Kindergarten Writing and the State Diagnostic Test
A Personal Journey in the Teaching of Writing

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The State of Ohio began to develop academic content standards in 1997. The Ohio Academic Content Standards include Content Standards (what a student should know) Performance Standards (what a student should be able to do) and Operating Standards (description of the learning conditions). (Academic Content Standards Frequently Asked Questions, 2001). These state standards were aimed at providing a statewide system to improve learning and instruction. The state also developed diagnostic assessments based on the standards to be implemented in the 2004-2005 school year with two goals for that assessment, to increase student learning and to strengthen instruction. Ohio achievement tests were also aligned with the academic content standards.

The researcher discovered that after implementing a sample of the state diagnostic test the kindergarten students seemed confused and uncomfortable with the process and format of the test. The researcher wondered that if the students were provided with purposeful developmentally appropriate writing instruction, the students would be comfortable with the format and have better mastery of the state standards.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this project was to determine if providing kindergarten students with purposeful developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities improved knowledge transfer and changed kindergarten students’ responses to writing. The research questions were: 1. What were the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students? 2. What writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten students? 3. What activities promoted student learning of writing skills? 4. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities?
5. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom?

Justification

The implementation of this project provided an action research directed plan for implementing a developmental approach to writing in the kindergarten classroom. By following the plan the kindergarten students were introduced to the testing model used in the Ohio Diagnostic test in incremental stages. It was hoped that by teaching the students in an organized strategy the students would improve their understanding of conventions of writing; left to right, top to bottom, return sweep, and spaces between words. In addition, it was hoped that this instruction improved student’s phonemics awareness as they practiced writing beginning sounds, ending sounds, medial sounds. It was also hoped that the practice of writing made connections between graphemes and phonemes and that practice also made students more familiar with this writing strategy and made them feel more successful and comfortable when taking the state diagnostic test.

Definition of Terms

**Academic Content Standards** were defined statements developed by the state to implement instruction and define what students are expected to know and do (Joint Council of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, 2001).

**Content Standards** were descriptions of the knowledge and skill the students should attain, know, or be able to do (Joint Council of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, 2001).
Conventions of print were the skills needed in order to write including; letter formation, spacing between words, directionality; left to right, top to bottom, return sweep (Bradley & Pottle, 2001).

Decoding was sounding out or reading words.

Developmentally appropriate writing instruction was instruction that matched the maturity of the child.

Diagnostic Test was the test developed for kindergarten students in the state to diagnosis the student's writing levels.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, DIBELS, was a standardized individually administered test that measures the development of early literacy skills such as phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding, automaticity and fluency of alphabetic principle (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2005).

Encoding was writing words.

Explicit instruction was instruction that concentrated on a small component of a skill. (Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003).

Facilitating was the process of the teacher moving the student from observing the skills, to practicing the skills, to independence (Morrow et al., 2003).

Graphemes were the smallest part of written language that represented a phoneme in the spelling of a word (Armbruster & Osborn, 2001).

Indicators

Initial Sound Fluency measured the students’ ability to match, produce, and identify the initial sounds of a given word (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2005).
**Letter Naming Fluency** was the measure of the students’ ability to identify random letters in one minute (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2005).

**Meaningful classroom activities** were activities that made connections for the learner as opposed to just copying text.

**Modeling** was the demonstration of the skill being taught by the teacher for the students. This was usually demonstrated by thinking aloud (Bradley et al., 2001).

**Nonsense Word Fluency** was the ability of students to decode individual phonemes and blend them together (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2005).

**Orthography** was the printed form of a word (Haney, 2002).

**Performance Standards** were statements that point out competent performance of skills (Joint Council of the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, 2001).

**Phonemes** were the smallest part of spoken language that makes a difference in the meaning of words (Armbruster et al.).

**Phoneme Segmentation Fluency** was the measure of students’ ability to auditory skills to distinguish the sound in words (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2005).

**Phonemic awareness** was the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words (Armbruster et al.).

**Phonics** was the understanding that there was a predictable relationship between phonemes and graphemes (Armbruster et al., 2001).

**Phonology** was spoken words (Haney, 2002).

**Phonological awareness** was a broad term that included phonemic awareness, phonemes; activities included rhymes, words, syllables, and onset and rimes (Armbruster et al.)
Return sweep was returning to the left side of a paper to continue writing at the end of each line.

Rubric was used to score student’s writing samples. The rubric assigned scores for meeting levels on varied writing criteria.

Scaffolding was the support a teacher provided to students when a new skill was taught. The teacher slowly removed the support so that the student moved to an independent level. (Morrow et al. 2003).

Semantic was the meaning of words (Haney, 2002).

Transfer was the ability of the student to apply the skills taught to their work.

Limitations and Appropriate Use of Results

This project was implemented in a half-day kindergarten class in a small mid-west city from August until February. The instruction was influenced by the state academic content standards and the state diagnostic test. The results were based writing samples scored with a rubric, questionnaires, and test scores. Because of the need to monitor these results a limited sample of students were used, the class was a morning class made up sixteen students, 7 girls and 9 boys, the results may not be generalized to other school populations.
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine if providing kindergarten students with purposeful developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities improved knowledge transfer and changed kindergarten students' responses to writing. The research questions were: 1. What were the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students? 2. What writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten students? 3. What activities promoted student learning of writing skills? 4. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities? 5. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom?

Research Question #1: What were the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students?

In order to answer research question #1 a review of literature was conducted to discover the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students. The researcher discovered that the best practices of teaching writing included explicit instruction, modeling, scaffolding, and facilitating. Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley (2003) further emphasized that good instruction started with clear goals, expectations of performance, and an assessment by the teacher and the student. They concluded that there needed to be a balance between teaching the writing process and the product the child produced. The researchers noted that good teachers encouraged the student's creativity while teaching the conventions of writing. They stated that students who were provided with a balanced approach to writing were more proficient in the skills being
taught and could use the skills independently. The researchers concluded that kindergarten students would need direct systematic instruction and classroom time to practice the skills taught. Thus the researchers inferred that the writing practice provided the kindergarten students with experiences that allowed them to make connections between their thoughts, letters, printed words, and sounds. They also concluded that writing practice made the students aware of the relationship between sounds and letter symbols. Therefore, this experience with written and spoken language improved students' decoding and encoding strategies. Morrow et al. (2003) pointed out that the best practices for writing instruction were “direct and explicit instruction…, where teachers modeled, explained, demonstrated, guided and engaged the students”(p. 258-259) and immersed them in the best practices.

**Explicit Instruction**

Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley (2003) stated that explicit instruction was a critical component of teaching writing and that teachers needed to concentrate on a small component of writing. McCarrer, Pinnell & Fountas (2000) pointed out the importance of carefully selecting teaching material for each lesson so that the student’s learning was expanded. They explained that by limiting the number of skills taught in each lesson, the students understood the skill and that allowed the students to apply the skills in their own writing practice. The researchers stressed the importance of the teacher using conversation to introduce the new skill before the lesson started, during the writing session, and after it was concluded. They observed that this process of using conversation about the key point during the writing lesson focused the students on the skill being taught and engaged the students in the conversation of writing. McCarrer et al., (2000) asserted that by having the students summarize the skill taught, the key point was emphasized and reinforced. Morrow et al. (2003) & McCarrer et al. agreed that writing
instruction for kindergarten students was precise and explicit which allowed the student to master the skills and expanded their knowledge base.

