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ABSTRACT

This report describes a literacy program that provides readers with materials and instructions that fit their individual levels of development. The targeted population consists of kindergarten students in a northwest suburb that is characterized by higher than average household earnings, highly educated residents, and a population encompassing all ages, occupations, and incomes. The children enter school displaying a wide range of reading readiness skills. Evidence includes running records that track each child's reading level, writing samples, and checklists that show children's understanding of print concepts and letter-sound relationships. Analysis of probable cause data reveals that a child's environment impacts literacy learning. Literacy development of children begins before formal schooling and is influenced by the quantity and quality of literacy-related experiences in the home environment. Parent involvement, preschool experiences, children's interests and strengths, and available materials are factors in a child's understanding of literacy. A review of solution strategies suggests a balanced literacy program. Through readalouds, shared reading, guided reading groups, interactive writing, and independent writing and reading, children will be provided with several kinds of reading and writing experiences. Post intervention data indicate an increase in student letter recognition and knowledge of letter and print concepts. The concepts about print the students learned during shared reading and writing experiences were transferred to journal writing and independent reading time. This is evidenced in the students' increased scores on their writing rubrics and the text levels. (Contains 18 references and 15 tables of data. Appendixes contain a permission letter; checklists; a running record sheet; and a sample writing rubric.) (Author/RS)

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INCREASING STUDENTS' READING READINESS SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF A BALANCED LITERACY PROGRAM

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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This report describes a literacy program that provides readers with materials and instructions that fit their individual levels of development. The targeted population consists of kindergarten students in a northwest suburb that is characterized by higher than average household earnings, highly educated residents, and a population encompassing all ages, occupations, and incomes. The children enter school displaying a wide range of reading readiness skills. Evidence includes running records that track each child's reading level, writing samples, and checklists that show children's understanding of print concepts and letter-sound relationships.

Analysis of probable cause data reveal that a child's environment impacts literacy learning. Literacy development of children begins before formal schooling and it is influenced by the quantity and quality of literacy-related experiences in the home environment. Parent involvement, preschool experiences, children's interests and strengths, and available materials are factors in a child's understanding of literacy.

A review of solution strategies suggests a balanced literacy program. Through read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading groups, interactive writing, and independent writing and reading, children will be provided with several kinds of reading and writing experiences.

Post intervention data indicates an increase in student letter recognition and knowledge of letter and print concepts. The concepts about print the students learned during shared reading and writing experiences were transferred to journal writing and independent reading time. This is evidenced in the students' increased scores on their writing rubrics and the text levels.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The targeted students in the afternoon kindergarten class exhibit different degrees of reading readiness skills. Evidence includes assessing children's letter recognition through checklists, running records that track each child's reading level, assessing the children's understanding of print concepts through observation checklists, and the collection of writing samples to assess letter and print concepts.

Immediate Problem Context

This action research project takes place in an elementary school district. The site services students from kindergarten through second grade. The information that follows was derived from the 1999 school report card.

The school was built in 1968 when the current K-8 building could not house all the grades. By February, 1972, over 700 students, kindergarten through fifth grade, were in attendance at the current site. Later that year, the fourth and fifth grade students moved to a different location. In the 1976-77 school year, the current site served 456 students, kindergarten through third grade. With the continued growing population, it was necessary to reorganize again. The site now serves kindergarten through second grades. The school is designed much like the letter E. The main hallway houses the kindergarten classrooms, teacher's lounge, and music room.

There is a hallway for the first grade classrooms; a hallway for the second grade classrooms; and a hallway for the gym, art room, lunch room, and an early childhood classroom. The library is in the middle of the school and contains the computer lab and resource room.

The kindergarten reading curriculum focuses on teaching students to follow printed text from left to right, see likenesses and differences between letters, say letters of the alphabet in order, recognize and begin to form capital letters, recognize and begin to form lower case letters, recognize initial consonant sounds, and recognize rhyming words. The kindergarten teachers adopted the Scholastic reading program in 1997. The Scholastic program consists of thematic units that are literature-based. Also used are The Letter People to enhance phonemic awareness.

Table 1 describes the racial /ethnic background and total enrollment. The school, as well as all of the school district, is primarily Caucasian. Enrollments were reported as of September 30, 1998.

Table 1
Racial/Ethnic Background and Total Enrollment

Caucasian	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Total
90.6%	1.4%	2.3%	5.8%	0.0%	573

Table 2 describes the low-income and limited-English- proficient students. According to the 1999 School Report Card, low-income students may come from families receiving public aid, foster homes with public funds, or institutions for the neglected or delinquent. Low-income students are also defined as receiving free or reduced-priced lunches. Limited -English-proficient students have English as a second language and are found to be eligible for bilingual education. There are no

low-income students attending the targeted school.

Table 2
Low-Income And Limited-English-Proficient Students

Low Income	Limited-English-Proficient
0.0%	1.4%

Student attendance at the targeted school is not a concern. The school has an attendance rate of 95.2%. The student mobility rate is 11.7%. (This is based on the number of students who enroll in or leave a school during the year.) There are no chronic truancies reported (students who were absent from school without valid cause for 18 or more of the last 180 school days).

For the 1999-2000 school year, the targeted building consisted of four kindergarten teachers (A.M. and P.M. classes), nine first grade teachers, and nine second grade teachers. All kindergarten teachers have the support of a full-time aide. First grade classes share four classroom aides. Table 3 shows the average class size for the following grades: kindergarten, first grade, third grade, sixth grade, and eighth grade. The average class size is 22.32.

Table 3
Average Class Size

Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 3	Grade 6	Grade 8
23.0	21.7	23.9	21.1	21.9

Table 4 describes the teachers from the targeted school district by racial/ethnic background and gender. Teachers include all school personnel categorized by the

district as classroom teachers. The information presented is based on full-time equivalents. The majority of the teachers from the targeted school are Caucasian females.

