HISPANIC STUDENTS’ BELIEFS REGARDING EMERGENT LITERACY:

A CASE STUDY

By

Jacqueline Breland Worley

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Jacqueline Breland Worley

Approved:

Esther Howard
Department Head and Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
(Co-Director of Dissertation)

Debra Lindsey Prince
Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
(Co-Director of Dissertation)

Jan Cooper Taylor
Professor of Human Sciences
(Committee Member)

Cathy Grace
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
(Committee Member)

Linda T. Jones
Director of Clinical/Field-based Instruction, Professor of Educational Leadership
(Committee Member)

Linda T. Coats
Associate Professor and Coordinator of Graduate Studies in Curriculum and Instruction

Sue Minchew
Interim Dean and Professor of the College of Education
The purpose of this study was to identify the beliefs of the participants with regards to emergent literacy. Another purpose was to identify literacy practices employed by the participants, while teaching preschool children. An additional purpose was to determine if participation in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy,” changed any beliefs of the participants regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children. The final purpose of this study was to determine the beliefs of the participants regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children, 3 years after completing the course entitled “Emergent Literacy.”

The results indicated that the initial beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy were not well defined. Moreover, their experience with literacy practices was limited prior to taking the emergent literacy course. Their responses to the
Final Guided Questions indicated positive changes in the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy and the literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children. Further the responses of the participants on the Follow-Up Survey indicated they still employed the literacy practices, 3 years after completing the emergent literacy course.
DEDICATION

My wonderful children Lara and Bryant whose support and encouragement have sustained me. They have always believed in me and were always there to show me unfailing love.
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My sincere thanks and appreciation go to my family, who have always supported me and encouraged me. I am grateful for my mother who loved me and sacrificed for me. Thank you Mama for the wonderful and exciting childhood you and Daddy gave me. I was fortunate to share a childhood with my sister, Rita, and my brother, Thomas. I treasure memories of those days. I still enjoy the times shared with you and the many individuals in my extended family.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent Literacy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Acquisition</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming Literate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Adult</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Events</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environments for Literacy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy for the Disadvantaged</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environments for the Disadvantaged</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating Disadvantaged Children</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged Hispanics</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environments of the Hispanics</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy of the Hispanics</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Years and Programs</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Programs</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare Programs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Hispanic Children</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Programs for Hispanic Children</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Teachers and Preparation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing Preschool Teachers</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Beliefs and Reflections</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating Hispanic Teachers</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification for the Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Course</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Events</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Units</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation (Instructor)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation (Student)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Journal Entries</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives Reflections</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Guided Questions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Portfolio</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of Validity and Reliability</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Profile of the Participants Case-By-Case</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers Summary</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers Summary</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Three ....................................................................</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Events ..............................................................................</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One .......................................................................................</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two ......................................................................................</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three .................................................................................</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four ....................................................................................</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five ....................................................................................</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Units ...............................................................................</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One ......................................................................................</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two ......................................................................................</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three ...................................................................................</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four ....................................................................................</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five ....................................................................................</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Presentations ........................................................................</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One ......................................................................................</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two ......................................................................................</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three ...................................................................................</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four ....................................................................................</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five ....................................................................................</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Preference .......................................................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One ......................................................................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two ......................................................................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three ...................................................................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four ....................................................................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five ....................................................................................</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers Summary ................................................................-------</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Four ...................................................................</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Literacy Beliefs ..................................................................</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One ......................................................................................</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two ......................................................................................</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three ...................................................................................</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four ....................................................................................</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five ....................................................................................</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Practices ..........................................................................</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case One ......................................................................................</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Two ......................................................................................</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Three ...................................................................................</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Four ....................................................................................</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Five ....................................................................................</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher's Summary .....................................................................</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary ............................................................................</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

How young children learn to read and write has long been of interest to educators. During the last two decades, researchers have started to look at early literacy learning in ways that are novel and exciting. This line of inquiry has yielded a rich new picture of young children’s literacy development (Britsch & Meier, 1999; Kirk, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Teale, 1999.) To early childhood educators, “emergent literacy” is the term applied to this way of understanding and describing early reading and writing (Teale, 1999).

Emergent literacy starts early and encompasses learning about reading, writing, and print (Boby, 2000; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Teale, 1999). Emergent literacy takes a broad view and examines children’s literacy development before reading instruction. Researchers agree that emergent literacy (a) begins during the period before children receive formal reading instruction, (b) encompasses learning about reading, writing, and print prior to schooling, (c) is acquired through informal, as well as adult-directed home and school activities, and (d) facilitates acquisition of specific knowledge of reading. Research findings about the importance of the literacy experiences in a child’s life before formal reading instruction shifts the focus from learning letters and sounds as part of reading readiness to experiences that encourage literacy development. Recent
theories indicate that reading, writing and oral language are interrelated and develop concurrently in literate environments (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Strickland, 2000; Teale, 1999).

Literacy is not simply an accumulation of specific skills related to print. Literacy evolves gradually as a function of exposure to other children and adults who are using print. Children begin to recognize pictures, look at books, identify logos (for example McDonalds’ Golden Arches), and draw and scribble (Teale, 1999.) Research shows that young children are strategic in early forms of writing (Schickedanz, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Teale, 1999). They begin using scribbles and progress through increasingly accurate representations of the relationship between letters and sounds for which they stand. Further, children are building skills that are useful for reading when they think about the sounds that represent the words in their attempts at writing the printed word. Initial understandings about print, how it works and why it is used, are important. Children who enter school behind in this understanding become “at risk” in subsequent years (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Dickerson & Tabors, 2002; NRC, 1998).

**Literature Review**

Research on emergent literacy has led to a reformation of many of our previous notions about early childhood reading and writing. This chapter includes the Literature Review, Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, and Justification for the Study, Limitations of the Study, and Background Information on the Course.
Emergent Literacy

In recent years, research has yielded new findings on the manner in which literacy develops in young children (Britsch & Meier, 1999; Kirk, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Willis, 1998; Teale, 1999). Current theories of literacy development hypothesize that children develop literacy the same way they acquire language, by means of comprehensive input (Dickerson & Tabors, 2002). More reading results in improved literacy development. Those who read more or live in a “print rich” environment do better on school tests that require reading, comprehensive vocabulary, writing and grammar. More opportunities to listen to stories are associated with increased vocabulary development (Dickerson & Tabors, 2002). From an emergent literacy perspective, the development of literacy can occur in formal or informal settings.

Three concepts arise from an emergent literacy perspective that influence what educators think about early reading and writing development. The concepts that are relevant to teacher educators are (a) literacy learning starts early, (b) young children construct their understanding of literacy, and (c) adults are vital in teaching children literacy (Teale, 1999).

The first concept explores when literacy learning starts. Current theories of literacy development hypothesize that literacy learning begins much earlier than once thought (Schickedanz, 1999). Children, who are read to and talked to early in their lives, will talk at an earlier age than those who do not have the literacy encouragement. New findings suggest the brain is developing before the baby is born. Newborn babies can identify the sound of their mothers’ voices after birth suggesting unborn babies are able
to distinguish sounds (Galinsky, 1997). Thus, the process of understanding the sounds of the language begins at birth if not before (SECA Position Statement, 2002).

Emergent literacy research has shown, contrary to the once held notion of reading and writing beginning when a child enters school, that if we look in the right way, we will see literacy already taking place in virtually every preschool child (Schickedanz, 1999). Young children do not read and write the way adults do, but their attempts are legitimate and are an important part of the process of becoming literate (Strickland & Marrow, 2000).

The second concept is a key for conceptualizing how young children become literate. Children are active learners that need to explore and experiment with language and literacy. Young children’s explorations are perhaps most visible in their emergent readings and their early attempts at writing. Young children are not taught to use “invented spelling” that represents their first attempt to produce written language (Teale, 1999). Instead, they do so because they are actively engaged in trying to figure out how print works. Children construct their understanding of reading and writing using what they know about their literate environment and their interactions with literate adults and older children (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; NAEYC, 2002).

The third concept deals with the role of adults in teaching children literacy. Adults are necessary in the process of young children’s reading and writing development (NAEYC, 2002; Shickedanz, Pergants, Kanosky, & Ollingan, 1997; Yang, 2000). Some educators tend to romanticize early literacy learning to the point that becoming literate is as natural as learning to walk and sit up. In reality, literacy is a social process, born of
social roots and dependent on interactions among people to learn, use, and pass on their reading skills. Adults enable children in their literacy development by providing personal and meaningful interactions. Adults “teach” children in real life contexts by encouraging, scaffolding, and answering questions (Teale, 1999; Yang, 2000).

**Language Acquisition**

From a theoretical perspective, Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, regarded language as a critical bridge between the social cultural world and individual mental functioning (Vygotsky, 1978; 1978). His theory is particularly applicable to language development (Berk & Winsloer, 1995; Yang, 2000). Central to his social-constructivist theory was a child’s capacity to use language to regulate thought and action. Vygotsky considered the most significant milestone in children’s cognitive development to be the acquisition of language.

Vygotsky further believed in a learning continuum, the zone of proximal development, which characterizes the distance between a child’s ability to solve a problem independently and the maximum problem solving ability under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky 1986). He believed it was important not to work outside of what the child could do independently and with help. He was also certain that a child should not have to spend time on what he/she had already mastered. Vygotsky recommended the need for adults to nudge children along the development path toward more complex learning. This concept of supporting the child during learning was later termed scaffolding (Yang, 2000).
Becoming Literate

From a theoretical perspective, Lev Vygotsky offers one of the best explanations of how children construct knowledge, including their understanding of literacy (Vygotsky, 1986). He wrote about the connections between children’s psychological and cognitive development. Vygotsky’s social–constructivist theory contends that individuals internalize their experiences and social mechanisms from their initial social and cognitive interactions (Dickerson & Tabors, 2002). Children value and pay attention to the social context in their environment which motivates them to learn new skills for their own interactions and experiences.

The National Research Council (1998) contends that the more children learn about language and literacy before they arrive at school the better equipped they are to succeed in reading. The council offers three major accomplishments: oral language skills, phonological awareness, and letter knowledge. These language and literacy accomplishments are achieved best through integrated activities across the areas of cognitive development, fine and gross motor development, social and emotional development and language development. Young children develop vocabulary, other language skills, and basic knowledge about the world around them, if they are given the opportunity. They also acquire literacy skills during interesting conversations with responsive adults. Children know what books are and how they work. Children should own books and have access to books be read to often, as well as see others reading (Britsch & Meier, 1999; Dickerson & Tabors, 2002).
The contexts in which such experiences occur include the home, community setting, and school-like environments, such as preschool and child care centers. The Head Start Family Literacy Project, defined in federal legislation and passed in 1998, was designed to build on Head Start’s existing training and to extend services to the community by providing literacy materials to parents (Head Start Bureau, 2001). The literacy project creates the expertise, resources, and capability among Head Start families to provide comprehensive in-depth family literacy training and technical assistance (Head Start Bureau, 2001).

Kirk (1998) contends that literacy emerges in children as they have varied experiences with oral and written language in the homes, schools, and communities. Their ideas and literacy skills are emerging and are lacking only in the ability to write the word. This contention supports the importance of the adult’s role in literacy learning in children.

The Role of the Adult

The National Association for Education of Young Children advises that adults play an important role in young children’s literacy development (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Early literacy learning is a social process and dependent on social interactions. Adult interaction with young children in the social setting (Berk, 1995; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Teale, 1999;) allows adults to demonstrate their literacy skills that enable children to grow in own their literacy development (Britsch & Meier, 1999). Adults support children by interacting with them during literacy experiences that occur naturally in the home.
Reading stories and books aloud to children is a common type of experience that supports literacy development (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Strickland & Morrow, 2000; Teale, 1999). Research, dating back at least 60 years, has shown that reading books aloud to young children is a singularly important experience for enhancing literacy development in early childhood (Boby, 2001; Schickedanz, 1999). Findings in a study of rural Head Start centers funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, led Britsch and Meier (1999) to suggest offering additional orientation to shared story reading as a way to strengthen early childhood programs. Preschool teachers are encouraged to make reading aloud a daily practice with the children in their care.

Reading aloud can exert a powerful influence on children’s literacy development. Reading the text itself encourages language and social skills. There is considerable conversation between adult and child that occurs before, during, and after reading.

Dictation, the act of a child telling a story and the adult writing it down, becomes one passageway to emergent literacy (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002; Kirk, 1998;). Some children have difficulty getting started. Guided questions, without imposing one’s own ideas, can help a child stay focused on a story.

Another significant feature of a read-aloud routine is the reading of particular books more than once. Such repeated readings enable children to engage in their own emergent reading of books. In addition, repeated readings help children reconstruct the story line, recall characters and identify story highlights. Read-aloud experiences also provide an opportunity to respond to the literacy event in additional ways (Boby, 2000). Responses to literature may include writing or creating artwork related to the story.
Writing and artwork created in response to stories and books should be displayed in a child-oriented space (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Dickenson & Tabor, 2002).

**Literacy Events**

Literacy events are the various experiences and activities used as supports or scaffolding for early literacy (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bredekamp & Copple 1997; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). A number of standard practices, now broadly defined as literacy events, support children’s literacy development. The National Research Council (2001) emphasized the critical importance of diverse forms of support for children’s early literacy learning through meaningful literacy events. Literacy events foster literacy learning that can occur in formal or informal environments, as well as adult-directed home and school experiences. Literacy events promote interaction between the child and adult, leading to the development of oral and written language (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002; Yang, 2000).

The roots of emergent literacy skills lie in the social interactions that occur in families during the literacy events (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Dickenson & Tabor, 2002). The occurrence of parent-child communication during literacy events in the home relates positively to ongoing development of reading and writing. Literacy-related activities, particularly storybook reading, support the development of reflective thinking necessary for school success (Boby, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Quality literature scaffolds the development and integration of all literacy processes including, speaking, listening, thinking, reading, and writing (Schickedanz,
1999; Teale, 1999; Yang, 2000). Literature provides authentic learning experiences and activities that teach and foster literacy development. Research clarifies the extreme importance of reading storybooks to young children at home and at school (Boby, 2000; Reid & Twardosz, 2000; Teale, 1999). Shared book readings offer both social and contextual support for the development of literacy. Initially, young children imitate reading, using picture clues and memory; and with experience, they begin to focus on the information conveyed by the story content.

