Differentiated instruction and literacy skill development in the preschool classroom

by

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ABSTRACT

The promotion of emergent literacy skills is a focus for Head Start classrooms. Teachers must find a way to meet the needs of all the students in their classroom when promoting literacy skills. Through principals of differentiated instruction, teachers are able to meet the diverse learning needs of students in a format that creates a respectful, safe learning environment. The current study explored Head Start teachers use of differentiated instruction when promoting literacy skill development in the preschool classroom. Although findings indicate that the teachers are providing skill development activities in print recognition, phonological awareness, writing skill development and oral language, an underlying factor in classroom implementation is tied to teacher feelings of support, professional development and pre-service training programs.

CHAPTER 1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) define emergent literacy to include the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are part of the developmental process required prior to formal reading and writing. Emergent literacy activities include reading aloud, singing, and writing or scribbling. Early childhood educators may be some of the first adults to introduce formal literacy experiences to young children. Children participate in preschool programs in childcare centers, churches, and local schools. Children may also experience literacy activities embedded in daily activities, such as discussing the days of the week, reading the helper chart, or engaging in large group reading.

Children in a group are at different skill levels and progress at different rates. Teachers need to be aware of child differences and determine how best to meet the learning needs of all students. However, early childhood educators are not always aware of accommodations that can be made to assist children in their classrooms. Differentiated instruction (DI) is one approach to addressing the learning needs of all children in the classroom. Through DI, teachers are able to create classroom environments that are respectful, welcoming and safe for learning (Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers utilizing the DI approach acknowledge every child where he or she is in the learning process, accept differences and figures out how to work with each child's needs. However, early childhood educators may not be familiar with the principles of DI. Traditionally, DI has focused on school age children, especially those in mixed ability classrooms. The literature is scarce to when looking for how DI is applied to all children rather than those children who require special education services. How do teachers gather knowledge to be able to provide differentiated instruction?

One way teachers share knowledge is through conversation. Teachers share resources among themselves, as well as experiences that have shaped the way they teach. Teachers, like most people, like to tell stories.

Stories have been used throughout different cultures to transmit knowledge, wisdom and morals. Every person interprets his or her own life differently and therefore they present stories based on their own interpretation. "Through telling stories, people can express their identity, relationships, and emotions" (Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2002, p. 38). In the teaching profession, students' learning is directly impacted by the lived experiences of teachers. Teachers teach what they know and in a manner consistent with what they have experienced.

Narrative inquiry is about storytelling. It is taking the lived experiences of a person and making those experiences have meaning. My goal through the use of narrative inquiry methodology is to make meaning of how and why teachers teach early literacy skills the way they do. Specific components of narrative inquiry will be discussed including narrative voice and researcher/participant relationships.

This paper will review the literature specific to early literacy, DI and the construction of teacher knowledge. The intended audience for this paper is early childhood educators and other professionals working with young children. Results from the project are intended to inform early childhood professionals about literacy skill development and the ways in which teachers teach literacy skills. I will provide a rationale for using narrative analysis as a method for analyzing data. Through the use of narrative analysis this study will address the following question: 1) How do teachers

differentiate instruction in preschool classrooms? 2) How do teachers implement literacy skill development in preschool classrooms? 3) How do teachers acquire knowledge?

Dissertation Organization

The information presented in this dissertation is intended to explore the ways in which teachers differentiate instruction and implement literacy skill development in preschool classrooms. A general introduction and literature review is provided in order to set the stage for two papers. The data from the study was synthesized in two papers that are presented in chapters two and three. The final section of the dissertation includes general conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Principles of differentiated instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is an approach to teaching based on key principles outlined by Tomlinson (1999):

1. The teacher is clear about the most important pieces of the subject to be taught

2. The teacher understands student differences and is able to build on these differences

3. There is no separation between assessment and instruction

4. The teacher focuses on content, process and product and how to adjust them

5. The work students participate in is respected

6. Teachers and students are collaborative partners in learning

7. Focus of the DI classroom is on the student and the student's growth

8. A differentiated classroom is flexible

Differentiated instruction is focused on helping students learn in a manner that they can understand and in a context that is real. Blaz (2006) emphasizes five

components of DI: content, process, product, classroom and teacher. The content is the subject matter needing to be learned. The process is how the teacher goes about instruction. For example, it could be whole group instruction, collaborative learning groups or individual instruction. The product is what the students produce to demonstrate their learning. The classroom is where learning can take place, but the emphasis is on the overall environment. Finally, the teacher is the instructor. The teacher is the person who leads the students through activities to learning.

O'Brien and Guiney (2001) look at the principles of DI in a more succinct manner than Tomlinson (1999). They emphasize the importance of quality education as a right for all children, that learning is about a relationship and that every child and teacher can learn. If this is the case, then DI should be seen in every classroom. However, DI is not a curriculum or assessment package. It is not about using traditional classroom instruction and making children fit their learning style to the teacher. DI is "a way of thinking about teaching and learning that can be translated into classroom practice in many different ways "(Blaz, 2006, p. 9).

Classroom Environment

One factor in the implementation of DI is classroom environment. Teachers need to recognize and accept that children all have something in common and that sameness is the place to start (O'Brien & Guiney, 2001). The classroom has to be a place that every child feels valued, respected and safe (Muijis et al, 2005; Tomlinson, 2006). This does not mean that teachers push children to be best friends, but it is "important to treat one another with respect" (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 46).

In addition to a classroom environment of respect and value, there also needs to be a feeling of inclusion. It is a teacher who sets the classroom atmosphere. Teachers consciously make decisions about how to arrange rooms, structure learning areas, create rules and encourage spirit. Children look to a teacher as a model for how they should act when working with others, giving feedback and sharing information. It is placed upon the teacher to build a "community of learners who care for and support one another" (Gregory & Chapman, 2006, p. 17). Is this not the intent of the preschool classroom?

Early education classrooms are designed to provide children with a variety of experiences throughout the day. Although most teachers may view this classroom structure as necessary to meet rules or regulations, this structure allows for teaching different kinds of learners. For example, center time activities allow children to work in small groups or individually with the teacher for additional assistance. Areas such as large/small motor, writing, reading, role play and housekeeping provide children with multiple ways to gather knowledge in a play setting that makes it seem less like "school." However, teachers still need to recognize that children learn differently. Some children may need assistance through the DI principle of personalized instruction.

Personalized Instruction

One component of DI is instruction that is personalized to students. The phrase "personalized instruction" may conjure thoughts of a teacher spending hours upon hours with individual students. This is not the case. Personalized instruction is about teachers understanding and accepting a student's abilities, strengths, weaknesses and knowing how to help that student talk about what they need to be able to learn (Tomlinson &

McTighe, 2006). Keefe and Jenkins (2000) suggest six elements of personalized instruction:

1. Teacher as coach and advisor

2. Teacher knows students' learning characteristics

3. Constructivist classrooms include collaborative learning

4. The learning environment is interactive

5. There is flexibility in schedule and pace

6. Assessment is authentic

These are all elements that should be visible in any early childhood classroom. For example, an early childhood teacher should be flexible in scheduling so that children are able to spend more time at centers they enjoy. A teacher as coach and advisor gives support to students, but also recognizes when it is important to push a little or direct kids to different kinds of activities they may perceive as different.

For students, DI also incorporates pacing, depth and complexity; learner independence; and structuring to facilitate learning (Blaz, 2006). However, in order to be able to structure learning environments, lessons and activities according to student needs, teachers have to really understand each child's learning profile. A learning profile is about children's preferences, their cultural influences, learning styles and even their gender (Tomlinson, 1999). How does a teacher develop this understanding of their students? Assessment is the place to start.

Assessment and differentiated instruction

When considering assessment in the DI classroom, a teacher has to think of assessment as an on-going process (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999).

Teachers should use pre-assessment data for planning, on-going assessment, tracking of growth, keeping student profiles, and helping parents understand their child in the learning process (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Pre-assessment needs to be used as a tool for planning. Early childhood teachers do not always have the time or resources to gather baseline data about students' skills. Specifically related to literacy skills, teachers may be able to gather information about a child's literacy skill level by talking with the student and having students participate in authentic tasks. Authentic tasks are those which relate to real life. For example, children may be asked to count spoons for snack time or locate their name cards to help take attendance. Gregory and Chapman (2002) suggest use of portfolios to follow student growth. Student portfolios provide teachers with an opportunity to demonstrate growth through the use of artifacts, such as art projects, reading comprehension checks and name/letter writing.

Assessment is a tool that teachers can use to change their teaching. "Assessment becomes responsive when students are given appropriate options for demonstrating knowledge, skill and understanding" (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 73). Appropriate options may be choices of activities to demonstrate a particular skill, counting out snacks or napkins, or following a multi-step instruction. It is with this ongoing assessment data that teachers can see how students learn, where they are in the process and make modifications to the content, process, or product (Tomlinson, 1999). Once pre-assessment has been completed and an on-going process is in place, teachers can look to developing active learning experiences.

Active learning

Active learning engages a student in the process so that is creates meaning. Keefe and Jenkins (2000) assert that "without engagement, much schooling is meaningless and unproductive" (p. 76). One piece of teacher planning that fits into active learning is that teachers should plan activities or experiences for children just above their skill level so that the child is challenged (Gregory & Chapman, 2002).

McTighe and Brown (2000) suggest that teachers choose big ideas from the curriculum as well as purposeful active learning activities to give students meaningful learning experiences. There are also curriculum approaches that can be used to provide active learning including centers and problem-based learning (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). In the preschool classroom, active learning is seen when children engage with materials in new and different ways that increase their understanding or knowledge. Children use sand/water tables to gain science concepts or work with play dough to create letters and work on fine motor skills. DI is about learning that speaks to each child by providing multiple learning activities or multiple materials and curriculum that makes sense. However, DI can only be successful if the teacher is committed to DI.

Teacher knowledge

Teachers are the leaders in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for students in the classroom and the learning that takes place. Tomlinson (1999) discusses teachers as leaders but also in the context that "like all effective leaders, she [teacher] attends closely to her followers and involves them thoroughly in the journey" (p. 12). In the lives of children, teachers can make a world of difference. A goal of teachers should be to promote each child's success with the knowledge and skills they have (Tomlinson &

McTighe, 2006, p. 95). The knowledge teachers have and the desire to gather more skills and knowledge speaks to a teaching philosophy of self-reflection. Self-reflection is a part of the construction of professional knowledge.

The ways in which teachers obtain and use knowledge is just as varied as the books children like to read. Teachers go through university programs and come out with a wide range of expectations and bases for instruction. When specifically looking at how teachers teach early literacy skills, Richardson (1991) discusses how teachers' define literacy is from typical decoding to a "transactional process between a reader and a text within a social context" (p. 562). In other words, some teachers choose traditional methods or more formal methods in which to engage students in literacy activities. On the other hand, some teachers look to more of a Vygotskian approach to literacy development and see the process as a relationship that is developed through social interactions within the environment.

Teachers are also given what Kennedy (2002) refers to as "prescriptions". Prescriptions can be viewed as curriculum guides that may be seen as ever changing. School districts are constantly reviewing their curriculum materials based on state and federal initiatives. Because of the constant changes, teachers may not be committed to what they are told to use as classroom teaching tools.

Spear-Swerling, Brucker, and Alfano (2005) discuss two components of effective reading instruction: being "knowledgeable about reading-related abilities and reading development" (p. 268). If teachers do not have a base of knowledge about early literacy then it is difficult to expand and encourage additional literacy experiences. Vartuli's (1999) study of teachers' beliefs regarding early childhood educators found that "more

knowledge in early childhood education does appear to influence beliefs, attitudes, and practice of teachers" (p. 570).

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) in Phillion and Connelly (2004) discuss how professionals need to understand how they acquire and use knowledge in order to understand how they teach other people. How often do teachers stop to think about their own education in relation to their students' needs? Many times teachers use the "whatever works method" without thought to how it is they developed the knowledge or teaching strategies they use.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) present us with a way of viewing and understanding teacher knowledge. They developed a concept that they refer to as a "landscape". This landscape takes into consideration a teacher's personal and professional experiences/life in hope of understanding the development of teacher knowledge. The landscape that Connelly and Clandinin discuss is one that is

> narrative constructed: as having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions. We see it as storied. To enter a professional knowledge landscape is to enter a place of story. The landscape is composed of two fundamentally different places, the in-classroom place and the out of classroom place (p. 2).

Teachers develop their knowledge in and out of the classroom environments because learning is not an isolated event. For example, as a teacher, I am able to gain knowledge of the necessity for daily living skills instruction for students with special needs by reading the latest professional journals. However, it is not until I have experienced washing clothes, cooking meals or grocery shopping that I can begin to understand the many skills needed to complete such ordinary daily tasks that I need to

teach my students. Teachers bring their incidental, or in some cases accidental, knowledge to the classroom.

<div align="center">Literacy Skills</div>

Many skills contribute to early literacy development. One of the first skills that is present from birth is communication. Kaderavek and Rabidoux (2004) suggest that reading and writing are not just products of themselves, but are part of communication. Reading and writing are the basic skills needed if children want to be able to have opportunities, such as learning about other places and holding jobs. A goal of literacy may be "to improve quality of life, increase social interactions and relatedness and improve communication in additional functional contexts" (Kaderavek & Rabidoux, p. 242). It is important for all children to understand the concept that text can be used to interact with others (Kaderavek & Rabidoux). Adults are the people who make the first impact on children regarding language development. It is through interactions (conversations) with adults and hearing adult language that children's language development increases (Clay, 1972).

Oral language development

Oral language is an integral part of children's early literacy development. Clay (1972) suggests that children need to have multiple opportunities to try out their language skills. Children babble and make noises that are part of their oral vocabulary. Adults are able to help children by expanding upon what the child says. The interactions that a child has with adults and book reading activities contribute to overall book knowledge and language development.

If we consider that language development is a part of communication and communication is a part of literacy, then literacy skills begin at birth. Morgan (2007)

states that "before they are able to say their first words, children build on non-verbal communication they initiate with their caregiver" (p. 106). This is why book reading, singing and playing with children are important. There are many important aspects of language and book reading.

