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Preschool teachers' beliefs and practices: Emergent literacy in inclusive preschools

Leigh Rohde

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:
EMERGENT LITERACY IN INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOLS

BY

LEIGH ROHDE

University of Massachusetts, B.A., 1981
University of New Hampshire, M.Ed., 1996

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

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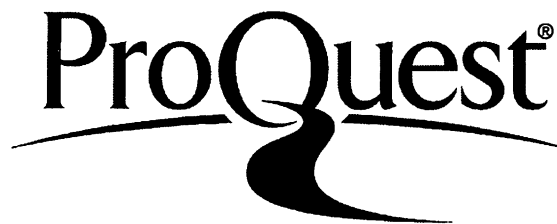
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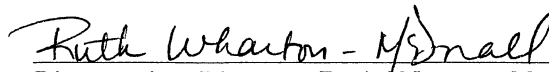


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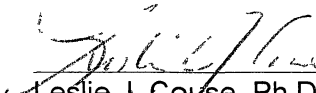
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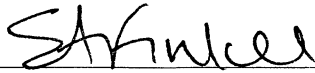
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Associate Professor of Education



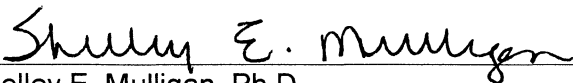
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Associate Professor of Education



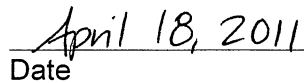
Elizabeth A. Finkel, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs
Graduate School of Education, Portland State University



Michael J. Middleton, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Education



Shelley E. Mulligan, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy


Date

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Richard A. Rohde, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: EMERGENT LITERACY IN INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOLS

by

Leigh Rohde

University of New Hampshire, May 2011

This study examines preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to emergent literacy learning for both children who are typically developing as well as those with identified disabilities. The sixty-eight teachers who worked in preschool programs that enrolled children with and without disabilities were asked to indicate levels of agreement with belief statements about emergent literacy, children with disabilities, and instruction. They were also asked to indicate what specific emergent literacy learning strategies and activities (if any) they used in their classrooms.

A new model of emergent literacy skills and understandings is used as a framework, indicating specific components of emergent literacy as well as the interactions between the components that lead to a greater understanding of literacy for young children.

Survey results indicate two significant findings. First, preschool teachers indicated high levels of agreement with, and examples of, the need to provide

emergent literacy learning opportunities for all students in their classrooms. Second, although teachers agree that children with disabilities should have access to emergent literacy learning, they do not generally provide additional support or materials to increase or ensure that access.

CHAPTER 1

EMERGENT LITERACY LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE'S PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.
~John Cotton Dana

Introduction

Much of my career has been spent visiting and working in early childhood education classrooms throughout New Hampshire; those classrooms most often include children with disabilities. My role in these classrooms ranges from consulting with teachers about how best to include children with disabilities to providing professional development to increase the quality of their instruction. It was not very long ago that I was often met with resistance to ideas and strategies related to emergent literacy; preschool teachers described their primary roles as helping children learn to play with one another and to explore their environment. The suggestion that “academic” learning had a place in preschool was foreign and suspect – damaging, at worst, inappropriate for young children at best. Additionally, there were many teachers and therapists who believed that their students with disabilities were not ready to engage in emergent literacy learning because there were other learning priorities for those children.

Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), 1996; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2008). Teacher quality is “predicated on teacher knowledge, particularly theoretical knowledge” (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 127). Teacher preparation and certification have the highest levels of correlation with student achievement in reading (Darling-Hammond, 2000). According to the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, research highlights two findings: (1) that high quality early learning programs are important for positive child outcomes, and (2) that practitioner education and training are keys in providing good early learning experiences (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2010). Additionally, there is a growing body of research that indicates a relationship between what teachers believe and what they choose to do in their classrooms (Fang, 1996). This study examines both teacher knowledge and teachers’ beliefs about emergent literacy.

Learning in Early Childhood Education

In recent years, great effort has been made to determine how best to support learning in young children. The early years are seen as a critical time period to establish basic skills and understanding, promote a love of learning, and build healthy relationships with others as a means to successful student outcomes later in life. A recent report of high quality inclusive preschool settings (Cate, Diefendorf, McCullough, Peters, & Whaley, 2010) pointed to instructional content and instructional techniques as two critical components of a high quality early childhood education setting. These indicators include strategies such as

developmentally appropriate learning activities and instruction during naturally occurring routines.

Learning Language in Early Childhood Education. It is well established in the field of Early Childhood Education that curriculum should include learning opportunities in all areas of development, including the social/emotional, physical, and cognitive domains (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Within cognitive development, the language and literacy domain focuses on vocabulary and other areas of oral language learning. Learning to communicate, primarily through listening and speaking, is a major component of a child's learning during the preschool years. Early childhood education settings promote children's learning of vocabulary, communication, and other forms of oral language as they grow through language-based activities and interactions between children and adults. These early language skills are strongly correlated with later reading success (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

There is enough evidence and research available to determine which children are likely to struggle in gaining literacy skills (Wilson & Lonigan, 2009). For instance, children living in poverty often have limited access to book reading and language-based interactions with adults and are at risk of struggling with literacy development later in school (Vernon-Feagans, Scheffner Hammer, Miccio, & Manlove, 2001). A parallel of potential risk can be drawn to children with limited oral language skills (i.e., those with articulation difficulties). These children who have delays or disabilities related to speech and language are of

particular concern to early childhood educators because these difficulties are indicators of potential struggles in gaining literacy skills and knowledge (Schuele, Spencer, Barako-Arndt, & Guillot, 2007). In 2009, there were 3,090 preschool children in New Hampshire who received special educational services and supports (http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/special_ed/documents/matrix_1209.pdf. retrieved April 3, 2011). Of that group, 1,444 children had a primary special educational code of “Speech and Language Impaired” as their primary disability. Nearly all preschool children with special educational needs receive speech and language therapy as part of their educational program as language is considered such a critical aspect of early childhood education.

Emergent Literacy

Literacy development and academic success for students can be predicted when children enter kindergarten (DeBaryshe & Gorecki, 2007; Vukelich & Christie, 2004). Specifically, oral language skills in preschool, such as using decontextualized language and having a large vocabulary, are strong predictors of later reading comprehension abilities (Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002). Children who have not developed emergent literacy skills before entering kindergarten are at risk for having later literacy and academic difficulties (Vernon-Feagans, et al., 2001).

Emergent literacy includes the knowledge and skills related to the alphabet, phonological awareness, symbolic representation, and communication that build over time beginning when children are very young – typically between birth and about age five. The concept of emergent literacy was developed in the

1980s to challenge the then- current notion that children are ready to become literate at a specific point in time, determined by age and maturity (Teale & Yokota, 2000; Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2000). It has been recognized as a vital content area of preschool curriculum for more than a decade, with a strong research base supporting its use (Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; Gunn, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995; Morrow, 1990). Emergent literacy for most children, is characterized by some as being *proactive*, in that it is preparing them for conventional school literacy and as being *preemptive*, inasmuch as the development of emergent literacy may play a role in preventing later reading difficulties (Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2004). Studies show that children who have a solid foundation of emergent literacy knowledge are best equipped to develop complex conventional literacy skills in school (Badian, 1982; Barone & Morrow, 2003; Justice & Kaderavek, 2004).

Speech and Language Disabilities and Emergent Literacy. Children with speech and language disabilities are at risk for difficulty developing literacy skills (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, & Colton, 2003; Light & Kent-Walsh, 2003). Studies report that children with developmental disabilities have far fewer opportunities to interact with literacy events and materials than their typically developing peers both at home and in preschool settings (Justice & Kaderavek, 2004; Katims, 1996; Koppenhaver, Hendrix, & Williams, 2007).

This reduced number of opportunities may be due to a number of factors, including a child's lack of interest in literacy, or a perceived lack of interest from the perspective of parents or teachers. It might also be related to physical,

cognitive, or social difficulties the child has in accessing emergent literacy materials or activities. Children with speech and language disabilities often struggle to distinguish sounds in language; research has linked this to difficulties with learning to read (Schuele, et al., 2007).

It has been suggested that many children with speech and language disabilities, particularly those with more significant challenges, are not expected by their parents or teachers to become readers and writers (Mirenda, 2003). However, many researchers and educators promote the inclusion of literacy goals for preschoolers with disabilities as a means to increase their social interactions with others and because they are entitled to the same opportunities to gain literacy skills as their typically developing peers (Kaderavek & Rabidoux, 2004; Katims, 1991; Kliewer, 2008).

It is particularly critical for children with speech and language disabilities to be provided with opportunities to gain emergent literacy skills during their preschool years. These skills are vitally important to their success in academics and schooling later in life as access may be limited to children who enter school without basic literacy skills and understanding. As Katim wrote: “the denial of literacy for young children with significant developmental disabilities (through the use of AAC communication systems) is similar to the denial of voice... the automatic exclusion from the literate opportunities and agendas of school also likely causes segregation from the general community of school” (2008, p. 23). This study examines what strategies teachers report using to support children

with speech and language disabilities in their classrooms in relation to emergent literacy learning.

The Role of the Teacher

Children develop emergent literacy if they play and interact with language and print (Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001). When teachers understand emergent literacy, they offer more opportunities to their students (Morrow, 1990). Social interaction and early literacy development are more likely to happen when teachers have a solid knowledge base of emergent literacy and child development. Conversely, preschool teachers with limited knowledge about literacy development are significantly less able to provide such experiences for children (Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, & Pianta, 2001). A firm base of teacher knowledge may contribute significantly to preschool teachers' abilities to effectively support young children's emergent literacy development. Dickinson and Sprague(2001) noted that children benefitted most from "a model of literacy development in which different kinds of knowledge that comprise early literacy (e.g., vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and print knowledge) are conceptualized as being part of a dynamic, mutually reinforcing system" (p. 276). The role of teachers is also defined by their own individual beliefs about what they should be doing in their classrooms and how they should be providing instruction.

Teacher Beliefs. For preschool teachers, these beliefs are often manifested in a focus on social, emotional, and physical development over academic learning (Lee, 2006). Many early childhood educators have indicated a high level of discomfort with "teacher-directed" learning, believing that children

learn best when allowed to explore and conduct their own learning (New, 2001). Others have expressed the need to provide more explicit instruction for their students (Winsler & Carlton, 2003). Winsler and Carlton (2003) wrote: “arguably the largest debate in the field of early childhood education for some time has been where along the continuum of ‘child-centered’ to ‘teacher directed’ it is best to define the role of the teacher for optimizing children’s healthy development in the early childhood classroom” (p. 156).

The Need for Further Research

There is a lack of research and evidence determining what teachers understand about emergent literacy. There is insufficient research literature that documents and analyses preschool teachers’ knowledge of emergent literacy and their use of recommended practices in their classrooms (Hedges & Cullen, 2005). In addition, there is limited research on the transfer of successful research findings in emergent literacy interventions to teachers’ classroom practices (DeBaryshe & Gorecki, 2007). Research in the area of teachers’ declarative knowledge with regard to emergent literacy in its infancy (Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004).

There is also a lack of research evidence that determines what teachers do in their classrooms to promote emergent literacy. There have been a small number of studies examining specific emergent literacy curricula but most focus on student outcomes as determined by an established curriculum, rather than on teacher practice, including the decisions they make about instruction. In fact, few studies even comment on the fidelity of teachers’ implementation of the

curriculum. Therefore, it is not clearly understood what teachers are doing in their classrooms, even if they are using a published, research-based curriculum.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct an initial investigation of the beliefs, understandings, and practices of a group of preschool teachers in New Hampshire. Specifically, I surveyed certified preschool teachers who work with both typically developing students and those identified with speech and language disabilities, to determine their understanding and practices of emergent literacy. The investigation examined teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy learning opportunities for young children and the ways in which teachers use specific strategies associated with each of five components of emergent literacy, including book reading, print awareness, writing, phonological awareness, and language.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review consists of two major sections; each is related to the outline articulated in Chapter 1. The first section defines emergent literacy. It includes an overview of the related research in child development and the development of early literacy skills. Two current models of emergent literacy are investigated; each model promotes a set of skills and related knowledge most children develop in their early years. A new model of emergent literacy is articulated, designed specifically for this research study. Next, the individual components of emergent literacy are elaborated. Within this section is a description of children with disabilities, particularly those with speech and language difficulties, and the challenges they face in early literacy learning.

The second section of this chapter focuses on teacher understandings, particularly understandings related to emergent literacy. This section connects young children's knowledge to their teachers' knowledge of emergent literacy learning and the teachers' role(s) in supporting young children's development. Additionally, there is an overview of teacher beliefs, specifically in relation to emergent literacy, child development and children with disabilities. Research has

demonstrated a strong correlation between teacher knowledge and beliefs and their classroom practices (Fang, 1996).

Definition of Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy consists of the set of skills and understandings that develop prior to, and serve as a foundation for, the development of conventional reading and writing. The term “emergent literacy” was introduced by Marie Clay (1966) who advanced the theory that young children develop important concepts about the forms and functions of print well before they can read and write words conventionally (e.g., by decoding, recognizing, and printing actual text) (Makin, Diaz, & McLachlan, 2007).

For most children, emergent literacy develops in early childhood, beginning as early as birth and continuing through early elementary school. Justice et al. (2003) wrote: “the majority of children, by virtue of being immersed in a literate society, acquire emergent literacy concepts and skills relatively effortlessly during the course of early childhood” (p. 321). This learning typically occurs within a rich literacy environment of books, effective conversation, pencils and paper - and without specific, explicit instruction about letters and language.

Other researchers, (e.g., Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Goodman, 1986; Mason & Allen, 1986) built on the concept of emergent literacy, particularly as a counter-argument to the reading readiness model, prevalent at the time Clay first presented her work. Emergent literacy skills include oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, including alphabet knowledge and concepts of print,

and writing. In addition to these skills, emergent literacy includes the early conceptual understanding of the functions of print.

There is a growing body of research that describes the process of literacy development for most children during their preschool years (McLachlan, 2007). For many, emergent literacy is an ongoing process, beginning with oral language and gradually incorporating aspects of print. Children begin with receptive and expressive language using single words, progressing through phrases, gaining vocabulary and semantics (the meaning of language) skills. These oral language skills and understandings aid children in their skills and understanding of written language.

Oral Language and Emergent Literacy

Oral language skills, particularly those related to the structure of language such as semantics and syntax, influence and later provide a structure for readers to construct meaning from text (Roth, Speece, et al., 2002). Many studies have shown strong correlations between a child's access to language models and later success in literacy particularly when children hear a wide variety of words and use a wide vocabulary in their own speech (Hart & Risley, 1995; Hoff, 2006; Justice & Pullen, 2003). This suggests that oral language abilities in preschool can predict and influence later reading comprehension.

Emergent Literacy and Students with Oral Language Disabilities

The connection between proficiency in oral language and emergent literacy skills is complicated and interactive; children with significant delays in oral language and communication are likely to struggle with literacy learning

(Justice & Kaderavek, 2004). Children with language deficits are likely to have fewer skills in phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and print awareness (Schuele, et al., 2007). Schule et al., (2007) cite two studies that report that as many as 75% of children with speech and language deficits also have deficits in reading, particularly in the areas of word decoding and reading comprehension. Difficulty with phonological awareness (the understandings associated with the sounds of language) is a commonly cited reason that children struggle with literacy (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2002). These deficits can result in children having difficulty learning to spell or in using writing conventions such as grammar and punctuation (Schuele, et al., 2007). Ferreira et al., contend “the most obvious aspect is that these children cannot articulate...consequently, these children have fewer opportunities to train speech sounds and their relations to letter symbols. The oral sounding of written text, common among beginning readers, is hard or impossible to master without functioning speech” (2007, p. 238).

Research has demonstrated a strong correlation between children with language impairments and later delays or difficulties in gaining conventional literacy, particularly with tasks related to written language as well as phonological awareness (Justice, et al., 2003). Direct and explicit instruction in oral language and phonological awareness is recommended for children at risk for later reading difficulties because of language deficits (Justice & Pullen, 2003). Preschool children with oral language delays who received specific instruction with books showed statistically significant growth in print concepts (Katims, 1996). In a later study, Laura Justice and her colleagues worked with children identified as having

expressive and receptive language disabilities combined with risk factors related to living in poverty. The children received instruction in emergent literacy, namely name writing, alphabet recitation, and phonological awareness. After a 12-week intervention program, significant positive effects in gaining emergent literacy skills were seen in these preschool children (Justice, et al., 2003).

Overview of the Emergent Literacy Research Literature

Most research conducted over the past ten years has focused on the individual components that make up the construct of emergent literacy (e.g., alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, vocabulary development). A recent (April, 2011) search of peer-reviewed research articles using EBSCO, ERIC, PsychInfo, and Academic Search Primer found over 1,984 articles about research related to emergent literacy. Many of the articles examined either a specific skill, such as phonological awareness or alphabet knowledge, or offered an approach to building emergent literacy skills, such as reading aloud to children or providing literacy-related materials in play settings.

Many emergent literacy studies have been conducted either in research settings or conducted by researchers. For instance, many of the studies were conducted over a fairly short period of time (six to 12 weeks) and were carried out by people who did not typically work in classrooms (Anderson & Matthews, 1999; Justice, et al., 2003). There have been a small number of studies looking at emergent literacy curricula, typically as a sum of the components rather than as in integrated approach to learning (Connor, et al., 2006; Gunn, et al., 1995)

There has been much *less* work focused on relationships between the components of emergent literacy and how they can be woven together to create what could be called a common knowledge base of literacy understandings prior to conventional reading and writing (Sénéchal, LeFevre, Smith-Chant, & Colton, 2001). A report released by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan examined the results of a survey, the Literacy Competency Checklist, given to preschool teachers to evaluate their students' early literacy behaviors. The study reported that preschool teachers believed that skills associated with comprehension of language and text were as, if not more, important than isolated skills related to alphabet knowledge or phonological awareness (Sayeski, Burgess, Pianta, & Lloyd, 2001). This indicates that preschool teachers may recognize that emergent literacy learning includes understanding of literacy as a "whole" beyond the sum of the individual "parts" of conventional reading and writing skills.

Another study focused on the development of "self as a reader" and the relationship between emergent readers and print in relation to their own experiences (Lysaker, 2006). Lysaker's study demonstrated how the ability to use oral language impacts a child's effectiveness in constructing emergent literacy knowledge, particularly print knowledge. The author concluded that the level of children's emergent literacy skill and knowledge development was dependent on the level of oral language the children used when they told stories depicted in wordless storybooks. The author argued that the children's production of stories was, at least in part, dependant on their ability to use oral

language. Children with higher levels of oral language skills were able to tell more complicated and detailed stories as compared to children with less developed oral language skills. The author argued that not only did the oral language permit the children to demonstrate higher levels of understanding about the book but were also able to comprehend the story at deeper, more complicated levels.

This study began with the hypothesis that children with limited access to oral language due to speech and language disabilities may, in fact, have higher levels of comprehension than they are able to demonstrate because they do not have a means to fully communicate their ideas and thoughts. This has implications for teachers in that they should be considering how to provide access to alternative modes of communication for children with limited speech so all children have the opportunity to demonstrate their true levels of understanding.

Other studies of children with disabilities have been conducted with children who have significant needs, such as girls with Rett syndrome (Koppenhaver, Erickson, & Skotko, 2001) or those with communication disabilities that require assistive technology or alternative and augmentative communication devices (Hetzroni, 2004). Few studies have examined the effects of targeted support for children with disabilities in typical preschool classrooms.

Historical Background of Emergent Literacy

The understanding of emergent literacy as a means to conventional reading and writing created a paradigm shift in early childhood education (Clay,

1998). The notion that children understand aspects of literacy prior to learning to decode was in stark contrast to the well-established theory of maturationism and reading readiness.

Beginning in the 1980s, researchers began to examine early literacy through a developmental lens. Early research in emergent literacy focused on children's understandings of reading and writing prior to entering school. Goodman (1986) referred to five research studies completed in the early 1980s as a basis for defining emergent literacy. She determined five "roots," or core concepts that define emergent literacy. They include: (1) the development of print awareness in situational contexts; (2) the development of print in connected discourse; (3) the development of the functions and forms of writing; (4) the use of oral language to talk about written language; and (5) the metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language (p. 7-11).

This developmental perspective was in stark contrast to the readiness perspective that was common in elementary schools and teacher education programs during much of the 20th century. Most early research in emergent literacy did not differentiate between the ways in which children conceptualized literacy and the specific early literacy skills children were developing, but rather examined the construct as a whole (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). These underlying concepts form the basis of emergent literacy, specific skill development occurs in relation to this foundation (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Early Research

Following Clay's (1966) early description of emergent literacy during the early 1980s, researchers joined together to challenge the traditional way of thinking about the way children gain literacy skills. Research emphasized two basic trends, first, a focus on the cognitive processes that influence learning and second, a renewed research interest in the sequencing of children's development (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). This careful examination of young children led them to a new way of thinking about children learning literacy. "Literacy emerges before children are formally taught to read. Literacy is defined to encompass the whole act of reading, not merely decoding. The child's point of view and active involvement with emerging literacy constructs is featured. The social setting for literacy is not ignored" (Mason & Allen, 1986, p. 7). Clay's term, "emergent literacy," intersected with the work of Goodman (1986), who was researching the impact of culture on children's acquisition of early literacy understanding. In addition, Sulzby (1986) contributed to the field by examining the relationship between early understanding of print and children's writing, described in more detail later in this chapter. This initial work on the social implications of communication and literacy focused on the conceptual framework of what emergent literacy entailed. Rather than the specific components of emergent literacy, this early research centered on how children build knowledge and skills about literacy starting very early in life.

Scientifically-Based Reading Research

The late 1990s witnessed a pendulum shift away from a maturationist view of “attaining literacy” as a construct and toward a more “academic” approach to early literacy. Some educators and others claimed that the naturalistic and maturational view of emergent literacy – where the approach was to wait for children to develop - was causing many children to fail to learn to read, or at least fail to gain the necessary early literacy understanding to be successful in early elementary school. Maturationist theory developed from the work of Arnold Gesell (Thelen & Adolph, 1992). His research focused on a fixed developmental progression of skill development in young children across domains. Gesell’s “readiness” theory suggested that the skills necessary to read would “unfold” naturally at the time children were ready to learn. In fact, Gesell (1949) pleaded with mothers to not be concerned with slight delays in development stating “patience does not cease to be a virtue; for the higher order of abilities cannot be hastened. Everything in season” (p. 90). Crain (2005) writes: “Gesell believed the child's development is directed from within, by the action of the genes... an outstanding feature of maturational development is that it always unfolds in fixed sequences” (p. 21). Pushing children with formal instruction prior to this time was considered to be detrimental to their learning (Kohlberg, 1968). This belief precipitated the common approach of watching and waiting for children to show signs they were ready to learn to read and write (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Proponents of a more structured approach to preschool argued that, in contrast to Gesell’s “wait and see” approach, children *could* learn with early

instruction and moreover, that these opportunities to learn early literacy skills and concepts were critical, particularly for children considered at-risk for later academic difficulties (Whitehurst, 2001). With the publication of many States' early childhood education standards as well as Snow's "Preventing Reading Difficulties," (1998) many in the field argued for more systematic, intentional instruction of early literacy knowledge and skills at the preschool level (Christie, 2008). At the same time, attention to preschool education was growing, with recognition of its importance in preparing young children for elementary schools (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

The term "scientifically-based reading research" came into fashion in the 1990s and quickly gained favor by many in the field of early childhood education who felt that children at-risk for reading difficulties should be targeted for more intensive academic instruction at the preschool level. This approach to instruction resulted in the development of some highly-structured academic preschools that functioned very differently from preschools following Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), as recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For example, so-called "academic" preschool programs and curriculum promote skill development (e.g., rote learning of alphabet letter names) rather than "DAP" programs that focus on play as a means of learning.