**Modeling**

Bradley & Pottle (2001) described modeling as the process of demonstrating how a skill or concept was implemented. Box (2002) further described modeling as the thinking process that was talked out in front of the students; “the teacher writes slowly thinking aloud about the content and the mechanics” (p. 11). Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley (2003) agreed by stating that when the teacher modeled the introduction of a new skill, it should be in front of the students and done orally by describing the skill or talking it out with the students. They further stated that as the modeling progressed, the teacher and the students worked together. Then they explained that as the teacher conversed with the students about the skill, the teacher allowed the students to practice the skill, the teacher provided assistance only when needed. Bradley and Pottle (2001) observed that when a teacher moved through the room and modeled with individual students, the teacher provided the student with feedback and met the needs of the individual. They also stressed that skilled teachers modeled this process and conventions of writing every day through out the day. Box (2002) indicated that the teacher modeled the thinking process of many different types of writing. The researcher stated that by modeling the thought process students made connections with the print. The researcher further stated that by modeling authentic and purposeful writing in the classroom, connections were made between written and spoken words and the use of purposeful of writing was demonstrated. Box (2002) described purposeful writing as authentic notes, such as notes to the office or parents, labels of objects, captions to pictures or artwork. Bradley & Pottle (2001), Morrow et al. (2003), & Box (2002) acknowledged modeling as the best practice for delivering explicit writing instruction to kindergarten students.
Scaffolding

Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley (2003), described scaffolding as the support that a teacher provided for the students during the writing exercise. The researchers stated that in the first stage of scaffolding the teacher assumed responsibility by modeling and describing the skills. They noted that in the second stage of scaffolding the teacher and the student assumed joint responsibility as the student practiced the skill. They further explained how in the third stage the student assumed most or all of the responsibility and practiced the skill independently. They concluded with the fourth stage where the teacher gradually withdrew the instruction, support, or scaffolding. The researcher summarized scaffolding as the support a teacher provided the student in the introduction of a new concept and explained that during the process the teacher shifted the responsibility to the student until the student was actively engaged in the learning process.

Facilitating

Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley (2003), described the teacher as facilitating learning as the teacher moved the student along a continuum of learning. They explained how the teacher guided the student’s learning through a process heavily reliant on the teacher to independence where the student understood the concept and used the skill without the teacher’s help. They stated how a teacher modeled a new concept and used explicit instruction to progress the student through the process and practices that led the student to independence. Morrow et al. (2003) recounted how when the teacher was active in the process of learning the student was passive and conversely at the end of the process the teacher was passive and the student was active. The researchers described facilitating as the process of leading students from a passive role in
learning to an active role in learning, solidifying concepts, and making them part of the learners independent knowledge base.

Through the review of literature the researcher discovered that modeling concepts, process, and functions of writing was an appropriate method of delivering explicit instruction to students. The research stated that it was best to teach one skill at a time so that students were able to internalize the skill. The researcher also emphasized that modeling was a useful tool to teach explicit skills to the whole class, small groups, or individuals and gave purpose to writing. The researchers demonstrated how scaffolding supported students as they learned new concepts and that it was the teacher’s role to facilitate learning by moving students along the continuum of learning.

**Research Question #2. What writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten students?**

In order to answer research question #2 a review of literature was conducted to discover what writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten students. Justice & Ezell (2004) depicted a sequence of written language progression that started with print interest. They stated that during this first stage students showed interest in letters and words. The second stage that they listed was print function when the student recognized that print provided meaning to events. They listed the third stage as print conventions where the student understood that print moved from left to right and that it had its own organization. The fourth stage that they listed was called print form, which described when the student understood that words, letters, and other print units had names that were used in patterns. The last stage of their sequence was the relationship for print from part to whole where students recognized that letters formed words.
Justice & Ezell (2004) stressed that a child’s transition in writing was dependent of moving through these key areas of written language awareness.

Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore (2004) noted that children needed to develop seven critical understandings about print. They stated that the child needed to know the purpose of writing and develop knowledge of word concepts. They also reported the need to develop concepts of print and phonemic awareness. They also indicated that students needed to know some concrete words such as mom, dad, love, or names and explained that it was important for students to know letters and sounds. But most of all students needed to develop a desire to learn about writing. These researchers emphasized that all children developed writing concepts if they had writing experiences and practice.

The State of Ohio began to develop academic content standards in 1997, when the State Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents created a Joint Council to put into action the recommendations made by the Secondary and Higher Education Remediation Advisory Commission. This council put together expectations for all students. These expectations were called the Ohio Academic Content Standards, which defined what teachers, schools, and districts should teach and what students in these districts should know. The State Department of Education developed Content Standards, what a student should know, Performance Standards, what a student should be able to do, and Operating Standards, which describe the learning conditions (Academic Content Standards Frequently Asked Questions, 2001).

The Ohio Department of Education (2001) emphasized three areas of kindergarten standards for writing. The first standard presented was the writing process standard which included five phases of process: prewriting, draft, revising and editing and publishing. This standard further emphasized writing for different purposes and audiences. The second writing
standard was writing application that included for the beginning writer understanding the different purposes for writing. The third writing standard was writing conventions, which included spelling, punctuation, grammar, and other conventions of writing. These standards were part of a continuum of learning across three grade levels that promoted student mastery of skills.

**Writing Process**

The Ohio Department of Education (2001) listed processes of writing as a standard that kindergarten students needed to learn that included prewriting skills. This process standard stated that the student needed to generate writing ideas through discussion, choose a topic, determine an audience, organize and group ideas, write from left to right and top to bottom. The standards also wanted students to use correct sentence structure, reread their own writing, use a word wall, and rewrite and illustrate writing samples.

**Writing Application**

The Ohio Department of Education (2001) described applications of writing that kindergarten students needed to practice. The process standards stated that kindergarten students needed to dictate or write using letters, words, and pictures. It also stated that the students needed to name or label objects and places. The process standards wanted students to work from left to right and top to bottom. Finally, the process standards wanted the students to dictate or write for different purposes. The process standards for writing application wanted the students to understand that writing was used for different purposes and took on different forms.

**Writing Conventions**

The Ohio Department of Education (2001) wanted students to practice writing conventions through modeling done by the teacher and authentic practice. The process standards
defined writing conventions as the process of using writing conventions. The process standard listed concepts that kindergarten student mastered which included print capital and lower case letter, use correct spacing, leave spaces between words. The spelling standard asked the student to use alphabetic or phonetic spelling and to use end consonants. The standard also wanted the students to use correct punctuation. The standard for writing conventions wanted the kindergarten student to master the conventions of print to help them progress in their writing.