Whitehead (1997) discusses how book reading activities "introduce children to the consciously patterned forms of literature" (p. 108). This includes the patterns of reading left to right, inflection in voice/tone and turning pages. Stahl (2005) states "when children learn to read, they use what they know about oral language to comprehend written language. The skills that children ordinarily use in oral language need minimal instruction to transfer to written language" (p. 55). This is reiterated in Honig's (2001) work in which he describes the tools that children need to understand written English. The basic tools that children need include the being able to use language to make different words and sounds, visually recognize letters, and knowing how to take the information they know about language (written and oral) and apply it to decoding and learning new words children find when reading. Children's use of oral language contributes to phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is an area of skills that children need to have for successful development of emergent literacy skills (Morris et al, 2003; McGhee, 2003). Phonological awareness is children's knowledge of letter sounds. Children may engage in such activities as rhyming and singing to help practice/produce letter sounds. Phonological activities may include blending, segmenting, word games, and word play (Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003). Hawken, Johnston and McDowell's (2005) study

of early literacy practices among Head Start teachers found that teachers implemented phonological awareness activities less than other activities, such as alphabet knowledge. In addition, Head Start teachers used few syllable and segmenting activities in the classroom to develop children's literacy skills. This would indicate that teachers should be conscious of the activities they are providing to children in the classroom. For example, when engaging in a shared reading activity with a child, the teacher may need to focus on sounding out unknown words and helping a child blend sounds together in order to develop new vocabulary. When a child is able to produce letter sounds, they may be more interested in "reading" the print that is around them in their environment. This awareness of print in turn leads to increased recognition of letters and words.

Print recognition

Print/letter recognition is tied to a child's language development. Morris et al. (2003) suggest that language print relationships (understanding of) are important in word recognition. Again, there is a connection between language and print. Teachers need to be aware of this connection in order to help promote children's relationships with print. Once children begin to develop an understanding that print tells a story, they can begin to understand that written language can be used in many different ways (Owocki, 1999). Teachers can help children find the various ways that print can be used. For example, children become aware of print in their environments through looking at billboards, signage on store fronts, and words on doors (in/out/exit). McGhee (2003) suggests that children need to have a conscious awareness that print is different than other things in the environment.

When considering print concepts, Clay (1972) suggests that children learn the following concepts: print can be turned into speech, there is a message recorded with the letters in a print statement, and when there are pictures with words, the picture is a rough guide to the message. Children begin with pictures and from the pictures they begin to understand that a story develops. This skill is part of beginning reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is part of an emergent literacy program. Reading comprehension is part of a balanced reading program, in addition to other emergent literacy skill activities, such as print awareness, phonological awareness, and letter recognition (Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003). When considering emergent literacy skill development for children under age five, reading comprehension instruction is not a formalized activity. Adults can introduce young children to reading comprehension by "reflecting on the story, asking open-ended questions, inviting discussions of the meanings of words and supporting children's curiosity about print" (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004, p. 56). Teachers can utilize discussion about stories to encourage young children to think about characters, what the story means, make predictions about what will happen and make links to the child's personal experiences (Honig, 2001).

Much of reading comprehension instruction can be accomplished through reading aloud activities in the classroom. Through reading aloud activities, children begin developing an understanding of the parts of a story. Children learn that a story has a beginning, middle and end which is a "key skill for future reading and comprehension of text" (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004, p. 55).

Even more basic, very young children make use of pictures to develop story meanings. Children will re-tell stories based on what they see. Makin and Whitehead (2004) suggest that adults encourage this story developing activity by asking the child questions about the story and discussing what is taking place in the pictures. However, when implementing such activities and discussion with young children, adults need to keep in mind the child's vocabulary level.

Children need to know the meaning of words if they are to comprehend what is going on in a story (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004). This would tell us that children need multiple experiences to hear words being read aloud and to be able to ask questions about what is meant. Although reading aloud is a factor in building a child's vocabulary base which may lead to better comprehension skills, Pressley and Hilden (2006) remind us that "massive reading is an essential part of elementary comprehension development, even though it is not sufficient to develop skilled comprehension" (p. 61).

Teachers need to recognize reading aloud and shared book experiences as important pieces in early comprehension skill development. Children need to be given opportunities to discuss and retell stories, as well as practice new words. Children play with print and letters/letter sounds which transfers to experimentation with writing. Engaging in activities such as drawing and scribbling are a part of emergent literacy (Kaderavek & Rabidoux, 2004).

Writing skill development

Writing of any kind should be encouraged for young children (Morris et al., 2003). Children engage in scribbling with crayons or anything that looks like a writing utensil. Teachers/adults need to model writing for children. Children observe adults

writing and begin to mimic writing (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004). Children will watch a parent write and try to grab the pen/pencil and write by themselves.

Writing is another activity that comes naturally and is seen by children in different environments. Children see writing take place at home, school, and during daily tasks, such as going to the bank or paying for groceries. "Children's scribbles are important. They are the children's first attempts at using writing tools to make marks" (Makin and Whitehead, 2004, p. 9).

Throughout the literature there are three main areas reported as important skills to develop for emergent literacy: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness (McGhee, 2003; Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax & Perney, 2003; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Reading comprehension is another skill area that needs to be developed through thoughtfully planned activities, including story discussion, asking questions and giving children opportunities to re-tell stories. But how do we know if a preschool program is providing the appropriate kinds of early literacy experiences for children? There are indicators of quality early literacy programs that may be observed in classrooms.

Indicators of quality early literacy programs

What does effective teaching in early literacy look like? Honig (2001) suggests that "effective teachers provide direct instruction in alphabet recognition, phonemic awareness, alphabet principle, phonics, decoding and word attack skills" (p. 9). Teachers need to incorporate these skills throughout a child's daily activities in the classroom. Language and literacy should not be taught as isolated skill areas, but taught in play and

daily activities (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004). Makin and Whitehead (2004) also emphasize the importance of play as informal opportunities for literacy instruction. They state

> Children between 4 and 6 learn through play, especially role play, which offers many opportunities to talk and listen, sing and chant, take on different roles, tell stories, and generally explore the functions and tools of literacy (p. 67).

There need to be multiple and varied opportunities for children to engage in literacy activities including teachers/adults reading to children frequently, opportunities for play with letters and sounds and times to explore using language (Makin & Whitehead, 2004). In addition to traditional literacy activities, Wolfe and Nevills (2004) suggest activities such as going to the library and washing clothes as contributors to concept development as these activities give children more experiences to be able to relate to stories they read. However, as these activities are integrated into classroom learning time, there has to be a balance between formal and informal teacher instruction. Meier and Sullivan's (2004) study of high risk kindergartners found that schools that were successful in helping children with literacy skills shared similar characteristics. These characteristics included: specific instruction in letter recognition, rhyming, and word sounds; strong connections between home and school; opportunities for professional development; and a shared responsibility for student success.

Although many classrooms in schools and childcare centers may provide varied activities, Walpole, Justice, and Invernizzi (2004) emphasize the importance of the activities needing to be high quality. Activities need to be well planned according to developmentally appropriate practice and the needs of the children in the classroom. Teachers need to have specialized training in literacy skill development in order to maximize opportunities for child learning. How does a teacher determine their own

definition of high quality? How do teachers construct the professional knowledge they use in teaching?

Methodology

Narrative analysis

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method used to study the intricacies of narrative and the variations that take place within narratives (Brodkey, 1987). It is within qualitative studies that researchers examine "process, meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures" (Creswell, 1994, p. 143). Within this methodology it is important for the researcher to give thought to and discuss the aspects of his/her personal life that affect how and what they research (Creswell). This self-reflection, prior to undertaking a project is necessary in order to understand the possible biases that a researcher brings to any study. When considering a narrative study, this is of particular importance. People trust the researcher with stories about themselves; their families; and the past, present and future experiences they have had and will have in their lifetime. I feel it is necessary as a researcher to discuss my personal beliefs that may affect the outcome and/or data interpretation of a narrative study.

My background as a white, middle class, educated female from the Midwest has led me to believe in the importance of one's life experiences in the development of the individual life. As researchers, we need to find alternate ways of viewing the world so that we can enter into discussions about how we understand what we base our research on, such as theories (Brodkey, 1987). Through narrative inquiry I feel this is something I can do. I can develop an understanding of how teachers choose what they teach and how they teach by listening to what others have to say.

The use of narrative analysis as a research method within the social sciences has become more common (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Gill, 2001). The process of qualitative research is one that involves triangulation of data, including data interpretation checks with the project participants. Leiblich et al. (1998) state that, "the use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires, or observations" (p. 9). The rich and unique data that Leiblich et al. allude to is the life stories that are told to researchers in order to make meaning.

Brodkey (1987) suggests that, "the specific problem for ethnographers is how to tell the story in ways consistent with both scholarship and negative critique" (p. 70). So why do a narrative inquiry? I agree with Reissman (1993) who proposes that narrative, as a research method, has gained more credibility due to the use and reflection on language which is not as simple as once thought. Language, in spoken and written form, has been taken more seriously as part of the research process due to the layers of meaning that exist. We can never assume what people mean when they speak. Through narrative inquiry, we are able to analyze stories for meaning, tease meaning out of individuals, and make meaning of even the tiniest phrase.

What is narrative? Is it a story? Is it someone sitting around and talking about what happened to them at work today? Reissman (1993) uses Labov's (1972) definition to suggest that a narrative is a story about some event that happened in the past. Some people find themselves telling their stories in multiple places and each time the story may change, but it still has the same main events, persons and happenings. Mishler (2001) utilizes Labov's (1972, 1997) model of narration to emphasize how a story has to have a

coherency which includes a specific point to the story and a story has to be "tellable". This of course includes the characteristics of a story that make it interesting. Again, a narrative, if considered a story, must have certain components that make it viable and interesting. Most researchers would argue that a narrative has a beginning and an end. In some cases, narratives are viewed as discrete or discernable units that may be pulled from a layered story and analyzed (Reissman, 1993; Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2002). I feel that a narrative is the story that an individual wants to tell on any given day. It is the stories that make up a person's views, their life, how they chose to live their life, and how they respond to others.

Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) talk about "narrative beginnings" in the sense that it is something based on the "feelings or interest of the researcher" (p. 25). However it is viewed, narrative can be seen as a life story, lived experience or telling of past events or re-storying (Reissman, 1993; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Regardless of whether it is viewed as a story or lived experience, Mishler (1999) outlines three main elements for narratives. Narratives need to be actions that are socially situated, identify performances, and have a combination of both form and content. Mishler's three elements speak to the essence of a life story. People relate their life experiences to those things that happen in the social realm. In particular, people relate to actions that are "socially situated" requiring some kind of performance on the individual's part, either good or bad. A combination of form and content brings the narrative together as a coherent piece.

Clandinin et al. (2007) echo Mishler (1999) in similar respects. They suggest that there are three common places that need be present and explored at the same time in order to consider a story part of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. These

commonplaces can easily be applied to the lives of classroom teachers. Temporality refers to the fact that people and the things that happen (events) are always in a state of transition. Life is constantly changing for teachers personally, as well in the classroom. There are never two days that are the same when working with children. Everything that students experience outside of the classroom comes to school with them each day.

Sociality refers to the participant and researcher (inquirer) relationship. When planning a project working with teachers, there is a unique aspect of the participant/researcher relationship that needs to be considered. When you observe anyone in their work environment they are opening themselves up to criticism and questions. Teachers are under constant pressure to improve student achievement; they may feel that everything they do has been placed under a microscope. A participant/researcher relationship needs to create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration.

The place, as discussed by Clandinin et al. (2007) is the real location where the events take place. This also includes the location where the inquiry between the participant and researcher takes place. I feel that taking time to describe and discuss the event location, as well as the research project location, provides insight and can help give context to the narrative and the analysis that takes place.

Why do people feel the need to tell their stories? Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) discuss individuals' needs to tell their stories in order to understand themselves. This understanding includes making sense of others' actions and understanding our own reactions to others. In their study of narrative used in social work, Reissman and Quinney (2005) link the daily happenings in social work to "human interaction in relationships" which is the "central area of narrative study" (p. 392). In the field of education, narrative

is being used in many instances to tell students' and teachers' stories. The purpose of telling these stories, in my field, is to better understand our practices and to increase our knowledge as teachers.

Reasons for using narrative inquiry

In the field of educational research, narrative inquiry makes sense. Teachers use their life experiences and classroom experiences to shape how they teach and what they teach. "Understanding one's own education is the basis for understanding how to educate others" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988 in Phillion & Connelly, 2004, p. 465). In their comparison of two teachers' interactions with students of diverse backgrounds, Phillion and Connelly (2004) discuss how experiential knowledge impacts teachers' decisions. They talk about experiential knowledge in relation to children, schools, community, and society. I find myself using experiential knowledge in making teaching decisions as well. I base decisions about students' goals and objectives on what I have experienced with former students or within the teaching arena. This attention to personal stories and knowledge is at the heart of narrative inquiry.

When thinking about whether or not to use narrative inquiry, it is necessary to consider how Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss narrative inquiry in terms of a three-dimensional space. The concept of a three-dimensional space is an elaboration on their earlier ideas of three commonplaces that make a story part of narrative inquiry. They use the terms interaction, continuity and situation to create a "metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension and place along a third (Clandinin & Connelly).

Again, they have used ideas that speak to action, relationships and space to outline the elements of a narrative.

Loughran et al. (2003) suggest that "in the teaching profession itself it seems rare for teachers to generally consider what they know about their teaching in ways that might be documented and portrayed through text" (p. 868). That is why I want to engage teachers in the narrative inquiry process – to find out why teachers teach the way they do and the differences in the basic approaches to teaching literacy skills to children who are at different developmental skill levels.

One starting point for a discussion surrounding teacher pedagogy is the concept of a landscape that is outlined by Connelly and Clandinin (1999). It is necessary to know teachers as individuals in their different landscapes. When elaborating on landscapes with the teaching profession, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) talk about teachers' understandings of their lives in terms of stories. People will tell stories time and time again, and with each telling changes are made. It is this ever changing landscape that I wish to explore through narrative inquiry. This is why narrative analysis is a methodology that works well with teachers. It provides a way for teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices in a way that makes sense to the individual.

Narrative voice

When considering the idea of beginning a narrative study, I began to question how the narrator's (researcher's) voice is heard. Clandinin and Connelly (1990) emphasize the importance of hearing both voices, that of the researcher and that of the participant. This is accomplished by creating a collaborative relationship from the very beginning of the narrative process. Eisner (1998) sums up this feeling best when he

states, "I want readers to know that this author is a human being and not some disembodied abstraction who is depersonalized through linguistic conventions that hide his signature" (p. 4). Narrative inquiry is about being heard. It is about creating a "we-reality" (Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004) that brings about an understanding between people.

Reissman (1993) discusses spoken language and its meaning in narrative inquiry. She repeatedly emphasizes the importance of how a narrative is produced through the process of talking and listening to one another. Reissman also provides a five level framework of how researchers represent an individual's experiences. The first level Reissman outlines is attending to experience. As a researcher, you must remember features of a situation, place or environment that can be reflected on for meaning, much like one of Connelly and Clandinin's commonplaces. This is also in agreement with Eisner (1998) who talks about attention to particulars. People telling stories may remember minute details that do not immediately make sense or seem important to a listener/researcher, but it is part of an observation for later recall and meaning. When observing in a classroom setting, there is much to take in: wall hangings, student artwork, assignment notices, and lessons on the board or overhead. A researcher must pay attention to the development of context and meaning. The context of the classroom becomes an ethnographic framework that joins the narrative methodology to provide a complete picture of the teachers' professional landscapes.

