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Impact of the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy on the Instructional Practices of Kindergarten Teachers

Mary Lynnette Grant

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IMPACT OF THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHER READING
ACADEMY ON THE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES
OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

By

Mary Lynnette Grant

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education
in Elementary Education
in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2005

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Title of Study: IMPACT OF THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHER READING
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INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

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Candidate for Degree of Doctorate of Education

The research question for this study was: Did the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy (KTRA) Professional Development Model impact the kindergarten teachers' instructional practices? Moat (2004) indicated that professional development should be job-embedded with substantive and sustaining power. This research employed a qualitative method. The Participant Knowledge Survey (pre-and posttest), was administered to all kindergarten participants at the KTRA. Six kindergarten teachers were then selected to participate in follow-up. This follow-up included a classroom observation and teacher interview at each teacher's school. All participants are certified kindergarten teachers that teach in public schools in Mississippi.

The results of the interview revealed that these teachers' instructional practices were very different. Teachers that received on going support and guidance throughout the academic year provided more instruction in kindergarten. These teachers have been

trained on all professional development models held in the state. After the initial trainings, participants attend Peer Coaching Study Teams weekly (2 hours per week). These teachers are given time to reflect on their practices, and are provided moral support from their peers and administrator.

Teachers that participated in this study indicated that they valued the activities and strategies from the KTRA. They have implemented the topics from the KTRA Professional Development Model. The results of the study indicate that attending a professional development session is not enough. Teachers need direct support and guidance if they want to improve their instructional practices. The KTRA did have an instructional impact on all of the kindergarten teachers that attended the session.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my immediate and extended family for all of their love and support. I want to thank my wonderful sisters and brothers for their encouragement and prayers. To my dear mother, Mrs. Ruby L. Grant, thank you for everything you have done for me. I cannot express in words how much you I love you and what you mean to me. To my daughter, Kelli Arlette, I appreciate the support you have given me over the years. You made me laugh when I needed it most. The bond that we share as mother and daughter goes beyond any imaginable moment. Thank you for being the best daughter and friend that a mother can have. To my nieces and nephews, deepest friends, LaShundria Ellis, and all who helped with prayers in this process to help me complete my task, thank you kindly. Last but not least, my husband Marshall E. Lee, who believes in me, encourages me, and supports me in every dream. Thank you all.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since there are many concerns about the quality of the nation's public educational system, more emphasis is being placed on the elements of teacher effectiveness.

Although there is no clear answer to what composes high-quality teaching, past research placed great emphasis on two areas of teacher effectiveness: (a) the level of learning and skills that individual teachers bring to the classroom, as measured by teacher preparation and qualifications, and (b) individual classroom practices (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Lewis, et al., 1999; Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

The level of learning and skills that individual teachers bring to the classroom, as measured by teacher preparation and qualifications, refers to teacher quality. The characteristics of teacher quality include (a) teacher education, (b) teacher participation in professional development and collaborative activities related to teaching, and (c) teachers' feelings of preparedness for the various classroom demands (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Lewis et al., 1999; Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). In order to achieve the desired level of expertise, teachers need to be provided with continuous learning through high-quality professional development since continuous learning is necessary for building the educational capacity for effective teaching. As educators are challenged by reformers

to improve teaching and learning, they must continually learn and change their ideas and strategies because higher standards are being implemented into the curriculum. If this challenge is to be met successfully, opportunities for continuous learning are needed at both the local school level and the school district level.

A body of literature, which has emerged, focuses on improving teaching and learning and examines the likely linkage between teachers' learning through professional development and changes that occur in their teaching practices. According to the literature, traditional workshops or conferences do promote teachers' consciousness by intensifying their knowledge and skills. However, these professional development techniques appear to be inadequate in promoting learning which essentially changes what teachers teach or how they teach (Shields, Marsh, & Adelman, 1998; Weiss, Montgomery, Ridgeway, & Bond, 1998). This literature provides an overview of basic principles underlying a quality and sound professional development plan which can equip schools with more proficient teachers and enhance education for all students (Lefever-Davis, 2002).

Research has shown that the expert or proficient teacher is the most important agent in student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). An individual teacher's classroom practices have a major influence on student achievement. Research from the Milken Family Foundation and Educational Testing Service (2000) indicated that the improvement of quality teachers currently is at the top of many policy proposals at the federal and state levels. This study addressed three areas of teacher quality, including teacher input such as the level of education and the years of experience, the use of classroom practices such as providing small group instruction, and

the professional development opportunities that support classroom practices. According to the research, more emphasis should be placed on improving the classroom aspect of teacher quality. Suggestions for improving the classroom practices of teachers include reforms such as raising standards, reshaping curricula, and restructuring the operation of teaching practices (Bybee, 1993; Darling-Hammond & McGlaughin, 1996; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1991; National Research Council, 1996; Webb & Romberg, 1994).

The No Child Left Behind Act mandated that all teachers must become competent in the subject matter they teach or plan to teach and must be certified in that area by 2005-2006 (United States Department of Education, 2004). By raising standards for teachers, this Act seeks to insure that schools and districts will have more proficient teachers in classrooms. Students tend to learn more from proficient teachers because they know their subject matter and know how to teach it to the students. These teachers have stronger academic abilities and are able to transfer knowledge to the students more effectively than teachers with weak academic abilities (Ballou, 1996; Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1994; 1995; Ferguson, 1991; Ferguson & Ladd, 1996; Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972). According to Hanushek (1996) and Hedges, Laine and Greenwald (1994), teachers' academic abilities are closely tied to student learning and academic achievement.

Teachers need to be prepared to meet the demands of educational reform. They must prepare their students to learn an expansive range of skills, including higher order and critical thinking skills along with developing technological expertise. Teachers should be able to teach in ways that advance these skills. Advocates of educational

reform should focus on encouraging teachers to foster the development of their students' higher order thinking skills, provide active engagement activities through hands on learning, and analyze test data to monitor individual student progress. Researchers from the National Center for Education Statistics (1999) stated that effective classroom practices should include: (a) actively engaged teachers and students, (b) a wide range of available materials and resources, (c) emphasis on the home-school connection, and (d) a plan for assessing progress. These classroom practices should be encouraged from the federal to the state level of government. They should be supported by providing rich, high-quality, sustained professional development for teachers (Milken Family Foundation & Educational Testing Service, 2000).

Statement of Problem

The problem of this study was to determine if the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy Professional Development Model impacted the instructional practices of kindergarten teachers.

Research Question

The research question for this study is: Did the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy Professional Development Model impact the kindergarten teachers' classroom instructional practices?

Significance of the Study

The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Reading First Initiative, along with the results from standardized test data, have fueled an effort by

policymakers to improve education (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Teachers are at the forefront of implementing this change for student improvement.

According to Cuban (1990), teachers are at the center of education reform and must carry out the demands of high standards in their individual classrooms. Therefore, they must be competent in the subjects they are assigned to teach. Teachers must know their subject matter and be able to provide quality instruction that promotes higher thinking skills.

(Loucks-Horsely, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

Although the majority of teachers support high standards for their students, many lack preparation to employ teaching and learning practices that are based on high standards (Cohen, 1990; Elmore & Burney, 1996; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthey, 1996; Grant, Peterson, & Shojgreen-Downer, 1996; Sizer, 1992). According to Cohen, McLaughlin, and Talbert (1993), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995), and Porter and Brophy (1988), many teachers teach children low level skills such as memorizing facts rather than teaching children to think critically and synthesize information. Core subject matter knowledge in academic areas is only one aspect of knowledge. Teachers must also help children to make real life connections from academics to their world. This produces a balanced individual that can be productive in society. Teachers must shift from teaching standards using minimal skills and begin addressing skills that place emphasis on understanding both core subject matter knowledge and real life connections. This means that many teachers must become more knowledgeable about the subject they teach and about how students acquire knowledge (National Board Professional Teaching Standards, 1989; Shulman & Sparks, 1992).

This study of the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy (KTRA) attempted to determine if, in fact, the professional development being offered had an impact on kindergarten teachers in their individual classrooms.

Review of the Literature

In this review of the related literature, professional development is discussed with a major emphasis placed on the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy (KTRA) Professional Development Model. The review is divided into the following areas:

(a) Characteristics of Effective Professional Development, (b) Impact of Professional Development, (c) Purpose of Kindergarten and the KTRA Professional Development Model, and (d) Components of the KTRA Professional Development Model.

It is imperative that teachers stay abreast of the current research and trends in teaching and learning. Teachers must continue to learn and implement new practices, strategies, and activities into their existing curriculum. Traditionally, there has been little effective professional development provided for teachers, especially in the area of kindergarten instruction. The current emphasis on improving student achievement has caused an increased emphasis on professional activities, strategies, and practices as educators consider a realistic opportunity for change in all of America's schools (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).

The National School Boards Foundation (1999) described teacher professional development as "the immediate policy lever that school boards have to raise student achievement and improvement" (Cassell, 1999, p.3). Recently, teachers have shown a high degree of involvement in professional development opportunities. According to the

U. S. Department of Education, (1999) high-quality professional development is a crucial component in helping all students achieve the high standards of learning needed today.

Fullan and Stiegelbaur (1999) acknowledged, “Ongoing professional development for all teachers is the basis for ideas, school improvement, and educational reform” (p.315).

Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

The overall goal of professional development is student learning (Loucks-Horsely, et al., 1998). Professional development is designed to promote learning processes that enable teachers, administrators, support staff, and other personnel to improve their educational organization (Mississippi Department of Education, 1998). Loucks-Horsely et al. (1998) identified the following essential attributes of professional development experiences: (a) enhancing partnership and cooperation among educators, (b) providing time for teacher investigation, (c) engaging participants in decision making, (d) providing participants time to practice what was learned and reflect on those practices, (e) providing guidance and sustained support, and (f) integrating the individual, school and district goals. Ganser (2000) noted that professional development should provide teachers with many chances to deepen their understanding of their beliefs related to teaching and learning. He further noted the activities embodied must be from research-based principles on teaching, learning, and leadership.

Over the past ten years, a tremendous amount of literature has appeared on in-service professional development, teacher learning, and teacher change. The research literature incorporates both large and small scale studies, including analyses of classroom teaching through case studies, evaluations of programs designed to improve teaching and

learning, and results of teacher surveys about their pre-service preparation and in-service professional development experiences (Cohen, 1990; Carey & Fretchtling, 1997; U. S. Department of Education, 1999). In addition, a significant amount of literature describes best practices in professional development based on professional experiences (Loucks-Horsely et al., 1998).

Griffin (1983) explained that professional development programs all share a common goal: to change the professional practices, thoughts, and understanding of individual teachers. Reviews on professional development, however, directed attention to the ineffectiveness of most programs (Cohen & Hill, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Wang, Frechtling, & Sanders, 1999). There are critical elements that cause professional development opportunities to become a failure within the school. Ineffective professional development programs do not take into account the motivating factor for teachers to get involved in professional development, nor do they consider the process on how change will occur (Gusky, 1986). Gusky proposed that there are three things to consider when developing and implementing staff development: (a) the process of change is a slow-paced, difficult, and, gradual process; (b) regular feedback and guidance must be provided on student learning outcomes; and (c) there must be teacher support and follow-up provided after the initial training.

A consensus has emerged about the specific characteristics of high-quality professional development (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). The specific characteristics of high-quality professional development focus on the types of learning opportunities offered to teachers. In high-quality professional development,

teachers look at the content and how students learn content and explore methods for providing students with engaging learning opportunities. High-quality professional development promotes continuous and ongoing growth, providing follow-up opportunities for further learning such as supplying support from outside of the school, incorporating the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same grade, school, or department, and eliciting opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles (Desimone et al., 2002). Studies conducted over the past ten years have suggested that professional development opportunities which incorporate all or most of these characteristics can have a positive influence on the teachers' classroom practices and student achievement (Birman, Desimone, Garet, & Porter, 2000; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Wilson & Lowenberg, 1991). Recently, a few studies have begun to examine the relative importance of specific characteristics of professional development. Several studies have found that the intensity and duration of professional development are related to teacher change (Birman et al., 2000; Garet et al., 2001; Wilson & Lowenberg, 1991).