Through the review of literature the researcher found that there were specific skills that should be explicitly instructed to kindergarten students. Justice & Ezell (2004) & Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore (2004) suggested that there were basic writing skills and experiences that kindergarten students should be exposed to in order to succeed as writers. The Ohio Department of Education (2001) presented standards that covered the areas mentioned by the other researcher.

**Research Question #3. What activities promoted student learning of writing skills?**

In order to answer research question #3 a review of literature was conducted to discover what activities promoted students' learning of writing skills. The research stated that the best writing activities for learners were activities that helped students grow in their understanding of the writing process, writing conventions, relationship between spoken and written words and purposeful writing (Bradley & Pottle, 2001). Miels (2001) stated that good classroom activities encouraged a positive attitude toward writing. Behymer (2003) & McCarrier, Pinnell & Fountas (2000) reported that modeling interactive writing for students provided opportunities to carry what they have learned into their own writing.

Behymer (2003) used a six step-writing workshop where step one, prewriting organizer, was made by drawing. The second step in Behyner’s workshop was phonetic spelling, where the
students listened for sounds and wrote down the letter they heard. The researcher's third step included a short lesson with the child on skills not mastered and the fourth step allowed the students to read their work to other students. The fifth step was partner reading the sixth step was publishing the student's work.

Haney (2002) and Merttens (2004) both cited name writing as the most meaningful way to introduce writing to young learners. These researchers pointed out that students made connection between their spoken name and their written name. They further pointed out that the learning the child gained from name writing transferred to other areas of literacy. Haney (2002) suggested implementing a sign-in activity for students, which provided daily practice of name writing. The researcher also recommended using name of the week activities centered on the letters in each student's name. These names of the week activities were also used to teach letter sounds, letter names, and phonemic awareness.

Salmon (1999) believed that kindergarten students needed to know how to spell words correctly and developed a six component-spelling program. The researcher's first component was assigning one spelling word each week. The second component was called "have a try," where everyone in the classroom would try to sound out the word as they came into the classroom in the morning. The researcher's third component was a picture word chart where the student asked the teacher to spell words and then the teacher drew a picture beside the word to help identify the word. The fourth component was a chart of words the students knew how to spell. The fifth component involved providing a can where individual students kept words they wanted to know how to spell. The sixth component was letting the students make their own dictionaries. Salmon (1999) asserted that these components improved the students writing skills and made the students more independent.
La Pointe (2002) introduced specific sight words to students, which allowed the students to read pattern sentences. The researcher used rebus pictures for the nouns. They continued to build on the words that students could read by adding one new word to every sentence while the rest of the sentence included words already introduced thus connecting the student's prior learning with new learning. The researchers also used picture icons to aid students with memorization of letters such as an angel helped the student remember the letter a.

Morrow, Gambrell, & Pressley (2003) stated that kindergarten students should be exposed to environmental print. They indicated that the teacher and the students labeled classroom items and students wore tags with their names on them. They explained that the teachers used these labels to teach students about print and the conventions of print. The researchers also suggested writing on computer websites and using software that made cards or stories helped the students use writing in a purposeful way.

Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore (2004) listed self-selected writing as an appropriate and important writing activity for kindergarten students. They described a four-step process that the teacher first modeled in a mini-lesson. They explained that the teacher started the mini-lesson by making a simple drawing of the main idea. They also noted that the teacher explained to the students what the drawing was about and then modeled name writing on the picture, followed by copying or stamping the date. They suggested that after the students had mastered this lesson the next lesson modeled included placing letters on the paper to represent text and eventually the teacher modeled phonetic spelling. The researchers stressed the importance of following each modeled mini-lesson with student practice. Cunningham et al. (2004) provided a model lesson that taught skills during mini-lessons and provided authentic practice to the students.
McCarrier, Pinnell & Fountas (2000) reported that interactive writing demonstrated concepts and skills that built a community of learners. Some of the interactive writing activities that they were used included, morning message, summaries or extended stories, writing survey question to ask the class, add to or summarize a story that was read, label art in the classroom, write letters, or record information. These researchers observed that interactive writing allowed teachers to group students based on goals, write for a purpose, share the writing with the student, use dialogue to support the student’s writing, create a common text, demonstrate and use conventions of writing, connect letters with sounds, connect reading and writing and teach specific skills effectively. Interactive writing covered the all criteria of the writing practices.

Through the review of literature the researcher found different writing activities for young students that helped transfer the skill taught to the students’ writing. The primary focus of these activities was the interaction of teacher and the student as the teacher modeled writing and the student practiced the skill taught. The use of purposeful activities furthered the students understanding of reasons to write and encouraged their creativity in writing.

Research Question #4. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities?

In order to answer research question #4 a review of literature was conducted to discover the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities. Clay (2001) indicated that writing was the reciprocal of reading and that if a teacher strengthened writing instruction, reading instruction was strengthened too. The researcher further stated that writers had to learn components of writing that were also components of reading. Clay (2001) also reported that if opportunities for writing practice were open ended students showed what they already knew about writing and reading. The researcher
later stated that students who were given writing instruction and were allowed to explore
writing seemed to work on writing individual letters and learned their names. These students
constructed words by sounding the word out one letter at a time practicing phonological
awareness and developed the spatial concept of the order of letters and spaces between words.
These students also developed an understanding of writing from left to right and learned to break
words down and then reconstructed the word to read it. Research showed that by teaching
writing skills a teacher was also teaching reading skills.

names they discovered that printed letters had a meaning and that the code of writing was made
up of letters that were placed in a correct order and a correct pattern. Writing their names
allowed the students to match sounds with letters while they practiced letter formation. The
researchers agreed that the linked practice of meaning of words, semantic, the spoken form of
words, phonology, and the written form of words, orthography, helped the students’ master
features of writing and encouraged their exploration and construction of knowledge about print.

Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore (2004) suggested that writing instruction
helped students develop phonological awareness skills and focused students’ attention on letter
sound relationships. They further stated that writing instruction provided application of
phonemic awareness and phonics. They concluded that if a teacher made observations of the
student’s writing they discovered the student’s application of letter sound relationships.

Haney (2002) stated that teachers could also discover other information about students
such as visual motor integration, spatial awareness, reversals, control, correct order of letters and
speed in writing letters.
Through the review of literature the researcher found that providing kindergarten students with explicit writing instruction actually provided the students with reading instructions. Research also showed that writing practice made connections for the students between the spoken word and the written word. Furthermore writing practice provided the students with authentic practice in letter formation and application of letter names to letter sounds. It was pointed out that writing samples could be used to check the students on other skills.

Conclusion

In order for the researcher to answer the question, would providing kindergarten students with purposeful developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities improve knowledge transfer and change kindergarten student’s responses to writing, a review a literature was conducted. The researcher used the literature to answer the questions: 1. What were the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students? 2. What writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten student? 3. What activities promoted student learning of writing skills? 4. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities? The researcher discovered that modeling explicit mini-lessons and providing authentic practice was the best practice for teaching writing to kindergarten students. The research explained the importance of the teacher being a facilitator that used scaffolding to move the students to independence with each skill. The Academic Content Standards for the State of Ohio provided skills that could be explicitly taught to students and helped the student develop on a writing continuum of learning.