Shared book readings should also include multicultural selections, as well as different genres of books (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002; Reid & Twardosz, 2000). When reading aloud to children, using informational books, concept books, and poetry, it is important to provide them with plenty of opportunities to experiment with the sounds and words of language (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002; Teale, 1999).

Poetry, including nursery rhymes, is another important type of text to read to preschoolers. Books that vary the sounds and words bring enjoyment. Rhymes, songs and word play books have an added benefit for the literacy learning of young children. They support the development of phonemic awareness, which is the ability to hear the constituent sounds. Rhyming and word play start children on the road to learning to decode print (Teal, 1999).

Children begin to tell stories as soon as they begin to talk. They enjoy acting out the expression of their own ideas (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002; Kirk, 1998). Children, with a few basic props, can reenact a story or a book to which they just heard. Flannel boards and finger puppets are effective props for young children to use in dramatizations.
Likewise, an experience that includes music deepens a child’s experience with particular books (Teal, 1999). Drama also offers a powerful opportunity for preschoolers to respond to books, and gives children the opportunity to see their own words come to life (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002; Kirk, 1998).

**Environments for Literacy**

A space or environment designed for literacy in a classroom is another issue for consideration (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002; Schickedanz, 1999;). The reading or library area should have comfortable places to sit, smaller cozy spaces, and living things (both plants and animals can help). The area should be bright and attractive with book related toys and stuffed animals and fun writing materials like paper of various sizes, shapes, texture, and colors. These areas should also house an array of pencils, crayons and markers, along with items like tape, staplers, and clips for creating books.

The space should be as child-oriented as possible, displaying artwork or writing created in response to books (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002). Children could be photographed participating in dramatization and music in response to literacy events and display those photos along with appropriate creations (Teale, 1999).

Proper planning and well-chosen props can provide opportunity for drama that serves to enrich the children’s experiences with books (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002). Preschool children’s play is fun and exciting—and educational (Teale, 1999). One type of play that is especially influential in promoting cognitive and language development in young children is socio-dramatic play where children adapt roles and act out make-believe situations or stories (Kirk, 1998). This experience builds the disposition to
literacy because the child realizes that reading and writing are meaningful and purposeful activities that people use in their lives. This concept does not always develop naturally in children. However, dramatic play events in which children pretend to shop at the grocery store, take a trip to the zoo, or a ride on a bus help explain and reinforce the concept with the print involved in the grocery list, signs of animals, tickets, and schedule (Schickendanz, 1999).

**Literacy for the Disadvantaged**

Our society of free enterprise includes individuals with great wealth, moderate incomes, as well as individuals receiving welfare assistance. These extremes intensified toward the end of the twentieth century as the wealthy became wealthier and the poor became poorer. Poverty affects the lives of many children. More than 12 million of our children, or one out of every five, are poor and one hundred thousand go to sleep homeless (Children’s Defense Fund, 2000).

While there are only a limited number of large studies that focus on language, literacy and poverty, a variety of smaller studies shed light on the factors in early childhood education that are related to literacy development (Au & Raphael, 2000; Britsch & Meier, 1999; Dickenson & Tabors, 2002). A number of studies show that some of the pre-literacy skills that children develop over the first five years of life are related to future reading and school success (Boby, 2000; Britsch & Meier, 1999; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Dickenson & Tabor, 2002).

Studies have examined the differences in literacy practices among families of different cultures and income levels (Au & Raphael, 2000; Green, 1997; Kagen & Cohen,
The research indicates children of middle class families learn to read and write through day-to-day experiences. African American homes provide literacy experiences in the life of young children in spite of poverty and other unfortunate circumstances (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). The findings showed that the low-income families focused more on the practical needs for survival (Center for Children and Families, 2000; Southern Early Childhood Association, 1999). Hunt also explored the literacy development of children in the rural south. The study included a white working class community of textile mill workers, a black working class community of textile mill workers and a community of middle class townspeople. Hunt suggested that the middle class children’s language and literacy activities tend to be more compatible with instruction and school than those of other families (Children’s Defense Fund, 1998; Gestwicki, 2000; Green, 1997).

Environments for the Disadvantaged

A child’s early home environment and particularly parent-child interactions are related to literacy development. Homes can surround children with an environment of everyday activities that encourage vocabulary development and engage children in complex uses of language. However, children live in homes that support language and literacy development to differing degrees (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). Parents’ own literacy practices appear to determine opportunity for future literacy-related interactions (Dickenson & Tabor, 2002). There is great variation in the ways and the extent to which families engage activities that encourage later achievements in literacy (Opitz, 1998; Tabors, 1998; Voltz & Marrow, 1999). While many children come to school with
emergent literacy skills well established, other children often have not developed the same kind of literacy skills (Green, 1997; Ramirez, 2003). This lack of understanding may place children in a position of being behind before they begin (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Garcia, 1997; Kagen & McClennen, 1997; National Research Council, 1998).

Poverty affects the lives and rearing of many children. Poverty alienates people from society and creates a culture of its own. Each culture has its own unique language (Au & Raphael, 2000). Thirty two million people, or one out of seven, use a language other than English (Garcia, 1996; Ramirez, 2003; Tabor, 1997; US Bureau of the Census, 2000). Regardless of the language spoken in the home, family members may use words differently. The child may not be familiar with certain words or word uses and therefore imitation of them may be a challenge (Garcia, 1993; Green, 1997).

The features and organizational structures that make up the environment play a central role in learning. Consequently, an argument arises over the importance of the environment and its potential to enhance young children’s understanding of literacy (Dickinson & Tabor, 2002). The environment in which disadvantaged children live has received greater attention in research studies than the health of the parents and children, which must be considered in the process of determining risk factors in children. The interest has heightened by the knowledge that early stimulating environments relates to later performances (Center for Children and Families, 2000; Dickinson & Tabor, 2002). Disadvantaged families are not always able to provide the environment middle-income families provide, such as going to the library and attending musicals and plays.
For decades, educators responded to increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the children they teach by attempting to assimilate them into the American mainstream. There is some evidence that assimilation may actually inhibit academic success. Green (1997) suggests that those children who maintain a strong identification with their native language and culture are more likely to experience school success. They also need books that celebrate the same values, heroes, and holidays celebrated by their parents.

Intervention strategies designed to bridge the gap between children’s early experiences and school expectation should affirm and expand the home culture and experience (Garcia, 1997). Parents should select stories that are interesting and relevant to children’s lives at home. Teachers should translate easy to read books used in the classroom into the child’s home language. Teachers should model various functions of print and demonstrate how writing is relevant and valuable to children.

Early childhood professionals should be aware of the difficulties children from diverse cultural backgrounds face. Children can gradually be introduced to the kinds of interactions expected in today’s classrooms. Early childhood professionals affirm the child’s own culture while learning to understand and function in the mainstream. NAEYC’s (1996) position regarding the educational practices relating to linguistic and cultural diversity in early childhood states the following:

Early childhood educators can best help linguistically and culturally diverse children and their families by acknowledging and responding to the importance of the child’s home and language and culture. Administrative support for bilingualism as a goal is necessary within the educational setting. Educational practices should focus on educating children toward the ‘school culture’ while presenting and respecting the
discovery of the home language and culture that each child brings to the early learning setting. (p.12)

Disadvantaged Hispanics

As a minority group in the United States, Hispanics are the most educationally vulnerable. Many start kindergarten somewhat behind their peers; 44% are at least one year below grade level by middle school and more than 40% drop out before completing high school (Espinosa, 1995). In order to help Hispanics in their educational experience, educators must understand possible barriers caused by cultural factors.

Just over one-fourth (27%) of Hispanic families lived below the poverty level in 1996. Eleven percent of Hispanics were unemployed, compared to 5.5% of Non-Hispanics (US Bureau of the Census, 1997). Hispanic children were more likely to be living in poverty than non-Hispanic white children (Schexayder & McCoy, 1996).

The Hispanic population in the United States has exhibited tremendous growth in the last 30 years. The largest ethnic subdivision of Hispanics, comprising over half of the Hispanics in the United States, is Mexican (US Bureau of the Census, 2000). Texas is home to one in five Hispanics (US Bureau of the Census, 1997). Hispanics are united by language and customs; however great diversity exists among Hispanics in socio-economic status, race, age, country of origin, and the nature and timing of their immigration to the United States.

Environments of the Hispanics

Hispanic families tend to socialize differently from other American families.

Obedience and respect for adult authority are values parents teach children early in their
lives. Communication is direct between parent and child, with little collaborative conversation or early literacy experiences (Barrera, 1998; Espinosoa, 1995). When Hispanic children enter school, they are frequently behind their American middle class peers in formal language. In addition to respect for authority the belief in the authority of the schools is also important. Parents’ view their job as the nurturer. The teachers’ job is to educate (Espinosoa, 1995). This belief is native to many Latin American countries that also consider it rude for parents to intrude into the life of the school.

Hispanics, as a whole, have strong family ties, believe in family loyalty, and have a collective orientation that is supportive to community life (Griggs & Dunn, 1996). This represents a warm, personalized style of interaction. Generally, Hispanics need a relaxed sense of time and informal atmosphere for communication.

**Literacy of the Hispanics**

One in seven Hispanic children in public schools come from homes in which English is not the primary spoken language (Garcia, 1996). Two out of three Head Start classrooms have children from at least two different first-language backgrounds and as many as 10 different home languages (Head Start Bureau, 2001). There are an estimated 5.2 million preschoolers in Head Start from homes in America that speak languages other than English (Kagan & Cohen, 1997).

There are social cultural variables that contribute to a child’s motivation to communicate in the target language (Optiz, 1998; Schwartz, 1996). The learner’s attitude toward members of a cultural group whose language he or she is learning influences language acquisition (Ramirez, 2003; Romo, 1999; Tabors, 1997). Chicano children are
more motivated to learn a second language only if they do not perceive this learning process as alienating their own culture. Not only is the individual’s attitude toward the target language important, but also the perceived relationship between the two cultures influences language acquisition. A motivated child will need certain social skills to facilitate his or her ability to establish and maintain contact and converse with individuals of the target language. Although the cognitive process used by children to acquire a second language may be similar in all children, social factors and the social climate do seem to influence second language acquisition (Garcia, 1997).

**Preschool Years and Programs**

Differences in literacy development among children from different economic, racial and linguistic backgrounds begin to appear in the preschool years (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). When young children in America arrive at school, one in three of these kindergarteners are unprepared to learn (Children’s Defense Fund, 2000). Linguistically and culturally diverse children are less likely to become successful readers and writers, yet many are successful (Dickerson & Tabors, 2002). Research suggests the early childhood period is the key to getting children off to a strong start in literacy. The National Reading Council stressed an urgent need for more effective literacy support by programs that serve low-income children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

The Children’s Defense Fund (2000) reports an individual other than the parents regularly take care of the majority of the children in the United States. In families, surveyed by the National Association of Education of Young Children (Children’s Defense Fund, 2001) 80% were in some kind of formal care before they entered first
grade. However, many of these children fail to receive adequate experiences in emergent literacy (Carnegie Corporation, 1994; Dickenson & Tabor, 2002). Bredekamp and Copple (1997) advise that young children will develop vocabulary, awareness of print, text structure, phonological awareness and letter naming and writing if they are given the opportunity. Consequently, when children are left to their own devices, they may not progress in language development, even if they are surrounded by all manner of print and writing materials.

Preschool Programs

The term “preschool” defines programs in childcare centers for young children. Preschools have a wide variety of educational components that range from a carefully constructed, developmentally appropriate academic curriculum to brief periods of direct instruction. Overall quality of a program has been found to be an important determinant of positive effects on language and pre-literacy skills (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Research indicates that preschool experiences have benefited children’s performance in school, which is encouraging, given the evidence of differences that exist in language and emergent literacy skills associated with class, culture and linguistic backgrounds.

Growing evidence indicates that high–quality preschool child development programs contribute to the short and long-term development of children (Epstein, 2001; Schweinhart, 1994, 2001). Child development programs vary in the quality of their services. However, one determinant of quality in programs is the adult-child-interaction. Research studies (Hyson, 2002; Jensen, 1999; Tabors, 1998) indicate adults working with children need a basic understanding of how children develop and learn.
Childcare Programs

In addition to enabling parents to work, childcare also benefits children. Prior research indicates low-income children have more educational and social problems than children that come from higher income families (Schexayder & McCoy, 1996). Behavioral, psychological and social problems appear more in the children of poor families. These children may also experience low self-confidence, have problems in school, and face additional difficulties as they enter adulthood (Katz, 1997).

The social and economic trends of the last decade have generated an increased demand for childcare services in Texas. Two primary factors have caused the demand: (a) a continued increase in Texas mothers’ participation in the labor force and (b) the tremendous growth of the Hispanic population, generated by the younger families with more children than other populations (Gonzales-Mena, 2001). As the population grows, a larger number of these children will live in poor families. In addition, the recently enacted reform legislation will require a large number of single parents, who receive welfare, to return to work (Robinson & Stark, 2002; Schexayder & McCoy, 1996).

Child development experts appear to be in agreement about what constitutes high quality programs (Schexayder & McCoy, 1996). Experts generally define these characteristics as small group size, appropriately trained caregivers, stable childcare relationships, educationally oriented curricula, and high staff-child ratios (Schexayder & McCoy, 1996).
Only California outnumbers Texas in the number of school-age children who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Over 13% of the children enrolled in Texas public schools in 1997 and 1998 were identified as limited English proficient. More than 90% of these children speak Spanish as their primary language. By law, every student in the state who has a home language other than English shall be provided the opportunity to participate in a bilingual education program or English as a second language program (Tabors, 1997).

The effects of poverty can be alleviated by early experiences and intervention through programs that enrich the immediate and future educational potential of poor children (Schexayder & McCoy, 1996). This research was with high quality preschool programs and programs serving special groups (Weikart, 1993). However, the findings indicate that programs of equal quality have the potential to produce similar benefits for children (Schexayder & McCoy, 1996).

Preschool Programs for Hispanic Children

During the preschool period (age 3-5), children may enter some type of out-of-home care. For bilingual children in the United States, this frequently means their first extensive exposure to an English language environment. In a bilingual early education environment, the home language of the children is supported at the same time they are learning English (Garcia, 1993; Opitz, 1998). Language use by the teacher in the classroom may determine the extent to which this happens (Dickinson & Tabor, 2002;
Willis, 1998). The teacher may use English for large groups, yet use Spanish for small
groups. Some teachers may use English and Spanish for both types of groups.