As the concept of emergent literacy has evolved over the last few decades, it is recognized as a merger of DAP together with an intentional focus on providing opportunities for children to learn about literacy. Emergent literacy

provides children with exposure to books, language, and writing in ways that are appropriate to their levels of development. Additionally, it includes structured (e.g., explicit) lessons and learning experiences for children that focus on the early literacy learning that is essential for their later success in school.

Models of Emergent Literacy

There are two models found in the research literature that conceptualize the common skills related to early understanding of literacy, prior to conventional literacy, and their relationships to one another (Sénéchal, et al., 2001).

Outside-In, Inside-Out Model

Whitehurst and Lonigan's (1998) model of emergent literacy includes both conceptual understanding of literacy and procedural understanding represented as a continuum of component skills and processes. Within their model, emergent literacy consists of the conceptual understanding that children develop about the function of reading and writing, the stability of print, and the beginning of comprehension strategies based on background knowledge and contextual clues. It also contains concepts related to the specific skills of interpreting print to make meaning. This includes understanding letters, by both form and sound.

They use the term "outside-in processes" to describe conceptual understanding, such as the function of print, particularly in the context of narrative; the "understanding of the context in which the writing they are trying to read (or write) occurs" (p. 854). Whitehurst and Lonigan recognized that "comprehension of all but the simplest of writing depends on knowledge that cannot be found in the word or sentence itself" (p. 854). The Outside-In end of

the reading continuum recognizes that literacy is ineffective without comprehension strategies to decipher the message of the writer to the reader.

The term “inside-out processes” describes procedural understanding related to skills of literacy rather than conceptual understanding. This includes understanding of the smallest components of literacy, sounds and print units (e.g., letters), moving towards larger units of words through understanding of letter-sound connections (Sénéchal, et al., 2001).

Their model is a continuum of interdependent understanding of literacy with outside-in processes at one end and inside-out processes at the other. In the middle are “language units” (e.g., words) that demonstrate the merger of skills associated with understanding the logistics of literacy, letters, sounds and putting them together into words with the conceptual understanding of ideas being represented in print, through constructed text. In order to successfully transition into conventional reading, children must have both procedural and conceptual understanding.

This model provides a framework for thinking about the print concepts and conceptual understandings of emergent literacy. In the model, there is only brief mention of the intricacies of phonological awareness (it refers only to the “sounds” of language) and language development (beyond simple vocabulary). Instead, Whitehurst’s and Lonigan’s model focuses solely on the relationship between print comprehension and emergent decoding.

Four Component Model

A second model, developed by Mason and Stewart (1990) also includes both conceptual and procedural understandings of emergent literacy learning. This four component model includes: (a) concepts and functions of literacy, (b) writing and composing, (c) knowledge about letters and words, and d) listening comprehension and word understanding (Sénéchal, et al., 2001). *Concepts and functions of literacy* are the broad understandings and behaviors related to reading and writing. These do not include specific skills but rather an overarching knowledge of literacy. For instance, that print is static and remains consistent over time. The *writing and composing* component focuses on formation of words and sentences in terms of composition, but not specific letter formation or “drawing” as such. *Knowledge about letters and words* includes alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness, including letter-sound relationships. This component comprises much more specific knowledge and skills than the first two components. Lastly, *listening comprehension and word understanding* relates to language, specifically narrative knowledge and vocabulary.

The four-component model contains the broad, over-arching concepts of literacy, as they are understood by young children. It also includes specific skills that young children learn about text, language, and the intricacies of literacy. However, each of the four blocks is presented individually with little mention of how the components interact with one another. Mason and Stewart did not provide a graphic of their model.

These two models described above reflect the importance of considering knowledge beyond emergent literacy skills, for instance background knowledge and understanding of semantics (e.g., the meanings of language) and pragmatics (e.g., the situational context of language). It is difficult to measure and evaluate children's understandings of these concepts, particularly with quantitative methods. Both models, described above, have similar components although they are presented in different orientations; they both include conceptual knowledge about the function of reading and writing, beginning procedural knowledge of how literacy works, oral language skills, including vocabulary, and metalinguistic skills such as phonological awareness (Sénéchal, et al., 2001, p. 456).

A New Model of Emergent Literacy

Each of the models described above presents children's emergent literacy as a combination of conceptual knowledge, including understanding the functions of print and text and emerging (or "pretend") reading and writing, and procedural knowledge of alphabet letters and sounds, book handling skills and the like. However, each model is inadequate in describing the intricacies of emergent literacy learning.

Emergent literacy is often referred to as a developmental continuum (Sénéchal, et al., 2001; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001) but research suggests that additionally, each component of emergent literacy is on its own trajectory of development and that the components are not clearly related to one another in a continuous way (Clay, 1998; McGee & Richgels, 2003). For instance, children's emergent writing develops through a series of stages from

scribbling to pseudo letters to inventive spelling (Sulzby, 1989). However, a child's emergent writing development is not necessarily dependent upon his or her level of phonological awareness. In other words, there is not one clear path of emergent literacy development but rather a series of experiences that result in the building of knowledge and skills related to the literacy process (see Figure 1 in Appendix C).

An alternative model of emergent literacy, developed as part of this study, illustrates a new way of looking at the skills and understandings that children gain as they move towards conventional literacy. This new model demonstrates how the skills and understandings of emergent literacy overlap and intersect, unlike the linear models described above. The model shows three distinct areas of emergent literacy, namely language development, print awareness, and phonological awareness. In addition, the model shows the intersection of the three major components into four smaller intersecting components, emphasizing the relationship between the major components.

Writing, the culmination of all of the other components, takes center stage in the model, demonstrating how all the skills and understandings contribute to the process of language development, print awareness and phonological awareness. These intersections demonstrate the holistic nature of emergent literacy learning for young children. As is true for all children's learning, emergent literacy is best learned and understood as knowledge that impacts all parts of a young child's life. A joint position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young

Children (NAEYC) regarding emergent literacy states: “children at any grade level will function at a variety of phases along the reading/writing continuum” (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998, p. 200).

This alternative model illustrates the importance of the interaction between the components of emergent literacy. Although children learn individual emergent literacy skills (e.g., letter names), they also learn how the components relate to one another (e.g., writing uses letters, vocabulary, understandings of print concepts). It provides a context for preschool teachers to ensure they are providing experiences and opportunities in all areas of emergent literacy learning, It can also be used as a tool in lesson planning, assessment, and instruction in that it contains all the aspects of emergent literacy learning that are critical to a well-formed, complete introduction to the world of speaking and listening, reading and writing,

This model of emergent literacy provides a framework for teachers, researchers, and other professionals to discuss and question all the components of emergent literacy in an organized way. Additionally, the model sets the learning of emergent literacy skills and understandings in a culture and a community that provide a basic level of context to the learning. Consistent with recommended practice in early childhood education, the new model of emergent literacy portrays a holistic view of how children learn about the many aspects of learning about emergent literacy that must be addressed.

This model was used to create the *Emergent Literacy In Special Education Preschool Classrooms* survey developed explicitly for this study. The survey contains questions focused on the specific components of emergent literacy. The questions for each component ask about strategies or practices that are commonly used in preschool classrooms. Some of these practices are recommended by experts or researchers in the field of early childhood education. Other practices are not based on evidence but base is not necessarily an indication that a practice is ineffective but may simply not have been studied.

This model of emergent literacy is now included in the New Hampshire Department of Education's Literacy Implementation Plan (2011) which includes information about literacy learning for young children (under age 5).

Two well-known and respected documents were used to determine whether or not a strategy had an adequate research base. The first was the joint position statement on emergent literacy released by the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). The second was a document produced for Head Start that indicated their desired child outcome measures, including emergent literacy, for their students (Administration on Children Youth and Families/Head Start Bureau, 2001). In addition, the research was culled to find recommended practices specific for using with children who have speech and language disabilities. These recommendations may not always be in sync with practices recommended for children who are developing in typical ways. The

recommendations made in these documents and studies were used to create descriptive statements of classroom activities or practices. Additional statements about practices that are not recommended were also included as a contrast. In the study, teachers were asked indicate which practices they used and how often they used them in their classrooms. A more complete description of the survey can be found in Chapter 3.

The Role of the Environment in Emergent Literacy

Much of the early research in emergent literacy provided support for the proposition that “growth in writing and reading comes from within the child as the result of environmental stimulation...the growth that has been observed occurs without the necessity for formal teaching” (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. xx). A close look at the research reveals that a child’s ability to develop emergent literacy skills depends on the environment having rich literacy experiences and partners to learn from (Connor, et al., 2006; Dickinson & Sprague, 2001; Olson & Gayan, 2001). Much of this early research was conducted in middle-class homes and preschools where literacy materials and experiences were in abundance, as opposed to homes for people living in poverty where children’s books and literacy learning opportunities are more rare (Vernon-Feagans, et al., 2001) . “American middle-class parents involve their children in ‘literate’ forms of narrative in preschool discourse, as they embed their children in a way of life in which reading and writing are integral parts of communication, recreation, and livelihood” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 115). When children are surrounded by literacy experiences and encouraged to participate in them, they acquire literacy skills

and knowledge in ways that appear effortless and without specific intention.

Children growing up in poverty or who have disabilities may not have the same access to rich literacy experiences and may need additional resources and supports to gain the same level of emergent literacy skill development and understanding.

The Need for Explicit Instruction

This early research that demonstrated a natural acquisition of literacy may have been based on strongly held beliefs around developmentally appropriate practices and child-centered learning. More recently, the NAEYC and IRA have recommended DAP when exposing young children to literacy skills and concepts (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998).

Current research suggests that developing literacy is intentional and, for many children, requires instruction (Adams, 2001; Goldenberg, 2002; Goswami, 2001; Lane & Wright, 2007; Schickedanz, 2003). It is clear that children can learn early skills and concepts about literacy from knowledgeable others when they are in supportive environments. The use of direct instruction is supported by research that indicates children can gain emergent literacy skills and knowledge without being in highly academic environments but rather in settings that introduce early literacy concepts in purposeful and deliberate ways. Purcell-Gates (1996) conducted a longitudinal study with children from low-SES homes examining their literacy experiences and concluded “we can infer that children who experience many uses of written language *to which they attend and*

personally experience have more opportunities to build the important conceptual basis of literacy development – that print is symbolic and serves communicative purposes” (italics in the original) (p. 426).

As research in the field progressed, the role of the environment in ensuring the building of emergent literacy has grown apparent. In particular, there is a strong body of evidence describing the correlation between social and cultural experiences and success in school and learning to read and write (McLachlan, 2007; von Tetzchner, Brekke, & Sjøthun, 2005).

Components of Emergent Literacy

The components of emergent literacy include the skills that children develop prior to conventional reading and writing as well as the conceptual knowledge of print and how it functions. There is some debate in the field as to where to draw a line between emergent literacy and conventional literacy. There is also some debate as to the specific skills to be included in emergent literacy. For instance, Purcell-Gates (1996) posited that oral language should be considered a separate entity and not included in definitions or descriptions of emergent literacy. It is universally understood, however, that the theory of emergent literacy promotes learning literacy as a process and a continuum with no clear distinction between oral language development and the other components.

As indicated earlier, three national organizations have provided published guidelines and recommendations of strategies to promote emergent literacy learning in preschoolers, used in the development of the survey used in this

study. In 1998, the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) produced a joint position statement on emergent literacy (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). This document, *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*, is still disseminated widely as a reputable source of recommended practices. The third organization, Head Start, released their Child Outcomes framework that contained recommendations for all areas of child development, including emergent literacy learning (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services & Administration on Children, 2003).

In the next section, I describe four specific components of emergent literacy, as illustrated in the model, and cited by the major documents described above.

Language Development

Oral language development is a critical aspect of literacy learning (Roskos, et al., 2004; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). The Inside-Out, Outside-In Model (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001) positions language as the juncture between the two ends of the continuum illustrated in the model. Children depend on language for social interaction and communication, demonstration of ability and knowledge, and acquiring new concepts (McGee & Richgels, 2003).

Much of the research on oral language development and its relationship to literacy focuses on white, middle-class children. However, additional research focused on children living in poverty began with the landmark study of Hart and

Risley (1995). Their study revealed remarkable differences in the amount of language heard by young children living in low, middle, and high SES homes. A child's understanding of language and vocabulary is strongly linked to his or her later literacy success (Lane & Wright, 2007); Pelligrini examined the relationship between oral language and early literacy, concluding that each influences the other. She concludes that the "degree of similarity between home and school literacy events predicts success in school-based literacy... in short, children are most successful in becoming literate when their socialization history is isomorphic to the socialization practice of school" (2001, p. 55).

Similarly, Watson (2001) argues that "the effect of literacy is to render the elements of language opaque, to bring them into conscious awareness" (p. 43). Despite its recognized importance, opportunities for children to develop oral language skills can be limited in preschool (Snow, et al., 1998; Tabors & Snow, 2001). Tabors & Snow studied young, bilingual children concluding that "it is certainly of interest to know what linguistic capacity a child has developed, and in what language, by the age of 3... the early language environment of young bilingual children, whether intentionally constructed by families or merely happenstance, will have an important impact on children's later language and literacy development" (2001, p. 163).

There are many parallels drawn between the development of oral language and the development of literacy, specifically written language (Justice & Pullen, 2003; Roskos, et al., 2004; Sulzby, 1986; Watson, 2001). However, there is still work to be done. Despite an extensive body of research focused on the

topic, the precise way that a child's oral language influences his or her ability to gain literacy is still not completely understood (Gambrell, 2004; Roth, Speece, et al., 2002).

Researchers have suggested that there is a need to consider a wider range of oral language skills, beyond vocabulary and phonological awareness, in order to better understand the connection between oral language and literacy (Roth, Speece, et al., 2002; Traw, 1993). In their research, Roth et al, (2002) used regression analysis to consider narrative discourse, structural language (semantics and syntax) and metalinguistics (phonological awareness and metasemantics) as predictors of literacy outcomes in print awareness, decoding, and comprehension. They concluded that the variables associated with early oral language development provided an initial advantage in gaining conventional literacy skills. However, much of that advantage could be mediated by effective instruction in both oral language development and early literacy skills.

Oral Language as Communication. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that oral language serves as a predictor and proof of intelligence. His initial work in speech and intelligence contradicted the previous work of Buhler (Lloyd & Fernyhough, 1998) who proposed that practical intelligence and speech were independent characteristics (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky examined children's use of speech as a means to solve problems, concluding that children must speak in order to think through a complex problem. However, Vygotsky's emphasis on oral language as the necessary path to intelligence has been critiqued by more recent psychologists who point out that in Vygotsky's work there was always an adult

present during his experiments. He did not examine what children did to solve these complex problems if an adult was not present for the child to talk with (Pellegrini, 2001; von Tetzchner, et al., 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

Others have interpreted Vygotsky's use of the term "language" as was referring to communication as a process rather than oral language specifically (William Wansart, Personal Communication, April 28, 2009). There are many people with significant disabilities who do not use oral speech as their primary means of communication and are presumed to have cognitive disabilities. However, with the support of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in their homes and classrooms, some children are able to communicate and express themselves, including demonstration of literacy skill and understanding (Koppenhaver, Spadorcia, & Erickson, 1998).

It has also been reported in the literature that writing and reading promote higher levels of understanding of oral language as well. Watson (2001) argued that Vygotsky believed that the process of writing created higher, or metacognitive, awareness of speech.

There are many strategies used by preschool teachers to encourage language development in their students. Some of these strategies have been researched and recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC Joint Statement (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998) or the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services & Administration on Children, 2003). Other strategies are those which do not have a strong research base; however

they are commonly used in preschool classrooms. Other research has been conducted specifically for children with speech and language disabilities that have identified effective strategies for those children.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, these strategies were included in the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms Survey*. Table 1 indicates, in the first column, language strategies that were included in the survey, the second column indicates whether or not the strategies were recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC or by independent researchers, and the third column describes the desired emergent literacy outcomes that might result from using the strategies.

Table 1

Language Strategies, Recommendations, and Outcomes from the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms Survey*

Practices that support Language Development	Recommended Practices for Typically Developing Children and those with Disabilities by	Emergent Literacy Outcomes
Extend children's conversations by commenting and/or adding more to what they say	IRA/NAEYC	Vocabulary Comprehension Syntax Semantics
	Use of AAC/AT(Ferreira, Ronnberg, Gustafson, & Wengelin, 2007)	Increased use of language
Direct children's attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud	Not Recommended practice	
	Using novel words (Sénéchal & Thomas, 1995)	Vocabulary
Direct children to repeat words to practice articulation	Not Recommended practice	
Direct children to repeat modeled sentences or phrases to extend oral language	Not Recommended practice	
	Modeled use of AAC(Binger & Light, 2007)	Increased use of multi word phrases
Use targeted vocabulary words in conversations with children	Not Recommended practice	
	Use of AAC in inclusive preschool classrooms (von Tetzchner, et al., 2005)	Conversational skills

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to detect, identify, and manipulate the sound structure of language. In particular, it is a growing understanding of the similarities and differences of words and parts of words, beginning when children are very young and progressing through middle childhood (Adams, 1998; Justice & Pullen, 2003). Phonological awareness differs from auditory discrimination in

its restriction to language which refers to the differences and similarities of *any* sounds (Hempenstall, 1997): phonological awareness refers only to the sounds that make up language.

Phonological awareness has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of later reading success (DeBaryshe & Gorecki, 2007; Dickinson, McCabe, Anastasopoulos, Peisner-Feinberg, & Poe, 2003; Ehri, Nunes, Schuster, Yaghouh-Zadeh, & Shanahan, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). A study determining the characteristics of unresponsive readers – students who did not gain reading skills with direct instruction - showed that many of these students had limited strong phonological awareness skills (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2002). The importance of acquiring phonological awareness cannot be overstated; it has been determined that “preschool-age children's awareness of phonemes – of the speech sounds that correspond roughly to individual letters – has been shown to hold singular predictive power, statistically accounting for as much as 50% of the variance in their reading proficiency at the end of first grade” (Adams, 1998, p. 2). However, the research also supports the notion that phonological awareness does not develop automatically in some young children, but rather, needs intentional teaching, particularly in alphabetic orthography, to support its development (Goswami, 2001). Little research has focused on either the specific lexical or linguistic factors that could lead to better instruction of phonological awareness in children (Goswami, 2001) although researchers strongly advocate the teaching of phonological awareness to support emergent literacy learning (Adams, 1998).

Phonological Awareness Development. Development of phonological awareness begins with the ability to identify and then manipulate the largest units of speech, such as words and syllables, often with an understanding of rhyme and followed by alliteration (Goswami, 2001). As children continue their development, they attend to the smaller units of speech, (e.g., onsets and rimes – the beginnings and ends of single syllable words, and phonemes) (Adams, 1990). As children discriminate sounds at the phoneme level, they are better positioned to recognize how individual sounds correspond to alphabetic letters (Lonigan et al., 2009b).

Rhyme Demonstrating the concept of rhyme is seen as the first indicator of phonological awareness in young children (Justice & Pullen, 2003). Rhyming, for many children, is the first time they shift their focus from the *meaning* of words to the *sounds* of language (Goswami, 2001). This may be difficult for some children as “this sensitivity to the sounds of the phonemes and the differences between them is not conscious. It is deeply embedded in the subattentive machinery of the language system” (Adams, 1998, p. 3).

It is not automatic for some children to discriminate between the sounds of language from the meanings of words (Goswami, 2001), perhaps because most children learn language as communication first and only later learn to attend to the sounds. Through exploration, or in some cases explicit instruction, children understand that the manipulation of phonemes can result in words changing to become other words for example from “cat” to “hat.” Researchers have found that explicit instruction in phonological awareness, with a focus on rhyming, with

children who have speech and language disabilities had a positive effect in their ability to rhyme (Roth, Troia, Worthington, & Dow, 2002).

For some children, seeing words in print is an explicit way for them to learn this concept. This is particularly true for children who are strong visual learners or those with speech and language difficulties as research has shown they may not attend to sounds as well as other children (Hartmann, Rvachew, & Grawburg, 2008).

Other researchers have included additional stages of developing phonological awareness. Hempenstall (1997) describes eleven stages of phonological awareness development, beginning at the recognition of words in sentences. He contends that it is important to begin at this word level of understanding as the understanding of words as units within speech is a critical first step in analyzing language. When children are exposed at an early age to spoken language, speech is not recognized as a series of words. As they become better users of speech, the manipulation of words in sentences leads them to this understanding.

Lexical Restructuring Theory A recently developed theoretical view of how children develop phonological awareness is called Lexical Restructuring theory (Walley, Metsala, & Garlock, 2003). It "is based on the premise that in the normal course of development, children's phonological representations become increasingly segmental and distinctly specified in terms of phonetic features with age (Goswami, 2001, p. 113).

Goswami (2001) examined research supporting the theory of lexical restructuring, specifically the relationship between phonological development, oral language and literacy. Children acquire language, first with babbling and seemingly random sounds during their infancy; the long awaited “mama” often is first heard near the child’s first birthday. As children grow older, particularly around 18 months of age and beyond into their preschool years, they may acquire several new words on a daily basis. With this large barrage of new vocabulary, the brain requires a systematic way to distinguish between words. Linguists contend that children use lexicons, the set of morphemes used by individuals in their speech, as a means of organization (Goswami, 2001; Lonigan, Anthony, Bloomfield, Dyer, & Samwel, 1999; Lonigan et al., 2009a).

The Lexical Restructuring Model is built on five premises: (1) as children grow, their lexicons of words become more segmented and with more developed parameters, (2) this segmentation is highly dependent on children’s vocabulary acquisition, (3) the segmentation, or restructuring, happens prior to phoneme awareness, (4) difficulty with this process may result in, or be demonstrated by, reading difficulties, and (5) reading supports phoneme awareness (Walley, et al., 2003). In other words, as children gain words in their spoken vocabularies, they begin to organize these words and word parts by their phonemes – how they sound – in addition to the meanings of the words. This organization begins to develop prior phonemic awareness or the understanding of the specific sounds related to letters. As children begin reading in a conventional sense, this organizational structure of sounds assists them in decoding unknown words.