The research pointed out that the teaching of writing had other benefits such as the reciprocity of writing skills to reading skills. The research further pointed out that writing samples were useful tools for gaining insight into students application of phonic, phonemic
awareness, visual motor integration, spatial awareness, reversals, control, correct order of letters and speed in writing letters. Research proved that providing kindergarten students with purposeful developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities would be part of best practices, improved knowledge transfer and changed kindergarten student’s responses to writing.
Chapter III Methods and Procedures

Introduction

The State of Ohio began to develop academic content standards in 1997 called the Ohio Academic Content Standards that included Content Standards, what a student should know, Performance Standards, what a student should be able to do, and Operating Standards, which describe the learning conditions (Academic Content Standards Frequently Asked Questions, 2001). Ohio Department of Education, (2004) developed state standards to provide a statewide system to improve learning and instruction. The state also developed diagnostic assessments to be implemented in the 2004-2005 school year with two goals for the state assessment, increase student learning and strengthen instruction. The Ohio assessment tests were aligned with the academic content standards.

The purpose of this project was to determine if providing kindergarten students with purposeful developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities improved knowledge transfer and changed kindergarten students' responses to writing. The research questions were: 1. What were the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students? 2. What writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten students? 3. What activities promoted student learning of writing skills? 4. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities? 5. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom?
Participants

There were 16 students who participated in this study. The students were enrolled in a half-day everyday kindergarten class in a small city school system in Northwest Ohio. The building housed pre-school through first grade during the 2004-2005 school year. There were 7 girls and 9 boys. All of the students were Caucasian. Two children were on Individual Education Plans and received their academic instruction from an intervention teacher for one-half hour everyday, one of these students also received speech services from an intervention specialist three times a week and the other student received twenty minutes of occupational therapy once a week. Four other children from the class received pull out intervention for at risk students four times a week for fifteen minutes.

Intervention

By answering research question number five, "What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom?" the teacher/researcher was better able to implement writing instruction in the kindergarten class that taught The Ohio Department of Education (2001) standards for kindergarten writing which included writing process, writing conventions, and writing applications. The teacher/researcher used what professional literature called best practices of teaching writing including explicit instruction, modeling, scaffolding, and facilitating. The teacher/researcher also used classroom activities that aided knowledge transfer from explicit instruction to students’ ownership of writing skills.
Modeling was described by Bradley & Pottle (2001), Box (2002) and Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley (2003) as the process of demonstrating how a skill or concept was implemented by writing slowly and discussing the thought process aloud with the students. Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore (2004) described a modeled mini-lesson where the teacher made a simple drawing of the main idea, demonstrated name writing on the picture, and later modeling other writing concepts. They further stressed that mini-lesson should be followed by student practice. Modeling was the primary teaching technique used in this research project to introduce new writing concepts this modeling was followed by student practice. The teacher/researcher modeled writing for the students by writing a message to the class each morning during circle time. The teacher/researcher also reinforced concepts and pointed out writing strategies while singing songs or learning poems that were written on chart paper. Some of the strategies taught and reviewed included starting at the top left and moving to the right, spacing between words, return sweep, capitalization, and punctuation. The teacher/researcher taught specific mini-lessons about writing conventions and concepts during these discussions and before the student completed any writing activity.

Morrow, Gambrell, & Pressley (2003) suggested that labels could be used to teach students about print and the conventions of print. Connections between spoken words and writing were emphasized as labels were recorded during all show-and-tells. After students presented their show-and-tell orally, they chose a word that classified their show and tell and the teacher/researcher recorded the word on a label. The teacher/researcher read the labels back to the students to make a connection between the spoken and written words, then the teacher/researcher questioned the students about the
labels on phonological skills such as what sound do you hear at the end of the word or what sound do you hear in the middle of the word, was that a compound word or phonics skills such as what letter does the word start with?

The teacher/researcher provided many different writing activities to aid the students in knowledge transfer of writing skills; one of these activities was a *Rhyme Time Book* where students were asked to illustrate the Nursery Rhymes that were taught at circle time. Illustrations were included in all kindergarten writing because children at this age view drawing as writing and Behymer (2003) stated that drawing was a prewriting organizer for kindergarten students. These assigned illustrations included a picture of the main characters and the setting of the rhyme, at the beginning of the year the students labeled the drawing with initial consonants, later in the year as the students developed a better understanding of the letter sound relationship, the students added medial and ending sounds.

Haney (2002) stated that teachers could also discover other information about students such as visual motor integration, spatial awareness, reversals, control, correct order of letters and speed in writing letters. The teacher/researcher used *Color Journals* to develop and practice visual discrimination and working from left to right. The students located the color word that was being studied on the cover of the journal and colored it the correct color. The students then located the page with the correct color word at the top and copied the word label that matched their show-and-tell onto a page. The students then illustrated the show-and-tell at the bottom.

Alphabet journals were used to reinforce the concepts of working from left to right, spacing between words, return sweep, the concepts of sentences, and sight words.
The journal contained a page for every letter of the alphabet. The students brought a show-and-tell to school that matched the letter of the week. The teacher/researcher wrote a label that matched the students' show-and-tell. The students located the correct alphabet page in their journal, copied the label at the top, and wrote a pattern sentence on the lines provided at the bottom. The page also contained an area to draw a picture that matched the label.

Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore (2004) listed self-selected writing as an appropriate and important writing activity for kindergarten students. Although the teacher/researcher used writing prompts, when the students worked in writing journals called *I Can Write*, they developed their own ideas about the given topic. These journals were blank sheets of paper where the students practiced the writing skills introduced by the teacher/researcher. The teacher/researcher taught a mini-lesson on concepts and conventions of writing, assigned a topic, and used writing prompts that matched the unit of study to start the writing. The students drew a picture that represented the topic and then the students attempted to label the picture using their knowledge of alphabetic principle and then wrote a sentence at the bottom of the page. The sentences could be scribbles, random letters, or the beginnings of phonetic spelling.

The Ohio Department of Education (2001) in the standards of writing conventions included a process standard that stated that kindergarten student mastered printing capital and lower case letters. In order to attain that process standard the teacher/researcher provided students practice in correct letter formation for each letter of the alphabet. The teacher/researcher modeled the correct formation on the chalkboard and the students
practiced first by writing the letter in the air, second by tracing over a worksheet with the correct letter formation, and finally practicing the skill on their own.

Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore (2004) noted that children needed to know the purpose of writing, know some concrete words such as mom, dad, love and develop a desire to learn about writing. To help the students understand the purpose of writing the teacher/researcher emphasized writing's usefulness whenever the teacher received written communication from a parent, while writing a note to the office, and by rereading the morning message. The teacher/researcher emphasized that writing was used to convey information or to record information that could be reread and remembered.

Haney (2002) suggested implementing a sign-in activity for students, which provided daily practice of name writing. Haney (2002) and Merttens (2004) both cited name writing as the most meaningful way to introduce writing to young learners and name writing helped the students make connection between their spoken name and their written name and state that these connections about writing transferred to other areas of literacy. The teacher/researcher required the students to sign their first name on the chalkboard everyday when they arrived at school. Colored shapes were on the board that represented the students setting assignment, at the beginning of the year name cards were provided for students that could not spell their first name which allowed the student to copy their name; by the end of the project students were required to write their first and last name on the chalkboard.