The native language spoken at home is the most obvious cultural influence on
communication. The NAEYC position statement (1996) on linguistic and cultural
diversity acknowledges the importance of mainstreaming the child’s home language, and
at the same time creating a learning environment that supports the development of
English. There are clear cognitive advantages to becoming proficient in more than one
language (Ramirez, 2003). The stages that a child goes through are much like learning a
first language. Learning is best accomplished in the context of interesting and meaningful
activities where the language is heard in simple context and matches what the child
experiences at the time (Griggs & Dunn, 1996).

**Preschool Teachers and Preparation**

All preschool teachers must understand the role they play in supporting children’s
long-term literacy development. In addition, preschool teachers need to both understand
how literacy develops and need to possess the skills necessary to promote that
development by engaging children in literacy events. Preschool teachers must develop the
skills required to constantly extend children’s oral language while they encourage
phonemic awareness and writing skills (Hyson, 2002; Jenson, 1999; Tabors, 1998).
Finally, teachers need to reach out to families, building on their strengths, while guiding
them towards the kinds of language and literacy activities that will help children achieve
the education success that families deserve for their children (Dickenson & Tabors, 2002;
Epstein, 2001; Espinosa, 1995). With these early language experiences, children will be
far more likely to acquire the specific reading and writing skills needed to be successful in later school experiences.

Knowledgeable preschool teachers are necessary to ensure the equitable education of the ethnically and linguistically diverse population of children of today (Gonzalez-Mena, 2001; Green, 1997; Ramirez, 2003). In the publication *Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*, NAEYC (1998) contends that adults working in early childhood programs need specialized college-level education and preparation that inform them about the developmental patterns of emergent literacy learning (NAEYC, 1998). In order to achieve this goal, an informed teacher education program needs to ensure that students are knowledgeable and sensitive to the needs of children (Tabors, 1998). Teacher education programs need to impact students’ existing beliefs and understandings in such a way that will make a difference in practices when the teachers have their own classrooms and teach young children (Green, 1997).

Preparing Preschool Teachers

It is crucial that nontraditional learners are prepared with knowledge, skills and resources to meet the needs of each diverse learner. This preparation must begin in the programs that prepare teachers. There is some evidence that indicates programs with particular features may have an impact on aspects of teacher development (Hyson, 2002; Jensen, 1999; Tabors, 1998). Teacher education programs that infuse a multicultural perspective across the curricula and field experiences may be more effective. There is also mounting evidence that teacher preparation programs that incorporate diversity from
the beginning of the professional sequence of methodology courses are more likely to produce teachers that reflect on their practices (Au & Raphael, 2000).

Educators must develop the ability to reflect on their own actions, observations, and responses, and connect these reflections with their academic knowledge and implementation of new approaches. They must have a reasonable acquaintance with research skills, strategies and models for incorporating research into instruction integrated with reflection of one’s own experiences. There must be a professional commitment to serve under difficult circumstances recognizing that our greatest opportunities occur in the most challenging situations (Hyson, 2002; Jensen, 1999).

**Teachers’ Beliefs and Reflections**

Teachers should reflect their teaching through critically inquiry (Tabors, 1998). This fundamental reflective thinking used with actual practice helps to ensure that teachers consider multiple and diverse viewpoints, as well as the long-term social and moral consequences of their decisions. In this manner, the result in education is that teaching will be more effective for all individuals.

Self-critique in teacher education programs as a means to shape practice also warrants attention as an effective means to challenge pre-service teachers. This assessment makes them explore their biases and how these biases reflect their classroom practice. However, changing attitudes and behavior are a slow and difficult process and teacher education programs are only one source of information from which students formulate their perspectives (Jensen, 1999).
Duesterberg (1998) relates his own experience teaching in rural communities vastly different from his own with his experiences to understand diversity in the content of the classroom. He expressed the importance of conceptualizing the social world that would account for attitudes and beliefs. The knowledge that student teachers shared should not be taken simply as a reflection of what was going inside their heads or as a valid description of the social world. What people say exists in the forms of disclosure, which are functions of the rules and relations of power. Individuals come into the social context with their own set of beliefs, dispositions, and ways of thinking and acting which have been formed through multiple social and cultural contexts.

Dong (1998) states that reflection involves observation of the phenomenon, describes the problem, makes the connections between theory and practice, finds solutions, and tests out the hypothesis. He further contends that competence in reflection is acquired. He describes developmental reflection as reflection on students’ interest, thinking, and patterns of developmental growth, and social constructive reflection on the social and political context of schooling and assessment of classroom actions. Doug also recommends creating a reflecting environment by writing in journals and sharing thoughts to foster reflective conversation among students. In addition pre-service teachers would review portfolios and reflect constantly rather than wait until the final product.

Educating Hispanic Teachers

The most compelling examples of success in the education of minority students indicate that context matters (Garcia, 1999; Gonzalez-Mena, 2001; Tabors, 1997). There
are significant differences in our lives, cultures, and settings that make a difference in education (Ramirez, 2003; Romo, 1999). Communication skills are clearly required.

Hispanic Americans have the lowest rates of high school and college graduation of any other major population group (Romo, 1999). Of the Hispanics, the Mexicans have the lowest educational attainment (47% receive a high school diploma). However, the Hispanic educational level is suppressed statically by the continued influx of Hispanic immigrants with low educational levels.

Hispanic students represent 75% of the language minority students in the United States. Forty-three percent speak a language at home other than English. Hispanic students are consistently among those with the lowest level of literacy. They tend to come from homes where parents have limited education. Approximately 2/3 of Hispanic students are bilingual. Being bilingual in itself is not attributed to difficulties in areas relating to reading; however, the relationship between speaking two or more languages and reading development is not fully understood (Ramirez, 2003).

To engage Hispanics in the learning process, educators must gain their trust and maintain that trust completely (Romo, 1999). If Hispanic community leaders get involved in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of educational efforts, there will be acceptance.

Respect for the learner is another important aspect of the Hispanic culture (Garcia, 1997). Teachers need to greet each learner and pay attention to individual learners. When planning education programs, teachers need to consider differences in educational levels, language skills, income, and cultural values among Hispanics. These cultures may vary considerably, even though the language, Spanish, is the same.
Conclusions

The educational and personal experiences young children bring to the school setting form a foundation for their learning. Therefore, educators should enhance these experiences and build on them, rather than suppress and replace them.

Children, who are fortunate, have educators dedicated to their success. The impact that dedicated educators have on the lives of young children, can hardly be overestimated. Education has a tremendous impact for children of a different culture and language. These children would have great difficulty getting into college and becoming engineers, playwrights, or educators themselves and making positive contributions to our social and economic well being, without the caring guidance of educators. Dedicated educators deserve the best and most appropriate education and training experience possible. They must be adequately prepared for the challenge and privilege to shape the lives of the children they teach. The linguistically and culturally diverse children in the classrooms of today will be the future citizens and leaders of our society.

Purpose of the Study

The students enrolled in courses at the Prince Community College in Texas came from the Hispanic community in the surrounding area. Many of the Hispanics in south Texas are Mexican immigrants; however, their language and education level will differ depending on the number of years they have lived in the United States. Other students come from families which have lived in the United States for generations, yet, maintain the Spanish language and Hispanic culture with friends and family in the home. The focus of daily life for many adults and older children was obtaining work in order to feed,
cloth and care for family members. Hispanics that are educated speak English when attending school and other events in the mainstream of America (Richardson, 1999). However, they back to Spanish, the home language, in order to communicate with other family members, who either do not understand English or speak Spanish more fluently.

The purpose of this study was to identify the beliefs of the participants with regards to emergent literacy. Another purpose was to identify the literacy practices employed by the participants while teaching preschool children. An additional purpose was to determine if participating in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” changed any of the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children. The final purpose of this study was to determine the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy 3 years after completing the course entitled “Emergent Literacy.” In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following questions will be examined.

**Research Questions**

This study answered the following questions about the students participating in a Childcare and Development program at Prince Community College with regards to emergent literacy:

1. What are the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy?
2. What are the literacy practices employed by the participants while teaching preschool children?
3. Will participation in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” change any of the participants’ beliefs with regard to emergent literacy and subsequent
practices employed while teaching preschool children?

4. What are the beliefs of the participants regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children 3 years after completing the course entitled “Emergent Literacy”? 

**Justification for the Study**

Children’s language and literacy skills in the preschool years are strongly related to later academic success. Research has shown how appropriate early experiences help children acquire emergent literacy skills (Snow, Burns, & Griffins, 1999; Teale, 1999). While some children have the types of linguistic experiences that would prepare them for the standard discourse of the classroom, others do not (Tabors, 1997).

Available childcare arrangements for young children vary considerably. Teachers are the primary determinant of what is taught and consequently the over-all indicator of quality in the center (NAEYC, 2002). There is justification to adequately prepare early childhood teachers to meet the developmental needs of the children. Teachers who use interesting and varied literacy experiences help create a language rich environment where children are exposed to and encouraged to use various types of expressions (Kirk, 1998). Teachers can encourage interaction with children and make books interesting and relevant to them in the social nature of the experience.

There is added justification to prepare the Hispanic students in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy.” These students, in the early childhood education AA degree program, come from a culture built on an oral society (Garcia, 1997) with few books that
are mostly in the Spanish language. The students indicate, through conversation, they had little opportunity for exposure to literacy experiences in the early years of their lives. It is important that the Hispanic students, preparing to be teachers, have a basic understanding of early literacy and an awareness of the experiences that support its development. The students need to know strategies to build language skills critical to early literacy in order to make a difference in the lives of the young children they teach.

It is important for faculty to determine if the current emergent literacy course meets the needs of the early childhood students. Specifically, for the present study it is important to know if the contents of the course, “Emergent Literacy,” will help enrolled students comprehend and utilize research supported emergent literacy events. Of equal importance is the need to know what these students believe about emergent literacy in order to influence their beliefs in regard to emergent literacy.

**Limitations**

A possible limitation for this study was that when students were journaling they may not have recorded their actual beliefs but the beliefs, they felt their instructor may have had. In an effort to elicit true beliefs, students were reassured that their journal reflections and entries were not being judged or graded with regards to right or wrong answers. The intent of the journal was to allow the participants to reflect on their emergent literacy beliefs and record how those beliefs were reflected in the literacy practices they employed.
Definitions

Emergent Literacy- For the purpose of this paper emergent literacy will refer to the process of young children becoming literate. It is a process that begins early and is dependent upon both formal and informal experiences.

Preschool- For the purpose of this paper preschool refers to the years before formal schooling begins when a child enters the first grade.

Preschool Children- For the purpose of this paper, preschool children are the children in school or learning environment prior to entering the first grade.

Childcare- For the purpose of this paper, childcare is a facility where the care of children is the primary function.

Literacy Event- For the purpose of this paper, a literacy event consists of a literature selection followed by activities incorporated around the theme or characters in the selection.

Literacy Practices- For the purpose of this paper, literacy practices are the activities designed to employ the adult to lead the children, engage them in experiences employed in response to the literature and practices employed to enrich and/or extend the literature selection to another time or place.

The Course

The subjects for this study were the students enrolled in a course entitled “Emergent Literacy” at Prince Community College, in the fall of 2001. The class met one night a week for a 3-hour time period for 16 weeks. The learning objectives of the course required the students to (a) learn the information in the textbook, (b) participate in class discussions, (c) observe and engage in the presentations of the instructor and other members of the class, and (d) complete the required assignments. Further, the learning objectives for the course included the students engaging young children for one hour a week in experiences that encourage literacy development.
The literacy practices assigned to the students included (a) developing four literacy events and implementing with preschool children, (b) developing a literacy unit with a group of students, (c) five presentations to members of the class (d) writing journal narratives and (e) developing a portfolio. The literacy practices are explained in the following section.

**Literacy Events**

The students spent 1 hour a week, outside of class, with preschool children in a childcare setting. The students planned and engaged young children in literacy events organized around reading nursery rhymes, practicing finger plays, creating a picture book, and telling a folk tale. The students read a literature selection to preschool children. Following the literature selection, the students engaged the preschool children in activities that enriched, supported, and extended the particular literature selections. The experiences included activities, such as retelling the story with sequence cards or flannel boards; reenacting the story with props, drama or puppets; representing the literature selection by dictation, dramatizing the story; singing songs about the story; or playing a game related to the story.

The students observed the children’s reaction to the experiences and took notes on their responses to the activities designed to enrich, support and extend the literature they selected. The students later organized and typed their reflections of the children’s responses to the literature and experiences designed to promote literacy development.
**Literacy Units**

As a further assignment, the students divided themselves into groups and worked together to design a literacy unit built around a theme that incorporated a week of plans. As a result of this, each group developed a unit inspired by literature and based on at least five literature selections connected by the theme. The group also developed a unit of study to incorporate literacy in classroom learning centers that provide opportunities with print in varied and meaningful contexts.

The written portion of the project contained five sections: (a) a map or web of the curriculum plan, (b) a brief overview of the topic that included objectives, (c) a bibliography of books that supported the theme, (d) a list of five selections of literature related to the theme and brief descriptions of three activities or learning centers planned for each selection, and (e) a section that addressed organizing the environment to support literacy development. Important concepts of the literacy unit included the teacher’s role, environmental print, dramatic play props, the book corner or library, writing center, and other literacy events.

**Presentation (Instructor)**

On September 19, 2001, the instructor of the emergent literacy course presented to the class literacy practices designed to help teachers engage preschool children in experiences that encouraged literacy development. The instructor presented examples of storybooks to the students and lead class discussions about the selections. The instructor explained the usefulness of reading various versions of the story and in retelling a story using a flannel boards. In addition, the class discussed the “lessons” and morals that,
many stories reinforce. The students in the class observed the instructor’s presentation and participated in hands-on activities, such as sequence cards, the flannel board, story props, puppets, and games.

Presentation (Student)

The course objective required the students to give five presentations to the class. The presentations included a finger play, folk tale, nursery rhyme, picture book and a literacy unit. The first presentation was a nursery rhyme. Nursery rhymes provided an opportunity to employ many of the practices associated with language development. The second presentation was a finger play. The finger play presentation could include the use of puppets and stick puppets. The third presentation was a folk tale. All cultures have stories to tell and the Hispanics have a rich heritage of folktales as well. The fourth presentation was a picture book. The picture book gave the children an opportunity to create their own stories with individual endings. For each of the presentations, the students prepared a handout of the literacy event to give the students in the class, indicating the name of the literature selection and a description of the activities used to enhance, support, or extend the literature.

