

Evaluation of a Creative Curriculum in Preschool Literacy Readiness

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Abstract

Evaluation of a Creative Curriculum in Preschool Literacy Readiness. Belen N. Mina, 2010: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Fischler School of Education and Human Services. ERIC Descriptors: Preschool Curriculum, School Readiness, Language Acquisition, Literacy Skills, Early Childhood Education.

Early literacy development and readiness are recognized to be significant in preparing the student to accomplish academic success. The importance of early education in the learning and development of the child establishes a need to evaluate the curriculum implemented. Preschools commonly implement different teaching instructions and provide different materials without assessing whether the application of these methods will address the individual needs of the preschoolers. The inability of preschool students to acquire the necessary literacy skills in reading will prevent them to achieve academic success in the elementary grade levels. This is mostly brought about by inappropriate teaching methods in the preschool classrooms.

The purpose of this applied dissertation study will be to evaluate the efficiency of the Creative Curriculum (CC) approach in developing early literacy development and readiness among preschoolers. This experimental program is designed to improve the reading and writing skills of students within preschool age experiences. The hypothesis of the study will be the group of students that will undergo the CC program will do significantly better in the assessment test than the group that will experience traditional teaching. The findings of the study will determine if this program can improve the reading and writing skills of the preschool and kindergarten students. The study will be conducted in a government nonprofit Child and Youth Program facility in the State of Florida. There will be approximately 24 pre-school students that will be participants. These students will undergo pretests and post-tests to determine the effectiveness of the program through a validated pre-school reading and writing assessment tool that was designed by the authors of the CC program.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Reading readiness skills are necessary for preschool children to initiate the learning-to-read process (Matthews, Klaassens, and Walter, 1999). These capabilities are classified as: (a) pre-reading, (b) emergent literacy, and (c) early literacy. Reading literacy skills that are developed in the preschool grades are the foundation of a student's literacy throughout his/her school years. Research has shown that preschools provide various teaching materials to their students without deciding whether the application of the materials will meet particular preschool students' needs. Preschool students who do not acquire the necessary literacy skills in reading may struggle to achieve academically in elementary grades (Berg and Stegelman, 2003).

Since each child has different learning curve at the time they enter preschool, there is a need for students to be exposed to differentiated learning instructions wherein various strategies can cater to the different needs of the preschool students (Beaty, 2008). There have been different research-based teaching strategies that incorporate brain research; technology and media-influenced instruction that will help young children develop literacy skills (Jalongo, 2008). Moreover, majority of preschool-age children entering kindergarten have experienced at least one of the theories on how children learn, such as environmental theory, which asserts children learn from their environment by copying and imitating peers on their performances. These theories have been developed by Johaan Heinrich Pestalozzi, John Locke, Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Friedrich Froebel, Albert Bandura, Burrhus Frederic,

Maria Montessori, Albert Bandura and Lev Vygotsky. Environmental theory posits that children learn from their environment, and this is evident when children imitate their parents or adults when they are taught the alphabet, counting, and writing. Further, environmental theory asserts that children learn through real life experiences, like scribbling, drawing, and pretending to read books.

These assertions influence teaching practices that are meant to develop emergent reading and writing literacy skills in schools (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005). Henderson, Berla, and National Committee for Citizens in Education (1994) confirmed that learned experiences in reading and writing the alphabet in preschool have a powerful influence on students' school achievements. They gain higher test scores at schools (U. S., Department of Education, 1994), and are more likely to earn their diplomas in higher education. Teachers have to decide how to implement research-based teaching strategies to support effective emergent reading and writing literacy skills and establish curriculum achievements before children enter kindergarten (McGee and Richgels, 2007). This study will evaluate the effectiveness of the Creative Curriculum Approach for Early Childhood (CCEC) (Dodge, Colker, and Herman 2002) in support of the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education emergent reading program.

Background and Justification

This proposed applied dissertation will take place in a government nonprofit Child and Youth Program (CYP) facility that has 180 students ranging in age from six weeks to five years. Ninety-five of these students are in the preschool program and will be immersed in either a Creative Curriculum (CC) teaching strategies or traditional teaching protocol for

one school quarter. The mission of the CC approach is to improve the quality of early childhood literacy programs. The CC teaching approach uses

innovative curriculum tools of the highest quality and teacher professional development that is appropriate, practical, and responsive to the children's needs.

The state of Florida requires all students entering kindergarten to be assessed using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) within the first 30 days of a school year (Florida, 2009). Kindergarten students' scores on the DIBELS within the last few years have shown that almost half of the new kindergarten students have not fully or did not partially acquire literacy from their curriculum instruction in preschool (Florida Information, 2009).

The CYP is based on the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) standards' guidelines on development (NAEYC, 2005) and utilizes the Creative Curriculum teaching tools. This NAEYC-accredited early childhood program is funded by the government, and strictly follows the United States Department of Agriculture's policy on health and food administration (OPNAV 1700E, 2008). It is located in a suburban area and is committed to providing high-quality educational opportunities that inspires all students to acquire and use the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a culturally-diverse and technologically-sophisticated world (Florida Information, 2009).

The faculty and staff members of the preschool are committed to the task of providing a high-quality education for each student. Students are afforded the opportunity to develop academically, socially, and physically "while striving to become a productive and integral part of the society" (Florida Information, 2009). Current statistics in the city

in Florida where the school is located show that there are 356,284 (48%) male and 379,333 (52%) females. The ethnicity is comprised of 64% Caucasians, 29% African Americans, 3% Asians, and 4% categorized as Other. This district is the nineteenth largest school district in the nation. It has approximately 130,000 students, with approximately 8,000 educators at 105 elementary schools, 28 middle schools, 17 high schools, three exceptional students' centers, two academies of technology, and five alternative schools (Florida Information, 2009).

The CYP is a participant in a VPK program that is subsidized by the state of Florida. On January 2, 2005, Governor Bush signed a House Bill making VPK free to all children who turn four years old by September 1 of the current school year (State of Florida, 2009). It creates a preschool curriculum designed to prepare children to enter kindergarten. Parents residing in the state of Florida are encouraged to enroll their children in a VPK program (State of Florida, 2009). The purpose of VPK is to assist children in enhancing their reading and writing skills and developing the skills they need to become good readers and writers in the academic areas of curricula in the grade school classrooms in their later years of study (Neumann and Cunningham, 2009).