Clay (2001) indicated that writing was the reciprocal of reading and that components of writing were also components of reading. She further stated that students
write by sounding the word out one letter at a time practicing phonological awareness.

The teacher/researcher taught phonological awareness skills during circle time. Students were given activities that practiced specific phonological skills such as phonemic awareness, which was working with individual sounds in a spoken word, phoneme segmentation that was stretching out words to hear the individual sounds, and hearing syllables in words, and working orally with rhymes. Practicing these reading skills aided the students in writing. All lessons and assignments were implemented in order to improve students’ performance and mastery of writing skills set forth in the state map and assessed by the diagnostic test.

Procedures

This project was implemented prior to the start of school year when the teacher/researcher discussed this action research project with the building principal. At Kindergarten Orientation August 23, 2004, the teacher/researcher explained to parents that with the emphasis on writing in kindergarten, developmentally appropriate instruction for emergent writers would be implemented. The teacher/researcher further explained that this writing instruction was part of the teacher/researcher’s master’s degree and that the methods used to teach writing to the kindergarten students were considered by professional literature to be part of best practices. The teacher/researcher also provided a letter to each family explaining the writing instruction. The students were asked questions from a questionnaire that recorded their knowledge of the purpose of writing. This questionnaire was given at the beginning of the project and again at the end. The teacher/researcher collected the students’ first writing sample from the first week of school and another sample in February, each sample was scored according to the
rubric on the state diagnostic test. The teacher/researcher compared the students’ Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2003) scores from September and February.

**Instruments**

*Rubric.*

A scoring rubric developed by the Ohio Department of Education (2001) was used by the teacher/researcher to assign scores to writing samples. These scores were used to measure the students’ progress in writing. The teacher/researcher assigned a number by looking at the quality of the writing samples and the performance levels assigned by this rubric. Five areas were evaluated using a scoring system of 0 to 4. The criteria and the point range for the holistic score was 4 points for a superior consistent writing sample above satisfactory work, 3 points for an acceptable performance with areas that needed improvement but a solid understanding of skills, 2 points for a marginally acceptable writing sample, 1 point for a minimal performance and 0 points for a writing sample that was off topic or illegible. The rubric was also used to assess and score the writing samples on directionality, spacing and letter formation, spelling, and content. The areas assessed were areas represented in the state standards and covered the areas of writing process, writing conventions and writing applications. Using the rubric the teacher/researcher assigned points using the criteria of consistent, 4 point student does the skill, frequent 3 points student mostly does the skill, partial 2 points students sometimes does the skill, minimal 1 point students does not do the skill, or not at all, 0 point student’s writing was illegible or does not meet criteria for 1 point. Twenty points
were the maximum attainable score a student could receive (Ohio Department of Education 2001).

*Questionnaire.*

A questionnaire developed by the teacher/researcher was administered to each student at the beginning of school and again at the end of the research project. This questionnaire recorded students' reaction to writing. The first two questions were open-ended questions that focused on students' knowledge, experience, and understanding of the purpose of writing. The teacher recorded students' answers on the questionnaire. The last five questions were yes or no questions that also allowed the students to demonstrate their skill of writing.

*Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills.*

The students were given the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2003), DIBELS test, which measured early literacy skills that included phonological awareness, the students' ability to hear and manipulate sounds, and alphabetic principle, students' knowledge of letter names. The DIBELS test was a timed test that looked at indicators that predict good readers.

In the first administration of the test, the students' ability to identify and produce sounds in words was measured using a test called initial sound fluency. The other beginning of the year test was called letter naming fluency, which measured the students' automaticity of letter names. During the second administration of the test, students were again tested on initial sound fluency, letter naming fluency, and also phoneme segmentation, the ability to hear the separate sounds in words, and nonsense words fluency the ability to decode phonemes and blend them together. The DIBELS test was a timed test that
looked at indicators that predict good readers (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2003).

**Timeline**

This research project started in mid-August when permission to proceed was granted by the principal and was further initiated at parent orientation on August 23, 2004 when the teacher/researcher explained the project to the parents. Students wrote their first journal entries on August 24, 2004 after receiving their first explicit writing instruction. The journal writing continued as assigned through February 2005. The first and the last samples were scored by the teacher/researcher using the rubric provided by the state. The questionnaire was given at the beginning of the research project and again at the end. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2003), DIBELS test, was administered in September 2004 and in January 2005.

**Data Analysis**

A writing sample from the beginning of the year and one from the diagnostic test were scored using the rubric provided by the State of Ohio. The teacher/researcher assigned scores using the rubric. The teacher/researcher looked for improvement in students' writing ability and understanding of concepts related to the state writing standards for kindergarten students.

The students answered a questionnaire developed by the teacher/researcher that dealt with their feelings about writing and their understanding of the purpose of writing. This questionnaire was completed again in February to evaluate if the student viewed themselves as writers and if they understood the purpose of writing.
The students were tested using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2003), DIBELS test, which measured early literacy skills. In September 2004, the students were assessed in the area of initial sound fluency and letter naming fluency and in January 2005, the students were again tested on initial sound fluency and letter naming fluency and also phoneme segmentation, and nonsense words. The scores from the test were entered on the DIBELS website and the scores were compared to an expected performance level, a status report was then printed for each student for each tested area and an overall instructional level was assigned that included intensive intervention, additional intervention and grade level (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2003).

Summary

This project was implemented to determine the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom. For this study, scores assigned by the teacher/researcher using a rubric developed by the State of Ohio evaluated students’ beginning writing samples and ending samples. Students’ attitude about writing were compared from a questionnaire and the students’ Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2003) DIBELS results were analyzed from the beginning to the end of this project. Results of this study will be covered in Chapter IV.
Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine if providing kindergarten students with purposeful, developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities improved knowledge transfer and changed kindergarten students’ responses to writing. The research questions were: 1. What were the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students? 2. What writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten students? 3. What activities promoted student learning of writing skills? 4. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities? 5. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom?

Through the review of literature, the teacher/researcher looked at the methods used to teach writing to kindergarten students and incorporated what was considered by literature to be part of best practices. The teacher/researcher used these best practices to teach writing including explicit instruction, modeling, scaffolding, and facilitating. The teacher/researcher also used classroom activities that aided knowledge transfer from explicit instruction to student’s ownership and demonstration of skills.

Data Results

In order to answer research question # 5: “What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom?” data was collected and analyzed. The first instrument used was a writing sample that was scored by using a rubric.
Comparison of the Student's Writing Samples.