Table 4
Teachers By Racial/Ethnic Background and Gender

Caucasian	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Male	Female	Total
98.1%	0.0%	0.9%	1.1%	0.0%	13.0%	87.0%	116

The basic curriculum at the targeted site includes the subjects of Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science. The elementary schools also offer instruction in the following areas: Physical Education, Art, Music, Library Instruction and Service, Environment and Outdoor Education, and Computer Technology. Table 5 shows the amount of time devoted to the teaching of these core subjects. This is based on the average number of minutes of instruction per week. English includes all language arts courses.

Table 5
Time Devoted To The Teaching Of Core Subjects

Mathematics	Science	English	Social Studies
60 minutes	30 minutes	90 minutes	30 minutes

Services to the students of the district include general education programs such as remedial reading and math; extended day kindergarten; English as a second language; counseling; health services; vision, hearing, scoliosis, and preschool screening programs; testing services; and 504 program. Special education services

include therapeutic interventions, consultative services, screening, and case study evaluation. Services are provided as a support to student's instructional programs.

To ensure an effective partnership between the school and the home, the targeted school relies on a variety of informal and formal communication tools: weekly parent bulletins; monthly calendars; teacher newsletters; quarterly report cards; and portfolio reviews. In addition to written forms of communication, the school has a variety of oral communication tools: Fall and Spring Open House; Parent Advisory Committee; and Fall and Spring Parent/Teacher conferences. School news and pictorial features, highlights of Board of Education meetings, and other special activities are features of the monthly school district magazine. Local newspapers carry weekly stories and pictures about happenings in the schools. The community takes an active part in providing the best educational programs possible.

The Surrounding Communities

The targeted school serves children that live in three suburban communities. The population and economic base of the community has grown dramatically over the years. The village's population was 237 at the time of its incorporation in 1957, 2,531 in 1970, and is over 5,600 in 1999. The community is characterized by higher than average household earnings ($163,703); highly educated residents; and a population encompassing all ages, occupations, and incomes. See Table 6 for demographics. Table 7 shows the population's age group percentages. The majority of the community is between the ages of 0-14. Table 8 shows the racial/ethnic breakdown of the community. The community is primarily Caucasian.

The school district is composed of a kindergarten, first, and second grade

building; a third and fourth grade building; and a fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade building. The administrative structure consists of a Superintendent, an Assistant Superintendent of Business, an Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, and a Director of Student Services. The average administrator's salary is $92,808.

Table 6
Educational Attainment

some high school	high school	some college	associates degree	bachelor's degree	graduate's degree
04%	16%	19%	05%	30%	23%

Table 7
Population and Age Group Percentage

0-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
23%	10%	10%	20%	18%	08%	07%

Table 8
Racial/Ethnic Background

Caucasian	Black	American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	Asian and Pacific Islander	Other Race
96.3%	0.4%	0.0%	2.7%	0.6%

The district is accustomed to placing near the top of all state public schools on the IGAP tests. High School students are offered more than 300 courses which include 19 Advanced Placement classes and honor courses. The High School is the only public school in the state to win the National Excellence Award three times. The 1998 average ACT composite score was 24.0.

The average teacher salary for the district is $47,790, and the average administrator salary is $92,808. The district spends $8,192 per student. Table 9 describes Teacher/Administrator Characteristics for the entire school district.

Opportunities for parent participation and involvement exist within the district through an active Parent Teacher Organization (P.T.O.). The P.T.O. organizes and sponsors many activities: resident information coffees; blood drive; block parent program; 7th grade dance lessons; and parent networking. In addition, the P.T.O. Volunteer Council coordinates volunteer programs. Literature Appreciation and Project Success are the two literacy volunteer programs that are coordinated by the P.T.O.. Literature Appreciation consists of: Great Books--volunteers lead small group discussions on selected books with 1st or 2nd graders; Author in Residence--volunteers will assist in the preparation, book sales, and visit of a children's author; and K-N-A Book Club--volunteers will assist in leading discussions on selected readings. Project Success is the district's volunteer reading support program. It employs the most time-honored method for helping children become fluent readers: the practice of providing young readers with a willing adult reading partner. Teachers also utilize parent involvement during Reading and Writing Workshops. Parents listen to children read and help the children edit the stories they write. Despite the community's interest in early literacy learning, students enrolled in kindergarten continue to exhibit different degrees of reading readiness skills.

Table 9
Teacher/Administrator Characteristics

Average Teaching Experience	Teachers with Bachelor's Degree	Teachers with Master's and Above	Student Teacher Ratio	Student Administrator Ratio
12.0 Yrs.	39.5%	60.5%	16:4:1	206.0:1

National Context of the Problem

Learning to read and write appears effortless for some children. For other children, nationwide, it is a struggle. Early literacy learning begins long before a child reaches kindergarten. Bissex, Teale & Sulzby believe that early discoveries about written language are learned through children's active engagement with their social and cultural worlds (as cited in Neuman & Roskos, 1997). Children interact with others in writing and reading situations, explore print on their own, and experiment with different forms, inventing their own literacies (Neuman & Roskos, 1997). Environments that are embedded with rich written language experiences provide children the opportunity to become naturally involved in literacy-related events.