Thompson and Cole (2002) explained that planning is the most important aspect of a successful professional development program. The initial planning should include teacher input, cost factors, resources, and program types that will be offered. They also concluded the most productive professional development activities extend over a long period. Professional development should be planned carefully so that teachers can receive ongoing support and feedback throughout the course of the activities.

However, research by Richardson (2003) revealed most professional development training comes from the short-term models which lack follow-up and participant involvement. Richardson's findings showed that effective professional development typically has certain characteristics. It should be long-term with follow-up provided. Effective professional development will promote a consensus among participants on goals and a vision. Another key is that administration must provide adequate support and encourage association among educators at various levels. Access to funding is also important so that an outside facilitator can be secured, along with appropriate resources, materials, expert presenters, and substitute teachers. Richardson also found that professional development participants need to determine their individual as well as collective goals, be willing to experiment with new practices, and be willing to engage in open communication about teaching and learning. Professional development models that incorporate these principles are more productive.

Professional development must also be relevant to the participants. Wolk (2002) reported that professional development should focus on real issues, such as developing and implementing curricula or evaluating student work. It needs to be grade specific. Wolk believed that effective professional development should be teacher oriented and scheduled into the teacher's workday. Teachers need to have time to work collegially on evaluating student work, solving problems, reading and discussing relevant research literature about their subject matter, and time to analyze their practice. This time should be built into their daily schedules.

According to Fullan and Miles (1992), the time allotted for teachers' professional development has been a major problem for the past ten years. Finding more time means reappropriating finances, changing teacher's schedules, rethinking the teacher's role, and amending the school curricula (Wolk, 2002). In the final analysis of Wolk's study, it was noted there was no consistency between state policies in regards to professional development. The No Child Left Behind Act provides funds for individual states and school districts to support teacher activities and strategies. "Each school district that receives Title I funds must spend five percent of their funds on professional development activities to assist teachers in becoming knowledgeable of these subject matter. In fiscal year 2004, \$605.2 million was set aside for professional development" (U. S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 13). This professional development includes implementation of new content as well as providing time for teachers to participate in follow-up activities.

Duration and Intensity of Professional Development

According to the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1996), professional development continues to be delivered as "one shot" workshops in which teachers listen passively to experts and learn about topics not essential to their teaching. A national survey conducted in the USA in 1998 reported that 81% of teachers participated in eight hours or less of professional development activities during the previous twelve months (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Even when the professional development opportunities focused on in-depth study in the subject area the teacher was assigned to teach, only 56% received more than eight hours of professional development. Studies of professional development in England and in the USA reported

the activities were often of unsatisfactory duration (Hustler et al., 2003; Corcoran, Shields, & Zucker, 1998). Other studies have found professional development opportunities that provide a substantial amount of contact hours and have sustaining power over a long period of time generally have a stronger impact on teaching practices (Corcoran, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Hiebert, 1999; Lieberman, 1996; Little, 1993; Richardson, 1994; Stiles, Loucks-Horsely & Hewson, 1996). This research emphasizes that certain types of professional development activities are more likely than others to offer sustained and maintained learning opportunities such as providing teachers sufficient time, developing problem solving and thinking skills, and encouraging meaningful changes in teachers' classroom practices.

Loucks-Horsely et al. (1998) noted study groups, coaching (peer or group) or mentoring arrangements, and teachers' networking are various reform types of professional development. Teachers participating in these reform types of professional development can work one-on-one with an equally or more experienced teacher to exchange ideas about topics of interest, pursue common goals, share information, and address common concerns. Another way of providing sustained learning opportunities is to set aside time for teachers to work together in study groups. Study groups include teachers who are engaged in regular, collaborative interactions structured around specific topics and concerns. Study groups can be very effective for teachers' self-efficacy. They can build community and relationships, make connection between beliefs, practices, and curriculum reform, and foster a sense of teacher professionalism (Loucks-Horsely et al., 1998).

In comparison to the traditional “one-hit” or one shot workshops, these types of professional development activities usually have a longer duration, allow teachers the opportunity to practice and reflect upon their teaching, and are job-specific with ongoing teaching activities (Loucks-Horsely et al., 1998). Mentoring, coaching, and observation take place during the process of teaching. They are, therefore, simpler to sustain over time (Garet et al., 2001). The National Center for Reading First (2004) revealed intensity and duration are important elements to regard when planning professional development opportunities. For example, a professional development session that only provides three days of training is unlikely to change teachers’ instructional practice. Effective professional development training takes time to implement into the teachers’ plan of work. Professional development should include follow-up sessions and provide ongoing support throughout the year (National Center for Reading First, 2004).

Teachers need the opportunity to practice and reflect upon their teaching experience. All professional development training sessions must be embedded in continuous teaching activities (Garet et. al., 2001). The National Center for Reading First (2004) noted professional development sessions are not just a series of events. Rather, they are parts of a focused professional development program designed to elicit a specific outcome. The recent literature on teacher learning and professional development has clearly called for professional development that is sustained and maintained over a period of time for teachers (Garet, et al., 2001).

The KTRA Professional Development Model is a professional development plan that can offer sustaining power for kindergarten teachers. These teachers that attend the

KTRA must train on all of other MDE modules (Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension). Along with the trainings, these teachers meet weekly in Peer Coaching Study Teams; receive ongoing support, feedback, and guidance throughout the grant phase. Schools that do not receive funding will only be able to implement the strategies and activities from the academy. The KTRA doesn't specific guidelines for follow-up or additional support during implementation. It would be considered a piece of the whole.

There are two important observations about professional development which should be noted. First, longer activities and strategies are more likely to provide an opportunity for in-depth conversations on content, student beliefs and non-beliefs, and instructional strategies. Second, activities that extend over time are more likely to allow teachers time to try out new practices in their classroom and obtain guidance and feedback about their teaching (Garet et al., 2001). A recent survey found many teachers believed that job-embedded, collaborative professional development activities such as the same planning time, formal monitoring by another teacher, or networking with other teachers outside the school were more helpful as professional development opportunities than the more traditional forms of professional development strategies (US Department of Education, 1999).

In summary, the main goal of professional development is to improve student learning. Professional development is a shared responsibility for the school district, school, and the individual teacher. It should involve teacher input to help set the priorities that are necessary for a successful professional development program. According to

Ganser (2000), professional development should provide teachers time to get a deeper understanding of content. Professional development should provide teachers follow-up, support, and guidance.

Impact of Professional Development

High quality professional development should provide open avenues for teachers to build new knowledge about teaching, learning, and their specific subject matter. Showers, Joyce, and Bennett (1987) noted professional development has received an enormous amount of attention as a way of improving education. Modern professional development efforts include improved performance by the school, staff, and individual students (Sparks, 1994). Gusky (1995) stated that professional development was successful only when it involved both organizational and individual development. Gusky revealed that high-quality professional development includes three major goals. First, there must be a change in the classroom practices of teachers. Second, there must be a change in their attitudes and beliefs, and third, there must be a change in the learning outcome of students. Professional development is effective when the change involves increasing individual student's competence and enhancing the effectiveness of the school, teachers, support staff, administrators, and other personnel involved in the learning process.

Professional development involves a process of learning about change which may require teachers to learn new knowledge, acquire a new skill, or develop a new attitude (Collins, 1999). Teachers have to change their instructional practices in order to improve teaching and learning. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) explained that teachers

learn by doing, sharing, reflecting, and collaborating with other teachers. Smylie and Denny (1989) supported this premise from their study on how teachers learn. Their study concluded teachers learn by: (a) direct experience as a teacher (learning by doing), (b) consultation with other teachers about teaching and learning (collaborating), (c) pursuing research and studying the research (reading and reflecting), and (d) observation of other teachers (sharing).

Collins and Collins (2002) noted elementary teachers would have a higher success rate of performing complex skills by participating in high quality professional development. Teachers would benefit from the collegial support and active engagement by increasing their capacity for both teaching and learning. Effective professional development on teacher learning also includes building the educator's capacity of meeting the changing and expanding demands of the national and state levels of government.

Wise (1991) stated that improvement could not take place in the school unless teachers and administrators improved. Teachers need freedom to talk publicly about their work and to participate in decisions about their instructional practices (Lieberman, 1995). Principals need to encourage teachers to become involved in discussions about curriculum and instructional issues (Gusky, 1997). Principals also need to inspire teachers to participate in more professional development opportunities that nurture a school environment conducive to learning, experimenting, cooperating, and eliciting professional respect among colleagues (Fullan, Bennett, & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1989; Little, 1982).

In a four-year longitudinal study on reading instruction in low performing urban schools observed classroom behavior to investigate teacher effectiveness, instructional time allocation, and then measured the relationship between those factors and student achievement (Foorman & Moats 2004; Foorman & Schatschneider, 2003; Moats & Foorman, 2003.) The researchers found a statistically significant relationship among the teachers' knowledge, teachers' effectiveness, and student achievement variables. The teachers in the study revealed that the keys to their success in the classrooms were based on professional development, the presence of classroom or literacy coaches and observers, and the adoption of core, comprehensive reading programs. The most effective professional development opportunities should be based on direct teaching experiences, provide teachers opportunities to reflect and process information, and promote interactions and observations of other teachers (Smylie, 1989).

According to Joyce and Showers (1995), the professional development training model should include three basic components. First, teachers need to understand the concept being addressed. They must then be able to attain the skill, and finally, they must be able to apply the skill. Joyce and Showers believed once a new strategy is taught during professional development, implementation and practice should begin immediately. Collins (1999) stated professional development is a shared responsibility between the teachers, schools, and school districts. All educators should play a major role in setting priorities and implementing the desired changes.

In summary, as Gusky (2002) noted, professional development is about change. Any change in a process involves both time and effort. Professional development

opportunities can increase teachers' competence as well as enhance student learning. The KTRA Professional Development Model provides teachers with new knowledge and allows them the opportunity to change their instructional practices as needed. Continuing support is available as teachers learn how to incorporate the components of the KTRA into their existing reading program.

Purpose of Kindergarten and the KTRA Professional Development Model

History and Purpose of Kindergarten. Kindergarten is an early childhood education program established in the United States aimed at early literacy development. Friederich Froebel, widely credited with developing the first kindergarten, noted that the learning process in the kindergarten classroom should reflect the child's own self-activity (Gutek, 1998). Froebel's idea of the kindergarten classroom was based on the psychological training of little children by means of play and occupations. Geometrical objects and a system of categories were the basic tools used with Froebel's method. According to Gutek, Froebel based this early childhood education method of teaching young children on the Idealistic philosophy.

The Idealistic philosophy stresses the idea of the child's own self-activity. The learning process is in the encouragement offered by the teacher and the environment committed to intellectual activity (Gutek, 1998). The child is attracted to certain acts, circumstances, and items in the learning environment. The teachers' role is to facilitate this learning environment. The teacher must be prepared to ask open-ended as well as leading questions to provoke the child's awareness of interests and ideas (Gutek).

One major purpose for kindergarten is for children to become comfortable in a formal setting. It serves as a transitional experience between the home and school. The kindergarten class should strongly reflect on the home at the beginning of the academic school year and become more like an entrance into an academic first grade classroom (Collins & Collins, 2002). The kindergarten curriculum, which is based upon the overall purpose of teaching social skills, building self-esteem, and developing a child's academic ability, continually promotes Froebel's ideas. His plan for kindergarten included children playing games, exploring concepts, interacting socially, and singing songs. According to the National Research Panel (1999), singing songs, rhyming games, language play activities, and nursery rhymes are all excellent tools that spark children's awareness of language and sounds. The KTRA Professional Development Model provides kindergarten teachers the opportunity to learn and employ Froebel's ideas.

Today, kindergarten teachers are faced with the challenge of providing kindergarteners with the appropriate prerequisites of learning to read and to adhere to diversity in the classroom. It is necessary that all teachers, especially kindergarten teachers, are provided with an understanding of literacy development and the role of "optimizing literacy development" (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p.10). Therefore, it is imperative that kindergarten teachers are provided with high-quality professional development. High-quality professional development is fundamental to school improvement and must be recognized as an investment in life-long learning for all educators (Mississippi Department of Education, 1998). The Mississippi Department of Education further believes professional development provides teachers with the

opportunity to assess their own teaching systems, learn new subject matter, work as a professional with other educators, develop and implement needed school improvement plans, and stay informed of the current research in their own field of study.

