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Kindergarten Phonics Instruction

Abstract

Understanding phonics is a critical component in a young student's ability to read. Research studies have shown the important role phonics plays in helping students become strong readers. The purpose of this study was to discover the ways that kindergarten teachers in Christian schools in West Michigan are teaching phonics in their classrooms, and to determine if kindergarten teachers share a list of common phonics goals for each of their kindergarteners to achieve by the end of kindergarten. The present study was a qualitative design using a survey to collect information from teachers in private elementary school kindergarten classrooms in West Michigan. The study found that the amount of time spent on phonics instruction in the kindergarten classrooms varied greatly and that a variety of instructional practices were being used. The study did find significant agreement regarding the desired outcomes of phonics instruction in the kindergarten classrooms.

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Kindergarten Phonics Instruction

Kindergarten Phonics Instruction

by

Erika Hall

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Action Research Report
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Kindergarten Phonics Instruction

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Table of Contents

Title page	i
Approval	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables	v
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction	1
Definitions	2
Review of the Literature	3
Methods	10
Results	11
Discussion.....	15
Conclusion	20
References	21
Appendixes	
Appendix A	23
Appendix B.....	24
Vita	25

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Phonics Strategies Used in the Kindergarten Classroom.....	12
2. Areas for Improvement in Phonics Instruction.....	12
3. The Amount of Time Spent on Phonics Instruction	13
4. The Desired Outcome of Kindergarten Phonics Instruction.....	13
5. Number of Sight Words Learned in Kindergarten.....	14
6. Changes in the Desired Outcomes of Kindergarten Phonics Instruction...	14

Abstract

Understanding phonics is a critical component in a young student's ability to read. Research studies have shown the important role phonics plays in helping students become strong readers. The purpose of this study was to discover the ways that kindergarten teachers in Christian schools in West Michigan are teaching phonics in their classrooms, and to determine if kindergarten teachers share a list of common phonics goals for each of their kindergarteners to achieve by the end of kindergarten. The present study was a qualitative design using a survey to collect information from teachers in private elementary school kindergarten classrooms in West Michigan. The study found that the amount of time spent on phonics instruction in the kindergarten classrooms varied greatly and that a variety of instructional practices were being used. The study did find significant agreement regarding the desired outcomes of phonics instruction in the kindergarten classrooms.

“The road to becoming a reader begins the day a child is born and continues through the end of third grade” (Armbuster, Lehr & Osborne, 1996, p. 1). Phonics instruction plays an important role in helping a child develop into a strong and fluent reader. “Research shows that how easily children learn to read can depend on how much phonological awareness they have” (Armbuste et al., 1996, p. 4). Phonics instruction also helps beginning readers see the relationships between sounds, letters and words. Phonics instruction is an important step in a child’s reading development but it can take many different forms within the kindergarten classroom. Due to the importance of phonics instruction, it is imperative that teachers take the time to make sure that they are using the best practices for phonics instruction within their classrooms.

Statement of Purpose

For many students phonics instruction begins in kindergarten. Kindergarten is when students develop phonetic skills which they will use as they begin to read and write. It is important that kindergarteners develop a proper foundation in phonics that will help them as their reading and writing skills continue to grow. That is why it is important that kindergarten teachers understand the best teaching strategies they can use to help their students understand and properly use phonics as they read and write. The purpose of this study was to determine if the phonics instruction of Christian schools in the West Michigan area is aligned with the research-based best practices of kindergarten phonics instruction.

Research Questions

In order to determine if kindergarten teachers in the Christian schools in Western Michigan are aligned their instruction with the research-based best practices of kindergarten phonics instruction, the following research questions were addressed.

- 1) What are the strategies used in phonics instruction in Western Michigan Christian schools as identified by kindergarten teachers?
- 2) Do the strategies utilized by Western Michigan Christian teachers align with research-based best practices?
- 3) What are the desired outcomes for phonics instruction in Western Michigan Christian schools as identified by kindergarten teachers?
- 4) Do the desired outcomes for phonics instruction identified by Western Michigan Christian school kindergarten teachers align with research-based best practices?

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will clarify the meaning of the terms throughout.

Phonemic awareness- The understanding that discrete sounds comprise words in oral language (Bursuck, Munk, Nelson, & Curran, 2002).

Phonics instruction- A way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use in reading and spelling (National Reading Panel, 2001).

Scaffolding - the intentional strategic support that teachers provide that allows children to complete a task they could not accomplish independently (McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009).