Recent findings from emergent literacy research have demonstrated that children who learn to read easily have had a variety of experiences with reading and writing before coming to school (Sulzby & Teale, 1991). According to Patricia Cunningham, children from print-rich homes experience an average of over 1000 hours of quality one-on-one reading and writing activities (Cunningham, 1996). Parents and care givers read to children and talk about what they are reading. This reading is usually done in the "lap position" (Phonics They Use, p. 7) where the child benefits from seeing the pictures as well as the words. Favorite books are read time and time again, which eventually may lead to pretend reading. Nursery rhymes, chants, and Dr. Seuss books play a large role in phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness develops through a series of stages during which children first become aware that language is made up of individual words, that words are made up of syllables, and that syllables are made up of phonemes (Cunningham, 1996). Torgesen and Davis's (1996) 12-week study on phonological awareness of 100 kindergarten children reveals that children who "have higher levels of awareness of the phonological structure of words prior to the beginning of reading instruction learn to read more easily when formal reading instruction begins" (p.2) . In addition to reading, children benefit from being exposed to writing at an early age. They scribble and make up ways to spell words, ask how to spell favorite words, make words from their magnetic letters, and copy favorite words from books. From the over 1000 hours of reading and writing experiences, children from print-rich homes learn important understandings critical to their success in beginning reading. Unfortunately, not all children have had the same home experiences through which they can develop these understandings. As a result, children are entering kindergarten exhibiting different degrees of reading readiness skills. Some children focus a great deal of attention on reading and writing and quickly develop an understanding of print, book handling-skills, word-by-word matching in reading, distinguishing between the ideas of letters and words, and the meaning of punctuation (Pinnel & Fountas, 1996). Other children have some basic knowledge of literacy--familiarity with the language of stories and with particular letters, sounds, and words--but they need help figuring out the complex process of reading text. Often children who do not come from literacy-rich homes do not have any understanding of print and do not recognize letters, sounds, or words (Nielsen & Monson, 1996). "The goal of a developmentally appropriate kindergarten will accept all children where they are and take them forward on their literacy journey" (Month-By-Month Reading and Writing For Kindergarten Systematic, Multilevel Instruction, p. 3).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of students' reading readiness skills, the results of the student's letter identification assessments and writing samples were collected. The inventory of known letters is important as children begin to take on reading and writing. Letter knowledge indicates that the child is familiar with some aspects of the visual details of print. The collection of writing samples aids in assessing each child's understanding of letter and print concepts.

Of the eighteen students in the class, all were included in the data collection. A letter identification form was developed by the researcher (Appendix A) to aid in the recording process. The children were asked to identify by name, sound, or as the first letter of a word, the upper and lower case letters. A summary of the correct responses is presented in table one.

Table 1
Upper Case Letter Identification

Number of Letters Identified	Number of Students
13	1
14	1
22	1
23	2
24	2
25	1
26	10

Lower Case Letter Identification

Number of Letters Identified	Number of Students
0	1
3	1
7	1
18	1
19	2
20	2
22	2
23	4
24	2
25	1
26	1

Out of the twenty six upper case letters, the mean is 23.78. The standard deviation is 15.77. The most frequent amount of upper case letters identified is twenty six. Out of the 26 lower case letters, the mean is 18.94. The standard deviation is 10.02. The most frequent amount of lower case letters identified is twenty three. More upper case letters were identified correctly than lower case letters.

Writing samples from all eighteen students were collected by the researcher to assess letter and print concepts. A rubric was created by the researcher (Appendix B) to score each writing sample. Criteria focused on the writing and spelling evidenced in their journals. Table two summarizes the results of the data collection.

Table 2
Writing Sample Rubric Scores

Rubric Score	Number of Students
1	9
2	3
4	2
5	1
6	1
8	1
9	1

The majority of the students received a score of one on their writing rubrics.

These children used drawings to tell their story rather than attempting to write. The mean score is 1.5. The range between the highest and lowest score is eight points. Only one child displayed conventional writing and used vowels as a place-holder.

Probable Causes

The literature suggests several underlying causes for the different levels of reading readiness skills exhibited in the kindergarten setting. Literacy development of children begins before formal schooling and is influenced by the quantity and quality of literacy-related experiences in the home environment (Nielsen & Monson, 1996). According to Cunningham (1995) reading to children in the "lap position" promotes oral language and concept development. When children are read to in the lap position, they have the opportunity to observe the print and the eyes of the person reading. They notice the reader always reads the top print first and then the bottom print. Children notice the reader's eyes moving from left to right and then making the return sweep at the end of the line. Children might notice that some words occur again and again and eventually learn to recognize these words. As children learn words, they notice recurring letter-sound relationships. Emergent readers also learn about letters, sounds, and words when they hear their parents recite nursery rhymes (Bryant, Bradley, Maclean, & Crossland, 1989). A variety of activities, which can be a part of daily living in many homes, enhance literacy development.

Children who see a purpose in reading and writing in daily activities show greater motivation in learning how to read and write (Cunningham, 1995). Some children focus a great deal of attention on reading and writing and quickly develop an understanding of print. Unfortunately, not all children have had home experiences through which they can develop these understandings and enthusiasm towards books.

Charlotte Huck states, "When teachers, librarians, and parents concentrate on

plans to foster a love of reading in each child, communities become caring, literate places to live" (1996, p. 21). Symons, Szuszkiewicz, and Bonnell's study reveals parents who read on their own model an interest in reading and portray reading as a valued activity (1996). Children whose parents are infrequent readers receive relatively less exposure to literacy activities than children whose parents are avid readers. As a result, these children's acquisition of literacy-related knowledge may be significantly impeded (Symons, Szuszkiewicz, & Bonnell, 1996).

A family's socioeconomic status also plays a role in children's literacy acquisition. Because books are expensive and many parents do not know how to select and use them, it is difficult for many parents to provide home literacy. Children in lower economic ares, in particular, are at a disadvantage (Pinnel & Fountas, 1996).

Children learn to read by reading (Pinnell & Fountas, 1996). Reading begins long before a child enters school. They participate in the literacy events they find in their homes, events that are different for different children. The different levels of reading readiness skills that children exhibit upon the entrance of school have left teachers with this dilemma: "How can I provide young readers with materials and instruction that fit their individual levels of development" (Guided Reading, 1996, p. xv)? As teachers we provide the range of experiences and the instruction necessary to help all children become good readers.

