 2012). What ends up happening is teachers are doing everything they can to get students to engage with them and ask questions about the book. They have no desire to read the book, let alone talk about it. Students should be able to select their own books to meet classroom

requirements (Miller, 2012). For example, you can still ask your students to read from certain genres to learn the skills and knowledge to meet requirements, however allowing students to pick the book out of that specific genre benefits everyone. Not only will teachers have more success with classroom discussions and related activities, but students will be more willing to read because the subject matter is engaging to them. Allowing students to choose what they will read will give them power and removes the opportunity for them to refuse to read at all (Miller, 2012). It matters more the amount of reading they're doing than the type of reading they're doing. Hours and hours spent reading and the freedom to choose their own books leads many children to discover a love of books and reading- a path to enjoyment and self-learning that lasts long after they complete their schooling (Miller, 2012).

Students read more, comprehend more, and are more likely to continue reading when they are allowed to choose what they read (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). Guthrie and Humenick's (2004) meta-analysis revealed that one of the two most powerful instructional design factors for improving reading motivation and comprehension was personal choice of reading material, the other access to books (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). Teachers should find some time every day for students to choose their books. Offering choice will also make it more likely that students are choosing books which match their reading level (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). Freedom of choosing their books is the key to inviting students into reading (Miller, 2012).

### **Authentic Experiences**

Having experiences that students can relate to is necessary. Not only will they find them relatable, but purposeful. Children will discover the social purposes of reading and writing as they write and receive notes and letters (Tompkins, 2010). Using children's interests and

background knowledge makes it much easier for them to read and comprehend the text (Lyons, 2003). The children will be able to relate to the text and have a higher level of motivation to continue reading. Students will learn language not in abstract, decontextualized terms but in application, in a context that language is really for (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall & Tower, 2006). It will not make sense to them if they're not applying it to the appropriate context. A study done found that teachers who include more authentic literacy activities had students who showed higher growth in both comprehension and writing (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall & Tower, 2006).

C. Kelly, L. Kelly, Offner and Vorland (2002) practiced teaching with authentic materials for over a decade, established that real-life materials energize the whole class and create positive feelings about learning (Guo, 2012). These positive feelings can increase students' interest and intrinsic motivation for learning (Guo, 2012). The students will be engaged and more driven when teachers assign classwork. Floris (2008) also notes that there is a necessity in incorporating authentic materials in curriculum because they are motivating, and engaging, and relevant to students' lives (Guo, 2012). Other researchers, Sanchez, Perez, & Gomes (2010) claim that authentic materials provide students with opportunities for language use in a more communicative and relevant way (Guo, 2012). Examples of authentic materials such as media connect students with the real world and keep them informed as well as hold their attention on the task at hand (Guo, 2012).

Another example of an authentic experience is letter writing. Letter writing which establishes a purpose and audience for writing can provide an authentic form of writing practice and engages children in writing experiences that emphasizes the practical while also promoting skills (Chohan, 2010). Students can easily see the purpose of it and be able to see themselves using it in their future. According to Fellowes (2008), "Writing tasks that stem from highly

motivating hands-on experience in which the children have been directly involved lead to engagement of the writer and his/her ongoing motivation toward classroom writing” (Chohan, 2010, p. 44). The students have more motivation and a better overall attitude about writing. These feelings can transition to other subjects as well which incorporate writing. Vygotsky (1978, 1981) established that personal communication plays a prominent role in learning a language and that children will learn more effectively partaking in experiences which are meaningful and relevant to their lives (Chohan, 2010). Teachers will find their students are more successful with experiences that are authentic.

### **Teach Multiple Strategies**

Teaching multiple reading strategies is important for students. Different situations will call for a range of reading strategies. Therefore, students need to have a range of multiple comprehension strategies. By using multiple strategies, poor comprehenders are more able to use evidence-based strategies routinely while they are reading (Szabo, 2006; Woolley, 2010). When we teach for strategies we are teaching ways to solve problems that students can use on another day in another situation (Johnson, 2006). It’s important to spend time on teaching these strategies because they will be using them again and again. Readers need to have control over their strategies, using part or parts of it when the need arises.

Additionally, teaching multiple strategies enhance a student’s reasoning (Duke, Pressley, & Hidden, 2004; Paris & Paris, 2007; Pressley, 2006). Explicit instruction of these comprehension strategies increases students’ comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002; McLaughlin, 2010). Teaching these multiple comprehension strategies should also involve scaffolding. Scaffolding is a strategic support that teachers provide which allows students to complete a task they could not accomplish independently (Vygotsky 1978; Wood, Bruner &

Ross, 1976; McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009). In order to scaffold appropriately, teachers determine what kind and how much help is needed for each student to respond correctly on the task at hand and to internalize skills needed for independent practice after that (Ukrainetz, 2006; McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009).

Teachers' use of scaffolding refers to the process of temporarily providing support to a learner and then gradually withdrawing their support as they see the learner becomes more capable to performing tasks independently (Wood et al. 1976; Pentimonti & Justice, 2009). According to Vygotsky (1978), scaffolding instruction should help children develop the skills they have not mastered yet; consequently, teachers' instruction will precede children's development of skills that are needed to complete certain tasks (Pentimonti & Justice, 2009).

Scaffolding is somewhat influenced by Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978), a student's ZPD is the difference between a student's actual abilities and his potential abilities (Pentimonti & Justice, 2009). In terms of scaffolding, the task given to a child must be at the appropriate level within the student's ZPD in order for scaffolding to be successful (Olswan et al. 1993; Pressley et al. 1996; Pentimontic & Justice, 2009).

### **More time to Read**

Students must spend substantial time on applying the reading skills and strategies that we are teaching before they will develop reading proficiency (Miller, 2012). This means they need to read, read and read some more in order to become a good reader. Having students pull out a book when they are finished with an assignment is one way to squeeze in time to read independently. Maximizing the wasted moments in the school day may add up to as much as an

hour per week of reading time for students (Miller, 2012). Allowing time to read in school will be more likely that students read at home in their personal lives and this is what makes them truly readers (Miller, 2012).

Lee's study (2008) conducted with children in Taiwan on sustained silent reading reveals that the longer students read, the better the reading results (Guo, 2012). This means devoting a substantial amount of time for students to read in the school day will improve their reading. The more time they're given, the better the reading. Ponniah's experimental study (2011) revealed that exposure to texts is a much more effective way to acquire vocabulary than conscious vocabulary learning (Guo, 2012). Golkar and Yamini (2007) found vocabulary was linked to an increase in reading comprehension and proficiency level (Guo, 2012).

### **Summary**

Modeling is an instructional practice to provide support for students before expecting them to do a task independently. Support can be given when teaching multiple strategies, for instance. Multiple strategies are taught in order for students to have more tools to allow them to do these tasks on their own. It's extremely important for students to spend time putting into practice what they're learning. Allowing more time for daily reading is one way to do so. Another important aspect to literacy learning is student-centered classrooms that provide choice for students and allow them to have authentic experiences in order to keep them engaged and excited about literacy activities.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter synthesized the literature that I reviewed that related to my study. This study will add to the existing research of the impact that teachers' beliefs have on their instructional

decisions. It will also provide valuable information on where teachers develop these beliefs. Research has found that these beliefs come from teaching experience, past experiences including teacher preparation programs, students and peers. I have shaped my own literacy beliefs as a result of a number of these factors. These beliefs include the importance of modeling, teaching multiple strategies, providing more time to read, choices for students and authentic literacy experiences.

### **Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures**

The main purpose of this study was to explore my beliefs about literacy and how they were present and impacted instruction during my substitute teaching.

#### **Research Questions**

Throughout the six-week study, I addressed the following research questions:

How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my literacy pedagogical choices?

How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my interactions with students in the classrooms in which I substitute teach?

#### **Context of the Study**

The study was conducted in a variety of classrooms because of my role as a substitute teacher. The classrooms were all a part of one school district which is located in a suburban area of Western New York. It is a rural city located between two mid-sized cities that are 30 minutes away, so it is called a bedroom community. Many people travel to the two mid-sized cities for work. The city school district is surrounded by many rural districts.

At the time of this study, the district had approximately 2300 students total. 79 percent of the students in the district were Caucasian, 8 percent were African American, 7 percent were multiracial, 5 percent were Hispanic or Latino and 1 percent were Asian. Throughout the district, 41 percent of the students were eligible for free lunch and 9 percent were eligible for reduced lunch (nysed.gov). The district has an elementary gifted and talented program, advanced placement programs for middle and high school students and college credit courses for high school students.

There are four schools in the district and I substitute teach in each one of them. There is a high school, middle school, intermediate school and primary school. All of the classrooms are equipped with Smart Boards and Elmo projectors. There are computer labs in each of the buildings. In addition, there are computers in some classrooms as well as laptop carts for individual classrooms. Students are provided with textbooks for their classes. In the primary and intermediate schools there is a designated area for a classroom library and in some cases the middle school and high school ELA teachers provide this as well.

### **My Positionality as a Researcher**

As I conducted my study it was important for me to remember my own positionality as a researcher. I am a 24 year old Caucasian female living in Western New York. I grew up in a suburban community in Western New York. I completed my undergraduate studies at the State University of New York at Fredonia where I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. Currently, I am pursuing my Master's in Childhood Literacy at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. I hold initial certifications in childhood education, grades one through six and students with disabilities grades one through twelve. On completion of my graduate program I will obtain a certification as a literacy specialist, birth through grade six.

I am currently employed as a substitute teacher in three school districts. I fill in at all grade levels so I experience the Elementary, Middle and High school buildings. Not having my own classroom, I decided upon this research based on my observations in the classrooms I had while substituting. I thought about my role as a substitute and what I do every day to inspire the many students I come across. As my background indicates, I am a literacy person. I enjoy reading and writing and I set out to figure out if and how I was transferring that passion to young people. I am always trying to grow as an educator and by doing a self-study it helped me learn

even more about myself and how I could improve as I go through my substitute teaching experiences.

My beliefs about literacy are student-centered. I believe students need to have choice every day in school. This will keep my students motivated and engaged in literacy. Going along with that, my students need authentic experiences that they can relate to and match their interests. In addition to student-centered learning, I believe students need explicit instruction through modeling, scaffolding and teaching of multiple strategies. Also, one of my strongest beliefs is that students will not become proficient in literacy activities without practice which means I think students need time to read independently on a daily basis.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Journal**

I kept an electronic journal where I recorded my thoughts and reflections as I conducted this study. It also served as a place for me to capture my beliefs and if I see them appearing in my daily practice. I wrote in my journal three times a week. I also reflected on my field notes in my journal.

#### **Field Notes**

In addition to the journal, I also took field notes of what I did as part of my classroom instruction. I recorded what the teachers' lesson plans had me do and how I carried them out. During the day I wrote brief anecdotal notes. Then I filled in the notes more fully at the end of each day.

## **Artifacts**

I also accumulated artifacts or pictures of the classrooms I was in. I collected photocopies and took lists of the artifacts. I did not copy the teachers' lesson plans or any other intellectual property. The artifacts and pictures represented the resources that were available to me and how I made use of them. It also allowed me to reflect on how my instruction changed based on the resources I had in a given classroom. According to research conducted on two elementary school teachers, school context also includes curriculum as an influence for the teachers (Deal & White, 2005). Additionally, I reflected on how my instruction was influenced based on the curriculum required by the school and/or district I was in.

## **Data Analysis**

As I analyzed my data I was coding common themes or patterns (Hubbard & Power, 1999). I began my analysis of my field notes and journal by looking for instances when I wrote about teaching practices that supported my beliefs. I coded these and this created my first theme. Next, I found instances where my teaching practices went against my beliefs and coded these, and this became my second theme. For each of these themes I looked more closely and found different contexts that either supported or went against my beliefs and coded these. This coding became my third theme. Lastly, I looked for resources that I used that supported my literacy beliefs and coded these, which became my fourth theme. This was done on a continuous basis throughout the six weeks of my study.