The second level Reissman (1993) discusses is the researcher telling about the experience. Others have referred to this as re-storying (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). For me, a narrator's role is to tell the story in a way that helps the listener understand the

meaning of place, people, and situation in order for there to be an understanding of context. There is a larger meaning from the small story. Prasad (2005) emphasizes this as well, as she talks about the need to create an interesting story to tell through the sharing of narratives. Regardless of how a person views what is shared, the experience that is retold can speak to others even if the experience is very different. People want to find a common ground with others in order to understand themselves and make meaning of their own lives. Sometimes the diversity within stories helps create a common ground.

Reissman's (1993) third level of representation is transcribing. She states "transcribing discourse, like photographic reality, is an interpretive practice" (p. 13). It is necessary and a critical part of the narrative inquiry itself to transcribe what has been told by the teller in order to create different meanings. The way in which a narrative is transcribed produces a different meaning, form and context dependent upon the transcriber. Researchers will always bring their own agendas to transcription and interpretation of narrative because it is an ideal and part of learning more about themselves (Prasad, 2005).

The fourth level Reissman (1993) presents is the actual analysis of the narrative. There are many things to consider when analyzing narrative. The researcher makes the decision as to which stories are presented, the themes that emerge, how the narratives are edited and overall what makes it into the written text (Reissman). Esterberg (2002) compares the use of scholarly literary techniques, such as analysis of texts to what happens in narrative analysis. Language is important in what is written and it is necessary to pay attention to language when describing stories. The interpretation and structure decided upon by the researcher/narrator is what gives the text meaning.

The fifth level of representation is the reading experience (Reissman, 1993). It is just what it says. By readers, Reissman means anyone who is reading the text, such as friends who are editing, participants who do member checks or others who come into contact with the text. Everyone will read the text and assess it for a different meaning. As the researcher/narrator, your voice will be heard through the interpretation and process of going through the levels of representation. If there is a question as to the voice heard, Clandinin and Connelly (1990) remind us that there does need to be a dominant voice. I feel that it is the responsibility of the researcher to use his or her voice to give voice to the participant. Heath (1993) makes a point about interpreting meaning in the text we read in books. It is a melding of both the individual's experience with books and life experiences that creates meaning. It is the language that we use that creates meaning that is interpreted by others (Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005). McVee's (2005) study found that "narratives are not the same, even when they are assumed to be "the same style" and illustrates that narratives are dynamic" (p. 895). No matter the language that is used, narrative has different meaning for different people.

For me, it is also important to live with the understanding that the voice of the researcher is the representative of the participant. It is my responsibility to capture the essence of the narrative, as told while knowing that the participants will "go on leading their lives beyond pages of characterization" (Heath, 1993, p. 258). This sense or knowledge that participants have lives that will be lived beyond the boundaries of the study has to be considered. It would be reckless for a researcher to think that the stories they interpret could be the only ones with meaning for a participant.

Collaborative relationships

I have spoken about narrative voice and the importance of making sure that the author, as well as the participant has a voice. Another piece to obtaining a narrative rich with meaning and detail is the development of a working relationship. For Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) part of the working relationship is that the researcher has an understanding that they will be learning from the participant. Therefore, in order to help make a participant feel comfortable, the setting needs to be comfortable as well. People are not going to want to open up and share their personal stories if they do not feel safe. It is the researcher's responsibility to make sure that participants are free to speak.

Along this same line is the need for the researcher to look at how a participant presents a story, through a sequence of events or by finding themes. These timelines or themes help the researcher understand important relationships and events of the participant's life (Reissman, 1993). People want to know that others feel their life is significant and that it has meaning. When making meaning from an individual's life, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) discuss the importance of understanding the part community plays in the life experience. Our lives as humans are defined by how we choose to live and participate in a community. These experiences are all stories with context and meaning. Gee and Green (1998) reference Bahktin (1986) when they assert that "speakers and hearers are not separate entities…rather, each is implicated in the actions (speaking and hearing) of the other" (p. 130). This again speaks to the two-way relationship that is critical in the narrative process.

Although it is traditionally attributed to the feminist theory, creating a reciprocal relationship is one that is necessary in the narrative process (Bloom, 1998; Prasad, 2005). A narrative is a collaborative process in which an individual chooses to share a very

personal piece of their life. It is necessary to reflect on Bray, Lee, Smith and York's (2000) statement that "common to all forms of participatory human inquiry is the tenet of working collaboratively with subjects and avoiding a manipulative, elitist approach to the research enterprise" (p. 3). I feel that in order to engage a participant in a narrative they have to feel that they are an equal partner in the relationship. Participants need to feel that their contributions are taken seriously and that they are not being judged by what they say.

Integrity when using narrative inquiry

As previously discussed, a narrative is the telling of an individual's story. However, there are criticisms associated with the use of qualitative research methods, including narrative inquiry. One problem noted by Brodkey (1987) is telling a story in a manner which is consistent and scholarly. She uses what she refers to as a "negative critique", meaning "any systematic, verbal protest against cultural hegemony" (p. 67). This critique can be in oral or written form. Through the narrative process, the researcher is attempting to make sense of the chaos in order to put the story and meaning in context, which includes the cultural and social context of the individual. The idea of making sure a narrative is done with scholarship is one that leads to a discussion of the features of a qualitative study as outlined by Eisner (1998). The components that Eisner presents are, to me, the foundations for undertaking a narrative inquiry in a manner consistent with scholarship and integrity.

The first feature discussed by Eisner (1998) is that a researcher needs to be "field focused". Eisner is suggesting that the researcher not only study situations, but that there is a study of the objects or artifacts that are intact in the environment. In narrative inquiry,

it is necessary to provide a rich description of the environment, such as a classroom. Knowing how the classroom is arranged, the materials on the walls (or not) and the access the students have to the teacher, are all important in helping the researcher make meaning of the narratives that are told.

A second feature Eisner (1998) discusses is that the researcher is an instrument. The researcher has to be able to really engage in the situation and make sense of what takes place. This "making sense" is on different levels. For example, a classroom of preschool children engage in learning with the teacher in a different way than fifth grade students would. Children with special needs may access the classroom curriculum and materials differently than children who are typically developing. The narrative researcher needs to be aware of these differences in the classroom.

A third feature of qualitative methods is "interpretative character" (Eisner, 1998). In other words, the researcher needs to be able to explain what is taking place. For me, this has two meanings. As a researcher you need to be able to explain what is taking place in the classroom in which you are physically located. Again, this goes to the thick, rich description that needs to be given. However, when interpreting an individual's narrative, you have to be able to understand that "meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal" (Reissman, 1993, p. 15). When interpreting narratives, the context is just as important as the environment.

A fourth feature from Eisner (1998) is the use of expressive language. A researcher is a real person and to participate in a narrative inquiry is to have your own voice. There are considerations, as a researcher, that need to be addressed in order to

make sure that there is strong feel for the voice of the storyteller (participant) and the researcher.

A fifth feature is that researchers must pay attention to particulars (Eisner, 1998). My interpretation of the point Eisner makes is that there needs to be a discussion of how to capture what took place in the story. This capturing of the story may be done through the use of discourse markers or some other strategy used to set off story transitions or changes that may not be readily evident to the researcher. Qualitative researchers need to be able to show how it is they came to their conclusions and what artifacts helped to get to those conclusions.

The final feature discussed by Eisner (1998) is that qualitative researchers need to use coherence, insight, and instrumental utility. In narrative inquiry, coherence is critical. In the role of researcher, you are trying to make meaning from a person's story. To do this you have to have a certain amount of coherence and insight. When interpreting narrative, a meaning may be hidden in a subtle way. You need to be able to tease out what the speaker means. Reissman (1999) says that "all we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly" (p. 15). As a narrative inquirer, I am to present a story and make meaning of it in a way that has integrity. However, no matter how a researcher strives for the perfect balance, there will always be an imperfect world. This interpretation with coherence and insight may also lead to other issues. Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) remind researchers that "the lived experience of doing narrative research all too often means that decisions about methodology are made based on feelings of uneasiness while enmeshed in ethical struggles researchers did not see coming" (p. 102). In narrative analysis, you must be prepared to conduct research in a

manner consistent with accurate data and valid interpretation (Priest et al., 2002). A researcher has to remain ever diligent in carrying out the research with integrity.

Ethnographic framework

In addition to the use of narrative analysis as a way to interpret the data, it is important to consider the ethnographic context of the classroom. The amount of time that I spent in the participants' classrooms allowed me to become familiar with the teachers' worlds. I became someone that the children knew and anticipated seeing each month. It is important to understand that although I intended to be an observer, a fixture it the classroom per se, there was a classroom context to the project. My experiences in the classroom drew me into the worlds of my participants and left me wanting to spend more time with the teachers and children. The classroom context is one that meshed with the participants' narratives to create rich discussion and analyses.

Participant recruitment

Initially, I felt that any two teachers would be able to be project participants. However, after some reflection, I felt it was important to have two teachers with similar years of teaching experience and education. In order to have consistency between classrooms, I chose to work with teachers from a regional Head Start program. I contacted the director of the regional Head Start program which was housed at local private university in a metropolitan area in the Midwest. The director was viewed as a "gatekeeper" in the participant recruitment process. It was necessary to contact Head Start first because I required permission to be in classrooms with children. Although I was not directly working with the children, it was necessary to obtain the director's permission and cooperation. The Head Start director was given copies of a project

abstract and IRB approved materials, including my contact information to review and share with teachers whom she considered to have exemplary classroom practices.

Upon speaking with the Head Start Director and receiving names of teachers who were interested in the project, I was able to contact the teachers via e-mail. Once contact was established via e-mail, I was then able to phone participants to arrange a time to share project information, answer any questions and have consent forms signed. After the initial meeting, a classroom observation was arranged. Each teacher participated in a total of seven interviews formatted around specific questions with additional probe questions (see Appendix A). These interviews were approximately one hour in length. However, additional questions were added to the interview protocols based on classroom observation of DI and classroom activities. Throughout the interviews, notes were kept along with audiotapes. The tape transcription produced approximately 180 double-spaced pages of text which I spent approximately 54 hours transcribing on my own.

In addition to individual interviews, the teacher participants were observed in their classrooms on six occasions. These classroom observations were intended to look for evidence of DI, active learning, and use of DI techniques when integrating literacy skill development in classroom activities. See Appendix B for lists of DI principles and literacy skills/activities to be observed in the classrooms. However, most classroom observations lasted an average of three hours per visit.

Data coding

Narrative analysis was used as the method for data collection. Narrative analysis as a methodology focuses on the lived experiences of individuals. Narrative analysis works for this project, as teachers are individuals who have stories to tell which will

provide information about why and how they teach and interact with children and gather

professional knowledge to enhance their teaching. By interviewing teachers about their

classroom practices, focusing on the use of DI strategies, literacy skill development and

teacher knowledge acquisition, I was able to find themes and patterns related to

answering the research question. I developed a data analysis matrix that can be found in

Appendix C. The purpose of the data analysis matrix was to provide an example of where

the data was found, type of data that I noted, the kind of information that was found and

how it all related to the research question.

Data were collected via interviews, fieldnotes, observations and artifacts, such as

written notes or lesson plans. I viewed data analysis as a continual process using what

Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as "bins". Miles and Huberman's bin analogy refers

to bins as an organizer for written memos, transcripts and other written artifacts that are

placed in bins according to theme, type of data or typology.

As suggested by Bodgan and Biklen (2003) the first step in data analysis was the

development of coding categories. Coding categories allowed for the data to be placed in

bins. The most general coding, as indicated by Bogdan and Biklen is to begin with

setting, topic or subjects. This general coding is meant to place the data into a bigger

picture. General context setting codes for the project included such codes as classroom,

demographics, teacher support, professional development, teacher education or literacy

activities.

The next set of bins used situation codes (Bodgan & Bilken, 2003). Situation

codes tell "how subjects define the setting or particular topics" (p. 162). For example,

situational coding for the project included definitions of teacher role, importance of literacy skills and impact of Head Start requirements on lesson planning.

The next level of bins for coding was that of the perspective held by the subject (Bodgan & Biklen, 2003). This bin included data on shared norms or societal rules that both teachers discussed or what I considered to be Head Start norms. Bodgan and Biklen suggest that perspective coding may come via way of repetitive phrases that have some shared meaning among participants.

Another bin of codes was related to how participants thought about people and things. This gave me an idea of how a participant understood/viewed people outside of their immediate world. For example, the bin in this project included data on how teachers expressed understanding between their roles and literacy development and that of the parent. It showed how teachers view collaborative teaching relationships and teacher knowledge in the classroom.

After initial codes/bins were created, the process for trying out the coding categories began. Bodgan and Biklen (2003) define "units of data" as "fieldnotes, transcripts or documents that fall under the particular topic represented by the coding category" (p. 173). This means that pieces of transcript from interviews were coded according to category and then divided into bins. For example, I used a coding category of active learning activities when coding fieldnotes of classroom observations. These notes and a memo were then placed in the bin for this category.

When reading various researchers regarding coding, I felt that is was important to remember to keep coding manageable and limited. It was also necessary to remember that a coding system could be modified. Coding categories did overlap. For example, flexible

classroom scheduling overlapped with difficult behaviors. This overlap occurred because classroom scheduling was often tied to the current behaviors of the students. Once the categories were narrowed, the various bins of data were organized into meaningful themes. The themes were organized to create meanings that were transferred into text showing how an individual's life experiences impacted their use of DI in the classroom, as well as implementing literacy skill development in the classroom. The themes were also used to explain how each participant's narrative was linked to their teaching practices. Creswell (2007) breaks the data analysis process down into the following steps; data managing, reading/memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting and representing. My use of bins fit into the data management step. Reading and memoing took place as part of the coding process. I used description as the step in which I put words to how a participant shared a story. The next step, classification, took place as I looked for themes that reoccurred throughout the data. Interpreting happened as I examined the themes from the data and decided how they made sense with the broader picture or story. The final step was representing the data collection process, findings and participants' narratives.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was documented in a variety of ways throughout the project. Participants were asked to read transcripts for accuracy and additional input. Member checks with the participants took place midway through the project and at the end of the project. In addition to participant member checks, members of my Program of Study Committee were asked to read written information, such as selections of transcripts, and discussions took place regarding emerging themes and data analyses processes. Committee members provided organizing thoughts and critical reflections of the project.

Throughout the data analysis process, it was necessary for me to reflect on my role as a researcher. I accomplished this via memos and fieldnotes. It was my responsibility to be a voice for the participants while maintaining a voice of my own. A researcher has to be aware of any personal biases that influence the research process and how it impacts the project. For me, my bias was reflected in how I viewed classroom management and implementation of literacy activities. I had been a preschool teacher for three and four year olds while completing my graduate work. In addition, my on-going work in preschool classrooms with children with special needs made it difficult to sometimes separate myself from what was taking place between teachers and children, such as challenging behaviors. Through journaling I was able to note my biases and focus on the classrooms and teacher participants.

