Evaluation of a Creative Curriculum in Preschool Literacy Readiness

by
Belen N. Mina

An Applied Dissertation Concept Paper Submitted to the
Fischler School of Education and Human Services
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

University
2010

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 from achieving 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 undergo 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 preschool students who will participate in the

study. These students will undergo pretests and post-tests to determine the effectiveness of the

program through a validated preschool reading and writing assessment tool that was designed by

the authors of the CC program.

Table of Contents

Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Reading readiness skills are necessary for preschool children to initiate the learning-to-read process (Matthews, Klaassens, & 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 & Stegelman, 2003).

Since each child has different learning curve at the time he/she enters preschool, there is a need for him/her 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 (US 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 & Richgels, 2007). This study will evaluate the effectiveness of the Creative Curriculum Approach for Early Childhood (CCEC) (Dodge, Colker, & 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 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 (State of 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 (State of Florida, 2009).

The CYP is based on the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) standards' guidelines on development (National Association of Education for Young Children, 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 (State of Florida, 2009).

The faculty and staff members of the preschool are committed to the task of providing 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" (State of Florida, 2009).

Current statistics in the city in Florida where the school is located show that there are 356,284 (48 percent) male and 379,333 (52 percent) females. The ethnicity is composed of 64-percent Caucasians, 29-percent African Americans, 3-percent Asians, and 4 percent categorized as Other. This district is the 19th largest school district in the nation. It has about 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 (State of Florida, 2009).

The CYP participates in the 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 the VPK program (State of Florida, 2009). The purpose of the VPK program 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 & Cunningham, 2009).

VPK includes quality literacy standards, teachers' accountability, age-appropriate 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 composed of 540 hours of teaching instruction in a school year, or the summer prior to the school year. The summer VPK class invovles 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 by providing fun instructional games. The program was developed in order to satisfy guidelines established by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The NCLB Act 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 et al., 2002). This tool meets the US 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.

Creative curriculum (CC). This term refers to research-based teaching instruction that offers students different avenues to develop their reading literacy skills in preschool, which will

serve as the foundation for their school success. This instruction is described to be flexible to meet the children's needs and interests. This term refers to a curriculum that is described to give professional development tools for teachers in different formats such as video-learning, E-learning, and other interactive tools (DeVries, Heldebrant, Edmiaston, & Sales, 2002). In this study, the Creative Curriculum program will be evaluated in a manner by which it develops preschool literacy readiness.

Early childhood education. According to Weigel and Martin (2006), this term refers to the stage wherein the foundation for literacy and school success is laid down. This term describes the education that children gain during the early years of their student life.

Language acquisition. This 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 refer 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 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 the level by which a child is able to cope and succeed in grade school, which involves 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, and the child's capacity for learning (Cassidy, Mims, Rucker, & 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 face 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 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 No Child Left Behind Act (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 will eventually 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 et al. (2010), school-based programs can positively impact a wide range of social, emotional, and behavioral 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 & Johnson, 2005). Studies indicate that teachers who are professionally developed are better poised to support students' academic achievement (Neumann & Cunningham, 2009) and have a cumulative impact on higher grades, depending on environmental settings (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2005).

Moreover, a child's reading readiness begins soon after birth, depending on the 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, & 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 decrease 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 include 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 Inner East Community Health Service, 2003).

School Readiness

School readiness was considered a crucial issue in the United States in the past decade (Kamerman & 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 & Kelley, 2008). Programs for early intervention and school readiness emerged as early as the mid-1960s as spurned 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 & 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 toward building a better workforce (Winter & 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 a 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 & Kahn,

1995). In response, there is a focus on the cognitive and socialization aspects of preschool

programs in order to help children and parents achieve successful preschool experiences.

According to the Elizabeth Love Inner East Community Health Service program (2003),

during the preschool years of children, teachers and parents are faced with the significant

concern of evaluating if the child is ready 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. These are 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. It needs to be recognized 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 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 needs 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 & 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 & 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 & Martin, 2006). During this time, children develop skills and attitudes that will increase their potential for success. Daily experiences and opportunities to develop oral language skills and gaining knowledge through written language strengthened their emergent literacy skills. Children acquire skills and knowledge in different formal and informal settings such as at home and at child care programs (Weigel & Martin, 2006).