Probable Causes Site-based

In analyzing the context, children's home environment has a major impact on literacy learning. As mentioned in the Probable Causes, literacy development of children is influenced by the quantity and the quality of literacy-related events. The children at the targeted school show a strong understanding of print concepts and have a rich oral vocabulary. This may be credited to the experiences children encounter at home, preschool, and daily outings. Parents express an interest in

supporting their emergent readers. Most parents take an active role in the literacy program by volunteering in their child's classroom.

Because the targeted population comes from homes with higher than average household earnings, parents can generally afford to buy their children books and writing materials. However, some parents do not invest their time in literacy learning activities with their children. Business travel, long work days, household chores, and family responsibilities often come first. Another possible reason why parents do not read to their children at the targeted site might be the lack of knowledge of importance of reading to children. Unfortunately, not all children have had at-home reading and writing experiences that develop critical understandings of print.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Researchers agree that early literacy learning begins at home. Tease and Sulzby have found that children born into homes where someone spends time with them in reading and writing activities start school with an incredible foundation upon which instruction can easily build (1991). To learn to read, children must first develop phonological awareness (the ability to tune in to the sounds of our language). Such awareness can be broken into two parts: phonemic skills and phonic skills (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1996). A child who possess phonemic awareness can segment sounds in words and blend strings of isolated sounds together to form recognizable word forms. Phonic skills involve seeing the relationship between print and sound. Phonemic awareness develops through a series of stages during which children first become aware that language is made up of individual words, that words are made up of syllables, and that syllables are made up of phonemes (Ehri, 1991). Children develop this phonemic awareness as a result of the oral and written language they are exposed to in the preschool years.

In developmentally appropriate kindergartens, teachers provide a variety of experiences which simulate as closely as possible at-home reading and writing experiences so that all children develop critical understandings of literacy (Cunningham, 1995). Fountas and Pinnell believe that basic reading is within reach of

every child--the key is a balanced literacy program (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

A balanced literacy program regularly provides several kinds of reading and writing. In its present form, a balanced literacy program has eight instructional components (reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing) (Guided Reading, 1996). A balanced literacy program emphasizes oral language across the curriculum by working with letters and words, integrating themes, observing, assessing, and providing a home-school partnership. This researcher often encountered these components.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is the foundation of the early literacy framework (Holdaway, 1979). The teacher reads aloud to the whole class using carefully selected children's literature. The collection should contain a variety of genres and represent diversity in our society (Nielsen & Monson, 1996). Favorite texts should be reread many times to encourage "pretend reading" (Daneman, 1991). Children will assimilate a sense of the structure of written language and can produce it in a way that sounds like reading. J. Adams suggests that shared reading experiences help children develop a sense of story, a knowledge of written language syntax, a knowledge of how texts are structured, an increased vocabulary, and a sense of how fluent reading sounds (1990). The teacher provides full support for children to access the text as the children respond to pictures, meaning, and language. Reading aloud to children also establishes known texts to use as a basis for writing and other activities through reading.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is another valuable reading experience. In shared reading, students and teacher read aloud in unison from an enlarged text. This technique was

originally developed in New Zealand as a way to involve young children in a story while attending to the print (Holdaway, 1979). Fountas and Pinnell recommend starting shared reading very early in the kindergarten year before children can read independently (1996). In shared reading, emergent readers get a chance to behave like readers and learn the process at the same time. Many strategies needed for independent reading of a text can be taught during shared reading. The large print allows children to observe early reading behaviors such as moving from left to right and word-by-word matching. After several readings, the teacher can draw children's attention to various aspects of the text, such as letter-sound relationships, visual information, predicting and checking, or using illustrations. Texts used for shared reading are predictable books in which repeated patterns, refrains, pictures, and rhyme allow children of all reading abilities to join in. Using nursery rhymes during shared reading experiences helps children develop phonemic awareness (Bryant, Bradley, Maclean, & Crossland, 1989). Acting out the stories and allowing the children to be "sentence builders" (cutting sentences into words and rearranging them so they match the text) are extensions that Cunningham uses in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms (1995).

There is a smooth transition from shared reading to guided reading as children reveal that they are on the verge of reading. Teachers make the decision to move children into guided reading groups by observing how children behave as they explore books independently and participate in shared reading.

Guided Reading

Guided reading presents a more formal instructional reading environment for the children. In guided reading, the teacher works with a small group of children who have similar reading processes. The ultimate goal in guided reading is to help children learn how to use independent reading strategies successfully. As children

encounter unfamiliar text, they develop a network of strategies that allow them to attend to information from different sources. Clay clusters these sources of information into three categories: meaning, structure, and visual cues (1996).

Meaning cues come from children's life experiences, structural cues (syntactic) come from knowing how oral language is put together, and visual cues come from knowing the relationship between oral language and its graphic symbols. Children have these sources of information at their disposal but may not know how to access and use them while reading and writing. Teachers help young readers learn how to use their knowledge to check on their own reading during guided reading time. Goodman has developed a list of prompts that teachers can use to help children learn how to think about different sources of information as they put together a system of strategies to read difficult text (Goodman, 1996). Making errors gives readers a chance to develop effective procedure for searching, checking, and self-correction. These problem solving opportunities are what enables young readers to build a reading process. The following list is an adaptation of prompts from Goodman (Goodman, 1996):

To support the control of early reading behaviors:

Read it with your finger.

Did you have enough (or too many) words?

Did it match?

Try _____. Would that make sense?

To support the reader's use of self-monitoring behavior:

Where's the tricky word? (after an error)

Why did you stop?

Check it. Does it look right and sound right to you?

You almost got that. See if you can find what is wrong.

To support the reader's use of all sources of information:

Check the picture.

Does that make sense?

You said _____. Does that look right?

You said _____. Does that sound right?

What can you do to help yourself?

Do you know a word that starts with those letters?

To support the reader's self-correction behavior:

Try that again.

I liked the way you worked that out.

You made a mistake. Can you find it?

