CHAPTER 2
Review of Literature

The chapter looks at the central figure in education – the teacher – and attempts to delve deep into how she has been conceptualized and understood in both her personal and professional life. Since the present study grew from my work experiences, I sought to explore the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching, with the emphasis on the thoughts, beliefs, values and attitudes and how these were linked to teaching practices of teachers. The chapter firstly reviews literature associated with teacher thinking especially teacher beliefs and linkages between teacher beliefs and practices. At the end of the chapter, studies which focus on reflection as a way to enable teachers to make connections between their beliefs and practices are presented. The aim of the chapter was to review literature in the area so as to get direction on how to proceed with the present study.

Before I proceed, I would like to make a submission. The review of studies encompasses both teachers and trainee teachers as participants in the researches. Initially I had demarcated the studies into two subsets but by the time I re-looked at the review (after analyzing the results), I found it more prudent to put them together. Majority of the literature on teacher beliefs came out of ‘teacher education research’, with teacher educators trying to understand the student teachers/trainees/interns and generalizing the same across the teaching community. The findings were equally relevant to teachers.
Review of Literature

2.1 Teacher thinking

Teachers have been considered to be the key learning catalysts. The complexity of teaching has been well recognized; Daneilson (1996) recorded that the teacher made a staggering 3000 non-trivial decisions daily. The skills required were not only physically daunting but required enormous stamina (ibid, 1996). Research indicating everyday teaching involves more complex decision making than just applying theory to practice (Black & Halliwell, 2000). Research reported since the 60s portrayed teacher decision making as more like managing, taking account of multiple, competing demands, assessing possibilities to make the best decision possible within the prevailing circumstances (Jackson, 1968; Doyle & Ponder, 1977), raising the question of how teachers manage to teach within such a bewildering array of demands.

The review of the available educational literature concerning the process of teaching looked at two domains - the teachers thought processes and the teachers’ actions or observable effects (Clark & Peterson, 1986). The past few decades have seen a proliferation of research on teacher thinking (Clark, 1988) and its impact on teaching; especially with the advent of cognitive psychology and diversification of research paradigms (Fang, 1996). An investigation of teachers thought processes had two underlying assumptions - that teachers made reasonable decisions in a complex environment and these decisions guided their classroom behavior (Stern & Shavelson, 1983).

Yero (2002) made the point that researches emphasized what teachers ‘should’ be doing rather than on what they were already doing and why. The study gave examples of how pervasive and unexamined teacher thinking influenced perceptions and behavior, suggesting strongly that the thinking processes must not remain hidden.

Clark & Peterson (1986) categorized teachers’ thought processes into teacher planning, teacher decisions and teacher beliefs. To be more specific, teachers used these thought processes prior to and after classroom interactions. Nisbett & Ross
(1980) defined teachers’ beliefs as a rich store of general knowledge that affects their planning, decisions and their classroom behavior. Shulman (1986b) went further to clarify that the general knowledge included subject knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge. Beattie (1995) added a fourth dimension – personal practical knowledge which included experiential, instructional techniques and class management skills. The term was used to refer to knowledge that was assembled in forms that made it possible to manage the practicalities of teaching (Elbaz, 1981; 1991; Clandinin, 1992). It was not clear about what teachers consider to be the practical knowledge informing their decisions (Beattie, 1995); although certain methods could enhance the ways that personal images enter into teaching decisions (Black & Halliwell, 2000).

Teachers’ theories and beliefs were used to perceive, process and act upon information in the classrooms (Munby, 1982). In some way or the other, teachers’ beliefs or philosophy affected learning and teaching (Fang, 1996). Shulman (1986) surfaced the idea that the researches were invariably from the learner’s perspective, rather than the teacher’s. Some studies started to suggest that the relationships between teachers’ thought and actions were important in order to understand educational effectiveness (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Brophy & Good, 1974). Since then, researchers have focused on understanding beliefs and effects on teaching and learning.

To sum up, teaching was considered to be a highly complex activity and demanded an extensive set of competencies and skills that were connected to the thinking of practitioners.

The construct of beliefs within teacher thinking played an important role in teaching, which is detailed out in the next section.