The fifth presentation was a group activity. Groups, consisting of four or five, presented their literacy unit to the class. The literacy unit was from five selections of children’s literature that were connected by a theme. The presentation focused on one of the five literature selections and included the appropriate visual aids. The group engaged the class in hands on activities designed to enhance, extend, and support the literature selection. The group of students prepared a handout for each member of the class that
included the unit theme, literature selection, and description of related activities. The
dhandouts, prepared by each group, were to be added to their course portfolio, which
provided the students with resources that they could continue to develop and use with
preschool children upon graduation.

Journals

To examine the students’ beliefs regarding the literacy practices assigned in the
course entitled “Emergent Literacy,” the students made reflective entries in a journal.
Reflective thinking is a vital component of teacher preparation and widely discussed in
the literature. The need of constant reflection and self-inquiry is especially critical when
teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students (Dong, 1998).

In-Class Journal Entries

At the conclusion of the class period, September 17, 2001, the students wrote in
an open format their reflections on emergent literacy, and their responses to the literacy
practices they observed. The students were allowed time to formulate their responses
during class. They were instructed to type the reflections and print two copies. One copy
was put in their portfolio and a second copy was for the instructor.

Narratives Reflections

The students prepared and implemented four literacy events to groups of
preschool children in a classroom setting. The students read a literature selection and
engaged the children in follow up activities designed to enrich and extend the literature
they chose. They students wrote narratives to document their reflections of these literacy
events and the children’s responses. One copy of the narratives was typed and returned to the instructor along with the lesson plans and evidence of the child’s participation in the form of a photo or example of the child’s work.

Final Guided Questions

At the end of the course, the students responded to take home guided questions pertaining to the general categories of Literacy Events, Class Presentations, Literacy Units, and Language Preferred. The students typed their responses and returned them to the instructor.

The Portfolio

Finally, a portfolio contained information that supported the course. The information was in clear plastic pages in a notebook. The students used creativity and developed a portfolio with attractive graphics and selected photos and samples of the children’s work. The first part of the portfolio focused on the emergent literacy class with colorful section dividers and tabs necessary to locate information. Part two, which was taken from the literacy events and journal reflections, was divided into three sections: (a) evidence of literacy events selected and implemented weekly, along with samples of children’s work; (b) copies of the nursery rhyme and picture book; (c) pages from a journal that showed the weekly plan, method and materials used with the children.
CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy. Another purpose was to identify the literacy practices employed by the participants while teaching preschool children. An additional purpose was to determine if participating in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” changed any participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent practices employed while teaching preschool children. The final purpose of this study was to determine the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and the literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children three years after completing the course entitled “Emergent Literacy.”

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology used to answer the research questions. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) Research Design, (b) Issues of Validity and Reliability (c) Participants, (d) Procedure, (e) Instrumentation, and (f) Data Analysis.
Research Design

A case study research design was selected because it was deemed the most appropriate. The design identified the Hispanic students’ beliefs about emergent literacy and how they demonstrate those beliefs of emergent literacy. The case study research design is described as a comprehensive research strategy that incorporates data collection and data analysis approaches. Yin (1993) contends the case study is not a data collection tactic or merely a design feature alone, but a comprehensive research strategy. The holistic narrative account of the case study enabled the researcher to examine if participation in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” changed any of the students’ beliefs and subsequent uses of emergent literacy practices. In addition, the researcher was able to explore the usefulness of emergent literacy practices in preschool classrooms 3 years after completing the course.

The need for case data may be present whether the unit of analysis is an individual, program, organization, or community (Patton, 1999). A case study sheds light on a phenomenon, which is the processes, events, persons, or things of interest to the researcher. The case is that particular instance of the phenomenon (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

According to Yin (1989), the desire to evaluate individual client outcomes is one major reason why case studies are conducted. This case study identified the Hispanic students’ beliefs with regard to emergent literacy and determined how those beliefs displayed their use of emergent literacy activities. In addition, this study examined if and how instruction changed those beliefs and subsequent actions. Finally, the case study
enabled the researcher to determine the Hispanic students’ beliefs and subsequent use of emergent literacy activities in early childhood classrooms 3 years after completing the course entitled “Emergent literacy.”

Case studies are particularly valuable when the evaluation aims to capture individual differences or unique variations from one program setting to another or from one program experience to another (Patton, 1990). A case study seeks to describe holistically and in depth the unit and the context. For the present study, the Hispanic students’ beliefs with regard to emergent literacy reflected various formats. In addition, the students recorded these beliefs at different intervals during the course of the semester and in preschool classrooms 3 years after completing the course.

A case study was the instrument used to develop an understanding of a complex phenomenon experienced by the participants. The researcher sought to view the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. The researcher then attempted to describe the phenomenon and finally conceptualize it.

**Issues of Validity and Reliability**

According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), qualitative researchers often use somewhat different strategies to deal with internal and external validity threats than quantitative researchers. They state that it is not entirely fair to measure the validity of qualitative research using the quantitative yardstick (p. 409). Patton (1990) stated “the validity and reliability of qualitative data depend to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p. 11).
To Patton (1990), validity in quantitative research depends on the instrument measuring what it is supposed to measure. In qualitative research, because the researcher is the instrument, validity “hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the field work” (p.14).

For case study research, the concern of internal validity may extend to make inferences. According to Patton, the combination of methodologies or triangulation strengthens the study design. Data triangulation—the use of a variety of sources, and methodological triangulation—the use of multiple methods to study the problem, are basic types of triangulation combined in the design of the case study (Patton, 1990). Multiple sources of evidence including journal entries, reflective narratives, guided questions, and follow-up survey were in the triangulation design. However with case studies no true generalizations occur beyond the current case study.

Reliability is the assurance that if an investigation followed the same procedures as the research describes, the later research should arrive at the same findings and conclusions (Yin, 1993). A chain of evidence in the form of direct text allows the reader to follow the evidence from the initial question regarding the Hispanic students’ beliefs about emergent literacy, to how they demonstrated those beliefs in teaching preschool children. The precise words recorded by the students in the journal entries were part of the narratives.

This study addressed validity and reliability by incorporating multiple sources of data including *In-Class Journal Entries, Narrative Reflections, Final Guided Questions, and a Follow-Up Survey*. The researcher used triangulation to collect and analyze the
following data in the study: (a) *In-Class Journal Entries* identified the Hispanic students’ beliefs with regard to emergent literacy, (b) *Narrative Reflections* identified literacy practices the Hispanic students employed while teaching preschool children, (c) *Final Guided Questions* determined any changes that occurred as a result of the course in the Hispanic students’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children, and (d) *A Follow-up Survey* enabled the researcher to examine the Hispanic students’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children three years after completing the emergent literacy course. Through triangulation of the data gathered by these four methods, the researcher was able to examine each source of information in respect to the other sources of information to ensure both the accuracy and reliability of identified themes and patterns.

**Participants**

The population for the study consisted of the students who enrolled in “Emergent Literacy” at Prince Community College in Texas. These students were part of a cohort group whose degree plan for the associate degree in Early Childhood Education required them to take the emergent literacy course. The course is listed in the third semester in the degree plan, indicating most of the students have attended other classes in Early Childhood Education. Participants for this study enrolled in the emergent literacy class during the fall semester of 2001.

The students who enrolled in the emergent literacy course lived in the towns and communities surrounding the community college. Most of the students were considered
part time students. They worked in preschool programs during the day and attended
classes at night.

The majority of the participants were female and in their late twenties and early
thirties. Although the Prince Community College has open enrollment, students enrolled
in the preschool programs have graduated from high school or passed the GED
equivalent. Most of the students are Hispanic or married to a Hispanic and have Hispanic
names.

Five students from the population of 26 students enrolled in the emergent literacy
class during the fall of 2001 were purposely selected as participants for this study. These
students were purposefully selected based on the following criteria: (a) are Hispanic, (b)
teach preschool children, (c) returned to the classroom to teach after completing the
course, (d) completed all the journal responses and narratives, (e) provided entries and
narratives that were full in content and description. The final decision in the selection
process included the researcher’s ability to contact participants.

Instrumentation

The researcher utilized two instruments to gather data for the study. The first
instrument was the researcher. As with most qualitative research, the researcher served as
the main data collection instrument. The researcher in this study examined archived data
in the form of journal entries including the following components: (a) In-Class Journal
Entries, (b) Narrative Reflections, and (c) Final Guided Questions supplied by the
instructor of the emergent literacy course. The researcher examined the data found in the
journals to identify beliefs and practices of the participants prior to and after instruction.
of emergent literacy. In doing so, the researcher identified and recorded themes, patterns and practices found within the data.

The second instrument utilized in this study was a *Follow-Up Survey*. The survey was mailed to the students 3 years after they completed the emergent literacy course.

**Procedures**

The researcher collected data for this study from journals the students completed while enrolled in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy.” The students made journal entries after the instruction began and continued throughout the course. Opportunities for ongoing reflection through journal entries, recorded throughout the semester, provided a snapshot of the students’ beliefs with regard to emergent literacy.

The researchers contacted the 5 participants and informed them of the intent of the proposed research plan, their role in the study, and how their recorded journal information would be used. The participants would be anonymous by giving them fictional names to them.

The subjects agreed to participate and devote the time necessary to answer the questions. The researcher asked them to sign an agreement. The agreement, if signed, gave the potential subjects’ consent to be in the study.

The researcher read and evaluated the *In-Class Journal Entries* to identify information pertaining to beliefs the participants have with regard to emergent literacy and the literacy practices included in the instructor’s presentation. The researcher...
examined all five narrative summaries and wrote concluding narratives containing information about the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy.

Next, the researcher read the four *Narratives Reflections* of each of the participants, which consisted of nursery rhymes, finger plays, picture books and folk tales. The researcher examined journal entries to obtain information on how the participants demonstrated their beliefs about emergent literacy. The researcher wrote a narrative summary that identified the literature selections and activities used by the participants.

The researcher read the final journal entry, *Final Guided Questions*, of the 5 participants for information that pertained to changes in the participants’ beliefs and subsequent uses of emergent literacy as a result of the course. Literacy practices used in the course included literacy events, literacy units, class presentations, and language preferred. The researcher wrote a concluding narrative summary that determined changes that occurred as a result of the emergent literacy course.

Finally, the researcher read the *Follow-Up Inquiry* of the 5 participants to identify the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children 3 years after completing the emergent literacy course. The researcher wrote a narrative summary of the participants’ responses that explored the usefulness of the literacy practices introduced in the emergent literacy course.
Data Analysis

There are three types of approaches used to analyze data: interpretation analysis, structural analysis, and reflective analysis (Gall, Borg, & Gall 1996). “Interpretative analysis is the process of examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied” (p. 562); “Structural analysis is the process of examining case study data for the purpose of identifying patterns in discourse, text, events, or other phenomena” (p. 568); and “Reflective analysis is the process in which the researcher relies primarily on intuition and judgment in order to portray or evaluate the phenomena being studied” (p. 570). Interpretative analysis is the procedure that was appropriate to the conditions and purpose of this case study.

Interpretative analysis enabled the researcher to achieve insight into the students’ journal entries to discover particular goals central to the journal entries. Further analysis discovered any frequently mentioned goals or constructs. Glaser and Strauss coined the term “constant comparison” as the continual process of comparing segments within and across categories in qualitative research (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996). This, then, was a discovery about possible significant patterns in the students’ journal entries.

In this case study, categories were derived or grounded into the data collected from the students’ journal entries. The researcher then coded the segment to develop categories, or constructs that refer to a certain type of phenomenon.
To answer Research Question 1, the researcher analyzed the data obtained from the *In-Class Journal Entries*. The researcher identified categories and patterns of the participants’ reflections of the literacy practices presented.

To answer Research Question 2, the researcher analyzed the data obtained from the *Narratives Reflections*. The researcher identified categories and patterns of the literature selections and activities used by the participants to enrich, support and extend each of the four literature selections. The researcher examined the list of identified literature selections and activities the participants used for patterns and then categorized the information.

To answer Research Question 3, the researcher analyzed the data obtained from the participants’ responses to the *Final Guided Questions*. The initial organization of the *Final Guided Questions* was the broad categories of the questions that included literacy events, literacy units, class presentations, and language preferred. The researcher examined the data from the *Final Guided Questions* for any changes in perspectives and subsequent uses of literacy practices. The researcher also compared the data from the *Final Guided Questions* to the participants’ beliefs recorded in the *In-Class Journal Entries* written at the beginning of the course.

Next, the researcher examined the findings of the *Narrative Reflections* written during the literacy events and activities over a 10-week period for cross comparison in beliefs and subsequent uses of literacy practices as indicated in the *Final Guided Questions*. Finally, the researcher noted differences as they emerged.
To answer Research Question 4, the researcher analyzed the participants’ responses to the *Follow-Up Survey*. Next the researcher identified construct, themes and patterns that represented the students’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy 3 years after completing the course entitled “Emergent literacy.”
CHAPTER III
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter includes the analysis of the data gathered from the participants’ journal entries including *In-class Journal Entries, Narrative Reflections, and Final Guided Questions*, and responses from the *Follow-Up Survey*. The information is organized in a format that follows the four research questions. The first section includes the demographic data obtained from the survey. The second section represents the analysis of data that was used to answer Research Question 1: What are the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy? The third section represents the analysis of data that was used to answer Research Question 2: What literacy practices participants employed while teaching preschool children? The fourth section represents the analysis of data that was used to answer Research Question 3: Will participation in the course entitled Emergent Literacy change any beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children? The fifth section represents the analysis of data that was used to answer Research Question 4: What are the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practice employed while teaching preschool children three years after completing the emergent literacy course? The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the findings.
**Demographic Profile of the Participants Case-By-Case.**

The following section contains narratives compiled from the demographic survey that was included in the *Follow-Up Survey*. The narratives are in a case-by-case format and include information about the participants’ careers, education, families, and language.

**Case One**

Alma, is a female and Hispanic. She is a teacher at a local childcare facility. She has worked in the same childcare center for 7 years. She has held her current position as teacher for the past 4 years. Alma has not worked in any other childcare facility.