To support phrased, fluent reading:

Can you read this quickly?

Put your words together so that it sounds like talking (p.161).

Goodman's goal is for all children to eventually consider the above questions themselves as they read (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The teacher needs to learn to prompt with just the right amount of support. As the child gains more strategic control, the teacher's level of support will lessen.

Another important component of guided reading is running records. A running record is a tool for coding, scoring, and analyzing children's reading behaviors (An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, 1997). Classroom teachers use running records for instructional purposes to guide them in their decisions about the evaluation of text difficulty, the grouping of children, monitoring the reading progress of children, and for observing particular difficulties in particular children. Running records are taken without marking a prepared script. They may be done on any piece of paper. Running records can be taken anywhere and on any text. The first step is

to choose a text for the child to read. The text should not be too easy or too hard. When the text is too hard, children cannot use what they know. The child may stop attending to visual features of print and start inventing text. When the text is too easy, it is nonproductive in helping the child become a strategic reader. Fountas and Pinnell believe that children should be reading with more than 90 percent accuracy (1996). Below 90 percent is too hard and above 95 is too easy. To determine the accuracy rate, subtract the number of errors from a previous running record's running words, divide by the number of running words, and multiply it by 100 (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). After a text has been selected, the teacher records everything that a child says and does as he tries to read the book that has been chosen.

The teacher's role while taking a running record is that of a neutral observer. The teacher watches the child closely as he reads and codes behavior on a separate piece of paper. Ticks are used for each correct response. Wrong responses should be recorded with the correct text under it. If a child tries several times to read a word, all of his trials should be noted. When a child succeeds in correcting a previous error it is recorded as a self-correction (SC). When no response is given to a word it is recorded with a dash. If the child cannot attempt a word, he is told the word (written T). Repetition is not counted as error behavior. If the child goes back over a group of words, or returns to the beginning of the line or sentence, the point to which he returns is shown by an arrow. Often this results in self-correction. When the teacher analyzes the running record he looks for behavioral evidence of cue use (meaning, structural, and visual) and evidence of the use of strategies such as cross-checking information and searching for cues. Good readers use all these information sources in an integrated way while reading for meaning.

Independent Reading

Independent reading is another component of a balanced literacy program. It

involves children not only in reading books but in using all the written materials in the classroom. A favorite activity of Cunningham's is "reading the room" which means walking around with a pointer and reading everything that is displayed (1997). Achieving independent reading in the classroom requires a large classroom library and teaching children how to select an appropriate leveled text. The targeted school's Reading Strategies Committee compiled a list of prompts (Figure 2) to help children select an appropriate leveled text (Reading Strategies Guide, 2000). Independent reading allows children to apply reading strategies independently and promotes fluency through rereading.

Reading and writing are interrelated. In reading, students see letters and work out the sound. In spelling students have the sound and work out the letters. What is learned in one area makes it easier to learn in the other. Processes are built up and broken down in both reading and writing, but Stosky believes that the concept may be easier for children to understand in writing (1983). Children learn words and how they work, hear and record sounds while constructing messages, or analyze words while reading. Writing demonstrates concepts of print (direction rules, space formats, and punctuation). Early attempts to approximate writing are valuable experiences for young children. Gentry and Gillet use the following stages to analyze students' writing development: Precommmunicative Stage (writing resembles scribbles, circles, and lines with a few letters thrown in at random), Semi phonetic Stage (words begin to be represented by a letter or two), Phonetic Stage (vowels are included and most sounds are represented by at least one letter), Transitional Stage (all sounds are represented), and the Conventional Stage (words are spelled correctly). The teacher provides the encouragement as young writers move through the different stages of writing. A teacher might help a child: relate a sound to a letter, hear a medial sound, identify vowels, and point out high frequency words.

Shared Writing

Through writing, children are manipulating and using symbols and learning how written language works as they write the sounds that they hear in each word. In shared writing, the teacher and children work together to compose messages and stories. The message is usually related to some individual or group experience. To facilitate shared writing, the children talk and the teacher acts as the scribe. The children are able to turn their ideas into written language, and the teacher can demonstrate the writing process. Shared writing provides the opportunity to draw attention to letters, words, and sounds. The finished product creates written language resources for the classroom.

Interactive Writing

Pinnell and Fountas find it valuable to involve children more in the writing process by sharing the pen during group writing experiences (1998). Mckenzie created this approach called interactive writing (1986). Sharing the pen begins with children filling in just a few letters and known words. As children gain more knowledge about writing, teachers make different decisions about sharing the pen. It is the teacher's responsibility to draw children's attention to elements of written language that challenge children and offer the examples that promote new learning. Interactive writing gives teachers a chance to demonstrate saying words slowly and connecting the sounds that are embedded in words. This approach demonstrates concepts of print, early strategies, and how words work.

Guided Writing

Guided writing is another way for teachers to help children learn to write, but in this case the children are constructing their individual pieces of writing with teacher guidance, assistance, and feedback (Graves & Hansen, 1983). Teachers provide instruction through mini lessons and conferences. Giacobbe, an expert in writing

development, categorized mini-lessons as procedural, strategy/skill, or craft (1996). A procedural lesson is a brief instruction on routines that enable writers to carry on independently. These mini-lessons show students how to manage their writing time. Strategy/skill lessons address the skills of a writer. These include saying words slowly and recording their sounds, leaving space between words, learning about word construction, and using capital letters for names or at the beginning of a sentence. Craft lessons address what writers and illustrators do to communicate their message to readers. When the mini-lesson is about something all writers need to do, teachers remind all students to attend to that particular topic in their own work. While students write, the teacher interacts with students in brief conferences that enable the writers to move through the developmental stages of writing at their own speed. The goal of guided writing is continuous growth in the writers as they learn more about the writing process. At the end of each guided writing session the children gather on the carpet to share their writing. This sharing session offers another opportunity for students to get responses to their writing and to observe how to conference with peers. Guided writing fosters creativity, the ability to write words and use punctuation, and provides opportunities for children to learn to be writers.