Lexical restructuring theory has important implications for the ways educators and researchers view phonological awareness acquisition. The second premise – that segmentation is highly dependent on children’s vocabulary acquisition – in particular, has great significance when thinking about children with limited oral language and vocabulary, due to disabilities or limited exposure because of environmental factors (e.g., poverty). Children from homes of lower SES tend to have lower phonological awareness skills than children from higher SES homes (McIntosh, Crosbie, Holm, Dodd, & Thomas, 2007). Similarly, children with oral language disabilities are more likely to have difficulty obtaining and demonstrating phonological awareness (Koppenhaver, et al., 2007). Additionally, by definition, children with oral language disabilities have limited expressive vocabulary; they are likely to have limited receptive vocabulary as well primarily due to lack of exposure (Koppenhaver, et al., 2007). It is unclear if children who live in poverty and children with oral language disabilities struggle with literacy because of a deficit in lexical restructuring.

There is great interest in determining why some children have difficulty gaining phonological awareness, primarily because it relates so closely to later reading success. It could be argued that, through the lens of the Lexical Restructuring Model, children with disabilities struggle with phonological awareness skills because of their limited receptive and expressive vocabulary, not because of an inability to learn to distinguish between the sounds of language. If a major premise of the model is that children’s ability to build this organizational structure depends on the size of their vocabulary, particularly

spoken words, it follows that children with limited vocabularies because of oral language disabilities will have difficulty building an elaborate system of phonemes and morphemes. Further research in examining the phonological awareness skills of children with oral language disabilities who have access to high levels of receptive and expressive vocabulary could provide insight to this query.

There are many strategies used by preschool teachers to encourage phonological awareness development in their students. In addition, there are several seminal research studies that examined the effectiveness of particular strategies to be used specifically for children with speech and language disabilities. As with the language component of the survey, these phonological awareness strategies were part of the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* Survey used in this study. Table 2 indicates, in the first column, phonological awareness strategies that were included in the survey, the second column indicates whether or not the strategies were recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC or by independent researchers, and the third column describes the desired emergent literacy outcomes that might result from using the strategies.

Table 2

Phonological Awareness Strategies, Recommendations, and Outcomes from the

Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms Survey

Practices that support Phonological Awareness Development	Practice Recommended By	Emergent Literacy Outcomes
Read or recite nursery rhymes with children	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Linguistic awareness
Play rhythm games practicing sounds or syllables in words	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Phonological Awareness
Provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time	Not Recommended Practice	
	Effective book reading practices (McGee, 2003)	Letter sound knowledge
Draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	
Provide opportunities for children to practice identifying initial sounds in words(e.g., /f/ in fish)	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Phonemic Awareness
	Assessment of PA skills (Rvachew & Grawburg, 2006)	Phonological Awareness
Provide opportunities for children to identify syllable units	Head Start Outcomes	Phonemic Awareness
Provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat)	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Phonemic Awareness
	Effective book reading practices (McGee, 2003)	Phonemic Awareness

Print Awareness

The U.S. Department of Education website defines print awareness as “the knowledge that printed words carry meaning and that reading and writing are ways to obtain ideas and information. A young child's sensitivity to print is

one of the first steps toward reading” (http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/early/teachingouryoungest/page_pg15.html). It can be divided into two primary categories of *alphabet knowledge* and *concepts of print*. Knowledge of print is linked with phonics, the later-developing skill of matching of letters with their sounds, the first step of decoding text. In addition, print awareness relates to learning about syntax, grammar, and the similarities and differences between the spoken and written word. Finally, print awareness skills are critical in generating text, or writing.

Alphabet Knowledge. Becoming literate depends both on knowledge of language and an understanding of text systems and symbols. For English, the foundation of text is based on the 26 letters of the alphabet. Alphabet knowledge consists of being able to recognize and name letters (Foulin, 2005), identify the sounds of letters (Invernizzi, 2003), produce the letters (e.g., in writing or using technology) (Stachowiak, 1996), and to match text letters with their sounds, (Invernizzi, 2003; Juel, Griffith, & Gough, 1986). Specifically, the alphabetic principle, “the basic concept that letters represent segments of their own speech” (Moats, 2000, p. 10) refers to written letters and their corresponding phonemes.

The developmental sequence of learning alphabet letters begins with the recognition of letter shapes. Children can identify a written form as a letter or not a letter (e.g., a number or a symbol) before they are able to correctly identify letters by name. Letter name knowledge has been shown to be a strong predictor of later reading success in multiple studies over the past two decades (Foulin, 2005). It is a critical skill in acquiring the alphabetic principle (Adams, 2001).

A review of research studies examined letter name knowledge to determine why knowing the names of letters correlates with reading success for many children (Foulin, 2005). In particular, the study examined the relationship between letter name knowledge and the phonological processing of print, specifically, how letter name knowledge relates to the learning of letter-sound correspondence, and how it correlates with skills in phonemic sensitivity (p. 129). Foulin (2005) cited early research suggesting that the relationship between letter name knowledge and phonological processing of print was simply a strong indicator of children's general understanding of print or their general cognitive functioning. However, this hypothesis was not supported by targeted experimental research, summarized by Ehri in 1983. Ehri found that specific instruction in learning letter names did result in higher levels of reading (Foulin, 2005). More recent research suggests that letter name knowledge "may have a much more influential role in the first stages of literacy acquisition by promoting the emergence of a phonologically-based strategy in early spelling and reading" (Foulin, 2005, p. 133).

Not only the ability but the speed with which children can identify letters by name has shown a strong correlation to later reading success (Hecht, Burgess, Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 2000). However, these studies point only to strong correlations without suggesting the mechanism by which letter name knowledge impacts reading development. Some studies have examined the relationship between knowing the names of letters and phonemic awareness skills (Foulin, 2005). Other studies have shown that young children use their

knowledge of letter names to learn the letter sounds (Treiman, Tincoff, Rodriguez, Mouzaki, & Francis, 1998), a successful strategy for many but not all the alphabet letters.

There are many teaching practices that are commonly observed in early care and education settings relative to print awareness. However, most have not been researched for effectiveness in teaching print skills. For example, letter-of-the-week instruction has been a staple in America's preschool classrooms for decades. However, research has indicated that it is an inefficient and often ineffective practice (Fisher, 1996). In contrast to letter-of-the-week activities, research in alphabet knowledge does support learning about letters through providing a print-rich environment (Foster & Campbell, 1993; Neuman & Roskos, 1990), increasing opportunities for children to write (Welsch, Sullivan, & Justice, 2003), and reading storybooks aloud that include explicit identification of letters and letter-sound relationships (Justice & Ezell, 2002). Similarly, although direct instruction in alphabet knowledge and concepts of print are recommended for children with speech and language disabilities, often at higher rates than typically developing children, there are limited data on specific recommended practices (Ferreira, Ronnberg, et al., 2007; Justice, et al., 2003; Schuele, et al., 2007).

There are many strategies used by preschool teachers to encourage print awareness development in their students. Both the IRA/NAEYC Joint Statement (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998) and the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services & Administration on Children, 2003)

recommend many print awareness strategies when working with young children. In addition, there are several seminal research studies that examined the effectiveness of particular strategies for use with children who have speech and language disabilities. .As with components of the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* survey discussed earlier in this chapter, these phonological awareness strategies were also included in the survey. This section of the survey also included one strategy (Letter-of-the-Week) that research has indicated is an ineffective and inefficient practice. However, due to its perceived popularity in preschool classrooms, it was included in the survey to determine how much it is still being used among the teachers who responded to the survey. Table 3 indicates, in the first column, print awareness strategies that were included in the survey, the second column indicates whether or not the strategies were recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC or by independent researchers, and the third column describes the desired emergent literacy outcomes that might result from using the strategies.

Table 3

Print Awareness Strategies, Recommendations, and Outcomes from the
Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms Survey

Practices that support Print Awareness Development	Practices Recommended By	Emergent Literacy Outcomes
Use "letter of the week" activities for alphabet instruction	Not recommended practice	
Provide access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Letter knowledge
Use a posted written schedule with text or text and pictures	Head Start Outcomes	Concepts of print
Introduce alphabet letters through direct instruction	IRA/NAEYC	Letter knowledge
Use a posted written list for children's chores or choices in the classroom	Head Start Outcomes	Concepts of print
Provide literacy-related props which include print(e.g., letters for post office, phone books, menus for restaurants) in dramatic play areas	Head Start Outcomes	Concepts of print Letter knowledge Literacy awareness
Provide flash cards to practice letter recognition learning	Not recommended practice	
Play games that teach letter/word recognition (e.g., letter lotto)	Not recommended practice	

Concepts of Print. Along with coining the term "emergent literacy," Marie Clay is best known for her development of an assessment tool to examine young children's understanding of the concepts related to print, particularly in books (1993). Her tool, *An Observational Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, provides a system of identifying the concepts children use to interact with books. It starts with simple orientation of a book and print (front to back, top to bottom,

left to right) and advances to more complex features of print including punctuation marks.

“Concepts of Print” is a term used to reference an understanding about print and how it works (Strickland & Schickedanz, 2004). These concepts range from understanding that print has different functions and that print carries a message to understanding the differences between words and letters. As with phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge, concepts of print follow a basic developmental continuum. Acquiring the concepts of words involves beginning phonological awareness along with alphabet knowledge by learning to separate speech into words and to match sounds with letters (Mason & Allen, 1986). An early study by Lomax and McGee (1987) examined specific components of understanding associated with concepts of print determining that young children understood many of the properties and rules associated with print.

There are many strategies used by preschool teachers while reading aloud to their students that help to build concepts of print (Neuman, 1996). Reading aloud has been cited as one of the most effective means of building concepts of print, vital to literacy success, particularly for students with disabilities (Katims, 1996). Both the IRA/NAEYC Joint Statement (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998) and the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services & Administration on Children, 2003) recommend many book reading strategies when working with young children. In addition, there are

several seminal research studies that examined the effectiveness of particular strategies for children with speech and language disabilities. As with components of the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* survey discussed earlier in this chapter, these book reading strategies were included in the survey. The survey also contains strategies that are not recommended and yet are commonly used in preschool classrooms. Table 4 indicates, in the first column, print awareness strategies that were included in the survey, the second column indicates whether or not the strategies were recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC or by independent researchers, and the third column describes the desired emergent literacy outcomes that might result from using the strategies.

Table 4

Book Reading Strategies, Recommendations, and Outcomes from the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* Survey

Practices that support Book Reading Development	Practice Recommended By	Emergent Literacy Outcomes
Have children hold books independently and turn pages	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Book Knowledge
Show children that the text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from left to right by pointing or discussion	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Alphabet Knowledge
	Print-focused reading sessions (Justice, 2002)	Concepts of Print (SLD)

Table 4 (continued)

Stop to ask questions while reading aloud to children	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Comprehension Strategies Alphabet knowledge Vocabulary
	Dialogic Reading(Whitehur st & Lonigan, 2001) Asking questions (Blewitt & Rump, 2009)	Improved Oral language Comprehension strategies
Show children punctuation marks such as question marks and exclamation points during read aloud	IRA/NAEYC	Concepts of Print
	Print referencing (Justice & Ezell, 2002)	Concepts of Print (SLD)
Stop to explain new vocabulary to children while reading aloud	Not recommended practice	
	Extratextural Conversation(Blew itt & Rump, 2009)	Vocabulary
Point to print while reading aloud to children	IRA/NAEYC	Head Start Outcomes
	Effective Reading Aloud (Lane & Wright, 2007)	Concepts of Print
Read alphabet books	IRA/NAEYC	Head Start Outcomes
	Explicit teaching of alphabet letters (Schickedanz, 2003)	Letter knowledge
Make books with children related to classroom events or activities (e.g., field trips, curriculum unit)	Not recommended practice	

Table 4 (continued)

	IRA/NAEYC	Head Start Outcomes
Provide opportunities for children to retell stories	Emergent Reading of Storybooks (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 2000)	Concepts of Print Understanding written language (SLD)
	Head Start Outcomes	
Provide opportunities for children to predict stories during read-aloud	Explicit Instruction with storybooks (Justice, et al., 2003)	Written language awareness (SLD) Phonological awareness (SLD)
	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	
Reread stories to individual or small groups of children	Emergent Reading of Storybooks (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 2000)	Written language awareness (SLD)
	Not recommended practice	
Have children act out stories while reading aloud	Book acting (McGee, 2003)	Vocabulary Story comprehension Language development

Writing

Children can express their understanding of emergent literacy through writing. It is a process that requires the integration of phonological awareness (being able to hear and isolate the sounds of “bat” to /b/-/a/-/t/), print awareness (understanding that text carries the message), and language (understanding the meanings of words to portray a message) (see figure 1 in Appendix X). In order to write, children need the skills and knowledge associated with these three

major components of emergent literacy. Additionally, children need fine motor skills and knowledge related to holding a writing tool and making marks on paper (or other materials). Research has indicated that children who spend time writing, or in “code-focused activities” have higher levels of alphabet knowledge and word recognition than children who spent more time in “meaning-focused activities” (Connor, et al., 2006). Other studies point out the literacy skills children gain from writing activities during dramatic play as a way to learn about the functions of print (Einarsdottir, 1996).

The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services & Administration on Children, 2003) recommends many specific strategies for emergent writing. The IRA/NAEYC Joint Statement (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998) focuses on reading and includes few recommendations for writing with young children. There are many fewer research studies about writing with young children than there are focused on reading with young children, and very few of the existing studies identify specific strategies. There is a handful of studies documenting effective practices for young children with speech and language disabilities; however, most were concerned with increasing access to writing and literacy overall, rather than specific strategies. Although the IRA/NAEYC and the Head Start documents focused on emergent reading, there were a few recommendations about writing process and young children (Administration on Children Youth and Families/Head Start Bureau, 2001; International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of

Young Children, 1998). These recommendations were used to create the writing component of the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* survey discussed earlier in this chapter. The survey also contains strategies that are not recommended and yet are commonly used in preschool classrooms. Table 5 indicates, in the first column, writing awareness strategies that were included in the survey, the second column indicates whether or not the strategies were recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC or by independent researchers, and the third column describes the desired emergent literacy outcomes that might result from using the strategies.

Table 5

Emergent Writing Strategies, Recommendations, and Outcomes from the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* Survey

Practices that support Emergent Writing Development	Practice Recommended By	Emergent Literacy Outcome
Provide stencils to help children form letters	Head Start Outcomes	Letter knowledge
Display children's writing around the classroom	Head Start Outcomes	
Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools (e.g., pencils, pens, markers, crayons, whiteboard, etc.)	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Emergent Writing
	Use of AAC for access to writing (Hetzroni, 2004)	Emergent Writing Social interaction
Write children's stories from their dictation	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Emergent Writing
Provide children with individual journals and time to write	Head Start Outcomes	Emergent Writing
Model writing during group activities (e.g., circle time message)	Not Recommended Practice	

Table 5 (continued)

Provide opportunities for children to write their names for authentic purposes (e.g., labeling work, sign-up sheets)	Head Start Outcomes	Letter knowledge
Support children to make their own books	Head Start Outcomes	Concepts of print
Help children trace letters/words	Head Start Outcomes	Letter/word knowledge
Provide opportunities for children to work in groups to write books	Head Start Outcomes	Emergent writing
Help children write and/or receive letters/notes in class	IRA/NAEYC Head Start Outcomes	Emergent writing
Provide letter stamps or letter sponges for children to use	Head Start Outcomes	Letter knowledge

Preschool Teachers' Beliefs and Knowledge

Teacher Beliefs

The relationship between teachers' beliefs, about themselves, their students and the curriculum, is closely associated with their behaviors in the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986). These behaviors include their planning of activities, use of materials, and interactions with their students (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Although teacher beliefs cannot be observed, teachers' behaviors can be; additionally, teachers can be questioned about their thought processes that influenced that behavior (Fang, 1996). It has also been demonstrated, in the research, that teachers' experiences in the classroom have an influence on, and may change, their beliefs about teaching and children (Abbott-Shim, Lambert, & McCarty, 1998). Other research has examined the relationship between teacher beliefs and their intentions in the classroom, finding that the teachers' intentions of teaching can be predicted based on their stated beliefs (Wilcox-Herzog &

Ward, 2004). Clark and Peterson (1986) noted that teachers' thought processes, which include beliefs about teaching and learning, often focused on the individual needs of students, particularly students with disabilities. Teachers' perceived subject knowledge also plays a role in curriculum design – if teachers believe they have high levels of background knowledge, they perceive themselves as more knowledgeable and are more likely to engage students in that subject area of learning (Fang, 1996).

Teacher Knowledge

Preschool teachers' domain-specific knowledge consists, in part, of knowledge regarding early childhood education, including emergent literacy. Snow, Griffin & Burns (2005) claim that at a minimum, preschool teachers need ideas and information related to early childhood education and practical knowledge about implementing effective instruction, including how to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. In addition, teachers rely on their own personal knowledge base of experiences and beliefs.

This concept of combined professional, personal, and practical knowledge is recognized as contributing to teachers' practices in classrooms. (Grisham, 2000). In the context of early childhood education, professional knowledge includes ideas and information related to literacy learning developed within a formal educational program. Knowing the developmental sequence of marks children make as they learn to write letters or understanding the relationship between rhyming and onset-rime patterns are examples of professional knowledge. Practical knowledge, in part, is that understanding required for

implementing instruction; in other words, the knowledge of how to teach. In the context of emergent literacy development, for example, this could be the knowledge of how to read stories to children in a way that increases their vocabulary or how to incorporate literacy materials into a dramatic play area. Personal knowledge relates to the beliefs that teachers bring into classrooms. This includes making decisions about priorities for instruction, classroom climate, and relationships between teachers and students (Fang, 1996). Research suggests that all three types of knowledge are important in enabling teachers to effectively support their students, though the process by which each is integrated into practice in the classroom is uncertain. Examples of professional, personal and practical knowledge related to emergent literacy are shown in Tables 6-8.

Table 6

Examples of Teachers' Knowledge of Oral Language Development for Children
with and without Speech and Language Disabilities to Increase Extended
Conversation

ORAL LANGUAGE	Professional Knowledge	Practical Knowledge	Personal Knowledge
Activity: Engaging children in extended conversation			
Children with Typical Development	<p>Know the progression of language development from babbling to complete sentences</p> <p>Appreciate that children's receptive language skills are more advanced than their expressive language</p>	<p>Extend child's phrasing into full sentences</p> <p>Use new words in conjunction with familiar words to build vocabulary</p>	<p>Understand that extended conversation builds social relationships as well as vocabulary and language skills</p> <p>Understand that accessing background knowledge and interests will help children to participate in extended conversations</p>
Children with Speech and Language Disabilities	<p>Understand that the gap between receptive language and expressive language might be wider than with typically developing children</p> <p>Know common sound substitutions to better understand child's speech</p>	<p>Instruct child to look at your face as you model words and sounds</p> <p>Provide visual cues (pictures) for vocabulary support</p>	<p>Appreciate that some children may need additional time or other supports to feel comfortable enough to respond</p>

Table 7

Examples of Teachers' Knowledge of Phonological Awareness Development
for Children with and without Speech and Language Disabilities to Increase
Awareness of Speech Sounds

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	Professional Knowledge	Practical Knowledge	Personal Knowledge
Activity: Word play during circle time			
Children with Typical Development	<p>Understand sequence of PA</p> <p>Understand the relationship between PA and later reading skills (spelling patterns, onset-rime)</p>	<p>Introduce songs with rhyming patterns</p> <p>Provide activities that use articulation, syllable segmentation or blending to reinforce PA concepts</p>	<p>Knowledge of songs, rhymes, and finger plays to use with children</p> <p>Share enjoyment of language and vocabulary</p>
Children with Speech and Language Disabilities	<p>Know that children may have PA concepts but do not demonstrate them orally</p> <p>Understand that limited access to oral speech will impede but not eliminate PA learning</p>	<p>Provide other materials to experiment with speech sounds</p> <p>Use technology (software, voice production device) with students so they can demonstrate understanding of PA</p>	<p>Incorporate alternative means of demonstrating understanding</p>

Table 8:

Examples of Teachers' Knowledge of Print Awareness Development for Children with and without Speech and Language Disabilities to Increase Understanding of Concepts of Print and Books

PRINT AWARENESS	Professional Knowledge	Practical Knowledge	Personal Knowledge
Activity: Reading storybooks to children			
Children with Typical Development	Understand that children know many concepts about print prior to conventional reading	Present print in a variety of settings and for a variety of purposes Activate children's prior knowledge prior to reading stories to increase comprehension	Appreciation of story, illustration, language
Children with Speech and Language Disabilities	Understand that reading books aloud provide opportunities for children to experience new vocabulary	Stop book reading to introduce new vocabulary during reading	

Summary

Through the literature and from examining the current research in early childhood education, the importance of emergent literacy instruction is well understood. Children who enter kindergarten without the benefit of a high quality preschool experience are likely to be at a disadvantage. Opportunities to explore emergent literacy concepts are recognized as an important part of an early childhood education curriculum.

The research identifies children who are at-risk for difficulty in developing literacy skills in school. Children with speech and language disabilities are included in this at-risk group. There is a need for these children to receive additional and target support during their preschool years.

Although recommended practices of emergent literacy are well established, it is not known what specific practices teachers use in their classrooms. It is also not known what teachers do that may be different for their students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to determine what emergent literacy practices New Hampshire preschool teachers report they use for their students, including those with speech and language disabilities. In were examined.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What practices do preschool teachers report using in their classrooms to support emergent literacy learning for typically developing students; and students with oral language disabilities?
 - a. To what extent do teachers' reported practices reflect evidence-based recommended practices?
 - b. Do teachers' report different instructional practices when supporting children with and without identified speech and language disabilities?
2. How do teachers' beliefs about young children's emergent literacy development relate to their reported use of evidence-based emergent literacy strategies in their classrooms?

3. Are teachers who have more children with speech and language disabilities in their classrooms more likely to believe that children with identified language disabilities can develop emergent literacy in preschool?
4. Are there differences in teachers' reported practices based on differences in (a) level of education; (b) years of teaching experience; (c) the ages of their students; (d) percentage of children with oral language disabilities in their classrooms; or (e) classroom settings ?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the current beliefs and practices of preschool teachers to support emergent literacy learning in their classrooms. It is critical to understand these beliefs and practices as a means to better understand the learning opportunities available to young children in preschool. In particular, this study was interested in emergent literacy learning opportunities for young children with speech and language disabilities as those children, in particular, are at increased risk to develop literacy difficulties in school.

The study focused on the beliefs and practices of preschool teachers working in New Hampshire early childhood settings that include young children with disabilities. Data were obtained through a web-based survey sent to preschool teachers throughout the state.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study examine the relationship between what teachers say they believe about young children, learning, and emergent literacy and what they report they do in their classrooms. When teachers report their beliefs about instruction and skill development, they indicate how they will choose to spend time in their classrooms with their students. As teachers

describe when and how children should be introduced to emergent literacy concepts, we can gain insight into how they believe they can best support children to learn. By responding specifically to questions about children with disabilities, teachers provide information about how they believe children learn and their role in teaching them.