For the purpose of this study, the teacher/researcher collected data to be aggregated and compared as a class unit and not as individual students. The teacher/researcher compared the rubric scores of the class from writing samples taken at the beginning of the research project to the rubric scores from writing samples taken at the end of the research project. The rubric scores from the first writing sample showed that 9 students or 56% of the students tested scored 0 points on the rubric, 6 students or 38% scored either 3 or 4 points on the rubric, and 1 student or 6% scored 11 points on the rubric. The rubric scores taken from the writing sample at the conclusion of the research project showed that 1 student or 6% scored 4 points, 4 students or 25% of the class scored between 8-10 points on the rubric, 6 students or 38% scored 12-16 points on the rubric, and 5 students or 31% scored 17-20 points of the writing sample. The higher the score, the more skill the students demonstrated. The average score for the students on the first sample was 1.6 points and the average score for the students on the last sample was 13.7 points, the average score gained was 12.1 points.

Figure 1. Comparison of students’ total number of points attained on the first and final writing sample.
The data showed that all students improved their rubric scores from the beginning of the research project to the end of the projects. Most students' mean score improved by 12.1 points from the beginning of the project to its completion.

*Holistic Score.*

A holistic score comprised the student's work as a whole. The teacher/researcher considered all assessed domains; directionality, spacing and letter formation, spelling and content and assigned a score based on the quality of the entire writing sample (Ohio Department of Education 2004). The data showed that most students improved their holistic score. On the first writing sample, 14 students or 88% had a holistic score of 0, 2% of the students scored one or two holistic points on the first sample. In the final sample, 1 student or 6%, received a holistic score of 0; 3 students or 18% received a holistic score of 1; 6 students or 37% received a core of 2 points; 4 students or 25% received 3 points; and 2 students or 12% received a score or 4 points.

![First Holistic Score and Second Holistic Score](image)

*Figure 2.* Comparison of students' holistic scores for the first and final writing sample.

Figure 2 showed that most 93% of students' holistic scores improved. On the initial writing sample, the total holistic points assigned totaled 3 or an average class
holistic score of .18 on the final sample the total number of holistic points assigned were 35 points the students average holistic score or 2.18 or an average gain of 2 holistic points.

*Directionality.*

A score was assigned to the writing sample based on the students’ ability to write from left to write and top to bottom. If the students’ writing sample showed that they consistently worked from left to right and top to bottom they received 4 points, if they frequently wrote left to write and top to bottom they were assigned 3 points, if they partial wrote left to write and top to bottom they were assigned 2 points and 1 point was assigned if they did not write left to write and top to bottom, 0 points were assigned if the students did not write or if their work was illegible (Ohio Department of Education, 2004). On the first writing sample, nine students out of 16 or 56% scored a 0 because they did not attempt to write letters, 1 student (6 %) scored 1 point by writing letters on the paper and 6 students or 38% were assigned 2 points for writing left to right. On the final sample, 5 students or 31% scored 2 points for partial writing left to write and top to bottom, 6 students or 38% scored 3 points for frequently writing left to right and top to bottom and 4 students or 25% scored 4 points for consistently writing left to right and top to bottom.
Figure 3. Comparison of students' scores on first and final writing sample for directionality.

Figure 3 showed that all students' assigned scores for directionality improved. The average score for the beginning writing sample was .08 points, the average score on the final writing sample was 2.75 points with 100% of the students making some gains in directionality. The average gain in points per student was 2 points.

Spacing and Letter Formation.

A score was assigned to the writing sample based on the students' use of correct letter formation or upper and lowercase letters and the correct spacing between words. If a student consistently used the correct upper and lowercase letters and left spaces between words, the writing sample was scored with 4 points. If the student mostly or frequently used upper and lowercase letters and paces between words, they received 3 points. If the student had some upper and lowercase letters correct and some spaces between words, they were assigned 2 points. If they printed letters without spaces and some of the letters were correct, they received 1 point; 0 points were assigned if they did not attempt to write or the writing was illegible (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).
On the first writing sample 9 out to 16 students or 56% scored 0 points because they did not attempt to write or their writing sample was illegible, 6 students or 38% scored 1 point for printing some letters correctly without correct spacing and 1 student or 6% scored 2 points for having some letter correctly and having some spaces between words.

![Comparison of students' scores on first and final writing sample for letter formation and correct spacing.](image)

**Figure 1.** Comparison of students’ scores on first and final writing sample for letter formation and correct spacing.

The graph showed that all students made gains in the number of points they were assigned for spacing and letter formation. The average points assigned for spacing and letter formation on the first writing sample was .62 points, the average number of points assigned on the final writing sample was 2.68 points. One hundred percent of the students improved their spacing and letter formation with an average gain was 2 points.

**Spelling Score.**

The writing samples were scored for spelling. Four points were assigned if the students used early sound-letter spelling and if they wrote consonant sounds at the beginning and the end of words; 3 points were assigned if the student used early sound-
letter spelling frequently and wrote beginning consonant sounds and some ending
consonant sounds; 2 points were assigned if the students used some early sound-letter
spelling and wrote some consonant sounds at the beginning and a few end sounds; and
the students scored 1 point if the writing sample did not include early sound-letter
spelling and only wrote a few consonant beginning sounds; 0 points were scored if the
students did not attempt to write or the writing was illegible (Ohio Department of
Education, 2004)

In the initial writing sample, 15 students out of 16 or 94% scored 0 points for
spelling on the first writing sample, 1 student or 6% scored 2 points for have a writing
sample that had some early sound-letter spelling.

![Initial Spelling Score and Final Spelling Score](image)

**Figure 5.** Comparison of students' scores on first and final writing sample for spelling.

Figure 5 showed that all but one student made improvements in the number of
points they were assigned for spelling. The average number of points assigned in the
initial writing sample was .12 points. The average number of points assigned in the last
sample was 3 points for a gain of 2.88 points from the first writing sample to the final
writing sample.
Content.

The writing samples were scored for content. If the writing sample conveyed the meaning of a simple story and related to the topic, it was assigned 4 points. If the sample conveyed a meaningful idea that related to the topic, it was assigned 3 points. If it conveyed a meaningful idea that somewhat related to the topic, it was assigned 2 points. If the writing sample conveyed an idea that did not relate to the topic, it was assigned 1 point, and 0 points were assigned if the student did not attempt to write or the writing was illegible (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

On the first writing sample, 15 out of 16 students or 94% received 0 points for content, and 1 student or 6% received 2 points for conveying a meaningful idea that somewhat related to the topic.

Figure 6. Comparison of students’ scores on first and final writing sample for content.

Figure 6 showed that all but one student improved the number of points assigned from the first writing sample to the last writing sample. The average number of points assigned on the first writing sample was .12 points. The average number of points
assigned on the last writing sample was 2.68 points or an average improvement of 2.56 points per student.

Comparison of the Questionnaire.

For the purpose of this study, the teacher/researcher collected data to be compared as a class unit and not as individual students. Each student answered questions on a questionnaire at the beginning of the research project and again at the end of the project. The first two questions were opened ended and dealt with the student’s understanding of what writing was and why we write. The last five questions were yes or no questions followed by short answer. At the beginning of the research project when the students were asked the question, “What was writing?” 7 out of 16 students or 44% of the students said that they did not know what writing was, 3 students or 19% thought writing was part of learning, and 6 students or 37% answered that writing was connected with drawing, coloring, and the use of pencils and pens. At the conclusion of the research project 3 students or 19% still did not know what writing was, 13 students or 81% stated that writing involved writing letters to make words, notes to people, or doing homework.