Independent Writing

Independent writing is generated by the child and requires very little teacher support. Children use what they learned through individual conferences, mini lessons, and group writing to construct their own pieces. The best way for young students to learn beginning spelling is through writing. Young spellers need daily writing opportunities and encouragement to write the sounds that they hear in each word (invented spelling). Invented spelling is the first step in the developmental spelling process. The student's job is to move closer towards conventional spelling. As writers become more fluent through invented spelling, they also need to learn that there are

other stages in the writing process. The teacher might identify a vowel, help the child remember a high-frequency word, or compare a word in the child's writing to a word on the word wall. It is essential that teachers understand how spelling and phonetic knowledge normally develop so that they can support the child's writing development. The "word wall" that contains high frequency words and other environmental print (predictable charts, songs, and poems) is also used as a resource as children write independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1998). A writing center encourages independent writing by providing a wide range of writing materials for children to use. The writing center may include small blank books, various kinds of paper, pencils, markers, scissors, staplers, glue, and stamps. Writing for different purposes is essential because we want children to produce many different types of writing.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of a balanced literacy program, during the period of September 2000 to December 2000, the morning kindergarten students will participate actively during story introduction and discussion, develop a core of known words, use visual information (words, letters and pictures) to check on reading and meaning, use developmental spelling in their journals, and gain a deeper understanding of print concepts. This will be measured through running records, writing samples, and concepts about print checklists.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Create a literacy portfolio for each student using a hanging file folder.
2. Develop a rubric to score the writing samples that go into the student's portfolios.
3. Prepare a journal for each child.
4. Acquire multiple copies of books at various levels for guided reading

purposes.

5. Acquire different writing materials and paper for the writing center.

6. Select the Big Books that will be used during shared reading time.

7. Create a checklist highlighting the concepts about print that the children need to grasp by the end of kindergarten.

8. Set up an inviting classroom library complete with cushions, books of varying sizes and genres, and different tubs for categorizing the books.

Project Action Plan

Week 1 -
- Send parent letter home
- Implement tools for pretests: concepts about print checklist, letter 0.recognition checklist
- Establish an opening routine: song, calender, pocket chart poem
- Model different literacy activities that children can choose from during Book Time (independent reading)
- Introduce Shared Reading
- Introduce journals
- Start to observe how children interact with books
- Begin "Special Student for the Day" Activity (letter and sound recognition is reinforced using students' names as well as print concepts and jargon)
- Begin Alpha-time Letter People
- Read aloud a book at the end of each day

Week 2 -
- Continue opening routine (Have students be the "pointers" when reading the pocket chart poems to practice word-by-word matching)
- Introduce "Sentence Builders" (children reconstruct sentences from pocket chart or predictable chart)
- Continue journals three times a week--select one writing sample each week to go into the portfolio
- Continue shared reading (Act out story this week)
- Continue "Special Student for the Day"
- Start a predictable chart (shared writing)
- Introduce writing center
- Begin "Book Time" (independent reading)
- Introduce new letter person (letter/sound recognition)
- Read aloud a book at the end of each day

Week 3 - Opening routine (introduce new nursery rhyme)
Journals three times a week: Model how to write a sentence.
Introduce new Big Book during shared reading (clap syllables using words from story)
Continue "Special Student for the Day"
Point out things that the children notice from predictable chart
Make class book using predictable chart sentences
Begin running records during "Book Time" to find at what level each student is reading
Set up a reading and writing center for students to visit each week
Read aloud a book at the end of each day

Week 4 - Opening routine (add the morning message for the class to read)
Journals
Continue "Special Student for the Day" until everyone has had a turn
Shared reading
Start new predictable chart
"Book Time"
Begin Guided Reading groups during center time
Read aloud a book at the end of each day

Week 5-8 - Continue Week 4's routine
Rotate Big Book Extensions

1. Act out story
2. Record class reading book for listening center
3. Sentence Builders activity
4. Sort words according to length, letters, specific letters
5. Hide words/children predict what would sound right
6. Make class book
7. Shared writing and Interactive Writing

Week 9 - Implement tools for post-test and continue weekly routine

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, each student was asked to identify, by name, sound, or as the first letter of a word, the printed uppercase and lowercase letters. Writing samples from journals were also collected each week. A

rubric that follows Gentry and Gillet's stages of writing (pre. communitative, semi-phonetic, phonetic, transitional, and conventional) was created to document each child's understanding of letter and print concepts (1992). Running records were administered to each student every other week, starting at at week three, to code, score, and analyze each child's reading behaviors.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objectives of this project were: to enable each kindergarten student to participate actively during shared reading experiences, to develop a core of known words, to use visual information to check on reading and meaning, to use developmental spelling in his or her journals, and to gain a deeper understanding of print concepts. In order to accomplish these project objectives the following were developed: literacy portfolios, a writing rubric, journals, and a checklist highlighting the concepts about print that the children need to grasp by the end of kindergarten. In addition, the selection of Big Books, multiple copies of books at various reading levels, and different writing materials and paper were acquired for the reading or writing center.

Before the start of the action research project, a parent letter (Appendix A) was sent home asking permission to use the children's data in the researcher's study. At this time, the students were assessed on their letter identification, and writing samples were collected and scored using a rubric created by the researcher. Checklists were created by the researcher to record this information (Appendix B). Running records (Appendix C) and concepts about print checklists (see Appendix D) were planned to be taken as well, but the lack of a classroom aide and the short kindergarten day (two hours and forty-five minutes) made it difficult to fit this into the schedule. Throughout

weeks two and three the researcher was able to accomplish the running records and assess the concepts about print.