The model of emergent literacy introduced in the last chapter provides a framework within which to ask about specific emergent literacy practices in a way that is organized by typical preschool classroom activities (for the teachers) and by content area (for the researcher).

The research questions for this study were:

1. What practices do preschool teachers report using in their classrooms to support emergent literacy learning for typically developing students; and students with oral language disabilities?
 - a. To what extent do teachers' reported practices reflect evidence-based recommended practices?
 - b. Do teachers' report different instructional practices when supporting children with and without identified speech and language disabilities?
2. How do teachers' beliefs about young children's emergent literacy development relate to their reported use of evidence-based emergent literacy strategies in their classrooms?
3. Are teachers who have more children with speech and language disabilities in their classrooms more likely to believe that children with

identified language disabilities can develop emergent literacy in preschool?

4. Are there differences in teachers' reported practices based on differences in (a) level of education; (b) years of teaching experience; (c) the ages of their students; (d) percentage of children with oral language disabilities in their classrooms; or (e) classroom settings?

Survey Design

The *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* survey was modified from the "Emergent Literacy Views and Practices: A National Survey of Head Start Early Childhood Teachers" from the Department of Special Education at the University of Utah (Hawken, Johnston, & McDonnell, 2005). Permission to view and adapt the survey was granted by the first author, Leanne Hawkin in June, 2008 (see Appendix X). Modifications were made to the original survey to accommodate the research questions related specifically to students with oral language disabilities. Additionally, questions specifically related to English language learners were deleted from the original survey.

Rationale for Survey Design

This survey consisted of both quantitative and open-ended questions. The quantitative questions were used to create a base of understanding of what teachers reported they believed about emergent literacy and children with and without disabilities. A survey was selected as an appropriate method because it allowed data to be obtained from an anonymous sample, thereby reducing the potential for social desirability (Randall & Fernandes, 1991). Although efforts

were taken to reduce the impact of social desirability (e.g., anonymity of the respondents, using aggregated responses), it is likely there were still some responses made by teachers that reflected their desire to have the “correct” response to some of the questions.

In addition, surveys are effective in gathering and analyzing data from a large sample. Although the number of returned surveys was less than anticipated, choosing a survey as a method, for that reason, was appropriate. Survey methodology is effective for gathering information on numerous variables, and in this study was related to teacher practices and beliefs. Finally, both quantitative and qualitative information could be gathered that would address the research questions posed. A survey design of asking teachers to indicate what, if any, strategies they used along with a determination of how frequently they were used was sufficient to answer the research questions of this study.

Interviews or focus groups are often designed to gather qualitative information (Willis, 2007). For this study, I intended to sample a large number (e.g., 80-100) of respondents. This large number made individual interviews impractical. I considered using a focus group format; however, I was interested in learning about individual teachers’ experiences. A focus group has the potential of contamination of teachers’ own stories as they will be listening to, and have their stories heard by, others.

The survey was developed to reflect current recommended practices in emergent literacy. Questions asked for numerical, quantitative and open-ended responses, some demographic information about the respondents and their

students, and levels of agreement of belief statements about emergent literacy learning in preschool. The survey employed 4 point and 5 point response scales, matrixes, and short answers. It was designed to ask teachers about their current practices and beliefs related to emergent literacy; care was taken to remove any embedded judgment or evaluation of their practices or beliefs in the questions.

In addition, respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments about strategies they used and thought were particularly useful for both typically developing preschoolers as well as children with speech and language disabilities. These open-ended questions provided a sense of reliability to the quantitative questions. By providing examples of how they used specific strategies or what they believed their students were learning, teachers indicated they were actually using these strategies and had not simply marked off the boxes in the other portions of the survey. As they described their use of the specific strategies, teachers demonstrated that they were familiar with them and used them in their classrooms.

I referred to *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method* (Dillman, 2007) in modifying the survey. Dillman included a set of criteria to use to evaluate each question to assure consistency and clarity. He also discussed the importance of the order of the questions asked, types of responses to chose from, and implementation strategies. For instance, Dillman recommended asking demographic information at the end of the survey. Usually, these questions are easier to answer and participants will be willing to answer them even at the end of the process. In addition, by beginning the instrument with direct and specific

questions related to the study, participants may have engaged more fully in the survey than they might be if they were asked more mundane questions related to their educational background and years of teaching.

The Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms Survey

The survey began by asking if the preschool teacher used a published curriculum to teach emergent literacy. By asking this as the first question, I established that the priority of the survey was to ask about emergent literacy within a preschool classroom setting. Within the question, there were options to indicate if the respondent did not teach emergent literacy skills at all, didn't use a published curriculum, as well as a list of several common early literacy curriculum programs. There were options to choose if the curriculum included something either the teacher, or someone within the program, had developed.

The five published curriculums listed: Ladders to Literacy (Notari-Syverson, O'Connor, & Vadasy, 1998); Opening the World of Learning (OWL) and Scott Foresman Reading Street, both published by Pearson; Read, Play, and Learn (Linder, 1999); and Pebble Soup Explorations, published by Rigby; all use evidence-based practices and provide research findings in their literature.

The second question presented five belief statements about young children and emergent literacy. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement along a five-point rating scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Some of the belief statements addressed issues relating to children with speech and language disabilities. By inserting this question early, I established that the survey was geared to gaining information

about young children who may experience speech and language disabilities. It was followed by a matrix of commonly-used literacy and communication supports on one axis and common activities along the other. Respondents were asked to indicate if they used of these supports during the listed classroom activities. This question provided data regarding the first research question, indicating if teachers used practices that support children with speech and language disabilities (e.g., using communication boards or pictures of sign language). It was followed by a question about the specific use of these strategies for children with disabilities that provided more information about the use of these strategies in classrooms.

The next five sets of questions were set up using a similar format. First, respondents were asked how often they used specific literacy materials and activities in their classrooms with regard to a specific component of emergent literacy. Then respondents were asked to indicate which of these materials and activities they believed best contributed to emergent literacy learning, using an open-ended question format. These questions asked about: (a) book reading, (b) writing, (c) phonological awareness, (d) language, and (e) print. These categories of emergent literacy materials and activities correspond with the major components of emergent literacy discussed in previous chapters. This section of the survey included questions about teaching strategies specifically geared towards children with speech and language disabilities. The questions were written in a similar format as the preceding questions. The responses to these questions provided most of the data for answering the first research question.

The survey finished with a set of demographic questions including teaching experiences, formal education, and teaching certification. Respondents were asked a few questions about their current teaching situation including what other early childhood education professionals they work with, schedule, and class size. Respondents were then given an opportunity to add any additional information or comments they wanted to include.

A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Reliability and Validity of the Survey

As stated above, the instrument used for this study was adapted from a survey used for a study involving Head Start teachers. There was no mention of internal consistency reliability with the survey published in the original article (SOURCE). However, content validity was addressed, as the authors reported the use of a pilot survey to validate the content, and to ensure clarity of the questions, and to provide some justification for the content included in the research article reporting on its results (Hawken, et al., 2005).

The adaptations to the survey for this study were made during the fall of 2008. Because this was a new instrument, modified from a survey that was only used once, little data were available to establish its validity. The added questions and modifications made were consistent with the literature related to teacher practices and beliefs and evidence-based practices related to emergent literacy. To further address content validity, the survey was presented in a focus group format to a group of early childhood education professionals. Comments were solicited related to clarity and the survey's ability to answer the research

questions. The questionnaire was then modified to its current form. In order to establish that respondents accurately answered questions in ways that reflected their true experiences and opinions, similar content was addressed through both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Sample

New Hampshire has a long and successful history of including students with disabilities into general education classrooms, even at the preschool level. For instance, I worked on a federally-funded project to increase inclusive preschool opportunities in New Hampshire for children with disabilities from 1994 to 1999. At that time, the project, Community Options, worked with five communities in New Hampshire to fully include all their preschool children with disabilities into community-based early care and education settings. Anecdotal evidence indicates that there are more preschoolers with disabilities included in general early childhood education programs in New Hampshire than in other states. However, rates or statistics of where these children are placed for preschool could not be found, despite a lengthy search.

The sample for this study consisted of teachers working in District-supported, inclusive preschools in the state of New Hampshire. These preschools primarily consist of programs run by school districts and created to meet the needs of young children with identified disabilities. Many of these programs have children without disabilities enrolled as “typical” peers in an effort to create an inclusive environment, although the numbers of these “typical” students is often low (e.g., ten of the 44 teachers who reported ratios of children

with and without disabilities in their classrooms worked in settings in which at least 66% of the enrolled children had special educational needs). Some school districts, particularly smaller ones, provide tuition and support for children with disabilities to attend community-based preschool programs rather than offering a program of their own. Teachers working in programs operated through school districts are more likely to be certified in either Special Education or Early Childhood Education. Similarly, they are likely to hold Bachelor's degrees in these fields or in Elementary Education. Teachers working in community-based programs were less likely to be certified or to hold degrees than teachers employed by school districts as certification is not required for hiring purposes (source: <http://www.daycare.com/newhampshire/>). In order to better understand differences among levels of education and professional development, the survey asked respondents to indicate if they were certified, and if so, in what area(s). I also asked them to indicate what preservice or inservice professional development opportunities they had to learn about emergent literacy.

The survey was sent, via email, to 189 preschool coordinators and special education directors in New Hampshire. Emails containing information about the study as well as a link to the online survey (on Survey Monkey) were first sent to all of the preschool coordinators and special educators on the list. In the email, I asked them to forward the message and link to all of the preschool teachers working in their school districts who worked in classrooms that enrolled both students with and without disabilities. The initial email was sent on May 11, 2010. A follow-up email was sent to the entire list on May 20, 2010. A third, and final,

email was sent on June 3, 2010. The link to the study closed on June 11, 2010, one month after sending out the first request. I was advised by the University of New Hampshire's Institutional Review Board to solicit participants with this method as it was an efficient way to get the survey to the participants without additional steps to gain consent from each person.

The email stated that by sending the message on, coordinators and directors were consenting to their preschool teachers to participate in the study. Additionally, the first page of the online survey stipulated that by continuing with the survey, teachers were, therefore, consenting to participate in the study. By using this method on survey distribution, I eliminated the need for additional consent and paperwork. A total of 68 teachers participated in the survey.

Teachers working in community-based programs were less likely to be certified or to hold degrees than teachers employed by school districts. The survey asked respondents to indicate if they were certified, and if so, in what area(s). I also asked them to indicate what preservice or inservice professional development opportunities they had to learn about emergent literacy.

Demographics of the Sample

For the purposes of this study, I sought to survey teachers who had both children with speech and language disabilities and those with typically developing language in their classrooms. I was interested in learning about the similarities and differences teachers indicate between working with these two designated types of children. I appreciate that children identified as having speech and language disabilities have a wide range of needs and strengths. There was little

information available through the study that indicated the specific needs of the children in these teachers' classrooms.

To obtain the sample, I received a list of email addresses for all New Hampshire school district preschool special education coordinators from the New Hampshire-based Preschool Technical Assistance Network (PTAN). This list contained approximately 190 names and addresses. I sent emails to each Preschool Coordinator explaining the study and asked them to forward the message and link to their preschool teachers.

Although specific data on the number of preschool teachers working in these programs is unavailable, it is estimated (based on personal experience and on professional contacts) that there are approximately two to three preschool teachers across each of 189 New Hampshire's school districts, therefore the pool of preschool special education teachers is estimated to be approximately 400 teachers. 68 teachers participated in the study, indicating a 17% response rate.

The email contained information about the survey and its purpose. It informed participants of their rights and asked for their consent. Teachers were informed that by accessing the link to the survey, they were, in fact, consenting to participate. I used the web-based program, Survey Monkey, to administer the questionnaire so that answers were confidential and participants could remain anonymous.

Incentives

It was suggested in the research literature that it is helpful to offer an incentive to respondents as a way to increase participation (Dillman, 2007).

Respondents were invited to send an email with their name and email address to me after they completed the survey. All the names were entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble as a thank you for participating.

Institutional Review Board

Permission to conduct the survey was requested from the Institutional Review Board of the University of New Hampshire. All necessary consents were received. Survey results were aggregated so that individual participants could not be identified.

The IRB provided guidelines for conducting web-based survey research on their website (<http://www.unh.edu/osr/>). The guidelines included information about elements that are required to be included in applications to the IRB for permission to conduct research as well as consent forms for participants.

The IRB had four areas of concern including general procedures associated with web-based surveys, consent of participants, privacy of participants, and security of the data. I addressed these concerns in the following ways:

1. Awareness of the Survey

The survey associated with this research project was available only to the sample described earlier in this document. I focused my study on New Hampshire preschool teachers who were working in district-run or district-supported programs. The survey could only be accessed by people who were contacted specifically for the study.

I described the research study in the initial email, as well as in the introduction to the survey. Participants were made aware of the purpose of the study. A hyperlink to the University of New Hampshire, Office of Sponsored Research was included in the introduction to the study. Additionally, my contact information as well as contact information (email and telephone numbers) for OSR and my dissertation advisor were included.

A final section of the survey acknowledged the respondents by thanking them for their participation in the study. A brief summary of the study, including its purpose will be sent to the participants at the close of this study. Participants were informed as to how they could learn more about the study at its completion. They were also informed about how their responses will be kept confidential.

2. Informed Consent

I requested consent with the initial information sent to potential participants. The survey was designed to require the participant to signify their consent prior to access to the rest of the survey. Participants were able to print this consent form for their own records. See Appendix X for copies of the consent page of the questionnaire.

3. Privacy of Participants

Each potential participant was contacted only after I had an initial exchange with the Preschool Coordinator for the school district. Part of this initial conversation was focused on gaining consent from the

preschool coordinator allowing the preschool teachers' participation. This initial consent negated any potential employment issues with the participants. For instance, the Preschool Coordinators' consent form contained a clause allowing the participant to complete the web-based survey during work hours and using the school districts' computers.

Characteristics of the Sample

A total of 68 completed surveys were returned after a period of one month. Assuming there are approximately 400 early childhood education teachers in New Hampshire, this indicates an approximate a 17 percent return. However, this is a rough estimate as the true number of distributed surveys is not known. Many of the returned surveys were incomplete, with six respondents filling out only the first portion of the survey, 45 respondents completing the entire survey, and 18 respondents completing only the belief statement portion, and two respondents filling out most of the survey but not completing the demographic information at the end. Because of the relatively low response rate, I decided to analyze all of the responses I had for each section of the survey and report the results based on those data. Table 9 indicates the number of responses and comments made for each section of the survey.

Table 9

Number of Responses and Comments per Survey Section

Survey Section	Number of completed responses	Number of comments made regarding typically developing students	Number of comments made regarding students with disabilities	Number of additional comments made
Curriculum Used	68			
Belief Statements	62			
Communication Supports	46			
Book Reading Strategies	47	39	38	15
Writing Strategies	46	38	37	12
Phonological Awareness Strategies	46	31	29	10
Language Strategies	46	25	25	6
Print Awareness Strategies	46	24	24	6
Strategies for students with speech and language disabilities	45		22	
Demographic Information	45			

Teachers' Levels of Formal Education

Approximately two-thirds (32 of 45) of the respondents who completed the demographics portion of the survey indicated they held master's degrees. The degrees were: Special Education (9), Early Childhood Special Education (4), Education (5), Early Childhood Education (3), Other (8), or not specified (4). The remaining third (13 of 45) indicated they held bachelor's degrees. These degrees

had been earned in: Early Childhood Education (6), Education/Special Education (3), Child/Family Studies (2), and Early Childhood Special Education (2). Of the entire sample, 23 respondents did not indicate their level of formal education or the focus of their degrees.

Teachers' Years of Experience. Teachers were asked to indicate how many years they had been teaching. Specifically, they were asked how many years they had been teaching children with IEPs, children ages three to five, and teaching in preschool environments. Responses among all three categories ranged from two years to 35 years. Table 10 shows the number of respondents according to years of teaching and experience with children.

Table 10

Teacher's Years of Experience Teaching Groups of Children

Years of Experience	0-4	5-14	15-24	25+
With IEPs	4	28	23	5
Ages 3-5	4	17	14	4
Preschool	6	20	8	3

As this sample demonstrates, it is not uncommon for teachers to shift their job responsibilities, working in different types of classrooms with different children. This diversity of teaching experiences speaks to the complexity of teachers' lives throughout their careers. For instance, one respondent reported four years of working with children with IEPs, 24 years of working with three to five year old children, and ten years of working in preschool. Five responses had

only one category filled out. Participants were also asked if they had worked in Head Start but only seven teachers indicated that they had.

Data Analysis

Data were primarily analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, and the comment section that follows is organized by the research questions.

Numeric Data

The responses required the participants to indicate how often they used specific strategies using a five point scale from “never” to “always.” In reporting the results, I determined the strategies that were used more frequently or less frequently, across the sample. Data were also analyzed descriptively to examine the frequency of use with children who were typically developing as compared to the strategies used with children who have speech and language disabilities. Inferential statistics, such as the use of chi square, to compare differences in frequency counts across groups, such as between teachers with many years of experience versus those who were just starting in the field, were not used because of the low responses that occurred across many of the categories.

I was interested in inspecting the relationship between the use of emergent literacy activities and materials with the belief statements teachers chose to represent their views on emergent literacy and early childhood education. For example, I examined whether teachers who indicated they believed emergent literacy learning was important also reported using materials and activities related to emergent literacy learning more often.

Qualitative Analysis

For the five sets of questions related to emergent literacy strategies, there were follow-up questions that asked teachers to identify the practices they believed contributed the most and least to emergent literacy learning. Analysis of these questions began with tabulating the responses to get a simple count. Second, the responses were compared to current recommended practices in the field as demonstrated in the research. For instance, dialogic reading is considered to have strong positive outcomes when used with preschool age children and is well documented in the research as a recommended activity (Justice & Pullen, 2003; van Kleeck & Vander Woude, 2003; Whitehurst et al., 1988). Several of the questions also provided a place for additional comments. These comments were examined for trends or themes.

Summary

In this chapter, I described my research methods, including the development and use of the *Emergent Literacy in Special Education Preschool Classrooms* survey. The procedures for administering the survey and protocols developed for compliance with the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board's policies were also discussed. The characteristics of the sample and the procedures of obtaining the sample were presented. The data gleaned from the survey is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This study focused on the beliefs and practices of early childhood educators with regard to emergent literacy, particularly for children with speech and language disabilities. The purpose of the study is to document current levels of knowledge and common practices related to emergent literacy development through (a) teachers' reporting of classroom practices, and (b) their beliefs about emergent literacy for their students, including those with speech and language disabilities.

Survey

In this chapter, I present the data obtained from the survey. Because of missing data, I present the data based on the responses completed for each section of the survey. To handle missing data, the percentage of responses calculated for each section were based on the actual number of responses received. Therefore, the "n" in various parts of the survey will fluctuate. Refer to table X for the number of responses for each section.

The results section is organized by each of the research questions posed that are restated to introduce each section. Results from the survey questions that are relevant to the research questions are presented using frequency data.

Research Question 1

What practices do preschool teachers report using in their classrooms to support emergent literacy learning for typically developing students; and students with oral language disabilities?

- a. To what extent do teachers' reported practices reflect evidence-based recommended practices?
- b. Do teachers' report different instructional practices when supporting children with and without identified language disabilities?

Survey results that answer these questions are summarized by each of the five emergent literacy components in the survey including book reading, writing, phonological awareness, language, and print awareness. These practices, as outlined in Chapter 2, are those that are either most commonly used or have been recommended by experts in the field of emergent literacy. Teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they used each strategy within their classroom, ranging from "always" to "never" on a five point scale. After discussing the frequency data, a summary for each component is provided.

Book Reading

The survey contained twelve statements relative to book reading practices. There were 45 participants who completed this section of the survey. In addition, 38 of those 45 participants made comments about book reading practices relative to all the students in their classrooms or relative to children with speech and language disabilities.

The three most common book reading practices identified by survey respondents were: (a) Stop to ask questions while reading aloud to children, (b) Have children hold books independently and turn pages, and (c) Stop to explain new vocabulary to children while reading aloud. Almost all respondents indicated that they *always* stopped to ask questions when reading books with children (44 of 45). Similarly, 41 of the 45 respondents indicated they supported children to hold books independently on a daily basis (*always*), with the remaining used this practice *frequently*. Thirty-five respondents indicated that they *always* stopped to explain vocabulary with the remaining stating they stopped *frequently*.

Table 11 indicates whether or not a specific book reading practice was recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC Joint Position statement or within the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. It also enumerates the frequency in which participants indicated they used each of the twelve book reading practices that were identified in the survey.

Table 11

Reported Book Reading Strategies for Typically Developing Children

Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	Always	Freq.	Occ.	Rarely	Never
Have children hold books independently and turn pages	✓	41	4	0	0	0
Show children that the text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from left to right by pointing or discussion	✓	27	15	3	0	0

Table 11 (continued)

Stop to ask questions while reading aloud to children	✓	43	2	0	0	0
Show children punctuation marks such as question marks and exclamation points during read aloud	✓	2	16	19	7	1
Stop to explain new vocabulary to children while reading aloud	No	35	9	0	1	0
Point to print while reading aloud to children	✓	25	15	4	0	1
Read alphabet books	✓	2	26	15	1	1
Make books with children related to classroom events or activities (e.g., field trips, curriculum unit)	No	4	11	25	5	0
Provide opportunities for children to retell stories	✓	16	20	6	3	0
Provide opportunities for children to predict stories during read-aloud	✓	21	24	0	0	0
Reread stories to individual or small groups of children	✓	18	20	4	3	0
Have children act out stories while reading aloud	No	0	11	21	12	1

In addition, participants were asked to indicate how often they used these same practices with children with speech and language disabilities. Forty-four of the 45 respondents indicated they *always* stopped to ask questions. Forty-one

respondents reported they *always* had children hold books, and 35 of them *always* explained vocabulary always or frequently.

Table 12 indicates if there were specific research studies about the use of the strategy with children who have speech and language disabilities and the frequency that participants indicated they used each of the twelve book reading practices with children who have speech and language disabilities.

Table 12
Reported Book Reading Strategies for Children with Speech and Language
Disabilities

Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	Always	Freq.	Occ.	Rarely	Never
Have children hold books independently and turn pages	No	43	2	0	0	0
Show children that the text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from left to right by pointing or discussion	✓	26	14	5	0	0
Stop to ask questions while reading aloud to children	✓	44	1	0	0	0
Show children punctuation marks such as question marks and exclamation points during read aloud	✓	2	16	18	7	2
Stop to explain new vocabulary to children while reading aloud	✓	35	9	1	0	0

Table 12 (continued)

Point to print while reading aloud to children	✓	25	15	4	0	1
Read alphabet books	✓	2	26	15	1	1
Make books with children related to classroom events or activities (e.g., field trips, curriculum unit)	No	4	11	25	5	0
Provide opportunities for children to retell stories	✓	16	21	5	3	0
Provide opportunities for children to predict stories during read-aloud	✓	20	25	0	0	0
Reread stories to individual or small groups of children	✓	18	20	4	3	0
Have children act out stories while reading aloud	✓	1	11	21	11	1

Participants also identified the book reading practices used the least amount in their classrooms. There were four practices with only one respondent for each indicating that it was *never* used. They were: (a) show children punctuation marks such as question marks and exclamation points during read aloud, (b) point to print while reading aloud to children, (c) read alphabet books, and (d) have children act out stories while reading aloud.