Alma has completed 65 hours of college credit. She earned an associate degree in Childcare and Development. She is not currently enrolled in college, but plans to continue her education until she receives a bachelor’s degree.

Alma was born in the United States of America. Her parents were both born in Mexico. She spent her preschool years living in the area along the United States and Mexico border where she lives today. She grew up in a migrant family. The family would travel together seasonally to the northern section of the United States to pick crops. Alma is a widow and has one child in elementary school.

Alma is bilingual and speaks both English and Spanish. Her first language is Spanish; however, she reads and writes English. She indicates she speaks Spanish in her home and the language of her parents is Spanish. However, her bilingual students’ first language is English. Alma uses both languages with the students she teaches. Most of the students speak Spanish as their first language and are just beginning to learn English.
Case Two

Janie is a female and Hispanic. She is a teacher at a local childcare facility. She has worked at the same childcare facility for 12 years. She has held her current position as teacher for the past 9 years. She worked at other childcare facilities during the summer when the childcare center of her primary employment was closed.

Janie has completed 80 hours of college credit. She holds an associate degree in Childcare and Development. She is currently enrolled in school at a local university where she is working on a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education.

Janie was born in the United States of America. Her parents were also born in the United States of America. During her preschool years, Janie’s parents were migrant workers. Seasonally they traveled to Illinois and Indiana to work in the fields. Janie is married and lives with her husband in the area where she grew up.

Janie is bilingual and speaks both English and Spanish. Her first language is English. She speaks English and Spanish at home. Her parents also speak English and Spanish. Janie indicates that if she and her husband have children, she would want to continue the tradition and teach her children to speak both languages.

Case Three

Mika is a female and Hispanic. Presently, she works at a childcare facility where she has worked for the past 14 years. She has worked as teacher for 6 of the 14 years. Mika has also worked in other childcare facilities over a period of 6 years.

Mika graduated from Prince Community College with an associate of applied science degree completing 64 hours of course credit. She also attended a local university
and earned 74 hours in her major, Elementary Education. Mika is not presently enrolled in college classes, but plans to go back to the university and complete her bachelor’s degree next year.

Mika was born in The United States of America. Her parents were both born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States. Mika spent her preschool years in the local region on the United States and Mexico border. Her family has always lived and worked in the local border region. Mika is married and she and her husband live in the local region.

Mika is bilingual and speaks both English and Spanish. English is Mika’s first language. However, her parents and the other members of her family speak only Spanish in the home.

Case Four

Oralia is a female and Hispanic. She is a teacher at a local childcare facility. She has worked at the facility for 10 years and has held her current position for 8 years. She has not worked at any other childcare facility

Oralia is currently enrolled as a student at Prince Community College. She has earned 48 hours towards an associate degree. She has not made further education plans beyond the associate degree.

Oralia was born in the United States of America. One of her parents was born in Mexico and the other in the United States. She grew up in the local region along the border area of the United States and Mexico. During her preschool years her family would migrate to Michigan during harvest season to gather crops. Oralia is married and
she and her husband live in the local border region. They have three children who are over the age of 20.

Oralia is bilingual and speaks both Spanish and English. Her first language is Spanish and she speaks Spanish at home. Spanish is also the first language of Oralia’s parents. However they speak both Spanish and English. Her children’s first language is English.

Case Five

Linda is a female and Hispanic. She is a teacher in a local childcare facility. She has worked at the same childcare center for 10 years. She has held her current position of teacher for the past 3 years. Linda worked in other childcare facilities over the period of 8 years.

Linda is not currently enrolled in college. She completed 50 hours at Prince Community College and earned a CDA preschool certificate.

Linda was born in the United States of America. However, both of her parents were born in Mexico. She spent her preschool years with her family living in the local region along the United States and Mexico border. Her family has always lived and worked in the local border region. Linda is married and she and her husband live in the local border region.

Linda is bilingual, and speaks both English and Spanish. She considers English her first language and speaks English in the home. However, during her preschool years, she spoke Spanish because her parents spoke Spanish.
Research Question One

Question one: What are the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy? Responses from the participants In-Class Journal Entries were analyzed to answer this question. The following section includes the exact text of the participants’ journal entries. Following the text of the participants’ entries, a summary of the participant’s entries is provided and identifies their beliefs with regard to emergent literacy.

Case One

On this day, Mrs. Earth read two very exciting stories: Gingerbread Man and Tortoise and the Hare. While reading each one, she involved the class in the story, and then she picked one person to go and sequence cards of the Gingerbread Man. When she finished, she had several materials laid out, so the class participated and created turtle and gingerbread objects. Several activities included: cutting out newspaper dolls, lacing a turtle, and creating our own turtle with two paper plates. She said that children would be able to use all these items in the different class workstations. She gave us some good ideas about preparing for story activities. For example, I took a paper plate, traced a turtle and laced it out of paper. It was a very interesting class because we all had a chance to participate. Mrs. Earth had several folktale versions: (a) The Gingerbread Man was eaten (b) The Gingerbread Man was saved. I believe it is important for us as early childhood educators to read at least three to four stories a day more if possible. Children are the future and need to learn that reading plays a major role in their lives.

Case Two

Monday, September 17, 2001. Today, class was fun and exciting. We did activities that we could use with children at school. Mrs. Earth read several books to us. The first book she read was the Gingerbread Man; this is my favorite book. She explained that just reading a book is not enough because we need to expand into more activities with the children. For example, after reading the story, we can question, make a cookie, art or other fun activities. In class, we read the story, and made paper
gingerbread boys with the newspaper; we made clay boy figures; we traced, colored and cut the boy; then, we decorated the boy. One student never tried making a gingerbread boy using paper plates. We can use many different ways and ideas to work with children. After Mrs. Earth read the second story, the *Tortoise and the Hare*, she read several other versions. After listening to the story, we made a turtle with paper plates and added the head, hand, legs and tail. Bonnie, a student, made a turtle that could move the head and tail in and out. We could add numbers or letters here. She also read the *Pea and the Princess*, but we did not have time to do an activity for this book. Today’s class was very interesting and exciting because we could use all the activities with the children at school. I really enjoyed today’s class because we are working hands-on, and I feel that we learn more and get more motivated. In the past, I have done activities, but now, I feel I get into the activity just like the children. We also had some homework. We have to do a finger play and present it to the class next week. I am really looking forward to seeing and hearing the finger plays of the entire class.

**Case Three**

Class was interesting. Mrs. Earth explained what she wanted in the class work. She brought some books that would help the students get an understanding of what she wanted. She wanted a Nursery Rhyme, Finger Play, and she wanted a reflection of each of them with the children. I never realized that a storybook like *The Gingerbread Man* had so many things we could learn. For example, where did the story originate and why? Mrs. Earth gave us handouts about this story, and she also showed us different versions of the story. It was interesting to know that there were some art activities I couldn’t do. I was having a lot of trouble with the gingerbread man. Despite my difficulty cutting the gingerbread man, I realize that I was having a lot of trouble completing the artwork. Mrs. Earth gave me a lot of ideas about activities for stories. One of the stories, *The Turtle and Hare* had a moral. She gave me ideas how I can present the story to my children. This class session was interesting. We did hands-on work, and everyone was being creative. The students seem to get involved and that’s what I like. She really knows how to get the class involved and to make it fun. I am really enjoying it.

**Case Four**

What were my reflections on Mrs. Earth’s presentation? I thought they were great. It was something that can help a teacher in a classroom. I
knew most of the ideas except for the paper dolls. It still takes me a while to cut the dolls. I continue to practice.

As I sat down at night, my thoughts were on how much fun this class was going to be. All the interacting among students and participating in the activities continues to help me overcome my shyness. A problem I must deal with for the students.

Your presentation helped break the ice among us, and we got to know each other better. I had fun and enjoyed every minute I was in your class. I think children would have loved having you as their teacher. I am going to get some ideas.

Case Five

Today in class, Mrs. Earth read some stories and how they have different versions. Also, it teaches us something about morals. We also got different ideas by doing art activities. The one I liked best was the paper doll chain. I always wanted to know how to do it. We also made a turtle out of a paper plate and dinosaur lacing. We use play dough to make a gingerbread man.

I really enjoy class when we do activities. I know I am learning more and understanding the concept. I realize how important it is to read to the children daily, and making it fun and interesting for them. I look forward to learning more from my fellow classmates and Mrs. Earth.

Researcher’s Summary

Research Question 1 identified the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy. The participants’ responses answered the questions on the In-Class Journal Entries. Examination of the journal entries suggested a common direction of thought pertaining to the participants’ reactions or opinions to the literacy practices they observed. While all of the participants enjoyed the presentations, they never expressed the belief that the activities were associated with emergent literacy. Their responses indicated that they thought the activities were simply fun and exciting.
The participants expressed interest and approval towards emergent literacy practices. The participants’ expressed positive anticipation regarding implementing the literacy practices with young children in a classroom setting, as well as presenting the events in class presentations. They looked forward to “learning more from their classmates” and discovering ideas and activities to employ while teaching preschool children in the classroom.

All 5 participants welcomed the opportunity for class participation and hands-on involvement. Case 2 indicated that if she does the activities in the college classroom, “she will get more involved when she goes back and does them with the children.” Case 5 made the comment, “I know I am going to learn more and understand if I do the activities.”

Three of the five participants made concluding comments referring to their beliefs regarding emergent literacy. Case 5 mentioned the importance of “reading to children daily” and indicated the event should be “fun and interesting.” Case 1, expressed her belief that “children are the future” and commented on the importance of reading “three or four stories a day.” Case 3 indicated, “I never knew a story book like The Gingerbread Man had so many things we can learn.” One case wrote “Children need to learn that reading plays a major role in their life.” Case 5 recorded, “I realize it is important to read to the children daily and make it fun and interesting.” Case 2 indicated that the literacy concepts in the instructor’s presentation were new to her.
Based on the analysis of data, the participant’s beliefs regarding emergent literacy were not well formed or defined. Furthermore, the participants expressed limited experience with planning and implementing emergent literacy activities.

**Research Question Two**

Research Question 2: What literacy practices did the participants employed while teaching preschool children? The researcher analyzed the participants’ responses from the *Journal Narratives*. The following section includes the exact text of the participant’s journal entries. Following the text of the participants’ entries, the next section provides a summary of the participants’ entries and identifies the literacy practices they employed while teaching preschool children.

**Case One**

October 22, 2001, I introduced a nursery rhyme called *Jack Be Nimble*. At first, the children just stared but after repeating it three times, they started saying some of the words. One child said, “Doesn’t he get burned jumping a candle”? I said, “Well, yes, that is true children should not play with fire, but this is just a nursery rhyme. Children should not do this at all.” I had a flannel board that included a picture of Jack and a candlestick, and I showed it to the children. I would do this every morning during circle time, and the children did well repeating the words. I had them (the children) draw their own little book which some of them did an excellent job. I placed the flannel board in the library center where the children enjoyed repeating the rhyme while moving the pictures.

October 29, 2001, I introduced the *Itsy Bitsy Spider* to the children during circle time for the whole week. We sang the song and did the finger play with our hands. All the children did not seem to trouble learning the words for this finger play. The children had a chance to paste eyes and legs on a construction paper spider. They were happy because it was during the time of Halloween. The children also saw a plastic spider and a picture spider. They had the chance to name some of the parts of the spider. Overall, the children enjoyed the song, rhyme, and pictures of the spiders. The children wanted to sing it over and over again.
On this week, I had the opportunity to read the book, and it took me a whole week because I had five different versions to it. All the children were asking me different questions? Why did the Fox eat all of them? Why did the fox eat all except Henny Penny? Why was there a chicken in the other story and a Hippo? The children were asking all kinds of questions that were very good because at least, they understood the story very well. Children enjoyed hearing the different versions and wanted for me to repeat them over and over. I also had them pretend to be the different characters, yet all of them wanted to be the Fox or Henny Penny. I asked them why, and they replied, “Because the wolf wins”; another responded, “Because Henny gets saved.” I was very impressed by all the children because they really enjoyed the story. When they heard Chicken Little, they asked, “Why a chicken and not a hen? They were curious at all times because it seemed like they understood the change of characters. All these stories were read during circle time and some during lunch.

October 15, 2001, I introduced a very special book called the Very Hungry Caterpillar. I feel that this book helped the children I teach because it helped them understand the different butterfly cycles. The children enjoyed listening to this book. They were curious and had many questions like why does a caterpillar turn into a butterfly and why does it get wings. I had a chance to read it to the children during transition after I allowed the children to make their own book. I also showed them a picture of the different cycles. Children had the opportunity to collage a butterfly and cut and paste circles to make their own caterpillar. The following day, I taught them a finger play of a caterpillar. They enjoyed the finger play yet they will need more practice. As an overall, the children enjoyed hearing this wonderful selection and using their art activities, which were exciting for everyone.

Case Two

I first introduced the rhyme to the children and introduced the characters. We read the rhyme and then explained any words they did not understand. We said the rhyme and added names of children in place of Mary. The children loved singing it with their own names in the rhyme. They felt proud about a rhyme named after them. For our art activity, the children created their own lamb. In the Discovery Center, they counted lambs and matched the number to the dots in the lamb. During dramatic play, they dramatized the rhyme. The children enjoyed singing the rhyme and would sing it throughout the day. The children also enjoyed doing all of the activities they did for the rhyme.
The children and I really enjoyed doing this activity. I first introduced the children to the book of the *Five Little Monkeys*, and then I introduced *The Monkey and Alligator*. We repeated the words to the finger play. Then, we used the sticks to retell the finger play. I demonstrated to the children by doing the finger play first. Then, the children did the finger play by themselves. It was interesting to see how each one changed the words or the finger play. It was fun and interesting. The children sang the finger play everyday and did not get tired or bored of singing it. They also like to sing *Five Little Monkeys*. When we role-played the finger play, the children enjoyed it very much. We had five children playing the monkeys and one the alligator and the children that were the audience wanted to do it next. I realized we need more songs that the children enjoy, so they can be involved, have fun and learn at the same time. I plan to have more activities that involve finger play.