Literacy portfolios (hanging file folders) were created for each student. Throughout the action research project, these folders housed the student's writing samples, letter identification and concept about print checklists, running records, and journals throughout the action research project. A rubric was created by the researcher to score each child's writing samples (see Appendix E). Criteria focused on the writing and spelling evidenced in the students' journals.

Journals were introduced the first week of the action plan and implemented three times a week for the remaining time. The students were required to use words and pictures to tell a story. Starting on week three, a writing sample was scored each week using the writing rubric described in the previous paragraph. During week three, the researcher also modeled how to write a sentence. Developmental spelling and the use of kindergarten sight words were encouraged. The sight words were displayed on the word wall for students to use as a resource while writing. Children also developed their writing skills at the writing center introduced during week two.

To increase students' phonemic awareness, a "Special Student for the Day" was selected during weeks one through four during the opening routine. Through this activity, children learned the names of their classmates, and they began to associate letters and sounds with the names they learned. The names were displayed on a pocket chart for the students to use as a resource during writing time.

In addition to the "Special Student for the Day", other literacy-related activities were put into place during the opening routine beginning with week one through the end of the research project. At the start of each day, the children did at least one of the following activities: read a poem from the pocket chart, sang a new or familiar thematic song, learned a new nursery rhyme, or went over the calendar.

Starting with week two, students took turns tracking the print during the reading of pocket chart poems. A morning message was added to week four.

After the morning routine, the children took part in Shared Reading. Shared reading experiences varied from day to day throughout the plan. Each week started with a new Big Book that the children and researcher read in unison. As the children became familiar with each book, the researcher extended the experience. Big book extensions included: acting out the story, becoming sentence builders, recording children reading the book for the listening center, sorting vocabulary words according to length and letters, making a class book; covering up words in the sentences and predicting what would sound correct, and participating in shared writing and interactive writing experiences.

Each week the students also were introduced to a new letter using the Alpha-Time Letter People. The students focused on the symbol and sound relationship of each letter, as well as letter formation.

Throughout the project, the students took part in independent reading time ("Book Time"). Week one, the researcher modeled the following literacy activities that the children continue to choose from during Book Time: read around the room with a pointer, read a book to a partner or by yourself, read a big book, read a book at the listening center, read books the class has written, read from journal entries, make words using the magnetic letters, build words using the letter blocks, or read from the book box. Week one and two the researcher observed how students interacted with books. Starting at week four, the researcher met with two to three children at a time while the children participated in Book Time for guided reading groups. At the end of each guided reading group, the researcher took a running record of each member.

At the end of the day the children listened to a book read aloud by the researcher, strictly for enjoyment purposes.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effect of increased letter recognition after the eight week plan, the researcher administered a pre- and post-test. A summary of the correct responses is presented in table one.

Table 1

Upper Case Letter Identification

Number of Letters Identified	Number of Students	
	Pre-test	Post-test
13	1	0
14	1	0
22	1	0
23	2	0
24	2	0
25	1	1
26	10	17

Lower Case Letter Identification

Number of Letters Identified	Number of Students	
	Pre-test	Post-test
0	1	0
3	1	0
7	1	0
18	1	0
19	2	0
20	2	0
22	2	0
23	4	1
24	2	1
25	1	8
26	1	8

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on the targeted students' letter recognition. Of particular note is the increase in the mean for both upper case and lower case post-tests. The standard deviation decreased in the post tests as well. In the pretest, of the 26 upper case letters, the mean was 23.78. The standard

deviation was 15.77. The mean for the post-test was 25.94. The standard deviation was .98. Of the 26 lower case letters in the pre-test, the mean was 18.94. The standard variation was 10.2. The mean for the post-test was 25.27. The standard deviation was 2.885.

Writing samples were also collected before and after the project to assess the improvement of letter and print concepts. The same rubric used to score the pre-writing samples was used to score the post-writing samples. Table two summarizes the results of the data collection. One is the lowest score possible, and ten is the highest score possible.

Table 2
Writing Sample Rubric Scores

Rubric Score	Number of Students	
	Pre-test	Post-test
1	9	0
2	3	0
4	2	0
5	1	0
6	1	0
7	0	3
8	1	5
9	1	0

Based on the comparisons of the pre- and post-writing sample scores, there was an improvement in the students' knowledge of letter and print concepts. The majority of the students received a score of one on the pre-writing sample compared to nine on the post-writing sample. The man score for the pre-writing sample was 1.5, with the range of eight between the highest and lowest scores. The mean score for the post-writing sample was 8.389, with the range of two between the highest and lowest scores. On the post-writing sample, all the children attempted invented spelling in their journals.

Time limitations and the lack of a classroom aide at the start of the action plan

presented a challenge. The researcher was unable to take running records and assess the students' concepts about print through reading. Throughout weeks two and three, the targeted students were assessed on their concepts about print using a checklist to record results. Running records were also taken at this time to identify the targeted students' reading level. The books were leveled using Fountas and Pinnell's book list (Guided Reading, 1996). At the end of the plan, running records and concepts about print were assessed again to compare results. Figure three summarizes the reading level of the targeted students. Figure four summarizes the students' concepts about print.

Table 3
Student's Reading Level

Reading Level	Number of Students	
	First Assessment	Second Assessment
A	14	0
B	3	6
C	1	6
D	0	3
E	0	2
I	0	1

At the start of the project, the majority of the students were reading from level A. This text level has a direct correspondence between the text and the pictures and is the easiest level to read. At the end of the project, the majority of the students were reading from levels B and C. Levels B and C still contain a pattern but there is more variation in the language patterns, requiring the children to attend more closely to the print.