Overall, participants indicated very little difference between practices used for typically developing children and those with speech and language disabilities. Table 13 indicates the specific book reading practices included in the survey and the number of times respondents reported using the practice more often with

typically developing children or with children with speech and language disabilities.

Table 13
Difference in Reported Practice in Book Reading Opportunities
across Student Type

Practice	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Typically Developing Children	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Children with Speech and Language Disabilities
Have children hold books independently and turn pages	2	1
Show children that the text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from left to right by pointing or discussion	1	0
Stop to ask questions while reading aloud to children	0	1
Show children punctuation marks such as question marks and exclamation points	4	0
Stop to explain new vocabulary to children while reading aloud	0	2
Provide opportunities for children to predict stories during read-aloud	1	0
Reread stories to individual or small groups of children	1	2
Have children act out stories while reading aloud	0	3
Total	9	9

Summary of Book Reading Strategies. Teachers' responses were very consistent across all the respondents in the sample. Not only were their frequency levels almost identical, but their three most common practices identified were the same for both typically developing children and those with speech and language disabilities. Two of the three most commonly used strategies are recommended practices. There was a similar level of consistency

indicated for practices that were, reportedly, *never* being used with children, with or without speech and language disabilities. The only difference being that two respondents indicated they *never* showed punctuation marks to children with speech and language disabilities but did to typically developing children. Of the four strategies that were never used by at least one respondent, the first three are recommended to be used with all children. The final strategy, acting out stories, has been only been recommended for use with children who have speech and language disabilities.

It is not surprising that teachers reported that children had the opportunity to hold books on a daily basis. It is a very common practice for preschools to have a time during the day that all children gather and look at books at the same time. Similarly, teachers will stop during book reading to check their students' understanding of the story by asking questions. It is also typical to use a book reading time to introduce new vocabulary. Asking children to predict what will happen next in a story is one of the most commonly used comprehension strategies when working with young children.

Although there were some differences in the strategies teachers reported using with children with and without disabilities, they were minimal. The greatest difference reported was that four teachers indicated they pointed out punctuation to typically developing children more often than to children with speech and language disabilities. Three teachers reported they had children with speech and language disabilities act out stories more often than other children.

As much as reading story books with young children is a highly recommended and common practice in preschool classrooms, the use of writing strategies was not quite as consistent across the sample.

Writing

The survey contained twelve statements relative to writing practices common to preschools and child care settings. Forty-six participants completed this section of the survey. In addition, 38 of those made comments about writing practices relative to all the students in their classrooms or relative to children with speech and language disabilities.

The four most common writing practices identified by survey respondents were: (a) present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools (e.g., pencils, pens, markers, crayons, whiteboard, etc.), (b) provide opportunities for children to write their names for authentic purposes (e.g., labeling work, sign-up sheets), (c) help children trace letters/words, and (d) display children's writing around the classroom. Presenting children with opportunities to use writing tools had the highest response by teachers for practices they *always* use in their classrooms with 41 respondents, or 89% of the sample, indicating use with both typical student and students with speech and language disabilities. Forty respondents reported that they provide opportunities for authentic name writing for typical children, 41 for children with speech and language disabilities. The other two most common practices (tracing and displaying work), had 24 respondents, or 52%, who indicated they were *always* used with both groups of children. Additionally, 15 respondents, or 33%, stated they frequently helped

children, with and without disabilities, to trace letters. And 16 and 17 respondents stated they displayed writing by typical children and children with speech and language disabilities, respectfully.

Table 14 indicates whether or not a specific writing practice was recommended by either the IRA/NAEYC Joint Position statement or within the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. It also enumerates the frequency in which participants indicated they used each of the twelve writing practices that were identified in the survey.

Table 14
Reported Writing Strategies for Typically Developing Children

Writing Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Provide stencils to help children form letters	✓	10	6	9	10	11
Display children's writing around the classroom	✓	24	15	6	0	1
Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools (e.g., pencils, pens, markers, crayons, whiteboard, etc.)	✓	41	3	2	0	0
Write children's stories from their dictation	✓	9	23	10	2	2
Provide children with individual journals	✓	11	12	6	5	12

Table 14 (continued)

Model writing during group activities (e.g., circle time message)						
Provide opportunities for children to write their names for authentic purposes (e.g., labeling work, sign-up sheets)	No	20	16	5	2	3
Support children to make their own books	✓	40	5	1	0	0
Help children trace letters/words	✓	5	13	19	7	2
Provide opportunities for children to work in groups to write books	✓	24	16	4	2	0
Help children write and/or receive letters/notes in class	✓	0	7	11	16	12
Provide letter stamps or letter sponges for children to use	✓	5	8	16	13	4
	✓	7	10	18	9	2

Participants were also asked to indicate how often they used specific writing strategies when working with children who have identified speech and language disabilities. The strategies recommended specifically for children with disabilities are different depending on whether or not there has been research conducted examining the effectiveness of particular strategies when used with children who have speech and language disabilities.

Table 15 indicated whether or not the listed strategies are recommended for use with children who have speech and language disabilities. It also shows the reported use of strategies by the respondents.

Table 15

Reported Writing Strategies for Children with Speech and Language Disabilities

Writing Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Provide stencils to help children form letters	No	10	6	8	11	11
Display children's writing around the classroom	No	24	15	6	0	1
Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools (e.g., pencils, pens, markers, crayons, whiteboard, etc.)	✓	41	3	2	0	0
Write children's stories from their dictation	No	9	24	9	2	2
Provide children with individual journals	No	11	12	6	4	13
Model writing during group activities (e.g., circle time message)	No	20	16	5	2	3
Provide opportunities for children to write their names for authentic purposes (e.g., labeling work, sign-up sheets)	No	41	4	1	0	0
Support children to make their own books	No	5	14	18	8	1
Help children trace letters/words	No	24	17	3	2	0
Provide opportunities for children to work in groups to write books	No	0	7	11	15	13

Table 15 (continued)

Help children write and/or receive letters/notes in class	No	5	8	16	13	4
Provide letter stamps or letter sponges for children to use	No	7	9	19	9	2

About 28% of the sample indicated they *never* provided individual journals for typically developing children or children with speech and language disabilities, or had children work in groups to create books. Eleven teachers reported *never* providing stencils for any of their students. Ten teachers *rarely* provided stencils for typically developing children and those with disabilities. In addition, a large number of teachers (13, 28%) reported rarely providing opportunities for children to write and/or receive letters or notes from others in the classroom.

Overall, participants indicated very little difference between practices used for typically developing children and those with speech and language disabilities. Table 16 shows the number of teachers who indicated that they used specific writing strategies more or less frequently with typically developing children or with children who have disabilities.

Table 16

Difference in Reported Practice in Book Reading Opportunities across
Student type

Writing Strategies	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Typically Developing Children	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Children with Speech and Language Disabilities
Provide stencils to help children form letters	1	0
Write children's stories from their dictation	0	1
Provide children with individual journals	1	0
Provide opportunities for children to write their names for authentic purposes (e.g., labeling work, sign-up sheets)	0	1
Support children to make their own books	0	2
Provide opportunities for children to work in groups to write books	1	0
Provide letter stamps or letter sponges for children to use	1	0
Total	4	4

Summary of Writing Strategies. As with the book reading strategies, teachers' responses indicated high levels of consistency in their classroom practices. However, unlike book reading, there were several strategies that teachers indicated they rarely or never used in their classrooms, including (a) Provide children with individual journals, (b) Provide opportunities for children to work in groups to write books, and (c) Provide stencils to help children form letters. And, as with book writing, respondents reported using very similar strategies with children with and without disabilities.

The high number of strategies that teachers reported were rarely or never used may indicate an overall lack of writing opportunities for children in these

New Hampshire preschool classrooms. The comments made by teachers about writing did not indicate they were using other strategies or classroom practices other than those provided on the list in the survey.

Phonological Awareness

The survey contained seven statements relative to phonological awareness practices (related to the sounds of language) common to preschools and child care settings. These practices, as outlined in Chapter 2, are those that are either most commonly used, or are recommended, as indicated above. Forty-six participants completed this section of the survey. In addition, 31 participants made comments about phonological awareness practices relative to all the students in their classrooms or relative to children with speech and language disabilities.

The three phonological awareness practices used most frequently in classrooms either on a daily or weekly basis were: (a) draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs, (b) provide opportunities for children to practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g., /f/ in fish), and (c) provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time. Twenty-six of the 46 participants indicated that they “always” drew attention to rhyming words in books and songs, 18 participants indicated they “frequently” used this practice. Similarly, 24 of the 46 used the practice of providing opportunities for children to practice identifying initial sounds in words on a daily basis, and 17 reported using the practice “frequently.” Twenty-two respondents reported “always,” and 14

reported “frequently,” providing opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time.

Table 17 shows the frequency of reported phonological awareness practices. It is important to note that, in terms of recommendations, the research supporting particular practices rarely indicated a level of frequency in their analysis of the data.

Table 17

Reported Phonological Awareness Strategies for Typically Developing Children

Phonological Awareness Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	Always	Freq.	Occas	Rarely	Never
Read or recite nursery rhymes with children	✓	18	21	3	3	1
Play rhythm games practicing sounds or syllables in words	✓	14	26	6	0	0
Provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time	No	23	13	6	3	1
Draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs	✓	26	17	3	0	0
Provide opportunities for children to practice identifying initial sounds in words(e.g., /f/ in fish)	✓	24	17	4	1	0
Provide opportunities for children to identify syllable units	✓	7	14	17	5	3
Provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat)	✓	5	15	15	10	1

As with the other components, respondents were asked to report the frequency of using phonological awareness strategies when working specifically

with children who have speech and language disabilities. Table 18 shows the frequency of reported phonological awareness practices.

Table 18

Reported Phonological Awareness Strategies for Children with Speech and Language Disabilities

Phonological Awareness Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	Always	Freq.	Occas.	Rarely	Never
Read or recite nursery rhymes with children	No	18	21	3	3	1
Play rhythm games practicing sounds or syllables in words	No	14	26	6	0	0
Provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time	✓	22	14	6	3	1
Draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs	No	25	18	3	0	0
Provide opportunities for children to practice identifying initial sounds in words(e.g., /f/ in fish)	✓	24	17	4	1	0
Provide opportunities for children to identify syllable units	No	7	14	17	5	3
Provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat)	✓	5	15	14	11	1

Thirty-one respondents, or 67%, indicated “frequently” or “occasionally” providing opportunities for children to identify syllable units, 29 respondents “frequently” or “occasionally” provided opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together. Three respondents for both categories of children indicated they “never” provided opportunities for children to identify syllables for either typically developing children or children with speech and language

disabilities. Three other practices: (a) read or recite nursery rhymes with children, (b) provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time, and (c) provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat) had one respondent each who indicated the practice was “never” used.

Two other practices were cited being used most often by respondents but they are used “frequently” rather than “always” in classrooms. These were: (a) play rhythm games practicing sounds or syllables in words, and (b) read or recite nursery rhymes with children. These practices were used “frequently” by approximately half of the respondents. Other practices were said to be used “occasionally” by many of the respondents; they were: (a) provide opportunities for children to identify syllable units, and (b) provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat).

Four respondents indicated they used practices less frequently with children with disabilities; they were: (a) provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (1 response), (b) draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs (1 response), and (c) provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat). Table 19 shows the number of teachers who responded that they used particular strategies for phonological awareness development more or less frequently with typically developing children or those with speech and language disabilities.

Table 19

Difference in Reported Practices of Phonological Awareness Opportunities
across Student Type

Phonological Awareness Strategies	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Typically Developing Children	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Children with Speech and Language Disabilities
Provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time	1	0
Draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs	1	0
Provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat)	2	1
Total	4	1

Summary of Phonological Awareness Strategies. As with the strategies related to writing, there were phonological awareness strategies that were used on a less frequent basis than the most popular book reading strategies. Additionally, there was much more variability in teachers' responses for phonological awareness than for the other components, particularly in the frequency of use for many of the strategies. As with other areas of emergent literacy, there was very little difference in responses for individual practices used with all children versus practices used with children with speech and language disabilities. However, as a whole, phonological awareness strategies were used more, albeit slightly, with typically developing children than with children with speech and language disabilities. It was not clear in the teachers' comments as to why this was the case.

Language

The survey contained five statements relative to language practices commonly used in preschools and child care settings. These practices, as outlined in Chapter 2, are those that either are often observed in early childhood settings or have a strong recommendations supporting their use. 46 participants completed this section of the survey. In addition, 25 participants made comments about language practices relative to all the students in their classrooms or relative to children with speech and language disabilities.

The two most common language practices identified by survey respondents were: (a) extend children's conversations by commenting and/or adding more to what they say, and (b) direct children's attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud. Forty-two of the 46 respondents indicated they extended children's conversations on a daily basis (*always*), with the remaining four saying they used this practice *frequently*. Similarly, 37 respondents indicated that they *always* directed children's attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud with the remaining nine respondents stating they stopped *frequently* to point out new vocabulary. Table 20 indicates whether or not the listed practice is recommended and the frequency that participants reported they used each of the five language practices with children who are typically developing.

Table 20

Reported Language Strategies for Typically Developing Children

Language Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	A	F	O	R	N
Extend children's conversations by commenting and/or adding more to what they say	✓	42	4	0	0	0
Direct children's attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud	No	37	9	0	0	0
Direct children to repeat words to practice articulation	No	30	8	6	2	0
Direct children to repeat modeled sentences or phrases to extend oral language	No	28	10	6	2	0
Use targeted vocabulary words in conversations with children	No	25	16	2	3	0

Table 21 indicates whether or not the listed practice is recommended and the frequency that participants reported they used each of the five language practices with children who have speech and language disabilities.

Table 21

Reported Phonological Awareness Strategies for Children with Speech and
Language Disabilities

Language Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	A	F	O	R	N
Extend children's conversations by commenting and/or adding more to what they say	✓	43	3	0	0	0
Direct children's attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud	✓	37	9	0	0	0
Direct children to repeat words to practice articulation	No	33	8	4	1	0
Direct children to repeat modeled sentences or phrases to extend oral language	✓	33	7	4	2	0
Use targeted vocabulary words in conversations with children	✓	26	16	3	1	0

The top two most common language practices indicated for children with speech and language disabilities were the same practices they said they used for all children, namely extending conversations and directing attention to new vocabulary. The frequency rate was nearly identical between the two groups.

None of the teachers indicated that they “never” used any of the five given language practice choices, meaning that they used all of the strategies at least sometimes. Three of the five practices were reported as being used less than once a month, or “rarely” by at least two respondents. These uncommonly used practices were: (a) direct children to repeat words to practice articulation, (b) direct children to repeat modeled sentences or phrases to extend oral language, and c) Use targeted vocabulary words in conversations with children.

Table 22 shows the number of teachers indicating practices they used more frequently with these groups of children.

Table 22

Difference in Reported Practices of Language Opportunities across Student Type

Language Strategies	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Typically Developing Children	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Children with Speech and Language Disabilities
Extend children's conversations by commenting and/or adding more to what they say	0	2
Direct children to repeat words to practice articulation	1	5
Direct children to repeat modeled sentences or phrases to extend oral language	0	4
Use targeted vocabulary words in conversations with children	0	3
Total	1	14

Summary of Language Strategies. There was little difference in the reported use of language strategies across the two groups of children. However, at least one teacher indicated a different level of frequency in using four of the five strategy choices when referring to children with speech and language disabilities versus typically developing children. The only strategy that all responding teachers used at the same frequency in both groups was “Direct children’s attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud.”

Although there were only four “recommended” strategies in this portion of the survey, they are well-researched and have a strong evidence base of effectiveness. The one “non-recommended” strategy, having children practice

articulation, was reported by teachers to be used more frequently in their classrooms than using targeted vocabulary, an effective strategy to increase children's vocabulary.

Print Awareness

The survey contained eight statements relative to print awareness practices commonly used in preschools and child care settings. These practices, as outlined in Chapter 2, are those that either are often observed in early childhood settings or have strong recommendations supporting their use. Forty-six participants completed this section of the survey. In addition, 25 participants made comments about print awareness practices relative to all the students in their classrooms or relative to children with speech and language disabilities.

Two print awareness practices were "always" or "frequently" used by the majority of respondents when asked about practices used in early childhood classrooms with typically developing children. They are: (a) use a posted written schedule with text or text and pictures, and (b) provide access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters. Another commonly used practice was to provide literacy-related props, 38 respondents, or 83%, indicated that they "always" or "frequently" use the practice. The next most frequently used practice, Use a posted written list for children's chores or choices in the classroom, was used "always" or "frequently" by 35, or 76% of the teachers. However, it also had the highest response of "never" used, by seven teachers (15%).

Table 23 indicates the responses of teachers to practices related to print awareness.

Table 23

Reported Print Awareness Strategies for Typically Developing Children

Answer Options	Practice Recommended by Experts	A	F	O	R	N
Use "letter of the week" activities for alphabet instruction	No	12	11	2	4	17
Provide access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	✓	35	7	3	1	0
Use a posted written schedule with text or text and pictures	✓	41	3	1	1	0
Introduce alphabet letters through direct instruction	✓	22	15	3	5	1
Use a posted written list for children's chores or choices in the classroom	✓	31	4	2	2	7
Provide literacy-related props which include print(e.g., letters for post office, phone books, menus for restaurants) in dramatic play areas	✓	29	9	5	1	2
Provide flash cards to practice letter recognition learning	No	5	12	4	12	13
Play games that teach letter/word recognition (e.g., letter lotto)	No	6	22	13	4	1

Table 24 indicates the responses of teachers to practices related to print awareness.

Table 24

Reported Print Awareness Strategies for Children with Speech and Language
Disabilities

Print Awareness Strategies	Practice Recommended by Experts	A	F	O	R	N
Use "letter of the week" activities for alphabet instruction	No	13	10	2	4	17
Provide access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	No	36	6	3	1	0
Use a posted written schedule with text or text and pictures	No	41	3	1	1	0
Introduce alphabet letters through direct instruction	No	22	15	3	6	0
Use a posted written list for children's chores or choices in the classroom	No	31	4	2	2	7
Provide literacy-related props which include print(e.g., letters for post office, phone books, menus for restaurants) in dramatic play areas	No	29	9	5	1	2
Provide flash cards to practice letter recognition learning	No	6	11	5	11	13
Play games that teach letter/word recognition (e.g., letter lotto)	No	6	22	13	4	1

Only three respondents indicated they used practices more or less frequently when referring to children with speech and language disabilities as opposed to typically developing children. One teacher indicated more frequent use of "letter of the week" with children with speech and language disabilities. Two teachers indicated more frequently use of direct instruction about alphabet letters, and two teachers indicated more frequent use of flash cards, with students with speech and language disabilities. Table 25 shows the number of teachers indicating practices they used more frequently with either typically developing children or those with speech and language disabilities.

Table 25

Difference in Reported Practices of Print Awareness Opportunities across
Student Type

Practice	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Typically Developing Children	Respondents Indicating More Opportunity for Children with Speech and Language Disabilities
Use "letter of the week" activities for alphabet instruction	0	1
Introduce alphabet letters through direct instruction	0	2
Provide flash cards to practice letter recognition learning	0	2

Summary of Print Awareness Strategies. Experts in the field focus on book reading and writing as a means to introduce print awareness skills at the emergent literacy level. For the purposes of this portion of the survey, I provided print awareness strategies that are most often observed in New Hampshire preschool classrooms. Many of these strategies would not be considered “instructional” but are instead strategies teachers might use to increase levels of print in the environment of the classroom.

Responses were very similar when teachers were asked about their use of practices with children with speech and language disabilities; this may be due to the “environmental” quality of the strategy. The only difference was that one teacher indicated that instead of “always,” there was frequent access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters for children with disabilities.

The use of “Letter-of-the-week” strategies had as many teachers respond they used it “always” or “frequently” as teachers who reported they “rarely” or “never” used it. Although the research has a strong evidence base that Letter-of-the-week is ineffective and inefficient, it has remained a staple component of the curriculum in many preschool classrooms.

Research Question #2

How do teachers’ beliefs about young children’s emergent literacy development relate to their reported use of evidence-based emergent literacy strategies in their classrooms?

Do teachers who indicate higher levels of agreement with belief statements (in the survey) about emergent literacy include more evidence-based practices in their classrooms?

Summary of Belief Statement Responses

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of five belief statements relating to emergent literacy instruction and young children. Response choices ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” on a five point scale. The belief statements were:

1. Significant classroom time should be devoted to emergent literacy instruction every day.
2. Children will best learn emergent literacy skills when specific skills (e.g., alphabet letters or rhyming) are targeted for instruction.
3. Children should have strong speech/language skills in place before they are introduced to emergent literacy learning.

4. Children with speech/language disabilities are not ready for emergent literacy instruction in preschool.
5. Direct instruction in emergent literacy should be held off until children are in kindergarten.

Each of the statements has a broad research base about its effectiveness, although some of them were written in an opposing format. For instance, one statement declares “Children should have strong speech/language skills in place before they are introduced to emergent literacy learning,” although the research base indicates that children with disabilities benefit from emergent literacy in preschool. See Chapter 2 for a description of the research base.

The statement with the highest level of agreement among respondents was “Children with speech/language disabilities are not ready for emergent literacy instruction in preschool.” Sixty of 62 participants responded that they “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” with that statement. The other two participants indicated neutral response.

The first belief statement “Significant classroom time should be devoted to emergent literacy instruction every day” had a high level of consistency across the survey respondents. Most participants (55 of 62 responses) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Six participants were neutral about the statement and one person disagreed.

Other consistent responses were for the statement “Children will best learn emergent literacy skills when specific skills (e.g., alphabet letters or

rhyming) are targeted for instruction.” Although only 14 participants indicated strong agreement, half the sample (33 people) indicated agreement with the statement. Similarly, 33 participants indicated they disagreed, and twelve voiced strong disagreement, with the statement “Children should have strong speech/language skills in place before they are introduced to emergent literacy learning.”

The belief statement about targeted skill instruction had the widest range of responses with people indicating strong agreement, agreement, neutral, and disagreement. No one indicated strong disagreement with the statement. Only one statement “Direct instruction in emergent literacy should be held off until children are in kindergarten” had responses at each level of agreement. Table 26 shows the participants level of agreement with each belief statement.