Figure 7. Comparison of students’ initial and final response to the question “What was writing?”
The second question asked the students, “Why do you write?” At the beginning of the research project, 8 students or 50% did not know why we write, and 8 students or 50% felt writing was helpful for learning and was used to tell people things. At the end of the research project, 1 out of 16 students or 6% did not know why we write, 15 students or 94% stated that writing was for homework, making words, or telling people things in letters and stories.

Figure 8. Comparison of students' initial and final response to the question “Why do you write?”

Question number 3 asked, “Do you know how to write?” At the beginning of the project, 6 students or 38% said they did not know how to write and 10 students or 62% stated that they did know how to write. When the research project concluded, 16 out of 16 students or 100% of the students said they knew how to write.
Question number 4 asked, “Do you like to write?” At the beginning of the research project, 3 out of 16 students or 19% did not like to write and 13 students or 81% did like to write. At the conclusion of the research project, 1 out of 16 or 6% did not like to write and 15 students or 94% stated they liked to write.

Question number 5 asked the students, “Can you write your name?” At the beginning of the research project, 15 out of 16 students or 94% could write their first names and 1 student out of 16 or 6% of the students could write his/her first and last
name. At the end of the project, 1 out of 16 or 6% of the students could only write his/her first name and 15 out of 16 students or 94% could write their first and last names.

![Bar chart showing comparison of initial vs. final responses for name recognition]

**Figure 11.** Comparison of students’ initial and final response to the question “Can you write your name?”

Question number 6 asked, “Can you write any other words?” at the beginning of the research project, 7 students or 44% stated that they could not write any other words beside their name, 9 students or 56% stated they could write other words; the other words were mom and/or dad. At the end of the projects, 1 out of 16 students or 6% wrote random letters for words, 15 out of 16 students or 94% of the students wrote from 1-8 different words.

![Bar chart showing comparison of initial vs. final responses for other words]

**Figure 12.** Comparison of students’ initial and final response to the question “Can you write other words?”
Question 7 asked the students, “Can you write a sentence?” At the beginning of the project, 16 out of 16 students or 100% stated that they could not write a sentence, at the end of the project, 4 out of 16 students or 25% of the students still stated that they could not write a sentence, 12 students or 75% stated that they could write a sentence and the students wrote sentences containing between 2 to 6 words.

Figure 13. Comparison of students’ initial and final response to the question “Can you write a sentence?”

The data showed that 81% of the students attained a beginning understanding of writing, 94% of the students stated that writing was for homework, making words, or telling people things in letters and stories. At the end of the research project, 16 out of 16 students, or 100% of the students said they knew how to write and 94% of the students liked to write. One hundred percent of the students could write their name, 6% of the students could only write their first name and 94% of the students could write their first and last names. Data showed that 94% of the students wrote from 1-8 random words and 75% of the students wrote a sentence using between 2 to 6 words in the sentences.
Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

For the purpose of this study, the teacher/researcher collected data to be compared as a class unit and not as individual students. The teacher/researcher compared the interventions level assigned for the students after the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 2005) DIBELS test was administered in September to the intervention level assigned in January. The DIBELS test results suggested instructional recommendations after the test results were compiled, which included intensive intervention, additional intervention, and grade level. In September, when the test was first administered, 1 out of 16 or 6% of students needed intensive intervention, 8 students or 50% need additional intervention and 7 students, or 44%, were at grade level. When the test was re-administered in January, 1 student or 6%, still needed intensive intervention, 6 students or 38% needed additional intervention and 9 students, or 56% were at grade level.

![Comparison of students' initial and final test recommendation for intervention](image)

**Figure 14.** Comparison of students' initial and final test recommendation for intervention.
The data showed that there was a 13% increase in the students who were at grade level at the end of the research project and no students dropped skill levels or required more intervention than recommended by the first test.

Summary

One hundred percent of the students gained points in their rubric scores from the beginning of the research project to its completion; the average score gained was 12.1 points.

Eighty one percent of the students attained a beginning level of understanding of writing, 94% of the students stated that writing was for homework, making words, or telling people things in letters and stories. One hundred percent of the students said they knew how to write and 94% of the students liked to write. One hundred percent of the students could write their name, 6% of the students could only write their first names and 94% of the students could write their first and last names. Ninety four percent of the students wrote from 1-8 random words and 75% of the students wrote a sentence using between 2 to 6 words in the sentences.

DIBELS testing showed that 56% of the students were at grade level at the end of the project, which was a 13% increase in the students at grade level. No students dropped skill levels.
Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine if providing kindergarten students with purposeful, developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities improved knowledge transfer and changed kindergarten students’ responses to writing. The research questions were: 1. What were the best practices for teaching writing to kindergarten students? 2. What writing skills were appropriate to explicitly instruct kindergarten students? 3. What activities promoted student learning of writing skills? 4. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities? 5. What were the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom?

Discussion

Diagnostic Test.

The impetus for this project was the State of Ohio requiring a writing diagnostic test for kindergarteners in the Spring of 2005. After giving a practice test in the Spring of 2004, the teacher/researcher began to consider different ways to teach kindergarten students to write so that they would not be so overwhelmed by the writing test. The project was implemented in the summer of 2004 before the teacher/researcher started the new school year. When the teacher/researcher returned to school in the fall, the state decided that only schools with a Continuous Improvement rating or lower would have to give the diagnostic test. The teacher/researcher’s school had a rating of Effective, which did not require the administration of the diagnostic test. The teacher/researcher’s project
was still an extremely useful tool because the teacher/researcher struggled with what were the best practice of teaching kindergarten students to write and this research project provided the teacher/researcher with effective methods to teach writing in kindergarten. This research project also involved state indicators; “writing process, indicator 5; write from left to right and top to bottom, writing application, indicators 1; dictate or write simple stories, using letters, words or pictures, indicator 2; name or label objects or places. Writing conventions, indicators: 1; print capital and lowercase letters, correctly spacing the letters, indicator 2; leave spaces between words when writing, indicator 3; show characteristics of early letter name-alphabetic spelling, and indicator 4; use some end consonant sounds when writing” (Ohio Department of Education, 2004).

**Modeling.**

Modeling was an effective way to teach writing concepts or skills to kindergarten students. The morning message was a good modeling tool but as the year progressed, the students became more familiar with the process, which made it much harder to hold their attention. The teacher/researcher plans to continue the use of morning message for modeling but occasionally have the message written before the students arrive and a discussion will be used to reinforce writing concepts. The teacher/researcher felt that by presenting the message in different ways the students would remain engaged and the morning message would remain an effective tool during the school year.

Modeling was included before all writing assignments. It was necessary for the teacher/researcher to remove the modeling sample before students went to work because many students did not want to take risks and would copy the teacher/researcher’s model.
Song and poem charts were also an excellent means of teaching and discussing writing conventions. The teacher/researcher used a pointer to touch each word as the students sang or said poems. Questions could be asked about print conventions and student were asked to come to the charts to point out writing conventions such as left to right, spaces between words, punctuation, capitalization, return sweep, number of words in a sentence, and top to bottom.