Overall, narrative analysis proved to be an appropriate methodology for the project. Teacher participants felt comfortable with telling their stories from both their personal and professional landscapes. The literature review provided a framework for the classroom observations as well as the interview protocols. In addition, by looking at the data in a manner that focused on differentiated instruction and literacy skill development separately, but with an overarching question of teacher knowledge acquisition, I was able to elicit rich narratives that spoke to the challenges faced by early educators in the preschool classroom.

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CHAPTER 2

Differentiation of Instruction in the Preschool Classroom

A paper to be submitted to *The Qualitative Report*

Susan A. Brennan

Abstract

Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching that focuses on personalizing instruction in order to address the diverse learning needs of all students in the classroom. The current study used narrative analysis to explore how Head Start teachers differentiate instruction in the preschool classroom. Although the Head Start teachers were differentiating instruction in the classroom, they were not able to discuss changes in content, process and product with the same vocabulary as teachers of older students. In addition, the challenges of working with children from low socioeconomic backgrounds in an environment where teachers did not feel supported impacted how teachers approached instruction.

Introduction

Children in a group are at different skill levels and make progress or learn new skills at different rates. Teachers need to be aware of child differences and determine how best to meet the learning needs of all students. However, early childhood educators are not always aware of accommodations that can be made to assist children in their classrooms. Differentiated instruction (DI) is one approach to addressing the learning needs of all children a classroom or a group. Through DI, teachers are able to create classroom environments that are respectful, welcoming and safe for learning (Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers utilizing the DI approach acknowledge every child where they are in the

learning process, accept differences and figure out how to work with each child's needs. DI is focused on helping students learn in a manner that they can understand and in a context that is real.

O'Brien and Guiney (2001) look at the principles of DI in a different manner. They emphasize the importance of quality education as a right for all children, that learning is about a relationship and that every child and teacher can learn. If this is the case, then DI should be seen in every classroom. However, DI is not a curriculum or assessment package. It is not about using traditional classroom instruction and making children fit their learning style to the teacher. DI is "a way of thinking about teaching and learning that can be translated into classroom practice in many different ways "(Blaz, 2006, p. 9).

Blaz (2006) emphasizes five components of DI: content, process, product, classroom and teacher. The content is the subject matter needing to be learned. The process is how the teacher goes about instruction. For example, it could be whole group instruction, collaborative learning groups or individual instruction. The product is what the students produce to demonstrate their learning. The classroom is where learning can take place, but the emphasis is on the overall environment. Finally, the teacher is the instructor. The teacher is the person who leads the students through activities to learning.

The key principles of Differentiated Instruction (DI) are outlined by Tomlinson (1999). The principles that Tomlinson discusses focus on children, teacher behaviors, and classrooms. To be focused on children, a teacher should understand and build on student differences and focus on each student and their growth. Teachers in the DI classroom should be clear about the most important pieces of the subject; not separate assessment

and instruction; and focus on content, process, and product. The DI classroom has to be flexible.

However, early childhood educators may not be familiar with the principles of DI. Traditionally, DI has been focused on school-aged children, especially those in mixed ability classrooms. The literature is scarce to non-existent when looking for how DI is applied to all children rather than those children who require special education services. How do teachers gather knowledge to be able to provide differentiated instruction?

This paper will review the literature specific to differentiated instruction and teacher knowledge acquisition. The intended audience for this paper is early childhood educators and other professionals working with young children. The results of the project will be meaningful to research participants as a self-reflective professional development strategy. Additionally, results from the project are intended to inform early childhood professionals about differentiated instruction and the ways in which content, process and product can be used to address the needs of all children. Through the interview process, participants shared narratives that demonstrated how they implemented teaching strategies that met the needs of learners in their classrooms.

I will provide a rationale for using narrative analysis as a method for collecting and analyzing data. Through the use of narrative analysis this study will address the following questions: 1) How do teachers differentiate instruction in the preschool classroom? 2) How do teachers acquire knowledge?

Literature Review

Classroom Environment

One factor in the implementation of differentiated instruction (DI) is classroom environment. Teachers need to recognize and accept that children all have something in common and that sameness is the place to start (O'Brien & Guiney, 2001). The classroom has to be a place where every child feels valued, respected and safe (Muijis et al, 2005; Tomlinson, 2006). Teachers encourage interactions between children in a manner that facilitates respectful partnerships, but not in a pushy way that forces children to be friends (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

In addition to a classroom environment of respect and value, there also needs to be a feeling of inclusion. A teacher sets the classroom atmosphere; teachers consciously make decisions about how to arrange rooms, structure learning areas, create rules and encourage spirit. It is placed upon the teacher to build a "community of learners who care for and support one another" (Gregory & Chapman, 2006, p. 17).

Early education classrooms are designed to provide children with a variety of experiences. Structure in early education classrooms is often focused on meeting requirements as outlined by state or national guidelines. Typically structured classrooms include areas such as; reading, dramatic play, fine and gross motor. This structure allows for teaching different kinds of learners. For example, center time activities allow children to work in small groups or individually with the teacher if additional assistance is needed. Areas such as large/small motor, writing, reading, role play and housekeeping provide children with multiple ways to gather knowledge in a play setting that makes it seem less

like "school." However, teachers still need to recognize that children learn differently. Some children may need assistance through the DI principle of personalized instruction.

Personalized Instruction

One component of DI is instruction that is personalized to students. The phrase "personalized instruction" may conjure thoughts of a teacher spending hours upon hours with individual students. This is not the case. Personalized instruction is about teachers understanding and accepting a student's abilities, strengths, weaknesses and knowing how to help that student talk about what they need to be able to learn (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Keefe and Jenkins (2000) suggest five elements of personalized instruction: (1) teacher as coach and advisor, (2) constructivist classrooms include collaborative learning, (3) the learning environment is interactive, (4) there is flexibility in schedule and pace, (5) assessment is authentic. These are all elements that should be visible in any early childhood classroom. For example, an early childhood teacher should be flexible in scheduling so that children are able to spend more time at centers they enjoy. A teacher as coach and advisor supports students but also recognizes when it is important to push a little or direct kids to different kinds of activities. Some children will always head to a writing center to color pictures or practice writing/scribbling. However, a teacher as coach will find a way to direct a child to try a new area, such dramatic play, to assist the child in developing better social skills.

For students, DI also incorporates pacing, depth and complexity; learner independence; and structuring to facilitate learning (Blaz, 2006). However, in order to be able to structure learning environments, lessons and activities according to student needs, teachers have to really understand each child's learning profile. A learning profile is

about a child's preferences, cultural influences, learning styles and even gender

(Tomlinson, 1999). How does a teacher develop this understanding of their students?

Assessment is the place to start.

Assessment and differentiated instruction

When considering assessment in the DI classroom, a teacher has to think of

assessment as on-going process (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers

should use pre-assessment data for planning, on-going assessment, tracking of growth,

keeping student profiles, and helping parents understand their child in the learning

process (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Pre-assessments are tools used by teachers to

assess a child's current skills and find areas where they need to develop their skills

further. Early childhood teachers do not always have the time or resources to gather

baseline data about students' skills, but pre-assessment tools need to be used for

planning. Specifically related to literacy skills, teachers may be able to gather information

about a child's literacy skill level by talking with the student and having students

participate in real life, meaningful tasks. For example, children may be asked to count

spoons for snack time or locate their name card to help take attendance. Gregory and

Chapman (2002) suggest use of portfolios to follow student growth. Student portfolios

provide teachers with an opportunity to demonstrate growth through the use of artifacts,

such as art projects, reading comprehension checks and name/letter writing.

Assessment is a tool that teachers can use to change their teaching. Teachers can

offer a variety of activities which may demonstrate a particular skill such as counting out

snacks or napkins or following multi-step instructions. It is with this ongoing assessment

data that teachers can see how students learn, where the student is in learning and make

modifications to the content, process, or product (Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers need to

thoughtfully and purposefully plan how to use assessment data when planning

curriculum. Collecting data can be seen as a poor use of time unless the data are actually

used in a meaningful way. Once pre-assessment has been completed and an on-going

process is in place, teachers can look to developing active learning experiences.

Active learning

      Active learning engages a student in the process of learning so that is creates

meaning. Keefe and Jenkins (2000) assert that "without engagement, much schooling is

meaningless and unproductive" (p. 76). One piece of teacher planning that fits into active

learning is that teachers should plan activities or experiences for children just above their

skill level so that the child is challenged (Gregory & Chapman, 2002).

      McTighe and Brown (2000) suggest that teachers choose big ideas from the

curriculum as well as purposeful active learning activities to give students meaningful

learning experiences. There are also curriculum approaches that can be used to provide

active learning including centers and problem-based learning (Gregory & Chapman,

2002). In the preschool classroom, active learning is seen when children engage with

materials in new and different ways that increase their understanding or knowledge.

Children use sand/water tables to gain science concepts or work with play dough to create

letters and work on fine motor skills. DI is about learning that speaks to each child by

providing multiple learning activities or multiple materials and curriculum that makes

sense. However, DI can only work when teachers are committed to using the approach in

the classroom.

Teacher knowledge

Teachers are the leaders in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for students in the classroom and the learning that takes place. Tomlinson (1999) discusses teachers as leaders but also in the context that "like all effective leaders, she [teacher] attends closely to her followers and involves them thoroughly in the journey" (p. 12). In the lives of children, teachers can make a world of difference. A goal of teachers should be to promote each child's success with the knowledge and skills they have (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 95). The knowledge teachers have and the desire to gather more skills and knowledge speaks to a teaching philosophy of self-reflection. Self-reflection is a part of the construction of professional knowledge.

The ways in which teachers obtain and use knowledge is just as varied as the books children like to read. Teachers go through university programs and come out with a wide range of expectations and bases for instruction. When specifically looking at how teachers teach early literacy skills, Richardson (1991) discusses the notion that how teachers' define literacy is from typical decoding to a "transactional process between a reader and a text within a social context" (p. 562). In other words, some teachers choose traditional methods or more formal methods in which to engage students in literacy activities. On the other hand, some teachers look to more of a Vygotskian approach to literacy development and see the process as a relationship that is developed through social interactions within the environment.

Teachers are also given what Kennedy (2002) refers to as "prescriptions". Prescriptions can be viewed as curriculum guides that may be seen as ever changing. School districts are constantly reviewing their curriculum materials based on state and

federal initiatives. Because of the constant changes, teachers may not be committed to what they are told to use as classroom teaching tools.

Spear-Swerling, Brucker, and Alfano (2005) discuss two components of effective reading instruction: being "knowledgeable about reading-related abilities and reading development" (p. 268). If teachers do not have a base of knowledge about early literacy then it is difficult to expand and encourage additional literacy experiences. Vartuli's (1999) study of teachers' beliefs regarding early childhood educators found that "more knowledge in early childhood education does appear to influence beliefs, attitudes, and practice of teachers" (p. 570).

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) in Phillion and Connelly (2004) discuss how professionals need to understand how they acquire and use knowledge in order to understand how they teach other people. How often do teachers stop to think about their own education in relation to their students' needs? Many times teachers use the "whatever works method" without thought to how it is they developed the knowledge or teaching strategies they use.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) present us with a way of viewing and understanding teacher knowledge. They developed a concept that they refer to as a "landscape". This landscape takes into consideration a teacher's personal and professional experiences/life in hopes of understanding the development of teacher knowledge. The landscape that Connelly and Clandinin discuss is one that is

> narrative constructed: as having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions. We see it as storied. To enter a professional knowledge landscape is to enter a place of story. The landscape is composed of two fundamentally different places, the in-classroom place and the out of classroom place (p. 2).

Teachers develop their knowledge in and out of the classroom environments because learning is not an isolated event. For example, as a teacher, I am able to gain knowledge of the necessity for daily living skills instruction for students with special needs by reading the latest professional journals. However, it is not until I have experienced washing clothes, cooking meals or grocery shopping that I can begin to understand the many skills needed to complete such ordinary daily tasks that I need to teach my students. Teachers bring their incidental or in some cases, accidental knowledge to the classroom.

We know that differentiating instruction among students is important. How do teachers implement DI effectively in the preschool classroom? I will outline how differentiated instruction took place in two Head Start classrooms and what it meant to the teachers to differentiate their instruction in their classroom.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method used to study the intricacies of narrative and the variations that take place within narratives (Brodkey, 1987). It is within qualitative studies that researchers examine "process, meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures" (Creswell, 1994, p. 143). Within this methodology it is important for the researcher to give thought to and discuss the aspects of his/her personal life that affect how and what they research (Creswell). This self-reflection, prior to undertaking a project is necessary in order to understand the possible biases that a researcher brings to any study. When considering a narrative study, this is of particular importance. People trust the researcher with stories about themselves; their families; and the past, present and future experiences they have had and will have throughout their

careers. I feel it is necessary as a researcher to discuss my personal beliefs that may affect the outcome and/or data interpretation of a narrative study.

My background as a white, middle class, educated female from the Midwest has led me to believe in the importance of one's experiences in the development of the individual life. As researchers, we need to find alternate ways of viewing the world so that we can enter into discussions about how we understand what we base our research on, such as theories (Brodkey, 1987). Through narrative inquiry I feel this is something I can do. I can develop an understanding of how teachers choose what they teach and how they teach by listening to what others have to say.

The use of narrative analysis as a research method within the social sciences has become more common (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Gill, 2001). The process of qualitative research is one that involves triangulation of data, including data interpretation checks with the project participants. Leiblich et al. (1998) state that "the use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires, or observations" (p. 9). The rich and unique data that Leiblich et al. allude to is the life stories that are told to researchers in order to make meaning.

Brodkey (1987) suggests that "the specific problem for ethnographers is how to tell the story in ways consistent with both scholarship and negative critique" (p. 70). So why do a narrative inquiry? I agree with Reissman (1993) who proposes that narrative, as a research method has gained more credibility due to the use and reflection on language which is not as simple as once thought. Language, in spoken and written form, has been taken more seriously as part of the research process due to the layers of meaning that

exist. We can never assume what people mean when they speak. Through narrative inquiry, we are able to analyze stories for meaning, tease meaning out of individuals, and make meaning of even the tiniest phrase.