Table 26

Respondents’ Levels of Agreement with Belief Statements

Belief Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD
Significant classroom time should be devoted to emergent literacy instruction every day.	34	21	6	1	0
Children will best learn emergent literacy skills when specific skills (e.g., alphabet letters or rhyming) are targeted for instruction.	14	33	11	4	0
Children should have strong speech/language skills in place before they are introduced to emergent literacy learning.	2	9	6	33	12

Table 26 (continued)

Children with speech/language disabilities are not ready for emergent literacy instruction in preschool.	0	0	2	29	31
Direct instruction in emergent literacy should be held off until children are in kindergarten.	1	1	5	28	27

Demographics of Teachers Responding to Belief Statements

Statement 1: *Significant classroom time should be devoted to emergent literacy instruction every day.*

A large number, 45 of 62 respondents, indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with this belief statement. These teachers had notable similarities and differences in their demographic information. Ten teachers, almost a third of the respondents, had fewer than six years of preschool teaching experience. Another third, or ten respondents, had between 11 and 15 years of experience. Six teachers indicated they had between six and ten years of teaching experience, another six had between 16 and 25 years. The final four teacher responses indicated they had at least 26 years of teaching preschool.

Only one teacher in the full sample indicated working in a classroom of mostly three year old children. This teacher indicated strong agreement with the belief statement about significant classroom time being devoted to emergent literacy instruction. Most of the teachers, 17 of 23, working in classrooms with a mix of three- and four-year olds were in agreement or strong agreement with the statement. Similarly, 14 of the 19 teachers working with mostly four-year old

children, and both teachers of four- and five-year old children were in agreement or strong agreement with the belief statement.

Eleven of the 13 teachers who work in inclusive settings (classrooms where fewer than 33% of the students enrolled have identified disabilities) either strongly agreed or agreed with the belief statement. Similarly, nine of the ten teachers in segregated classrooms (classrooms where more than 66% of the students have identified disabilities) reported they strongly agreed or agreed with the belief statement. In classrooms in which 34%-66% of the students have identified disabilities, or “balanced” classrooms, 19 of the 21 teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

All but one of the total sample of respondents with bachelor’s degrees, 12 of 13, reported strong agreement or agreement with the belief statement. Slightly fewer, or 27 of 32 total, master’s degree teachers also reported strong agreement or agreement with the belief statement.

Statement 2: Children will best learn emergent literacy skills when specific skills (e.g., alphabet letters or rhyming) are targeted for instruction.

Unlike the first statement, there were many more that “agreed” rather than “strongly agreed” to the second belief statement. In fact, more than half of the respondents, 33 of 62, said they agreed. Another 14 said they strongly agreed. This statement had the largest number, 11, with a neutral response.

The distribution of years of teaching preschool was almost identical to the first belief statement with eight teachers having less than five years of

experience, five teachers with six to ten years of experience, eight teachers with 11 to 15 years, six teachers with 16 to 25 years, and two teachers with more than 25 years of experience.

There is more variability in the responses with regard to the ages of the children in the teachers' classrooms. Again, the only teacher of mostly three-year-olds had strong agreement. Twenty-two teachers of mixed classrooms of three and four year olds and 18 teachers of mostly four-year olds had agreement or strong agreement with the belief statement. And again, both of the teachers indicating their classrooms had four- and five-year olds also had agreement with the statement.

All but one of the 13 teachers in inclusive classrooms indicated agreement or strong agreement with the belief statement. Sixteen out of a total of 21 teachers who taught in blended classrooms indicated agreement or strong agreement but they were not necessarily the same teachers who indicated agreement with the first statement. Eight of the ten teachers in segregated classrooms indicated agreement.

Thirty of the 32 teachers with master's degrees had agreement or strong agreement with the statement. All 13 of teachers with bachelor's degrees also agreed.

Statement 3: Children should have strong speech/language skills in place before they are introduced to emergent literacy learning.

The third belief statement had the least amount of agreement across participants. There were at least two responses for each of the five levels of

agreement with this statement; however most respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (30 of 42). Teachers' years of experience ranged from less than five years to over 25 across the levels of agreement, particularly those teachers who disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. There was also a range in responses with regard to the ages of the students in the classrooms. Most of the teachers, across the statement, worked in classrooms with a mix of three- and four-year olds. All but one of the teachers who reported working in a segregated program either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the belief statement.

Table 27 describes responses for the third belief statement delineated by years of teaching experience, age of students, percentage of students with disabilities, and the teachers' educational background.

Table 27

Respondents' Level of Agreement with Belief Statement 3 Based on
Demographic Factors

Belief Statement #3	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total number of responses	2	6	4	21	9
Years of Teaching Preschool					
0-5		1	1	4	4
6-10		3	2	4	
11-15	1	1	1	5	3
16 – 25	1			5	
Over 25		1		1	2
Did not Answer				2	
Ages of Students					
Mostly 3s					1
Mixed 3 and 4	1	2	2	13	5
Mostly 4s	1	4	1	7	3
Mixed 4 and 5			1	1	

Table 27 (continued)

Percentage of Students with Disabilities					
Inclusive	2	3	3	2	3
Blended		3	1	12	5
Segregated		1		8	1
Educational Background					
M.Ed.	2	4	3	15	6
BA	0	2	1	6	3

Statement 4: *Children with speech/language disabilities are not ready for emergent literacy instruction in preschool.*

Most of the responses for this statement were in the negative, that is – they indicated disagreement or strong disagreement. In fact 60 of the 62 respondents responded in the negative with 29 indicating disagreement and 31 indicating strong disagreement. The two remaining respondents indicated they were neutral towards the belief statement.

Most teachers, 11, had fewer than five years of experience. The next highest level, 10 teachers, had between 11 and 15 years. Seven teachers with six to ten years of experience, and another seven with 16 to 25 years of experience indicated strong disagreement or disagreement with the belief statement. All three of the teachers with more than 25 years of teaching also disagreed.

Similarly, the majority of teachers in classrooms of threes, fours, mixed three- and four-year olds, and mixed four- and five-year olds disagreed or strongly disagreed with the belief statement. Again, the only teacher of mostly

three-year olds had strong disagreement. Twenty-two teachers of mixed classrooms of three- and four-year olds and 18 teachers of mostly four-year olds disagreed or strongly disagreed with the belief statement. And again, both of the teachers indicating their classrooms had 4- and 5-year olds also had disagreement with the statement.

All but one of the 13 inclusive classroom teachers (fewer than 33% of the students with disabilities), 20 of the 21 blended classroom teachers (between 34% and 66% of the students had disabilities), and all 10 of the segregated classroom teachers (more than 66% of the students had disabilities) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the belief statement.

Thirty of the 32 teachers with master's degrees had agreement or strong agreement with the statement. All 13 of teachers with bachelor's degrees also agreed.

Statement 5: Direct instruction in emergent literacy should be held off until children are in kindergarten.

As with Statement #4, most of the responses to this statement were either strongly disagree, 27 responses, or disagree, with 28 responses. This was the only belief statement that had at least one response in each of the five choice categories. One teacher indicated strong agreement, one teacher agreed, and five were neutral.

Most of the teachers had either fewer than five years (11) or between 11 and 15 years (10) of teaching experience. Six teachers had between six and ten years, six had between 16 and 25 years, and three teachers had more than 25 years of teaching experience.

Other than the single teacher of three-year olds, fewer teachers in each category responded negatively to this belief statement. Thirteen teachers of four-year olds, 16 teachers of both three- and four-year olds, and both teachers of 4- and five-year olds responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

All of the teachers in segregated classrooms (with more than 66% of the students having disabilities) indicated disagreement or strong disagreement. Eighteen of the 21 teachers working in classrooms with roughly half, or between 34% and 66%, of the students having disabilities, also disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Twelve of the 13 teachers in inclusive classrooms (in which at least 33% of the students did not have disabilities) also disagreed or strongly disagreed with the final belief statement.

Almost all of the teachers with master's degrees, 28 out of 32, disagreed with the belief statement. Again, all 13 teachers with bachelor's degrees either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Rated Importance of Emergent Literacy Components

Teachers were asked to rate five emergent literacy components by importance. The components were: (a) a large vocabulary (expressive and

receptive), (b) strong phonological awareness skills, (c) ability to name alphabet letters, (d) strong concept of print knowledge, and (e) ability to write letters.

Most respondents rated all five components though others rated only some of them.

Teachers rated a large vocabulary as the most important, closely followed by strong phonological awareness skills. The ability to name alphabet letters and having strong concept of print skills were most identified as having a moderate level of importance. The ability to write alphabet letters was the component most often identified as being the least important.

Table 28 delineates teachers' rating of five emergent literacy skills from most to least important, including the average rating for each component and the number of responses for each skill. These skills coincide with the three major components of the emergent literacy model outlined in Chapter 2. The chart includes an average rating "score" for each skill. As you can see, there were different numbers of respondents across the survey.

Table 28

Respondents' Rating on Emergent Literacy Skills by Levels of Importance

Emergent Literacy Component Skill	1 (most)	2	3	4	5 (least)	Rating Average	Response Count
A large vocabulary (expressive and receptive)	23	19	9	3	2	1.96	56
Strong phonological awareness skills	22	18	12	4	1	2.02	57
Ability to name alphabet letters	6	10	13	20	6	3.18	55
Strong concept of print knowledge	6	12	25	15	2	2.92	60
Ability to write letters	1	1	2	16	40	4.55	60

Vocabulary Practices. There were no noteworthy differences between the entire sample and the teachers who indicated that vocabulary was the most important emergent literacy component. Almost half of the teachers answering this question and who also ranked the effectiveness of specific language strategies (in a separate section of the survey) indicated that a large vocabulary was most important. These 20 teachers' responses were very close to the entire sample with regard to practices used either "always" or "frequently" in classrooms with both typically developing children and children with speech and language disabilities.

Table 29 shows a listing of strategies used for vocabulary development. It indicates the number of teachers from the entire sample (46) and the number of teachers who indicated that vocabulary was the most important component (20) for both typically developing children and those with speech and language disabilities.

Table 29

Respondents' Rating of Vocabulary Strategies across Complete Survey

Vocabulary Skills	Typically Developing Children		Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	
	Total	Vocab most important	Total	Vocab most important
Extend children's conversations by commenting and/or adding more to what they say	46	20	46	20
Direct children's attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud	46	20	46	20
Direct children to repeat words to practice articulation	38	17	41	18
Direct children to repeat modeled sentences or phrases to extend oral language	38	18	40	15
Use targeted vocabulary words in conversations with children	41	17	42	18

Phonological Awareness Practices. A large number of participants also indicated that having strong phonological awareness skills was the most important component of emergent literacy. When comparing responses by teachers who indicated that phonological awareness was most important compared to the entire sample of teachers, the percentages for “always” and “frequently” used practices are quite similar. There are some notable differences when the “always” and “frequently” responses are added together. For instance, for the item “Provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during

read-aloud time,” 78% of the total sample used the practice either always or frequently but it was only used 53% by the smaller group. There were 46 teachers from the entire sample that answered this section of the survey, 15 of them indicated that PA was the most important component of emergent literacy.

Table 30 shows a listing of strategies used for phonological awareness strategies. It indicates the number of teachers from the entire sample and the number of teachers who indicated that vocabulary was the most important component for both typically developing children and those with speech and language disabilities.

Table 30
 Respondents’ Rating of Phonological Awareness Strategies across
 Complete Survey

Phonological Awareness Strategies	Typically Developing Children		Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	
	Total	PA most important	Total	PA most important
Read or recite nursery rhymes with children	39	10	39	10
Play rhythm games practicing sounds or syllables in words	40	11	40	11
Provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time	36	8	36	8
Draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs	41	10	43	10

Table 30 (continued)

Provide opportunities for children to practice identifying initial sounds in words(e.g., /f/ in fish)	42	11	41	11
Provide opportunities for children to identify syllable units	21	5	21	5
Provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat)	20	5	20	4

Alphabet Letters. Most respondents indicated that knowing alphabet letters was of moderate importance compared to other components of emergent literacy. Six respondents rated alphabet letters as most important; another six rated that component as least important. Comparing those sets of responses yielded some interesting contrasts. For instance, twice as many respondents who indicated alphabet letters as most important reported using “letter of the week” activities than respondents that rated alphabet letters as least important. However, the same number of respondents for both groups reported using flash cards to teach alphabet letters.

Table 31 indicates how often respondents reported “always” or “frequently” using specific strategies by the number of respondents who indicated that the ability to name alphabet letters was “most important” compared to those who indicated it was least important. The table also indicated the use of these strategies with children who are typically developing and those who have speech and language disabilities.

Table 31

Respondents' Rating of Phonological Awareness Strategies across Complete Survey for Children with and without Speech and Language Disabilities

Ability to name alphabet letters	Most Important	Least Important
Use "letter of the week" activities for alphabet instruction - Typically Developing Children	3	0
Use "letter of the week" activities for alphabet instruction - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	4	0
Provide access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters - Typically Developing Children	5	3
Provide access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	4	3
Introduce alphabet letters through direct instruction - Typically Developing Children	4	2
Introduce alphabet letters through direct instruction - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	4	2
Provide flash cards to practice letter recognition learning - Typically Developing Children	1	1
Provide flash cards to practice letter recognition learning - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	2	1
Play games that teach letter/word recognition (e.g., letter lotto) - Typically Developing Children	1	1
Play games that teach letter/word recognition (e.g., letter lotto) - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	1	1

Table 31 (continued)

Play games that teach letter/word recognition (e.g., letter lotto) - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	1	1
Model writing during group activities (e.g., circle time message) - Typically Developing Children	4	2
Model writing during group activities (e.g., circle time message) - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	4	2
Help children trace letters/words - Typically Developing Children	2	1
Help children trace letters/words - Children with Speech/Language Disabilities	2	1

Concepts of Print. Almost every respondent, 52 out of 60, rated concepts of print as second, third, or fourth in a scale of five. Almost half the respondents, 25 of 60, rated the component as third most important in a scale of five.

Ability to Write Letters. Two thirds of the respondents to this question rated the ability to write letters as the least important component of emergent literacy. One respondent rated it as most important.

Summary

The high level of consistent responses across the belief statements made analysis of the relationship between beliefs and practices uncertain. The majority of teachers' responses were clustered to such a high degree that it was not practical to draw conclusions about what practices might be related to individual belief statements.

Research Question 3

Are teachers who have more children with oral language disabilities in their classrooms more likely to believe that children with identified language disabilities can develop emergent literacy in preschool?

Ten teachers who completed the survey work in inclusive classrooms, defined as those in which at least 65% of the students are considered to be developing typically. Nine teachers who completed the survey work in segregated classrooms, defined as those in which at least 61% of the students have identified special educational needs.

The two sets of teachers have many similarities. As was indicated earlier, there was strong agreement across the entire sample with most of the belief statements. The third belief statement, **Children should have strong speech/language skills in place before they are introduced to emergent literacy learning**, had the widest range of responses across all participants. As seen in Table 32, there was wide variation across the teachers in inclusive classrooms but almost complete agreement among the teachers in segregated classrooms. Teachers in segregated classrooms, on the whole, believe that students do not need to have strong speech and language skills prior to learning emergent literacy skills and understandings.

Table 32

Respondents' Levels of Agreement with Belief Statement 3 by Classroom Type

Belief Statement #3	Inclusive Classrooms	Segregated Classrooms
Strongly Agree/Agree	4	1
Neutral	2	0
Strongly Disagree/Disagree	4	8

Teachers were asked to indicate how often they used particular strategies, different from the ones aligned with specific components of emergent literacy, with their students who have speech and language disabilities. Again, the teachers in both types of classrooms had very similar responses. Table 33 shows teachers' levels of agreement, according to classroom type that varied the most between inclusive classrooms and segregated classrooms.

Table 33

Respondents' Reported Use of Emergent Literacy Strategies By Classroom Type

Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms	A	F	O	R	N
Have child listen to a book on tape and follow along with the book.		3	3	2	1
Use visual aids to illustrate oral or written language (e.g., use props during read-aloud).	3	5	1	1	
Change pace of wording when key information is given.	6	2	1		
Ask questions that require shorter answers (e.g., yes/no)	2	4	2		1
Use peer support strategies (e.g., pair child with strong oral language skills with child who has weaker skills).	3	4	2		
Provide alternative means for expressive communication (e.g., sign language, AAC, props, communication boards).	7		1		1

Table 33 (continued)

Demonstrate vocabulary and language patterns through repeated activities (e.g., theme of the week for story, dramatic play, art projects).	6	2	1		
Read aloud books with predictable and repeated lines	5	3	1		
Support child to participate in verbal language activities (e.g., dramatic play, circle).	8		1		
Teachers in Segregated Classrooms	A	F	O	R	N
Have child listen to a book on tape and follow along with the book.	1	1	3	4	
Use visual aids to illustrate oral or written language (e.g., use props during read-aloud).	1	5	2	1	
Change pace of wording when key information is given.	4	5			
Ask questions that require shorter answers (e.g., yes/no)	7		2		
Use peer support strategies (e.g., pair child with strong oral language skills with child who has weaker skills).	4	2	1	2	
Provide alternative means for expressive communication (e.g., sign language, AAC, props, communication boards).	6	1	1	1	
Demonstrate vocabulary and language patterns through repeated activities (e.g., theme of the week for story, dramatic play, art projects).	6	2	1		
Read aloud books with predictable and repeated lines	5	4			
Support child to participate in verbal language activities (e.g., dramatic play, circle).	8	1			

Narrative Comments Differentiated by Classroom Type

Teachers had the opportunity to provide written comments about their practices for each of the five emergent literacy components. They could indicate practices they used with children who are typically developing, children with speech and language disabilities, and additional comments about the component.

Teachers in inclusive classrooms made comments across the components. In many instances, they indicated their practices were the same for each group of children. They also indicated that often they repeated, reinforced, or provided time for additional practice of strategies for students with disabilities.

Teachers in segregated classrooms also made comments. As in the inclusive classrooms, teachers often indicated their practices were the same. They also indicated that their children needed additional time or repetition but were more likely to indicate a more direct focus on skill development.

Seven of the ten teachers in inclusive classrooms and three of the nine teachers in segregated classrooms indicated the use of communication boards within the classroom environment. Eight and six of the teachers, respectively, indicated they used communication boards to support children with speech and language disabilities. There was only one comment among the 19 teachers that indicated using AT or AAC supports in their classrooms.

Table 34 provides a list of the comments made by teachers in inclusive classrooms and in segregated classrooms with regard to strategies used particularly with children who have speech and language disabilities

Table 34

Respondents' Comments Regarding Most Effective Emergent Literacy Strategies
by Classroom Type

Inclusive Classrooms
Increased practice with phonetic sounds
Repetition
Direct Instruction related to their disability
Extra time
Individual copies of the storybooks
Opportunities for participation at their level
Reinforcement
Practice
Playing with environmental sounds
Naming pictures in books
Providing an alternative means for expressive communication.
Lots of experience and hands-on opportunities. Carry-over activities for parents to use at home.
Support child in verbal language activities during play.
Predictable books
Segregated Classrooms
I really don't see any difference. I take the Least Dangerous Assumption.
same as above with a more intense focus
Using stories with clear, simple illustrations from which the children can retell the story.
Our writing/art center is stocked with crayons, markers, pencils, stencils, paper, scissors, glue, modeling dough, Magnadoodles etc. The children have access to these each day.
We teach all our students together and find with accommodations such and pre-teaching, visuals and adult cuing they benefit from the typical classroom activities.
Going from more support such as language models, visuals, cues to independent language.

Table 34 (continued)

Exposure to letter/reading activities across the preschool day.
As you can tell by now, I believe the strategies we use to teach children with learning disabilities and typically developing children are best practice for almost all students.
Again, students with speech/language disabilities probably need to be read to even more often than typically developing students. They need to hear how words sound and hear the rhythm of speech.
Repeating words to practice the articulation
Providing props or manipulatives to use as a memory aid for re-telling purposes reading aloud creating stories about life experiences picture books theme related books to build theme related vocabulary books on tape or iPod
modeling sound production
I also believe that some of these students are going to need more explicit instruction with these skills because they may be more challenging.
having things labeled in the classroom using a word wall for old and new vocabulary so they can see the words at all times having their names posted around the classroom in various settings using a variety of materials to experiment with in a variety of situations
stress letter sounds by highlighting them at the beginning of words to make sure they are really heard and practiced.
Expanding their sentence length when they are talking. introduce turn taking with conversations model correct articulation but don't expect child to keep repeating it after you
I think the addition of boardmaker and pictures as well as devices helps aid the understanding of the written word.
Daily literacy instruction that is varied, fun and engaging for students at all levels of development.
Predictable books

Table 34 (continued)

Match vocabulary to student use of props peer models predictable repetitive text
Books, oral language opportunities, props
I think that students with speech and language disabilities should be taught as all preschool students. All of the same skills are essential to their success. These students may have more difficulty with them, but it doesn't make them less important. These students may also need more explicit instruction for them, but again this does not make them less important.

Research Question 4

What are the differences in teachers' reported practices based on differences in (a) level of education; (b) years of teaching experience; (c) the ages of their students; (d) percentage of children with oral language disabilities in their classrooms; or (e) classroom settings?

General Reported Practices

There was a high level of consistency across the responses in each of the five components of emergent literacy. However, three strategies, two associated with writing and one in print awareness, showed more variation of use across the participants. They were: (a) use of stencils, (b) use of individual journals, and (c) (use of Letter-of-the-Week.

Ten participants indicated they always use stencils in their classrooms, eight participants indicated they never did. Slightly more teachers with bachelor's degrees indicated they always used stencils. Teachers with master's degrees were almost equally divided.

Nine teachers indicated they always use individual journals while ten teachers indicated they never use them. Again, the responses were spread across the sample.

The responses regarding the use of Letter-of-the-Week were more slanted. Almost twice as many teachers with master's degrees indicated they never use letter-of-the-week as a strategy in their classrooms that master degree teachers who indicate they always use it.

Reported Practices in Communication Supports

Participants were asked identify specific literacy and communication supports that they used throughout the classroom for all children and for children with speech and language disabilities. 45 teachers completed this portion of the survey, including 13 teachers with Bachelor's degrees and 32 teachers with master's degrees.

Teachers were given a choice of six literacy and communication supports and asked which of those they used across five areas or activities within a preschool classroom. The six supports included: (a) teacher-generated letters and words, (b) child-generated letters and words, (c) pictures of sign language, (d) communication boards, e) Boardmaker © pictures, and (f) print with photos. The five areas/activities of the preschool classroom included: (a) labeling objects around the room, (b) presenting information during direct instruction, (c) reading books with children, (d) presenting information during free time/non-instructional time, and (e) dramatic play area.

In general, teachers indicated using many of the supports across most of the areas and activities. For instance, 42 of the 45 reported using teacher-generated print to label objects around the classroom. Many teachers reported using Boardmaker © pictures in each of the identified areas and activities. Pictures of sign language was the least commonly used support, yet it was mentioned in each of the five areas/activities.