2.2 Understanding belief systems

The focus on patterns of beliefs was effectively used by educational researchers in trying to understand the nature of teaching and learning in classrooms. Although the field of research on teacher thinking had been thriving, critics had questioned its
significance for teacher education (Shulman, 1986, 1987). An alternative focus on ‘the things and ways that teachers believe’ was recommended (Clark, 1988; Pintrich, 1990). This view was based on the assumption that beliefs were the best indicators of the decisions and choices individuals make throughout their everyday lives (Bandura, 1986; Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Rokeach 1968).

Eisenhart et al. (1988) acknowledged the difficulty in locating a working definition of teachers’ beliefs in the research literature. The construct of belief seemed difficult to define and study (Pajares, 1992; McCullen, 1997), yet it had been a subject of legitimate inquiry in fields as diverse as medicine, law, anthropology, sociology, political science as well as psychology. These fields have focused on the social and personal domains wherein the attitudes and values were addressed (Pajares, 1992).

Human beings have beliefs about everything. Rokeach (1968) defined beliefs as ‘any simple proposition, conscious or unconscious, inferred from what a person says or does...’ (p. 113). Another definition by Eisenhart et al. (1988) was that beliefs were ‘a way to describe a relationship between a task, an action, an event, or another person and an attitude of a person toward it’ (p. 53). Specifically, teachers’ beliefs were those beliefs that related to what they did in the classroom with students and materials (ibid, 1988).

Educational beliefs had always been considered too difficult to operationalize as a construct, mainly due to the complexity in interpretation. Specific types of beliefs were explored in education e.g. self-efficacy, attribution beliefs, subject-specific beliefs (mathematics, science, reading), self-esteem etc. Needless to say, each line of research delved deeply on the beliefs of teachers. The past two decades saw an upsurge in the beliefs related to subject of study.

Pajares (1992) in his insightful review pointed out that along with general beliefs, educational ‘beliefs about’ must also be understood. He gave some examples like – teacher efficacy which looked at beliefs about confidence to affect students’ performance; epistemological beliefs which related beliefs about the nature of knowledge to the subject of study; self esteem which reflected beliefs about perceptions of self and so on. Thus, educational beliefs were meant to be understood
in terms of their connections not only to each other but also to other belief substructures in the system (Kitchener, 1986; Peterman, 1991; Rokeach, 1968).

Beliefs were classified in different ways. Belief statements could be classified as: (a) descriptive beliefs e.g. It is time for children to settle down, (b) evaluative beliefs e.g. I do not enjoy teaching older children or (c) prescriptive e.g. I must reach on time otherwise the class will be too noisy. When clusters of beliefs were organized around an object or situation and predisposed to action, this holistic organisation became an attitude. Beliefs could also become values which were more evaluative, comparative, and/or judgmental functions of beliefs and replace predisposition with an imperative to action. **Beliefs, attitudes and values formed an individual’s belief system** (taken from Pajares, 1992).

Conceptualizing a belief system involved the understanding that this system is composed of beliefs connected to one another and to other cognitive/affective structures, complex and intricate though these connections may be, that form beliefs about constructs – e.g. beliefs about learning, beliefs about teaching, about children and so on. Teaching beliefs was conceptualized by frameworks. One example was Pratt’s (1998) research on different teaching perspectives. He saw beliefs as the defining attribute of teaching perspectives. They ‘represent the most stable and least flexible aspect of a person’s perspective on teaching’ (p. 21). He identified three types of beliefs fundamental to a perspective on teaching. These were: (a) epistemic beliefs (views of knowledge) which were concerned with the “why?” behind what teachers choose and how they teach. Exploring these beliefs, meant asking teachers about what they want students to learn? Moreover, how do students go about learning the course material? (b) normative beliefs focused on the social norms of a teacher’s roles, responsibilities, and relationships with students and others. Understanding these beliefs meant asking questions about what they saw as their primary role responsibilities as a teacher. (c) procedural beliefs focused on tactical skill and strategic beliefs; i.e., managing the how and when of actions in the classroom and the justification of those actions. Exploring these beliefs meant asking teachers how they introduced a new concept in class and their justification for a particular approach. These three structures form a comprehensive framework for understanding the beliefs of educators.
Kagan (1990) defined beliefs as ‘teachers’ self-reflections, beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students and content; and awareness of problem-solving strategies endemic to classroom teaching’ (p. 421), which reinforced the idea that it was an important construct in educational research (Pajares, 1992).