VPK includes quality literacy standards, teachers' accountability, ageappropriate activities, genuine instruction periods, manageable classrooms, and qualified teachers (Office of Early Learning, 2007). Qualified teachers are those who hold at least one of the following recognized credentials that allow them to work with young children: an associate's degree in early childhood development or a bachelor's degree in early childhood or in primary grade education (Office of Early Learning, 2007). The VPK program is comprised of 540 hours of teaching instruction in a school year, or the

summer prior to the school year. The summer VPK class has 300 hours of instruction, and requires teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree in elementary education, or in early childhood development (Office of Early Learning, 2007). The hours and days of instruction depend on provider preferences (Office of Early Learning, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the efficiency of the Creative Curriculum approach. To determine if the CC approach is effective, between group differences will be assessed after controlling for pre-test score differences. The study posits that students in the CC program (intervention group) will do significantly better on outcome exams in reading and writing than students in the traditional teaching class (control group).

The teachers involved in the CC program allow children to play with other children while providing fun instructional games. The program was developed in order to satisfy guidelines established by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. The NCLB law was signed into effect on January 8, 2002 by George W. Bush, and went into effect nationwide at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year. To ensure no child is left behind, the Senate and House Representatives in congress integrated the NCLB Title 1 "Improving the Academic Achievements of the Disadvantaged."

The Creative Curriculum Assessment System will be used in recording, explicating, and planning curriculum improvements. This is similar to NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists (NASECS) (Dodge, Colker, and Heroman, 2002). This tool meets the U. S. Department of Education's Office Special Education Program's (OSEP) standards for VPK assessment.

Definition of Terms

This section will provide the contextual definition of the significant terms that will be used in this study:

term refers to the process by which children develop communication skills (Singer, 1999). It refers to the development of speech, wherein in the child is able to understand and communication through language.

Literacy Skills. According to Bennett-Armistead, Moses and Snow (2005) literacy skills referred to the ability of an individual to listen, speak, read and write. Early childhood educators provide children with activities that enable young students to develop these abilities, which included reading aloud, writing centers, dramatic play sessions and simple conversations with the child.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This term refers to a legislation that was enacted by former President George W. Bush in 2002, which is designed to guarantee that no child is left behind. It is a legislation intended to close the performance gap between advantaged and disadvantage students. The latter group refers to those from racial minority groups, students with disability, and those that have low socio-economic backgrounds.

Volunteer Pre-Kindergarten (VPK). This term refers to a mandate of legislation that is intended to prepare every four-year-old in the state of Florida for kindergarten and to provide the groundwork for his or her educational success (Agency for Workforce Innovation, 2010). This is intended to improve the child's school readiness, which includes achieving high literacy standards.

School Readiness. As promoted by the National Educational Goals panel, school readiness is described as level by which a child is able to cope and succeed in grade

school, which five areas of child development and learning. These areas include physical health and motor development, socio-emotional development, cognition and general knowledge development, literacy development, as well as the child's capacity for learning (Cassidy, Mims, Rucker and Boone, 2003). This term refers to the ability of the child to benefit from school, in the context of this study to develop literacy skills.

Summary

The problem of the study is based on the risks that preschool students faced if they are unable to develop foundational reading skills before they transition into grade school. This chapter introduced the background and purpose of the study. It discussed about the significance of evaluating the CC program, not only because of the mandate of the NCLB Act, but also because of the importance of early childhood education. The chapter also provided the significant terms that would be used throughout this study. The next chapter will provide a review of related literature, wherein discussions about school readiness, language development, progressive education, and the Creative Curriculum program were provided in order to present the backbone for evaluating the creative curriculum for ensuring preschool literacy readiness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Hess and Petrilli (2006) describe NCLB, as one of the most influential pieces of federal legislation for education in American History. The legislation is designed to

ensure that American students will be proficient in core subjects such as mathematics, reading and science by the year 2014. This act provides the standards for measuring student performance and making sure quality teachers are teaching the students. It focuses on preschool students who eventually will need to acquire academic standards in their elementary and secondary grades (Cristmann, 2009). The National Assessment evaluation of Title 1 indicates that there is a three-to-four year gap in reading and writing levels among the same groups in elementary academic areas. One purpose of Title 1 is to fill the gap in academic achievements, and that begins with success in VPK's research-based foundations in early literacy.

According to Domitrovich, Bradshaw, Greenberg, Embry, Poduska, and Ialongo, (2010), school-based programs can positively impact a wide range of social, emotional and behavior outcomes for the students. The current state of accountability for the schools prevents schools from trying out new methods and they are restricted to activities that were a part of the core curriculum alone. Nearly two years ago, the preschool under study began utilizing Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood (CCEC), which implements age-appropriate teaching approaches drawn from the following: Johaan Heinrich Pestalozzi's theory that children learn through a sense of observation and perception; John Locke's emphasis on learning through play; Jean Piaget's research that children learn through stages of development; Lev Vygotsky Albert Bandura, and Erik Erikson's theory of socio-emotional development; and Maria Montessori and Friedrich Froebel's curriculum from real life practices (Roopnarine and Johnson, 2005). Studies indicate that teachers who are professionally developed are better poised to support

students' academic achievement (Neumann and Cunningham, 2009), and have a cumulative impact on higher grades, depending on environmental settings (Dodge, Colker, and Heroman, 2005)

Moreover, a child's reading readiness begins soon after birth, depending on a child's health conditions. The oral speech patterns that a child hears in his/her environment provide the necessary groundwork for learning how to read. Human language acquisition develops naturally (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), while reading does not; learning how to read is a taught process, and reading is the foundation of academic success.

One characteristic of children who begin the primary grades with difficulty reading is a lack of prior earned knowledge and skills in alphabet recognition and phonics or basic reading and writing abilities (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 2005). The students who struggle with reading and writing in the primary grades could be the product of a lack of reading readiness, health problems, or impoverished backgrounds. Various preschools that provide excellent curricula, rich in reading and writing opportunities initiate a change to reduce the number of children at risk for reading literacy difficulty; playtime in pleasant settings motivates language skills, cognitive development, social skills, and preschool writing skills (Snow et al., 2005).

Oral language is related to both speaking and listening components. It is a crucial part of developing the skills for written language, which included reading and writing. Normally, individuals find no need to consider the development of language, as adults are already competent speakers. Thus, they do not consider what language is and how oral and written language is developed. As young children embark in their school journey, it

is significant to understand areas that impact their literacy development (Elizabeth Love, 2003).

School Readiness

School readiness was considered a crucial issue in the United States in the past decade (Kamerman and Kahn, 1995). Kindergarten teachers released a report that about a third of the children in the country are not sufficiently prepared to achieve success in school (Boyer, 1991). In fact, experts warned that there were many children that enter grade school without fundamental skills that were needed in order to achieve academic success. Most reports reveal that children from minority groups have not developed appropriate skills for language, literacy and other areas that were needed to ensure they will do well in school (Early et al., 2007).