KTRA Professional Development Model.

In 1997, a reading initiative was created to change literacy in Mississippi (Mississippi Department of Education Reading Initiative, 2002). This initiative was developed to address the need of improving reading instruction in the state by using scientifically-based reading research best practices in kindergarten through third grade. In 1998, the legislature supported the initiative by passing a Reading Sufficiency Law. This law requires every school district in Mississippi to create and initiate a program for reading reform (Mississippi Department of Education Reading Initiative, 2002). As a part of this law, the Reading Reform Model was established. It emphasized scientifically based reading research. The goals of the model are designed to impact student achievement by providing: (a) well-designed literacy interventions to ensure reading readiness, (b) prescriptive direct instruction utilizing the essential elements of reading instruction and based upon the results of appropriate assessments, (c) opportunities for young children to receive extended or additional instructional opportunities, and (d) high quality professional development to improve the reading instructional practices of Mississippi teachers, administrators, and support staff (Mississippi Department of Education Reading Initiative).

The Mississippi Department of Education is attempting to meet the needs of kindergarten teachers by providing them with continuous improvement and learning

through the KTRA Professional Development Model. This model provides kindergarten teachers with four days of professional development training to enhance their knowledge of effective instructional practices that promote early reading success. It serves as an integral part of the Mississippi Reading Reform Model. Component four of the Mississippi Reading Reform Model stresses the importance of providing administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals with high quality professional development to improve reading instructional practices. The KTRA attempts to offer high quality professional development for teachers and intensify individual teachers' abilities to offer effective reading instruction (Office of Reading, Early Childhood, & Language Arts, 2003).

The implementation of the KTRA Professional Development Model can assist teachers in building effective strategies and activities leading to gains in student achievement into their curriculum. This model allows kindergarten teachers to increase their knowledge base of effective reading instruction and effective classroom instruction (Teacher Reading Academies, 2002). The KTRA was developed to support teachers in their efforts to teach young children to read.

The academy provides 2.4 Continuing Education Units (CEU's) for kindergarten teachers or any other teachers desiring to participate (North Mississippi Education Consortium [NMEC], 2002-2003). When all requirements are completed, certificates verifying these units may be submitted for license renewal. The NMEC collaborates with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to offer these institutes through the Office of Reading, Early Childhood, and Language Arts. The KTRA Professional Development Model was adopted from Texas in the summer of 2003. This model is

highly recommended for kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten is offered to children in nearly every state and is mandatory in nine. Mississippi offers kindergarten to the children in the state, but it is not mandatory; therefore, the KTRA Professional Development Model is not a state mandate for kindergarten teachers.

Kindergarten teachers are expected to aggregate what they already know about reading instruction with the ingredients of effective reading instruction from the Academy (Teacher Reading Academies, 2002). Examples of strategies encouraged by the Academy include grouping techniques, monitoring student progress, and preparation of interventions for struggling learners. The Academy addresses the essential elements of reading instruction through examination of oral language and vocabulary development, phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding and phonics, book knowledge, and listening comprehension (Texas Reading Initiative, 1999). Additionally, the Academy encourages practices consistent with the kindergarten curriculum, the Mississippi Language Arts Framework for Kindergarten, and the Kindergarten Accomplishments as summarized by the National Research Council (1999).

Research has consistently agreed upon the critical skills that young children need to learn in order to become successful readers (National Reading Panel, 2000). The underlying belief in helping individual children to learn to read is to help individual teachers benefit from the research (Snow et al., 1998). That goal can be accomplished by offering high quality professional development for kindergarten teachers focusing on these five areas linked to the essential elements of reading identified in the National Reading Panel 2000 report and teaching them to use scientific research based best

practices in their instruction through implementing the components of the KTRA Professional Development Model (Teacher Reading Academies, 2002).

The KTRA Professional Development Model focuses on the same characteristics of effective professional development as the three year longitudinal study done by Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman (2002). It was concluded from this study that the key features of improving effective teaching practices through high-quality professional development are either structural features or core features. The structural features of professional development include activities that are organized as a reform type. Reform types of professional development include study groups, duration of activities, and collective participation of teachers teaching the same subjects and grade levels. These core features provide teachers with opportunities to promote active learning, promote coherence, and encourage continuing professional communication.

The KTRA promotes all of these core features in its professional development model (e.g., teachers are mandated by state and federal guidelines to participate in study groups for a minimum of two hours per week). When teachers implement content focused professional development such as the KTRA into their existing curriculum, they can increase their knowledge and skills and improve their teaching practices. This can lead to active learning opportunities, coherence, and a content focus, which in turn increases teachers' knowledge and skills and changes in their teaching practices (Garet et al., 2001).

Components of the KTRA Model.

Research consistently demonstrates that teachers' instruction should build progressively on what children understand about spoken and written language (National Research Council, 1999). Kindergarten teachers need to focus their daily reading instruction on the following areas specifically: oral language and vocabulary development, phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding and phonics, book knowledge, and listening comprehension. These areas form the basis for later reading success. They assist in helping young children become lifelong readers and learners.

Oral Language and Vocabulary Development. The foundation of all language arts is oral language (Sticht & James, 1984). The acquisition of language is an important part of the kindergarten child's intellectual development (Smith-Brooks, Goodman, & Meredith, 1976). Pinker (1984) believes the majority of children's early language learning experiences appears to be spontaneous. For example, the child's early language experience is dependent on the language experiences from the family and home environment. Pinker explained that each child must use the home and family experiences to build his or her own understanding of the language system and how it actually works. Even though many children enter kindergarten from homes with rich language experiences, a tremendous amount of learning about language still has to be developed before formal reading and writing begin.

Countless children enter kindergarten lacking a strong foundation in oral language. This lack of oral language development will likely cause them to have difficulty with learning to read. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) and

Honig (1996) reported that it is critical for kindergarten teachers' early literacy instruction to engage children in a variety of oral language activities. These early language activities should include interactive story reading, story telling and retelling, dramatic play, and communication among the teacher and peers through discussions. These story reading activities provide the kindergartener with the opportunities to develop language and vocabulary (Snow, 1991).

Research studies have provided evidence that language and vocabulary have developed as a result of incidental exposure to storybook reading activities within the classroom (Elley, 1989; Nicholson & Whyte, 1992; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Senechal & Cornell, 1993). Activities that develop oral language should be designed to teach language concepts, vocabulary, and enhance background knowledge (Clay, 1991). In effective kindergarten classrooms, teachers are engaging children in discussions about books, capitalizing on daily routines by giving directions, and encouraging children to think by building upon their background knowledge. Children get the opportunity to make predictions, clarify these predictions, and make connections between their personal experiences in the home and the school. The overall goal of oral language development is to foster a love of reading and prepare children to read (Snow et al., 1998).

Phonological Awareness. According to Collins and Collins (2002), phonological awareness refers to the understanding that spoken language is made up of individual sounds. The National Institute for Literacy (2001), defined phonological awareness as the ability to manipulate and think about the main features of spoken language such as words that begin or end with the same sound, words that rhyme, words that join to form

sentences, and words that can be divided into parts (syllables, onsets and rimes). It was further reported phonological awareness incorporates many levels, but phonemic awareness is the most complex level. Phonemic awareness refers to the ability of a child to be able to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken words (National Research Panel, 2001). According to Learning First Alliance (1998), phonemic awareness is one of the most important foundations for building young children's reading success. Extensive research supports the effectiveness and practicality of providing kindergartners with daily classroom instruction in phonological awareness (Snow et al., 1998). Yopp (1992) conducted a study that described developmentally appropriate activities, wherein she argued that phonological awareness instruction should include play activities. She found that these activities should incorporate active engagement through interacting and socializing. Kindergartners' play should stimulate curiosity and experimentation with language.

Adams and Bruck (1995) explained playful language activities that form phonological awareness skills are most effective when the goal of the kindergarten classroom instruction is to develop phonological awareness. According to Neuman, Copple, and Bredekamp (1999), young children who gain knowledge in phonemic awareness in kindergarten are most likely to become successful readers. Other researchers have concurred, finding that measures of a child's phonemic awareness and phonological awareness when he or she enters kindergarten appear to be very strong predictors of success in learning to read (Snow et al., 1998; Stanovich, 1986).

The documentation of one study revealed kindergartners who received specific instructional training in phonological awareness were able to learn to read more rapidly. Kindergartners who were of similar backgrounds and did not receive phonological awareness training did not progress well (Lundberg, Frost, & Peterson, 1988). These lessons should not be long and complex. Cunningham (1990) reported that fifteen minutes a day of direct instruction throughout the school year can significantly improve the phonological skills for kindergarten children. The Consortium on Reading Excellence (1990) noted fifteen minutes or more of instruction a day for two or three months were sufficient for most first graders if they have been provided with phonological awareness instruction in kindergarten.

Kindergartners should receive systematic and explicit instruction centered on language activities that encourage children's active engagement of exploring and manipulating sounds. This type of instruction will allow children to develop phonological awareness skills such as attending to the separate words of sentences, noticing and producing rhymes, blending phonemes to produce words, substituting phonemes to create words, and identifying the initial, medial, and final phonemes of words (National Institute for Literacy, 2001). Yopp (1992) reported that children who participated in these activities significantly accelerated both their reading growth.

Alphabetic Understanding and Phonics. According to Ehri and Sweet (1991), alphabetic knowledge is the ability of a child to name the letters and to identify their shapes. Children must be able to recognize and name each letter to be able to understand and apply the alphabetic principle. Bond and Dykstra (1967/1998) pointed out children's

proficiency in letter naming is one of the well-established predictors of the end-of-the-school-year achievements. In reality, phonemic awareness and beginning of the year alphabetic knowledge are two of the best predictors of reading accomplishment at the end of kindergarten and first grade (Ehri & Sweet).

Children learn about letters systematically. First, they must learn the letter names, then the letter shapes, and finally they learn the letter sounds (Mason, 1980). Many children enter kindergarten with some knowledge of the letters of the alphabet since learning about letters begins in the home (Mason). There, children learn letter names by singing songs and reciting rhymes (Adams, 1990). Adams further explained children move from learning letter names to letter shapes by playing with plastic or magnetic letters, exposure to alphabet books and blocks, watching children's television shows, and playing games on the computer. Kindergarten teachers should teach children the shapes of letters by the distinction of one character from another by using spatial features. Cunningham (1990) stated that after children have been exposed to the alphabetic principle they should be able to apply their knowledge of some letter names to initial reading experiences.

Chall (1967) and Ehri (1992) asserted that before beginning reading instruction, young children should develop some knowledge about sight words and be knowledgeable about letter forms, phonemes, and segmentation of sounds. Beginning reading programs should incorporate these areas, as well as systematic phonics instruction. Phonics refers to the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language to the sounds (phonemes) of spoken language (National Research Panel, 2001). Systematic phonics

programs expose children to letter sound relationships in an organized, logical sequence. These programs provide kindergarteners ample opportunities to apply what they have learned about the letters of the alphabet and sounds to the reading of words, sentences, and then stories (National Institute for Literacy, 2001). They further revealed systematic and explicit phonics instruction should significantly enhance kindergarten and first-grade children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension.

Book Knowledge. According to Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1999), book knowledge is defined as the universal knowledge of print and book concepts. They further noted those children actively participating in teacher read-alouds and other literacy-related activities involving books and other print materials could strengthen their book knowledge. Children need to learn the purpose and fundamental properties of written language and that print carries meaning. Clay (1979) found in her study that print concepts include children knowing: (a) that print is read from left to right; (b) what a letter is, what a word is, and what a sentence is; (c) that there are spaces between words; (d) the function of capital letters and punctuation marks; and (e) that oral language can be written and then read. In her conclusion, she acknowledged that the immediate goal of the preschool years is for young children to discover concepts about print. When kindergarten teachers are able to link reading to the experiences of kindergarten, these young children begin to gain an understanding that print carries meaning.

Teachers should help young children develop an awareness of print concepts by exposing them to environmental print. Environmental print is an early source of print awareness, and teachers can easily build environmental print experiences into their

classrooms (Burns et al., 1999). For example, teachers should expose children to familiar labels and signs, place their names on tubs or folders, label learning centers and classroom materials, list classroom helpers and group members, display names of topics being studied, and show directions for classroom activities.