The importance of beliefs was justified as beliefs were not only influential in determining how individuals organised and defined teaching tasks but they became strong indicators of behaviour for beginning teachers. Kagan (1990) proposed that: ‘beliefs are those tacit and often unconsciously held preconceptions and assumptions about students, classrooms and the academic material to be taught’ (p. 65).

Studies were designed to find out how student teachers pre-formed beliefs could be aligned to teacher education (Raths, 2001; Aldridge & Bobis, 2001; Henson, 2001; Bullough, 1997; Freppon & MacGillivary, 1996; Bird et al., 1993; Wubbels, 1992; Hollingsworth, 1989). In many of these studies, teacher educators were the researchers and their aim was to find out the best way to develop the teacher education curriculum. A set of other studies attempted to find reasons for teacher education to address student teachers’ prior beliefs (Raths, 2001; Henson, 2001; Holt-Reynolds, 2000; Freppon & MacGillivary, 1996; Bird, Anderson, Sullivan & Swidler, 1993; Calderhead, 1991).

A tangential line of research looked at ‘dispositions’. Katz & Raths (1985) were the first to introduce the notion of dispositions as a goal in teacher education in the middle 80’s. Freeman (2003) made an observation that the domains of ‘knowledge, skills, and attitudes’ changed to ‘knowledge, skills, and dispositions’ without much debate. He conceived of a disposition as arising out of the interaction between and among the following components: (a) values and beliefs; (b) strategies; and (c) intention. The explanation described disposition, ‘By values and beliefs, I refer to those commitments, principles, convictions that appear to lie behind or under action, e.g., "All children can learn." By strategies I refer to those approaches, habits of mind, ways of doing things that an individual adopts in order to pursue some desired end, e.g., if I value children being able to read, I might adopt a phonics approach as a strategy. By intention, I refer to commitment to a purpose, a desire to realize an aim, e.g., if I value children being able to read and I adopt a phonics approach, I may or
may not desire implementing this approach sufficient to insure that students learn to read ‘(p. 11).

In a way, these correspond to the belief systems conceptualized by Rokeach (1968).

It seemed that people used the word belief in a variety of ways (Yero, 2002). Terms like attitudes, values, judgments, opinions, dispositions, perspectives and knowledge were used interchangeably; though many researchers tried to demarcate beliefs from other constructs (Raths, 2001; Goodenough, 1981; Aiken 2002; Richardson, 1996; Ernest, 1989; McCullen, 1997; Pajares, 1992; Freeman, 2004). The review of literature on teacher beliefs also underlines diverse definitions like preconceptions, teaching ideology, teacher perspectives and implicit theories, (Goodman, 1988; Clark, 1988; Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1984; Sharp and Green, 1975); yet these views of belief constructs as inferences of what individuals say, intend, and do were perfectly consistent with Rokeach’s (1968) definitions of belief system – beliefs, attitudes and values (Pajares, 1992).

2.3 Sources of beliefs

Individuals develop a belief system that houses all the beliefs acquired through the process of cultural transmission (Abelson, 1979; Brown and Cooney, 1982; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Posner et al., 1982). Goodenough (1981) postulated that culture provides a context for beliefs to originate which has a link to people’s behaviour. The culture contains many beliefs or assumptions about what the world is like, and also many prescriptions for conduct, which were usually learned at the level of action before there was conscious realization (Kitwood, 1983).

Beliefs have been found to emerge out of past and present experiences. The source of the beliefs could be one’s upbringing, or reflect life experiences, or the socialization processes in schools (Raths, 2001).

Individuals involved in the socialization and education of young children were presumed to hold cultural models that guide their actions (Harkness & Super, 1995). Cultural models include beliefs or conceptual schemas (e.g., "children should be seen and not heard") as well as behavioral scripts (e.g., steps to take when a child acts in

In a detailed review of literature on socialization of teachers, Zeichner & Gore (1988) presented three intellectual traditions in teacher socialization research as well as several alternative explanations of how teachers were socialized at various points in their careers—prior to, during and after their teacher education experience. Until recently, the study of teacher socialization was dominated by functionalist studies which depicted teachers as either prisoners of their pasts (e.g., of anticipatory socialization during childhood) or as prisoners of the present (e.g., of pressures emanating from the workplace) but lately there has been ‘growing consensus in the field about the highly interactive nature of the socialization process and about the constant interplay between choice and constraint in the process of learning to teach’ (p. 26). Their contention was that teachers not only influence and shape the structures into which they were being socialized but they too were being shaped by a variety of forces at many levels.