Despite the fact that public schools are focusing much needed attention in preschool and elementary school education to serve younger children, the schools are not perceived to be adequately-equipped to handle the children's early learning and development (Winter and Kelley, 2008). Programs for early intervention and school readiness emerged as early as the mid-1960s, as spurred by initiatives that included the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and initiatives such as War on Poverty. Focusing on early childhood programs in this period enhanced the development of economically and socially disadvantaged children because of services in the areas of education, health and family support (Winter and Kelley, 2008). Head Start is considered as one of the most valuable products of the War on Poverty Act. It offers a model that provided services in the areas mentioned for young children and their families. Ever since, variations of this program emerged.

In 1989, the National Education Goals 2002 initiative gave emphasis to the importance of early intervention and school readiness efforts to help children achieve individual success and accomplish societal goals towards building a better workforce (Winter and Kelley, 2008). The increase in the literature for school readiness strengthened federal commitment to early education. The preschool level is then perceived to be just as important as all the other grade levels. There is still an critical need to learn more about early learning environments. The stress on the value of preschool education involves achieving the objectives at this age. It also highlights the negative consequences involved if children will enter grade school without earlier experience in preschool education, especially in literacy development (Kamerman and Kahn, 1995). In response, there is a focus on the cognitive and socialization aspects of preschool programs in order to help children and parents experience successful preschool experiences.

According to the Elizabeth Love Inner East Community Health Service (Elizabeth Love) program (2003), during the preschool years of the children, teachers and parents are faced with the significant concern of evaluating if the child is read to for grade school the following year. The education process is perceived as a joint venture between the child, the family, the school and the teachers. This is involved in the discussion of school readiness, a complex issue in education research.

Cassidy, et al. (2003) mentioned that there is an increase in the focus on readiness in the context of early childhood education in the country because of the growing concern for failing students and schools, as determined by the NCLB assessments. The National Education Goals Panel promoted an approach for school readiness that covered five areas

of child development and learning, such as physical health and motor development, socio-emotional development, approaches toward learning, literacy, cognition and general knowledge development (Cassidy et al. 2003).

The National Association of State Boards of Education points out that developing school readiness was about building the ability for children to be ready to benefit from school and readiness to learn more than the alphabet and numbers. Although, there needs to be a recognition that it is not appropriate to expect that children will have a common set of skills when they enter school because they come from different backgrounds. Moreover, the focus on readiness does not necessarily involve the children alone. It is also about scrutinizing the environment by which the children are exposed to in order to guarantee student success.

Weigel and Martin (2006) noted that the development of intervention programs to help improve early literacy and school readiness skills for young children need to be developed to address the needs of children, with the help of parents, child care programs and the community at large. Through this focus, educators and early childhood providers will be able to target local programs at an optimum level. The increase in the demand for accountability and for the improvement of the performance of students at a national level also increased the concern for school readiness and early literacy (Weigel and Martin, 2006). School readiness remains to be a sensitive topic wherein early educators and policy makers have not agreed upon definition. Furthermore, it is about recognizing predictors based on the preschooler's literacy and language abilities as to their performance in the early levels of grade school (Weigel and Martin, 2006).

The concept of early literacy and school readiness involves laying down the foundation for literacy and school success in the early years of the student's life (Weigel and Martin, 2006). During this time, children develop skills and attitudes that will strengthen their potential for success. Daily experiences and opportunities to develop oral language skills and to gain knowledge through written language strengthened their emergent literacy skills. Children acquire skills and knowledge in different formal and informal settings, even at home, and at child care programs (Weigel and Martin, 2006). The development of young children does not happen in isolation. Instead, it occurs in wide array of direct and indirect influences. Research links children developmental outcomes and environments wherein they have supports for that recognized the critical nature children's experiences to their learning and growth (Weigel and Martin, 2006). According to Cassidy et al. (2003), the preschool teachers should plan their activities in such a way that they consider the interests of the children and how these interests can be used to increase their understanding and learning. These activities must be shaped in such a way that they accommodate the development of specific skills. This helps in building a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and child-centered, as well as increases the school readiness levels of children (Cassidy et al. 2003).

Cassidy et al. (2003) recognized three essential factors that need to be present to address the needs of preschoolers. The first is the teachers need to be knowledgeable and have the ability to facilitate each child's learning. They need to possess an understanding for the child's development and the process by which young children learning. They need to have the ability to identify the child's skills, individual personalities, family cultures and priorities (Cassidy et al., 2003). The teacher serves as a catalyst in the creation of an

educationally stimulating environment. Additionally, it is also significant to have communication with the parents in order to help them build on the benefits of the curriculum, through establishing play-based strategies to enhance the child's development at home (Cassidy et al., 2003).

Missal et al. (2008) emphasized on the importance of early literacy development and school readiness. Children that fail to enter school with the adequate level of literacy and school readiness are more likely to fail than to catch up with peers that are equipped with these attributes. They are considered to be at a high risk of reading failure and also considered to have a higher potential for dropping out in high school and experiencing broader social failure (Missal et al., 2008). This highlights the need for educational practices in early education to allow children to maximize on their skill development, but at the same time proceed at their own rate. There is a need to balance skill acquisition with the individual development rate of the students. Conversely, early education classroom environments and curriculum must be designed to offer the most opportunities to enhance the individual potential of the child for school readiness and early literacy development.

Progressive Education

Roberts (1976) stressed that there were four types of preschools, such as the traditional (eclectic), cognitive (approach that stressed on the development of learning abilities), informational (focuses on teaching specific skills) and prepared environment, which is based on Maria Montessori principles. There has been relative effectiveness in terms of the different preschool programs for improving skills through the different types of preschools. According to the findings of this study, children in the Head Start or the

traditional preschools made small to moderate gains in terms of improving their intellectual quotient and revealed improved attitudes for school and self-concepts. Nevertheless, the control group was able to catch up with the experimental group, as well as receive a passing grade for kindergarten and grade one levels. It was noted that when parents are involved and the programs are more structured, there are impressive gains identified (Roberts, 1976).

Over the years, Creative Curriculum approaches and philosophies on educating young children that alter the subject matter to meet the needs and choices of the learner, have been adopted from the Progressive Era (Roopnarine and Johnson, 2005). This philosophy subscribes to the concept that children learn best within true-to-life activities with their peers. Progressive education is described innovate teaching and learning strategies. Progressivism is associated with the experience of providing novel or up-to-date education and it is often compared to traditional education (Hampel, 2008).