I first read the story to the children in Spanish and English. The children enjoyed it very much and were asking questions. The second time I read the story they knew what was going to happen. For art the children did their own *Little Red Hen Book*, the children did the hen, dog, cat, and the duck. They retold the story in their own words. We also made the hen, dog and the duck in different colors to match by color. The children also made a farm in the block center and role-played the animals. In the library center we did puzzles and lacing cards out of the animals. I feel that what the children enjoyed or had more fun with was the role-playing they all wanted to be the hen. Some did not mind being one of the animals. We also tasted the wheat bread. Some of the children like it but others said it was OK and ate some of it. The children enjoyed all the activities we did with just one story. The participants realized that with one story we break it down into so many activities. We the staff and the children enjoyed ourselves and the days go by very quickly.

The book, *I Don’t Want to Sleep Tonight*, was read and introduced to the children. I introduced the book and the cover. I asked the children what they thought the book was going to be about. I also introduced the characters in the book. As we read the book we could flip the flaps and read it or make up own story. For art we created what we had dreamed at night. The children also drew a monster they thought they would see at night. (For) Discovery we did clouds and counted the clouds. For dramatic (play) we role-played the book and what some of the children had dreamed the night before. For manipulative, we laced a monster. The book was placed in the book center the children read the book to each other and shared their dreams. It was interesting to listen to what every child had dreamed and how some of the children just make up their own dreams.
Case Three

Children said the rhyme first Jack and Jill and I had the children do hand movements. I wanted them to learn what is up and what is down, plus, learning and naming the words girl and boy. The children cut out puppets for Jack and Jill so they can understand the concept more visually. The children really like the activity because they had an actual picture of what they were singing. They pick up the verses quick when they actually finish their project. The children also had an understanding of up and down. I also told the children to pick up the girl puppet and boy puppet so I can see if they know the difference. I feel that they learn faster when they have the picture or object in their hand. It identifies the rhyme more to them.

Children like imitating and pretending (they are) catching a bumblebee. Children were very involved in the finger play. They gave reactions and facial expressions on the finger play. I saw that they closely followed the teacher’s hand movements, which develops their cognitive skills and small motor. It also really helps them to develop their feelings of sad, mad, hurt, angry and exciting. The children like catching the pretend bumblebee in their hand and after it stings them on their palm they learn how they felt. This helps the children describe their feelings and understand what “emotions” mean.

The children really liked the story and they especially like the colorful animal. I notice that they really had their eyes glue to the book. They seem to enjoy when I made sound of the animals. When I finish the book the children responded very well to the story. They answer questions about the story and they named all the animals that were in the book. Plus, they wanted me to read it again, so they can see the animals and read along with me. The book had a rhythm to the story that the children enjoyed, which made it easier for them to learn the book and take part in the lesson. They also had a chance to choose an animal from the story. All the children wanted to be a different animal from the book. So the teacher gave them a choice for a puppet animal. Some of the children didn’t know their colors very well. So, I asked them to be creative. The children were excited to choose their own animal and use their color. The children also were excited to use scissors. I saw (on) their faces, that they were working” very hard to cut out their animal very carefully. The children like getting their fingers with glue and they were giggling with each other. The children seemed to enjoy the activity because I saw them really like getting their hands dirty and sticky. The children communicated with one another and compared their different animals. When their work was done, they made animal sounds and imitated their own animal from the book.
The children enjoyed listening to the story *The Ugly Duckling* and how it became a beautiful swan. The teacher showed the picture of the duckling for the activity. The children began to collage the duckling and covering it with yellow construction paper. Some of the children were calling their duckling beautiful because they wanted it to be like the beautiful swan. The children like gluing and getting their finger sticky with glue. The children were recalling the story back to the teacher while doing their activity. The children were recalling the story back to the teacher, while doing their activity. The children were telling why they didn’t like the duckling and who were the animals that the duckling encountered, when the duckling ran away. The teacher explained that everyone is beautiful in (their) own way. The children “collaged” it very slowly and carefully, so it can look pretty. Some children put a lot of yellow construction paper because they said that the ducks have a lot of feather and so it can fly like a bird. The children even made duck sounds because the teacher was making sound of the duck while reading the story. The children also asked if all ducks were the same color. I thought that was a very good question that one of the students asked. I told the children that not all ducks are yellow. Ducks can be black, white, brown, and gray. While the children were doing their work, I noticed that they were looking at each other and swaying side to side like the ducks. The teacher also told the children how the duck walks, while telling the story of the duckling. The children were laughing and giggling on how they were moving side to side.

**Case Four**

During this week it is the same routine from the previous week. During circle time we saluted the flag, sang the Head Start song. The Rhyme of the week is *Jack Be Nimble*. Children enjoyed jumping over the candle. They jumped over and over again. They also learned safety tips if it were real fire on the candle. Again we usually do finger plays before going to wash our hands or before naptime we read a story. One of their favorite finger plays is *Al Subir Una Montana, Where is Thumpkin*, (and) *Pin Pin*. The book I read was *There’s a Nightmare in my Closet*. I showed them the pictures in the book and pointed to the words for the children to follow. All of the activities are bilingual. In the afternoon children will pick a book they want to have read to them, if it has colored animals. I ask (the children) questions, “What is this animal called”? “What color is it”? For example *Brown Bear* book has all animals in colors, blue horses, black sheep, red bird, etc.

I introduced the finger play to the children first. I repeated the words for them to get familiar to the play. Then they were anxious to get started.
They liked the puppets. They all wanted to be first to use them. The puppets were displayed at the dramatic area for them to take turn to use them. While at play, I asked Yazmin, “Who is first of all the family members? She said “Daddy”. While being outdoors they kept singing it (the finger play). It wasn’t so hard for them to learn it because they already knew how to sing, Where is Thumpkin? While waiting to go to the bathroom Damian kept singing. He learns all rhymes and songs after hearing them for the first time.

Again our day starts out at 9:00 and outdoor play begins at 9:30. We have circle time where we do roll call, salute the flag, Head Start song, discuss weather, safety, nutrition, culture, unit. We ask the children questions about the culture and unit, they answer, review colors. They are learning the Calabaza song for Halloween. I did the Little White Box where children sing with me and repeat children’s names. This week I read them a story in Spanish, La Horuga Muy Hambrienta, in English The Very Hungry Caterpillar. With this story they lean to count fruits. This week I also read to them Brown Bear to review colors. I have the 3 year olds and they can recognize some colors already. To review the alphabet, we sing the alphabet song and we have the alphabet displayed on the wall. This is a routine for the whole week. The names of the stories read and the rhymes changed. Also in the morning outdoors while we do exercise we count 1-10 in every exercise for children to develop on language skills.

The story of Little Black Sambo was read to the children. They enjoyed it so much they wanted to hear it over and over again. The tigers had a great impact on the children. They (the children) all wanted to hold the pictures so I let them take turns in holding them (the pictures). They (the children) asked questions about the tigers, what they ate? They also enjoyed putting the lion mask on and pretending to be a lion. They would try to make the animal sound. (The) Children traced pictures of lions in their journal and were very creative with their drawings.

Case Five

When I first introduced the book and talked about it, my children were kind of confused. I have never shared love poems or other kind of poems. At first they weren’t paying attention to me. But after we started talking about things we liked, they were coming out with all different stories. What their Mom liked, their Father, what they liked. Some of the girls talked about how they liked to wear MOM perfume, and then the boys say they wear my Dad’s perfume too. So everybody had a story to share in class. When it came time to do the Art activity, they didn’t want to get
their hands dirty with the charcoal. I told them it was Okay. We would wash our hands afterward. They would say. My dad has some of those at home (charcoal). They (the students) really enjoy doing their artwork

I choose to do my finger play on my little hand, because the children really enjoy saying the finger play. They love using their hands to sing songs, and the activity they like getting finger paints on their hands, and using Popsicle sticks to be able to move their hands with the finger play. I have used this finger play song for the longest time. I have been working with all ages of children for about 15 years and each time I do it I see how excited they are to sing it.

I read the story *My favorite Time of the Year* and the children talked about the leaves they have at home. How they fall on their parent’s car and back yard. The children were kind of confused when I talked about the four different seasons. They understood it better when I said the different months. For example October means it is fall. Some of these kids talk about their favorite time of the year, even though they didn’t quite understand the concept of seasons and months. They also talked about how the trees at their home did die when it was real cold outside and they had to buy new ones. Two children even brought me some leaves from home the next day after reading the story just to let me know they too had leaves. The parents were telling, “As soon as we got home they wanted to go outside and collect some leaves for you”. The children were happy making their own leaves on paper, by tracing their favorite shape of leaves and coloring it. They would say, “This one looks like the leaves I have at home on my tree.

My children really like the story, they like for me to read them a book before naptime. I used this one *Corduroy* because that day a little boy was missing a button on his shirt and the kids were making fun of him. So when I started reading the story, they said “Like Juan’s shirt” is missing a button too. And I said, “Yes, just like Juan shirt, but its okay, it happens to everybody, it happened to *Corduroy* too.” They were so quiet though the story. (The) Children were talking about how they had money at home like the girl did. And their Mom and Dad had money too. Some of the children said they had a teddy bear at home too. For art the children paste buttons on a shirt. Juan wanted to take buttons so his mother can sew one to his shirt.
Researcher’s Summary

Research Question 2 identified the literacy practices employed by the participants while working with preschool children. Data was collected and analyzed from the Narrative Reflections of the participants during four literacy events: (a) nursery rhymes, (b) finger plays, (c) picture books and (d) folk tales. The researcher compiled a list of practices from information in the review of the literature of this dissertation and used them to establish uniformity in identifying literacy practices. The literacy practices employed by the participants while teaching preschool children are as follows: (a) literacy practices employed to lead the preschool children, (b) literacy practices employed to engage responses from the preschool children, and (c) literacy practices employed to extend the literature selection.

Literacy practices employed to lead the preschool children included reading the rhyme and repeated readings for familiarity using hand movements and hand clapping. After retelling the rhyme with a flannel board, the participants explained the words the children did not understand and lead the children in a discussion of their favorite phrases in the rhymes.

The literacy practices employed to engage responses from the preschool children included listening to the rhyme, saying the rhyme, and singing the rhyme. Also, the children retold the rhyme substituting children’s names for Mary and retelling the lines using boy and girl puppets. In addition, the children clapped along with their hands, using the boy and girl puppets to retell the rhyme.
Literacy practices employed to extend the literature selection included the children making individual books, and counting lambs and matching numbers on lambs for number recognition. Finally, the children dramatized the characters in the rhyme and retold the story on the playground.

The literacy practices employed to lead the preschool children included saying the line and repeating the words until the children became familiar with the words. The participants also repeated the lines of the finger play using finger motions and retold the finger play using stick puppets.

The literacy practices employed to engage response from the preschool children included repeating the lines, singing the rhyme, and practicing the finger movements. Also, the children played with puppets and pretended to be stung by a bumblebee.

The literacy practices employed to extend the literature selection included the preschool children examining a plastic spider and naming the body parts of the spider. Also, the participants let the children talk about emotions, make facial expressions, and describe their feelings. In addition, the participants extended the literature selection by encouraging the children to repeat the finger play during outside play.

Literacy practices employed to lead the preschool children included reading the story in Spanish and English. The participants repeated readings of the story using a different version and asking questions. In addition, the participants lead discussions of the seasons, fruits, and counting numbers.

The literacy practices employed to engage responses from the preschool children included the children reading along with the story and asking the children higher order
thinking questions. Also, the children observed pictures of butterflies and discussed the life cycle of a butterfly.

The literacy practices employed to extend the literature selection included making individual books, making a butterfly collage, cutting and gluing animal puppets, and creating a butterfly, using circles. Also, the children dramatized the characters in the folktale making animal sounds while moving like animals.

The literacy practices employed to lead the preschool children included reading the story in Spanish and English. The participants also repeated the tale or told the story in their own words. One participant led the preschool children in a meaningful conversation and discussion that cast positive attention on the young boy with the missing shirt button.

Literacy practices employed to engage responses from the children in response to the literature selection included making individual books, drawing the characters, working puzzles of the characters, and lacing cards of the animals. The children made masks and role-played the characters making animal sounds and movements.

The literacy practices employed to extend the literature selection included drawing pictures of what they dreamed, lacing a monster, and role-playing the book about dreams. They enjoyed tasting the wheat bread and asked to hear the story over and over.

Research Question 2 asked: What literacy practices are employed by the participants while teaching preschool children? Based on the analysis of the Narrative Reflections, the participants employed a variety of literacy practices while teaching
preschool children. Literacy practices ranged from reading and repeating the words of the literature selection to a more abstract situation of using a book to solve a real life situation. The participants demonstrated an understanding of the concept of literacy events as involving more than reading or telling a story. The experiences extended to all areas of the classroom and often continued through the day. The participants engaged the children in literacy practices that enhanced the literature selection and allowed an opportunity for social, emotional, aesthetic, and cognitive development. They provided an opportunity for the preschool children to engage in literacy practices that extended the literature selection and encouraged development in social, cognitive, emotional, and language development.

Research Question Three

Research Question 3: Will participation in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” change any of the beliefs of the participants regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children? To answer Research Question 3, the researchers analyzed the responses of the participants from Final Guided Questions. At the end of the course, the participants responded to Final Guided Questions pertaining to the general categories of literacy practices used to engage young preschool children in activities that encourage literacy development including (a) literacy events, (b) class presentations, (c) literacy units, and (d) language preferred. The initial organization was found within the broad categories predetermined by the subject of each guided question. The guided questions examined any change in beliefs of the participants and subsequent literacy practices employed with preschool children.
The following section includes the exact text of the participants’ *Final Guided Questions*. Following the text of the participants’ entries, the research provides a summary of the participants’ entries and identifies changes that occur in the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children. A concluding paragraph answers the research question.

**Literacy Events**

The participants were asked the question: How did your concept of a literacy event change? In addition, they were asked the question: How useful were literacy events while teaching preschool children. The following contains the participants’ responses to these *Final Guided Questions*.

**Case One**

I believe that it (my concept of a literacy event) changed in the aspect that I now realize the importance of reading to children on a daily basis at least three to four times. Children enjoy hearing new rhymes, finger plays, and stories. They like to act (out) stories and get involved in anything that has to deal with literacy. I learned a lot from each (class) presentation. (They) also gave me ideas so I can better plan and prepare materials and activities with the children under my care. (The) Children enjoyed hearing several of the stories I have read to them and especially they are getting a routine of drawing their own ideas into a clean piece of paper.