Knowledge of book concepts develops as children learn concepts about print. Morrow (2001) defined book concepts as (a) understanding that a book is for reading; (b) knowing the function and location of a book's front, back, top, and bottom; (c) knowing how to turn the pages properly; (d) knowing where to begin reading; (e) understanding the different functions of print and pictures; and (f) identifying the title, author, and the illustrator. Clay (1979) explained that many kindergarten classroom teachers employ big books during reading instruction to illustrate the fact that print carries the meaning, not the pictures. Children need to construct the meaning of a story from the linguistic content rather than relying on pictures to construct their overall meaning (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

The early development of concepts about print provides a firm foundation for the growth of other pre-reading skills. Rozin, Bressman, and Taft (1974) concluded that, as children gain a deeper understanding of print concepts, they begin to notice words as individual units within the text on the page. In another study, Adams (1999) found that young children who have had exposure and experiences with concepts about print enter kindergarten with a deeper understanding that there is no difference in print whether it is in a book, on a sign, or seen on television. Reporting their findings, Morrow, Strickland, and Woo (1998) asserted that children's' previous experiences with and exposure to print

were found to be more beneficial when children received instruction that extended their knowledge base. The key to print concepts is to develop word awareness; this skill allows children to see how print works and opens the door for entering the world of literacy (Adams) 1990 & (Roberts) 1998.

In her study on print concepts, Adams (1990) found five things kindergarten students should learn as they develop print awareness: (a) Print is categorically different from other kinds of visual patterns and forms in the environment, (b) print is the same across a variety of media, (c) print is all over the place, (d) adults use print differently and for various purposes, and (e) print can be created by everyone. Adams also noted the knowledge base of print concepts provides a strong awareness and framework for learning to read and write. Knowledge about the forms and usage of print serves as a platform for developing letter shapes, names, sounds, and words (Neuman et al, 1999). The ability to process the skill of learning to read and write is critical to success in school and in life. Reading and writing continuously develop throughout one's life, but the early years are the most crucial years for developing reading and writing skills (Snow et al., 1998).

Listening Comprehension. According to the National Institute for Literacy (2001), listening comprehension refers to children's understanding of stories and other texts that are read aloud to them. Comprehension is a complicated process that involves the connection of ideas and information with prior knowledge and experience (Collins & Collins, 2002). Reading comprehension is seen as the most important part of reading; it is an essential component for life-long learning (Durkin, 1993). Collins & Collins explained

the reader must attach the recognizable words into their memory until the thought processes are able to understand word meaning. Listening comprehension lays the foundation for young children to later be able to “understand what they read, remember what they read, and communicate with others about what they read” (National Institute for Literacy, 2001, p. 48). Children should develop good listening comprehension as a necessary foundation for their future achievements throughout the grades (National Research Council, 1999).

Adams (1990) concluded reading aloud to children is probably the most suggested activity in kindergarten that encourages literacy and language development. Reading aloud helps make the connection between oral language and reading (National Research Council, 1999). Additionally, reading aloud to children encourages the development of thinking and reasoning skills which provide opportunities for children to use their speaking, reading, and writing abilities (Wells, 1985). The National Institute for Literacy (2001) contended having kindergarten children listen to stories that are read aloud, participate in deliberations, and embark on other literacy-related activities can increase listening comprehension. For example, teachers that asked predictive and analytic questions before and after reading a story reported significant improvement in vocabulary development and comprehension skills.

Neuman et al. (1999) concluded kindergarten teachers should provide excellent instruction that builds on prior knowledge. Read-aloud activities should focus on discussing the story elements, discussing after-the-fact story questions, and having children reflect on the major ideas. Text talk is a very beneficial approach for intensifying

young children's ability to build meaning from text. During text talk, the teacher engages children with open-ended questions that lead to class discussions (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Children should be exposed to wide range of reading material so that they can learn to listen to different genres for different purposes (National Research Council, 1999). Researchers suggest that the most important aspect of the teachers read aloud session is that it provides the children with decontextualized language, making it a requirement for the children to make sense of ideas that are beyond the here and now (Chochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1983; Snow, 1993; Snow & Dickinson, 1991; Snow, Tabors, Nicholson, & Kurland, 1995).

In summary, reading readiness is essential to learning and provides the establishment for future reading development through oral language development, phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding and phonics, book knowledge, and listening comprehension. The KTRA addresses all five components by utilizing research based publications, supplies, age appropriate materials to practice activities, reading and discussing children's books, and evaluating teacher's editions of reading programs. These components promote early reading success and improve classroom teachers' instructional practices.

In conclusion, professional development, which is designed to promote a change in the learning process, requires on-going support, guidance, and feedback along with follow-up. Research indicates that professional development opportunities for teachers should consider the intensity and duration of training sessions and that the overall goal of

professional development should be to foster change for the individual, school, and school district.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Method

This chapter presents a discussion of the method and materials used during this study. A qualitative method was used. The following description is a representation of the study. Kindergarten teachers attended a KTRA Professional Development training session. All participants were administered a pretest and posttest from the Participant Knowledge Survey. This survey consisted of 35 items.

The participants were asked to rate their knowledge and use of the academy topics and concerns. The participants were trained for four days (intervention) on the KTRA Professional Development Model. After the intervention, participants were administered the posttest. Six participants were selected from (high and low survey scores) to participate in follow-up. This follow-up included a classroom observation and teacher interview.

Open-ended interviews and direct observations are effective qualitative research methods. Case studies are descriptive measures which lend themselves to case study data analysis (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The results of the open-ended interviews and direct observations in this study were analyzed and written in the form of case studies.

Yin (1994) acknowledged case studies are empirical inquiries that include an investigation of a phenomenon. The process of developing a case study can produce

major details and descriptions of the phenomenon, develop some possible explanations, and assess the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). These cases studies are the results of the individual classroom observations and interviews. Six subjects were selected to participate in the qualitative phase of this study; therefore, multiple case studies will be used. Yin (1994) revealed multiple case studies require the researcher to have extensive resources and time. He further noted multiple case studies need to have replication power. This means the same or similar results should occur in all six cases. Herriott and Firestone (1983) believed multiple case studies are more robust and more compelling than a single case study.

Participants

After the four days of training, six kindergarten teachers were selected to participate in a follow-up classroom observation and interview. The scores on the Participant Knowledge Survey were used to select the six participants who participated in this phase of the study. After the scores were analyzed, three participants showing the greatest gain on the posttest scores as compared to the pretest scores were selected to form Group 1. Table 1(Appendix E) illustrates that this group was composed of subjects 116, 107, and 201. Since some of the potential subjects in this group declined to participate, the subjects with the next highest differences were asked to participate. The three participants showing the least gain when comparing the posttest scores with the pretest scores were selected to be members of Group 2. This group included subjects 124, 113, and 117. Again, potential subjects declined to participate, so the researcher invited

those with the next lower scores (210, 115, and 114) to participate. These declined to participate.

The participants ranged from first year teachers to veteran teachers with 20 years of teaching experience in kindergarten. The ethnicity of the groups included African Americans, Caucasians, and one teacher originally from Germany. Of the 55 educators enrolled in the KTRA at the two sites involved in the study, 19 were public school kindergarten teachers who were included in the study. The others were not eligible to participate in this study because they were not public school kindergarten teachers. The ineligible group consisted of administrators, literacy coaches, and retired teachers who wished to maintain their teaching certification.

The other participants were from private kindergarten institutions around the state who were not certified teachers but attended the KTRA to enhance their knowledge base or learn about effective instructional classroom practices. Teachers who attended the KTRA either wanted to increase their knowledge base or were interested in obtaining CEU credit for license renewal. All 19 eligible participants completed the Participant Knowledge Survey (pretest and posttest). These participants were administered the 35-item pretest before the initial training, trained for four days, and then administered the same 35-item posttest after the training on the fourth day.

Materials

The materials and resources used in this four-day training came in two forms, presenter materials and participant materials. Presenter materials included a presenter

guide which provided both color transparencies and a CD-ROM for presenting knowledge to participants. The presenter materials also contained detailed notes and handouts for participants such as journal articles, lessons, references, the Mississippi Reading Reform Model, the Mississippi Language Arts Framework's Chart of Scope and Sequence Continuum of Competencies, and the Kindergarten Reading and Writing Benchmarks. Videotapes were shown to provide segments of kindergarten teachers providing appropriate reading instruction related to the essential component being discussed. These video segments, created to introduce, review, and support the content, provided examples of most of the academy topics.

The participant materials included participant guides consisting of handouts such as journal articles, lessons, and references. Participants were asked to bring their current teacher's edition of their reading program to be used to evaluate reading instruction. Teachers were asked to determine the effectiveness of their reading program and to notice how the components of effective reading instruction were addressed in various sections. The teacher's edition was used during the sessions on oral language and vocabulary development, phonological awareness, reading aloud, and listening comprehension.

Participants were also asked to bring their favorite narrative and expository children's books which were used to develop lessons and activities during the phonological awareness and alphabetic understanding and phonics sessions. They were also used when designing effective lessons were highlighted. Plastic letters, pennies, counters, general elementary school supplies, and the alphabet mats and arc were also used during this academy.

Instrument

The Participant Knowledge Survey (Appendix A) was only used as selection criteria. It allowed the researcher to select six participants out of the 19 participants to participate in the classroom observation and interview. This survey was developed by the Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts at the University of Texas, Austin for use with the KTRA. The Participant Knowledge Survey consisted of 35 items arranged on a Likert scale.

According to Gay and Airasian (2000), a Likert scale is a type of attitude scale which requests participants to respond to various statements by indicating their answers using a variety of choices. Participants were asked to rate these 35 items using a scale with four possible choices: (a) 1-Don't Know-new idea or need information, (b) 2-Novice-fairly knowledgeable, use sometimes in my teaching, (c) 3-Intermediate-knowledgeable, use regularly in my teaching, and (d) 4-Master-very knowledgeable, use regularly in my teaching, could help a colleague. The Participant Knowledge Survey consisted of five sections corresponding to the elements of reading addressed in the training: (a) oral language and vocabulary development, (b) phonological awareness, (c) alphabetic understanding and phonics, (d) book knowledge, and (e) listening comprehension.

Teachers responded to items relating to each of these areas which were designed to rate how well they felt they could implement the suggested strategies in their classrooms and schools. The first section, oral language and vocabulary development, contained eleven items. In the second section, phonological awareness, participants were asked to rate seven items. The third section, alphabetic understanding and phonics,

contained seven items, and the fourth section, book knowledge, was composed of three items. The final section, listening comprehension, required participants to rate seven items.

Procedure

Prior to the beginning of the 2004-2005 academic school year, kindergarten teachers volunteered to attend the KTRA. The KTRA was being held in four geographical regions around the state during the months of June and July of 2004. Two training sites were selected for this study. At the beginning of the training on the first day, all participants were administered the Participant Knowledge Survey to obtain pretest data. Each survey was coded to allow the researcher to compare pre- and posttest data.

Site 1 surveys were coded beginning with 101 and site 2 began with 201. At the end of day four, participants were administered the Participant Knowledge Survey to obtain posttest data. All surveys were administered and collected by the researcher to insure confidentiality of responses.

The follow-up study began in October, 2004, following the teachers' participation in the KTRA. The researcher observed each classroom teacher's instructional practices in an effort to determine if the teacher was using the instructional practices learned during the KTRA. For example, the researcher was interested in noting the use of activities to promote oral language development, book knowledge, and listening comprehension. An overview of the observation format is included in Appendix B. Participants were then asked a series of open-ended questions about classroom instruction, including topics such as classroom instructional practices and the current reading program being used by the

school for kindergarten reading instruction. The protocol used in the interviews and the participants' responses are included in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Miles and Huberman (1994) noted qualitative data should be analyzed as it is collected. Data were collected through the process of note taking during the observation and interview, and then placed in a Microsoft Word file. Next, the data were coded and placed in categories to facilitate analysis and development of the case studies which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Data Analysis

The analysis included analyzing and identifying categories or common themes of useful and relevant information. Data gathered from the classroom observations and interviews were reported and analyzed in case studies. The six cases represent the three participants who gained more knowledge and the three participants who gained less knowledge. The participants from Group 1 will represent the first three cases. The participants from Group 2 will represent the last three cases.