## **Journal**

As I analyzed my journal I found similarities in my record of my thoughts and reflections throughout the study. I coded my beliefs in my journal in order to get an idea of how many times I was writing about them and when. Also, I coded again based on which beliefs were

strongest based on the context that I was in, and how I enacted those beliefs. I also looked for instances of where I had to work in a way that conflicted one or more of my beliefs about literacy learning and teaching, or where I experienced a tension between my passion for literacy and my experience in the classroom.

### **Field Notes**

My beliefs were the basis of my study so I had to get an idea of how strongly they were embedded into my daily instruction. I wrote and coded what I saw in teachers' lesson plans and where my beliefs appeared in my teaching. By analyzing my field notes, I was able to see what my strongest beliefs were and the types of activities I did most often in order to meet my beliefs. Again, I also looked for instances of where I had to work in a way that conflicted one or more of my beliefs about literacy learning and teaching, or where I experienced a tension between my passion for literacy and my experience in the classroom.

### **Artifacts**

As part of analyzing the artifacts I collected, I wrote a reflection to record my thoughts. I then analyzed the written reflection and coded the common findings I noticed. This included the number of times I used specific artifacts and the activities or instructional practices that I my students or I used them. I also analyzed the artifacts present in my instruction based on the grade level, classroom or school I was in. Lastly, I analyzed my reflection to determine if and where my beliefs were present in my instruction and how the artifacts played a role in that.

As part of my analysis, I used triangulation of data. Because my journal was an expansion of my field notes, I found similar findings between my field notes and journal. Then, I would analyze my artifacts or pictures and when I found data that supported this pattern I had a

triangulation of data. I repeated this process to find patterns and create the themes that were present across all three sources of data.

### **Procedures**

The data collection for this study took place over six weeks. The following was my sequential plan for collection:

- Weeks One & two- began my electronic journal and field notes. Began collecting artifacts and pictures of classrooms. Began to analyze my journal, field notes and reflection on artifacts to identify trends.
- Weeks Three & four- continued collecting artifacts and pictures, continued journal and field notes. Continued analyzing my journal, field notes and reflection on artifacts to note common patterns.
- Weeks Five & six- finished collecting data in the last two weeks. Analyzed all the data at the conclusion of the six weeks.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

As a teacher-researcher I was determined to accurately report the findings and my interpretations in this study. I conducted my study in an ethical and unbiased manner and I was sure to remain objective throughout my research, coding and recording of my field notes. The themes I discovered came from my electronic journal and the field notes that I collected. I used triangulation of data across multiple sources in order to increase the validity of my findings: electronic journal, field notes, artifacts and pictures. My research process was documented, clear and detailed to ensure dependability. In addition, I participated in peer debriefing to increase the validity of my work and coded research. After the completion of my research I used the process of member checking in order to review the accuracy of my findings and my process of coding the research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of the study was the length of time that I had to complete it. Six weeks is a short duration of time to really look at if my passion for literacy and beliefs affect the whole outlook of my teaching and instruction.

### **Summary**

My study took place in different classrooms, but they were all part of one school district. The district is primarily made up of Caucasian students. The district has an abundant supply of technology present throughout its schools. My role in the study is a substitute teacher. I am an educator working on completing my Master's requirements. The data which I collected as part of my study included a journal where I wrote about my beliefs, field notes of my instruction and artifacts or pictures of classrooms that I was working in. I used a triangulation of data and based on what I was seeing I coded common trends present in the data. This study took place over a six-week time period which was one limitation of the study.

## Chapter 4: Interpretation on Data

The purpose of this study was to examine how my passion and beliefs about literacy impact my instructional decisions in the classrooms in which I substitute teach. This research set out to answer two major questions:

**Question 1:** How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my literacy pedagogical choices?

**Question 2:** How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my interactions with students in the classroom in which I substitute teach?

Over the course of six weeks, I collected data in elementary and middle school classrooms in the district where I substitute teach. I collected field notes from the teachers' lesson plans in regard to what they ask me to do and how I carry that out. Then I kept an electronic journal where I elaborated on my field notes, wrote about my literacy beliefs in regard to where I saw them appearing in my practice, and discuss how I used the resources that were available to me and how my instruction varied based on the resources available.

There were a few major themes that emerged throughout the analysis of the data I collected through my field notes and electronic journal. The first theme revolves directly around my literacy beliefs, specifically that I see myself often bringing them into my instruction. The second theme is that there were times where my instruction went against my beliefs, either because of my role as the substitute teacher and how students respond to that, or because of the lesson plans the teacher left for me to follow. The third theme was that my beliefs had to be altered based on the context I was in, including special education or grade level. Lastly, the resources that were available to me changed my instruction and what I was able to do.

## **Theme 1: Evidence of My Literacy Beliefs in My Teaching**

It was evident through my analysis that I do my best to pull in my literacy beliefs in my instruction. The first theme answers my first research question, how is my passion for literacy reflected in my literacy pedagogical choices? As indicated in the results below, I have drawn on my passion and beliefs about what works best to teach literacy in my pedagogical choices. I uncovered in my data that over the course of six weeks I had implemented every one of my literacy beliefs in my teaching. My first theme also addresses my second research question, how is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my interactions with my students? I always had positive interactions with my students about literacy. I modeled for them my own passion for literacy by reading aloud, reading independently and giving them more time to read. I created a student-centered learning environment by giving them choice and created authentic experiences to spark their passion for literacy like myself. Also, I taught them multiple strategies to ensure they could be successful in all areas of literacy.

Within this section are categories and each of my literacy beliefs will have a designated category. The section begins with choice, then more time to read, followed by modeling, teaching multiple strategies, and finally authentic experiences.

### **Choice**

Choice can occur in many different ways, but the overarching theme is allowing the students some say in what goes on each day. This idea is part of my desire to form a student-centered environment where I am not the one always making the decisions. Student-centered teaching is when students participate in the decision making process, including what or how to learn, what kind of support is needed and how to decide what was learned (Bery & Sharp, 1999;

Lea, Sttenhanson & Tray; Hartly, 1987; Sharma, Millar & Seth, 1999; Acat, 2005; Cubukcu, 2012). It is a model that puts the student in the center of the learning process with a more active role, as opposed to a teacher-centered environment where they take more of a passive role (Cubukcu, 2012).

Immediately I noticed this becoming apparent in my instruction. In my journal entry from January 10, 2014, I wrote that I offered choices to my students in regard to whether or not they would like to read independently or as a whole group. The teacher had informed me that I could choose to do either. Instead, I chose to give each small group their own choice. In every group it just so happened that the majority ruled to read whole group. I was taking this student-centered approach by taking into account my students' interests when making decisions. There might have been one or two students out of all of my groups who wanted to read independently. However, I still had given them a voice in the first place without automatically making the decision without consulting with them. The choice may not always go in the students' favor, but in a teacher-centered environment there will be more instances where it will not go in their favor because they never had the opportunity to voice their opinion.

I was continuing to find that I was providing choice in different ways. In my field note from March 5, 2014, I wrote that I was instructed to do reader's workshop with my students. Now all classes I'm in have time for *read-to-self*, or independent reading, as most teachers call it. However, I also let my students have time to read to someone. I allowed them to pick their own partners to read with, as well. This is double choice because they get to pick who they read with and they get to pick what they read. I reflected on how it worked in my journal entry from that day:

The students really seem to enjoy the freedom to read with someone. They stay on task because they know it can be taken away at any time and they would have to go back to *read-to-self*.

Choice can be contingent because the decision to give students choices again is dependent on how they can handle it. It puts the responsibility in their hands, thus they have more power in this student-centered approach. I noticed that during *read-to-self* I didn't have to go around and redirect anyone. They were all reading silently in order to gain that partner time.

Implementing choice time with reading material and context has the potential to give students control. Every student may not always get what they want, but they will feel they have some control in the classroom when teachers ask for their feedback. Also, in the off chance that they lose that choice time they know that they are responsible for it, which is creating the ultimate student-centered environment. I also noticed students will be more engaged when they are able to determine what they read during reader's workshop.

Choice was present in my instruction in another area besides reading and that was writing. From my field notes on February 24, 2014, the teacher's lesson plans asked me to write a journal prompt on the board for the students to answer when they came in the room. The prompt was simple, "What I did over my break." I found pros and cons to the prompt. Some students were able to start writing enthusiastically, while others yelled out "I did nothing!" So how do you get those students to write, then, if they claim they have nothing to tell about their break? Instead of expecting them to write a page in their journal or a certain number of sentences, I told them they could do any type of entry they would like. They could make a list, draw a picture, or any other entry they would like along those lines. Somehow when I took away

the sense that this was a “writing assignment” I saw more pencils moving. The students were in favor of the choice with the journal criteria.

In the end it doesn't always matter the type or amount of writing a student is doing as long as they are partaking in writing daily. Students should not always choose because students need to have a wide range of experiences in the classroom and if they had their choice they might stick to reading or writing one genre, for example. Not only that, but it's unrealistic for students to have choice all the time with all of the school and state requirements in place. With that being said, creating a student-centered environment by giving students choices everyday will make them more engaged and motivated in their literacy learning and they will be more successful as a result.

### **More Time to Read**

Providing more time to read and the opportunity for students to select their own books will increase the students' engagement during reading and ability to obtain the benefits that comes from reading (Miller, 2012). In order to get my students to become engaged learners, I must allow them more time to read. More time to read will create more opportunities to become immersed in books. Only by reading volumes and volumes of texts can students internalize the reading comprehension skills and gain the reading experience they need to succeed academically (Miller, 2012). This means that the more time students spend reading, the more successful they will be in all areas in school. The time spent reading will also allow students to obtain reading comprehension skills, which are needed in other content areas as well.

I found that allowing more time to read was the easiest belief for me to implement as a substitute teacher. When guided reading or small groups meet students may feel that they can

get away without having to read. This is because there are other students there who will volunteer to read right away and time may run out before the others have to read. However, I was not allowing my students to get away without reading.

Additionally, I was finding that some students miss out on independent reading or *read-to-self* time in Reader's Workshop, because that's when they're in intervention. This shouldn't be the case. They should still be reading in their regular classroom and the intervention should be an extra support with their reading- not a substitute. The students who meet with a reading teacher are the ones who struggle, so it follows they in particular should be reading as much as possible in order to get better.

I had the opportunity to substitute for a reading teacher during my first week of collecting data on February 25, 2014. The students told me what their teacher usually does – students can read if they want to or they don't have to. Instead I decided not to give my students the choice, but give them the extra time to read. I did this because it is one of my beliefs that students need as much reading time in school as they can get. Not only that but, the small group atmosphere is also less intimidating to read in. My job as the reading teacher is to provide a level of support to them in their small group. I'm not able to provide support if the students are not reading. Intervention is a time to target the students' needs and assess for progress. This cannot happen if students are not participating in reading every day in their intervention group.

When the five students came in on February 25, 2014 there was one student who was already talking nonstop. I got the students to settle down and introduced the story we were going to read for the day. I provided background knowledge and then asked a couple of questions to get them thinking about the story. Then one student volunteered to begin reading. After he read

he called on the student who had been the one talking non-stop when they came in. The student immediately said he didn't have to read and that their teacher didn't make him read. There was a lot of back and forth between the students. My journal from that day elaborates on this:

I got the impression that the students didn't have to read if they didn't want to. This one student in particular was acting as though it was acceptable for him not to read and that it was also acceptable to sit and talk while others were reading. I didn't like this at all and I decided he was going to read with me because we are after all in reading group.

All of the students in the reading group took turns reading. What I found was that this student, and all of the students in general, had success in answering the comprehension questions after reading. This could be because they were all participating in the reading, which makes them more engaged with the story as opposed to just listening to others. The more time children spend reading, the more children gain in language ability and reading comprehension (Loh, 2009).