Literature Review

Phonics instruction in the kindergarten classroom plays an important role in helping students build their reading skills in preparation for first grade. This review examines literature related to: (a) the status of kindergarten phonics (b) the best strategies to use for kindergarten phonics instruction and (c) the desired outcomes of kindergarten phonics instruction.

Phonics instruction, or the method of breaking words down into sounds, was first introduced to reading instruction in the U.S. in the 1790s (Morrow & Tracey, 1997). Phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use in reading and spelling (National Reading Panel, 2001).

In the mid 1800s, reading instruction took a turn with the introduction of the word method, in which children learned to read and memorize entire words rather than analyze words according to their sound (Morrow & Tracey, 1997). Educational historian Nila Baton Smith stated, “Since the introduction of the word method, the field of reading has been embroiled in a controversy surrounding the superiority of either a phonetic approach or a whole-word approach to early reading instruction” (As cited in Morrow & Tracey, 1997, p. 645).

In the late 1990s, the National Research Council brought together reading researchers and educators that favored both the word method and the phonics method to examine which method of instruction should be supported by public policy. In the end, the group endorsed the value of teaching both letter/sound relationships and a range of whole language strategies, including the extensive use of good literature, a focus on comprehension and the use of developmental spelling for beginning writers (Zemelman & Bizar, 1999).

Currently in phonics instruction, there are three different forms of instruction. The first form of instruction is explicit instruction. “Explicit instruction is the systematic sequential presentation of phonics skills using isolated, direct instruction strategies” (Morrow & Tracey, 1997, p. 646). Often times in explicit instruction, teachers use worksheets to assess a student’s phonetic knowledge. The second form of instruction is contextual instruction. Contextual instruction includes learning within meaningful or functional contexts (Morrow & Tracey, 1997). In contextual instruction, teachers use activities like a morning message, a storybook, language

chart or a text in which an element of phonics is pointed out. The last approach to phonics instruction is the combined approach. The combined approach is phonics instruction in which both explicit and contextual instructions are used (Morrow & Tracey, 1997).

A study conducted by education students from Northeastern University in the 1990s sought to determine the predominant forms of phonics instruction. Observations took place in 76 classrooms: 29 preschool classrooms, 20 kindergarten, 13 first grade classrooms and 14 second grade classrooms over a four-month period in which each room was observed every third week for the entire school day. The classrooms were located in districts that varied by socioeconomic level, mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds. Classroom teachers were informed that the education students would be observing and taking notes but they were not informed of the content or purpose of the study. The study determined that preschool teachers engage children in contextual experiences more often than teachers at any other grade level. It also found that worksheets were the materials used by most of the teachers in kindergarten and first grade, and that phonetic instruction from kindergarten on was mostly explicit instruction. This study also found that preschool teachers were more likely to incorporate phonics into the classroom experience and that preschool teachers tended to teach phonics more than they believed they did (Morrow & Tracey, 1997). The results of this study showed that all three forms of phonics instruction were being used in the early childhood classroom.

Good phonics instruction helps students build a connection between, letters, words, reading, spelling and writing. The National Reading Panel (2001) conducted a study to address questions related to the effects of phonics on a child's success in reading and spelling. Their study revealed that systematic phonics instruction- that is; specific phonics skills taught in a sequential manner- produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

Also, the ability to read and spell words was enhanced in kindergarteners that received systematic beginning phonics instruction (National Reading Panel, 2001). Explicit, contextual, and the combined approach of phonics instruction can be used to provide systematic phonics instruction.

It is important for teachers to be aware of the differences between these types of phonics instruction, as well to as consider the phonics content that should be included. Phonics instruction should include deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns and words. The connection between all three of these things plays an important role in developing skillful reading (Ferguson, Behan, Dunbar, Dunn & Mitchell, 2009).

Phonemic awareness can also play an important part of systematic phonics instruction. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the speech stream consists of a sequence of sounds-specifically phonemes (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Phonemic awareness should take into consideration that children appear to be better able to capture and gain control over larger units of sound before smaller units of sound (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Phonemic instruction should include activities that focus on rhyme, syllables, onset and rime and phonemes. For this reason, songs, charts and word sound games are ideally suited to help students develop their phonemic awareness skills. Another dimension of phonemic awareness instruction is the task or operation that students must perform with sounds. Matching sounds is one of the easier tasks for students to complete. The more difficult task for students may be the ability to blend sounds together to form words (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Another dimension of phonemic instruction is the use of cues. These include games, activities, poetry, stories and songs that demand attention to the spoken language itself (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

Phonics helps to not only prepare students to become strong readers but also strong writers. The purpose of developing the skills of blending phonemes to make words and segmenting the words into phonemes, and the skill of decoding and encoding is to not only enable children to learn to read, but also to enable them to learn to write. Any good phonics program will be concerned with the development of both of these abilities (Ferguson, et al., 2009).