Case Studies

Pseudonyms were used to identify each subject throughout the study. Group 1 was composed of, Kell, Lakeshia, and Danielle. All participants within this group have been trained extensively for reading instruction in kindergarten. Group 2 was composed of Brenda, Delicia, and Janice. Delicia is the only participant in this group that has been trained extensively for reading instruction in kindergarten. Brenda and Janice have not received very much training for reading instruction in kindergarten. The KTRA Professional Development Model was their first training for kindergarten instruction.

The researcher used this grouping technique to enable an investigation of those who appeared to have learned the most and those who have appeared to learn the least. Insights gained from careful analysis of their teaching practices allowed the researcher to determine if the KTRA had an impact on these instructional practices (Appendix F). The participants were observed and interviewed on topics about reading instruction in kindergarten. Each case will include demographic information, experience, and the result of the observation and interview with each participant.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The results of the interviews and observations with the six selected subjects were summarized in case studies. As the research process developed, the applicability of the two groups based on the amount of increase (or lack thereof) on the posttest scores over the pretest scores became less important than the actual findings being presented. Therefore, the cases are presented individually in this section. Statements taken from the transcripts of the interview responses are located in Appendix D.

Participants' Views on KTRA

Case One-Kell

Kell noted the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy Professional Development Model is her favorite of all the trainings offered by the Mississippi Department of Education. This training enhanced her knowledge. "It was a refresher course. It covered all the things that our report card requires us to teach. It showed me how to put the creativity back into the kindergarten curriculum. In a few short words, I love the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy."

Case Two-Lakeshia

Lakeshia revealed she has attended all of the professional development modules offered by the Department of Education. She stated, “The KTRA was great. This professional development model focuses on specific areas and needs for kindergarten instruction.”

Case Three-Danielle

Danielle stressed the importance of attending the KTRA. “First, it was one of the requirements of our grant, secondly, it focused strictly on kindergarten instruction, and finally, it taught me some specific skills that I could practice with my children.”

Case Four-Brenda

Brenda stated, “The only drawback to it is that it focused on a lot of research. I wanted more information on learning center activities.”

Case Five-Delicia

Delicia revealed the KTRA was very thorough and it can be very beneficial for all kindergarten teachers. “I learned new strategies, activities and perspectives. I enjoyed working with other teachers from the other locations.”

Case Six-Janice

Janice noted the KTRA was worth attending. “I feel that this academy was the most productive training to help me with effective kindergarten instruction.”

Experience and Support

Case One–Kell

Kell is a 41-year-old white female. Kell knew early in life she wanted to be a teacher. Her mother, who inspired her to teach, displayed to her the attributes of a great teacher: patience, hard work, dedication, a love for books, and a love for children.

Kell's teaching experience began with three and four-year-olds, and after several years she began teaching kindergarten. Kell has taught kindergarten for the past 19 years and currently serves as grade level chairperson and mentor of new kindergarten teachers. She considers herself an expert teacher and has a Masters Degree and National Board Certification to support her confidence.

Always interested in improving her abilities, Kell has attended many professional development sessions. She has attended the annual Mississippi Early Childhood Association (MECA) Conference, the annual MDE Mega-Conference, the annual International Reading Association (IRA) Conference, and all of the following MDE Professional Development Modules: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Fluency, Integrating Learning Centers, Pre-K RAISE, and RAISE K-3.

Case Two–Lakeshia

Lakeshia is a middle-aged black female who is in her second year of teaching kindergarten in the public sector. She worked in Illinois for 18 years in the private setting. Her career in education began as a secretary, then curriculum coordinator (testing

students and scheduling the academics for the high school), and ended as Junior Accountant for the school in Illinois. Lakeshia knew she always wanted to be a teacher; she felt she could make a difference. She moved to Mississippi and prepared herself to become a teacher. She has been teaching kindergarten for two years.

She attended numerous trainings in Illinois but none similar to the trainings she has attended in Mississippi. “I have attended all of the MDE professional development modules for kindergarten teachers. Our school has been trained on all of the components of Reading Instruction (Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension), Pre-K RAISE, and the KTRA Professional Development Model.” She attended the MEGA-conference during the summer of 2004 in Biloxi.

Case Three-Danielle

Danielle is a 39-year-old white, female teacher. She has taught in the public sector for 19 years. She spent two of these years teaching second grade, and the remaining years in kindergarten. During the summer months, Danielle works with preschool children in the private sector.

Danielle has attended many professional development modules. She has membership in MECA and has attended the Bridges training offered through the MDE. For the last two years, she has been trained on the following sessions offered by the MDE through the Reading First Grant: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Pre-K RAISE, and Peer Coaching Study Teams.

Case Four-Brenda

Brenda is a white female in her middle thirties who described herself as being motivated and driven. “I want to be the best I can be at whatever I want to do.” Brenda is currently in her eighteenth year of teaching. She holds a Masters Degree and is National Board Certified. She has previously taught second, third, fourth, and fifth grades and is presently teaching kindergarten.

Brenda has attended many professional development modules during her teaching career, most of which have been either in the areas of math or science. She stated, “The KTRA was the first Language Arts/Reading session I have attended in years.” Brenda has no prior experience with reading instruction except the knowledge she gained at the KTRA Professional Development Model.

Case Five-Delicia.

Delicia is a 45-year-old white female. She holds National Board Certification as a kindergarten teacher and received her Masters Degree in the area of Curriculum and Instruction. She also received her Administrative License in Educational Leadership in the summer of 2004. She stated, “My husband and I both worked on our administrative license together. He has taken a job as an administrator in a neighboring high school.” She believes she is not ready to take on the role as an administrator. “Presently, I serve as a mentor for new kindergarten teachers,” she added.

Delicia has twenty years of experience in education. Nine of those 20 years have been spent in teaching kindergarten. During her teaching career she has also spent four

years teaching in a Title I reading program, four years teaching reading and math in sixth grade, and has experience with the GED Youth Challenge Program in her district assisting 16-18 year-old students.

She has spent numerous hours in professional development trainings. Her trainings have included all of the MDE training for the Reading First Grant (Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension, Peer Coaching Study Teams, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), KTRA, WoodCock Johnson III, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Pre-K RAISE, and RAISE K-3). “I have attended many other ones offered by MDE even before our school received the grant,” she added. Every year she attends the annual MECA conference and the annual Mega-Conference sponsored by the MDE. She has attended and presented at the IRA conference in Reno, Nevada with two other teachers from her school. “We presented the adoption of peer coaching study teams in our school. We discussed how we implemented it and the successes and failures of peer coaching study teams.” Delicia revealed that she spends a great deal of time reading professional research articles and watching videos on professional development. “I am always trying to expand my knowledge base to effectively teach the students.”

Case Six-Janice

Janice is a 30-year-old white female who has been teaching for six and a half years. All of her experience is in kindergarten. She has a Masters Degree and plans to obtain her National Board Certification in the next two years. She has attended several workshops and conferences over the last six years including some on brain research. She

attended the Learning Center Training and the KTRA Professional Development Model to help her with effective kindergarten instruction.

In conclusion, all six kindergarten teachers participating in this study are certified by the state of Mississippi. They volunteered to participate in this study. Each of the participants, principals, and superintendents received and signed a letter of informed consent when they agreed to participate in the interviews and observations for this study. These kindergarten teachers are participating in professional development modules to increase their knowledge base and for license renewal. 4 of the 6 teachers are meeting in Peer Coaching Study Teams set aside by the school or meeting informally on their own to discuss research to provide effective instruction for their students.

KTRA Activities Observed

Case One-Kell

Kell implemented activities and strategies encouraged by the KTRA. She was using the Alphabet Mat and Arc and some grouping strategies. She consistently applied the principles of reading instruction by including strategies to help children develop competence in oral language and vocabulary development, phonological awareness, alphabetic understanding and phonics, book knowledge, and listening comprehension. Kell employed more flexible grouping practices that helped improve her instructional focus from the Grouping Practices of Effective Instruction session at the KTRA.

Case Two-Lakeshia

Oral language and vocabulary development activities were an inherent part of every activity in the classroom. The children matched the plastic uppercase and lowercase letters on the Alphabet Mat and Arc. These activities allowed her to provide reinforcement in alphabetic understanding and phonics for the students using appropriate activities matched to the students' knowledge level. She also taught a lesson on phonological awareness that focused on a rhyming activity that she learned at the KTRA. The children practiced this activity.

Case Three-Danielle

Danielle implemented phonological awareness games and activities. She stressed that she is reading aloud daily. She is providing small group instruction rather than whole group instruction. Danielle is also focusing on providing more knowledge about concept of print.

Case Four-Brenda

Brenda focused more on teaching alphabetic understanding and phonics during the lesson. She worked with the students using the Pocket Chart activity she learned at the academy. Brenda worked with the She is also doing more with Oral Language and Vocabulary Development.

Case Five-Delicia

Delicia is monitoring the daily progress of all of my students. I am assessing and grouping them on a regular basis now, basing my grouping on the instructional needs of the students. She has implemented the majority of the activities and strategies into her daily classroom practices such as the Alphabet Mat and Arc, Pocket Chart activity, Story Wheel, and the Say It and Move It chart. ” During center time, the students are now being arranged in small flexible groups. One of the centers during the observation was the Alphabet Mat and Arc whereas students placed lowercase and uppercase letters on both sides of the mat and arc.

Case Six-Janice

Janice implemented a phonological awareness activity (Say It and Move It chart) to work on individual sounds with the students. She used the Pocket Chart activity cards to develop alphabet knowledge and build vocabulary skills.

Gaps*Case One-Kell*

Although Kell was implementing the strategies for reading instruction, she did not take advantage of every opportunity as efficiently as she could have. The *Three Billy Goats Gruff* was suitable as a read aloud for enjoyment, but the book from the reading series offered the teacher more opportunity to emphasize letter-sound association and would have been more effective in supporting the lesson on initial sounds by using alliteration. The book also stressed the use of the high frequency word *go*. Had this book

been chosen, students would have received more practice with the word and would have been able to see the word in print rather than just hearing the word. Using this book would have enabled the students to practice writing more during the shared writing time as well. The shared writing then could have been done in small groups rather than having the students working independently.

Case Two-Lakeshia

Although she has limited experience in teaching, Lakeshia is attempting to implement the instructional strategies she learned at the KTRA. Some difficulties were obvious in her teaching, however. She was using both the comprehensive and the supplemental programs with the students

In working with the students on phoneme segmentation, Lakeshia did not seem to spend enough time with this activity. She used the phoneme segmentation isolating the final sound chart from the board and modeled the phoneme segmentation skill of isolating the final sound, but the students never practiced this activity. Each student could have had a small chart to use to practice locating the final sounds in words. The teacher could immediately determine who actually understood phoneme segmentation isolating the final sound.

Case Three-Danielle

Danielle only teaches these kindergarteners from only a phonics program. Danielle's previous professional development trainings enabled her to know that phonics is not a complete reading program, but is one of the essential components of reading

instruction. Even with this apparent desire to teach effectively, however, Danielle had not yet begun to make several of the major modifications in instruction proposed by the KTRA.

For example, during her read aloud time, more might have been done with the story. She could have asked the students more open-ended questions, discussed story elements (character, setting, theme etc.), and read the story more than once. Although Danielle is using learning centers to reinforce important concepts, she should consider selecting centers that can be completed more independently. It is impractical for her to try to teach at more than one center at a time.

Case Four-Brenda

Brenda participates in professional development but there is no scheduled follow-up for teachers in the school. The teachers in this school must share among themselves in the hall or through passing one another. She has shared with her colleagues all of the resources and strategies she learned at the KTRA. Unfortunately, each teacher will have to implement the strategies and activities from the KTRA into her own instructional practices.