There are some teachers who leave enough in their plans for substitute teachers that they won't get through all of it. Other teachers do not do this and it was up to me as the substitute to decide what I would have the students do. Almost always I opted for more time to read. I discussed this in a journal entry from February 25, 2014:

For two days in a row I've had extra time with my fifth graders and instead of giving them total choice time my instructions were to do some independent reading. I believe students need this time to get excited about a book that interests them. Even though most teachers assign reading every night for some duration of time I can't expect my students will follow through with that. Therefore, I need to provide the time to read in school.

Although I stated earlier that I'm not giving them full control, it's still choice time. Throughout the majority of the school day, students are accustomed to being told what to read, so giving them this independent reading time serves as time to relax and have the freedom to choose what they would like. If they pick up a magazine that's okay; reading a magazine is still reading in my book.

Providing more time to read was also my go to literacy belief when students would finish activities early. They would hand something in and pronounce they were done, with nothing else to do. My response from a field note on March 3, 2014, "Find a book to read until everyone is finished." I also made sure students came prepared on days of tests with a book in case they finished early so they could read quietly at their desks. All of these extra minutes add up in my mind to becoming a better reader. They will also give students a chance to become engaged readers. Young readers will learn what life readers know- that keeping a book with you to pull out in your downtime will eliminate boredom (Miller, 2012). I was able to notice this in my classrooms, which I elaborated on in my journal from March 3, 2014:

As I looked around the room I see students invested in their books. Students are raising their hands so that they can show or tell me about what's happening in their book. Some are leaning over to their buddy next to them and pointing at a certain point of the book.

Even with this level of engagement with their books, the students were staying on task and remaining quiet which is another benefit of initiating this reading time. The more time students get to read their books, the more engaged they will become with them and with reading in general. Reading will become an activity that they want to do in and out of school.

## Modeling

I found that modeling and teaching multiple strategies went hand in hand a lot of times. I could not expect my students to be able to apply the strategies I was teaching them on their own, without giving them explicit modeling. Modeling is a necessity for effective instruction that helps students to conceptualize and apply new skills and strategies (Methe & Hintze, 2003; Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009; Regan & Berkeley, 2011). Teachers cannot expect students to apply new skills and strategies effectively before being shown how to carry them out. The *think-aloud* is one of the common teaching techniques used for modeling cognitive processing for students (Regan & Berkeley, 2011). When modeling the steps of the strategy it's important to include explicit modeling for each step (Regan & Berkeley, 2011). Teachers should not assume that the students know how to do any of the steps on their own before they demonstrate how to do them.

One strategy that I was modeling was using non-fiction text features to guide the students' reading. For example, I modeled how using the headings and sub-headings allows me to find information faster. I was in a sixth-grade ELA classroom. The students were assigned to groups of three or four prior to that day. The groups were working together to complete a reading on the Taj Mahal and then to answer the questions on the reading and to write a summary. The students had to use evidence from the texts to support their answers and it became apparent that they were struggling with the non-fiction text. I addressed this further in my journal entry from March 6, 2014:

I noticed that the students were stuck on where to find information regarding how to help the Taj Mahal. Instead of just telling them to reread from the beginning, I modeled for

them how to use the bold headings and subheadings to tell them where they would find the information. “If I wanted to find information about how to help the Taj Mahal I would look under the solutions heading or another relevant heading. Same would go for the question you have to answer about the destruction of the Taj Mahal. I would look under the heading labeled Taj Mahal in Trouble.”

Non-fiction text features are unique to that genre and if students do not know how to use them they could struggle reading non-fiction texts. By modeling how to use the features to their advantage it will help my students as they read future texts.

Another aspect of modeling that I incorporated into my teaching throughout the six weeks was modeling as part of reading aloud. Modeling is not always about teaching a specific strategy for students to apply, but teaching them proficient reading skills to apply to their reading. For example, I was modeling fluent reading with expression, pace and proficiency. Maybe more importantly, I was modeling overall enjoyment for reading. Reading aloud provides students with a model of fluent oral reading and being introduced to new vocabulary and knowledge (Pegg & Bartelheim, 2011). Teachers often pick texts that are above their students’ levels so students are experiencing books with which they are not familiar. The experience could initiate a new love for reading (Fisher et al., 2004; Pegg & Bartelheim, 2011). By reading books aloud enthusiastically I am modeling my love for reading and it will be more likely to translate over to my students than if I was reading in a monotone voice.

I elaborated on my passion for bringing read aloud into the classroom in a journal entry from January 14, 2014:

I like to bring stories alive for students during read aloud. I like to do different voices for the different characters which makes it fun for the students. Then I pay attention to punctuation and either pause, raise my voice, etc. depending on the mark. This makes the students even more engaged, anticipating what's to come. When I stopped reading the students sighed and I knew I had them hooked.

All of these tactics, such as expression and tone, that I can pull out during read aloud time are what draws students to read these books. They see how engaged I am with the story and they will want to repeat that. When I essentially make the stories come to life, I'm modeling how much fun reading can be.

Modeling is important during read aloud, but it's also beneficial to model good reading habits during independent reading. I wrote an entry on January 29, 2014 where I discussed this:

Some students may never be exposed to adults in their lives reading. I was also modeling for them during independent reading time by reading myself. This makes it clear that I have a love for reading which will hopefully rub off on them. Modeling good reading habits is also a representation that adults do read as a leisure activity and that it's not just "something kids in school do."

Modeling proficient reading habits should be done in school daily, especially because teachers never know if they're the only adult who the student sees reading. Students will also look at the teacher as an example and try and copy them when they read independently. Students might internalize that reading is valuable, fun, and for everybody.

The same applies for good writing habits. Students need modeling of good writing that they can use as examples.

One writing piece that I modeled with my students was using the Answer Cite Expand (ACE) strategy to write a summary. The Answer Cite Expand strategy is used to answer short written response questions. When using the ACE strategy, students will answer the question. Then they will cite evidence from the text and lastly they will extend their answer using background knowledge. I worked with the students by doing a model response to guide them when doing their own after I modeled for them.

Students were seated at their desks for whole group instruction. I was at the whiteboard so that all students could see what I was writing. My journal entry on February 3, 2014 further explains how I implemented this belief:

I was thinking aloud as I was going through the response and modeling for my students why I was doing what I was doing. For example, “Okay, the first step I need to do is restate my question and answer it. Then students would help me do that. Then I’m going to find evidence in my text that supports my answer. If I’m going to be using evidence I need to remember to use quotation marks. Can someone find a sentence in their text that supports what we have written? Now for the E in ACE, E means to expand my answer which just means explain it further. I want to add details from my own background knowledge to further prove my thinking.”

Modeling for my students by doing a think aloud was demonstrating the thinking that they should be doing when they do it on their own. I took it step by step through the ACE strategy so that students knew what was expected for each step to implement this strategy

successfully. When they are asked to use the ACE strategy in the future, they will be imitating my thinking in their head in order to carry out the strategy. The modeling is the first step in order for students to independently use a new strategy.

Another example of when I was implementing my literacy belief was in a fourth grade classroom. I arrived on January 23, 2014 and according to my field notes the teacher's instructions were for me to model a paragraph starter which was..."I think dodge ball should (not) be banned in school..." I had the students sitting at their desks and I walked around the room reading the text aloud. After reading the text I wrote the paragraph starter on the whiteboard for students to copy down on their paper. My journal entry from January 23, 2014 further details what I did next:

"Now if I'm going to support my answer what do I need?" The students told me evidence. Using the Elmo, I read through the text again and highlighted evidence from the text to use in my written response. I was thinking aloud about the text and then demonstrating how one line of the text can support my claim for banning dodge ball. "It says here that banning dodge ball would prevent injuries. That's a pretty good reason for banning dodge ball so I should highlight this sentence." I did the same when finding a piece of the text which supports the notion not to ban dodge ball in schools. Then when I went to write my written response I modeled how I take that evidence I highlighted and formulate it into a sentence. "Okay so I highlighted that banning dodge ball would prevent injuries. When I add this to my response I can write according to the article, banning dodge ball will prevent injuries. See how I found a sentence which supports my opinion to ban dodge ball and I put it in a sentence? You must have multiple pieces of evidence in your response." Next, I repeated the same modeling for a piece of evidence

that supports not banning dodge ball for those students who wanted to write that response. Then I informed them that they could continue with their response by highlighting evidence and putting it into a sentence like I did with the first example.

After I did the whole group modeling I circulated around the room and kept giving reminders that evidence comes from the article we read, not our head. Only after we have our evidence can we provide our own background knowledge.

Students benefit from explicit modeling with these strategies before they're able to do them independently. I was able to model for my students how to do an ACE response and how to find evidence from the text to support their claim. Modeling can be done with more advanced strategies like these, but it's also done to teach more basic skills such as capitalization and punctuation. By taking the time to model for students before setting them free it will improve their writing.

I found that I did different types of modeling for my students, for different purposes. I was modeling proficient reading for my students, by reading aloud. In addition, I was modeling for them my own passion and engagement with reading, by reading independently, so that they too could become as passionate. Lastly, I was providing modeling for reading and writing strategies in order for them to learn and apply those strategies on their own.

### **Teach Multiple Strategies**

When students have a range of strategies that they can pull out and use at a moment's notice they will have more success when reading. Not all texts are the same so not all texts will require students to use the same strategy in order to read proficiently. In order to become a proficient reader, students need to know when their comprehension is fading and be able to step

up and use a variety of “fix-up” strategies (McLaughlin, 2012). These readers are also able to select the appropriate strategies to use and consistently keep understanding the text at the focus of their reading (McLaughlin, 2012). I found that not only was I teaching strategies to my students in the weeks that I collected data, but I was in fact teaching a variety of them which shows what a strong literacy belief it is for me.

In a field note from January 22, 2014, I wrote that I was instructed to read aloud to my sixth grade students out of the book that they’ve been reading, *Hoot* (Hiaasen, 2002). These students are in a 12:1:1 self-contained classroom. After the students summarized the book thus far for me, I had them make predictions. I did a think aloud with them to teach them how to make predictions. These students have learning disabilities so I knew that teaching them the strategy of making predictions would help them comprehend the story. My journal entry from January 22, 2014 captures how I enacted this belief:

“I’m thinking about what’s happening in the story. We know that Beatrice is telling Roy to leave the running boy alone so that could mean that she knows him. Who do we think the running boy could be? My predictions aren’t wild guesses. They come from our knowledge of the story thus far.” The students made their predictions of who the running boy could be.

Teaching them to make predictions was keeping them engaged in the text because they were paying attention to whether or not their predictions were coming true. It was also increasing their overall comprehension of the book because they had to think and understand what was happening in order to make the predictions in the first place. Before asking students to

make predictions, I taught the strategy to them. As a result, my students would be able to know how to apply the strategy of making predictions when reading, in future texts.

From the same field note I also had my students making connections with *Hoot* (Hiaasen, 2002). Making connections can be done with any age student, even the young ones. Students will learn it is easier to remember what we're reading if we can stick it onto something that's already in our heads; when we make this connection it helps us understand what we are reading (Gregory & Cahill, 2010). This is another strategy that is extremely beneficial for struggling learners because it helps them relate to the stories and comprehend them more.

When teaching this strategy once again I did a think aloud. First though, I instructed the students that there are three ways to make connections with a text. These are text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections. Text-to-self connections are when something in the story reminds us of something in our own lives. Text-to-text connections are when we make a connection to another part of the story and text-to-world connections are when we make a connection from the text to the world around us. I provided a visual of a chart which highlights these points on the board and gave one to each student. They could use their chart as a reference to know what connection they're making when reading the story. Next, I continued with my think aloud:

“Beatrice doesn't want Roy to talk to the running boy. Hmm...that reminds me of when my mom would tell me when I was little not to talk strangers. Roy doesn't know the running boy and Beatrice is trying to protect him because he could be dangerous. That was the connection I made. What connection would that be? Look at your chart is it a text-to-self, text-to-text or text-to-world connection?”