Traditional education is characterized by learning strategies such as memorization of facts and formula, which are perceived to have a growing irrelevance for the students of today. Conversely, progressive education is described to be child-centered, rather than textbook-centered and grounded on authority (Hampel, 2008). The curiosity and creativity of students are highlighted by using strategies that would awaken a wide range of interests.

Roopnarine and Johnson (2005) stressed that Johaan Heinrich Pestalozzi, John Locke, Jean Piaget, Eric Ericson, Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori, Abraham Maslow, Albert Bandura and Lev Vygotsky are some of the philosophers who contributed to the idea that children learn through the development of social skills, real

experiences, and the Progressive Era process. Teachers who use Creative Curriculum research-based teaching instruction provide opportunities for children to develop reading literacy skills in preschool that will support their school achievements through college. Creative Curriculum provides professional development tools for educators in various formats: in-service training, video learning, onsite professional development, E-Learning, curriculum instruction, and engagement with the principles of adult learning theories (DeVries et al., 2002).

Progressive instruction is focused on educating the whole child through specifically designed school curriculum (Hampel, 2008). Within progressive education, the young children are given opportunities to excel in music, art, drama, and recreation. Through this approach, instructional methods and materials are different from traditional education. Progressive education called for teachers to be facilitators that allow students to participate extensively through discussions and group works (Hampel, 2008). This is observed have decreased the rate of dropouts among students and increased school enrolments in first third of the twentieth century (Hampel, 2008). Those that support progressive education supported intelligence testing. They perceived evaluating the innate mental abilities of young children to provide a fair manner by which students are assigned to particular courses and education tracks.

The Age for Literacy Development

According to Schickendaz (1999), skills like reading and writing that are learned in the first grade of middle school are really the “end result of years of literacy learning” (p. 1). Since there is a small group of children that reach recognizable levels of literacy before entering school, teachers and parents fail to recognize how much of the children’s

prior first grade education. Thus, they attribute the student's literacy skills to have been accomplished in the first four or six months of first grade instruction (Schickendaz, 1999). While there are students that find it difficult to accomplish these skills during these stages, Schickendaz (1999) noted that there is cases wherein children struggle because they lacked the sufficient foundation that was needed to complement the instructions that teachers provide to help children become beginning readers. Thus, there is a specific need to have a strong background to build literacy learning before they even transition into first grade.

According to Neuman, Copple, Bredekamp, and the National Association for the Education of Young Child (2000), there has been issues regarding when and how children should be taught to read and write that has been discussed by both the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). These organizations provided a position statement that described how teachers could ensure children's success for learning how to read and write through understanding informed instruction and recognizing effective practices through evidence-based research.

Conversely, Neuman et al. (2000) argued that the recognition of early beginnings of literacy acquisition led to the implementation of inappropriate teaching practices that were suited for older students, rather than young children that were only in preschool and kindergarten. Nevertheless, Roskos, Tabors and Lenhart (2009) emphasized on the significant impact of the development of oral language skills in the preschool years of the student in order to ensure future reading achievement and school success.

Piaget noted that underlying language acquisition can be considered as processes for elementary logic and reasoning (Singer, 1999). According to Piaget's observations, the children's speech can be categorized as egocentric speech and socialized speech. These types of speech served a different function for the preschooler. The purpose of each speech pattern is to communicate between different people, but this was not always the case for children's speech (Singer, 1999).

Language in the beginning stages of a child's life is considered to be completely egocentric (Singer, 1999). The speech of the student reflects what he thought at the present moment. This is regardless of whether one made sense to anyone or to himself. Thus, when a child speaks he does not concern himself of who is or is not listening. Speaking is considered a pleasurable sensory-motor experience for a child in itself (Singer, 1999). One of the basic form of egocentric speech is repetition. During this stage, children would not know or understand what they are saying and what it meant.

According to Singer (1999), one of the most socialized of the three forms involved egocentric speech that made use of simultaneous monologues between two or more children talking together, without any one of them listening. Even when young children play along side one another, most of the time they are absorbed by their personal fantasies and conversations with themselves. The point where literacy develops included the increase in the socialized speech in the child, wherein one considers the meaning of one's speech and communication activities to another person. Wadsworth (2003) described Piaget's perception of intellectual acts to function through processes of organization and adaptation to the environment. This did not mean that intellectual

development is attributed completely to biological functioning. Nonetheless, the concepts of biological development are useful for looking at intellectual development.

According to Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009), the development of writing skills represented a strong predictor for the child's future literacy success. During the time when a child was two to three years of age, it was crucial for their writing to evolve from scribbling into script, as they are able to write actual alphabet letters. Thus, it is important for educators and parents to help the preschoolers achieve communication by means of writing.

Glover (2009) noted that there is a need to encourage students to pick up their pen and share their ideas through writing. Educators should be able to match their instructional strategies with the individual interests and patterns of learning of the child.

While the approach is child-centered, educators should be able to know how to draw ideas and interests from children that they will translate through writing activities.

There is a need to nudge writers into action through the use of meaning, choice and purpose. Preschool children are also encouraged to write using conversations, such as using notes to communicate with each other. Glover (2009) also noted on the importance of imaginative writing that could be achieved through dramatic plays or through reading aloud what they wrote. Young children should also be motivated to write stories through the use of personal experiences. Thus, children should also be given the chance to express their individual passions and interests through non-fiction writing activities (Glover, 2009).

Gibson (2010) stressed that there were many factors that affected the student's attitude for reading, including the parents, sibling attitudes, school and library programs, curriculum and instruction, and the teachers. In a study that Gibson (2010) conducted,

preservice teachers observed that students had preconceived notions about reading that were rooted from their experiences as a child, young person and young adults. The examination of these experiences was significant to provide a tool in understanding the future student's reading development success.

Adler and Trepanier-Street (2007) examined the perception of college students that participate in early literacy development programs for young children. After the study was conducted, the findings revealed that college students found six important literacy practices that are effective for early literacy development. These practices involved having conversations with children, wherein they were allowed to take turns and listen to other children speak. Second, it is effective when they followed the children's lead in conversations. It is also advisable to ask questions that required one-word answers to prevent confusion for the students. It is also an effective practice to allow the children to pretend to read and allow them to attempt writing. It is also significant to engage children in rhyming activities or games (Adler and Trepanier –Street, 2007).

Teaching Literacy Skills

Neuman et al. (2000) described the beginning years (from birth to preschool) to be the first period wherein children would begin to experiment with language. As young infants, babies would imitate the tones of adult talk. They would respond to adult gestures and facial expressions. It would also be observed that it is during this period when toddlers are taught jingles and nursery rhymes. Children learn the meaning of symbol systems through their interactions with others. As these young children learn the principle of the alphabet, usually taught by their parents, children process the letters, translate them into sounds, and connect it with a known meaning. Even if it seems that

they naturally acquire these skills, children are beneficiaries of adult guidance and instruction for learning language, even if the approach would be playful and informal (Neuman et al., 2000).