Case Five-Delicia

While Delicia has implemented many strategies and activities she learned from the KTRA, there are areas which seem to have been neglected. One important area of consideration is the apparent need to spend more time developing phonemic awareness skills in small groups with the students. According to the Report of the National Research

Panel (2000), phonemic awareness instruction doesn't absorb long periods of time to be effective. It is more effective when it makes explicit how children are to apply phonemic awareness skills into their reading and writing activities. Therefore, phonemic awareness activities can be practiced spontaneously throughout the school day. It was further noted by the National Research Panel that phonemic awareness programs that lasted less than 20 hours were more effective than programs of longer duration. She could easily do more singing and chanting with the students to distinguish the various sounds they are currently studying.

Delicia should also be more careful in her use of some of the materials provided by the KTRA. She should realize that struggling learners usually cannot use the alphabet arc and mat as an independent activity. They typically need some guidance and feedback to make sure they are progressing. During the observation, some of the students were placing uppercase letters on lowercase letters. The uppercase and lowercase letters were mixed together in one plastic container. That activity would be appropriate for those students who are familiar with both uppercase and lowercase letters, but the students who only knew a few letters should have been working only with the letters they knew. Additionally, she could do more with her stories such as ask questions that encourage the students to start thinking. She needs to start asking higher order thinking questions that begin with what, when, where, how, and why. The teacher could also ask predicting questions before reading a selection, during the selection, and after the selection. After the selection, the teacher needs to clarify the students' predictions. All feedback needs to be presented in a positive manner.

Case Six-Janice

While it was evident to the observer that Janice was working to implement the strategies taught by the KTRA, there were also areas which needed attention. In order to effectively meet the needs of her students, Janice needed to work with more than one group of students throughout the school day. After working with the first group of students with phonemic awareness, she could have rotated the groups to work with all of the students in the classroom. She could also do more work with her read aloud session than just have the students construct a picture. She could build students' background knowledge and expand on what they already knew. The identification of the objective she wants to teach throughout the day would be beneficial. These could assist with building specific knowledge and skills from the state standards. Janice could benefit from attending more professional development on kindergarten instruction and on developing learning centers.

Conclusions and Discussions*Case One-Kell*

In conclusion, Kell did a great job at providing reading instruction in her classroom. She incorporated frequent and immediate feedback. She modeled every activity for the students by giving clear, simple directions. She scaffolds their understanding by providing prompts to help them notice and find their answers. She engaged them in dialogue by asking who, what, when, and where questions. She gave positive, motivating feedback to every child in the classroom. Kell implemented activities

and strategies she learned at the KTRA. She used manipulatives from the academy to provide more frequent practice. She employed more flexible grouping practices that helped her improve her instructional focus from the Grouping Practices of Effective Instruction session at the KTRA. Kelli made many changes in her instructional practices she learned at the KTRA. Kell's changes in her instructional practices were due to her using a comprehensive reading program to give her more structure with reading instruction. She has received trainings on all of the modules for effective reading instruction in kindergarten. She was able to implement the appropriate practices into her curriculum. Her school allows the teachers to participate in Peer Coaching Study Teams. She also serves as mentor of new kindergarten teachers. She knows that she has to keep abreast of the current research for reading instruction in kindergarten.

Case Two-Lakeshia

In conclusion, Lakeshia is providing the students with developmentally appropriate reading and writing activities she learned from the academy. She has received a lot of expert training. She acknowledged that her instructional classroom practices include more activities and strategies she learned from the academy. She also revealed that she has increased the usage of learning centers. She also is providing the students with many literary materials, modeling all concepts, and building language development. Lakeshia will have access to follow-up training with guidance at the school level. She will also have many opportunities to work with her mentor and meet with grade level peer-coaching study teams at her school. According to Richardson (2003), these support systems should support her with implementation of what she learned in the KTRA.

Lakeshia has changed her instructional practices since her attendance at the KTRA. She has support from the team of teachers that she works with on a daily basis. She has a mentor that provides her with constant feedback. She has received all professional development trainings for reading instruction in kindergarten. She is also using a comprehensive and supplemental reading program to give her some guidance.

Case Three-Danielle

In conclusion, Danielle has been consistent with providing her students with structure, routines, and her expectations. She noted that she is incorporating more phonological awareness activities and strategies from the KTRA. Danielle revealed that she is doing more read aloud sessions. She is also working with smaller groups in the classroom rather than whole group during the entire day. Danielle has attended many professional development trainings sessions at her school and at the regional service center. Danielle is receiving support and guidance from the administrator, literacy coach, and other teachers on her team. She has been trained on all the modules for kindergarten reading instruction. She participates in Peer Coaching Study Teams and has to keep up with the current research for her students' instructional needs.

Case Four-Brenda

In conclusion, Brenda modeled and demonstrated the think aloud activity while reading a book. She provided the students with corrective feedback to help them understand concepts. The students were working in small groups and worked independently. She constantly checked for children's misunderstanding. Brenda modeled

and practiced the pocket chart activity with a small group of students. She learned grouping techniques and the pocket chart activity from the KTRA. She also modeled and demonstrated the vowels and consonants. The educational environment in this school does not support change for teachers' instructional practices. Teachers that attend professional development training sessions must implement these practices themselves. The teachers do not meet as a team to discuss grade level issues. Presently, there is no mentoring program for new kindergarten teachers.

Case Five-Delicia

In conclusion, Delicia has provided her students with the appropriate activities and strategies for kindergarten instruction. She modeled and demonstrated procedures for her students. She identified the objectives and specific elements that were needed to be learned by the students. She guided the students and allowed them to practice activities. She provided them support during independent practice as well as group activities. Although Delicia allowed the struggling students to practice an activity that they were not ready to master, she could clarify students misunderstanding immediately through assessment. Delicia participates in Peer Coaching Study Teams. She is also grade level chairperson; therefore, she has to keep up with the current research for reading instruction. She also works in a school that promotes professional development. She has been trained in all of the areas of reading instruction. The school has purchased a comprehensive program for its' teachers so that they can have some more guidance and structure for kindergarten instruction.

Case Six-Janice

In conclusion, Janice allowed the students to work in small groups during learning center time. The students were actively engaged in these activities. She activated students' background knowledge to build upon what they already knew and to expand on increasing and expanding their knowledge base. She provided the student with the appropriate level of materials. She provided the students support and guidance during small group instruction. Janice implemented phonological awareness activities and phonics activities from the KTRA. She also utilized small groups during center time. Janice works in a school that does not promote change. Janice has been teaching for 6 years in kindergarten. The KTRA was the first professional development training she has received since student teaching. She does not have a mentor. The teachers do not participate in Peer Coaching Study Teams.

Case Comparisons

The Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy had an observable impact on all the teachers' performances in these classrooms. The KTRA addressed five specific areas of key importance to early reading instruction including oral language and vocabulary development; phonological awareness; alphabetic understanding and phonics, book knowledge; and listening comprehension. During follow-up observations in kindergarten classrooms, all six teachers were observed utilizing activities designed to address the five reading related areas emphasized throughout the academy training. In addition, participants were observed utilizing at least one specific activity demonstrated in the academy training. All six participants utilized small group instruction during a portion of

the lesson observed. Delicia and Kell were using flexible grouping during some segments of their lessons to allow the students to be members of more than one group. Kell did a better job at providing flexible grouping for reading instruction. She was determining which students were not making expected progress and whether she needed to adjust her lesson to provide more intense instruction.

The teachers indicated they were able to implement reading strategies and activities in their kindergarten classrooms after participating in the KTRA sessions. Kell discussed using the alphabet mats and flexible grouping strategies. Oral language and vocabulary activities were predominant features in her classroom instruction. Lakeshia used a phoneme blending and segmentation and rhyming activity she had practiced at the academy during the segment on phonological awareness. Danielle discussed utilizing phonemic awareness activities she learned in the KTRA sessions. Brenda stated that she had used the pocket chart and letter sound matching activities. Delicia utilized the alphabet mats, individual student pocket charts, and both the Elkonin Sound Boxes and the Say It and Move It card to build phonemic awareness. Janice used the Say It and Move It card, and other phonemic awareness activities.

Interviews with individual teachers confirmed these observations. Teachers indicated they were able to implement reading strategies and activities in their kindergarten classrooms after participating in the KTRA sessions. The teachers' responses to the interview indicated that they had changed their teaching reading practices after attending the KTRA. A major component of KTRA is grouping techniques. Kell stated, "I am providing more flexible, small group instruction and

assessing the children on a daily basis.” She acknowledged that progress monitoring the progress of your students’ on a daily basis is more effective than waiting until the end of the six week period.

Brenda benefited from the knowledge she gained at the KTRA. “I am stressing sounds more and providing small group instruction rather than whole group instruction. I am giving the children more time to work independently, in group of fours, and pairing them.” Delicia also is working with her students in small group instruction. She stated, “I am not doing whole group instruction all day in the classroom. I am monitoring the daily progress of all of my students. I am assessing and grouping them on a regular basis. I am focusing more now on their instructional needs.”

Another aspect of how the KTRA impacted these teachers was in the area of reading strategies. Janice believes that she should focus on the prerequisites to reading than trying to teach them how to read when they have not acquired these necessary skills. “I am assisting the children with phonemic awareness and phonics skills.” Danielle stated, “I am reading aloud to the children more than I used to do. I am not assuming that they understand the concept of print anymore. I am focusing on providing more knowledge about print.” Lakeshia benefited from the session on learning centers and assessment. “I am implementing more learning centers and providing time for these children to work with each other. I am keeping a better record of students’ weekly progress.

The teachers in the high group had been trained on all of the modules for effective professional development and participate in weekly peer coaching study teams. These

meeting provide follow-up, guidance, and support for teachers. Many studies have found that the intensity and duration of professional development are related to teacher change (Birman et. al., 2000; Garet et. al.,2001; Wilson & Lowenberg, 1991). Kell attended professional development as a personal choice. Lakeshia and Danielle attend professional development as a mandate from their Reading First Grant. Delicia has received training on all of the modules for kindergarten instruction from the Mississippi Department of Education. She implemented many activities and strategies from the academy although her scores from the results of the Participant Knowledge Survey indicated that she had gained very little from the sessions. Brenda and Janice have not received very much training on kindergarten instruction. The KTRA was their first professional development session for reading instruction. They have both implemented at least one activity and strategy from the academy in each area. (Shields, Marsh, and Adelman, 1998; Weiss, Montgomery, Ridgeway, & Bond, 1998) revealed traditional professional development can provide some knowledge but these sessions do not promote learning which can change what teachers teach or how they teach. Brenda and Janice should to attend more professional development sessions for reading instruction along with guidance and follow-up. Desimone et al. (2002) noted these teachers need to be provided engaging learning opportunities that promote continuous and ongoing growth, follow-up opportunities, and the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same grade. Wolk (2002) supports these ideas that professional development should be built into the teachers' daily schedules. They need time to read and discuss research material about their subject matter and reflect on their practices.

There were other factors that should account for these teachers changing their instructional practices as a result of attending the KTRA. These teachers demonstrated an interest in teaching the strategies and activities from the KTRA. According to Alexander, Kulikowich, and Schulze (1994), teachers must have a personal interest in a topic that will ultimately sustain involvement in the activity over the long run. Research acknowledged that interest can promote more effective information processing in a particular topic in turn creates greater active engagement in the topic (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993; Schiefele & Wild; and Wigfield, 1994. Although Janice and Brenda had not been trained on all of the modules for reading instruction in kindergarten they showed in an interest in the KTRA and therefore was able to implement the strategies and activities they had practiced during the training.

All six teachers reported that they had enhanced their knowledge and skills. Enhanced knowledge and skills enabled them to change their instructional practices in the classroom. Research reported by Garet et al. (1999) states that teachers that receive professional development that is connected to their other professional development experiences, is aligned to their state standards, and assessments, can foster professional communication, are more likely to change their instructional practices. Although Janice, Brenda, Danielle, and Delicia did not use a core program for reading instruction, they did use the state standards with their teaching. They were able to align the skills and strategies necessary for effective kindergarten instruction.

Recent research done by the U. S. Department (2000) reveals that there is no difference between teachers who have taught 5, 10, 15, or 20 years of experience. The

research suggests that more exact measures of collegiate training, experience, and skills are stronger predictors of student learning. This study indicates that there is no difference in the teachers' collegiate or professional levels. The majority of the teachers have over 15 years of experience, and all have received additional in areas of instruction for student learning.