The development of young children does not happen in isolation. Instead, it occurs in a wide array of direct and indirect influences. Research links children's developmental outcomes with environments where they have support for the critical connection of the nature of the children's experiences to their learning and growth (Weigel & Martin, 2006). According to Cassidy et al. (2003), the preschool teachers should plan their activities in such a way that considers 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 that the teachers need to be knowledgeable and have the ability to facilitate each child's learning. They need to possess an understanding of the child's development and the process by which young children learn. 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 important 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 their skill development but at the same time proceed at their on 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. These are 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, impressive gains are 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 & Johnson, 2005). This philosophy subscribes to the concept that children learn best with true-to-life activities with their peers. Progressive

education is described as innovative 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. This is 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 child through specifically designed school curriculum (Hampel, 2008). With progressive education, the young children are given opportunities to excel in music, the arts, drama, and recreation. In 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 to have decreased the rate of dropouts among

students and increased school enrolments in the first third of the 20th century (Hampel, 2008).

Those that support progressive education supported intelligence testing. They perceived that

evaluating the innate mental abilities of young children provide a fair manner by which students

are assigned to particular courses and education tracks.

The Age for Literacy Development

According to Schickendaz, 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" (1999, 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 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 are

cases wherein children struggle because they lacked the sufficient foundation that was needed to

complement the instructions that teachers provide to help children become beginner 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, & the National Association for the Education

of Young Child (2000), there have 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 the early beginnings of

literacy acquisition led to the implementation of inappropriate teaching practices that were suited

for older students rather than for 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 a process 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/she thought at the present

moment. This is regardless of whether one made sense to anyone or to himself/herself. Thus,

when a child speaks, he/she is not concerned 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 forms 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 alongside one another, most of the time they are absorbed with 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) said that Piaget's perception of intellectual acts functions 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 is two to three years of age, it is crucial for his/her writing to evolve from scribbling into script. 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 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-fictional writing activities (Glover, 2009).

Gibson (2010) stressed that there were many factors that affected the student's attitude toward reading, including the parents, sibling attitudes, school and library programs, curriculum and instruction, and the teachers. In a study that Gibson (2010) conducted, pre-service teachers observed that students had pre-conceived notions about reading that were rooted from their experiences as a child, young person, and young adults. The examination of these experiences was significant in providing a tool for 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 in which they were allowed to take turns and listen to other children talk. 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 & 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 could 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 focus on the development of their literacy skills and those that create 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 language can be in speaking; it requires the support, time, and effort of adults to provide skilled instruction (Time4 Learning, 2009). Foundations must be established 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 them to learn 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 heighten their comprehension skills (Burns et al., 1999).

Reading is not easy to learn, and it is not innate as there is a process by which it is learned (Elizabeth Love Inner East Community Service, 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 reading with speed and accuracy.

Burns et al. (1999) stated 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 of 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 gain a significant advantage in their literacy development.

At the end of a substantial study of preschool reading readiness, the researcher

recommended providing various curriculum approaches to preschool students to nurture their

reading literacy skills (DeVries et al., 2002). Every child, depending on his/her 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

specific teaching method or mix of methods that would be more effective than the others for all

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 learn how they could develop

skills for 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 & 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 & 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, the significance of understanding print symbols and interpreting them could already be identified.

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 their intellectual development. 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 perceive 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/she 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 the use of dramatic play to jumpstart writing skills. As children begin to role play and 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 & 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 message, also helped children developed their writing skills (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2009). There were typical standards and learning experiences that need 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	Observes and follows along as adults track print left to right while reading aloud;

| bottom movement on a page | browses through books from front to black |
| 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 & 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 sound-letter 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 & 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 Inner East Community Health Service, 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 ability 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 Inner East Community Health Service, 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 because 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 & Casbergue, 2009). Fluency is defined as 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 each 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 reveals the relationship between the

learning experiences of the students and the standards they could accomplish:

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

Table 3. Typical Standards and Learning Experiences: Alphabet Knowledge (Schickedanz &

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 Inner East Community Health Service, 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) encouraged 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 among their peers and friends (Brock & 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 experience 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 & 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 then 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 & Raphael, 2005).