Then as I continued to read the book I asked students to give me their connections and use the visual chart to help them. When I instructed them to make their own connections, students were reiterating times when they were in the same position as the main character Roy, for instance. This strategy showed me that the students understood the characters and plot in the story. I provided the necessary modeling by doing a *think-aloud* so that the students would be able to successfully make connections on their own, in future texts.

On January 23, 2014 in English Language Arts, my seventh grade students were working on identifying some challenging vocabulary in an article about revenue generating sports. Students were working in groups of two or three around the room. After reading the article, students had comprehension questions to answer. Some of these questions asked them to identify some of these challenging vocabulary words. Instead of telling them what a word meant, I taught them how to use context clues. Context clues are the words or sentences around a given word. By looking at those words and sentences it will guide them to the meaning of the given word. Being able to know how to use context clues is essential, especially with the increasing amount of higher level texts with tier II and tier III vocabulary students are being exposed to in school.

I reflected on how I taught this strategy in a journal entry from January 23, 2014:

When I was circulating around the room one of the groups of girls stopped me and asked what a word meant (point to it). “Watch what I do when I don’t know a word. I’m going to re-read what comes before the word and after it. So that word is subsidizes. Can you read the two sentences before this one and the one after?” The student did. “What do you think subsidizes means now? You are right on track. Now the next time before

calling me over you can use what's in the text to help you determine the meaning of new words.

When I was teaching my students how to use context clues I was guiding them to become more independent. After instructing them how to use this strategy and supporting them while they practice it, students will be able to apply the strategy on their own in future texts.

Another strategy that I taught was thinking while reading. I gave students a bookmark with different symbols and words on it which represent one of the things they can respond to during readings. For example, an eye represents visualizing. I implemented this strategy in my guided reading groups and reflected on it in my journal on March 7, 2014:

I was stopping every few pages and students would record their thinking on a sticky note. They were able to write about parts they loved, questions they had or even parts that they were able to visualize in their mind. I found that the more we practiced the easier it was for them to immediately start writing and drawing. I only heard one student say they were stuck during all my guided reading sessions. This tells me that they are engaged and focused when they're reading because they know they will be expected to fill a sticky note after. It's getting them in a good habit to think when reading.

This activity emphasizes the purpose for reading, first and foremost. My students were learning that if they were not thinking when they were reading then they were not going to comprehend. After teaching this strategy and guiding them with support my students should be able to carry out this strategy in their independent reading.

In order to teach multiple strategies I used a great deal of modeling for my students. Modeling with a think aloud and practicing the strategy in front of my students provided the

understanding for them to be able to use the strategy on their own. I also used visuals as a reference point for my students until they apply the strategies enough and become comfortable with them.

### **Relatable and Highly Engaging Experiences**

Incorporating authentic literacy activities into the classroom can be one of the best ways to motivate students and keep them engaged in their learning. Students learn language best when the learning context matches the real functional context (Dukes, Gates, Hall & Tower, 2006). This is why real life experiences about relatable topics are the best way to teach students. What I found after collecting data for six weeks is even though I believe authenticity is important in teaching literacy, it was challenging to fully create authentic literacy activities for my students. For an activity to be considered highly authentic, a literacy activity must include an authentic text read or written for an authentic purpose (Dukes, Gates, Hall & Tower, 2006). This is easier said than done, especially when I'm a substitute. I had restrictions because I did not have full control of what I could do because I wasn't the regular teacher in the classroom. Although authentic experiences were challenging to achieve, the way I worked toward those was creating relatable and highly engaging experiences. These experiences were not fully authentic experiences, but I found that implementing relatable and highly engaging experiences are still very important in teaching literacy.

Prior to my substituting in a sixth-grade classroom, the students had been embarking in a unit of study exploring the Seven Wonders of the World. They had been doing various readings about these landmarks in their Common Core code-x books (Scholastic.com). Students were learning some background knowledge about where the Seven Wonders are and the significance

of them. They also were exposed to the problems which are occurring because of the years of wear and tear on these world treasures from factors such as weather and tourism.

One highly engaging experience that I had my sixth-grade students participate in was a debate. Not only were the students learning about how the Taj Mahal was slowly being destroyed because of a number of issues including pollution and tourists, but they also read about solutions to help the outcome saving the Taj Mahal. So what I chose to do with them was have them take sides either in favor of saving the Taj Mahal or tearing it down. Then we held a class debate. In a journal entry from March 3, 2014 I reflected on the success of the real life debate:

I can see the students getting more out of this than writing about what they learned. They were thinking of argument after argument to defend their stance. I know they would not have been as invested otherwise. There were students chiming in that rarely participate. They all asked me if they could continue the debate tomorrow.

As my journal entry indicates, the students' interest level and motivation were high throughout the lesson. I did not have to do much to keep the discussion going. After one side made a stance, the other side would be searching their notes to find a rebuttal. I found that creating this highly engaging experience made them more invested in the content. Not only were they participating in a debate that they would see in the real world, but they were debating about a real life topic. The students wanted to keep going even after I had to stop them.

I also found a repetition of highly engaging writing activities. The intermediate school has a post office in the school where students can mail letters to other friends or teachers in the building. This is a great resource that I took advantage of for the purpose of creating a relatable experience.

There were many times where students would come to me and tell me that they had everything done. If I didn't tell them to read a book, my other response would be to write a letter. Writing letters gives a purpose for writing. They are also a great way to apply and practice writing skills. Upon entering a fourth grade classroom, I learned that the students had previously been working on opinion writing. The teacher had been teaching students to form an opinion on an issue by taking a side. Then they would have to support their reasons for the side by using evidence from the text they're reading. My field notes from January 24, 2014, indicated that students were reading an information article that day about why dodge ball should or should not be banned in school. The teacher told me to have them write an opinion piece. What I did was instead of having them write a traditional short response, I had them write in a letter format. The "friendlier format" created a less daunting writing task. The students wrote the letters to a teacher or a friend at school. I also let anyone who wanted to read theirs to the class do so. The students were still accomplishing the same assignment, but they were doing it in a more engaging way. They were more engaged when writing, knowing that someone would be receiving it from them. The students also related to the purpose of writing letters because they do it outside of school as well.

In another fourth grade classroom, it was in the afternoon when I decided to give them this more engaging activity. The students had been on task and working hard all day so we had accomplished what the teacher had left for that day. The teacher did leave *Time for Kids* (timeforkids.com) articles as an extra in case they needed something to do, but there were no specific instructions on what to do with them.

My field notes from that day dated February 7, 2014, stated that I told students after they completed reading the *Time for Kids* article to write a letter to their friend about one of the

article's stories. I encouraged them to pick the article that they enjoyed the most because it makes it easier to write on a topic that's meaningful to them. This would help those students who aren't as eager to write a letter to give it a try. I noticed walking around the room that the students were taking their time trying to write neatly and check spelling with me. They also asked if they could take out colored pencils to add a picture. I could tell that they were more engaged in writing a letter to a friend than they would be if they were just turning it in to the teacher. The stories that they were writing about were also relatable for them because they were focused on current events put together in a kid friendly format. I saw that most of them were writing on the stories about animals because those were the ones that engaged them in the issue.

In both of these writing activities, students were writing about real life material, which in turn is relatable to them. They were also writing informative pieces which serve a purpose, rather than the normal question and answer format that they're accustomed to working on in school and turning in to a teacher. The letters to the teachers and friends at school served a purpose because they were trying to inform someone else and get them to take their side, that dodge ball should/should not be allowed in school. The purpose of the letters to their friends, about an article they read, is to inform and teach that person about what they learned from the article. Instead of just writing the information down to show what they learned, the students were writing to others, which served a greater purpose, to inform and persuade someone.

Another relatable and engaging experience that arose when I was analyzing my data had a lot to do with reading a relatable topic. Students in my seventh grade English Language Arts classroom were reading a published article about revenue generating college sports. This article was engaging for my students because it was detailing a real life issue. The students could have just answered typical comprehension questions. However, I had them make an information

pamphlet or brochure presenting the pros and cons of revenue generating college sports which they read about in the article. The students were able to work with a partner on this assignment. The students seemed to have more knowledge of the reading after using a computer, to create a pamphlet or brochure, to enhance their understanding. The students had to pull out evidence from their texts to support both sides of the issue which showed their comprehension of the piece. Also, they had to give multiple pros and cons so they were analyzing the text more in depth. An entry from my journal on January 29, 2014, illustrates my findings on their engagement with the assignment:

Reading about a relevant topic grasped my students' attention, especially the boys. They were motivated to put together an informational piece because it was about Division I athletics and these big name schools that they know all about. The students were exposed to new vocabulary and they probably came away with a better understanding of it because they were participating in a relatable experience.

I found that when students can relate to an assignment, they will be more motivated to put the time and effort into it. The students, especially the boys, were engaged while making the pamphlets and brochures, because it was about a topic that they care about, sports. Their interest level with the topic was high, which in turn, made comprehension increase.

Relatable and highly engaging experiences should be a part of the classroom whenever possible, that is my literacy belief. I produced data showing that I implemented relatable and engaging experiences successfully through reading, writing and speaking activities, which illustrates it can be done. The biggest factor with incorporating relatable and engaging experiences is the motivational outcome from the students. The students' motivation also

extends their overall understanding of the topics which I found occurred with the debate about the Taj Mahal, the opinion writing pieces about dodge ball, and the letters to friends about *Time for Kids* stories.

## **Theme 2: Teaching Against Beliefs**

There were circumstances, including problems with classroom management and unfamiliarity with the students, where I found that I had to go against my beliefs because of my role as the substitute teacher and not the regular teacher in the classroom. I had to follow the teachers' lesson plans whether or not I believed that was the best way to implement them. My second theme targets my first research question, how is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my pedagogical choices? There were situations in which I was not able to enact my beliefs. In this section, I have drawn on data that points where and when I would have wanted to bring in my own literacy beliefs in my pedagogical choices, but could not as the substitute teacher. My passion for literacy is still present in this theme because I have uncovered data where I am very adamant about how I could have done better to invoke that same passion for my students. For example, when I did not offer them choice in writing topics, I really struggled with that.

In one instance on January 10, 2014 my field notes show that the teacher's lesson plan informed me to read to all the students in one of the guided reading groups. Before teaching the lesson I was unsure about this because I know that students who spend more time reading have many related benefits other than just becoming more proficient at it. Studies have found a consistent link between the amount of time spent reading and word knowledge in both children and adults (Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005). They will acquire larger vocabularies than those

who read less frequently (Nippold et al., 2005). This will benefit the readers in other content areas as well because they will have deeper background knowledge of the subject.

During the lesson, I was constantly pointing to students' texts as a reminder that they should be following along while I was reading. I also had to tell them they were supposed to turn the page when they missed it. After I finished reading students had to answer comprehension questions and use information found in the reading to answer the questions. The fact that students didn't read the text caused them to have trouble with going back to the reading and finding the answers. Once students found an answer in the text they wanted to show their friend next to them. I wasn't sure that this lesson was as successful as it could have been. Students listened to the reading and then struggled with the comprehension piece because they weren't as engaged with the reading as they would have been if they were reading parts of it.

If I were to adapt the lesson in order to target my belief of giving students more time to read, I would have done some buddy reading. This way students would have more opportunities to read the book, switching on and off with a partner. They could also have a peer modeling proficient reading, which would be beneficial, seeing as the teacher wanted me to read to them so they would receive this modeling. Each student would be able to adequately provide a level of support for the other when students are paired together to read (Flint, 2010). So the student is still receiving a level of support that would come if I were reading to them. However, they will be flourishing more by receiving more time to read.