Teachers in inclusive classrooms indicated that, overall, the supports were particularly helpful to children with speech and language disabilities. In particular, teachers in inclusive classrooms cited print with photos, Boardmaker © pictures, and communication boards as being the most helpful. Three teachers in inclusive classrooms indicated they believed that communication boards were particularly helpful for students with disabilities but did not indicate they used them at all in any of the five suggested areas or activities.

Teachers in segregated classrooms had similar responses, indicated high use of communication boards, Boardmaker © pictures, and print with photos most often. However, they were much less likely to use child-generated text in much less likely to any of the settings. Only half of the teachers in segregated classrooms indicated using child-generated text, compared to nine of the eleven teachers in inclusive classrooms.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study came about as I traveled across New Hampshire working with preschool teachers in their efforts to include children with disabilities in their classrooms and to increase their use of emergent literacy strategies and practices with young children. Initially, I was interested in learning whether teachers were able to carry out recommended practices in their classrooms, based on their own knowledge, skills, and beliefs. Before I could address that question, however, there were other questions to ask. What do teachers believe about emergent literacy and young children – and how do those beliefs differ (if at all) for children with disabilities? Do teachers' beliefs match up with how they actually report spending their time in classrooms? These questions are the foundation for this study.

This chapter will focus on two critical findings from this study of preschool teacher beliefs and reported practices. First, the survey results indicate that teachers *do* support emergent literacy development in their classrooms and that many of the instructional practices they report using are recommended by experts in the field. This finding suggests a significant shift in not only teachers'

beliefs about the kinds of learning that should be happening in preschool classrooms but also how that learning might be taking place.

The second finding suggests that while teachers do appear to have some foundational knowledge of emergent literacy development and do support it in deliberate ways, they do not differentiate their instructional practices for children with disabilities, specifically, for children with speech and language disabilities. This finding raises the question of *why* teachers do not differentiate their instruction. At the same time, it points to a new direction of professional development for preschool teachers – particularly those who have students with speech and language disabilities in their classrooms. The fact that teachers are currently familiar with emergent literacy concepts and practices suggests that with support and training, teachers may now be ready to not only provide *access* to emergent literacy for students with disabilities, but to provide high quality, differentiated *instruction* in their classrooms so all students can learn.

Preschool Teachers Report Using Emergent Literacy Strategies

There is strong evidence to support the goal of young children learning emergent literacy skills in preschool; however, there has been little research focused specifically on the classroom environment (Masseti, 2009). Much more attention has been devoted to the effectiveness of specific emergent literacy strategies, activities, or approaches in more isolated settings (Justice & Pullen, 2003). This study examined all of the components of emergent literacy at once and asked teachers to describe their implementation of instruction and the ways

in which they differentiate to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities in New Hampshire preschool classrooms.

Emergent Literacy Is an Accepted Part of Preschool

When I began this study, I anticipated that teachers would report limited use of emergent literacy support strategies in their classroom practices, with teachers instead commenting on the importance of “developmentally appropriate practice” or the need to build social relationship prior to introducing pre-academic skills. I had heard those comments not long ago as I visited early childhood education settings throughout the state.

Instead, there was a very high level of consistency in teachers’ responses throughout the survey, with reports of high usage of practices and strategies that promote emergent literacy learning. Children in their classrooms, they reported, had daily interaction with books, writing, and early phonological awareness learning. Additionally, teachers responded to questions about their beliefs about emergent literacy with great uniformity. They reported believing that preschool children *are* ready to learn about print and language and that significant classroom time should be spent developing emergent literacy skills. Comments throughout the survey suggest that teachers, overall, were familiar with the language and concepts of emergent literacy. They presented themselves as knowledgeable and skilled in their role as preschool teachers charged with introducing early literacy concepts to their students.

There were no noticeable differences in the responses of teachers with higher levels of formal education or among those with degrees more closely related to early childhood or special education, nor among those with higher levels of professional development in their responses throughout the survey.

Teachers reported that they read books aloud to their students, often stopping to ask questions and to explain new vocabulary. Children had opportunities to explore writing and to engage in conversations with each other and with their teachers. Consistently across the survey results, teachers indicated that they provided opportunities for children to learn rhyming and to learn letters and their sounds. Teachers also reported the use of signs, labels, and other environmental print. Throughout the survey, teachers reported providing chances for children in their classrooms to gain understandings of emergent literacy. One teacher wrote: *Emergent Literacy is integrated into all areas of my classroom and throughout all of my routines and activities* (Respondent #40, Item 4.1).

The teachers surveyed reported that they not only provided opportunities for their students to gain emergent literacy skills, but also believed it was *important* to do so. Some of them commented specifically about ensuring that emergent literacy learning happened in developmentally appropriate ways. For instance, when asked about her beliefs related to emergent literacy learning in preschool, a teacher wrote: *There is definitely a place for emergent literacy in preschool but it should be fun and a planned but almost hidden agenda. Those (children) who are ready will pick things up and a background is built for those*

who are not (Respondent #31, Item 4.1). Another responded: *I think all preschool children should be exposed to literacy concepts in fun ways. Some children will get things right away, and some will benefit from many exposures* (Respondent #25, Item 4.1).

Teachers Understand Emergent Literacy

Teachers' responses to the survey suggested a strong understanding of the components of emergent literacy. The vast majority of teachers reported using the strategies recommended by experts, e.g., stopping to ask questions and pointing to print during read aloud (Lane & Wright, 2007). However, they also reported use of strategies that are commonly used in preschool classrooms but are not recommended by experts, e.g., stopping to explain new vocabulary (Lane & Wright, 2007). It is important to note that although some strategies are not recommended, it may be because research has not yet investigated them as opposed to any of them being deemed ineffective.

Although I am not able to speak to the quality of their teaching, respondents reported both a strong belief in providing emergent literacy learning opportunities for all their students and an understanding of the skills they were supporting.

Teachers Reported Using Research-Based Practices

I examined two widely used documents to determine current recommended practices for emergent literacy instruction for this study. The first was the joint position statement from the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

(International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). The second document is the Head Start Child Outcome Measures (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services & Administration on Children, 2003). Both of these documents contain recommendations for providing high quality emergent literacy learning opportunities for young children.

Although the documents described above have recommendations for emergent literacy learning, the practices are presented as research findings of successful teaching strategies, rather than as instructions for how to use the strategies in preschool classrooms. As I discussed earlier in this study, much of the research examining emergent literacy learning focuses on a single component (e.g., Hartmann, et al., 2008; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998) rather than on the total, and connected learning that is desired and recommended in early childhood education. Much of this research has been conducted in clinical settings or by outside researchers rather than by classroom teachers themselves. The literature base providing guidance to incorporate these strategies into classroom practices is minimal. This study has provided a picture of how some New Hampshire teachers are implementing emergent literacy strategies in their preschool classrooms, despite a lack of guidance from research.

The study was not designed to ask or answer conclusively whether or not teachers refer specifically to research studies or expert recommendations in the planning and implementation of the emergent literacy strategies they use in their classrooms. The teachers surveyed did not provide feedback (e.g., comments)

indicating that they referred to research when designing their instructional approaches for their students. So it is not possible to know what role research played in developing actual instructional practices.

Teachers Report They Do Not Use a Single Curriculum

Only a handful of teachers reported using a single, published curriculum to teach emergent literacy in their classrooms. Rather, 73% (50 of 68) of the respondents indicated they do not use a curriculum at all, use one they developed themselves, or use a curriculum based on individual students' IEP goals and objectives. One teacher reported: *We use an eclectic approach. Some self developed, some based on IEP goals and parts of the Core Curr. and Creative Curr (sic)*(Respondent #56, Item 3.1).

Preschool teachers often have more autonomy than elementary school teachers have in their curriculum choices. The New Hampshire Department of Education has only very general guidelines for early childhood education, as opposed to the detailed standards seen in the K-12 grade documents (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2005). Without specific standards, it is up to individual preschool teachers to determine what they will emphasize in their classrooms.

It is well established that teacher beliefs are highly correlated with classroom practices (Fang, 1996). Results from a recent study assert that teachers who emphasize child-directed play, emergent literacy and language development report stronger alignment with developmentally appropriate

practices than teachers who use preplanned curriculum (McMullen et al., 2006). It is important to note that almost all of the published curricula listed by teachers in this study contain a literacy component. The survey was designed so that teachers could choose only one curriculum, but several respondents commented that they tried to indicate they used more than one. For instance, one teacher wrote: *I wanted to select more than one box, but it would only let me choose one. We also individualize activities based on IEP goals and we use the Assessment Evaluation & Progress System as a base curriculum for our program* (Respondent #23, Item 3.1).

Differentiation for Students with Speech and Language Disabilities

There is a growing body of research examining the emergent literacy learning of young children with disabilities. In particular, researchers have examined the challenges of providing specific literacy instruction for children with disabilities (Schuele, et al., 2007), supporting literacy learning for children with speech and language disabilities (Justice & Kaderavek, 2004), using assistive technology (Hetzroni, 2004), and the importance of having high expectations for all children (Kliewer, 2008). These studies and others point to the need for additional opportunities, support, and services for children with disabilities so they can access emergent literacy learning.

Without increased attention to access, children with speech and language disabilities are less likely to have the preliminary skills they need to be successful readers and writers later in life (Zascavage & Keefe, 2007). This is particularly

true with respect to language development, a critical component of emergent literacy (Schuele, et al., 2007). Children with complex language development needs must have additional language supports, particularly if they use alternative means of communication (von Tetzchner, et al., 2005).

Given their expressed beliefs in the importance of emergent literacy and their apparent understanding of the components and strategies, as well as their experience with students with disabilities, it was somewhat surprising to find that teachers in this study reported little differentiation in their instruction for their students with disabilities. On the contrary, except for occasionally providing more practice, teachers described offering all students the same opportunities. There were many comments from teachers indicating specifically that they provided the same instruction for all children. Teachers infrequently reported providing children with disabilities more frequent opportunities to participate in some of the emergent literacy activities. Even the teachers who did report increased frequency of practice or use of particular strategies did so without strong conviction this would result in better outcomes for their students with disabilities. One teacher commented: *Again, students with speech/language disabilities probably need to be read to even more often than typically developing students. They need to hear how words sound and hear the rhythm of speech* (Respondent #41, Item 5.6). Using words like “possibly” and “probably” were common throughout the survey responses, as if the teachers were not quite sure what they should be doing.

Thirty-one of the 68 teachers reported using communication boards with their students. However, the teachers' comments suggest that they are only used for functional (basic communication) purposes rather than using them for instructional purposes. It was as if teachers viewed the communication boards as tools for logistical purposes rather than as tools for supporting learning. For instance, there was not a single comment about using communication boards or other technology as a preferred strategy to develop language learning for children with disabilities. However, this could be a very successful strategy for some children, for example, communication boards can be used to engage students in extended conversations (see Chapter 2 for additional recommended strategies) but this use was not indicated in any of the comments in the survey.

On the contrary, although teachers indicated they used communication boards, their perceived emergent literacy instructional support was viewed as a "bonus" rather than an effective strategy. For instance, one teacher noted that using AAC or communication boards sometimes had some added benefit for some children with disabilities, commenting: *I think the addition of boardmaker (sic) and pictures as well as devices helps aid the understanding of the written word* (Respondent #2). Another said: *I find that for children using AAC devices, sight word recognition tends to develop quicker due to the amount of practice and opportunities these students have manipulating these icons and words. Especially such words as I And Go My Me etc (sic)* (Respondent #40).

Lack of Differentiation in Classrooms

Each respondent worked in a classroom with children who were developing in typical ways as well as children with identified speech and language disabilities. The ratio of children with and without disabilities ranged from a majority of children without disabilities to highly segregated classrooms with only one or two typically developing children enrolled. Yet, even with these differences, teachers' responses were consistent. Across the five component areas of emergent literacy, when asked for strategies that are most effective for children with disabilities, teachers overwhelmingly reported that they were the same as for typically developing children. Of the 39 teachers who commented about reading books with children, 31 reported they used the same strategies for all the children in their classrooms. Of this group, seven teachers reported using the same strategies but indicated that they used them more frequently with students with disabilities. Similarly, 23 of the 24 comments about print awareness indicated no unique strategies, as did 25 of the 31 comments about phonological awareness. Even within the domain of language development, an obvious area of concern for children with speech and language disabilities, 23 of the 25 comments from teachers indicated that they used the same strategies for all of their students.

For the most part, children with disabilities have access to much of the same strategies, activities and materials as their non-disabled peers. Some skills and strategies, such as drawing attention to punctuation marks, may be used

more with children who are typically developing. Others, such as directing children to repeat words to practice articulation, were noted as being used more frequently with children with speech and language disabilities. As noted previously, these differences in instruction were minimal.

Prior to conducting the study, my hypothesis was that teachers would report focusing their instruction on language development, seen as a separate from emergent literacy learning, for students with speech and language disabilities. I anticipated responses similar to those found in recent research; there have been several studies claiming that children with disabilities have less access to learning literacy than children who are typically developing (Kliewer, 2008; Kliewer, Biklen, & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2006; Koppenhaver, et al., 2007). Just over a decade ago, preschool teachers were still being introduced to the concepts and strategies associated with preparing young children to become readers and writers in elementary school (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). The more recent consensus of experts in the field of emergent literacy and children with disabilities is that children with disabilities are denied opportunities to learn about reading and writing, not only in preschool but in elementary school as well (Kliewer, et al., 2006; Koppenhaver & Erickson, 2003; Light & Kent-Walsh, 2003; Zascavage & Keefe, 2007).

The good news is that it appears that these New Hampshire teachers *are* providing learning opportunities for emergent literacy for children with speech

and language disabilities. Based on the findings reported here, children with disabilities have access to book reading, writing, phonological awareness activities, language development, and print awareness learning in their preschool classrooms. It is exciting to see that beliefs and practices have shifted, at least as reported by the teachers in this study, towards providing emergent literacy learning opportunities for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities now have the opportunity to participate in emergent literacy instruction, as long as they can access it in the same way as their typically developing peers.

However, the consistency of the teachers' responses begs the question: Why are so many teachers providing identical experiences to children with and without disabilities? The answer is likely related to their beliefs which impact their classroom practices. These beliefs may be contingent on what they understand about gaining emergent literacy knowledge and their own knowledge and skills of working with children, including those with speech and language disabilities.

Possible Explanations for the Lack of Differentiation

It is surprising and encouraging to discover that children with disabilities have more access to emergent literacy learning than I anticipated prior to conducting this study, particularly given the research base indicating a lack of access. This may be because they are in classrooms with typically developing children and teachers are not differentiating their instruction. It may be that teachers are cognizant of the importance of emergent literacy and believe it is important for all of their students. Whatever the difference, it is important to note

this shift towards increased exposure to emergent literacy learning in the teachers' instructional practices of children with disabilities. However, exposure to strategies may not result in learning if children require differentiation of the materials or delivery of instruction by their teachers in order to benefit and learn.

Given the focus on differentiated instruction at the K-12 level (Block, Oakar, & Hurt, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999), the absence of differentiation in preschool reported by the teachers in this study is rather surprising. There is a singular published study examining the effects of differentiated instruction at the preschool level, a small study with teachers working in Head Start classrooms (DeBaryshe, Gorecki, & Mishima-Young, 2009). This study indicated that all of the children made gains in their emergent literacy skills, with the greatest gains made by those students at the highest risk for academic failure (DeBaryshe, et al., 2009).

The initial research on differentiated instruction has focused on elementary and secondary school teachers and has not yet been observed in early childhood education settings. The lack of research specific to preschool may be one reason teachers are not providing alternative instruction, materials, or ways to demonstrate learning in their classrooms. Additionally, it may be that rather than thinking of "differentiating instruction," preschool teachers think of "scaffolding instruction" for individual students (Jacobs, 2001). In other words, teachers may be focused on each child's level of understanding and providing support in that moment instead of making curriculum decisions to provide a wider

range of experiences, as seen in differentiated instruction. It is critical to determine *why* instruction is not being offered to children at their individual levels so that changes can occur to best meet the needs of all students.

Explanatory Hypothesis #1: Teachers Believe They Shouldn't be Doing Different Things for Different Children. Teachers may not differentiate their instruction for children with disabilities because they sincerely believe the right thing to do is to treat children equally. To them, equality may mean “not different” and that means providing the same instruction to each child in the classroom. This idea may have originated in the early days of special education, when children with disabilities were mainstreamed into general education classes with no additional support. In many cases, these students received little in terms of modifications or accommodations and with little collaboration between the general and special educators. Rather, the students were expected to be successful simply because they now had access to the general curriculum (Murphy, 1996; Rogers, 1993). Incorporated into the survey, teachers were asked to provide comments about strategies they had found were most successful for students with disabilities to learn about each of the five components of emergent literacy. One teacher, on the final emergent literacy component question in the study, commented: *As you can tell by now, I believe the strategies we use to teach children with learning disabilities and typically developing children are best practice for almost all students* (Respondent #32, Item 5.23).

This mindset of “no difference” seems similar to beliefs about educating children from minority races or ethnic groups; by treating children as the same, there is no need to acknowledge differences (Jervis, 1996). In the case of children with disabilities, it seems that teachers are promoting this belief with the best of intentions. They are trying to avoid setting limited expectations for children; they are providing access to the best educational experiences they know of to all of their students. In the phonological awareness strategies comment section, one teacher wrote: *as always, I believe best practices are best practices, and should be used with ALL children, whether they have speech and language disabilities or not* (Respondent #22, Item 5.14).

This perspective is consistent with a philosophy promoted by many in special education: namely that students with special needs are capable of learning the general education curriculum (Jorgensen, 2005). However, those promoting access to the general education curriculum recognize that students with disabilities often require additional supports in order to effectively access the curriculum and be successful (Knokey, 2006; Sonnenmeier, McSheehan, & Jorgensen, 2005). The current study suggests that teachers may not be privy to this information or may have misunderstood the intent of inclusion. When asked about the most effective book reading strategies for children with disabilities, one teacher commented: *I really don't see any difference. I take the Least Dangerous Assumption* (Respondent #2, Item 5.6). The Least Dangerous Assumption (LDA) (Jorgensen, 2005) suggests that teachers assume that students can understand

even if they are not able to demonstrate learning in the same way as other students. There are misconceptions about the LDA. LDA promotes the idea that students are provided opportunities and access to the curriculum even if the student does not present himself or herself as if learning is taking place. Importantly though, LDA does not mean that the student is left only to his or her own devices to be able to learn. It does not preclude, for instance, differentiated instruction for all students.

Explanatory Hypothesis #2: Teachers Do Not Know How to Differentiate Instruction for Preschool Students. A second possible explanation for teachers' lack of differentiation is that they do not know how to adapt their instruction to best meet the needs of their students. The notion of adapting, or differentiating, instruction is not new in education (Tomlinson, 1999). However, it is not a strategy that is typically addressed in early childhood education, particularly with the goal of supporting children with special educational needs. It is possible that the preschool teachers surveyed believed that because their students are so young, their pre-academic needs are not "different enough" to require different instruction and support. As stated above, the literature base for differentiated instruction at the preschool level is scarce so it is unclear what the exact motivations and understandings of preschool teachers in this area might be.

Elementary school teachers have reported in the past that they often feel unprepared to meet the needs of children with special educational needs in their classrooms (Snow, et al., 2005). Although this was not strongly indicated in my

study, there were comments indicating that teachers did not necessarily believe it was their responsibility to know how to differentiate their instruction. For instance, in the section of the survey addressing teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy and children with disabilities, one teacher stated: *students with disabilities...need instruction in specific skills in a school setting, rich language experiences in the setting with peer models and circle activities, and specialized instruction from people trained in working with children with learning differences* (Respondent #60, Item 4.1). This particular teacher did not indicate whether s/he had that specialized instruction or not – but the implication is that the “people trained” are somehow different from the teacher herself.

Another teacher, after commenting how important it was to provide emergent literacy opportunities for students with speech and language disabilities, seemed to indicate that specific instruction would come later in that student's academic life. When asked about effective practices for children with disabilities, this teacher wrote: *... I also believe that some of these students are going to need more explicit instruction with these skills because they may be more challenging* (Respondent #52, Item 5.6). This comment suggests that this teacher may not have the skills necessary to teach children with disabilities.

Several respondents indicated that speech therapists provided additional support in their classrooms. When asked about specific strategies that are most effective in teaching children with speech and language disabilities, one teacher indicated the importance of having aides in the classroom to work with those children:

Having trained paraprofessionals who can carry over communication goals and objectives throughout the day - everyone's working on the "same page"

(Respondent #23, Item 5.25).

Rather than employing different strategies, many teachers indicated they provided more of the same for their students with disabilities. In response to the question above, another teacher wrote: *I think that students with speech and language disabilities should be taught as all preschool students. All of the same skills are essential to their success. These students may have more difficulty with them, but it doesn't make them less important. These students may also need more explicit instruction for them, but again this does not make them less important* (Respondent #52, Item 5.25). Another responded: *The same literacy practices we use for all children- provide numerous opportunities for practicing reading, writing and speaking skills in the classroom* (Respondent #56, Item 5.25).

Instructional Implications for Preschool Classrooms

The investigation of preschool literacy teachers described here yielded two significant findings: First, teachers believe that emergent literacy is important and should be actively supported in the preschool classroom, and second, teachers are not currently differentiating their emergent literacy instruction for children with disabilities in their classrooms. Both of these findings indicate a shift in the knowledge and skills of preschool teachers in New Hampshire. These findings point to three implications for instructional practices in preschool

classrooms: (1) teachers have a knowledge base of emergent literacy development, (2) teachers believe that emergent literacy learning belongs in preschool, and (3) teachers are less familiar with specific differentiation strategies maximizing the learning of children with speech and language disabilities.

Historically, it has been reported that preschool teachers have limited knowledge and understanding related to young children and learning, particularly those with disabilities (Jeon et al., 2010; Lee, 2006; Snow, et al., 2005).

However, the current study suggests we have moved beyond simply introducing the idea of letters and language in the classroom; preschool teachers' comments suggest a familiarity with emergent literacy development. It appears that, at a minimum, these preschool teachers' knowledge includes the conceptual vocabulary and understanding of recommended practices related to emergent literacy. These implications of a shift in teacher knowledge and practices are important to consider in developing instructional strategies for preschool classrooms, particularly those where children with disabilities are enrolled.

The second implication is that teachers not only have a growing knowledge base of emergent literacy but that they value it and believe it belongs in preschool. Emergent literacy is a priority for the teachers who participated in this study. Teachers indicated they embraced their role of introducing literacy concepts to young children, including those with disabilities; they demonstrated a strong commitment to providing learning opportunities for children with disabilities

– with a belief those children could learn the skills alongside their classmates.

This indicates that teachers no longer need to be convinced that emergent literacy learning has a place in their classrooms. Research suggests that when teachers believe in particular practices and strategies, they use them (Chen, 1998; Fang, 1996).

The third implication for instructional practices rises from these declared teacher beliefs about their students' learning potential, particularly those students with disabilities, paired with their knowledge of emergent literacy practices. Teachers currently report essentially identical approaches when working with all the students in their classrooms. The single instructional adjustment that was consistently reported across the emergent literacy components was to provide *more* of the same learning opportunities for children with speech and language disabilities.