Spiegel (2005) said 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 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 improve 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 child-centered instruction. 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 provide children with 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 the advantage of learning art in developing 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 are supposed to learn, it is recognized as an important means for helping them express their ideas and feelings (Moomaw & Heironymous, 2002). When children create art, they are usually motivated to talk about it to improve on their literacy skills. The manner by which they discuss their ideas with their teachers and their peers reveals the importance of artistic development in early education curriculum (Moomaw & 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 highly likely to draw symbols. When adult guidance is present, they will be able to assist the children in developing 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 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 problem solving, social behavior, and learning engagement (Biermen 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 & Morrow, 2009). Schools consistently need to assess or evaluate their curriculum, mode of instruction, as well as the environments in 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 need 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 & 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 that the former enabled teachers and parents to gauge the progress of the child and allows the teachers 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 that there was a need to use teaching and

assessment frames in order for the teachers to develop an awareness and understanding of 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 of the level by which readers could think within,

beyond, and about a text to gain understanding about it (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008).

The Creative Curriculum Approach

Heroman and Jones (2004) described the Creative Curriculum Approach as a means that

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. These are the source of enjoyment; vocabulary and

language; phonological awareness; knowledge of print, letters, and words; comprehension;

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

setting (Heroman & 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, and 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, & 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 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 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 institute 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 a 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 implement 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, 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 of 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 preschool 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 of explaining the phenomena. This process will involve the collection of data from the evaluation of the students. Quantitative method will enable the researcher to 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, qualitative method is not appropriate for this study. Qualitative approach will fail to address inquiries that required quantification and statistical treatment. Conversely, a mixed methodology would also be unnecessary because of the sufficient nature of the 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 preschoolers before and after the Creative Curriculum for the intervention group (Delcourt, Loyd, Cornell & 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 wherein 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 of the variables toward the different strategies implemented (Zhang & 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

preschool students. The sample will consist of four- and five-year-old boys and girls from a

single school with two preschool 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 that will be used is a content-validated preschool 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 the level of understanding about alphabet, shapes, numbers,

and colors. Participants will be graded on a 1-10 scale, wherein 1 is equal to very weak and 10 is

equal to 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

those 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 will be accessed by going to

Analyze → Descriptive Statistics → Cross-tabs. The coding for one coder will go into the Rows

box, and the coder for the other coding will go into the Columns box. Cohen's Kappa can be

obtained by clicking on Statistics and putting a check next to Kappa. The coder will then click

Continue and then OK. The cross-tab tables can be used to assess percent agreement. Generally,

a kappa of 0.8 is considered very high in terms of 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 be controlled definitely.

References

Adler, M., & Trepanier-Street, M. (2007). College students' beliefs about preschooler's literacy

    development: Results from a national study of jumpstart. *Early Childhood Research and*

    Practice, *9*(2), 1.

Beaty, J. (2008). 50 early childhood literacy strategies (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Bennett-Armistead, D. N., Moses, A., & Snow, E. (2005). Literacy and the youngest learner:

    Best practices for educators of children from birth to 5. New York: Scholastic.

Berg, B., & Stegelman, T. (2003). Critical role of phonological and phonemic

    awareness in reading process: A model for early literacy in rural school. *Rural*

    Special Education, *2*(4). Retrieved September 2009 from BNET with ProQuest

    Database.

Bierman, K. L., Domitrovich, C. E., Nix, R. L., Gest, S. D., Welsh, J. A., Greenberg, M. T.,

    Blair, …, & Gill, S. (2008), Promoting academic and social-emotional school readiness:

    The Head Start REDI Program. *Child Development, 79*, 1802-1817.