*Writing Journals.*

The writing journals allowed the students to practice writing skills that were being taught. The first scored writing sample came from these writing journals. To make the journals more beneficial for the parents when they are sent home the researcher plans to type out the writing prompt and have the students glue the prompt in their journal. The teacher/researcher also plans to write the students’ sentences in the journals especially at the beginning of the year, this under writing will help the parents understand what their students was trying to say.

*Alphabet Journals.*

The teacher/researcher used Alphabet Journals for many years but research suggested that it was beneficial for students to use pattern sentences for their journal writing. The teacher/researcher required the students to use pattern sentences in their journals during the project. After the project was completed, the researcher allowed the students to write any sentence that they chose for their journal writing. The teacher/researcher will continue to start the year with pattern sentences because it provided the students with sentences that they could manage to write and reread, it reinforced the concept of a sentence, and it taught some basic words to the students.
Rhyme Time Book.

The students were taught poems or songs at circle time, at work time the students were required to draw a picture that included the setting and the main characters of the rhyme. After the students drew the pictures, they were asked to label their drawings by writing the initial consonant on each part of the picture. The teacher/researcher had used the rhyming books before but had never asked the students to begin to label the picture. The teacher/researcher plans to continue with this process in the following academic year because it provided the students with another opportunity to practice initial sounds, labeling, and writing. It was an activity that helped students make connections between the pictures, the sounds, and the letters.

Writing Questionnaire.

The writing questionnaire measured the students’ attitude about writing at the beginning of the project and at its conclusion. The information was useful to see how the students’ knowledge about the purpose of writing and their attitudes of writing improved; at the end of the project one student knew how to write but still did not like to write. This information was useful not only for the project but was also useful when discussing a student’s performance with intervention team members and parents. The questionnaire was a tool that the teacher/researcher will continue to use to gain a basic knowledge of where the student begins the year with the writing process.

The teacher/researcher used implicit instruction to teach the purpose and usefulness of writing. The teacher/researcher plans to use a combination of explicit and implicit instruction next year to teach the purpose and importance of writing. The teacher/researcher will still stress the importance of writing when discussing notes from
parents and notes written to the office but some young students need to hear the purpose of writing directly through explicit instruction to make the connections with implicit information.

*DIBELS.*

The DIBELS test was an effective tool to look at the students’ instructional level. The teacher/researcher’s school has chosen the DIBELS test to monitor student progress in reading but the skills assessed by the test related directly to writing. Students must be able to use phoneme segmentation when they use phonetic spelling. The students must stretch the word out and write down the sound that they hear. Teaching students to use phoneme segmentation helped them to hear beginning, ending, and medial sounds, which they can write down on paper. The teacher/researcher will continue to administer and use data from this test because it is the adopted test for the teacher/researcher’s school system.

*Summary*

Although the state diagnostic test was not required of the current kindergarten class, the process of this project helped the teacher/researcher improve teaching strategies for writing. The teacher/researcher had always struggled with how to teach kindergarteners to write. Many kindergarten workshop presenters suggested that just given kindergarten students’ blank paper and telling them to write was an effective method of teaching writing. The teacher/researcher had never been comfortable with this strategy, never found it useful, and basically returned to having students copy writing from the board.
The teacher/researcher now has effective methods to teach writing that can be improved, expanded on, or changed to meet the needs of the students in the classroom. The data from this project showed that all students’ writing scores improved with the implementation of best writing practice and better connections were made between sounds and written letters. The average score for the students on the first sample was 1.6 points and the average score for the students on the last sample was 13.7 points, the average score gained was 12.1 points. Student’s attitudes about writing improved. At the beginning of the research project, 19% of the students did not like to write and 81% did like to write, at the end of the research project 6% did not like to write and 94% of the students liked to write. At the end of the project, students viewed themselves as writers, at the beginning of the project 38% of the students said they did not know how to write and at the end of the project 62% stated that they did know how to write. At the end of the research project 16 out of 16 students or 100% of the students said they knew how to write.

Recommendations

The teacher/researcher will continue to work on writing strategies to help kindergarteners meet the grade level indicators and will continue to use the format that related to the state diagnostic test. Future classes may have to take the diagnostic test and the research project focused on writing strategies that allowed the students to practice the format of the test by drawing pictures first, labeling the pictures, and then writing a sentence about their pictures. In the following years the final test sample will be taken in early May which would allow for more teaching and practice time.
Continued study of best practices of writing would help the teacher/researcher become more effective in teaching kindergarten students to write. The teacher/researcher will look into the use of interactive writing and formula writing for kindergarten students.

Conclusion

Through the review of literature, the teacher/researcher looked at the methods used to teach writing to kindergarten students and incorporated what was considered by literature to be part of best practices. The teacher/researcher used these best practices to teach writing including explicit instruction, modeling, scaffolding, and facilitating. The teacher/researcher also used classroom activities that aided knowledge transfer from explicit instruction to student’s ownership of the skill. Students understanding of what writing was and the purpose or writing improved, the students felt they could write, and most of the students attitude about writing improved.
References


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*Young Children,* 56, 36-41.


Salmon, M. (1999). My guide for teaching spelling in kindergarten *Young Children,* 

54, 67-68.

The Ohio Department of Education. (2001). Academic Content Standards K-12 English 

Language Arts. Columbus, Oh: ODE.
Consent of School Principal

August 9, 2004

Mr. Ron Rittichier  
Washington Elementary School  
501 Ave A  
Bryan, Ohio 43506

Dear Mr. Rittichier,

I will be working on my Master's of Education research project at Defiance College starting with the beginning of the 2004 school year. The purpose of this project was to determine if providing kindergarten students with purposeful developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities improved knowledge transfer and changed kindergarten student’s responses to writing. I will be trying to discover the results of providing developmentally appropriate writing instruction and meaningful classroom activities in a kindergarten classroom. I will be using strategies that literature states are part of best practices. This writing instruction correlates to the Ohio Academic Standards and would be implemented at the start of the current school year. I ask your permission to work on this project during this school year at Washington School starting the first day of school.

Sincerely,

Kathy Nicholls

Signature of School Principal
Dear Parents,

I am presently enrolled in the Masters of Education Program at Defiance College. Because of the Ohio Academic Standards for kindergarten emphasis on writing, I am currently working on my research project entitled, “Kindergarten Writing Strategies.” I will be trying to determine the benefits of providing what literature calls “best practices” of teaching kindergarten students to write. The students will be working on journal writing, rhyming books, and other writing activities as part of their regular classroom activities all of which will help them meet the standards as assessed by tests. These journal entries will be scored using guidelines provided by the State of Ohio. I will keep you apprised of your child’s progress.

Sincerely,

Kathy Nicholls
Questionnaire
Teacher asked each student orally and then records the student’s response.

Name ________________________________

1. What is writing? ________________________________

2. Why do you write? ________________________________

3. Do you know how to write? Yes or NO

4. Do you like to write? Yes or No

5. Can you write your name? Yes or NO

6. Can you write any other words? Yes or NO

7. Can you write a sentence? Yes or NO