According to Massengill and Sundberg (2006), children should learn through “active” exploration of the relationships between letter names, the sounds of letter names, their visual characteristics and the motor movement involved in their formation. Letters have names, sounds and shapes and the three are not always logically connected. It is important for teachers to take all three elements of a letter into consideration as they help their students develop alphabet knowledge. Teachers should make sure to integrate early reading skills with handwriting, taught using a variety of senses to help students best develop their phonics skills. Massengill and Sundberg (2006) recommend that phonics and handwriting be taught together.

Scaffolding can also be used as an effective strategy to help with phonics instruction. “Careful, more intensive instruction involves the explicit teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics using carefully scaffolded instruction including the use of controlled texts” (Bursuck, Munk, Nelson & Curran, 2002, p. 5). There are three different levels of scaffolding that can be used for phonics instruction. Intense scaffolding is when teachers introduce letter sounds in isolation, that is, not as part of a word. Moderate scaffolding is when the teacher isolates and emphasizes the first sound by bouncing or elongating the sound. In minimum scaffolding the teacher merely stresses the first sound while saying a word (McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009).

McGee and Ukrainetz (2009) collected data on the level of phonemic awareness reached in over 30 preschool and kindergarten classrooms and found that in classrooms where scaffolding was used to teach phonics, 75% of the preschool students entered kindergarten able to isolate 7 or more of 10 beginning sounds in words. They also found that by the middle of their kindergarten year, all children in the project except one could isolate consonant beginning sounds (McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009).

Having all students read independently and well by the end of the third grade is a national goal (Bursuck, et al., 2002). According to Bursuck, Munk, Nelson and Curran (2002) 38% of fourth graders and 26% of eighth graders failed to meet basic reading standards on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. It is important that kindergartners receive strong phonics instruction so that the national goal of reading independently by the end of third grade can be met.

A recent study revealed that two-thirds of America's kindergarten teachers believe that most young children are academically unprepared for school when they enter kindergarten (Kosanovich & Verhagen, 2012). Most kindergarten teachers recommend that before entering kindergarten, a child should know the names of the letters of the alphabet. This includes these abilities: reciting the letters in order; naming a letter of the alphabet when they see it, in either uppercase or lowercase; and pointing out which letter out of a group is the one requested (Kosanovich & Verhagen, 2012). The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children recommends that kindergartners have some basic phonemic awareness by the end of their kindergarten year (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

According to the Common Core Standards for the state of Michigan, by the end of kindergarten, in the area of phonological awareness, kindergartners should be able to

demonstrate an understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds (phonemes). They should be able to recognize and produce rhyming words. They should be able to count, pronounce, blend and segment syllables in spoken words. They should be able to isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel and final sounds (phonemes) in three- phoneme consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. Lastly, they should be able to add or substitute individual sounds (phonemes) in simple, one –syllable words to make new words. In the area of phonics, by the end of kindergarten, kindergarteners should be able to know and apply grade level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. They should be able to demonstrate basic knowledge of one to one letter sound correspondences by producing the primary or many of the most frequent sounds for each consonant. They should be able to associate the long and short sounds with common spellings (graphemes) for the five major vowels. They should be able to read common high – frequency words by sight. Lastly, they should be able to distinguish between similarly spelled words by identifying the sounds of the letters that differ (Common Core State Standards K-2, 2010).

The National Institute of Literacy created a similar list of kindergarten phonics goals. Their list included: by the end of kindergarten a child should know a number of letter sound relationships, and should understand that the order of letters in a written word represents the order of sounds in a spoken word. A child should recognize some common words on sight and should also be able to identify words that have the same beginning sound. A child should be able to put together or blend spoken sounds into simple words and understand that spoken words are made up of separate sounds (Armbuster, Lehr, & Osborne, 2006).