It appears that teachers would likely benefit from learning about effective differentiation of instruction so they could better support their all their students. A successful strategy often used with students with disabilities is the method of “repetition with variety” or providing multiple opportunities in an assortment of situations to practice particular skills. This provides the students with the chance to generalize their learning across settings. For instance, rather than having a student write her name 3 times at the writing center, the child would be assisted to write her name on a sign in sheet when entering the classroom, on the back of her art project, and to sign a letter to a friend written at the classroom post office. It may be that some students would benefit from having letter board to point to or

a large grip on a marker to support writing as well. Communication boards or AAC devices can be modeled by teachers and used by students to participate in circle time, to interact with other children in dramatic play, and to engage in conversation during snack.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the emergent literacy beliefs and reported practices of preschool teachers working in inclusive classrooms. The interpretation of findings from this study is limited, given the small scope of the project and the small number of respondents. In addition, this study relied on teacher report of beliefs and strategies; the study was not designed to gather information about how teachers actually used the strategies. Further research in this area would benefit from a larger sample of teachers as well as observations in preschool classrooms.

Using a survey design was an appropriate method to answer the initial research questions of this study. However, like all research, online surveys present methodological limitations. Survey design dictates that the length of the survey and amount of generated text from respondents be monitored carefully (Dillman, 2007). Participants quickly tire with online surveys (Dillman, 2007) so it is important to vary the question style and keep the measure fairly concise. I found even with the limited number of questions I asked, some of the participants only filled out a portion of the survey, thus complicating the analysis of my results. Although there were other questions that would have been beneficial to

ask, I was cognizant of asking only the most critical questions in an attempt to keep participants engaged in the survey. Subsequent survey research could pick up where this survey left off, probing teacher knowledge and motivation in more detail.

The method used to obtain consent and participation was chosen as it was the most direct way to get the online survey out to participants. (See Chapter 3 for details.) However, because it was distributed through a third party – preschool coordinators and special education directors sent the survey link out to teachers – the number of potential participants is unknown. Therefore I do not know how complete my sample was, nor how many teachers could have potentially participated in the survey.

The survey served to raise questions about New Hampshire preschool teachers' beliefs and practices of emergent literacy learning and provide suggestions for future investigations. By design, I targeted teachers with bachelor's and master's degrees, believing those teachers would be most likely to be familiar with recommended practices from experts. It would be beneficial to use this survey with a wider audience, e.g., more preschool teachers in New Hampshire, teachers from other states. Head Start teachers would likely provide an interesting perspective to the questions in the survey due to their high levels of professional development.

Future Research

A follow-up study of a larger sample could provide critical insights of the trends that were implied in this study. It may be that a larger study's results would show more variation across the responses; it might access more specific demographic analysis of the sample. For instance, the study did not ask teachers to indicate what region of New Hampshire they were from. It may be that there are differences between teachers in rural or urban settings or between teachers from the North Country as opposed to the southern tier.

Perhaps most importantly, future research is critical to better understand *how* teachers are using emergent literacy components in their classrooms. Some of the teachers indicated they did not provide as much instruction as they felt they should. For instance, when asked about effective practices for supporting phonological awareness, one teacher reported: *actually I believe I don't do enough of this in my classroom and it is extremely important. My goal is to work harder at incorporating phonological awareness activities into our daily routine* (Respondent #22, Item 5.13). This teacher did not indicate why she wasn't offering more or what she was going to do to increase opportunities to develop phonological awareness. Classroom observations or structured interviews with teachers could provide great insight as to where, and why, teachers struggle to include specific learning opportunities, how they prioritize the activities and instruction in their classrooms, and how they determine whether children are learning what the teacher intends for them to learn.

Very little is known about the participating teachers' students. Teachers were only asked to identify the total number of children in their classrooms, the number of students with speech and language disabilities, and the average age of the students. Future studies that identified the specific conditions and disabilities might yield important information about children's access to emergent literacy. It may be that children with more significant disabilities still do indeed have limited access to emergent literacy opportunities, consistent with previous research findings. It is certainly possible that inclusive classrooms that only enroll children with more mild disabilities, (e.g., students with speech and language disabilities rather than those with cognitive disabilities or autism) are more likely to provide learning opportunities similar to their typically developing peers.

Finally, because the responses were so similar across the sample, future studies would benefit from direct observations or interviewing teachers to examine the *quality* of the emergent literacy instruction and strategies. For instance, I was not able to ascertain why teachers reported using particular strategies except when their comments indicated they believed specific practices were effective. It may be that teachers provide certain learning opportunities because they believe the children enjoy them or the activities are readily available, rather than because they are particularly suited to teaching emergent literacy skills or knowledge.

This study has shown that progress is being made towards ensuring students with disabilities have access to emergent literacy learning opportunities. It is clear, however, that this access is likely to be insufficient to ensure that these

students are actually gaining all the emergent literacy knowledge and skills necessary to become successful readers and writers. This is particularly true for students who approach learning in atypical ways or need significant additional or alternative support. It is critical that preschool teachers provide high quality instruction to all their students, including differentiated instruction, additional materials and specific instructional strategies for those students who need them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EMERGENT LITERACY IN INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

1. Consent to participate

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY

The title of this research study is: Supporting Emergent Literacy Development in Preschool: the Role of Teachers' Knowledge and Practice. I am a Ph.D. student at the University of New Hampshire.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this research is to gain understanding about teachers' use of emergent literacy learning in their classrooms for their preschool students.

WHAT DOES YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY INVOLVE?

Your involvement in this project consists of completing an on-line survey. The survey should take about 20-30 minutes to complete.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I GET SICK OR HURT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

As this is an on-line survey, it is highly unlikely you would get sick or hurt from taking part in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

Although you are not anticipated to receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, the benefits of the knowledge gained are expected to be improved professional development for early childhood educators, particularly here in New Hampshire.

IF YOU CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY, WILL IT COST YOU ANYTHING?

There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any compensation, however all participants will be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 gift certificate from Barnes and Nobel.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You understand that your consent to participate in this research is entirely voluntary, and that your refusal to participate will involve no prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

CAN YOU WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

If you consent to participate in this study, you are free to stop your participation in the study at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

HOW WILL THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF YOUR RECORDS BE PROTECTED?

The researcher seeks to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research.

I seek to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. You should understand, however, there are instances when I am required to share personally-identifiable information (e.g., according to policy, contract, or regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at the University of New Hampshire, designees of the sponsor(s), and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies may access research data. You also should understand that I am required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g., child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, communicable diseases).

Data will be collected using an online survey, using Survey Monkey. This survey will only be available to participants for this particular study.

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

2. Introduction

For the purposes of this survey, "emergent literacy is the reading and writing behaviors and concepts that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (Sulzby, 1989). Conventional literacy is the reading and writing behaviors and concepts that are considered "real" reading, as in sounding out words and inventive spelling.

Please answer each question in the entire survey. It should take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.

If you are working as an itinerant special educator and provide support in more than one setting, please answer the questions as if you were working in your own classroom.

If you work with more than one age group, please choose 1 classroom group on which you base your answers (e.g., class of 4 year olds on M, W, F and 3 year olds on T. Th. please choose 1 group)and indicate which group of children you chose at the end of the survey.

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

3. Emergent Literacy Curriculum

*** 1. Do you use a published curriculum to teach emergent literacy skills? Please check all that apply. Use the "Other" box to describe how you use each curriculum if portions of multiple curriculum are used.**

- No I do not teach emergent literacy skills
- No I do not use a curriculum
- Ladders to Literacy
- Opening the World of Learning (OWL)
- Read Play and Learn
- Rigby/Pebble Soup Explorations
- Scott Foresman/Reading Street
- Program Developed Curriculum (e.g. national, state, or local curriculum)
- Self Developed Curriculum
- Computer Program(s) (specify)
- Individualized activities based on IEP goals

Other (please specify)

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Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

4. Beliefs about Emergent Literacy

*** 1. Please check the response which most closely represents your view.**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Significant classroom time should be devoted to emergent literacy instruction every day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children will best learn emergent literacy skills when specific skills (e.g. alphabet letters or rhyming) are targeted for instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children should have strong speech/language skills in place before they are introduced to emergent literacy learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children with speech/language disabilities are not ready for emergent literacy instruction in preschool	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Direct instruction in emergent literacy should be held off until children are in kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional Views or Comments

*** 2. Please rate each component of emergent literacy from most to least important for later literacy success in school.**

	1 (most important)	2	3	4	5 (least important)
A large vocabulary (expressive and receptive)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strong phonological awareness skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to name alphabet letters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strong concept of print knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to write letters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

5 Emergent Literacy Strategies and Activities

1. Indicate if any of these literacy or communication supports are used in your classroom(s) for the activities listed below. Please check all that apply

	Teacher-generated letters and words	Child-generated letters and words	Pictures of sign language	Communication Boards	Boardmaker Pictures	Print with Photos
Labeling objects around the room	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presenting information during direct instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading books with children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presenting information during free time/non-instructional time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dramatic Play area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Which, if any, of these supports are in place specifically for students with speech/language disabilities?

- Teacher-generated letters and words
- Child-generated letters and words
- Pictures of sign language
- Communication boards
- Boardmaker pictures
- Print with photos

3. Please indicate any other literacy or communication supports that are used in your classroom for children with speech/language disabilities

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

* 4. For each item below, check the box which BEST describes your use of book reading materials and activities for emergent literacy in the classroom

	Typically Developing Children	Children with Speech/Language Disabilities
Have children hold books independently and turn pages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show children that the text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from left to right by pointing or discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stop to ask questions while reading aloud to children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Show children punctuation marks such as question marks and exclamation points during read aloud	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stop to explain new vocabulary to children while reading aloud	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Point to print while reading aloud to children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Read alphabet books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make books with children related to classroom events or activities (e.g. field trips curriculum unit)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to retell stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to predict stories during read aloud	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reread stories to individual or small groups of children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have children act out stories while reading aloud	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. What book reading practices do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy learners?

6. What book reading practices do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy development among students with speech/language disabilities?

F C 2 e -

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

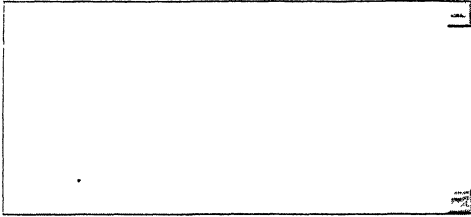
7. Any additional comments about book reading?

8. For each item below, check the box which BEST describes your use of writing materials and activities for emergent literacy in the classroom.

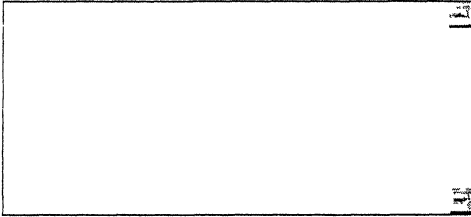
	Typically Developing Children	Children with Speech/Language Disabilities
Provide stencils to help children form letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Display children's writing around the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools (e.g. pencils, pens, markers, crayons, whiteboard, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write children's stories from their dictation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide children with individual journals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Model writing during group activities (e.g. circle time message)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to write their names for authentic purposes (e.g. labeling work, sign up sheets)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support children to make their own books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help children trace letters/words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to work in groups to write books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help children write and/or receive letters/notes in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide letter stamps or letter sponges for children to use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

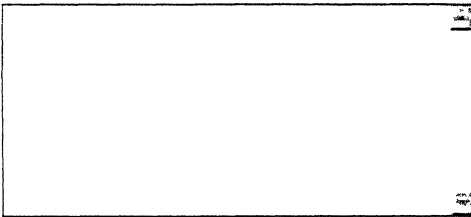
9. What writing materials and activities do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy learners?



10. What writing activities and materials do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy development among students with speech/language disabilities?



11. Any additional comments about writing?



Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

12. For each item below, check the box which BEST describes your use of phonological awareness materials and activities for emergent literacy in the classroom.

	Typically Developing Children	Children with Speech/Language Disabilities
Read or recite nursery rhymes with children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Play rhythm games practicing sounds or syllables in words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to practice letter sounds during read-aloud time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Draw attention to rhyming words in books and songs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g. /f/ in fish)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to identify syllable units	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide opportunities for children to practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g. /k/ /a/ /t/ = cat)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. What phonological awareness practices you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy learners?

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

14. What phonological awareness practices do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy development among students with speech/language disabilities?

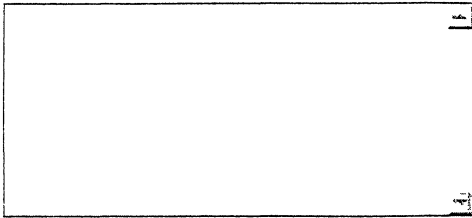
15. Any additional comments about phonological awareness?

16. For each item below, check the box which BEST describes your use of language activities and materials for emergent literacy in the classroom.

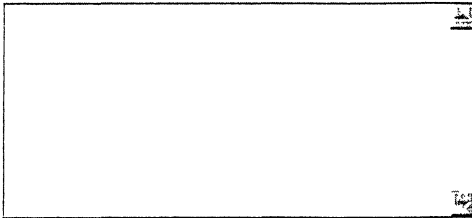
	Typically Developing Children	Children with Speech/Language Disabilities
Extend children's conversations by commenting and/or adding more to what they say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Direct children's attention to new vocabulary during read-aloud	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Direct children to repeat words to practice articulation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Direct children to repeat modeled sentences or phrases to extend oral language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use targeted vocabulary words in conversations with children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

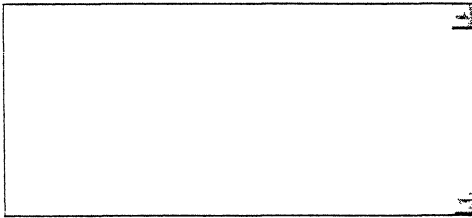
17. What language learning practices you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy learners?



18. What language learning practices do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy development among students with speech/language disabilities?



19. Any additional comments about language development?



Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

20. For each item below, check the box which BEST describes your use of print materials and activities for emergent literacy in the classroom.

	Typically Developing Children	Children with Speech/Language Disabilities
Use 'letter of the week' activities for alphabet instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide access to alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use a posted written schedule with text or text and pictures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce alphabet letters through direct instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use a posted written list for children's chores or choices in the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide literacy related props which include print (e.g. letters for post office, phone books, menus for restaurants) in dramatic play areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide flash cards to practice letter recognition learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Play games that teach letter/word recognition (e.g. letter lotto)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. What print awareness practices you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy learners?

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

22. What print awareness practices do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy development among students with speech/language disabilities?

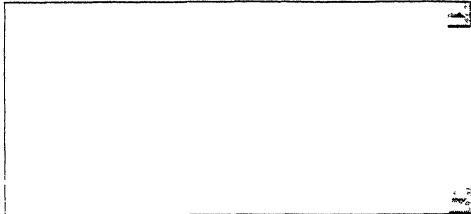
23. Any additional comments about print awareness?

24. For each item, check the response which BEST describes your use of activities for emerging literacy in the classroom for a child with speech/language disabilities.

	Always (essentially every day)	Frequently (at least once a week)	Occasionally (at least once a month)	Rarely (less than once a month)	Never
Have child listen to a book on tape and follow along with the book	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use visual aids to illustrate oral or written language (e.g. use props during read-aloud)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change pace of wording when key information is given	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ask questions that require shorter answers (e.g. yes/no)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use peer support strategies (e.g. pair child with strong oral language skills with child who has weaker skills)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide alternative means for expressive communication (e.g. sign language, AAC, props, communication boards)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Demonstrate vocabulary and language patterns through repeated activities (e.g. theme of the week for story, dramatic play, art projects)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read aloud books with predictable and repeated lines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support child to participate in verbal language activities (e.g. dramatic play, circle)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

25. What emergent literacy practices do you believe are most effective for supporting emergent literacy learners with speech/language disabilities?



Emergent Literacy in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms

6 Background Information

This information will be held confidentially. You will not be able to be identified.

*** 1. Please indicate your experience teaching preschool children (3, 4, and/or 5 year-olds in a pre-kindergarten program). Please round down to the next lowest number for partial years of teaching.**

Total years of teaching with one or more children with disabilities (e.g. children with IEPs) in your class

Total years of teaching in a HEAD START preschool program

Total years of teaching in a CHILD CARE center

Total years of teaching in a PRESCHOOL program

Total years of teaching 3, 4, and/or 5 year olds

*** 2. Please indicate the class of children you considered in answering the survey questions**

Mostly 3 year olds

Mostly 4 year olds

Mixed ages (3 and 4 year olds)

Other

Other (please specify)

*** 3. Please describe your teaching schedule (check all that apply)**

I travel as an itinerate teacher to different classrooms

I teach either a morning OR afternoon class only

I teach different groups of children in the morning and the afternoon

I teach the same group of children all day (full day program)

I teach different children on different days of the week for morning, afternoon or all day classes

In my classroom, some children stay all day, others come for either the morning or the afternoon

Other (please specify)

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* 4. Please indicate your formal educational experiences (check all that apply and fill in degree major or emphasis)

High School Diploma	<input type="text"/>
Associates Degree in	<input type="text"/>
Bachelor s Degree in	<input type="text"/>
Master s Degree in	<input type="text"/>
Other degree (specify) in	<input type="text"/>

* 5. Please indicate any teaching certificates, licenses, or endorsements (check all that apply).

- Child Development Associate Certificate or Credential (CDA)
- Elementary Teaching License or Certificate
- Early Childhood Teaching License or Certificate (includes kindergarten and first grade)
- Early Childhood Special Education Teaching License or Certificate
- None
- Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

* 6. Please estimate the amount (# of hours)of Professional Development related to preschool curriculum and instruction you have received over the last 3 years.


* 7. Please estimate the amount (# of hours)of Professional Development related to emergent literacy you have received over the last 3 years.

* 8. How many children are in your classroom if no one is absent? Please submit the total number of children you work with if you have more than one group of children. Please indicate the total number of adults (both full and part-time) working in your classroom.

Total number of children	<input type="text"/>
Children without identified disabilities	<input type="text"/>
Children with identified disabilities	<input type="text"/>
Staff (teachers assistants related services personnel including yourself)	<input type="text"/>

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9. Please add any additional comments you would like to share:

A rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for handwritten or typed comments. It is currently empty.

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7. Thank You

Thank you for completing this survey

Appendix A (continued)

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3 Thank you for your response!

Thank you for your participation in this survey. I appreciate the time and effort you put into providing this information. It will be used as the research base for my dissertation in Teacher Education at the University of New Hampshire.

If you have questions regarding this survey, please contact me Leigh Rohde at leigh.rohde@unh.edu or at (603) 862-0791. Additionally, if you would like to receive a summary of the results of this survey, please contact me at the email address provided above.

If you would like to be entered in a drawing for a \$50 gift certificate for Barnes and Noble, please send me an email at leigh.rohde@unh.edu with your name and contact information. This information will be kept separately from the survey to maintain confidentiality. The drawing will take place after the survey has closed, approximately 1 month from now.

The Institution Review Board at the University of New Hampshire has granted permission for this survey. It has been deemed consistent with policies and procedures of the IRB.

My dissertation advisor is Dr. Ruth Wharton-McDonald; she can be reached at wharton@unh.edu.

This survey was adapted from
Hawken, L., Johnston, S., & McDonnell, A. (2005). Emerging literacy views and practices of Head Start preschool teachers. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 25*, 232-242.

APPENDIX B
IRB APPROVAL

University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

11-May-2010

Rohde, Leigh E
Education, Morrill Hall
Institute of Disability
10 West Edge Drive
Durham, NH 03824

IRB #: 4880

Study: Supporting Emergent Literacy in Preschool: The Role of Teachers' Knowledge and Practice

Approval Date: 06-May-2010

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

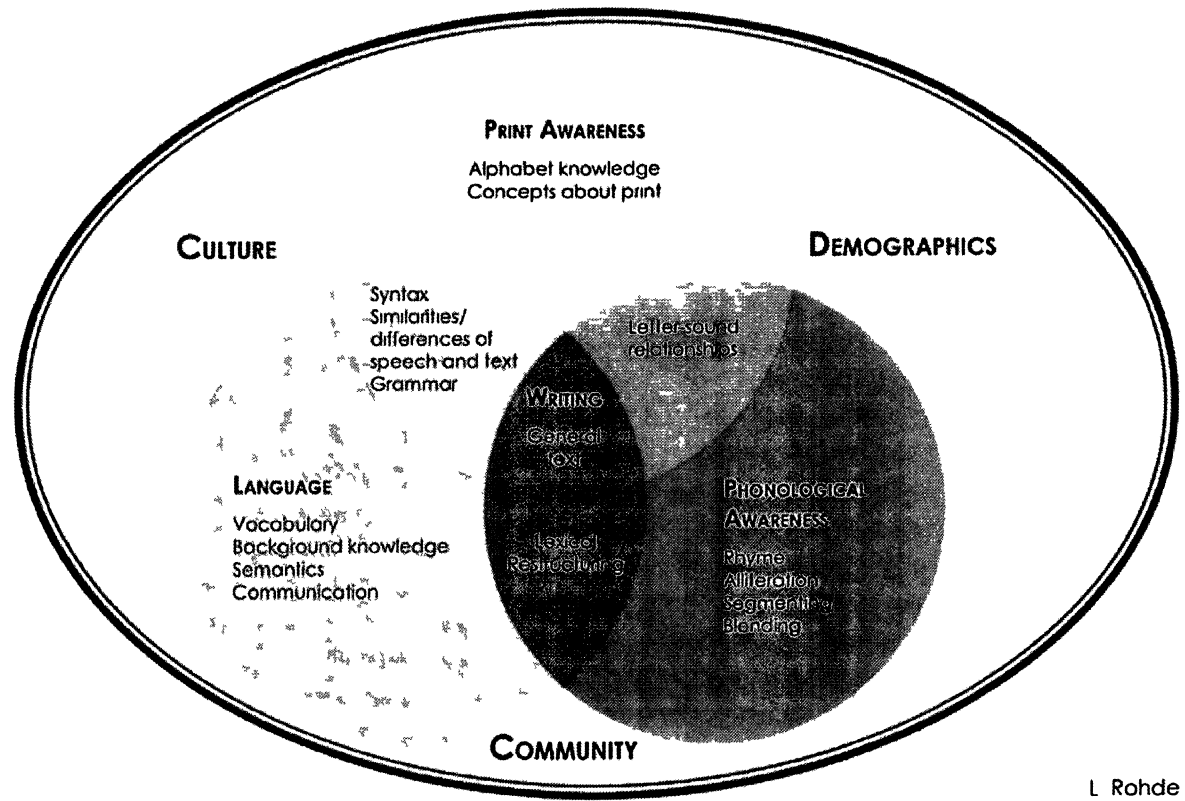


Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Wharton-McDonald, Ruth

A MODEL OF EMERGENT LITERACY

APPENDIX C



L Rohde