What is narrative? Is it a story? Is it someone sitting around and talking about what happened to them at work today? Reissman (1993) uses Labov's (1972) definition to suggest that a narrative is a story about some event that happened in the past. Some people find themselves telling their stories in multiple places and each time the story may change, but it still has the same main events, persons and happenings. Mishler (2001) utilizes Labov's (1972, 1997) model of narration to emphasize how a story has to have a coherency which includes a specific point to the story and a story has to be "tellable". This of course includes the characteristics of a story that make it interesting. Again, a narrative, if considered a story, must have certain components that make it viable and interesting. Most researchers would argue that a narrative has a beginning and an end. In some cases, narratives are viewed as discrete or discernable units that may be pulled from a layered story and analyzed (Reissman, 1993; Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2001). I feel that a narrative is the story that an individual wants to tell on any given day. It is the stories that make up a person's views, their life, how they chose to live their life, and how they respond to others.

Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) talk about "narrative beginnings" in the sense that it is something based on the "feelings or interest of the researcher" (p. 25). However it is viewed, narrative can be seen as a life story, lived experience or telling of past events or re-storying (Reissman, 1993; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Regardless of whether it is viewed as a story or lived experience, Mishler (1999) outlines three main elements for

narratives. Narratives need to be actions that are socially situated, identify performances, and have a combination of both form and content. Mishler's three elements speak to the essence of a life story. People relate their life experiences to those things that happen in the social realm. In particular, people relate to actions that are "socially situated" requiring some kind of performance on the individual's part, either good or bad. A combination of form and content brings the narrative together as a coherent piece.

Clandinin et al. (2007) echo Mishler (1999) in similar respects. They suggest that there are three common places that need be present and explored at the same time in order to consider a story part of narrative inquiry; temporality, sociality, and place. These commonplaces can easily be applied to the lives of classroom teachers. Temporality refers to the fact that people and the things that happen (events) are always in a state of transition. Life is constantly changing for teachers personally, as well in the classroom. There are never two days that are the same when working with children. Everything that students experience outside of the classroom comes to school with them each day.

Sociality refers to the participant and researcher (inquirer) relationship. When planning a project working with teachers, there is a unique aspect of the participant/researcher relationship that needs to be considered. When you observe anyone in their work environment they are opening themselves up to criticism and questions. Teachers are under constant pressure to improve student achievement; they may feel that everything they do has been placed under a microscope. A participant/researcher relationship needs to create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration.

The place, as discussed by Clandinin et al. (2007) is the real location where the events take place. This also includes the location where the inquiry between the

participant and researcher takes place. I feel that taking time to describe and discuss the event location, as well as the research project location, provides insight and can help give context to the narrative and the analysis that takes place.

Why do people feel the need to tell their stories? Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) discuss individuals' needs to tell their stories in order to understand themselves. This understanding includes making sense of others' actions and understanding our own reaction to others. In their study of narrative used in social work, Reissman and Quinney (2005) link the daily happenings in social work to "human interaction in relationships" which is the "central area of narrative study" (p. 392). In the field of education, narrative is being used in many instances to tell students' and teachers' stories. The purpose of telling these stories, in my field, is to better understand our practices and to increase our knowledge as teachers.

Role of the Researcher

I engaged in self-reflection throughout the data collection and analyses in order to note additional questions, personal bias and thought processes. It was difficult not to make judgments based on once a month classroom observations. By this, I mean that although there was consistency in what happened in the two classrooms over the seven month period, there was always something new to note.

My role was to look for differentiation in student instruction, but also to reflect on my observations and questions in order to pursue a greater understanding of how the participants taught the way in which they chose to teach. Having been a former preschool teacher in private and corporate child care facilities, it was a challenge to separate my

teacher side from my researcher side. However, through journaling and noting my feelings as they emerged, I feel I was able to remain focused on the research question.

Participants

The teachers that were participants in the study were both from the same Head Start agency in a Midwest metropolitan area. The purpose of working with participants from Head Start was for consistency in classroom requirements, such as use of the same curriculum and access to the same professional development opportunities. One classroom was located in a downtown area and had students from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. during the week. The other classroom, located in a suburb, had wrap-around care. This meant that the children had access to the classroom for childcare before and after school. This classroom was open for preschool from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. during the week.

The classroom atmospheres felt different. For example, in the first classroom, there was student work all over the walls and visitors were met by a variety of art projects that hung along the hallway to the classroom. Classroom number two was located in a community center and therefore the teacher was not able to place much student work on the walls outside the classroom. Inside the classroom there was limited wall space, and the areas for large group and small group activities felt cramped. The display of student work was an indicator for the particular teaching style of the participants and their philosophy regarding how a classroom should function.

Procedure

Approval for the research project was first obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University. In both classrooms there was a lead teacher and a teacher associate. The classrooms were licensed for 18 children but on any given day, 12-15

typically arrived at school. Both teachers had earned their bachelors degrees and had been teaching for Head Start on between three and five years.

The participants were contacted after discussions with what I refer to as "gatekeepers" at the Head Start offices in the area. By "gatekeepers," I refer to individuals whose cooperation I required in order to pursue classroom observations and contacts with teachers. I needed the permission of the Head Start regional director before making contact with potential participants. In addition, once approval was given for me to proceed, Head Start gave me leads on which teachers would possibly be willing to participate based on information the office had shared with teachers. Teachers were contacted based on their interest in participating in the project and information was distributed via e-mail to interested individuals. Teachers responded to my e-mail requests and initial meetings were arranged with potential participants to go over the specifics of the project and answer questions. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from each teacher participant as outlined by the requirements of the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University. At one point, there was a delay in the project due to communications between myself and Head Start administration. Only after my initial meetings with teachers was I made aware that I needed to complete a Head Start orientation, background check, and tuberculosis test prior to beginning classroom observations. However, once everything was completed, scheduling of observations began.

I conducted classroom observations and interviews as a primary means for data collection. Classroom observations were arranged with each teacher according to their classroom schedule. Individual interviews were scheduled within one to two weeks after

each observation and were held at the teacher's classroom location. Each interview was scheduled for an hour to respect time constraints placed upon the teachers and their schedules. Observations were conducted once a month from October 2007 through April 2008. During observations, I kept detailed notes of teacher activities as related to a semi-structured observation protocol based on principles of DI and literacy activities. Not only did I note teacher activities, but the changing classroom appearance, level of activities and interaction with students.

When arranging interviews, I first thought that meeting outside of the center site would be beneficial. However, after trying it one time with one participant, it made more sense to meet with the participants in their centers for their convenience. The interviews were audio-taped and I transcribed the tapes after each interview. I felt it was necessary to transcribe the tapes myself as a way to be closer to the data. In addition to approximately 180 pages of double-spaced interview transcripts, I kept field notes and completed classroom observation records during each visit. The interview transcripts were coded at first looking for narratives related to DI. Once these narratives were found, they were coded for their representation of DI principles and emerging themes. When looking at themes that emerged related to the research question, I also reflected on their meaning to the research questions: 1) How do teachers differentiate instruction in the preschool classroom? 2) How do teachers acquire knowledge?

Results and Discussion

I examined how teachers differentiated instruction in the preschool classroom and how the teachers acquired knowledge. I used Tomlinson's (1999) principles of differentiated instruction as an organizer for the themes surrounding differentiated

instruction and teacher knowledge acquisition. I used the narratives that the teachers

shared as examples of how they differentiated instruction. My field notes from classroom

observations were then used as a framework for understanding the classroom context in

relation to the teachers' narratives as themes developed. I have organized the narratives to

explain how DI was demonstrated in the classrooms based on Tomlinson's (1999)

principles of DI. Please note that the teachers' and students' names are pseudonyms.

Amy is the name used for the teacher in classroom one, and Tracy is the name for the

teacher in classroom two.

Student social-emotional well-being

The first principle discussed by Tomlinson is that the teacher is clear about the

most important piece of the subject to be taught. A theme that emerged from my

discussions with both participants was one of deep concern for their students' overall

emotional well-being and social skills needed for success in school. In the following

narrative, we can see how Amy tries to integrate individual needs with learning skills.

Amy states

> "I want them to have everything. I want them so badly to be ready to go to
> kindergarten and make a smooth transition and have academic skills they need to
> know. Everyday we do the ABCs, phonic songs and we're talking all the time. I
> try to do some writing with them a lot and we've got our names everywhere. But
> they've got to have that social interaction too."

In this narrative, Amy demonstrated that she knows the children need daily

exposure to literacy skill development such as print letter recognition, letter sounds and

language development. The space that defined this narrative was the classroom. Every

day, Amy was trying to provide her students with the skills they need to be successful

once they leave her classroom. However, she also mentioned the need for social

interaction. Tracy shared similar concerns about one of her students.

> "I've got several (students) that are going (to kindergarten) and only have one that
> I'm very concerned about. There are a couple that I hope their parents will just
> step up and get more involved because right now the parents are sending the
> message that education is not important."

Tracy's narrative shared concerns about a student going to kindergarten, but also voices

additional concern that parents were not sending a positive message about education. In

addition, when questioned further, Tracy shared information about the limited

collaboration between herself and local school district teachers. She wanted to be clear

about the most important pieces of the curriculum to be taught, but yet Tracy was not

given the opportunity to interact with her students' future teachers unless specifically

requested by a parent or the district.

Student differences

A second principle of differentiated instruction is that the teacher understands student differences and is able to build on those differences (Tomlinson, 1999). Throughout the year, Tracy struggled with a class in which many children had academic and emotional needs. During an observation in the spring, I watched as Tracy had to work one to one with a student, who I will refer to as Parker, who had challenging behaviors. After the situation de-escalated and Tracy was able to return to the rest of the class, she shared that Parker had cried and she had cried with him. Tracy shared that she was emotionally drained and just felt like she could not do the job anymore. The whole situation was about one student's needs. Tracy had been trying to work with Parker to build his social and conflict resolution skills. However, after spending nine months on the same skill building, Tracy was exhausted.

The same kind of differentiation and skill development took place in Amy's room in a different way. During several observations, I noted that Amy spent "center time" going throughout the room and working with individual students for a few minutes at a time. For example, Amy stopped to assist a child with an alphabet puzzle while emphasizing letter sounds, played a number game with a pair of students who were more advanced, and helped a child write his name in the writing center. All of these brief teaching moments happened in between diffusing student conflicts.

Assessment and instruction

Tomlinson's (1999) third principle of differentiation is that there is no separation between assessment and instruction. The Head Start that both teachers worked for required that they use the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (Dodge,

Colker & Heroman, 2001). Each teacher had very definite feelings about using the

curriculum in their classroom and the comfort level each had in implementing the

curriculum. Tracy integrated her weekly themes into the Creative Curriculum format.

When specifically asking about how it all worked together, Tracy provided this example:

> "Usually our small group activity and assessment are basically the same thing
> because I'm doing Creative Curriculum number whatever and we'll show them
> (the students) a little and then we'll do it and we'll try to bump them up to the
> next level and see if they can do it. We'll come back and do it again and just say
> what can you do on your own? We have them show us and then we write it down
> right then and we see where we're at. I'd say every time we've done something
> like that, they move up a little bit. If we see a kid that's constantly stuck, they
> need more one on one time or there's something else going on because they just
> pick up so quickly."

Tracy was able to differentiate the instruction in order to make sure that

individual students understand a concept. When given the opportunity to think about how

she uses assessment and instruction, Tracy was able to share how she noted student

progress through use of the Creative Curriculum Developmental Curriculum (Dodge, et

al., 2001) assessment. It was a somewhat of a surprise for Tracy to think back and see

how the students had progressed. Tracy shared on multiple occasions that she often

questioned the progress her students made in academics due to the time spent on behavior

issues. Tracy was able to reflect through sharing her story and know that her students

made progress.

Amy expressed more concern about her ability to use the Creative Curriculum

(Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2002) assessment information in planning for her students:

> "We use the Creative Curriculum. I like that we're taking observations and then
> planning what needs to happen next from those observations. I'm not really very
> good at taking these observations, so I just try to keep…my thing is to know just
> kind of where everybody's at."

Amy's demeanor during the discussion about assessment led me to question why she felt so unsure of herself in this particular area. Amy shared that she did not feel that she had received adequate training in the required curriculum and that it was overwhelming to make sure to gather all of the student information. This is a feeling that is common among teachers, especially when asked to take on a new curriculum. Amy did not feel that she received adequate support from Head Start in their curriculum choice and had limited work time to be able to carry out the integration of assessment and instructional planning as required. As I continued to reflect on Amy's statements about her feelings of inadequacy and insecurity in using the prescribed curriculum, it gave me a sense of loss. By this I mean that I was saddened by the fact that a bright, creative teacher was not receiving enough feedback to know that she was doing a good job in the classroom. How would this be reconciled with everything else taking place in Amy's classroom?

Content, process and product

Tomlinson's (1999) fourth principle states that the teacher focuses on content, process and product and how to adjust them. When asked a question related to how the teachers focused on content, process and product, it was difficult for the participants to answer. Tracy had this to offer when discussing content:

> "We have an ELL student so we can plan activities that everybody can do. Every week we've been doing three vocabulary words. I ask them to tell me what those things are in Spanish and we're telling all the kids what they are in Spanish and then we're teaching Luis what they are in English. We would have learned some Spanish words but we wouldn't have done it that way if we had not had this student, so it's a way that we're changing the content and I think everybody ends up benefiting from it in the end."

Tracy was able to provide a vivid narrative of an activity that was intended for one student, but benefited all of the students in the class. This example demonstrates that in using DI strategies, all students were able to make gains and learn something new. However, what Tracy goes on to discuss later in the interview were all of the steps it took to be able to get assistance to plan activities for Luis. Yes, DI is intended to benefit all students, but there is a cost associated with this type of instruction as well – teacher collaboration and planning time. In order to implement DI in a classroom, it takes thoughtful planning and a thorough understanding of instructional outcomes.

Teacher-student respect

The fifth principle of differentiated instruction is that the work the students participate in is respected (Tomlinson, 1999). Throughout my monthly visits to Amy's classroom, I noted that the presence of the children's work changed each time. In addition to displaying students' work when participating in theme-based activities, Amy also gave the children their own spot in the classroom to display work of their choice:

> Amy: "Everybody has their own little name spot."
> Researcher: "Yes and they were putting their things up."
> Amy: "If they want to. At the beginning of the year I would steal certain things or if they had two of something, I would take it and stick it up just to get it kind of going. Do you want to put it up on the wall by your name? Oooh, I want to put mine up on the wall."
> Researcher: "It gives them a chance to show off what they think they want to keep."
> Amy: "Yes and they have their own little spot."

This exchange demonstrates how Amy not only respected the children's work but tried to instill in them a pride for their work. The classroom space was one of safety and encouragement. Amy's goal was to instill in the students a pride of workmanship and boost self-esteem. Throughout my observations I noted that the children's own work

spots did change throughout the year and children were eager to show me their latest projects.

In contrast to the display of student work in Amy's room, there was very little display of student work in Tracy's classroom. This was due in part to the lack of space in Tracy's room. During a typical observation, I noted that the student work on the cabinets in Tracy's classroom may or may not have changed. Student work hung from the ceiling at various times during the year, but not always.