In summary, the literature suggests several important points. First, reading experts from the National Research Council endorsed the value of teaching both letter/sound relationships and

a range of whole language strategies, including the extensive use of good literature, a focus on comprehension and the use of developmental spelling for beginning writers (Zemelman & Bizar, 1999). Second, students can succeed in a reading program that includes intensive, comprehensive, explicit instruction in a phonemic awareness or the understanding that (a) discrete sounds comprise words in oral language (b) alphabetic principle or the knowledge that letters in written words represent sounds (c) word identification skills leading to accurate, fluent reading and (d) comprehension (Bursuck, Munk, Nelson & Curran, 2002). Third, the purpose of developing the skills of blending phonemes to make words, segmenting the words into phonemes, and the skill of decoding and encoding is not only to enable children to learn to read, but also to enable to them to learn to write. Any good phonics program will be concerned to develop both of these abilities (Ferguson, Behan, Dunbar, Dunn and Mitchell, 2009). Fourth, scaffolding can be used as an effective strategy to help with phonics instruction. Scaffolding is the intentional strategic support that teachers provide that allows children to complete a task they could not accomplish independently (McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009). Lastly, The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children recommends that kindergarteners have some basic phonemic awareness by the end of their kindergarten year (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

It is important that kindergarten teachers are aware of the important role phonics instruction plays in kindergarten. Phonics creates a foundation for students as they begin to learn to read, spell and write. Teachers need to be aware that phonics is connected to many other areas of learning, and implement strategies that can be used to create strong phonics instruction.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were the instructors of kindergarten programs from the Christian schools located in the West Michigan area. The participants taught at large and small Christian schools as well as schools in both urban and rural settings. Some of the schools surveyed offered three full days per week of kindergarten, some offered five half days a week, and some offered five full days per week of kindergarten instruction. Thirty-three surveys were sent out to kindergarten teachers in Christian schools located in West Michigan area; fourteen surveys were returned, for a return rate of 42%.

Research Design

A six-question, open-ended survey was created by the researcher. The survey was designed to provide information and feedback on the kindergarten phonics instruction at their school, and the desired outcomes of their instruction by the end of kindergarten. The survey is located in Appendix A.

Materials

The materials necessary to carry out the research were based on best practices in kindergarten phonics instruction. A list of survey questions was created by the researcher and turned into a questionnaire to be completed by thirty-three Christian schools. To create the survey, the researcher used the information gathered from the literature review about the most common areas of phonics instruction, as well as the desired outcomes of phonics instruction. Specifically, the work of Morrow and Tracy (1997) and Yopp and Yopp (2000) were helpful in constructing the survey.

Procedure

A cover letter and questionnaire were emailed to thirty-three West Michigan area Christian schools (Appendix A and B). Fourteen questionnaires were completed, for a response rate of 42%. The researcher coded the information provided on the questionnaire via axial coding using the constant comparative method. Themes were then created from the broad commonalities in the responses.

Results

The responses of the fourteen completed questionnaires are summarized below. At times more than one response was given by a teacher to complete a survey question.

In response to the survey question, “What are the strategies you are using for phonics instruction in your kindergarten program?” a variety of answers were provided, many of which mentioned phonics curriculum, phonics content and materials, rather than teaching strategies. Two teachers responded indicating they used singing letters and sounds or used songs to remember phonics rules. Two other teachers mentioned the use of movement, jumping, and clapping to practice phonemes and syllables. One teacher mentioned the use of word games and two other teachers mentioned using workbooks and oral sound activities. Nine answers were given about phonics curricula: *Zoo Phonics*, *Letter People*, *Handwriting without Tears*, *Daily Five* and *Teacher Pay Teachers Resources*. Five answers were given about phonics content: Consonant Vowel Consonant words, rhyming, initial sounds, final sounds, blending, segmenting, substituting phonemes, adding phonemes and deleting phonemes.

Table 1

Phonics Strategies Used in the Kindergarten Classroom

Phonics Strategies	Number of Responses
Word Games	1
Singing	2
Movement	2
Workbook	2
Oral Activities	2
Materials	2
Phonics Content	5
Phonics Curriculum	9

In response to the question “What areas of phonics instruction would you like to improve in?” the answers varied. However, all of the areas coded had two teachers each that responded suggesting that there is uniform agreement of areas in which teachers would like to improve.