Bennett-Armistead, et al. (2005) also described literacy research to stress the onset of the development of listening, viewing, speaking, reading and writing skills long before children enter middle school. Thus, early childhood educators needed to provide children with activities that focused in the development of their literacy skills and creating an environment by which these activities could be encouraged. Activities that develop literacy skills included reading aloud, playing with words, writing centers, book nooks, dramatic play sessions, and the like (Bennet-Armisted et al., 2005).

Roopnarine and Johnson (2005) stated that children learn to read from the shortest words to the longer ones. Using movable letters, magnetic alphabet boards, and slate boards enables children to construct words on their own. This activity is a high level of play that constructivist teachers can use to extend preschool children's interest in learning how to read and write (DeVries et al., 2002). Learning to read should be fun, self esteem enhancing, and motivating for children and their families. It develops children's emerging literacy skills (Time4 Learning, 2009).

Reading is not intuitive like whole language can be in speaking; it requires the support, time, and effort of adults to provide skilled instruction (Time4 Learning, 2009). Foundations must be formed so that the child is able to understand print concepts, phonics, decoding, fluency, words, and the understanding that makes a child a successful reader. All of these skills are developed through adults reading aloud to children, providing a high level of play with adult intervention, singing and chanting songs and

nursery rhymes, reading and recognizing the alphabet, and practicing basic print activities

(Time4 Learning, 2009).

Burns, Griffin and Snow (1999) characterized reading as a multifaceted and complex process that children undergo. In order to understand this process, they need sufficient help for learning these processes, such as using spelling sounds, understanding the writing system and recognizing the opportunities to appreciate the information offered by textbooks and other learning materials. Children also need to be exposed to procedures that heightened their comprehension skills (Burns et al., 1999).

Reading is not easy to learn and it's not natural, as there is a process by which it is learned (Elizabeth Love, 2003). The process begins at an early age with first experiences with print. Skills in oral language and pre-literacy are described to support a person's ability to read and write. Thus, phonological awareness is also considered as a key factor for early literacy instruction. Readers are recognized to have appropriate decoding skills, comprehension skills and to read with speed and accuracy.

Burns et al. (1999) provided three accomplishments that described good readers. These accomplishments included the understanding of the alphabet system through the identification of printed words, the use of background knowledge and strategies to interpret printed words and the ability to read fluently. In short, Burns et al. (1999) described preschool language and literacy foundation to be the identification of printed words, fluency and meaning. They also noted that the experiences in the first months and years in a child's life with language and literacy could serve as a basis for their later

reading success. For example, children as young as six weeks could provide a significant advantage in their literacy development.

At the end of a substantial study of pre-school reading readiness, the researcher recommends providing various curriculum approaches to preschool students to nurture their reading literacy skills (DeVries et al., 2002). Every child, depending on their health conditions, needs to have developed reading literacy basics before entering kindergarten. These basics determine a student's successful academic achievement throughout his/her entire school career, and create a promising future for America. Nonetheless, it must be noted that there is no one teaching method or mix of methods that would be more effective than the others for all the children (Neuman et al., 2000). Instead, good teachers use a variety of teaching strategies to address the diverse needs of children. The effectiveness of the instruction depends on how the instructional method builds on what the children already knew and could do, as well as provide knowledge, skills and dispositions that will set them for lifelong learning. Aside from learning the technical skills of reading and writing, students also need to learning how they could develop skills for reasoning and reasoning.

Wilber (2000) stated that learning how to read begins with the ears: listening, reading books, playing with rhyming words, and talking to children improve both their vocabularies and learning capabilities. The process of learning how to read begins with recognizing the alphabet, sounds, and blending letters (Wilber, 2000) by preschool age (before five years of age). Neuman et al. (2000) and Vukelich and Christie (2009) stressed that one of the most essential activities for building literacy skills would be reading aloud to children, following it up by asking children analytic questions.

Vukelich and Christie (2009) recognized the importance of phonological awareness of children, which could be developed through differentiated instruction. There is also a need to provide a planned and print-rich environment wherein children will be exposed to print symbols in an interesting and informal manner. The process of literacy development is included in children's play in order for them to practice literary concepts in informal settings (Vukelich and Christie, 2009).

As mentioned, sharing books with children was considered as a significant part of the process because it allowed for children to build on skills that research recognized to be needed for later reading success. This is also the foundation for the student's interest in concepts of print. Typical preschool-aged children were identified to understand that print is functional and could be used to get things done in everyday living (Vukelich and Christie, 2009). Preschoolers were described to be engaged in dramatic play, such as writing phone messages, writing checks for purchases and looking up recipes in cookbooks, as well as making shopping lists. This shows that as young as preschoolers, they understand the significance of understanding print symbols and interpreting them.

Roskos, et al. (2009) offered different ways of joining oral language with teaching early reading and writing skills in order to prepare young children for life in grade school and beyond. There was a need to make sure that preschool children will develop oral language skills in such a way that they would be eager learners, ready readers, as well as potential writers.

Singer (1999) noted that print materials like children's literature will help students learn these concepts. Stories like *Alice in Wonderland* and *Winnie-the-Pooh* provide children with unique ideas that would enhance and hasten the intellectual development of

the child. Exposing children to literature at a very young age is encouraged by psychologist Jean Piaget. Piaget's work has provided new ideas as to how children think, reason and perceives the world through the use of mental activities that are classified as cognition (Singer, 1999). Piaget was not concerned with how much a child knew but how he came to know it. Thus, his work revealed how storytelling and other print-assisted literacy activities helped the children enhance their literary experiences with understanding print concepts.

Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009) discussed about the use of dramatic play to jumpstart writing skills. As children begin to role play and to create stories, educators encouraged them to create stories for themselves. Fictionalization of personal experience was observed to have become a central theme in child's play and writing (Schickedanz and Casbergue, 2009). Through the encouragement of dramatic play and the initiation for them to make up fictional stories, children will be able to construct stories by drawing, imagining events, and having a genuine interest for writing in order for their ideas to be preserved and shared with others (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2009).