During an informal conversation with Tracy when in the classroom, she commented that she did not feel that it was a good thing to have too many things up around the room. She felt it could be a distracter to the children, especially when she had students who had difficulty staying on task. So rather than an outward display of student work Tracy chose to individualize the respect of student work. For example, Tracy would frequently take digital photos of the students' work, such as a block project or artwork the students felt were outstanding. These pictures were then used to make books for the students to look at when in the reading center.

Collaborative partnerships

The sixth principle of differentiated instruction is teachers and students are collaborative partners in learning (Tomlinson, 1999). While in both classrooms, I saw numerous examples of collaboration between teachers and students. Amy gave an example based on my observation of a peanut butter and jelly recipe I saw hanging on the wall in her classroom. She gave details on how the class made their peanut butter and jelly sandwiches:

"We talked about how we could do it and then they had to follow the directions to do all the steps to make their own peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Then they could eat them of course."

I questioned Amy more as to similar sorts of activities. She responded that, "We've done pizza and written out the recipes. We made pumpkin pie and apple sauce. We actually made the applesauce and what we do first, second, and third."

Amy's cooking activities gave her and the students a way to be collaborators on a project. The students were excited about the final product they created because it was tangible. It was food and food can be eaten. Amy's use of cooking in the classroom made me question Tracy's use of such activities as a way for collaboration between teacher and students. Tracy had specific concerns regarding the Head Start food policies and felt that the work involved to create food activities was not worth the output of time and energy. However, Tracy did use collaboration with students on problem solving activities such as a teddy bear hunt. After I observed the teddy bear hunt activity, I spoke with Tracy informally about her planning and the event. She was clear about the goal of the activity and the strategies she used to make the students collaborators in the process. The strategies she used included breaking them into two groups for more one-to-one teacher time, incorporating student suggestions on how the "hunt" should take place (where to go next) and providing an alternate way for students who did not have an actual teddy bear to participate in the activity (students colored paper bears). During my observation of the bear hunt, I was able to see how Tracy drew the students into the activity and the fun the children had while using their problem solving skills.

Student growth and progress

The seventh principle of differentiated instruction is that the focus of the differentiated classroom is on the student and the student's growth. This was of great concern to both teacher participants. On multiple occasions the teachers expressed their concerns about their students' readiness for school and general skill development levels. Amy expressed this in her comments about her students:

> "I think a lot of times there is such a huge span of skills in this class. Elaine and I were just trying a way we can meet the needs of everybody. At large group it's just not happening for some of them. For a lot of them they're bored because it's over their head or below them. We've got these small groups and we can be challenging the ones that need to be challenged. They all need challenge, but in a way that is appropriate for them and hopefully building on the school skills."

The needs of Amy's students made it difficult to plan for every situation. She used the assessment information from the Creative Curriculum as best she could, but then relied upon her observations of large and small group activities. Another factor in Amy's planning and implementation of activities was student absence. Throughout my yearlong observations, there was not one day that I was in the classroom, that all of the students were present. The class size which was maxed out at 18 was typically at 13 or 14. This made it more difficult when trying to plan for different skill levels knowing that not everyone would be in attendance.

Tracy expressed the same concern over students' skill levels. Tracy talked about ways in which she felt she was meeting the different needs of students in her classroom:

> "Last year we were weeks ahead of where we are right now (February, 2008). Because we had half girls and half boys, we had lots less behavior concerns. There are so many boys and just the social skills and all that come slower. We've spent so much time on how to play together and how we get a toy we want or how to use the bathroom – we've spent lots of time in the bathroom this year. So when I met with parents at conferences and we were talking about this is where your child is, I kept catching myself thinking we were further along last year. We were

further along last year, but I feel like we've gotten to the point now where the relationships are established, the classroom is running well, the kids run the classroom on their own and we can be there to help out with problems. Now we can do more. I feel like we'll be able to go much faster through the rest of the school year."

Tracy shared how she felt that the class was falling behind, but it was important for the students to have time to establish relationships and routines. It was good that she had another class with which to compare the current students, but being an experienced teacher helped her to realize that each class is different and she had greater needs with the group that she had now. Tracy gave examples of areas that she had to work on with the students, such as joint play activities and bathroom skills. However, after taking the time to build necessary skills, Tracy did feel that the class could progress at a faster rate. So, by addressing individual student needs, Tracy could move the rest of the class along in their skill development.

Classroom environment

The final principle of differentiated instruction is that the differentiated classroom is flexible (Tomlinson, 1999). My observations of both classrooms were full of evidence of flexibility. This flexibility included lesson planning, pace of instruction and attention to individual student needs.

Tracy provided a story about a problem solving instance that occurred in the classroom and spoke to her flexibility within the classroom:

"Last week the kids started building bridges and they were going all out with the bridges. It started with just three of them and now it's spread. All the kids want to come to the block center, kids who never wanted to come to the block center before want to come and make bridges. One reason is that they get to break a rule, because the blocks are supposed to be on the floor and not on the shelves. So they get to break a rule because they came up with the idea and they were so smart so I told them they could break the rule. That's our only boundary. They're supposed to build on the carpet, but could build on the shelves when making a bridge. So

they're trying to make a bridge and they need help but they kept working on it and I didn't want to help them too much. I wanted them to figure it out on their own and I just knew if I didn't step in it was going to blow up. I drew a picture for them and they tried that out for a while and that didn't work. We scooted the shelf a little bit closer and finally they got it to work. They were so excited they wanted pictures, so we took pictures of it. They've all been able to do it on their own and we haven't had to help any other kids. It was really great to see, I almost cried. I was so excited. When we go back and look at the pictures it's just really exciting because I've had these three boys for two years and they wouldn't have done that in the past."

In this narrative Tracy shared that she was willing to alter the classroom rules in order to meet the learning needs of the students. As I observed during my time in Tracy's classroom, she made a conscious effort to step back and allow the children to build their problem solving skills. Tracy utilized the students in the multi-age classroom to teach each other and figure things out together.

Amy met students at their own levels and then spent time with them on a one-to-one basis to address individual skills. The time that Amy spent with individual students is something that I refer to as "drive by" teaching. By "drive by" I mean that Amy would stop and attend to a child's needs such as asking about letter recognition or having a child write their name on a paper. Amy would spend approximately 30 seconds to a minute with a student as she walked through the room during center time activities. For example, when Amy walked by a student working with an alphabet puzzle, she stopped for a brief moment, commented on the letters to the student, and asked a question, such as "What sound does this letter make?"

Reflecting on these brief teaching moments, I questioned why these examples were different than teachable moments. For me, teachable moments are ones that are longer. Teachable moments occur during the regular flow of the classroom in response to an event or occurrence in the classroom and give a teacher time to expand upon a

learning experience. A "drive by" teaching experience is one that is much shorter in length and is intended to keep the flow of the classroom going without a break in child-directed activities. So, when comparing the two teachers' approaches to learning, was one better than the other in implementing differentiated principles? Both teachers met the challenges of the classroom with a different philosophy and life experiences. It is difficult to say if one teacher implemented strategies more completely or consistently than another. It is accurate to say that the teachers reacted to the needs of their students and adjusted their teaching accordingly.

Tomlinson's (1999) principles served as an organizer for teachers' demonstrations of DI in the classroom. However, there was another layer to the narratives that emerged demonstrating the relationship between instruction and teacher knowledge acquisition, especially in the areas of assessment and curriculum. The following is a more in-depth discussion of how the research questions overlapped and the role teacher knowledge acquisition played in understanding instructional practices.

<p align="center">Implications and Conclusion</p>

Addressing individual learning differences

In both classrooms it was obvious that teachers were addressing individual student needs. Maybe not referred to as differentiated instruction, the teachers used phrases familiar in the world of early childhood education, such as activity based learning, student directed activities, and interventions to discuss what went on in the classroom. As previously discussed, Keefe and Jenkins (2002) outlined five components of personalized instruction that are seen in classrooms where DI takes place: 1) teacher as coach and advisor, (2) constructivist classrooms include collaborative learning, (3) the

learning environment is interactive, (4) there is flexibility in schedule and pace, (5) assessment is authentic. Both participants were coaches in the classroom to students in order to facilitate their individual learning. The teachers viewed their classrooms as collaborative environments between teacher and child, as well as places where interactive learning took place every day. As is the case with most preschool classrooms, Tracy and Amy had schedules that were flexible and a pace within the classroom that changed with the needs of the children. Assessment was not always authentic in the sense that specific activities would be arranged for children to complete to check off a box on the assessment form (stacking blocks, making patterns) and did not always occur naturally. However, both teachers knew their students well enough to recognize when a child had made progress in a particular skill area.

In addition to meeting the individual learning needs of students, both teachers discussed their daily struggles to meet the needs of those children who brought emotional, social and behavior needs into the classroom. For example, there were four out of the 18 children in Tracy's classroom that were going through formal mental health counseling. Twenty-two percent of Tracy's students who were between the ages of three to five were already identified as needing assistance with mental health issues. That is not to mention the other children who may have benefited from such service but were not eligible or did not have family support for such service.

Amy reflected on her year in a similar way as Tracy. She felt that there were so many individual student needs in the classroom that it was difficult to make sure every student was getting what they needed. Amy also expressed the same concern about

students with challenging behaviors and need for support to work through the challenging behaviors in the classroom.

In either classroom, teachers were doing what they could to meet the academic needs of the students. However, it was evident that the role of academics in the students' lives took a backseat to their immediate need for structure, safety, comfort and positive adult and child interaction.

Assessment and curriculum in the classroom

Assessment in a classroom that differentiates instruction should be authentic and there should be a seamless relationship between assessment and instruction (Tomlinson, 1999). The issue of bringing assessment and instruction together in the classroom was easy for Tracy and much more difficult for Amy. There are ways to make teachers feel more comfortable with prescribed curricula, such as professional development, mentoring, and co-teaching. However these are topics that would need to be discussed more in-depth at another time. Regardless, the value of using assessment to focus instruction is worthwhile. Both teachers used child development screening tools such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (Squires & Potter, 1999) to obtain basic skill information at the beginning of the school year. The use of even basic tools can provide a jumping off point for further assessment.

Although Tracy created her own system for organizing her student assessment data, she did indicate that it was difficult to find the time and energy to complete the assessments thoroughly. One consistent thought I had throughout my discussions with both teachers was the need for collaboration among Head Start classrooms. I would have liked to have shared what was going in each classroom (activities, strategies, assessment

practices) with each teacher about the other. However, this was not appropriate due to the requirements to keep research data confidential. Strides to encourage teacher sharing and collaboration across classrooms still need to be made.

Content, process and product

Observations from the classrooms and notes about student activities and products allowed me to follow the path for how Amy was able to be flexible within her teaching processes in order to ensure every child had success. The student products in Amy's room varied, but were appropriate when considering the children's ages and levels of skill development. As mentioned, Blaz (2006) discusses how content, process and product relate to the personalized needs of students in the classroom. Although I was able to observe and note changes teachers made to process and products, it was not as evident to the participants. Participants had a difficult time answering questions specifically related to how they chose the content of their instruction and the process that they went through with the students to create an end product. I question if this is in part due to a less structured expectation of student work at the preschool level compared to teachers who work with students in older grades. In preschool it does not usually matter how your snowman looks in your picture, but the emphasis is on the fact that you participated and created an individual picture that uses the skills the child has at the moment.

Both teachers had weekly lesson plans based on skills from the Creative Curriculum (Dodge et al., 2002), but each used different instructional strategies to achieve their goals. Tracy reported using assessment data to drive her instruction; however, it was difficult to see more than a minimal tie between the weekly lesson plans and what had been stated as individual student needs.

Lessons focused on pinpointing skills yet to be mastered by all students in the classroom. The teachers used the skill development lessons as content. The product in the classrooms was different dependent upon the activity.

Differentiation of instruction is intended to focus on meeting the needs of all learners in the classroom through an approach that creates a multi-faceted classroom. In this study, preschool teachers demonstrated their ability to differentiate instruction, even if they were not familiar with the specific principles of DI or processes that go into differentiating instruction in the classroom as outlined by educators of school-age children. The classroom observations proved critical in the documentation process as the participants were not always able to give voice to what actually took place in the classroom in the language used with differentiation of instruction.

The study focused on two teachers' classrooms, but the implications for agency policy and federal Head Start requirements give a glimpse into the rigors that Head Start teachers face when working with young children facing more than academic challenges. It was clear that both participants spent exhaustive amounts of time working with the social, emotional and behavioral needs of the students in their classrooms. It was also clear that these challenges took their toll on the participants as well in ways that were emotional and physical. In order for teachers to address individual learning needs they had to take care of social and emotional needs first.

The need for teacher collaboration was prevalent in my discussions with participants. Agencies such as Head Start need to provide supports for teachers in expanding their knowledge through teacher networking opportunities and collaborative teaching environments. Teachers continue to need support from their administrators in

dealing with the demands of challenging student behaviors in Head Start programs. In addition, there needs to be a common language among early childhood educators and elementary school educators. The participants had a difficult time articulating their craft in a way that could be understood by educators not familiar with three to five year olds.

Thoughtful collaboration among teachers is needed to provide a network of support to teachers and staff. Both participants had feelings of being overwhelmed with the responsibility of meeting all of the needs of the students in their classrooms. They each found varying levels of support and in Amy's case, I felt there were resources she could have been using for assistance, but did not know about them or how to access such assistance. More structured opportunities for teacher collaboration or co-teaching would have alleviated some concerns.

The participants in the study worked hard to meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms. They varied their lesson plans, integrated skill development goals from the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (Dodge et al., 2001) and provided activities for the varied skill levels in the classroom. Additional professional development focusing on meeting the challenges in the Head Start classroom would have been of benefit to both participants.

Teachers need to be given opportunities to advance their knowledge acquisition through collaboration and administrative support. Differentiation of instruction is not a new concept. However, what DI means to early childhood educators is something new. Conversations need to continue to bridge the gap between what the expectations are in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Only through continued discussions and collaboration will we see changes in educational expectations that will benefit all students.

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 3

Literacy Skill Development in the Preschool Classroom

A paper submitted to the *Journal of Early Childhood Research*

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Abstract

Literacy skill development has been undertaken by early childhood educators as a priority skill for instruction in the classroom. Head Start teachers work within a national framework that emphasizes the importance of early literacy skills. Through a qualitative research approach, this study examined the ways in which two Head Start teachers implemented and promoted literacy skill development in their classrooms. Classroom observations and interviews demonstrated teachers were carrying out activities to encourage literacy skill development. However, challenges with behavior management, lack of support and self-efficacy were overarching themes that influenced the quality, quantity and creativity of literacy skill instruction in the classroom.

Introduction

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) define emergent literacy to include the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are part of the developmental process required prior to formal reading and writing. Emergent literacy activities include reading aloud, singing, and writing or scribbling. Early childhood educators may be some of the first adults to introduce to young children formal literacy experiences. Children participate in preschool programs in childcare centers, churches, and local schools. Children may also experience literacy activities embedded in daily activities, such as discussing the days of the week, reading the helper chart, or engaging in large group reading.