Teachers had strong beliefs about the role that education can play; about explanations for individual variation in academic performance; about right and wrong in a classroom; and many other areas. Work experience also helped in changing or realigning beliefs. Beliefs about learning and teaching were found to be drivers of decisions-making in the classrooms. Teachers had implicit assumptions—‘tacit beliefs’—regarding education, how children should be taught, their learning process and curriculum goals of which they are often unaware (Kagan, 1992). It is clear that for purposes of investigation, beliefs must be inferred. The inference must take into account the ways that individuals give evidence of belief—belief statements, intentionality to behave in a predisposed manner and behavior related to the belief in question (Rokeach, 1968).

To sum up, there was clear support in the literature about the importance of beliefs and influences. It was important to understand that if beliefs were to be clearly understood in terms of how they impacted on children, looking at the observable practices seemed obvious.
2.4 Linkages between beliefs and practices

A number of studies tried to find linkages between beliefs and practices of teachers. The review of literature clearly indicated that researching the belief systems of teachers was a necessary and valuable avenue of educational inquiry and could feed into educational practice. As Kagan (1992) concluded that ‘... the more one reads studies of teacher belief, the more strongly one suspects that this piebald of personal knowledge lies at the very heart of teaching’ (p. 85).

The question was that although prior beliefs were well established, they seemed difficult to change. The connection between beliefs and practices would help to bring about change. Teacher behavior was looked at as practice and studies attempted to find variables associated with it (Burke et al, 1996; Castellano & Datnow, 2000; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Laine & Otto, 2000; Ross, 1994). Teacher beliefs about an innovation, its consequences and concerns were studied. Beliefs about learning and teaching were revealed that they played an important role in giving directions to teachers to teach (Biggs, 1999).

All teachers did hold beliefs about their work, their students, their subject matter and their roles and responsibilities. The teachers prior beliefs and values were important influences on their practice (Kagan, 1992), not just in the direct sense of dictating what is important to accomplish but also in the indirect sense of influencing how receptive teachers are to ideas they might encounter from others (Hollingsworth, 1989). The presence of such prior beliefs and values created a dilemma and suggested that changing practice cannot occur simply by informing teachers (Kennedy, 1996).

Certain types of beliefs were found to be much more resistant to change, and they tended to be the beliefs teachers rely on (Pajares, 1992; Rokeach, 1968). Beliefs that were most resistant to change were those formed during childhood; those that are closely associated with one’s identity; and those that are a part of an interlocking network of beliefs.

The teacher’s personal belief system guided her choices of classroom management approach (Agne, Greenwood & Miller, 1994; Burman, 1993, Combs, 1982; Schmidt and Jacobson, 1990; Tobin and Fraser, 1988). Martin et al. (1998) stated ‘...there can
be little doubt that the teachers encounter a variety of new experiences in the classroom. Their beliefs regarding these experiences and the manner in which they approach them, work together to create a unique and individual style of classroom management.

Teachers’ belief system had an impact on the students learning processes also (Agne et al, 1994; Lunenberg & Schmidt, 1989). Agne et al. (1994) concluded that ‘…determining that a system of beliefs differentiates the most effective teacher from the general population of teachers could, in part affect the future direction of educational reform and ultimately the quality of the educational system’ (p. 142).

Teachers seemed to have a certain autonomy to do what they want to do in the use of strategies and choice of content (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1999; Goodlad, 1984; Ingersoll, 2003; Reeves, 2002). Other studies (Isenberg, 1990, Kagan, 1997; Munby, 1982 Vartuli, 1999) suggested that beliefs, values and theories of teachers influenced their teaching, learning and shaped the pedagogy. Spodek 1987 suggested that interpretations made by teachers based upon their concept of reality could become the basis for the actions and decisions they made in the classroom.