Even though my students may not like to read or struggle with reading it does not mean I should do it for them all the time. They will become too dependent on that help and never learn to do it for themselves. Small group reading is ideal for all readers because this is a time when

there are less “eyes” on them as they’re reading. I think one of the biggest reasons why students don’t want to read aloud is because they think others are making fun of them.

There were factors which made me think that I had to teach against my belief of giving students more time to read on this day. Guided reading groups for this second grade class meet toward the end of the day. This group had just gotten back from their reading groups later than usual and there had been a lot of tattling going on between some of the students in this group. I knew that if I was to read to them it would keep them more engaged and on task. Because I had less time with this group I knew from the teacher’s notes that we would not get through what she wanted me to do if I asked them to read the text. The text was the same one as all the other groups so there was no differentiation that day. Another big factor is that I am the substitute teacher, which means I don’t always feel comfortable changing the teachers’ plans unless they specifically tell me I can. I also wanted to make sure that all my groups finished what the teacher left. All of these reasons go into why I chose to teach against my belief with this group and do all the reading that day, instead of giving them an opportunity.

Another time that I had to teach against my beliefs was when I was in a third grade classroom. My field notes from February 4, 2014 state that I was to do a listening activity with the students. According to the teacher’s plans, I should read aloud *The Story of Punxsutawney Phil, “The Fearless Forecaster”* (Moutran, 1987) and then students should take notes while I’m reading to help them answer the questions afterwards. My analysis of the lesson before I began teaching was that there was not much direction at all. As indicated in my field notes, the teacher’s plans were very simple, read, students take notes and answer questions. The simplicity of the lesson plans made me think that she had done this sort of listening activity with them prior

to that day. I thought they wouldn't need much direction with it because they had practiced it with her.

However, during the lesson I noticed that when I said they should be taking notes it was like a foreign language for these third graders. The teacher had not told me they needed explicit modeling or for me to even teach the strategy for that matter. What came next I wrote about in my journal entry from that day:

It seemed like no one knew how to take notes. I was just doing what the teacher instructed me to do. She wanted to see how well they could listen and answer questions independently. Well she should know her students. The students had blank note pages and they answered the questions either from what they could remember or from guessing.

There wasn't time built into the lesson for me to teach or model the strategy of taking notes. I basically had to sit back and watch an unsuccessful lesson because I couldn't do what I knew was best.

If I were able to adapt this lesson to target my belief of implementing modeling I would have done so by providing scaffolding to the students. Scaffolding should take place, but only after efficient modeling. Scaffolding is when a teacher provides the minimal amount of temporary support necessary in order for the student to complete the task(s) independently (Vygotsky 1978; Flint, 2010). I could have modeled for the students on the board how to take notes by illustrating such things as using bullets instead of full sentences. Also, I could have told them to only write down what you think is really important from the story, because you can't and shouldn't write down everything. This model would have provided students with guidance for taking their own notes afterwards.

Instead of providing modeling by using scaffolding, which is one of my beliefs in regard to teaching literacy, there were reasons which prevented me from doing so. This had been my first time in the classroom so I didn't know the students at all. As soon as the day started I could tell there were problems with classroom management. The students were not sitting down and getting right to their morning work like I have witnessed in other classrooms. I also had some drama between two students in the cubbies because one student moved his belongings out of the cubby they shared. I could already tell that these students did not have a firm structure that they followed.

This lesson that I was teaching came in the morning after all of this had already happened. Not knowing the students at all and their needs prevented me from knowing that they could benefit from modeling. I thought that if the teacher knew the students would need this then she would have indicated this on her plans. I also did not want to deviate from the plans in any way because of the problems with classroom management I was witnessing. I figured if I were following the teacher's plans then the students would be doing what was expected.

Another instance when I was teaching against my beliefs was in sixth grade English Language Arts. In my field note from March 3, 2014, I wrote about how the teacher's plans had me tell the students that they must write about saving the Taj Mahal for their writing piece that day. My analysis of the lesson before the students even arrived was that this would cause some students to feel restricted in their writing. They are being told which side to take even though the text that they had been reading on the Taj Mahal has information which supports both sides of the argument. However, I'm sure there would be some students who would be okay being told which side to take because then they didn't have to make a decision.

Not long after I gave the directions, I had students coming to me asking, “What if I don’t want to save it?” I had to tell them they needed to pretend. Their anger showed through with huffs and puffs. What came after I addressed in my journal entry from that same day March 3, 2014:

I had a lot of blank stares. The students who had asked me if they could write about not saving the Taj Mahal had written nothing. I tried to be persistent, but I couldn’t inspire them to write about something they weren’t passionate about. My passion in writing comes out when I can write creatively so I know how these kids feel. If they can’t write what they would like they don’t want to write at all. I can’t blame them.

It was evident by walking around the room that there were many writing pieces that were lacking a lot of effort. I felt uneasy after this lesson when the students were leaving the room. I could tell that they were not pleased with my assignment (even though it wasn’t really mine).

If I had the ability to adapt this lesson in order to target my literacy belief of providing choice I would have done so by giving them their choice to write from either perspective; saving or destroying the Taj Mahal. Choice has been found to be a strong motivator for middle school students (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Fisher & Frey, 2012). These findings came from a study done on adolescent boys. The students who were asking me for the choice that day were, in fact, boys. Although the teacher was having me deny the students their choice in writing for only one lesson, over time if this continues it can really decrease the students’ motivation and interest writing in general.

Once again, instead of trying to adapt the lesson I thought that I had to teach against my belief of providing choice and carry out the teacher’s lesson for different reasons. One of the

reasons was that this whole lesson was part of a bigger unit of study surrounding the Seven Wonders of the World. Therefore, I didn't know if all of the students needed to write about saving the Taj Mahal for a particular reason. I also didn't know if the teacher was going to give students an opportunity to write about the other side of the issue at a later date, but when she came back she was expecting to see the writing pieces about saving the Taj Mahal completed. Another big reason that I taught against my belief was because I didn't know the teacher at all. It was my first time substituting in her room and I didn't feel comfortable changing anything. I never want to make a bad impression as the substitute, especially when it's my first time in someone's classroom. What I found was that I can't always make the choices I might normally make if I was the regular teacher because I don't know the bigger picture of what's going on in the classroom and the decisions aren't always mine to make as the substitute.

There were reasons which made me teach against my beliefs throughout the six weeks of data collection. One of the main reasons I did so, was because of my role in the classroom. I was the substitute teacher and not the regular teacher. Therefore, I felt unsure about changing lessons, in case it was going to interfere with later lessons or if it would make the regular teacher upset. Another reason I found I was teaching against my beliefs was because of behavior management issues in the classroom. Other reasons that go along with this include, first time in the classroom and unfamiliarity with the students. Lastly, I found that the lack of time I had with lessons also gave in to my decision to teach against my beliefs.

### **Theme 3: Context Influencing Beliefs**

There were factors which influenced my ability to carry out my literacy beliefs in practice and factors which made me put a greater emphasis on certain beliefs more than others. For

instance, special education vs. general education classrooms and grade level were two major components of this. In addition, the regular teachers' classroom management effectiveness prompted me to teach against certain beliefs to keep the students' behaviors in the classroom under control. My third theme answers my second research question, how is my passion and beliefs for literacy reflected in the interactions with my students? There are examples of when I was supporting my students positively no matter their gender, ability or grade level. For example, providing scaffolding with strategies and questions to help them be successful indicates my passion for literacy and it's importance so that my students come away with that same passion.

As a substitute teacher I see a range of classrooms. There are times where I'm in classrooms and it's clear that the regular teachers do not have too much control over their students. When there is a lack of a behavior management plan established in the classroom, then I am not always able to do what I would like, or what they ask. One common finding was that I was unable to give these students as much freedom when it came to choice, as opposed to the classrooms that have teachers with a solid behavior plan set in place. For example, in an entry dated January 13, 2014, my field notes indicate that I did a lot of independent work. The teacher's plans for the writing lesson that day were to write a paragraph to answer questions using details from the text to support their answers. They may work with a partner.

Prior to this writing lesson, the students had been very wild. I had one student in particular who couldn't stay in his seat. He was throwing things around the room and talking to other students while they were trying to work. This caused those other students to come up to me and complain about him. The students were disruptive while I was reading aloud right before their special, too. This writing lesson was going to happen right after special so I knew I had to

adjust what I was going to do, if I wanted to have all the students cooperating during their work time.

Instead of immediately sending them off to work with a partner for the writing lesson, I had students start out working on the assignment independently. Students remained at their seats and I circulated around the room to offer my assistance. They were complaining about how they didn't understand the text and the questions were difficult. I informed them that if they were working hard for a while on their own then they would be able to work with a partner. After about fifteen minutes, I did allow students to work with a partner somewhere in the room. The students were back to the constant chatter and were unfocused. I did want the students to be able to work with a partner because that's what the teacher had wanted, but they were not getting anything accomplished by having that choice. This prompted me to send the students back to their seats to finish up the assignment by themselves.

The context of this classroom influenced the way I carried out my belief of providing choice to the students. Choice can automatically raise the volume level in the classroom if students are working with another person, because they have to talk with that person. Another thing that can happen with choice is students are able to work out of their seats, which automatically makes them more excited, thus louder. Knowing all of this is why I did not choose to tell them to find a partner right away after handing out the assignment. The students had already been difficult to manage thus far and it was still early in the day. I knew the choice time could create even bigger issues for me for the remainder of the day. Although I did offer them choice in the middle part of the lesson, I was teaching against my beliefs for part of the lesson.

If I were to adapt this lesson in order to teach literacy using choice, I would address behavior management. Before beginning the lesson, I would have the students help me make a poster of all the things they think are important to do when working with a partner. Students will be clear on the expectations they have even before they begin working. With choice, comes freedom, and with the freedom come responsibilities. Students will begin their responsibilities with creating a class poster for partner/group work. Then, this can be used as a reference point when the choice gets taken away. When I looked around the room in the classroom I was in that day, I saw nothing like this. I've seen these types of posters in other teachers' rooms and their students had worked well with partner work. I think this would have made me feel more comfortable giving that class the choice right away, without worrying if I'm going to regret it later.

Normally, I would want the students to have that choice and interactive time by working with a partner for the whole lesson. However, sometimes as the substitute teacher and not the regular teacher who holds the power, I can't afford to do these things. I've had to tell the teachers that they couldn't handle it; it was too chaotic for anything to get done. I've also felt judged by the teachers next door who might think I'm doing a poor job because of how loud it's getting. I would be all for skipping all the independent work because it does get boring for students, but at times it's necessary in my position.

One context that I found influenced the way I carry out my beliefs was a special education classroom. My literacy belief is for students to spend more time reading independently; however with students in the self-contained classroom, I found myself adjusting to the students I was working with.

For example, when I was in a self-contained middle school classroom the students were very low readers, unable to identify many words for themselves. My field note from that day, January 21, 2014, stated that the teacher's lesson asked for students to read in their textbooks and find the blanks to fill in on their notes.

I began circulating between the groups of desks. I noticed one student in particular had nothing written on his paper, was mumbling to himself, and staring around the room. When I inquired if he needed help I found out that reading was a struggle for him. He had not read any of the pages yet. I sat down beside him and began reading the text for him. In my journal from that day, January 21, 2014 I reflected on this lesson while working with this student:

Because I was reading for the student he didn't have to worry about trying to decode the words. All he had to worry about was comprehending what I was reading, which for a struggling reader, is hard enough sometimes. He was successful searching for the answers after I had read the passages and filled in the blanks on the worksheet with minimal help from me.

In order for this student to be able to complete the lesson, he needed a lot of support. It was in his best interest for me to read to him instead of leaving him on his own like I did with the other students. If I didn't read to him, then it would have been really difficult for him to finish the assignment on his own. The context of the self-contained classroom led me to teach against my belief of allowing more time to read for this lesson.