In conclusion, these teachers are providing their students with many of the activities and strategies introduced and practiced at the academy. The teachers are working with the students on building oral language and vocabulary development. Some are providing more instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics instruction than others. They are working with the children developing book knowledge and listening skills. The morning message and the news of the day are providing the teachers the opportunity to have a lot of dialogue, build language skills, and promote language interaction among the peers and the adults in the kindergarten classroom. Overall, the students in these kindergarten classrooms were actively engaged in emerging reading instruction.

All teachers in this study implemented at least one strategy in every category from the Participant Knowledge Survey. Although Janice and Delicia have received very little professional development in the area of reading instruction for kindergarten instruction, they were able to at least practice one strategy. These teachers should attend more training in the area of kindergarten instruction. They should also receive feedback, ongoing support, guidance, and have the opportunity to participate in Peer Coaching Study Teams. Danielle has been trained on all of the modules for kindergarten

instruction. She needs more support with the process of implementation of professional development into her classroom instructional practices.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of the KTRA Professional Development Model on the instructional practices of kindergarten teachers. It investigated the impact that this model has on teachers' content knowledge of effective reading instruction and kindergarten teachers' implementation of strategies and activities. The KTRA incorporates four days of training. This professional development model features the skills needed for effective instructional practices in kindergarten. This model was not designed to be a traditional type of professional development. It is the beginning of a host of trainings for effective kindergarten instruction.

Conclusions

The kindergarten teachers in this study were administered a Participant Knowledge Survey. The results of the survey indicated that the knowledge base of these kindergarten teachers showed a statistically significant improvement with posttest scores being higher than pretest scores. The results of the survey revealed that the participants responded more positively to the items on the instrument after completing the KTRA. The teachers' comments from the interview revealed that they valued the activities and strategies that were provided by the model. The classroom observations indicated that the

activities and strategies provided direct support and guidance for the teachers' instructional practices.

The kindergarten teachers in this study were implementing strategies and activities from the KTRA Professional Development Model. The KTRA is a professional development model designed to enhance the knowledge base of kindergarten teachers. It is only one component of well-planned instruction for kindergarten teachers. Kell is a veteran teacher and has attended many professional development models for improvement in teaching children. She was resistant to changing what she was doing, but she knew that providing the students with the structure provided by her reading program would be very beneficial for their success in kindergarten. She stated, "I am always open to new ideas and change is good." She believes in the comprehensive program that her school has adopted. "I am pleased with it."

The teachers are using the strategies and activities discussed and practiced at the KTRA training. They believe that the academy should give them ample time to practice these strategies and activities in their classrooms and return for follow-up to discuss how they worked in their individual classrooms. Moats (2004) conclusions support the teachers' feelings; she stated that teachers' professional development should be job-embedded, sustained, and substantive and should include support, follow-up, and guidance.

Overall, the teachers stressed the importance of follow-up with more feedback and guidance. Gusky (1986) revealed that teachers need adequate support while implementing a new strategy. If they do not receive that support, they will not practice

the strategy long enough to gain confidence in using it. He further acknowledged that the new strategy will be abandoned and the teachers will return to their old familiar way of doing things. Teachers that participate in Peer Coaching Teams in their schools receive the support and ongoing support from their peers, literacy coach, and administrator. Kell, Lakeshia, and Danielle receive the support from their colleagues and are implementing the strategies and activities from the KTRA and other professional development modules they have attended. These teachers teach in Reading First Schools. These teachers have to participate Peer Coaching Study Teams. They have to follow the guidelines from their grant.

The results of the observations and interviews indicated that teachers are more comfortable in working with students in developing oral language and vocabulary development. All of the teachers worked with the students with developing and enhancing this skill. However, there is a major concern for the areas of phonological awareness and assessment. Kell promoted phonemic awareness in her class by singing songs, chanting individual sounds, practicing a tongue twister, using rhyming activities, using music and pictures to practice sounds, and elongating and stressing individual sounds. The other five teachers practiced only one type of activity with the students. Kell was the only teacher to immediately assess her students. She knew exactly which students needed additional instruction.

All of the teachers worked with the students on providing the students with book knowledge and listening comprehension. Each classroom was conducive to learning and had a print enriched environment. Each teacher read aloud a selection or allowed the

students to listen to a story on tape. They discussed the author, illustrator, pictures, and the text. Some of them worked with the students on answering and generating questions. Overall, some components were addressed in the teachers' instructional practices than others such as oral language and vocabulary development, phonological awareness, and alphabetic understanding and phonics. All teachers implemented some form of book knowledge into their lessons, whereas, listening comprehension lacked attention by these teachers. Kell and Brenda were the only teachers that assessed their students' knowledge during the day.

In conclusion, these kindergarten teachers are emerging to become better kindergarten teachers. Some of them have a lot of experience in education but lack the implementation of strategies and activities. One of the teachers has not attended many professional development trainings in kindergarten instruction. She stressed that she had not received any training in kindergarten instruction except in student teaching. The other teacher in her school district has attended many professional development trainings, but they have not been in Language Arts instruction.

Teachers should keep up with the current research on reading instruction. These two teachers need to be provided time to attend substantive professional development modules that challenges them to learn and apply new teaching behaviors in their classrooms (Moat, 2004). They should attend professional development modules in order to learn how to assist those individual children who begin schooling at a disadvantage in the area of learning to read. These teachers must be able to consistently provide these

children with a linguistically informed, structured, research-based comprehensive reading program along with a content-rich kindergarten curriculum (Moats).

Two of the teachers are meeting in Peer Coaching Study Teams and have been trained on all modules for reading instruction from the Mississippi Department of Education. There is a concern that many teachers are participating in professional development models but may not exactly understand the subject matter they need to teach to the students. These two teachers will be at an advantage because they will participate in the Mississippi FIRST on-line professional development. This is can develop to become a wonderful tool for pre-service as well as novice teachers. All participating Reading First Schools will have access to this on-line professional development. Its modules include topics such as an overview of the Mississippi Reading Reform Model, the Essential Elements of Reading Instruction, Differentiated Instruction, and Classroom Management.

This on-line professional development is an interactive piece and provides teachers with depth of knowledge. Teachers work at their pace to complete the model or work with other teachers. This on-line 12 module course provides teachers with follow-up, guidance, and the support. It is targeted for Mississippi teachers and emphasizes real problems that occur in teaching children to read. It provides teachers with activities, content material on their grade level. The long term goal of MDE is to offer these on-line professional development modules to all Mississippi teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the research findings, several recommendations for future research can be made. A longitudinal study should be conducted to determine long term effects of the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy Professional Development Model. This study would allow researchers to determine if the instructional changes can be sustained over time, and perhaps indicate the degree of follow-up needed for sustained implementation.

Future research could focus on the degree of teacher input for professional development modules at the local level and its impact on implementation. Teachers seem to want to receive additional professional development trainings in the areas of scientific reading difficulties and reading development, and be provided more information about the structure of language, history of language, discourse and genre structure, and the cultural and linguistic differences among all children they teach. Teachers want to be actively engaged in learning through high, quality professional development.

Future research should focus on the level of follow-up and guidance offered along with support for teacher's professional development opportunities. Teachers want to be provided adequate time for mentoring through classroom demonstrations, classroom coaches to assist with understanding scientifically-based research findings, participate in team meetings, and provided a supportive context to help them to maintain and sustain intensive effort from one year to the next. They want to grow professionally, and research in Mississippi classrooms could determine the impact of these types of opportunities on student learning.

Future research should focus on mandating that all kindergarten teachers attend the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy along with all of the modules for Effective Reading Instruction proposed by the Mississippi Department of Education. After completion of training on all modules, the schools should participate in the Mississippi FIRST online professional development sessions to offer their teachers follow-up, support, ongoing feedback, and guidance in kindergarten instruction.

The literature review and the results of this study show that professional development is more likely to positively affect the classroom environment when teachers effectively implement the activities and strategies along with support and follow-up. It is important that schools plan for the implementation and that follow-up support be included as a part of the plan before professional development opportunities are started.

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APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE OF ONE GROUP PRETEST-POSTTEST DESIGN

Figure 1
Example of One Group Pretest-Posttest Design

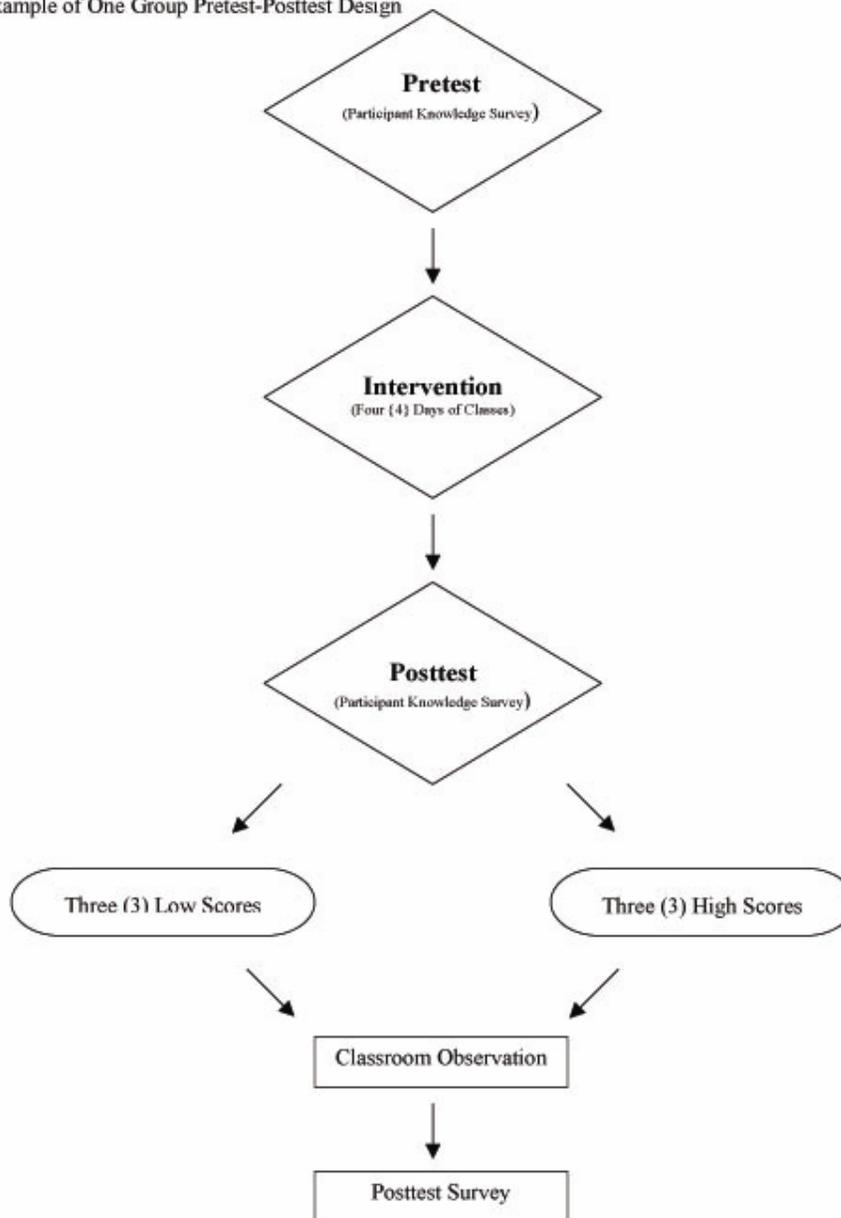


Figure 1 Example of One Group Pretest and Posttest Design

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

Participant Knowledge Survey

Rate your knowledge and use of academy topics and concepts.