Nespor (1987) and (Kagan, 1992) were unsure about how beliefs were strengthened or weakened. One theory which could be helpful suggested evolution of beliefs (Einarsdottir, 2001) based on the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1977). The interrelationships between the immediate setting nested within larger systems influenced how beliefs would evolve. Van Fleet (1979) posited that enculturation, education and schooling were the different processes through which teachers’ acquire beliefs and knowledge. The idea of enculturation included incidental learning that happens throughout life e.g. learning from teachers. Many studies found that experiences during early years were influential in shaping beliefs and practices (Ayers, 1989, Clandinin, 1986, Hsieh, 1994).

Bruner (1986) propounded the idea that culture is important in shaping the mind – especially what he called the ‘folk psychology’ – underlying beliefs of a culture about how minds work. In his later work, he suggested the notion of folk psychology which impacted the practice of teachers (Bruner & Olson, 1996).
With the understanding that culture played an important role in the way teachers practiced or behaved in the classroom, many cross-cultural studies were undertaken. Spodek & Saracho (1996) suggested that the diversity across cultures led teachers to modify theory and practice consistent with their culture. The relationship between beliefs and practice was extensively examined in early childhood settings. Einarsdottir, 2001 underscored the influence of culture of a country on the content of early childhood curriculum. Her study of two preschool teachers in Iceland was evocative. She found that the cultural context is influential in molding the attitudes and beliefs of preschool teachers and ‘influences the very nature of the programs’ (p. 14).

Spodek (1988a, 1988b) posited that teachers used implicit theories to make decisions on the classroom. The argument was that as teachers created their own understanding of curriculum and method, they interpreted practical and theoretical knowledge to integrate such constructions into classroom practice. Some researchers have found disconnects between beliefs and practices (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Verma & Peters, 1975).

Dunn & Kontos 1997 suggested more research in early childhood settings between teacher beliefs and practices. A major trend saw a number of studies with the aim of connecting teachers’ beliefs to the developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) of the early childhood programs. Chalesworth et al. 1993 found that beliefs of teachers’ were more developmentally appropriate than their practices; even though they seemed to be related. Some studies implied a relationship between belief and practices (Charlesworth et al, 1993; Kagan & Smith, 1988, Smith & Shepard, 1988. Goodman, 1988; Nespor, 1987, Zeichner, 1986); they suggested that beliefs were filters through which experience was screened for meaning. Other studies (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Nespor, 1987, Pajares 1992) thought that teacher beliefs influenced classroom decision making and practice.

Researchers have confirmed that teachers’ personal teaching beliefs and philosophies (i.e., what they think about the impact of teaching in general, as well as their understanding of how children learn) play a critical role in actual teaching practices and classroom decisions (Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault, & Schuster, 2001; McMullen, 1999; Pajares, 1992; Smith, 1993). Consistently, however, researchers
report a discrepancy, or at best only a small correlation, between the self-reported beliefs and the actual classroom behaviors of teachers (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Hyson, 1991; Kemple, 1996). In studies that report a discrepancy between self-reported teaching beliefs and observable practices, typically teachers report holding more progressive (i.e., more developmentally appropriate or child-centered beliefs) than the more traditional practices (i.e., more academic or structured practices) in which they were observed to engage. In particular, when child-directed choice/play time, and emergent literacy and language development activities were emphasized in the classroom, the beliefs of the teacher were found more likely closely aligned with DAPs. When consistent routines, organized classrooms, preplanned curriculum, and teacher-directed learning were the behaviors that stood out to the observers, the teachers were found to more likely to hold more traditional beliefs.

To conclude the learning from the literature review on beliefs and practices, there was a clear idea that teachers and student teachers’ beliefs had an impact on their practice. Clearly, teachers when evaluated on the DAP measures showed that their beliefs were more appropriate as compared to their practices, thus questioning the factor of quality. As improvement in the quality of services was an imperative, research started to move towards ‘how to improve effectiveness of the teacher’.