Boyer, E. L. (1991). *Ready to learn: A mandate for the nation*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie

    Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Bredekamp, S., Copple, C., & National Association for the Education of Young Children

    (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood program.*

    National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Brock, C., & Raphael, T. (2005). *Windows to language, literacy, and culture*. Newark, DE:

    International Reading Association.

Burns, M., Griffin, P., & Snow, C. (1999). Starting out right: A guide to promoting children's

    reading success. USA: National Academic Press.

Cassidy, D., Mims, S., Rucker, L., & Boone, S. (2003). Emergent curriculum and kindergarten

    readiness. *Childhood Education*, *79*(4), 194.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*

    approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cristmann, E. P. (2009). The big picture of NCLB. *Educational Forum, 73*(3), 272-273.

DeVries, R., Hildebrandt, C., Edmiaston, R., & Sales, C. (2002). *Developing a*

    constructivist early childhood curriculum. Teachers College Press.

Delcourt, M., Loyd, B., Cornell, D., & Goldberg, M. (1994) Evaluation of the effects of

    programming arrangements on student learning outcomes. *The National Research Center*

    on the Gifted and Talented, 1-85.

Dodge, D. T., Colker, L. J., & Heroman, C. (2002). *Creative curriculum* (4th ed.).

    Quality Books Inc.

Domitrovich, C., Bradshaw, C., Greenberg, M., Embry, D., Poduska, J., & Ialongo, N. (2010).

    Integrated models of school-based prevention: Logic & Theory. *Psychology in the*

    Schools, *47*(1), 71-88.

Early, D. M., Maxwell, K. L., Burchinal, M., Alva, S., Bender, R. H., Bryant, D., … Zill, N.

    (2007). Teachers' education, classroom quality, and young children's academic skills:

    Results from seven studies of preschool programs. *Child Development, 78*(2), 558-580.

Elizabeth Love Inner East Community Health Service. (2003). School readiness and early

    literacy. *Love and Reilly*, *7*, 1-7.

Enz, B., & Morrow, L. (2009). *Assessing preschool literacy development: informal and formal measures to guide instruction*. New Jersey: International Reading Association.

Fountas, I., & Pinnell, G. (2008). *Teaching for comprehending and fluency: Thinking, talking, and writing about reading, K-8*. London: Heinemann.

Gibson, K. (2010). Through the eyes of the preservice teacher: Using a reflective reading journey to inform teaching and learning. *Issues in Teacher Education*, *19*(1), 109-120.

Glover, M. (2009). *Engaging young writers, Preschool-Grade 1*. London: Heinemann.

Heroman, C., & Jones, C. (2004). *Literacy: The creative curriculum approach*. Delmar Cengage Learning.

Hampel, R. (2008). Progressive versus traditional education. Retrieved August 11, 2010, from http://www.faqs.org/childhood/Pa-Re/Progressive-Education.html

Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (Eds.), & National Committee for Citizens in Education. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to students achievement.* Center for Law & Education.

Hess, F., & Petrilli, M. (2006). *No Child Left Behind (Peter Lang Primer).* Michigan: Peter Lang.

Jalongo, M. (2006). *Early childhood language arts* (4th ed.). United Kingdom: Allyn & Bacon.

Kamerman, S., & Kahn, S. (1995). *Starting right: How American neglects its youngest children and what we can do about it*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mathews, D. P., Klassens, A., & Walter, L. B. (1999). *What is reading readiness?* SIL International.

McGee, L. M., & Richgels, D. J. (2007). *Literacy's beginnings: Supporting young readers and writers*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

McGee, L. (2007). Transforming literacy practices in preschool: Research-based practices that

give all children the opportunity to reach their potential as learners. New York: Scholastic

Teaching Resources.

Missall, K., Reschly, A., Betts, J., McConnell, S. Heistad, D., Pickart, M., …, & Marston, D.

(2007). Examination of the predictive validity of preschool early literacy skills. *School

Psychology Review*, *36*(3), 433.