SCALE:	1-Don't know-new idea or need more information 2-Novice-fairly knowledgeable, use sometimes in my teaching 3-Intermediate-knowledgeable, use regularly in my teaching 4-Master-very knowledgeable, use regularly in my teaching, could help a colleague
---------------	--

Oral Language and Vocabulary Development	
Areas of oral language development: phonology, vocabulary, syntax (grammar), and pragmatics	1 2 3 4
Relationship of oral language to reading success	1 2 3 4
Oral language accomplishments of five-year-olds	1 2 3 4
Language diversity among kindergartners	1 2 3 4
How to scaffold children's oral language development	1 2 3 4
Providing instruction to strengthen children's narrative skills	1 2 3 4
Extending children's language during daily conversation	1 2 3 4
Ways to build expressive and receptive vocabulary	1 2 3 4
Room arrangements that promote language interaction	1 2 3 4
Ways to stimulate oral language development in English language learners	1 2 3 4
Ways to systematically monitor progress in oral language development	1 2 3 4
Phonological Awareness	
Differences between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics	1 2 3 4
Five levels of phonological awareness	1 2 3 4
Instructional practices and activities for teaching the five levels of phonological awareness	1 2 3 4
Research evidence for phonemic awareness and learning to read	1 2 3 4
Meeting the needs of English language learners	1 2 3 4
Addressing the needs of struggling learners	1 2 3 4
Ways to systematically monitor progress in phonological Awareness	1 2 3 4

Alphabetic Understanding and Phonics	
Alphabetic principle	1 2 3 4
Instructional practices and activities for teaching the alphabet and phonics	1 2 3 4
Decoding and blending	1 2 3 4
Matching beginning texts to children's abilities	1 2 3 4
Meeting the needs of English language learners	1 2 3 4
Addressing the needs of struggling learners	1 2 3 4
Ways to systematically monitor progress in letter recognition and letter-sound correspondences	1 2 3 4
Book Knowledge	
How to enhance children's understanding of book concepts	1 2 3 4
Ways to teach print concepts	1 2 3 4
How to systematically monitor progress in book and print Awareness	1 2 3 4
Listening Comprehension	
Different types of questions to scaffold children's learning	1 2 3 4
Ways to increase listening comprehension of narrative	1 2 3 4
How to enhance listening comprehension of expository texts	1 2 3 4
Ways to use graphic organizers to enhance listening comprehension for narrative and expository texts	1 2 3 4
Meeting the needs of English language learners	1 2 3 4
Addressing the needs of struggling learners	1 2 3 4
How to systematically monitor progress in listening comprehension	1 2 3 4

APPENDIX C
CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE

Impact of the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy on the Instructional Practices of Kindergarten Teachers

Research Method to be Used: Observation of Classroom

- Kindergarten classroom
- Number of teachers: Six
- What literacy instruction activities are taking place?

Activities in Oral Language Development

Alphabetic Understanding and Phonics

Book Knowledge

Listening Comprehension

- What other instructional activities will take place?

Activities in Daily Read-Aloud Sessions

Activities in Circle Time

Activities in Learning Centers

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW FORM

Interview format for use with kindergarten teachers:

1. Describe something positive about the reading program you currently use in your classroom.
2. Describe something negative about the reading program you currently use in your classroom.
3. What's your role in making sure that kindergarten children accomplish the prerequisites to reading instruction?
4. What are some changes you have seen in the scientifically based reading research program at your individual school?
5. What reading strategies and activities have you implemented from the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy into your classroom instruction?
6. What has changed about your teaching of reading and skills related to reading since your training at the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy?

APPENDIX E
RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following section includes the exact words of the participants' responses to the interview.

Statement One: Describe something positive about the reading program you currently use in your classroom.

Case One- Kell

“This program teaches the sight words. It follows the benchmarks and kindergarten guidelines. It goes along with the activities and strategies presented in the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy Professional Development Model. It also teaches what a letter looks and sounds like. The most important aspect of the program is children learn from the program.”

Case Two- Lakeshia

“The program is broken down step by step. It lays the foundation in a simplified, self-explanatory way. You can just look at the program and make it work.”

Case Three- Danielle

“Children learn and they don't know they are learning.”

Case Four- Brenda

“Presently, we do not have a comprehensive reading program. I use the benchmarks from the Mississippi Language Arts Framework as my curriculum guide. At the beginning of each school year, we (kindergarten teachers) meet and discuss the units and themes to teach.”

Case Five- Delicia

“We are using a Phonics program. I like the program because it teaches the children the letters of the alphabet.”

Case Six- Janice

“We don’t have a structured reading program. We are using the Benchmarks as our guide.”

Statement Two: Describe something negative about the reading program you currently use in your school.

Case One- Kell

“It is a good program but the literature does not go along with the reading series. There is also not a correlation between letters and sounds.”

Case Two- Lakeshia

“I don’t like the way some words are segmented. I often use my supplemental program to teach phoneme segmentation.”

Case Three- Danielle

“I have seen great improvement in word recognition but not comprehension.”

Case Four- Brenda

“I am facing many challenges because we don’t have a comprehensive reading program. We are currently using the Benchmarks (teaching minimal skills).”

Case Five- Delicia

“There is no comprehensive program. I use only a Phonics program.”

Case Six- Janice

“The Benchmarks are just interventions for struggling learners. We have to use the Benchmarks to make sure that all children master them.”

Question Three: What’s your role in making sure that kindergarten children accomplish the prerequisites to reading instruction?

Case One- Kell

“My role is to instruct, teach, and reinforce letters and sounds. I have to make sure that they have access to knowledge of letter-sound relationships, know some sight words, and understand the concept of print.”

Case Two- Lakeshia

“My role is to take the children on an adventurous journey through the world of reading by reading aloud to them daily. I have to review the benchmarks, introduce letters and sounds. I have to help them develop a positive attitude.”

Case Three- Danielle

“My role is to teach letters and sounds, teach the child how to write his or her name, recognize, name and write upper and lowercase letters, help them learn to answer open-ended questions from stories that are read aloud. Children need to learn to recognize some words by sight.”

Case Four- Brenda

“My role is to model lessons and give the children ample time to practice skills. My role is to provide them with a solid foundation for learning to read.”

Case Five- Delicia

“My role is to make sure the children are progressing. I have to make sure that all of the needs of the child are met. I have to make sure that the children understand letters and sounds, how to write his or her name, name some words by sight, know upper and lower case letters, and understand that print carries the meaning.”

Case Six- Janice

“My role is to model lessons so the children can practice the concepts later. I make sure that the children can hear the sounds. I make sure that they understand the concept of print. I read aloud to them daily to build vocabulary.

Question Four: What are some changes you have seen in the scientifically based reading program at your school?

Case One- Kell

“This program offered some structure. I was able to follow a plan. I don’t have to try to make things work. The concepts and skills are sequentially organized. The concepts follow a scope and sequence. This is only our second year with the program.”

Case Two- Lakeshia

“I noticed that the program focuses on findings from scientific research in all areas of reading instruction such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The program offers more strategies and activities to use for instruction. The program shows the teacher how to group the students for whole group, small group, and one-on-one instruction.”

Case Three- Danielle

“This program provides teachers’ with more instruction on relating letters to individual sounds, how to break words into individual sounds, and the difference between upper case and lower case letters.”

Case Four- Brenda

“We don’t have a scientifically based reading program. I am using what I currently have to make sure the children are exposed to a lot of print.”

Case Five- Delicia

“I have noticed that the program focuses on specific skills that need to be addressed in kindergarten. It focuses more on individual or small group instruction rather than a whole group instruction.”

Case Six- Janice

“There is no scientifically based reading research program used in our school at this time.”

Question Four: What reading strategies and activities have you implemented from the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy into your classroom instruction?

Case One- Kell

“I have implemented the Alphabet Arc and Mat, Grouping strategies, using paper plates to introduce sounds, and the Say It and Move It Chart. These activities help with building phonemic awareness.”

Case Two- Lakeshia

“I have implemented the Alphabet Arc and Mat, using sound blocks, the Say It and Move It chart, and color coding letters (consonants blue and the vowels red) to form words.”

Case Three- Danielle

“I have added more games and activities. I found a new way of doing the same old thing. I have implemented more phonological awareness activities, reading aloud daily, and providing small group instruction rather than whole group instruction.”

Case Four- Brenda

“I have used more letter sound matching activities. I have implemented the Pocket Chart activity. I use it on a daily basis. I am currently working on flexible grouping strategies.”

Case Five- Delicia

“I have implemented the majority of the activities and strategies into my daily classroom practices such as the Alphabet Arc and Mat, Pocket Chart, Story Wheel, Morning Message, and Say It and Move It Chart. I am working on assessing the children formally.”

Case Six- Janice

“I have used the Say It and Move It activity, the Pocket Chart Activity, and all of the other Phonological Awareness activities. I am also assessing the children more and moving them from one group to another based on their individual needs.”

Question Five: What has changed about your teaching of reading and skills related to reading since your training at the Kindergarten Teacher Reading Academy?

Case One- Kell

“I am providing smaller group instruction and assessing the children on a daily basis.”

Case Two- Lakeshia

“I am implementing more learning centers and providing more time for the children to work with each other. I am keeping a better record of students’ progress.”

Case Three- Danielle

“I am reading aloud to the children more than I used to do. I am not assuming that they understand the concept of print anymore. I am focusing on providing more knowledge about print.”

Case Four- Brenda

“I am stressing sounds more and providing small group instruction rather than whole group instruction. I am giving the children more time to work independently.”

Case Five- Delicia

“I am not doing whole group instruction all day in my classroom. I am monitoring the daily progress of all of my students. I am assessing and grouping them on a regular basis now basing my grouping on the instructional needs of the students.”

Case Six- Janice

“I am focusing on the prerequisites to reading rather than trying to teach them how to read when they aren’t ready. I am focusing more on phonemic awareness and phonics now.”

APPENDIX F

TABLE I

Table A.1. Pretest and Posttest Mean Differences Participant Knowledge Survey

Participant number	Mean difference (pretest – posttest)
116	-2.5
118	-2.37
107	-2.08
105	-1.74
127	-1.65
201	-1.14
126	-1.11
101	-1.02
123	-.91
128	-.60
215	-.34
102	-.17
104	-.15
114	-.14
117	.00
113	.11
124	.60
210	.83
115	.85

APPENDIX G
CASE STUDY CHART

Participants	Kell	Lakeshia	Danielle	Brenda	Delicia	Janice
Demographic Profile	19 years in k instruction Bachelor and Masters Degree National Board Certified trained on all MDE modules mentor for new kindergarten teachers	1 year of teaching K Bachelor Degree trained on all MDE modules for reading instruction	19 years teacher Bachelors Degree trained on all MDE modules for reading instruction	17 years of teaching taught 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , & 5 th grade Bachelor and Masters Degree National Board Certified no professional development training in reading instruction	20 years teaching Bachelor and Masters Degree Administrative License Has taught chapter reading 6 th grade (Reading and Math) trained on all MDE modules for reading instruction	K teacher (6.5)years) Bachelor and Masters Degrees Professional Development has been in Brain Development no prof. Dev. follow-up
Oral Language and Vocabulary Development	Talk/Singing/ dialogue/ open-ended questions, circle time, Read Aloud activity, scaffolding activity (generating questions)	Discussed community helpers discussed illustrations Rehearsing and reciting	Discussed vocabulary Read aloud No dialogue	Discussed the book, dialogue Interaction home living area	Dialogue Read aloud Discussed vocabulary	dialogue
Phonological Awareness	Rhyming activity, spontaneous activity, songs, music, pictures, letters, and tongue twister	Rhyme activity	Letter m picture activity	worked with vowels sounds	Poem, beginning sounds say it and move it activity	Letter sound and picture activity with three students say it and move it activity
Alphabetic Understanding and Phonics	Letter recognition, shape of letter, alphabet mat/arc, flashcards, journal chants/songs	Alphabet mat/arc, word family, pocket chart	File folder games, word pattern individual alphabet letters uppercase and lowercase letters word families	Pocket chart	Alphabet mat/arc, uppercase/lowercase letters, consonants/vowels mentioned flashcards pocket chart	pocket chart word puzzles
Book Knowledge	Pointed out punctuation (period, comma, quotation marks) read aloud the title, print enriched environment	Read aloud, print enriched environment big books, informational books, word web labels, charts, signs, discussed author, illustrator, title	Read aloud a story, print enriched environment, big books	print enriched environment word walls, photos of animals	print enriched environment trade books, story wheels, word wall	Read aloud a story, print enriched environment
Listening Comprehension	Asked questions after the story	Read aloud stories	Read aloud a story	Read book orally to the students	Listened to a story on tape	Listened to the story and had the students to follow directions to an art activity
Assessment	Immediate	None	None	Assessed	None	none

Figure 2 Case Study Chart