2.5 Towards effective practices through reflection

Research on effective teaching over the past few decades had shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth (Harris 1998). Reflective practice as a form of professional development could be useful during training as well as on the job. By gaining a better understanding of their own individual teaching styles through reflective practice, teachers could improve their effectiveness in the classroom (Ferraro, 2000)

Schon (1983) pioneered the thought about being a reflective practitioner. The notions of reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action were central to Schon’s efforts in this area. The former was sometimes described as ‘thinking on our feet’. It involved looking to our experiences, connecting with our feelings, and attending to our theories
in use as well as building new understandings to inform our actions in the situation that were unfolding. Schon (1983) wrote, ‘The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation’ (p. 68). He explained that one can link this process of thinking on our feet with reflection-on-action. This was done later – after the encounter. Teachers could use recordings, talk with a supervisor and so on. The act of reflecting-on-action enabled a practitioner to spend time exploring why we acted as we did, what was happening in a group and so on. In so doing they develop sets of questions and ideas about their activities and practice.

Empowering the teacher with awareness to understand her strengths and weaknesses and techniques to improve herself and her teaching practices, were considered to be ideal in order to move towards effectiveness. There was evidence that reflective practice enhanced change in classroom practice (Bowman & Stott, 1994). In becoming more self conscious, teachers could also become more intentional, more able to endorse or reject aspects of their own teaching through self reflection (Ayers, 1989).

Unless teachers were facilitated to reflect upon themselves it seemed likely that they would continue to be biased as they interacted with children and families (Bowman & Stott, 1994). Teachers were encouraged to cultivate certain specific attitudes towards reflective thinking such as open mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility for facing the consequences. The idea of self awareness was characterized as “valuable, perhaps indispensable” (Ayers, 1989, p. ix).

The primary benefit of reflective practice for teachers was a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher. Other specific benefits noted in current literature include the validation of a teacher's ideals, beneficial challenges to tradition, the recognition of teaching as artistry, and respect for diversity in applying theory to classroom practice (Ferraro, 2000). Freidus (1997) describes a case study of one teacher/graduate student struggling to make sense of
her beliefs and practices about what constitutes good teaching. Her initial pedagogy for teaching was based on the traditions and practices of direct teaching. Her traditional socialization into teaching made it difficult for her to understand that her views of good teaching were being challenged in her practice. But the opportunity for exploration through reflective portfolio work enabled her to acknowledge and validate what she was learning.

Just as a person's own life experiences influence the present, studies have shown that teachers were able to adjust, modify or alter their teaching methods, styles, or manners based on what they learnt about individual students (Anderson, 2001; Hargreaves, 1998; Carter, 1994; Wubbels, 1992; Clark, 1988). Clark (1988) commented that teachers attended to learning outcomes before, during or even after the teaching had occurred. Teachers modified programs and planning to account for their own reflective thought about: what worked; did not work; for whom it worked and for whom it did not work.

Clark (1988) commented on the fact that teachers reflect on their practice as they go about their planning and programming. Wubbles (1992) acknowledged that pre-service teachers have preconceptions about teaching and their role as the teacher as they enter teacher education. He then offered strategies that could enable teacher educators to better influence change in their student teachers whose preconceptions were seen as naïve or inappropriate. Carter (1994), Hargreaves (1998) and Anderson (2001) reported on studies that utilised Wubbels' strategies and the extent to which they did or did not influence pre-service teacher beliefs.

What can we understand from the literature on reflective practices? A key message was the significance of the person in the process of reflection. Thus, from a prescriptive view of what ought to be practiced, there was a complete turn towards enabling the teacher to become effective in the classroom. The notion was that becoming aware about one's beliefs would make the teacher mindful about her practices.

Another issue that researchers have surfaced was the danger of transporting research generated in one country to another (Tabachnick, 1988) with the importance of interpreting research based on the traditions of the country. As already discussed in
the introduction chapter, the socio-cultural paradigm gave rise to cross-cultural research which gave importance to the social and cultural conditions of the society and marked the influences on how the teacher learnt to teach. That the teacher was a product of the varied influences of micro and macro level interrelationships (based on ecological theory) was acknowledged and accepted.