**Case Two**

My concept of literacy changed because of taking this class and seeing all the presentations. I was able to see and get more ideas of how to work with children and include letters and what children need to learn. The events were very useful because the children enjoy doing all the activities and they are kept busy and are learning at the same time. It was hard to plan everything and prepare but once you get used to it is easy and enjoyable.
Case Three

I feel that it has changed my way of thinking, you can learn a lot in literacy books. There are special meanings behind each book and the whole meaning of literacy events has a purpose in each book you read. I thought it helped children listen and develop their communication skills. The children participated more and they were always excited to listen to a story. I knew I could setup a lesson because I do it almost every week, but using a literacy event in my lesson wasn’t hard. I pick my center areas related to the story.

Case Four

I thought all the literacy events were great. Everyone in the class had very good activities. Usefulness I presented several of the activities to the children when I had extra time from my weekly plan and they really enjoyed them. I got started with the event I had all the confidence in the world thanks to Mrs. Earth, who was a great help and gave me some ideas. It is just how one of the girls said, “Once you get started you can’t stop.”

Case Five

It has changed a good deal. I used to read to the children when I didn’t have anything else to do, maybe because it was raining outside. I realized now how important it is to read to the children, how much they learn. Very useful, I get some great ideas from the other students that I am now using in my classrooms. It has opened up my mind to do just not reading but something to go among with, to make it fun and interesting for my children. I don’t have any kind of problem coming up with a literacy event. It is so much easier when you have been working with children for years. You get so many ideas down the read. I had a great time working on my literacy event. I feel so good about myself and (what) I have accomplished on my own. I hope I get a good grade on it.

Literacy Units

The participants were asked the question: How did the role of literacy units change your approach to teaching as a result of this class? They were also asked the
question: What are the advantages of using literacy as a base for developing units? The following represents their responses to this Final Guided Question.

Case One

I feel that the units that were presented gave me some wonderful ideas to implement in my classroom. The unit I did with some of my classmates took a lot of work, yet it was rewarding having so many ideas for a simple (one) topic. Children enjoyed the flashcards and materials that were taught to them and they seemed to be expanding their vocabulary more with the units I presented. It also helped me plan in my lessons that I teach.

Case Two

The literacy unit I enjoyed very much because one book or idea can expand to so many books and from their work to all the books and get more ideas from the children. The advantage in using units is that from one idea we expand it and we get to do so many activities.

Case Three

I know I have learned to use the literacy event for each center areas and it has taught me to teach children in different approaches. I now know that by using a literacy event you have many kinds of units depending on the story we are using for the children.

Case Four

Literacy Units are very important in a child’s language and communication skills development. My children get the opportunity to have stories read to them and I have them choose a book when want to listen to during playtime. One advantage of using literacy as a base for developing units is how helpful they are going to be for the children to learn
Case Five

My concept of literacy has changed so many different ways. I now see the whole picture of having literacy in the classroom and how important is for the parents to continue at home with your children. It has made a big different at work, my parents are so involved now, I ask my children to bring me a book from home so I can read them before naptime and the kids bring me books everyday. Even the parents are now buying their kids books and reading to them at home. I had two children that brought a book and then self read to their friends in the classroom. O course they cannot read but they had memorized the whole book, word for word. I was so impressed. The act of the children self-reading a book, made me feel good about myself. Proud of my self because I actually started something for these parents and their children.”

There are so many advantages of using literacy for developing a unit. The children love it. Having to do activities that reflect on the book, they remember the story better, they have so many things to say and share with their friends and parents. It is “fun for me and fun for them.” I have enjoyed now doing literacy events in my classroom, not only do I read a book and that’s it, I do things with it so many children can remember the story later on.

Class Presentations

The participants were asked the question: Were the class presentations helpful to you? The following section contains the participants’ responses to this Final Guided Question.

Case One

The presentations were definitely helpful because there were stories, finger plays, folktales, and rhymes that I had never heard and some I did not know how to teach to the children. The only difficulty I encountered was making copies (for handouts) because it was kind of expensive making copies for thirty students, besides that the rest was fine. I did get more confidence in preparing well for my presentation and I had more courage to make my presentations, and to teach the children under my care.
Case Two

All of the presentations were very helpful and fun to watch. By seeing all the presentations we are able to learn and get more ideas. This way we can better help our children. The most difficult task I found was getting all the material together having to work all day and the going to school. My confidence level changed to a ten from one to ten.

Case Three

Yes, the class presentations were helpful the student had many helpful ideas. I like when they gave us handouts of their presentation and patterns of the activity. Patterns are very helpful. I learned a lot and I see that having a literacy event for the children will help them learn a lot. The only difficulty I had is trying to get hold of a computer. Unfortunately, I don’t have one. Plus, I did have a little difficulty in understanding some projects, but I seem to overcome and complete the tasks.

Case Four

Yes, the class presentations were helpful. Some of the girls had great ideas and great activities. The Christmas Book is an example. At the beginning I did not have a computer and I did not have much knowledge of operating one. My son gave me his computer after he learned how much trouble I was having doing my work. So now that I have the computer I have leaned how to operate it.

At the beginning of a presentation I get very nervous, but you made me comfortable. After a couple of minutes I felt better and enjoyed doing the presentation. Definitely, my level of confidence changed.

Case Five

Yes, very! I love learning from other students getting ideas and going back to my classroom and sharing with my children and co-workers. I got some great ideas!” I did not have any difficulty in preparing for my presentation. My confidence changed because I got good feed back from my instructor and from my classmates in class. It made me feel proud of my self, and the students were asking me questions. I felt very good about myself and I still do.
Language Preference

The participants were asked to describe the language preferred by the children they engaged during the literacy events. The following section contains the participants’ responses to this Final Guided Question.

Case One

The language I encountered most was Spanish because most of the children under my care speak Spanish. I read most of the stories in English one day and the next in Spanish. What I mainly had to do was to translate most of my activities into Spanish, which I did not have difficulty doing, yet some children are already saying words in English. It is amazing to see children role play a story when they are in the book center.

Case Two

The children I have are four and most are five years old. The children enjoyed all the activities I did with them. They wanted more and more activities. The language(s) we used was/ (were) English and Spanish. We try to get the children to speak English and they are trying to say some words.

Case Three

Describe the children? Some children were eager to listen to a story and others were very good listeners. Language played an important roll in the literacy event. The literacy unit that was read to the children, the children recalled the story and answered question about the story. Plus, the activities that the children participated act (as an) important role of language development.

Case Four

The main issue for me is the importance for children to develop language and communication sills by letting them browse through books and reading to them. By letting them be creative, giving them paper and all material needed for them to make their own creation giving then a chance
to express thoughts, ideas and imagination. The children I encountered in the literacy events were very excited and anxious to make activities and listen to stories. I did most of my events and units in English, but on some occasions I did them bilingual.

I have children that don’t understand English.

Case Five

I said before my children enjoyed doing literacy events in the classroom. When nobody brings a book, they say “Mrs. Ortio, you are not going to read us a book because nobody brought one today? I said, “Of course I am.” Either I read one of their favorite books we have in the classroom, or I borrow a book from the other teachers. The children always remember that we read a story before naptime.

It was difficult deciding what language I was going to use. I usually read a book in English, but after I read the first page I said it is Spanish and so on with the other pages. I repeat everything I say in Spanish to English. I sing songs in both languages. It’s hard when most of your students only speak and understand Spanish.

Researcher’s Summary

All 5 participants’ responses on the Final Guided Questions implied that their concept of literacy events changed, as result of the course. All 5 participants indicated the literacy events were useful when employed with preschool children. One participant noted her experience had expanded to involve the parents of the children. They became more interested in the children’s reading and began buying books to send to school with their child.

All 5 participants’ responses indicated that they realized the advantages of teaching around a literacy theme. All participants mentioned that literacy units helped with planning lessons. One participant commented that as a result of the course, she could
see the whole picture of literacy and understood the importance of literacy in the classroom.

The participants’ responses reflected enthusiasm about class presentations. Seeing the participants demonstrate the various literacy events and the literacy practices employed to lead and engage children was very motivating and encouraging to the participants.

The responses of the participants indicated that the preschool children they taught spoke Spanish. They implied that the children either do not understand English or have a limited understanding. However, the participants mentioned reading the selection in both languages and discussing the plot and the characters in both English and Spanish. In spite of the limited understanding of English, all 5 participants recorded that the children were eager to listen and enjoy the experience. One participant’s comment indicated that the children were beginning to say words in English.

Research Question 3 determined any changes that occurred in the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed with preschool children after taking the emergent literacy course. Based on the analysis of the Final Guided Questions, changes did occur in the participant beliefs and literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children. All of the 5 participants expressed a change in their concept of literacy events as a result of the course. The 5 participants’ responses indicated they appreciate the advantages of planning and teaching around a literacy unit. The participants’ responses reflected enthusiasm to the question pertaining to class presentations and how they had been instrumental in motivating and encouraging
creative plans and experiences for the preschool children. The participants indicated the preschool children they taught spoke the Spanish language and have a limited understanding of the English language. However, after the participants incorporated the literacy experiences, the children were eager for the experiences and were beginning to say words in English.

**Research Question Four**

Research Question 4: What are the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children 3 years after completing the course entitled Emergent Literacy? To answer the research question, the researcher analyzed the responses of the participants to the *Follow-Up Survey*. The following section will discuss the data obtained from the *Follow-Up Survey*. First the researcher asked the participants to recall their beliefs with regard to emergent literacy prior to taking the course and the ways they thought children learned to read. Next, the inquiry addressed the participants’ beliefs regarding the usefulness of the four literacy practices used in the course.

The following section represents the participants’ exact responses from the *Follow–Up Survey* and answered the research question: What are the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy employed and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children 3 years after completing the course. Following the exact responses of the participants, a summary of the participants’ responses is provided. Finally, a concluding paragraph identifies the beliefs of the
participants and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children.

Initial Literacy Beliefs

The participants were asked what their thoughts were regarding emergent literacy prior to taking the emergent literacy course. They were also asked how they thought children learned literacy. The following section contains the participants’ responses to that question of the *Follow-Up Survey*.

Case One

I felt that the implementation of literacy practices was not very important in the daily routine of the children. I thought the children learned through daily communication with the children.

Case Two

Before I took the emergent literacy course I did not really think much about literacy, only children had to learn letters. The way I thought children learned literacy was by going over the letters on a daily basis but I was wrong because letters can be taught in all the learning areas.

Case Three

My thoughts about literacy were learning to read and write and having an understanding of literature. I thought children learn literacy by teachers reading to them and showing them pictures of book, that way they would have an understanding of the stories.

Case Four

My thoughts about literacy were just about reading books to the children. I did not know that it also involved finger plays, rhymes, poems, and many
other ways. I thought children just learned by having books read to them, and finger plays.

Case Five

My thoughts about literacy were that I was going to learn the proper way to read to the children, what books were proper for the different age’s groups. The way I thought children would learn literacy was just by reading to them.

Literacy Practices

The participants were asked: Now that you have taught in the classroom, how useful have the following literacy practices been in your current position? The following section contains the participant’s responses to this question of the *Follow-Up Inquiry*.

Case One

The class gave me an understanding of how to teach children stories. I learned how to use stories and break them down in the web to further extend the lessons. I work with 3-year-old children and I need to make my activities interesting and informative, so they can have a learning experience in all 7 areas (Discovery Area, Block Area, Dramatic Area, Art Area, Book Area, Writing Area and Music Area). I feel that through rhymes and stories children learn more and expand their imagination. It helps them develop their thinking skills as well as their social skills. The literacy units helped the children under my care to be more in touch with the topic being presented for that week. Children had the opportunity to focus on the unit and material being presented by seeing it in each center that they went to and doing hands on activities on that unit. I learned good ideas that were presented in class like the one where a student made her own apron and added Velcro to present the story, *There Was An Old Lady*. It was amazing how she told the story and added each character in her apron. I also learned that you could make and create your own ideas to make it more interesting for the children under our care. I feel more prepared when it comes to reading, doing nursery rhymes, using folktales, and preparing a unit for each week. I am now able to implement my ideas and other student’s ideas in my everyday activities with the children. It has helped me be more open with the children. I have learned that through literacy, children learn and
that it is very important to read at least three or four books a day and ask open-ended questions to our children.

Case Two

I have found literacy very useful in all the learning areas. Children learn throughout the day in whatever they are doing, especially when we have materials ready for them in the learning areas with letters, words and other educational activities. Literacy events are very useful when working with preschool children. It is very useful to have one theme in all areas because the children are learning one theme in all the learning areas. Children learn when a theme is taught as a literacy unit for a whole week. A literacy unit is very useful because we need a unit to start the week or weeks. The best way to start in my opinion is by doing a web. The class presentations have been very helpful because we get ideas from our classmates. A lot of times our minds are blank and we can go back to our classmate’s presentation to get ideas and work from there. The portfolio has been very useful because a lot of times we have so much in our minds that we forget information. With a portfolio we can always go back and get ideas and information. The portfolio can also be helpful for other educational classes.

Case Three

When teaching a story or a rhyme to children, it important to have them understands the concept or the lesson behind the story. In order to teach them further, the teacher needs to plan activities that relate to the story or the rhyme. For example, if you are teaching “The Three Little Pigs”, you can have lessons on art by collage a pig, creating a house of sticks, hay, or bricks. Learning about sounds of animals in the farm, lesson on sizes by using plastic pig, learning about different kinds of wolfs, dogs. The children can create their own story and ending. The literacy unit has been very helpful. I do use units in my curriculum, but not stories or rhymes. The literacy unit gives me ideas and methods on how to use different kinds of lessons relating to the stories or rhymes. It has helped me teach and help my children better understand the literacy unit that is planned for them. Class presentations were very useful, it gave me ideas on lesson that I can use for my children. The students had great units for lessons, which I have used in my class. Having others present lessons in the classroom, gave me so many ideas that I could explore further and create my own lessons. My children enjoyed learning about the units that were presented by the students. I really enjoyed observing the class presentation, it helps
me plan and teach my children different ways of learning. Preparing a portfolio throughout the semester and keeping it as a reference has helped me better plan and teach my lesson to the children. I do go back and see the documentation on how they use their lesson and materials. I use the units and their materials to put it on my lesson plan to help my children understand a story or rhyme.