Table 2

Areas for Improvement in Phonics Instruction

Areas of Improvement	Teacher Responses
Amount of Time	2
Differentiated Instruction	2
Specific Phonics Content	2
Writing Instruction	2
Phonics Centers	2
Phonics Curriculum	2
No Improvement Needed	2

In response to the question, “How much time do you spend a day on phonics instruction in your kindergarten program?” the amount spent varied due to the differences in kindergarten programs. Some kindergarten programs surveyed were three full days a week, some were five

half days a week, and some were five full days a week programs. The amount of time spent on phonics instruction ranged from ten minutes to four hours.

Table 3

The Amount of Time Spent on Phonics Instruction

Time Spent on Phonics Instruction	Teacher Responses
15 to 20 Minutes	3
30 to 45 Minutes	3
60 Minutes	3
60 to 90 Minutes	3
Hours	1
2 to 4 Hours	1

In response to the question, “What are the desired outcomes of your phonics instruction in your kindergarten program?” many of the kindergarten programs in West Michigan had similar goals. The outcome that was most agreed upon was the goal of having students become confident learning to blend sounds by the end of kindergarten.

Table 4

The Desired Outcome of Kindergarten Phonics Instruction

Desired Outcomes	Number of Responses
Blend Sounds	7
Segment Words	6
Letter Sound Correspondence	6
Isolate Sounds/Phonemes	5
Decode Text	4
Write Words	4
Read Words	4
Sight Words	1
Rhyming	1

In response to the question, “What is the desired number of sight words a student should be able to identify by the end of kindergarten?” teachers’ answers fell between twenty-two to one hundred. However, most answers fell somewhere between thirty and fifty.

Table 5

Number of Sight Words Learned in Kindergarten

Number of Sight Words	Number of Responses
30	3
40	3
50	2
60	2
100	2
22	1

Lastly, in response to the question, “What changes would you like to see made to the desired outcomes of phonics instruction in kindergarten?” five teachers did not feel like any changes needed to be made to their kindergarten programs. A variety of other answers were provided but they did not focus on changes with the desired outcomes of kindergarten phonics instruction.

Table 6

Changes in the Desired Outcomes of Kindergarten Phonics Instruction

Changes in Desired Outcomes	Number of Responses
No Changes Needed	5
Phonics Curriculum	4
Focus on Phonological Awareness Abilities	1
Higher Reading Scores	1
Phonics Instruction	1

Discussion

Phonics instruction in kindergarten plays an important role in helping a student develop their reading skills and so it is important that kindergarten teachers practice effective phonics instruction in their classrooms. This study was designed to measure whether kindergarten instruction in West Michigan Christian schools is aligned with best practices for phonics instruction. Overall, the results of this study were not able to confirm if kindergarten phonics instruction in West Michigan is aligned with what research suggests are the best practices.

Best Practices in Phonics Instruction

Although the researcher hoped that the results of the “Kindergarten Phonics Survey” would determine the strategies that kindergarten teachers in West Michigan are using, the researcher found that many teachers did not answer the question as expected, which meant that the researcher was unable to determine what strategies are currently being used by kindergarten teachers in West Michigan. However, after analyzing the results of the survey, the researcher was able to determine that some kindergarten teachers in West Michigan are using word games, movement, singing and workbooks as a part of their phonics instruction.

The results showing that teachers are using word games, movement and singing is not surprising. Literature suggests that the use of word games, movement and singing can be effective teaching strategies. According to Massengill and Sundberg (2006), children should learn through “active” exploration of the relationships between letter names, the sounds of letter names, their visual characteristics and the motor movement involved in their formation. Literature also suggests that phonics workbooks can be an effective teaching strategy and combining both workbooks, word games, singing and movement can also be very effective for students. Literature shows that it is important that teachers to remember that phonics instruction

should include deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns and words. The connection between all three of these things plays an important role in developing skillful reading (Ferguson, Behan, Dunbar, Dunn & Mitchell, 2009).

One teaching strategy that was not mentioned by any of the kindergarten teachers in West Michigan, but that the literature shows to be an effective teaching strategy for phonics instruction is scaffolding. “Careful, more intensive instruction involves the explicit teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics using carefully scaffolded instruction including the use of controlled texts” (Bursuck, et al., 2002, p. 5).

Desired Outcomes for Phonics Instruction in West Michigan

When looking at the results of “Kindergarten Phonics Survey” the researcher was able to determine that many of the kindergarten teachers in West Michigan do desire similar outcomes for their kindergarteners in the area of phonics by the end of kindergarten. The study found that kindergarten teachers in Christian schools in West Michigan desire students to be able to blend letters together, segment words, isolate sounds and be strong in letter and sound correspondence. Teachers also desire students to be able to decode text, write and read words.