Conversely, Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009) also acknowledged that there were cases wherein preschool students would create "mock words" or form writing without any particular message content to begin with. They would simply experiment with writing. This experimentation with word making, despite the fact that they were devoid of a message, also helped children developed their writing skills (Schickedanz and Casbergue, 2009). There were typical standards and learning experiences that needs to be observed to evaluate the child's understanding of print concepts. Learning experiences would enable children to learn the standards. These served as the markers

for educators as to the level of knowledge and experiences that children have for understanding concepts of print:

Concepts of Print	
Standards	Learning Experiences
Understands that print is used for different functions	Observes varied uses of print for various purposes (e.g. shopping lists, recipes) and participates in their use
Understands that speech can be written down	Observes adults writing as they say the words aloud
Understands that print carries a message	Participates in composing process by offering ideas and language for others to write down
Understands that illustrations carry meaning but cannot read	Attempts to print during Big Book activities
Understands that books have titles and authors	Refers to books by their titles; is beginning to understand that a book represents a person's ideas and that this person is the author
Understands concepts of a word – letters are grouped to form words, and words are separated by spaces	Engages in opportunities to draw and “write” independently
Understands concepts of directionality – front to back, left to right, and top to bottom movement on a page	Observes and follows along as adults track print left to right while reading aloud; browses through books from front to back
Understands the letters function differently than numbers	Participates in opportunities to write own name

Table 1 Typical Standards and Learning Experiences: Concepts of Print (Schickedanz and Casbergue 2009, p. 6)

According to Strickland and Schickedanz (2004), aside from helping students to write through understanding the concepts of print, there is a need to mold them into becoming master of phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge. These are described as scientifically-based key predictors for the child's literacy success and school readiness.

Phonemic awareness referred to the ability of the children to hear, identify and manipulate individual sounds or phonemes in spoken words. This concept needs students to have more specific skills, as they link more directly to phonics that relates to sounding off the letters that represented them. Activities that developed phonemic awareness also included standards that could be accomplished through learning experiences:

Phonemic Awareness	
Standards	Learning Experiences
Builds on understanding associated with phonological awareness, such as ability to recognize and produce words starting with the same sound.	Observes others as they segment spoken words into their individual sounds and use letters to write the sounds.
Has the general understanding that letters represent the sounds that make up spoken words (alphabetic principle)	Selects letters to represent individual sounds that a teacher has segmented in a spoken word
Begins to make some soundletter association	Selects a letter to represent an individual sound (usually at the beginning of the word) that he or she has segmented in a spoken word

Table 2 Typical Standards and Learning Experiences: Phonemic Awareness (Schickedanz and Casbergue 2009, p. 7)

Phonological awareness is also described as the individual ability to reflect or identify the sound or phonological system of a specific language (Elizabeth Love, 2003). It is included in a person's metalinguistic abilities. It is not just about the child's ability to hear and say sounds. Instead, it involved a number of skills that are related to reading

development and other skills that are an outcome of the abilities to read. This involves the

ability of the child to rhyme, to start with the same sound (bad boy), to segment the first sound, segment words into separate sounds, and to change or manipulate words by removing, adding or reordering sounds within the word (Elizabeth Love, 2009).

The level of phonological awareness is considered as one of the most important predictors for reading development and success. It is considered an important feature of reading programs, as through this concept, children could develop an understanding for the nature of the English alphabet.

Alphabet knowledge or letter name knowledge serves as a good predictor for success in early reading (Schickedanz and Casbergue, 2009). Fluency is defined by the speed and accuracy by which a child could recognize letters; the higher the level of fluency that students have, the higher the chances that they will experience success in developing reading skills. Additionally, alphabet knowledge also predicts the children's interests in learning how letters and their sounds relate with one another. Schickedanz and Casbergue (2009) emphasized that alphabet knowledge serves as a "byproduct of extensive early literacy experiences" (p. 8). Training students to simply memorize letters without the provision of learning within the literary context is an unsuccessful predictor for reading success. Table 3 will reveal the relationship between the learning experiences of the students and the standards they could accomplish:

Alphabet Knowledge

Standards	Learning Experiences
<p>Notifies and is able to name letters that begin common logos and names of friends and family members</p> <p>Understands that letters of the alphabet are special visual graphics that have unique names</p> <p>Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet</p> <p>Identifies letters in his or her name</p> <p>Uses magnetic letters or tiles for play and exploration; plays with alphabet puzzles</p> <p>Has experiences with alphabet books</p> <p>Discusses letter names in the context of daily meaningful activities Observes and participates in experiences where letter names are linked to writing names and other meaningful words</p>	

Table 3 Typical Standards and Learning Experiences: Alphabet Knowledge (Schickedanz and Casbergue 2009, p. 8)

Parents could prepare their children to develop alphabet knowledge through activities that allowed them to identify the correct alphabet sequence. Singing the alphabet song is still considered as an effective method for teaching the alphabet sequence to young children (Elizabeth Love, 2003). Thus, children should be given opportunities to learn the names of individual letters, outside of the sequence. It is also advisable to teach the common and consistent sound-letter associations, such as m, s, b, n, k and the first sound of the child's name.

Brock and Raphael (2005) promoted the use of small group interactions for preschool literacy development. There were three critical reasons why small group settings were valuable for preschool students. First, children felt more comfortable in a small group because they were amongst their peers and friends (Brock and Raphael, 2005). As a result of this first reason, students also felt easier to share their confusions about their lessons in a group wherein they felt they were among their friends. In a small group setting, peers and friends could help each other out with areas they found difficulty with. Teachers needed to lead a class wherein educators would be able to draw on the knowledge of his or her students' abilities and personalities, as well as their friendship circles, which could be made possible in small group settings (Brock and Raphael, 2005).

The traditional approach, which makes use of whole-group settings, implement the "Initiate-Respond-Evaluate" (IRE) method, wherein the teacher would initiate the interaction, the student would respond and the teacher would evaluate the response. This method was described to be limited because it meant the teacher did most of the talking, it

limited the depth of the response, and it limited the degree of information that the teacher could use to understand the students' individual abilities and personalities

(Brock and Raphael, 2005).

Spiegel (2005) described that there were specific tools that could enable students to be engaged and to reflect and learn deeper about language arts and other content areas. Effective strategies involved allowing the students to develop literacy skills within whole-class and small group settings. An infusion of different strategies was noted to be important in order to maximize on the child's potential. Also, follow-up activities would also extend the learning experiences of the child (Spiegel, 2005).

Preschool children that experienced high-quality literacy instruction will benefit their emotional and cognitive development significantly. There is a need to identify what high quality literacy instruction appeared like (McGee, 2007). Research-based and practical resources are available in order to help educators and parents maximize the potential of students in achieving literacy success. The quality of the language and literacy environment that the teachers set would determine the quality of curriculum, children's language and literacy development (McGee, 2007). The two common approaches that are used in preschool literacy programs are embedded instruction and direct instruction. The proponents of these instructional approaches advocated for childcentered instruction and they are considered to be childhood appropriate, in terms of matching the instructional method with the age of the child (McGee, 2007).