However, once teachers have left their pre-service training programs, how do they gain additional knowledge about such things as research or teaching strategies? One way teachers share knowledge is through conversation. Teachers share resources among themselves, as well as experiences that have shaped the way they teach. Teachers, like most people, like to tell stories.

Stories have been used throughout different cultures to transmit knowledge, wisdom and morals. Every person interprets their own life differently and therefore they present stories based on their own interpretation. "Through telling stories, people can express their identity, relationships, and emotions" (Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2001, p. 38). In the teaching profession, students' learning is directly impacted by the lived experiences of teachers. Teachers teach what they know and in a manner consistent with what they have experienced.

Narrative inquiry is about storytelling. It is taking the lived experiences of a person and making those experiences have meaning. Through the use of narrative inquiry methodology, my goal is to make meaning of how and why teachers teach early literacy skills the way they do in the classroom. This paper will review the literature specific to early literacy and teacher knowledge acquisition. The results of the project will be meaningful to research participants as a way to reflect on their teaching practices.

Results from the project are intended to inform early childhood professionals about literacy skill development activities taking place preschool classrooms and how teacher knowledge acquisition impacts what is taught. Through the use of interviews, self-reflection and narrative analysis, this study will address the following questions: 1)

How do teachers implement activities to advance literacy skill development in the preschool classroom? 2) How do teachers acquire knowledge?

Literature Review

Literacy Skills

Many skills contribute to early literacy development. One of the first pre-literacy skills that children engage in as infants is communication. Kaderavek and Rabidoux (2004) suggest that reading and writing are not just products of themselves, but are part of communication. Reading and writing are the basic skills needed if children want to be able to have opportunities such as learning about other places and holding jobs. A goal of literacy may be "to improve quality of life, increase social interactions and relatedness, and improve communication in additional functional contexts" (Kaderavek & Rabidoux, p. 242). It is important for all children to understand the concept that text can be used to interact with others (Kaderavek & Rabidoux). Adults are the people who make the first impact on children regarding language development. It is through interactions (conversations) with adults and hearing adult language that children's language development increases (Clay, 1972).

Oral language development

Oral language is an integral part of children's early literacy development. Clay (1972) suggested that children need to have multiple opportunities to try out their language skills. Children babble and make noises that are part of their oral vocabulary. Adults are able to help children by expanding upon what the child says. The joint-interaction activities that a child has with adults and book reading contribute to overall book knowledge and language development.

If we consider that language development is a part of communication and communication is a part of literacy, then literacy skills begin at birth. Morgan (2007) states that "before they are able to say their first words, children build on non-verbal communication they initiate with their caregiver" (p. 106). This is why book reading, singing and playing with children are important for language development. There are many important aspects of language and book reading.

Whitehead (1997) discusses how book reading activities "introduce children to the consciously patterned forms of literature" (p. 108). This includes the patterns of reading left to right, inflection in voice/tone and turning pages. Stahl (2005) states, "When children learn to read, they use what they know about oral language to comprehend written language. The skills that children ordinarily use in oral language need minimal instruction to transfer to written language" (p. 55). This is reiterated in Honig's (2001) work in which he describes the tools that children need to understand written English. The basic tools that children need include being able to use language to make different words and sounds, visually recognize letters, and knowing how to apply the information they know about language (written and oral) and to decoding and learning new words they find when reading. Children's use of oral language contributes to phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is an area of skill development that children need to have for successful development of emergent literacy skills (Morris, Bloodworth, Lomax & Perney, 2003; McGhee, 2003). Phonological awareness is children's knowledge of letter sounds. Children may engage in such activities as rhyming and singing to help

practice/produce letter sounds. Phonological activities may include blending, segmenting, word games, and word play (Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003).

Hawken, Johnston and McDowell's (2005) study of early literacy practices among Head Start teachers found that teachers implemented phonological awareness activities less than other activities, such as alphabet knowledge. In addition, Head Start teachers used few syllable and segmenting activities in the classroom to develop children's literacy skills. This would indicate that teachers should be conscious of the activities they are providing to children in the classroom. For example, when engaging in a shared reading activity with a child, the teacher may need to focus on sounding out unknown words and helping a child blend sounds together in order to develop new vocabulary. When a child is able to produce letter sounds, they may be more interested in "reading" the print that is around them in their environment. This awareness of print in turn leads to increased recognition of letters and words.

Print recognition

Print/letter recognition is tied to a child's language development. Morris et al. (2003) suggest that understanding language print relationships is important in word recognition. Again, there is a connection between language and print. Teachers need to be aware of this connection in order to help promote children's relationships with print. Once children begin to develop an understanding that print tells a story, they can begin to understand that written language can be used in many different ways (Owocki, 1999). Teachers can help children find the various ways that print can be used. For example, children become aware of print in their environments through looking at billboards, signage on store fronts, and words on doors (in/out/exit). McGhee (2003) suggests that

children need to have a conscious awareness that print is different than other things in the environment.

When considering print concepts, Clay (1972) suggests that children learn the following concepts: print can be turned into speech; there is a message recorded with the letters in a print statement; and when there are pictures with words, the picture is a rough guide to the message. Children begin with pictures and from the pictures they begin to understand that a story develops. This skill is part of beginning reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is part of an emergent literacy program. Reading comprehension is part of a balanced reading program, in addition to other emergent literacy skill activities, such as print awareness, phonological awareness, and letter recognition (Morrow, Gambrell & Pressley, 2003). When considering emergent literacy skill development for children under age five, reading comprehension instruction is not a formalized activity. Adults can introduce young children to reading comprehension by "reflecting on the story, asking open-ended questions, inviting discussions of the meanings of words and supporting children's curiosity about print" (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004, p. 56). Teachers can utilize discussion about stories to encourage young children to think about characters, what the story means, make predictions about what will happen and make links to the child's personal experiences (Honig, 2001).

Much of reading comprehension instruction can be accomplished through reading aloud activities in the classroom. Through reading aloud activities, children begin developing an understanding of the parts of a story. Children learn that a story has a

beginning, middle and end which is a "key skill for future reading and comprehension of text" (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004, p. 55).

Even more basic, very young children make use of pictures to develop story meanings. Children will re-tell stories based on what they see. Makin and Whitehead (2004) suggest that adults encourage this story developing activity by asking the child questions about the story and discussing what is taking place in the pictures. However, when implementing such activities and discussion with young children, adults need to keep in mind the child's vocabulary level.

Children need to know the meaning of words if they are to comprehend what is going on in a story (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004). This would tell us that children need multiple experiences to hear words being read aloud and to be able to ask questions about what is meant. Although reading aloud is a factor in building a child's vocabulary base which may lead to better comprehension skills, Pressley and Hilden (2006) remind us that "massive reading is an essential part of elementary comprehension development, even though it is not sufficient to develop skilled comprehension" (p. 61).

Teachers need to recognize reading aloud and shared book experiences as important pieces in early comprehension skill development. Children need to be given opportunities to discuss and retell stories, as well as practice new words. Children play with print and letters/letter sounds which transfers to experimentation with writing. Engaging in activities such as drawing and scribbling are a part of emergent literacy (Kaderavek & Rabidoux, 2004).

Writing skill development

Writing of any kind should be encouraged for young children (Morris et al., 2003). Children engage in scribbling with crayons or anything that looks like a writing utensil. Teachers/adults need to model writing for children. Children observe adults writing and begin to mimic writing (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004). Children will watch a parent write and try to grab the pen/pencil and write by themselves.

Writing is another activity that comes naturally and is seen by children in different environments. Children see writing take place at home, school, and during daily tasks, such as going to the bank or paying for groceries. "Children's scribbles are important. They are the children's first attempts at using writing tools to make marks" (Makin & Whitehead, 2004, p. 9).

Throughout the literature there are three main areas reported as important skills to develop for emergent literacy: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness (McGhee, 2003; Morris et al, 2003; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Reading comprehension is another skill area that needs to be developed through thoughtfully planned activities, including story discussion, asking questions and giving children opportunities to re-tell stories. But how do we know if a preschool program is providing the appropriate kinds of early literacy experiences for children? How do teachers acquire knowledge to implement new and creative ideas into classroom instruction?

Teacher knowledge

Teachers are the leaders in the classroom. Teachers are responsible for students in the classroom and the learning that takes place. Tomlinson (1999) discusses teachers as leaders but also in the context that "like all effective leaders, she [teacher] attends closely

to her followers and involves them thoroughly in the journey" (p. 12). In the lives of children, teachers can make a world of difference. A goal of teachers should be to promote each child's success with the knowledge and skills they have (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 95). The knowledge teachers have and the desire to gather more skills and knowledge speaks to a teaching philosophy of self-reflection. Self-reflection is a part of the construction of professional knowledge.

The ways in which teachers obtain and use knowledge is just as varied as the books children like to read. Teachers go through university programs and come out with a wide range of expectations and basis for instruction. When specifically looking at how teachers teach early literacy skills, Richardson (1991) discusses the notion that how teachers' define literacy is from typical decoding to a "transactional process between a reader and a text within a social context" (p. 562). In other words, some teachers choose traditional methods or more formal methods in which to engage students in literacy activities. On the other hand, some teachers look to more of a Vygotskian approach to literacy development and see the process as a relationship that is developed through social interactions within the environment.

Teachers are also given what Kennedy (2002) refers to as "prescriptions". Prescriptions can be viewed as curriculum guides that may be seen as ever changing. School districts are constantly reviewing their curriculum materials based on state and federal initiatives. Because of the constant changes, teachers may not be committed to what they are told to use as classroom teaching tools.

Spear-Swerling, Brucker, and Alfano (2005) discuss two components of effective reading instruction: being "knowledgeable about reading-related abilities and reading

development" (p. 268). If teachers do not have a base of knowledge about early literacy then it is difficult to expand and encourage additional literacy experiences. Vartuli's (1999) study of teacher beliefs regarding early childhood educators found that "more knowledge in early childhood education does appear to influence beliefs, attitudes, and practice of teachers" (p. 570).

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) in Phillion and Connelly (2004) discuss how professionals need to understand how they acquire and use knowledge in order to understand how they teach other people. How often do teachers stop to think about their own education in relation to their students' needs? Many times teachers use the "whatever works method" without thought to how it is they developed the knowledge or teaching strategies they use.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) present us with a way of viewing and understanding teacher knowledge. They developed a concept that they refer to as a "landscape". This landscape takes into consideration a teacher's personal and professional experiences/life in hopes of understanding the development of teacher knowledge. The landscape that Connelly and Clandinin discuss is one that is

> narrative constructed: as having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions. We see it as storied. To enter a professional knowledge landscape is to enter a place of story. The landscape is composed of two fundamentally different places, the in-classroom place and the out of classroom place (p. 2).

Teachers develop their knowledge in and out of the classroom environments because learning is not an isolated event. For example, as a teacher, I am able to gain knowledge of the necessity for daily living skills instruction for students with special needs by reading the latest professional journals. However, it is not until I have

experienced washing clothes, cooking meals or grocery shopping that I can begin to understand the many skills needed to complete such ordinary daily tasks that I need to teach my students. Teachers bring their incidental, or in some cases accidental, knowledge to the classroom.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method used to study the intricacies of narrative and the variations that take place within narratives (Brodkey, 1987). It is within qualitative studies that researchers examine "process, meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures" (Creswell, 1994, p. 143). Within this methodology it is important for the researcher to give thought to and discuss the aspects of his/her personal life that affect how and what they research (Creswell). This self-reflection, prior to undertaking a project is necessary in order to understand the possible biases that a researcher brings to any study. When considering a narrative study, this is of particular importance. People trust the researcher with stories about themselves; their families; and the past, present and future experiences they have had and will have in their lives.

The use of narrative analysis as a research method within the social sciences has become more common (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Gill, 2001). The process of qualitative research is one that involves triangulation of data, including data interpretation checks with the project participants. Leiblich et al. (1998) state that "the use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires, or observations" (p. 9). The rich and unique data that Leiblich et al. allude to is the life stories that are told to researchers in order to make meaning.

Brodkey (1987) suggests that "the specific problem for ethnographers is how to tell the story in ways consistent with both scholarship and negative critique" (p. 70). So why do a narrative inquiry? I agree with Reissman (1993) who proposes that narrative, as a research method has gained more credibility due to the use and reflection on language which is not as simple as once thought. Language, in spoken and written form, has been taken more seriously as part of the research process due to the layers of meaning that exist. We can never assume what people mean when they speak. Through narrative inquiry, we are able to analyze stories for meaning, tease meaning out of individuals, and make meaning of even the tiniest phrase.

What is narrative? Is it a story? Is it someone sitting around and talking about what happened to them at work today? Reissman (1993) uses Labov's (1972) definition to suggest that a narrative is a story about some event that happened in the past. Some people find themselves telling their stories in multiple places and each time the story may change, but it still has the same main events, persons and happenings. Mishler (2001) utilizes Labov's (1972, 1997) model of narration to emphasize how a story has to have a coherency which includes a specific point to the story and a story has to be "tellable". This of course includes the characteristics of a story that make it interesting. Again, a narrative, if considered a story, must have certain components that make it viable and interesting. Most researchers would argue that a narrative has a beginning and an end. In some cases, narratives are viewed as discrete or discernable units that may be pulled from a layered story and analyzed (Reissman, 1993; Priest et al., 2002). I feel that a narrative is the story that an individual wants to tell on any given day. It is the stories that make up a

person's views, their life, how they chose to live their life, and how they respond to others.

Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) talk about "narrative beginnings" in the sense that it is something based on the "feelings or interest of the researcher" (p. 25). However it is viewed, narrative can be seen as a life story, lived experience or telling of past events or re-storying (Reissman, 1993; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Regardless of whether it is viewed as a story or lived experience, Mishler (1999) outlines three main elements for narratives. Narratives need to be actions that are socially situated, identify performances, and have a combination of both form and content. Mishler's three elements speak to the essence of a life story. People relate their life experiences to those things that happen in the social realm. In particular, people relate to actions that are "socially situated" requiring some kind of performance on the individual's part, either good or bad. A combination of form and content brings the narrative together as a coherent piece.

Clandinin et al. (2007) echo Mishler (1999) in similar respects. They suggest that there are three common places that need be present and explored at the same time in order to consider a story part of narrative inquiry; temporality, sociality, and place. These commonplaces can easily be applied to the lives of classroom teachers. Temporality refers to the fact that people and the things that happen (events) are always in a state of transition. Life is constantly changing for teachers personally, as well in the classroom. There are never two days that are the same when working with children. Everything that students experience outside of the classroom comes to school with them each day.