Literature suggests that these desired outcomes align with researched desired outcomes. According to the Common Core Standards for the state of Michigan, by the end of kindergarten, in the area of phonological awareness, kindergarteners should be able to demonstrate an understanding of spoken words, syllables and sounds (phonemes). They should be able to count, pronounce, blend and segment syllables in spoken words. They should be able to isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel and final sounds (phonemes) in three- phoneme consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. Lastly, they should be able to add or substitute individual sounds (phonemes) in simple, one –syllable words to make new words. In the area of phonics,

by the end of kindergarten, kindergarteners should be able to know and apply grade level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. They should be able to demonstrate basic knowledge of one to one letter sound correspondences by producing the primary or many of the most frequent sounds for each consonant.

The literature also suggests two other desired outcomes that are important for students that were mentioned by only one teacher who completed the survey. The first is being able to rhyme words and the second is sight words. According to the Common Core Standards for the state of Michigan, by the end of kindergarten, in the area of phonological awareness, students should be able to recognize and produce rhyming words. In the area of phonics, by the end of kindergarten, kindergarteners should be able to read common high – frequency words by sight.

Lastly, the literature showed one more important outcome that was not mentioned as a desired outcome by kindergarten teachers in West Michigan and that is being able to use letter sounds to spell words. According to the Common Core Standards for the state of Michigan in the area of phonics, by the end of kindergarten, kindergarteners should be able to associate the long and short sounds with common spellings (graphemes) for the five major vowels. Lastly, they should be able to distinguish between similarly spelled words by identifying the sounds of the letters that differ (Common Core State Standards K-2, 2010).

Summary

In response to the research questions stated above the researcher was unable to accurately determine what strategies kindergarten teachers in West Michigan are using for phonics instruction. The researcher was able to determine some of the strategies being used and determine that some teachers are using some of the research based effective strategies for phonics instruction in their classrooms. The researcher suggests that teachers remember the

importance of incorporating letter sounds, spelling patterns and words into their phonics instruction. The researcher also suggests that teachers in West Michigan Christian schools work on incorporating scaffolding into their phonics instruction.

In the area of desired outcomes for kindergarten phonics instruction the researcher found that the kindergarten teachers in West Michigan have a strong list of desired outcomes that align with research. The researcher suggests that teachers work on adding the outcome that students should be able to rhyme words, identify sight words and use letter sounds to spell short words to their list of desired outcomes.

Limitations

Even though the researcher was able to identify some effective strategies that are being used in kindergarten classrooms in West Michigan and to create a list of desired outcomes of kindergarten teachers in West Michigan, there were a couple of factors that impacted the results of this study. One of the limitations of this study came via the decision to use open-ended questions in the questionnaire. This allowed the respondents to give widely varying answers, which made coding of the responses more difficult. In one case, with question one, the teachers actually “missed the mark” about what was being asked. It would be this researcher’s recommendation that a follow up questionnaire be given which required more objective answers in hopes to be able to accurately determine the teaching strategies that are being used by kindergarten teachers in West Michigan.

The second factor that could have impacted the results of this study was the timing of the survey. The survey was sent out to teachers during the busy winter months when teachers are trying to juggle report cards, conferences, the 100th day of school, Valentine’s Day and all of the additional responsibilities that come during these months. The researcher found that it was

difficult to get teachers to complete the survey and it is possible that the teachers that did respond went through the survey too quickly, and so, answers may not have been complete.

Through this study, the researcher was able to take a closer look at the teaching strategies used to teach phonics in the kindergarten classroom and the desired outcomes of this instruction by the end of kindergarten. Unfortunately the results of the research survey did not lend themselves to the determination of effective teaching strategies being used to teach phonics in kindergarten programs in West Michigan; the educators that completed the surveys spoke more about curricula, rather than strategies. Each of these curriculums can be taught using a variety of strategies so it difficult to speculate which strategies these teachers are using in their programs.

Recommendations

The study's findings suggest a couple of possible areas for future research. Specific data could be collected by sending a follow-up survey to kindergarten teachers in West Michigan on the area of teaching strategies in phonics that would require more objective answers. This follow-up survey could be used to gather more specific information on the strategies teachers are using to teach their phonics curriculum, and would help to provide the researcher with greater insight into the strategies that are being used by kindergarten teachers in West Michigan.