Moomaw, S., & Heironymous, B. (2002). *More than painting: Exploring the wonders of art in

preschool and kindergarten*. USA: Redleaf Press.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2005). *NAEYC early

childhood program standards and accreditation Criteria: The mark of quality in

early childhood Education.* NAEYC.

National Research Council. (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and

school.* National Academy Press.

Neuman, S. B., & Cunningham, C. (2009). The impact of professional development and

coaching on early language and literacy instructional practices. *American Research

Journal, 46*(2), 532. Retrieved October 8, 2009, from ProQuest Database.

Neuman, S., Copple, C., Bredekamp, S., & the National Association for the Education of Young

Child. (2000). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for

young children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young

Child.

Office of Early Learning. (2007). *Florida Department of Education: Voluntary preschool

education program.* Florida Department of Education.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2003). Early reading strategy: The report of the expert

    panel on early reading in Ontario 2003. Retrieved September 30, 2009, from

     http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/reading/index.html

OPNAV 1900E. (2008). *CYP policies.* US Government.

Roberts, C. (1976). An investigation of the influence of preschool programs on children's

    reading progress: A review of model programs with implications for the future. *Paper*

    presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association World

    Congress on Reading.

Roopnarine, J. L., & Johnson, J. E. (2005). *Approaches to early childhood education* (4th

    ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Roskos, K., Tabors, P., & Lenhart, L. (2009). *Oral language and early literacy in preschool:*

Talking, reading, and writing (2nd ed.). New Jersey: International Reading Association.

Schickedanz, J. (1999). *Much more than the ABC's: The early stages of reading and writing*.

    Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Schickedanz, J., & Casbergue, R. (2009). *Writing in preschool: Learning to orchestrate meaning*

    and marks. New Jersey: International Reading Association.

Singer, D. (1996). *A Piaget primer: How a child thinks; Revised Edition*. New York: Plume.

Snow, E. C., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (2005). *Preventing reading difficulties in young*

    children. The National Academies Press.

Spiegel, D. (2005). *Classroom discussion: Strategies for engaging all students, building higher-*

    level thinking skills, and strengthening reading and writing across the curriculum. New

    York: Teaching Resources.

State of Florida. (2009). Voluntary prekindergarten education program. Retrieved

September 4, 2009, from http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/documents/

Strickland, D., & Schickedanz, J. (2004). *Learning about print in preschool: Working with*

letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness. Newark, DE: International

Reading Association.

Time4 Learning. (2009). Reading skills pyramid. Retrieved August 9, 2009 from

http://www.timesforlearning.com/reading_pyramid

Tyler, J., & Gee, R. (1999). *Ready for reading*. E.D.C. Publishing.

US Department of Education. (1994). Strong families, strong schools. Washington, DC:

U.S. Government Printing Office.

Voluntary Prekindergarten. (2010). Agency for Workforce Innovation. Retrieved August 30,

2010, from http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/VPK%20Program.html

Vukelich, C., & Christie, J. (2009). *Building a foundation for preschool literacy: Effective*

instruction for children's reading and writing development. New Jersey, USA.

Wadsworth, B. (2003). *Piaget's theory of cognitive and affective development: Foundations of*

constructivism. USA: Allyn & Bacon.

Weigel, D., & Martin, S. (2006). Identifying key early literacy and school readiness issues:

Exploring a strategy for assessing community needs. *Early Childhood Research &*

Practice, *8*(2). Retrieved August 12, 2010, from

http://www.questia.com/read/5017885745?title=Identifying%20Key%20Early%20Litera

cy%20and%20School%20Readiness%20Issues%3a%20Exploring%20a%20Strategy%20

for%20Assessing%20Community%20Needs

Wilber, P. (2000). *Reading rescue 1-2-3: Raise your child's reading level 2 grades with this 3 step program.* Crown Publishing Group.

Winter, S., & Kelley, M. (2008). Forty years of school readiness research: What have we learned? *Childhood Education 84*(5), 260.

Zhang, L., & King Fai-Hui, S. (2003). From Pentagon to triangle: A cross-cultural investigation of an implicit theory of giftedness. *Roeper Review, 25*(2), 78.