However, the context did support my ability to carry out the belief of modeling for this student. In this case, I was modeling proficient reading for him as a lower reader. I was noticing throughout my time reading aloud with him that he had an easier time answering the questions as

time went on. The student was looking back in the text to find his answers for the worksheet, but I made it easier for him by already decoding the challenging vocabulary for him. Listening to reading aloud helps students develop their reading comprehension and vocabulary (Harris & Sipay, 1990; Routman, 1996; Hurst & Pearman, 2013). The student will have a better comprehension of the text if I read aloud to him myself. Hearing the vocabulary read aloud will also give the student a better understanding of it (Hurst & Pearman, 2013). As this student becomes a better reader, modeling proficient reading for him will serve a great purpose as part of his reading progress.

One area where teachers form their literacy beliefs is in the needs of their students. This is why the context of the classroom and the students present, will influence teachers' beliefs as it did for me when I went between general education and special education classrooms.

As far as the general education classes, I found that as the context changed between primary, intermediate or middle school, my literacy beliefs were influenced. When substituting in the lower grades, I found that those students still needed modeling with specific strategies because they hadn't had explicit modeling or been exposed to as many strategies. For example, when my students were working in groups on January 22, 2014, I went around to groups and modeled for them how to pull out the main idea of the text. I wrote about how I provided this modeling in a journal entry from January 22, 2014:

Alright, someone remind me what the main idea of a text means. The students gave me their feedback. Now, if I wanted to determine what the main idea of this story would be I am going to focus on the big picture instead of the details in the text. Can someone tell me about what happens in this text about Jackie Robinson? The students took turns

giving me a synopsis about his baseball career and what he did for Civil Rights afterwards. Good, now if I were to tell someone else what this text was about and I only had one sentence to do it would I say the main idea is about Jackie Robinson's baseball career or fight for Civil Rights? Now I know the baseball teams Robinson played for and the awards he won, but those seem like just details. His baseball career is highlighted in a small portion of the text. However, these details are included for the bigger picture. Robinson used his fame to be an advocate for Civil Rights. This text is focused on that instead of his baseball career. That's how we work towards finding the main idea of a text.

With these students in the intermediate grades, I wasn't simply instructing them to find the main idea of the text and then sitting back and watching them. These students need guidance as I teach strategies like finding the main idea before I can expect them to do it on their own. The context of the intermediate grade level supported my ability to enact my literacy belief of providing modeling and teaching multiple strategies for my students. These students need me to teach them reading strategies, which includes modeling for them. One way that I did this was by thinking aloud for my students.

On the other hand, when working with the upper grades I found that I wasn't so much teaching multiple strategies, rather I was reinforcing them. The students at this level have had practice with these strategies so it's just a matter of prompting them to apply them, and then reinforcing when they do. For example, when I was in an eighth grade classroom one day I was finding that I didn't have to teach those students what re-reading is or how to use context clues to help them determine the meaning of the word. These students have already had teachers who have taught and modeled these strategies for them. What they need to learn is to apply those

strategies that they've learned, which is where prompting comes in. In an entry from January 24, 2014 I expanded on this prompting that I did for my students:

I'm finding my older students simply sit and stare at the text when they're stuck. I know that they will be able to help themselves so I prompted them to get them to try something. For instance I will ask them, "What do you know that might help?" or "If you don't know what the word means what can you do?" Questions like these are used as prompts to guide my students to be successful independently. Most strategies they have knowledge of, but may not know what they're called or won't think about using them when they get stuck. By prompting them, I'm hoping that eventually they will automatically do them without me having to remind them. I don't need to teach them how to re-read, the prompting is a push to get them to be more independent now that they're eighth graders.

This context influenced me to teach against my beliefs. My beliefs of teaching multiple strategies and modeling are intertwined because I feel that's the only way for students to really learn the strategies. Although these are my beliefs, I learned that this cannot be done all the time. Students in the upper grades, like these eighth graders, have already had this instruction, which included two of my beliefs. However, now is the time that students practice these strategies. I shouldn't be teaching students in eighth grade the same strategy that I'm teaching a second grader, for example. Prompting the strategy is the next step after modeling. I don't think I would do anything differently if I were to adapt this lesson. These students already have the knowledge of the strategies like re-reading and using context clues that I don't need to teach them the strategies. I found that I will not be implementing any or all of my literacy beliefs in every lesson. Going back and forth between the contexts of the different grade levels made me see when and where these beliefs are more appropriate and appear more.

I really noticed what I do differently depending on the context that I'm in, particularly the grade level I'm working with. Until the younger students are taught strategies through modeling and have practice applying the strategies with teacher support, I can't expect them to do them on their own. Only after this support has been provided for a duration of time, can I begin scaffolding the support, until eventually they can do it independently. I found that students in the different contexts are at a different point in the scaffolding process.

Throughout the duration of this study, I discovered that the contexts that I was working in either supported my ability to enact my beliefs or led me to teach against my beliefs. Behavior management issues in the classroom, resulted in teaching against my belief of providing choice to students. The context of a special education classroom also had me teach against my belief of offering more time to read for all students. However, the general education classrooms resulted in my ability to enact my belief of teaching multiple strategies and providing modeling. The way I was able to implement this belief, varied among grade levels.

#### **Theme 4: Resources Impacting my Beliefs**

The available resources that I had in the classrooms, schools and district where I was substitute teaching allowed me to implement my literacy beliefs smoothly. If I did not have these resources readily available I would not be able to incorporate my beliefs into my instruction as effectively. My fourth theme that I uncovered answers my first research question, how is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my pedagogical choices? I found that my pedagogical choices came from using a variety of resources in order to carry out my literacy beliefs such as modeling, teaching multiple strategies, and providing relatable and engaging experiences.

One of the biggest resources is the availability of modern technology in every classroom, such as the use of interactive white boards. Having the use of the interactive white board is great for interactive activities. Students are being pushed to use the Answer Cite Expand (ACE) strategy for short written responses and as the substitute teacher in fifth grade I was able to use the interactive white board to construct an ACE response together. For instance, in my journal entry dated February 3, 2014 I reflected on this activity:

I worked on it with the whole class and we created our own summary using ACE. By doing it whole class I was able to get students involved. They were able to share their ideas from their seats as I wrote. Then we would discuss the students' ideas and continue to expand. I could also think aloud as I was going through the response and model for my students why I was doing what I was doing. For example, "Now that we have restated our question can we all look in the text and find a sentence that supports our statement that cheating in schools is wrong." A student shared their idea. "Great, now when I write this what do I have to remember to put around it? Quotation marks is right."

Interactive white boards have many tools which allowed me to highlight on the text or write in the margin, just to name a few. As part of this lesson, I was able to teach the ACE strategy by modeling and demonstrating what their papers should look like if they are doing it well, without having to go from person to person, circulating around the room. I highlighted the evidence in the text that we found which supported our stance, that cheating in schools is wrong. I did this on the interactive white board and had students copy on their own papers. Once again, I used thinking aloud to model the strategy. "Remember, we highlight on our text so that pinpoints exactly what we're going to write on our papers." By using the interactive white

board as a visual, the students were able to see how I went about using the ACE strategy myself. The interactive white board supported my ability to use two of my literacy beliefs, teaching multiple strategies and modeling. My beliefs and the use of the interactive white board will allow my students to conduct this strategy independently afterwards.

In another entry from my field notes dated January 23, 2014, my instructions were to model a paragraph starter for them which was...”I think dodge ball should (not) be banned in school...” I was able to model this on the interactive white board for all the students to see and then copy down on their papers. Being able to display the text on a large screen like the interactive white board allows all the students to see it, which is ideal for explicit modeling. The students were able to follow along with me as I was reading and highlighting evidence from the text to use in my written response. I was thinking aloud about the text and then demonstrating how one line of the text can support my claim for banning dodge ball. For example, my journal entry from January 23, 2014 explains this further:

Now, I remember from the text that dodge ball can cause injuries. So what I’m going to do is go back and re-read the paragraph where it talks about health risks. As I read the text I stopped when I came to a sentence that supports this idea. This is a perfect example so I’m going to highlight it and write it down. After I write it, I have to remember to explain it further using my knowledge.

I did the same thing when finding a piece of the text which supports the notion to ban dodge ball in schools. After modeling for students how to find the first piece of evidence, I had them work on their own for the next example. Again, the interactive white board was used as a representation to show what I was doing when working through this strategy. The students were

not only hearing what I was doing, but everyone was able to see it to because of the use of technology present in the classroom.

One of the other big resources that the district uses is a computer program called Reading Assistant (scilearn.com), which allows students to practice their literacy skills. The students can do a number of things on this program including, being able to hear a text read to them and also record their reading by speaking into a microphone. In a journal entry dated January 13, 2014 I reflected on using this program:

By having Reading Assistant accessible, I was able to carry out many beliefs all at once even with students who are at different levels. One of my students needed help with solving a word. I was able to teach him a strategy which would help him decode new words. If you cover up the beginning part of the word it should help you read that word. Watch- what if I cover up the wood. What's the word say that you see...lands. Now read both words together. See how you can cover up parts of the words you don't know to help you solve the new word?

The technology provided the text which created opportunities for me to help teach new strategies, thus I was carrying out my literacy belief of teaching multiple strategies. More importantly, I wasn't just teaching this strategy, I was able to have the student apply and practice the strategy right away with a real text.

While I was working with this student, next to me, another student was recording his reading of a text into the program. On the other side of me, a student was listening to a new text being read to him. Both of these examples show that the computer is assisting me by modeling for my students as I work with another student. All three of these students are special education

students and struggling readers. They all will benefit from readers modeling proficient reading for them. Although all of these students are struggling readers, they are still at different levels. Therefore, they need instructional texts at their level. This program allows each student to receive modeling that is at their reading level. Additionally, all of the students are given more time to read with this program and it's at their reading level.

Having the opportunity to implement this resource that the school provides, allowed me to target a number of my literacy beliefs at the same time, including modeling, teaching multiple strategies, and more time to read. This is ideal because not all students need the same modeling on a daily basis or to work on the same strategies. Reading Assistant acts as another teacher in a way. It also finds texts that match my students' reading levels which is another benefit as a substitute teacher. I could still feel that I was supporting the students I was working with even though I don't know their needs as their regular teacher would.

Additional resources that are available to me are the Common Core ([engageny.org](http://engageny.org)) teacher's manual and the corresponding flipchart. The availability of these resources might be the most helpful for a substitute teacher because I don't know what I'm going to be teaching when I go into a classroom that day. The manual provided me with questions I was able to ask the students. The pictures on the flipcharts served as visuals for students to have a greater understanding of the events and characters in the units they were studying. From a journal entry on March 2, 2014 I explained this further:

Students had already been studying the Greek myths. Before starting the read aloud today I was able to have students use the flipchart to explain to me the Greek characters. This provided background for students going into the read aloud. It also helped me

because I have not been in the room learning what they have. The manual provided me with questions I was able to ask, including, “how do Greek heroes influence our lives today?” The questions I asked strengthened the students’ understanding of the text. For this lesson, the manual also had me focus on the word retrieve. This also helped my students’ comprehension.

With the use of the manual and flipchart, my lesson was enhanced to make it more relatable and highly engaging. The flipchart provided visuals to keep my students engaged during the story. Also, it strengthened their understanding of the characters and events we were reading about because they could refer to the large images displayed on the flipchart. Even though the events of the stories are not as relatable to students as they could be, the visuals brought the story to life for them so that they could understand and relate to them better. They were able to picture themselves in the story. The use of the manual and the corresponding questions also provided a way to engage my students. The manual allowed me to ask questions before, during, and after the story, which held students’ attention. Overall, they were more engaged because the questions channeled into a rich discussion.