In addition further research could be done to identify whether students in West Michigan are able to successfully achieve the list of desired outcomes by the end of kindergarten. An additional research study could be created to measure how many students by the end of kindergarten in West Michigan are able to achieve each of the desired outcomes that literature and teachers in West Michigan have determined to be important. This additional study would also help to provide greater insight regarding the teaching strategies that kindergarten teachers in West Michigan are using, and whether they are effective.

Conclusion

Even though the answers the educators provided varied greatly, the researcher did find that phonics instruction plays an important role in the kindergarten classrooms in Western Michigan, and that educators continue to work on developing their teaching strategies in order to meet the needs of all of their students. The researcher also found that teachers in West Michigan are using teaching strategies that research has shown to be effective. In addition, the researcher also found that the list of desired outcomes that kindergarten teachers in West Michigan desire their students to achieve by the end of kindergarten agrees with research. It is encouraging to see that phonics instruction remains a priority to kindergarten instructors in the Western Michigan area.

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Appendix A
Cover Letter

Good Afternoon,

My name is Erika Hall and I am a kindergarten teacher at Muskegon Christian School. I am currently working on completing an action research project to complete my graduate course work in curriculum and instruction. I would greatly appreciate if you would be willing to take the time to complete the attached survey on phonics instruction in the kindergarten classroom. I would appreciate if you would be willing to complete the attached survey by Thursday Feb. 20. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the results from this survey, please let me know and I will email you a copy of the findings. Thank you so much for taking the time to help and have a wonderful rest of the school year.

God Bless,
Erika Hall

Here is a link to the survey:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx>

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx>

Appendix B

Kindergarten Phonics Instruction Survey

Question One - What are the strategies you are using for phonics instruction in your kindergarten program?

Question Two - In what areas of phonics instruction would you like to improve in?

Question Three - How much time do you spend a day on phonics instruction in your kindergarten program?

Question Four - What are the desired outcomes of your phonics instruction in your kindergarten program?

Question Five - What is the desired number of sight words a student should be able to identify by the end of kindergarten?

Question Six - What changes would you like to see made to the desired outcomes of phonics instruction in kindergarten?

Erika Hall

1869 Ada Ave.

Muskegon, MI 49442

Telephone: 773-573-0882

Email: rkhl@hotmail.com**Personal Profile:**

- Dedicated to developing lesson plans to accommodate individual student learning styles and needs.
- Creates a stimulating learning environment in which all students can grow socially, intellectually and spiritually.
- Lives a life dedicated to serving Christ.
- Taught eight years in an inner city, high risk setting.

Education

- Bachelor of Arts (2003); Major: Elementary Education Minor: Reading
Dordt College, Sioux Center, IA
- Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction (2014)
Dordt College, Sioux Center, IA

Professional Experience**Muskegon Christian School, Muskegon, MI (2011-Present)****Kindergarten Teacher**

- Teaches general subjects
- Develops and adapts lesson plans to meet differing abilities
- Diagnoses individual strengths /needs
- Enhances student academic growth by using varied teaching strategies and techniques
- Contributes to quarterly reports and participated in teacher / parent conferences
- Creates a welcoming and safe classroom environment
- Created a pre-kindergarten assessment tool

Muskegon Christian School, Muskegon, MI (2012-Present)**Computer Teacher**

- Teaches 1st through 6th grade computer classes
- Develops and adapts lesson plans
- Guides students as they work with different computer programs
- Organizes projects on the computer that coordinate with classroom curriculum

Chicago West Side Christian School, Chicago, IL (2003-2008, 2009-2011)**Second Grade Teacher**

- Taught general subjects
- Developed and adapts lesson plans to meet differing abilities and social needs
- Promoted understanding of and respect for different cultural backgrounds of students
- Encouraged creative approaches to problem-solving
- Motivated/ mentored students towards higher success and achievement

- Diagnosed individual strengths / needs
- Contributed to quarterly reports and participated in teacher / parent conferences
- Enhanced student academic growth by using varied teaching strategies and techniques
- Completed AimsWeb assessment training and trained fellow staff on how to use the program as an assessment tool

Chicago West Side Christian School, Chicago, IL (2008-2009)

After School Program Coordinator

- Developed a schedule for the after school program
- Coordinated volunteers
- Planned special activities and events
- Assisted students with their homework
- Monitored snack time

Activities:

- Girl Talk Instructor 2004 - 2011
- MCS Destination Imagination Coordinator 2011-Present