The traditional classrooms need to be transformed into centers of excellence that allowed children into a language-rich and print-rich setting (McGee, 2007). The transformation process involves the identification of increased opportunities for children to use oral language and to experience the use of print in different situations and forms. Through planning, teachers could transform their classrooms into an environment that optimized the child's talking, reading, and writing for a wide range of purposes (McGee, 2007).

Moomaw and Heironymous (2002) discussed about the advantage of learning art to develop literacy among children through activities that included specific learning accomplishments. Since art is considered as one of the early symbol systems that young children are exposed to and learn, it is recognized as an important mode for helping them express their ideas and feelings (Moomaw and Heironymous, 2002). When children create art, they are usually motivated to talk about it and they improve on their literacy skills. The manner by which they discuss their ideas with their teachers and their peers reveal the importance of artistic development in early education curriculum (Moomaw and Heironymous, 2002).

Tyler and Gee (1999) described youngsters that are given a handful of pens or crayons, as well as paper or activity books to be the ones to draw symbols. When adult guidance is present, they will be able to assist the children to develop their skills for basic reading, writing and math. Therefore, young children are expected to be motivated by art materials and the parents or teachers only needed to use this interest to the advantage of teaching.

Bierman and her colleagues (2008) conducted a study that evaluated 44 Head Start classrooms that were assigned to enriched conditions, which involved the Head Start Research Based and Developmentally Informed strategies. They were compared to those that implemented traditional practices. The intervention involved “hands-on” extension activities, as well as strategies that encouraged social-emotional competencies.

Bierman et al. (2008) promoted the use of intervention programs that involved language development and emergent literacy skills. In this study, they considered take-home materials in order for the children to experience enhanced skill development with the assistance of their parents at home. According to this study, there were significant differences that favored children that experienced intervention classrooms based on measures of vocabulary, emergent literacy, emotional understanding, social problemsolving, social behavior, and learning engagement (Bierman et al., 2008).

The Need to Assess

From the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Early Reading First grant that were focused on improving preschool literacy programs, the emphasis on accountability increased more than ever (Enz and Morrow, 2009). Schools consistently need to assess or evaluate their curriculum, mode of instruction, as well as the environments by which children were expected to be nurtured and to learn. Enz and Morrow (2009) emphasized on the need for multiple assessments for preschoolers. There were different factors that would be considered and a solitary form of assessment would not suffice.

In addition, there is a needed for instruction methods to be assessment-guided, otherwise, there would be no way of evaluating if they are effective. There is a need to assess the preschool literacy environment, as well as the language development of the students in order to enhance their success for developing these skills. In the same way, there is a need to heighten phonological awareness, comprehension of the text and the understanding of concepts about prints, books and writing.

Authentic assessments are described to be in the form of evaluating daily performance work samples and teacher observations (Enz and Morrow, 2009). Enz and Morrow (2009) stressed that the assessment of the child's development is considered a crucial factor in the development of high-quality preschool programs. The difference between assessment and testing is the former enabled teachers and parents to gauge the progress of the child and allows the teacher to understand appropriate instruction methods for their student's constantly changing language development and literacy needs. Conversely, testing referred to the evaluation of effective curriculum materials in the context of the children's needs. Effective educators will make use of both evaluation and testing to understand their practice and to receive specific information about the student progress and to plan for their future success. According to Enz and Morrow (2009), "preschool teachers who use a wide variety of assessments to collect information about children's literacy development provide the clearest picture of a child's knowledge" (p. 6).

Fountas and Pinnell (2008) pointed out that there was a need to use teaching and assessment frames in order for the teachers to develop an awareness and understanding for

the student's reading levels. These levels are described to determine where the students are, where they should be and what they need to do to get there, for a particular student, for a specific grade and period. It also provides an awareness as to the level by which readers could think within, beyond and about a text to gain understanding about it (Fountas and Pinnell, 2008).

The Creative Curriculum Approach

Heroman and Jones (2004) described the Creative Curriculum Approach provides a way for educators to design literacy learning activities that will enable them to develop, within the context of a inclusive and integrative curriculum. There are seven components of literacy development, such as the source of enjoyment, vocabulary and language, phonological awareness, knowledge of print, letters and words, comprehension and books, as well as with other texts.

This approach allowed literacy experiences in the preschool curriculum. This curriculum offers a collaboration of literacy activities in all the interest areas in a traditional classroom (Heroman and Jones, 2004). This approach enables educators to increase learning opportunities for the students. In this approach, the teachers could promote literacy learning through techniques such as reading aloud, storytelling, talking, singing, playing with language, writing, as well as scaffolding children's learning through their play.

The preschool program under study is accredited by NAEYC, and its standards were established to maintain quality child development program services. It provides a safe and healthy learning environment (Bredekamp, Copple, and NAEYC, 1997) for the children who attend and trust in this facility. The Child Development Program acknowledges the importance of literacy for preschool students; an additional two hours are provided for

teachers to access the Creative Curriculum online in order to support their curriculum planning approaches. This program supports emergent curriculum literacy for preschool students who have to learn the basic reading and writing skills before entering kindergarten (Dodge et al., 2002). They are provided with the opportunity to learn reading, writing, and recognition of the alphabet.

One focus of the program is on children who have no interest in learning basic literacy skills. Each child is assessed quarterly with a CCEC progress report. The results help to determine and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the preschool child's learning capabilities. Teachers use theorists' philosophies on how children learn, providing a variety of teaching tools and materials, such as instructional computer games, large-print alphabets, pictures, music, books, child-size furniture, learning centers, resources for teachers, and visual aids that meet VPK Standards (VPK, 2009).

The 2008 VPK Education Standards provided by the state of Florida include: a) physical health, b) approaches to learning, c) social and emotional development, d) language and communication, e) emergent literacy, f) mathematical and scientific thinking, g) social studies and art, and h) motor development (Office of Early Learning, 2007). These standards, when met, assist a child in passing the DIBELS kindergarten test at the beginning of the school year, which consists of: Phonological Awareness, Alphabetic Principles, Fluency with Connected Text Vocabulary, and Comprehension.

The VPK standards present opportunities for children to develop the reading and writing learning skills needed before entering kindergarten (Office of Learning, 2007).

Teachers' decisions on daily curriculum should enhance the learning of the alphabet, phonics, segmenting of words, and contain experiences within a real-world environment that extends broadly to the children's understanding of reading (Bredekamp et al., 1997). Preschool teachers may use various theorists' reading readiness methods for how children learn to read and write, such as: a) the teachable time for reading: child is ready to read, and b) a child merging from a non-reader to a primary reader (Matthews et al., 2009).