Case Four

Now that I have put what I learned in the literacy class into practice, I believe that the children; have widely expanded their language skills. They enjoy and like the variety of literacy activities being presented to them. The literacy events are very useful. The children enjoy these activities. They seem to want them repeated over and over. It has helped them to share feelings and ideas. By sharing ideas children overcome shyness and sharing helps their social behavior. A literacy Unit is very helpful to children, it helps them get familiar with a certain topic or event if it is used in a variety of activities. The class presentations were of much help to me, I implemented some of the activities to my children and they enjoyed them. Not only did it help the children in the classroom, being one of the presenters, helped me overcome my shyness among my peers. By keeping a portfolio helped me to be an organized person, be creative, and also keep all those wonderful ideas of my peers with me forever. I learned about Portfolios from you, I am very happy that you taught me to keep a portfolio. It has helped me throughout my other classes.

Case Five

Very useful. I have to read three times a day to the children or do an activity called “drop everything and read.” It has made me realize how important it is to read to the children everyday. I realize through the course that having finger play, songs, props, rhymes, flannel board stories, having the children even role playing the story is very important. It makes the experience fun for the children. They enjoy it and they remember the story. They can retell the story and they contribute to the class in a group discussion.

Literacy Units were very useful. Now, when I work on my lesson plans, I use books to reflect the unit we will be learning, there are so many fun activities I do to reinforce the story. I even have children bring a book from home that I might be able to use for the literacy unit. The children
love the ideas of the teachers reading their book. I also have center books that reflect each center.

I loved class presentation. I looked forward to observing the presentations. I got great idea from my classmates. I took those ideas back to my classroom and used them and shared with my co-workers. I still go back to my portfolio to use some of those ideas; it's like a guide for me. I even share those ideas with my co-workers. I have art activities that children made for the books I read, that I use when planning my lesson plan. I realize now you can do so many activities.

Researcher’s Summary

Prior to taking the course, the participants did not realize literacy was important in the daily life of the children. They believed literacy was children learning to read and write and children learning letters. They believed literacy was reading to children. The course changed their beliefs. Moreover, all of the participants’ responses indicated the continued use of literacy events three years after completing the course. Two cases indicated that children learn more when stories, rhymes, finger plays, flannel boards, songs, props and puppets are used. Another case reported literacy events provided opportunities for extending a story.

The participants indicated they now believe children become more in touch with the unit theme when they have the experience of books and characters that extend the lessons. They believe literacy units supplement a theme that is required in the curriculum they teach because of the added experiences.

The participants’ responses were very supportive of the class presentations. They report receiving useful and creative ideas. Furthermore, they indicated that the
experiences of presenting helped prepare them for reading stories, nursery rhymes, telling folk tales and preparing literacy units.

The participants’ responses indicated that they continue to use the portfolios compiled during the course. They use their portfolios as a reference book and a resource for planning and teaching. They also indicated that the process of preparing a portfolio helped their organizational skills.

Research Question 4 asked: What are the beliefs of the participants regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children 3 years after completing the course entitled Emergent Literacy. Based on the analysis of the Follow-Up Survey the participants had refined their definition of emergent literacy. Their responses indicated they have experienced success employing the literacy practices while teaching preschool children. They continue to plan and use literacy events daily. Furthermore, they use their portfolios as a resource of literature selections and guide for activities to employ while teaching preschool children.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 contained the results and discussion of the data obtained from the 5 participants’ journal entries including the In-Class Journal Entries, Narrative Reflections, and Final Guided Questions and the data from the participants’ responses on the Follow-Up Survey. Based on the analysis of data, the initial beliefs of the participants with regards to emergent literacy were not well formed or defined. Moreover, their practices appeared to be random activities in which they failed to see the literacy connection. However, after participating in the course, their beliefs regarding emergent literacy and
their subsequent uses of literacy practices had changed. Not only did the type of activities employed change but also their motivation for using the activities. They could now see the link between the activities and emergent literacy. Evidence of their change of beliefs was validated by their continued use of the practices taught in the course 3 years later.
CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a summary of the first three chapters: Review of the Literature, Methods and Materials, and Results and Conclusions. Following this is a discussion of the conclusions reached based on the data gathered during this research. The final section presents conclusions on how this research can advance the literature on emergent literacy, Hispanic students, and preschool children.

Summary

Chapter 1 began with a summary of the literature on emergent literacy. Researchers agree that emergent literacy (a) begins before children receive formal instruction, (b) encompasses learning about reading, writing and print prior to schooling, (c) is acquired through informal as well as adult-directed home and school activities, and (d) facilitates acquisition of specific knowledge of reading.

Research findings on the importance of literacy experiences beginning early in a child’s life before formal reading instruction shifts the focus from learning letters and sounds as part of reading readiness to meaningful experiences that encourage literacy development. Recent theories indicate that reading, writing and oral language are
interrelated and develop concurrently in literate environments (Teal, 1999; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1999).

In recent years, research has yielded new findings on the manner in which literacy develops in young children (Britsch & Meier, 1999; Kirk, 1998). More opportunities to listen to stories are associated with increased vocabulary development (LEAP, 2003) and more reading results in improved literacy development. The children who read more or live in a “print rich” environment do better in school. From an emergent literacy perspective, the development of literacy can occur in formal or informal settings.

Three concepts arise from an emergent literacy perspective that influence how we think about early reading and writing development: (a) literacy starts early, (b) young children construct their understanding of literacy, and (c) adults are vital in teaching children literacy (Teale, 1999).

The first concept explores when literacy learning starts. Emergent literacy research has shown, contrary to the once held notion of reading and writing beginning when a child enters preschool, that children are engaging in literacy development even before preschool (Gainsky, 1997).

The second concept explores how preschool children become literate. Preschool children are active learners that need to explore and experiment with language and literacy. Preschool children construct their understanding of reading and writing using what they know about their literate environment and their interactions with literate adults and older children (Teale, 1999; Snow, 1999; NAEYC, 2002).
The third concept deals with the necessary role adults play in the process of young children’s reading and writing development (NAEYC, 2002; Yang, 2000). Adults enable children in their literacy development by providing personal and meaningful interactions. Adults teach children in real life contexts by encouraging, scaffolding and answering questions. Reading stories and books aloud to children is a common type of experience that supports literacy development (Teale, 1999; Yang, 2000).

Differences in literacy development among children from different economic, racial and linguistic backgrounds begin to appear in the preschool years (Snow, 1999). According to Dickenson and Tabor (2002), linguistically and culturally diverse children are at risk for not becoming successful readers and writers. However, the research suggests that the early childhood period is the time to intervene to help linguistically and culturally diverse children develop a strong literacy foundation.

According to Garcia (1997) and Ramires (2003), preschool teachers must be knowledgeable about the educational needs of the ethnically and linguistically diverse population of children of today, if they are to provide them with an education that is equitable to that of mainstream children. The National Association for the Education of Young (1998) contends that adults working in early childhood programs need specialized college level education and preparation that informs them about the developmental patterns of emergent literacy learning. Teacher educators need to impact students existing beliefs and understandings in such a way that will make a difference in their practices when they have their own classrooms and teach young children (Tabor 1998).
The purpose of this study was to identify the beliefs of the participants with regards to emergent literacy. An additional purpose was to identify the literacy practices employed by the participants in literacy events with preschool children. A further purpose was to determine if participation in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” changed any of the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed by the participants in literacy events with preschool children. The final purpose of this study was to determine the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed in the classroom with preschool children three years after completing the emergent literacy course.

The following research questions were formulated to investigate these specific areas:

1. What are the beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy?

2. What are the literacy practices employed by the participants while teaching preschool children?

3. Will participation in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” change any of the participants’ beliefs of the participants with regard to emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children?

4. What are the beliefs of the participants regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children three years after completing the course entitled “Emergent Literacy”?
Chapter 2 presented the details of the methodology used to conduct this research. A case study research design was selected to identify the participants’ beliefs about emergent literacy and the literacy practices they used to engage preschool children during literacy events. The study determined if participation in the course entitled “Emergent Literacy” changed the participants’ beliefs and subsequent literacy practices used to engage preschool children in literacy events. Finally, the study determined the participants’ beliefs and subsequent literacy practices used to engage preschool children in the classroom three years after completing the emergent literacy course.

The population of the study consisted of students who were enrolled in an emergent literacy course during the fall of 2001 at Prince Community College in Texas. Five of the students from the population of the 26 students were purposefully selected as participants for this study. The students were purposefully selected based on the following criteria: (a) were Hispanic, (b) taught preschool children, (c) planned to return to the classroom to teach after completing the course, (d) completed all the journal responses and narratives, and (e) provided entries and narratives that were rich in content and description.

Two instruments were used to gather data for the study. The first instrument was the researcher. As with most qualitative research, the researcher served as the main data collection instrument. The researcher examined the archived data in the form of journal entries. The journal entries included (a) In-Class Journal Entry, (b) Narrative Reflections, and (c) Final Questions. The researcher examined the data found within the journals to
identify beliefs and literacy practices of the participants prior to and after instruction of emergent literacy.

The second instrument utilized in this study was the *Follow–Up Inquiry* that was mailed to the participants 3 years after they completed the emergent literacy course. The *Follow–Up Survey* gathered data that was used to identify the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and literacy practices used to engage preschool children in their current childcare classrooms. Analysis of the data focused on the participants’ initial beliefs regarding emergent literacy, the initial literacy practices they employed while teaching preschool children, changes in beliefs and practices that occurred as a result of the emergent literacy course and the participants’ beliefs and use of literacy practices three years after completing the course.

The In-Class Journal Entry of the 5 participants provided insight for answering Research Question 1. The data identified the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy. The participants had not heard many of the stories, folk tales, and rhymes introduced during the class, indicating the emergent literacy concept of exposing children to various types of literature was new to them. This finding also indicates that many of the students in the emergent literacy class were not familiar with much of the literature that is often used in childcare settings. The participants’ responses in the In-Class Journal Entry also indicated that the participants were not familiar with literacy events associated with different types of children’s literature.

The data also indicated that the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy were not well formed or defined. Not only did the participants express limited experience
with literacy events but their responses also indicated that they had misunderstanding regarding literacy and how preschool children become literate.

Research Question 2 identified the literacy practices the participants used to engage preschool children in literacy events. The researcher analyzed the data from the Narrative Reflections of the participants during the four literacy events.

The use of a variety of literacy practices was identified in the Narrative Reflections of the five cases. Literacy events ranged from reading and repeating the word to a more abstract use of a book to solve a real life situation. The participants demonstrated an understanding of the concept of literacy events as involving more than reading or telling a story. Their understanding of literacy events held that literacy experiences extended to all areas of the classroom and often continued throughout the day. The participants engaged the children in literacy practices that enhanced the literature selections and allowed an opportunity for social, emotional, aesthetic, and cognitive development.

The third research question determined changes in the beliefs and literacy practices participants used to engage preschool children in literacy events that occurred as a result of the emergent literacy course. Data was collected from the Final Guided Questions that addressed the literacy practices the participants employed while teaching preschool children.

Based on the analysis of the Final Guided Questions, changes did occur in the participants’ beliefs and literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children. All of the 5 participants expressed a change in their concept of literacy events as a result
of the course. The 5 participants’ responses indicated they appreciated the advantages of planning and teaching around a literacy theme. The participants’ responses reflected enthusiasm for class presentations and indicated how the presentations had been instrumental in motivating and encouraging creative plans and experiences for the preschool children. The participants indicated that the preschool children they taught spoke the Spanish language with a limited understanding of the English language. However, after the participants incorporated the new literacy experiences, the children were eager for more literacy related activities and were beginning to use more English in their communications.

Research Question 4 asked the question: What are the participants’ beliefs regarding emergent literacy and subsequent literacy practices employed while teaching preschool children 3 years after completing the course entitled “Emergent Literacy.” To answer the question, the researcher analyzed the responses of the participants’ Follow-Up Inquiry.

Based on the analysis of the Follow-Up Inquiry, the participants had refined their definition of emergent literacy. Their responses indicated they had experienced success employing the literacy practices while teaching preschool children. They continued to plan and use literacy events daily. Further, they also indicated that they used their portfolios as a resource of literature selections and guide for activities to employ while teaching preschool children.
Conclusions and Recommendations

There were three purposes for this study. The first purpose was to identify the beliefs and practices of Hispanic students enrolled in an emergent literacy course with regards to emergent literacy. The second purpose was to determine if participating in a course entitled “Emergent Literacy” would change any of their initial beliefs and practices regarding emergent literacy. The final purpose for this study was to determine if the participants still employed the methods they learned in the emergent literacy course 3 years after completing the literacy course. The findings of the current study indicate that initially the participants had very basic and often times flawed perceptions of what constituted emergent literacy. One plausible explanation of their limited scope of beliefs and practices may hinge on the fact that their exposure to children’s literature was somewhat limited. Their journal responses indicated that many popular children’s stories and activities were new to them. In either case, the participants believed emergent literacy practices merely consisted of reading to children and teaching them the alphabet through drill and rote memorization. The practices they initially employed included reading to the children and having them recite their alphabet. Their beliefs and practices were not consistent with research findings that suggest that children’s emergent literacy is best accomplished through integrated activities across the areas of cognitive, social, emotional, language, and fine and gross motor development (Dickerson, 2002).

The findings of this study also indicate that the participants not only changed their initial beliefs regarding emergent literacy but they also changed the practices they employed while working with preschool children. Based on this finding, once again it can
be concluded that the participants had very few personal experiences in becoming literate that are consistent with research but when provided with appropriate experiences the participants changed their beliefs and subsequent practices. Moreover, as indicated by their responses to the follow-up survey, the changes in beliefs and practices were enduring in that even three years after having taken the class they were still employing many of the literacy practices they experienced in the class.

Based on the result of this research two recommendations are made for instructors of pre-service, Hispanic, early childhood teachers. The first recommendation is the continued use of the literacy practices that were used in the emergent literacy course. The Literacy Events, Literacy Units, Class Presentations, and Portfolios were instrumental in helping not only the instructor but also the students identify their beliefs and practices regarding emergent literacy. These practices also served as a means of self-assessment and diagnostic assessment in that the instructor was able to develop instruction to alleviate many of the misconceptions of the students regarding emergent literacy. Furthermore, based on the results of this study, the emergent literacy class afforded the students the opportunity to experience many literacy practices for the first time. The second recommendation is that an additional component be added to the class. Based on the responses found in the journals, it is obvious that the students need more exposure to all kinds of children’s literature. In which case, the recommendation is that an additional requirement of the class consists of the students developing a detailed bibliography of various types of children’s literature.
REFERENCES