As my journal entry indicates, the resources allowed me to expand my lessons and expand the students’ learning even when I haven’t been there to know what they’ve been studying. I had the ability to ask more insightful, thought provoking questions that the students could benefit from and highlight key vocabulary terms to improve their comprehension. Resources like these enhance my instruction and engage the students so they can have a better understanding of the lessons.

The resources that I found that had the greatest impact on my beliefs included an interactive white board, the Reading Assistant program on the computer, and the Common Core teacher's manual and corresponding flipchart. The interactive white boards allowed me to model and teach multiple strategies to my students, by providing a visual representation to guide them. Reading Assistant also supported my efforts to work on multiple strategies. In addition, the program modeled fluent reading for my students and provided more time to read, which both target my literacy beliefs. Lastly, the Common Core teacher's manual and flipchart provided visuals and questions to support background knowledge and comprehension. These factors made my lessons more relatable and engaging for my students.

## **Conclusion**

After careful analysis of the data collected in this study, I found that there were many ways that my passion for and beliefs about literacy were present in my daily interactions with my students and my pedagogical choices.

I was able to implement four out five of my literacy beliefs effectively, including, choice, more time to read, modeling and teaching multiple strategies. Although I found creating authentic learning experiences was difficult as a substitute teacher, I was able to create relatable and highly engaging experiences. Each one of my literacy beliefs were implemented in different ways each time.

My passion for literacy was present in my interactions with my students in order to translate that passion over to my students. However, there were times that I had to teach in ways that go against my literacy beliefs because of my role as the substitute teacher, without full

control of the classroom that I was in. I found that unfamiliarity with the students and teachers' expectations made it difficult to adapt the lessons in order to meet my beliefs.

As a substitute teacher, the context in which I was teaching changed regularly. Therefore, I was flexible when implementing my literacy beliefs in order to meet the needs of the students and the environment I was working in. I adapted my beliefs based on the grade level that I was in. This did not always mean I was able to teach in a way that supported my beliefs. The context of the special education classroom impacted my decisions, as well as behavior management issues in the classroom.

The resources that were available to me in the school district enhanced my ability to carry out my literacy beliefs. Interactive white boards were present in every classroom and allowed me to teach reading and writing strategies, so that students could learn how to use them independently. The Reading Assistant program targeted three of my beliefs, including, modeling, teaching multiple strategies, and giving more time to read. The Common Core teacher's manual and flipchart also supported my efforts to provide relatable and engaging experiences for students.

After participating in this study for six weeks, I found that my passion for literacy was present in my pedagogical choices. Four out of five of my literacy beliefs were also present; however, I found ways to address the last belief as best I could. My role as a substitute teacher and the context I was teaching in, were the biggest factors in the instances where I found myself teaching against my beliefs. The resources present in the classrooms, supported my efforts to target my literacy beliefs. I did find that my literacy beliefs have a profound impact on all my pedagogical choices.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study set out to explore my literacy beliefs and how they were present and impacted my instruction during my substitute teaching. The study focused on the following questions:

**Question 1:** How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my literacy pedagogical choices?

**Question 2:** How is my passion for and beliefs about literacy reflected in my interactions with students in the classrooms in which I substitute teach?

In this chapter I will discuss conclusions I have made based upon my findings from the study. I will discuss how the findings from chapter four benefitted my future teaching practices and created implications for student learning. In addition, I will address recommendations for future research and final thoughts on my research.

### **Conclusions**

#### **Teachers must be flexible with implementing literacy beliefs into their pedagogical choices**

I found that that I was not always able to incorporate my literacy beliefs into my pedagogical choices. This was because I was a substitute teacher and did not have the power to make all the decisions in the classrooms I was working in. Even though my position varies from a regular teacher I think that these teachers still need to be flexible. There are factors which prevent all teachers regardless of their status to make all the decisions in their classroom, including district and state mandates.

This held true for one of my beliefs throughout the duration of the study, providing authentic learning experiences for students. Even though I could not fully carry out this belief, I

found ways to adapt this belief in order to include parts of it into my teaching. I focused on creating relatable and highly engaging experiences for students. Students are more motivated and have a strong initiative to actually understand a text when they are participating in an engaging activity (Kabilan & Kamaruddin, 2010). I had students participate in various activities that were both relatable to something in their lives, and engaging, which would make them want to participate. Additionally, when students participate in these activities, their interest and motivation levels are higher and their comprehension is significantly increased (Kabilan & Kamaruddin, 2010). The students were interested and motivated in taking part in the activities, which has the potential to strengthen comprehension of the text, or task, at hand. Even though I was unable to fully implement my belief of creating authentic experiences in the classroom, I was flexible with my beliefs, and still found it benefitted my students in the end.

One of the main strategies that I considered when adapting my literacy beliefs was the students' interest level. This was the main factor when I was creating their assignments. I wanted something that would be engaging for them. One of the assignments I had them do was create a pamphlet or brochure which engaged them and motivated them to do well. I also knew students would be more motivated to write to a friend than to me so I created relatable and highly engaging experiences that involved them writing to their peers. Taking my students' interests into account was the first step to designing relatable and highly engaging experiences for them.

### **Teachers adapt their practices to meet the needs of their students and the context in which they are working**

It was also difficult to incorporate all of my literacy beliefs into my instructional decisions at the same time. This was because I got to know my students from observing them. I

was able to learn the strengths and needs of my students. Then as I got to know the students better, I saw that what the students would benefit from is not the same for every student.

Knowing the students' needs and the context that I was working in proved beneficial. When I saw the need, I would adapt my practices in order to meet the needs of the students I was working with. Because every child is different and learns differently, the most effective instruction is designed to fit each learner (Connor et al., 2011; (Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor & Walker-Dalhouse, 2012). I learned that my teaching beliefs would not be ideal for every student in every lesson. I learned this by closely observing the students I was working with. If I saw that students were not benefitting from how I was approaching the instruction, then I learned it may be more beneficial to try another approach. Therefore, I adapted my lessons in an attempt to find success with the students. Once I adapted the lessons, I saw that the instruction was meeting the students' abilities better because it was formed around their learning styles. Additionally, the needs, interests, and strengths of students within specific instructional contexts guide decision making about how to best differentiate at that time (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

Although my beliefs did not change, I found that the way I adapted my practices was always changing because the context that I was working in was always changing. For instance, I had to change my practices based on grade level. By observing and working closely with the students across grade levels, I found that middle school students do not need teaching practices that incorporate all of my literacy beliefs. To make middle school students listen to the strategy would have been counter-productive. Rather, they would benefit from instruction at a different step in the scaffolding process. I also worked with the students across different contexts where I found that some students would not benefit from a strict adoption of my literacy beliefs. Some

special education students would benefit from a different type of instruction as a precursor to any instruction that would approach a strict adoption of my literacy beliefs. My literacy beliefs did not meet the needs and abilities of all of the diverse learners that are in every classroom.

Therefore, instruction was altered so that the literacy practices were consistent with the audience.

Teachers should adapt their practices based on the context that they're in at that time. To this point, special education students benefit from being read to as opposed to reading independently.

This flies in the face of my belief of taking the time to read independently, but I modified this practice to best fit their abilities.

### **Teachers exhibit the value they place on literacy through modeling**

Research suggests that the amount of time students spend reading in and out of school depends upon the priority that the classroom teacher puts on independent reading (Anderson et al., 1988; Loh, 2009). Students get a first-hand account the priority that literacy plays in the lives of their teachers. This is evident when teachers ask students to read independently. The teacher is showing students that reading is important and it's an activity to be done every day. I was doing this by providing time in the school day for students to read. This also gives them the time needed to become invested with books. I was also demonstrating the way I value literacy when I instructed students to take out a book during their free moments, after finishing an assignment, or a test early. I wanted students to take advantage of any opportunity they had to read because it's a valuable activity.

The value that teachers place on literacy is also present when students see their teachers reading independently. Every time that I asked my students to read independently, and I was doing the same, they were seeing the value that literacy has in my life. I was not just asking

them to read. I was demonstrating that reading is an activity that I want to spend my time doing. This was also evident when I read aloud to my students every day. I was reading enthusiastically, emphasizing tone and expression. The students were able to hear and see how much I enjoy reading when I did this. It's necessary to demonstrate to students that literacy is important by participating in literacy activities daily, and having students do the same. When teachers do this, students will be more likely to feel that literacy is important as well.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

The findings of this study led me to conclude that my students engaged in activities that were based on my beliefs. It also showed that I was able to model the value of literacy for my students. Lastly, I found that the students participated in engaging activities using technology and visuals. The following section will explain implications for student learning, which I determined through analyzing my results of this study.

#### **Students were placed in learning activities based on my literacy beliefs**

The findings of this study led me to conclude that the pedagogical choices I made with the inclusion of my literacy beliefs maximized the potential for students' learning.

One of my beliefs is providing choices for students. One procedure that teachers can use in order to increase academic productivity and engagement is to provide students with choice-making (Hua, Lee, Stansbery & McAfee, 2014). Because my students had a say in what they were doing in the classroom, it created the potential for more engaged learners. My students felt good about having a say in what they did and they appeared more motivated to learn because of it. For example, as part of my study, students had choices when deciding what to write about

and what type of setting they wanted to read in. This made them more engaged and eager to learn.

I provided my students more time to read which gave them time to become familiar and engaged with a book. When students had free moments after finishing an assignment I asked them to find a book and read. I also set aside time in every classroom I was in for all students to get an opportunity to read independently. Time spent reading independently has been shown to increase students' enjoyment for reading, and the time they spend reading for pleasure (Chua, 2008; Pegg, & Bartelheim, 2011). Ultimately, when students enjoy reading they will be more likely to read for pleasure outside of school as well.

By modeling for students step by step, they were able to learn new strategies. I was able to use visuals to assist in modeling for them. I also modeled for students in different settings, including 1:1, small group, and whole group. In addition, the students were provided support for their own reading by listening to me read aloud. Providing students with the opportunity to see someone who is excited and engaged while reading is important to ensure that they will find the same joy in reading (Pegg & Bartelheim, 2011). I modeled for students my love for reading which created the potential for students to enjoy it too.

I was able to teach students multiple strategies mostly by doing think-alouds. For example, I did this when teaching my students about making predictions and connections. Students were able to hear how I form a prediction or a connection. Next, they used my examples to guide them when trying to make their own. Research supports that instruction with different strategies will increase the number of strategies students will use (Gurses & Adiguzel,

2013). Students were being taught new strategies in order to have the ability to apply them independently.

Lastly, I adapted my belief of creating authentic experiences for students to creating relatable and highly engaged experiences. For instance, students were writing letters to friends in order to demonstrate their understanding. The writing pieces were written about relatable topics and they were more engaging because they were writing to a friend. This writing served a communicative purpose, rather than just for evaluation (Duke, Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2013). I also had students participate in a debate. Students' interest level and motivation was high during this lesson. These activities maximized the potential for students' learning because they were more engaged with them.

### **Students had a teacher who modeled the value of literacy, creating opportunities for engagement**

Throughout this study, I did a lot of modeling for students to demonstrate to them my passion for reading and writing. I read aloud with my students, where I modeled such things as expression and tone while reading. This environment supported the students' ability to become engaged with the books I was reading and want to read other books on their own. An interactive read aloud allows students to listen, talk and think about the story being read to them (Pegg & Bartelheim, 2011). It creates another opportunity for students to become engaged with literacy.

Another way I modeled was by reading independently myself, when I asked my students to do the same. Because the teacher is living and real, the teacher is the one who can influence the reluctant reader to read (Loh, 2009). The teachers are also able to influence the student by their words and actions (Loh, 2009). My students saw me reading every day. By doing this, I

was showing my students that I value literacy, and that activities like reading should be done at any age.