Summary

A review of studies that surrounded early childhood education would reveal the significant importance of school readiness and literacy skills development. The onset of literacy skills was observed as early as the child's preschool years and there was a need to make school there were effective intervention programs for these children. The review of related literature revealed the conceptual framework for literacy development, especially for reading skills. While school readiness, especially in the area of literacy, was considered as complex area of discussion, it is a concept that carries a critical value in the face of the NCLB provisions. Progressive education was also discussed in this chapter because of the recognized need to implemented differentiated instruction to cater to the individualized needs of the students. This philosophy of education was based on the understanding that different students have different interests, motivation, experiences and backgrounds, by which the teacher should put into consideration for curriculum development. The CC approach was also described in this chapter in order to provide an in-depth understanding for the program that this study would evaluate.

The next chapter will describe the research methodology that will be employed to achieve the purpose of this study. This chapter will describe the design, as well as the procedures for data collection and data analysis that will take place for the completion of the study. The instruments and limitations of the study are also defined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The study intends to assess the effectiveness of a creative curriculum teaching strategy in a pre-school population of four and five year old boys and girls. This chapter will discuss the methodology and design of the research, which will be implemented to address the purpose of the study and the research questions. The detailed procedures for conducting this study are also described in this chapter.

Methodology

The method that will be implemented will be quantitative. This research method is selected because of the perceived necessity to test the hypotheses that are presented in the beginning of the study (Creswell, 2009). A quantitative research will include numerical representation and the manipulation of observations for the purposes for explaining the phenomena. This process will involve the collection of data from the evaluation of the students. The quantitative method will enable the collect data that can be quantified and statistically analyzed.

A qualitative study would be limited to gathering descriptive and experiential interpretations of a phenomenon, while there will be a need to measure the effects of the Creative Curriculum in the preschool literacy readiness of the students. Thus, a qualitative method is not appropriate for this study. The qualitative approach will fail to address inquiries that required quantification and statistical treatment. Conversely, a mixed methodology would also unnecessary because of the sufficient nature of a quantitative approach to address the research questions.

Creswell (2009) noted that this research method follows a post-positivist worldview and a reductionist approach that is geared towards theory verification. Since the purpose of the study will be to measure the effects of the curriculum through statistical analysis and verification, and not to generate meaning through experiences this method will be chosen. There will also be a need to generate inferences based on statistical measurements from the analysis of covariance (Creswell, 2009).

Design

A quasi-experimental design uses pre-post assessment of preschooler's before and after the Creative Curriculum for the intervention group (Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell and Goldberg, 1994). The baseline data of the preschool scores will be obtained from the beginning of the preschooler's participation in the program. Follow-up data will be collected at the end approximately 18 weeks. The design of the study is a quantitative, quasi-experimental design where mean differences will be assessed but statistical proof cannot be inferred. That is, since the study does not employ true randomization of participants (manipulation of the independent variable), results will be inferred as suggestive of creative

curriculum effectiveness rather than proof that it works. The study will use Analysis of Covariance to test for mean differences between a control group and an intervention group. A pre and post test strategy will be used to test for mean differences between groups while controlling for pre-test reading and writing knowledge differences.

The use of statistical analyses through a series of analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) procedures, which controlled for baseline adjustment, as recommended by Delcourt and her colleagues (1994), will enable the comparison of the group of students that experienced the Creative Curriculum and the group that did not. ANCOVAs will allow the researcher to evaluate the mean differences for the variables towards the different strategies implemented (Zhang and King Fai-Hui, 2003).

Research Questions

This experimental Creative Curriculum teaching approach is designed to improve reading and writing literacy skills within preschool age experiences. The program study will strive to respond to the following questions:

Research Question 1: Does creative curriculum instructional technique improve kindergarten reading and writing skills?

Research Question 2: Does creative curriculum instructional technique improve preschool reading and writing skills?

Participants

The participants in this study will be a convenience sample of approximately 24 pre-school students. The sample will consist of four and five year old boys and girls from a single school with two pre-school classes. Students will not be filtered by any other socio/cognitive/demographic variable other than if a child has been defined as a special needs student. Special needs students will be allowed to participate, but their scores will be summarily removed from the sample prior to statistical testing.

Instruments

The researcher and one other qualified subject matter expert (both preschool teachers at the CDP), will assess the preschool children's knowledge of reading and writing at the beginning of the study. The instrument used will be a content validated pre-school reading and writing assessment tool designed by the authors of the creative curriculum program. In the Creative Curriculum assessment profile, there are 51 criteria that a preschool child should meet during the course of the school year. The instrument will be used to quantify knowledge of reading and writing skills along with level of understanding about alphabet, shapes, numbers, and colors. Participants will be graded on a 1 -10 scale where 1 equals very weak and 10 equals very strong. The two proctors will independently

rate each child on each dimension (reading and writing) and scores will be compared to assess inter-rater reliability using.

This initial assessment will be followed by a quarterly assessment, (Post Test) which is required over the course of the school year by the Creative Curriculum approach. The preschool students' profile assessment quarterly reviews will provide a framework for this applied dissertation study to determine the effectiveness of Creative Curriculum teaching strategies over that of traditional teaching.

Data Analysis

Basic demographic information will be collected on participants to assist in developing a general profile of the two groups (control and intervention). Intercoder reliability statistics will be estimated using the cross-tabs menu in SPSS/PSAW. This is accessed by going to Analyze → Descriptive Statistics → Cross-tabs. The coding for one coder goes into the Rows box and the coding for the other coder goes into the Columns box. Cohen's Kappa can be obtained by clicking on Statistics and putting a check next to Kappa. Click Continue, and then OK. The crosstab tables can be used to assess percent agreement. Generally, a kappa of .8 is considered very high reliability. Finally, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) will be used to determine mean differences between groups after controlling for pre-test reading and writing abilities.

Procedures

Students will be not be randomly assigned to groups (control, intervention) since the make-up of each class has been predetermined. Students' from both groups will be assessed

prior to study intervention and then re-assessed after one half of school work has been completed (approximately 18 weeks). Since the children in the study are so young, discussion about voluntary participation will be with the parents of the children.

Limitations

Limitations of the study include the convenience sample of students being used and artifacts associated with pre-school teaching. The fact that randomization is not being used impacts study validity and generalization to the sampling frame (i.e., pre-school children). Further, artifacts associated with assessing pre-school teaching effectiveness may include socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and a host of other factors that cannot definitively be controlled for.

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