Table 4
Concepts About Print

Score	Number of Students Receiving Score	
	Sept. Test	Dec. Test
7	1	0
8	1	0
10	1	0
11	4	1
12	2	1
13	1	2
14	7	0
15	1	1
16	0	13

This mean score for the September test was 12.167 out of 16. The mean score for the December test was 15.111. This showed a gain of 2.955 points for the final assessment. All of the targeted students received a higher score on the December assessment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the data presented, the targeted students showed an improvement in reading readiness skills. The concepts about print that the children learned during shared reading and writing experiences were transferred to journal writing and independent reading time. Students began to write sentences in their journals using sight words from our word wall, put finger spaces between their words, started their sentences with upper case letters, and always used end punctuation. As the children became more aware of the letter/sound relationships, they included the beginning, middle, ending, and sometimes vowel sounds in their invented spelling.

Children transferred the reading strategies that they learned during guided reading groups to independent and shared reading time. The targeted students learned that when decoding words it is important to say the beginning letter sound and the letter or letters after it, to look for spelling patterns, to check to see if the word is on

the word wall, and to ask what word would match the letter sounds and make sense. Students began to realize that print, rather than pictures, is the best source of information about the text. This project provided the range of experiences and the instruction necessary to help children become readers. The balanced literacy program regularly provided several kinds of reading and writing opportunities for the students to develop their understanding of literacy.

The researcher will continue to use the balanced literacy framework and assessment tools in a more flexible manner. Next time the researcher will allow more time for assessment to eliminate the pressure felt to assess the students in a short period of time. Finding the time to individually work with each child was difficult in the beginning.

Running records and guided reading groups might pose a problem for teachers without classroom aides because of the children's needs for one-on-one attention. After a classroom aide was hired, this researcher was able to find the time to implement guided reading groups and administer running records without student interruptions. As the year progressed, the students learned the routine and worked more independently, allowing the researcher to work with children in small groups.

The short kindergarten day did not always give the children enough time to revisit favorite activities. Many times after a read-aloud the children would ask to hear the story again, but it would be time to line up for a "special" or to get ready for dismissal. Building sentences was a favorite activity during calendar time. The researcher found that all the students wanted a turn to hold a word, however, it took too much time. A handful of students always became disengaged.

The researcher would have also like to allow the children more time to write in their journals. Many children said, "But I'm not finished." The researcher found herself responding with, "You can finish it next time," but knew that many of the children would

forget what they were doing. Journal writing is an open-ended writing activity that can be implemented at any grade level.

As Cunningham states, "The goal of a developmentally appropriate kindergarten is to accept all children where they are and take them forward on their literacy journey" (Month-by-Month Reading and Writing for Kindergarten, 1997, p.3). The balanced literacy format meets this goal.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Appendix A
Sample Permission Slip

September, 2000

Dear Parents,

I am currently working on my Master of Arts degree in Education at Saint Xavier University. This is a two year program that I started last August. I am looking forward to graduating this spring! As part of the requirements towards graduation, I am taking part in an Action Research Project.

My research focuses on a balanced literacy program with a goal of helping children begin to read and become strategic users of literacy. I want to be sure that every child is working with materials that help him take the next step in learning to read. Your child will be immersed in reading and writing through: story time, guided reading groups, shared reading, interactive writing, journaling, and independent reading. Running records will be used to keep track of your child's reading progress. In addition, I will be using checklists to record your child's understanding of print concepts and letter-sound relationships. Writing samples will also be considered for letter and print concepts.

I do need your permission to use your child's data in my thesis. The students' names, school, and school location will remain confidential. Please fill out the permission slip below and return to me by _____. Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,

Miss Elsea

Please have your child return this form by _____.

_____Yes, my child's data can be used in the study. Her/His name will remain confidential.

_____No, I do not wish for my child's data to be used in the study.

Student Name _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

APPENDIX B

Appendix B
Sample Letter Identification Checklist

Name:_____ **Age:**_____ **DOB:**_____

Date:_____ **Test Score:**_____

Recorder:_____

	A	S	Word	I.R.		A	S	Word	I.R.
A					a				
K					k				
P					p				
Z					z				
F					f				
W					w				
B					b				
O					o				
U					u				
H					h				
J					j				
C					c				
L					l				
M					m				
Y					y				
Q					q				
D					d				
S					s				
I					i				
N					n				
X					x				
E					e				
R					r				
V					v				
G					g				
T					t				
				TOTALS					

Confusions:

Letters Unknown:

Comment:

Recording:

A Alphabet response

S Letter sound response

Word Record the word the child gives

I.R. Incorrect Response Record what the child says

TOTAL SCORE ☐

APPENDIX C

Appendix C
Sample Running Record Recording Sheet

Running Record Sheet

Name:_____ **Date:**_____

Book Title:_____ **Book Level:**_____

				Info. Used	
Page		**E**	**SC**	**E MSV**	**SC MSV**

APPENDIX D

Appendix D
Sample Print Concepts Checklist

Student:_____

Assessing Print Concepts			
	Fall	Winter	Spring
Name of Book			
Finds the Cover			
Points to First Word			
Left to Right			
One-to-One Correspondence			
Finds Words in Text • reads from beginning • uses grapho-phonics • knows from sight memory			
Finds Punctuation • period • exclamation mark • question mark			
Finds Capital Letter			
Finds Page Number			
Cuts Sentence into Words			
Puts Sentences Together • matches print from book • reads each word in order • self-corrects			

✓ indicates student demonstrates the skill

APPENDIX E

Writing Sample Rubric

Appendix E
Sample Writing Rubric

Category	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	Drawing	Random scribbling	Controlled scribbling	Writing (letter reversals, writing in any direction)	Conventional writing (left-right, top-bottom, correct letter formation)
Spelling	Initial consonant	Initial and final consonants	Medial consonant; awareness of blends	Initial, final, and medial consonants; vowel place-holder vowel can be incorrect	Conventional spelling

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Sign here, → please

Signature: Rebecca J. Elsea	Printed Name/Position/Title: Student/s FBMP	
Organization/Address: Saint Xavier University E. Mosak 3700 W. 103rd St. Chgo, IL 60655	Telephone: 708-802-6214	FAX: 708-802-6208
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