So in a way, even though the teacher was supposed to be influenced by factors beyond her immediate control, the agency of the teacher was clearly a point which was brought out. Many studies mentioned the ‘good’ teacher that was expected but rarely defined other than as qualities or competencies or skills that she needed to possess. But who was the ‘real’ teacher? There was limited research about what made a good early childhood or elementary school teacher (Ayers, 1989; Yonemura, 1986; Clandinin, 1985). Ayers (1989) made the point that most of the studies that looked at good teachers simply developed lists of behaviors and skills and tried to find the “expert teacher”, as if it is easy to copy the good ones.

We started off with the premise that teaching was a complex task. In order to find out about teachers and teaching, qualitative researches would be more appropriate. Qualitative research could capture the voices of the teachers and look at the world from their perspective. This would decidedly be realistic and vital. Ayers (1989) revealed from his study that the reader may find an inner sense of the profession from the stories of teachers and their descriptions of their own inner and professional paths. Life stories and biographies of teachers may help us to understand the teaching profession better (Goodson, 1992a, 1992b; Carter, 1993). This trend of drawing out the voice of the teacher so that school reform could be effective created a niche for researchers to investigate the concept of change in education.

Apart from the use from the perspective of learning about teachers, there was an implicit idea of empowerment in the qualitative studies. If teachers were to continue to grow they must at some point begin to study themselves (Paley, 1986). This conscious effort could lead to an in depth understanding of ‘why they do what they do’. Since, teachers finally decided what went on in classrooms; her empowerment would assist her to choose deliberately the teaching practices which she believed in.
It was acknowledged that the teacher’s role can in no way be isolated from the effects upon children’s learning, yet studying the beliefs, skills and knowledge of the teachers was probably and logically the first step to improving child outcomes. Research studies (Moyles & Suschitsky, 1997; Moyles & Adams, 2001) have shown the difficulty experienced by teachers in focusing upon their own impact upon children’s learning as opposed to making practical provision, e.g. laying out materials from which children can make choices. This inability to articulate may put a significant constraint upon effective practices. Just as children are expected to be engaged in metacognitive process (exemplified in Bruner’s work), this must apply equally to the teacher’s in order to develop their professional skills.

Teaching is a form of public service that may bring personal fulfillment to those who were involved in this profession (Katz, 1995; 1984; Spodek, Saracho, & Peters, 1988). Yet such personal fulfillment, the development of a sense of doing a public service, is not accomplished without inner struggles, difficult choices, self-clarification and an enlarged sense of one’s role (Ayers, 1989). Through reflection, the teacher could get insights into her own behaviour and its consequent impact on each child.

Teachers’ perceptions also determine the ways in which they establish effective relationships with children, their families and the wider community. These perceptions inform the ways in which interactions occur. The relationship developed between teacher and learner (child) was critical in promoting effective pedagogy. The quality of relationship between teacher and learner underpins subsequent interactions, for example, in providing feedback to children, encouraging an ethos of enquiry, being sensitive and supportive to young children’s responses. The skilled interactions between teacher and children are considered critical in determining effective learning because young children are highly dependent on the adults with whom they interact (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001).

Caring and competent teachers were the major hubs within school systems. Therefore, it was paramount that teacher professional development must change to equip teachers to meet the increasing challenges of the teaching profession. Educators identified the importance of individual responsibility for professional development within a supportive environment. Duff, Brown, and Van Scoy (1995) explain that reflection, self-evaluation, and self-direction were critical to the process
of professional development. This recognition of the importance of the work environment is included in the early childhood management perspective of Bloom, Sheerer, and Britz (1991), who also focused on individual staff development. They argued that to support staff members in their attempts to develop a "comprehensive and personalized staff development action plan". To accomplish this end, staff must understand their own professional growth needs and strengths as contributing members to the schools in which they work. Thus, understanding the teacher within the context that she functions in (both within and outside the school) becomes all-important.

To conclude, let me summarize the valid points which emerged:

- Teaching was considered to be a complex activity
- What goes on in the minds of teachers or teacher thinking was essential to understand the process of teaching and learning
- An individual’s belief systems in the practice of teaching was worth revealing
- Each teacher had her own belief systems which were born from varied sources like culture, early experiences, and school experiences
- The teachers’ belief systems had a direct and indirect influence on her practices
- Self reflection was an invaluable tool for building self awareness
- Professional development rests undeniably on the individual teacher

Having established a map of the literature review, I now go to the methodology of the current study. The rationale follows.