### **Through the use of technology and visuals students were provided opportunities for engagement**

By using various forms of technology and visuals to model strategies, my students had the potential to develop a deeper understanding of what they were being asked to do. The students were able to look at examples on the interactive white board and then use those to help them carry out the strategies on their own. Interactive white boards are highly effective for whole group instruction, active discussion and questioning (Preston & Mowbray, 2008); they hold students' attention much better than a traditional lecture-and-blackboard lesson could (Vallis & Williamson, 2009; Martin, Shaw, & Daughenbaugh, 2014). The level of engagement that students brought to the lessons had the potential to benefit their understanding.

Also, I had students use technology to create pamphlets and brochures. By doing this, the students were able to demonstrate their understanding of the article that they had read about revenue generating sports. The implementation of multimedia activities improves student engagement in the learning process due to the ability to meet various learning styles (Courts & Tucker, 2012; Puckett, 2013). When student learning styles are addressed, they become more engaged with learning, and their success rate will increase (Puckett, 2013). I had my students engaging in activities that used this multimedia to motivate them and strengthen their understanding.

As far as visuals, the main one I used with students was the Common Core flipchart. I used this with students as a way to develop their background knowledge prior to reading aloud.

Then, I also used it during reading aloud to develop their understanding of the text. The visuals were used as a way to engage the students. Visual supports provide additional prompts to help these children understand discussions (Blagojevic, Logue, Bennett-Armistead, Taylor & Neal, 2011). The supports remain visible to serve as a reminder of what was said (Blagojevic et al., 2011). This aids in students' overall comprehension of the text because they can reference the flipchart during discussion.

### **Implications for My Teaching**

My own learning was strengthened as a result of this study. This study has provided me with a deeper understanding of what my literacy beliefs really are and how they shape my pedagogical choices. It has shown me that it's not always easy to do what I think is right in the classroom because of other factors that are beyond my control. I've learned how to adapt my beliefs in a way that is best suited for the students or the classroom I am working in. Finally, I learned it is beneficial to use resources that are available to me in order to enhance my lessons and my students' learning. The following section will explain implications for my own teaching, which I determined through analyzing my results of this study.

#### **Teachers must be prepared to adapt their literacy beliefs and pedagogical choices to meet the needs of their students**

My literacy beliefs include providing choices for students, modeling, allowing more time to read, teaching multiple strategies, and creating authentic experiences. These beliefs shaped how I interpreted my students' strengths and needs. My beliefs influenced what I was looking for in my students. For example, when my belief is to allow more time to read, I was looking for students who do this and I would consider that a strength. If the student was lacking time spent

reading, then I saw that as a need. Throughout the study, I based my students' strengths and needs on my beliefs and then adapted lessons to target those areas.

Research from a study found that a classroom schedule and the learning centers created by the teacher are examples of how the students' needs influenced her instructional decision (Deal & White, 2005). My students' needs influenced my instructional decisions throughout my study. When I was implementing a lesson, I adapted the choices I was making in order to meet the needs of my students. For example, when I was working in a self-contained classroom, I found that it was more beneficial for one student for me to read to him instead of allowing him the time to read himself. Even though one of my literacy beliefs is to allow students more time to read, after working with this student I could tell that that was going to be too much of a struggle for him to read. I didn't want my student to spend that much time struggling because it would only frustrate him to not want to read again. Teachers really need to focus on the students' abilities to guide their pedagogical choices. They should also be flexible with their decision making instead of focusing on meeting their beliefs.

I also adapted my lessons across grade levels. In the primary grade level, I did a lot more modeling for those students because they needed it in order to learn the strategies. I did step by step modeling with the use of the interactive white boards so that the students could have a visual to aid in their understanding of the strategies. Whereas at the middle school level, I did not do as much modeling for those students because it's not what they needed. One of my beliefs is the importance of teaching multiple strategies. By the time the students are at this age, many of the strategies that I would like them to practice, the students have already learned in previous grades. Therefore, I adapted my lessons when working with these students. They would not benefit if I

was teaching multiple strategies to them, instead, I found that they benefitted from more practice and less instruction.

I was flexible in my pedagogical choices which are rooted in my beliefs. I didn't carry out my beliefs in the same way on a daily basis. From this study, I learned to be flexible and my opinion would be that other teachers will have to develop this trait. Every student is different, and every class will be different from year to year for all teachers. Teachers must keep in mind that the needs of their students outweigh their beliefs.

### **Teachers must deal with district and state mandates to implement their beliefs**

The area that has been found to influence teachers' decision making and bring new challenges is curriculum issues (Deal & White, 2005). This held true for my study as well. One hot button topic currently being discussed is Common Core ([engageny.org](http://engageny.org)). Common Core monopolizes students' and teachers' time, often to the exclusion of other areas of study or interest. It was not always possible for me to give my students the choices I may have otherwise because of the state and district mandates set in place. I learned how valuable choice is for students and did what I could to provide a student-centered environment for my students every day. For instance, the district Common Core curriculum requires students to do close readings of texts. This comes directly from the Common Core modules ([engageny.org](http://engageny.org)). This is not always the most engaging activity for students and it can be challenging because of the vocabulary and critical thinking questions that go along with the texts. What I decided to do was provide students with a choice in how to respond to the article. They could either demonstrate their understanding of the text with a pamphlet or a brochure. Students were still meeting the requirements, but I adapted the lesson to provide some form of choice for the students to go

along with it. I did find that the mandates do provide a challenge to my beliefs on a daily basis and I will have to continue to adapt my lessons to meet the present and future mandates that are sure to occur.

Time spent on writing instruction that transfers between classroom and assessment is crucial (DeFauw, 2013). In a way, students must be able to know how to write for the test and it all starts with how they write in the classroom every day. One mandate in this district is the use of the ACE strategy when answering a short response question. This often becomes repetitive as students do a written assignment the same way over and over. As a result, it's hard to create relatable and highly engaging experiences when using this strategy. Because I wasn't able to fully target this belief with most writing assignments, I found ways to do it with other writing assignments. I had students writing about relatable topics which they read about and then they wrote to friends, which was engaging for them. Although the mandate was difficult to work around, it did allow me to target another one of my beliefs, modeling. I used the interactive whiteboards to model the ACE strategy so that it was more engaging for students. The visual held their attention better and they would still be learning the skills needed to implement the strategy independently.

One of the biggest state mandates is the tests that they require students to take. The common core curriculum requires teachers to prepare for and point students towards testing at specified times throughout the year. The teachers have to make sure they get through all the material before the test. Most states require that students pass prompted direct writing assessments, and this requirement influences classroom tasks (Olinghouse, Zheng, & Morlock, 2012; DeFauw, 2013). What happens next is we "teach to the test" to prepare students for the content and context of these standardized assessments (DeFauw, 2013). From my study, I found

that I used the teachers' manuals and flipcharts to teach students from the modules in order to prepare them for the tests. The teachers had to leave the modules for substitute teachers to do or they would get behind in their instruction. The manual provided me with background information and questions to ask my students. However, what I discovered was that not all of the lessons were laid out to allow students time to read. Time to read is one of my literacy beliefs. The manual instructed me to read aloud to the students and they listen. Because of these requirements, I created time in other parts of the day for students to read more. For instance, I had all students doing some amount of independent reading time in every class I was in. In addition, I encouraged students to take out a book and read whenever they got done with an assignment or test early. This way I was still finding ways to meet one of my literacy beliefs even if it wasn't always during my lessons. The district and state mandates may create challenges to implement certain beliefs so teachers must be prepared to be flexible.

### **Teachers need access to classroom and district resources to carry out their beliefs effectively**

I found that incorporating resources that were available to me enhanced my lessons and helped me target my beliefs more easily. I relied on the interactive white boards a lot for my teaching. The interactive white boards benefited my teaching because I was able to model and teach with them so that all students could see from their seats. If I did not have these boards in the classrooms I was working in, the modeling and teaching that I did, would not be as effective. I would have to find a different method to accomplish all the modeling I did for students at once. I used the interactive white boards to show parts of the texts that I wanted students to highlight on their papers. It would be more time consuming and less effective if I had to circulate around the room and show students where to highlight on their texts. Research indicates that teachers

find these resources to be more engaging and motivating as opposed to traditional resources (Blackwell, 2013). In addition, the interactive white boards allowed me to develop writing pieces with the whole class. Again, I was more effective in my teaching practices with the use of this resource.

The availability of computers with programs such as Reading Assistant also benefited my teaching practices. The program acted as another teacher in a sense that was able to work with students in ways that matched my beliefs, while I worked with other students 1:1. The features that the technological resources provide, enhance a student-centered environment (Blackwell, 2013). Students were able to work with the technology to become independent learners. If I did not have access to a resource like this then I would have been unable to implement as many literacy beliefs into my teaching at one time. I would not have been able to rely on Reading Assistant to support my efforts. I learned what a tremendous asset the resources that I used throughout this study were to me and carrying out my beliefs.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

### **Implement in diverse school districts**

This study took place in a school district where the majority of the students are Caucasian. This study should be done in districts that have a more diverse population in order to determine if that would impact the findings set forth in this study. Being in classrooms that are largely Caucasian based, could have an effect on the results of this study. If the researcher were to implement this study in a more diverse setting, he/she will be able to determine if race played a factor in this study.

The positionality of the researcher may be different so it will also affect the results of the study. One way is that teachers may or may not be from the same background as I am which will influence their findings. Similarly, not all the researchers will be in the same position as I am in my role as a substitute teacher. Therefore, their positions may find them in only one school, throughout the study. However, it could still be implemented in a different school district with more diversity present to determine if race and gender played a factor in this study.

### **Conduct this study among multiple substitute teachers within my district**

This study was conducted using the field notes and research journal of one substitute teacher- myself. I conducted this study thoroughly over the course of six weeks, I used triangulation within my data, and I reflected in my research journal honestly three times a week. All of these things helped to ensure that my research is valid and credible and not influenced by my bias. However, it is inevitable that my bias could have played a role in my reflections. In order to eliminate this possibility, it would be valuable to conduct this study with other researchers. Because this study was based on the context of the specific district and schools I was working in, I would suggest having other substitute teachers in the district participate in the same self-study.

### **Implement at the beginning of the school year**

This study took place at the end of the school year. There were many factors which interrupted data collection such as state tests and school breaks, which made it difficult to complete six weeks of data collection at one time. In addition, six weeks is not a substantial amount of time to collect data to formulate results. Future studies should be implemented at the beginning of the school year. This will allow the study to take place over a longer period of

time. The beginning of the school year could also provide different findings for the study. Teachers would not have covered some strategies yet and the themes and units they would be working on would differ.

### **Final Thoughts**

As I reflect back on my initial thoughts when I started this study, I realize that teachers' literacy beliefs have a profound impact on the pedagogical choices that they make. When the teachers make instructional decisions based on their beliefs, it has the potential to increase students' overall learning. This study has given me proof that my students do participate in activities based on my literacy beliefs. While it was not always possible to remain true to my beliefs because of my role as a substitute teacher, I did find that it was difficult for me to teach against my beliefs because they're important to me and I find them valuable. At the conclusion of this study, I still wonder how regular teachers' beliefs would affect their instructional decisions. They are the ones that hold the power over decision making in their classroom. Adapting my lessons in order to meet the needs of my students and the contexts I was working in, proved to be beneficial. I was still able to help students find success, even though I was not teaching exactly in line with my beliefs. I also found that the availability of various resources in the schools and classrooms that I was working in enhanced my lessons, thus benefitting my students. As I implemented the lessons based on the interests of the students, and having a relatable factor to them, I saw students' engagement and comprehension increase. Finally, the priority that I demonstrated literacy has in my own life, proved to relay positively with my students. By asking students to participate in various literacy activities every day and participating in them myself, students saw that literacy is something that should be valued.

Students will also realize that they should remain active about engaging in these activities in and out of school, including, into their adult lives.

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