Sociality refers to the participant and researcher (inquirer) relationship. When planning a project working with teachers, there is a unique aspect of the

participant/researcher relationship that needs to be considered. When you observe anyone in their work environment they are opening themselves up to criticism and questions. Teachers are under constant pressure to improve student achievement; they may feel that everything they do has been placed under a microscope. A participant/researcher relationship needs to create an atmosphere of trust and collaboration.

The place, as discussed by Clandinin et al. (2007) is the real location where the events take place. This also includes the location where the inquiry between the participant and researcher takes place. I feel that taking time to describe and discuss the event location, as well as the research project location, provides insight and can help give context to the narrative and the analysis that takes place.

Why do people feel the need to tell their stories? Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) discuss individuals' needs to tell their stories in order to understand themselves. This understanding includes making sense of others' actions and understanding our own reaction to others. In their study of narrative used in social work, Reissman and Quinney (2005) link the daily happenings in social work to "human interaction in relationships" which is the "central area of narrative study" (p. 392). In the field of education, narrative is being used in many instances to tell students' and teachers' stories. The purpose of telling these stories, education, is to better understand our practices and to increase our knowledge as teachers.

Role of the Researcher

I engaged in self-reflection throughout the data collection and analyses in order to note additional questions, personal bias and thought processes. It was difficult not to make judgments based on once a month classroom observations. By this, I mean that

although there was consistency in what happened in the two classrooms over the seven

month period, there was always something new to note.

My role was to look for demonstration of literacy activities taking place in the

classroom, but also to reflect on my observations and questions in order to pursue a

greater understanding of how the participants taught the way in which they chose to

teach. As a teacher myself, I have very strong feelings about the role of early literacy

activities in the development of young children. It was difficult not to facilitate incidental

learning experiences when observing students on the edge of developing a new skill, but

still needing guidance. Past experiences working with young children made it difficult

not allow personal biases to affect my observations of the teachers' skills. In addition, my

personal experiences as a mother of two young children often made me reflect on what

was going on in the classroom. I questioned what my response would be as a parent to the

activities that took place in the classrooms. Through regular journaling and self-

reflection, I was able to use my experiences as a guide to assist me in understanding the

participants' viewpoints.

Participants

The teachers that participated in the study were both from Head Start classrooms

in a Midwest metropolitan area. The purpose for working with participants from Head

Start was for consistency in classroom requirements, such as use of the same curriculum

and access to the same professional development. Classroom one was located in an urban

area and had students from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. during the week. Classroom two,

located in a suburb, had wrap-around care. This meant that the children had access to the

classroom for childcare before and after school. This classroom was open for preschool from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. during the week.

The classroom atmospheres were different in their feel. For example, in the first classroom, there was student work all over the walls and visitors were met by a variety of art projects that hung along the hallway to the classroom. Classroom number two was located in a community center and therefore was not able to place much student work on the walls outside the classroom. Inside the classroom, there was limited wall space and the area for large group and small group activities felt cramped. The display of student work was an indicator for the particular teaching style of the participants and their philosophy on how a classroom should function.

In both classrooms there was a lead teacher and teacher associate. The classrooms each had 18 children but on any given day, 12-15 typically arrived at school. Both teachers had earned their bachelor degrees and had been teaching for Head Start for three years (classroom one) and five years (classroom two). The real name of participants will not be used in this paper. The teacher for classroom one will be referred to as Amy and the teacher for classroom two will be referred to as Tracy.

Procedure

Approval for the research project was first obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University. The participants were contacted after discussions with what I refer to as "gatekeepers" at the Head Start offices in the area. By "gatekeepers," I refer to individuals whose cooperation was required in order to pursue classroom observations and contacts with teachers. I needed the permission of the Head Start regional director before making contact with potential participants. In addition, once

approval was given for me to proceed, Head Start gave me leads on which teachers would possibly be willing to participate based on information the office had shared with teachers prior to me making initial contacts. Teachers were contacted based on their classroom location and information was distributed via e-mail to interested individuals. Prospective participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from each participant at outlined by requirements of the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University. Teachers responded to my e-mail requests and initial meetings were arranged with potential participants to go over the specifics of the project and answer questions. At one point, there was a delay in the project due to communications between myself and Head Start. Only after my initial meetings with teachers was I made aware that I needed to complete a Head Start orientation, background check, and tuberculosis test prior to beginning classroom observations. However, once everything was completed, scheduling of observations began.

I conducted classroom observations and interviews as a primary means of data collection. Classroom observations were arranged with each teacher according to their classroom schedule. Individual interviews were scheduled within one to two weeks after each observation and were held at the teacher's location. Each interview was scheduled for an hour to respect time constraints placed upon the teachers and their schedules. Observations were conducted once a month from October 2007 through April 2008. During observations, I kept detailed notes of teacher activities as related to a semi-structured observation protocol based on areas of literacy skill development that are

considered critical in early education. Not only did I note teacher activities, but the changing classroom appearance, level of activities and interaction with students.

When arranging interviews, I first thought that meeting outside of the center site would be beneficial. However, after trying it one time with one participant, it seemed more convenient to meet with each participant in her center. The interviews were audio-taped and I transcribed the tapes after each interview. I felt it was necessary to transcribe the tapes myself as a way to be closer to the data. In addition to tape transcripts, I kept field notes and completed classroom observation records during each visit. The interview transcripts were coded at first looking for narratives related to literacy instruction. Once the narrative segments were found, they were coded for varying areas of literacy skill development including phonological awareness, print recognition and writing skills. These narrative segments were then placed into general themes. When looking at themes that emerged related to the research question, I also reflected on their meaning to the research questions: 1) How do teachers teach literacy skill development in the preschool classroom? 2) How do teachers acquire knowledge?

Results and Discussion

Components of early literacy skills were used as an organizer for the themes surrounding the research question. Teacher narratives provided examples of understanding literacy skill development. Information from classroom observations provided support for the strategies used in the classrooms.

Oral language

Oral language skills can be developed through a variety of activities. One of the most visible activities is that of singing songs. Throughout my observations in Amy's

classroom, I saw and heard a great deal of music. Singing was a daily activity that began

during the large group opening. For example, the children would sing alphabet songs as

well as "silly songs" about various things. The songs gave the children a way to practice

words they knew and to learn new words. The children loved the music and movement.

In addition to songs at opening, Amy led the children in song during transition times,

such as cleaning up before lunch. When discussing oral language development with Amy,

she shared a story about one large group activity that had taken place:

> "We talked about J and tried to sound out the different letters. We did
> O as "ah" in frog, stretching it out. We did OG words and broke them
> down…the three letters. We all got into a circle and they had to think of
> an OG word like dog or log. We rolled a ball and they had to roll the
> ball to their friends and say the word. If they needed help, the other kids
> would think of rhyming words."

This story demonstrated Amy's creativity in implementing activities that used various

means to keep the children actively engaged. She used the strategy of rhyming words to

focus on oral language development. Activities such as singing and rhyming were

observed in both classrooms. Singing songs to start the school day was part of the routine

in Amy's classroom. The children anticipated the songs and were able to participate even

if they did not know all of the words.

Print/letter recognition

Print recognition activities in Tracy's room were integrated with writing skill

development. One particular print/letter recognition activity that Tracy discussed was that

of using an alphabet show with the students. She said:

> "Right now we do alphabet show and tell. We give the kids a lot of time to look at
> each letter. We do one letter a week and blow up these inflatable letters. We pass
> it (inflatable letter) around and say its name. They love that part. We've got some
> books that are just all about the letters. We try to hunt for the letter and then we
> do an alphabet show. We tell the kids to bring something from home. I really like

that because it encourages the parents to get involved and we're always trying to get the parents to be more involved."

Tracy's practice of using an "alphabet show" was one that the children really enjoyed and also gave them specific time on individual letters and letter sounds. In addition to the "alphabet shows," the discussion with Tracy revealed themes around letter recognition/print recognition that were sometimes contrary to what I observed in the classroom. Although Tracy discussed the activities that were implemented in the classroom, materials around the room did not change very often. There typically was a different project hanging from the ceiling each month, but items on the cabinet fronts changed infrequently or were not existent. The cabinet doors in Tracy's room were some of the only places that could be used to display the children's work. Tracy said she wanted the children to be exposed to print, but in her classroom this exposure took place via center activities, the reading corner or in teacher-directed activities. Environmental print was not a high priority for Tracy as noted in my classroom observations. The lack of exposure to environmental print in Tracy's classroom was in direct contrast to the wealth of print in Amy's classroom.

At each visit to Amy's classroom (more than three weeks apart), I noted that the room changed. From the moment I entered the Head Start center and began walking down the hallway to Amy's classroom, I would find out what the class had been studying. For example, there was a large mural of the Three Billy Goats Gruff and the troll on the wall. Surrounding this picture were the children's individual pictures of the goats and sentences about what the children would do to cross the bridge. Upon walking into the classroom, I could tell immediately that the class was learning about fairy tales. When I examined the room more thoroughly, I found fairy tale books in various centers

around the room, fairy tale mobiles hanging from the ceiling and a flip chart paper list of who did and did not like porridge. All of the items involved some use of print. This contrast demonstrated that although teachers were able to verbalize what they knew to be best practices when working with early literacy skill development, the practices were not carried out in the classroom.

Reading comprehension

Amy was always introducing new books to her students. During one visit Amy was reading the book, *Lunch*, to the students. The book had been chosen because her class was doing a thematic unit on food. Amy read the book to the students, asking them to predict what the next food was going to be on the pages of the book. The children's attention was held by Amy's expressive reading and asking them for their answers. After reading through the story once, each child was given a piece of felt fruit to put onto the felt board as the story was retold. The retelling of the story was an example of how reading comprehension works at the early childhood level. The children were able to use felt pieces as tangible items to recreate the story so that it had meaning for them. Later, when discussing my observation of the storytelling with Amy, she stated that:

> "I try especially at the beginning of the year to use book pieces. Because if I can get pieces they really listen and they can retell the story and it's just fantastic. Last year we did it all the time. I love doing interactive stories."

Amy actively sought stories that could be used to engage the children in literacy in a way that was tangible for them to grasp.

Tracy also engaged in reading aloud activities with her students. Reading activities typically took place during large group activities, such as the transition time between outdoor play and lunch. On one occasion, Tracy chose the book *Horton Hears a*

Who, because the movie was opening in movie theaters. The children were not familiar with the particular book, but Tracy introduced it as one of her favorite books. The children were interested in the story because it was something their teacher wanted to share.

In either case, the teachers were choosing activities that introduced students to new literature and gave them an opportunity to hear spoken language. The way in which the activity was integrated in each classroom was different, but the repeated exposure to books basics, such as turning pages, discussing who the author was or making predictions about the story increased the students' understanding.

Writing skill development

Children need to have opportunities to practice writing. Opportunities to practice writing skills were present in both classrooms. For example, while in Tracy's classroom, I observed four boys in the writing center. Two boys worked together to write letters and two of the boys put paper on clipboards and walked around the room asking children and adults how to spell their names and to give them their phone numbers. One of the boys, Diego, was a student with higher level literacy skills. He was able to read sight words and sound out most words that he did not know. When Diego had a difficulty writing a number, he asked Tracy. She would write it for him and then ask him to copy the number. When the boy with Diego wanted to know how to write a number, Tracy instructed him to ask Diego for help. This allowed Diego to practice writing the number again and also empowered him to help another child.

Another writing activity which I observed in Tracy's classroom took place on a daily basis. When arriving at school, the children were required to "sign in" with their

parent's help. At the beginning of the year, some children were only making a few writing strokes and did not recognize their own name card. By the month of May, some children were writing their names independently and others were writing their letters correctly with help from parents. When asked about writing activities in the classroom, Tracy referred to the number writing activity Diego had initiated. Tracy shared that "it is exciting and I love it when they do it (writing) on their own." She capitalized on the learning activities that the students self-initiated and looked for additional ways to empower the students in their learning.

Amy provided several ways for the children in her classroom to practice their writing skills. One of my observations was on "opposite" day in the classroom. The children came to school dressed in clothes worn inside out and backwards. One activity for opposite day was to taste opposites, such as sweet and sour. During center time activities, the children tasted different foods, such as lemon juice and honey. The children then wrote their name under the food they liked best on flip chart paper. Some children were able to independently write their names on the flip chart paper while others required assistance from the teacher.

On more than one occasion, I observed as students in Amy's classroom spent time writing things down on paper while walking around the room with clipboards. While I sat, observing the students, one little girl brought a piece of scribbled paper over to me and told me that I "got a discount." Not knowing what she was playing, I simply replied, "thank you."

In addition, Amy had materials available in the dramatic play area for students to access for writing practice. Students participated in running a restaurant in the dramatic

play area. Children were dressed in aprons, restaurant menus were available for people when ordering and there were classroom-made menus for children to use in their play. Students used clipboards with paper and pencils or markers to take orders. They hurriedly scribbled down information on their papers after asking other students and adults in the room what they wanted to eat. Their orders were a mix of various squiggle lines, alphabet letters and numbers. Whatever the children wrote, they reported back to the "chef" and orders were placed.

When discussing writing skill development with Amy, she described how she approached writing activities in the classroom, including use of a writing center:

> "There are some kids that are there (the writing center) all the time. They are always over there making something or writing something or drawing. That's why I think it's important to change up the materials a little bit or kind of show them a new idea over in the writing center. This sometimes gets new ones in the writing center. If I bring something out onto a little table, not in the writing center, but out in the classroom, they get a little more exposure to it and they are more willing to go and seek out the materials at the writing center."

In this narrative, Amy talked about a strategy she used to encourage students to explore the writing center. By bringing the writing center out into the room in a different way, Amy was able to encourage students to initiate their own writing activities at later times. She also emphasized the importance she placed on changing materials in the room so that the children would be interested and willing to try new activities.

Phonological awareness

Activities that incorporate letter sound knowledge focus on phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is important as it provides children with a base for sounding out words, putting letter sounds together to make words, and rhyming. Amy incorporated a number of phonological awareness activities into the class. One song that

was sung often during the opening large group time was "Willobee Wallabee Woo."

When singing this song, the children had to think of words that rhymed with the song.

The children enjoyed singing and especially had fun with the silliness of the song. In

addition, while observing the classroom during breakfast time, Amy led the class in an

activity for preparing to eat. The children said "open and shut them, open and shut them,

put them in your lap. Open and shut them open and shut them, give a little clap." Prior to

saying the rhyme, Amy asked the children which sound they wanted to use. For example,

they would choose a consonant and then substitute the consonant for the beginning letter

sounds throughout the rhyme. Another way in which phonological activities were

integrated throughout daily activities included singing along with the ABC song and

saying the letter sounds as a classroom helper pointed to the letters on an alphabet strip.

Tracy used a combination of large group activities and individual interactions

with children to encourage phonological awareness. Large group activities included

singing songs and letter sound games. For example, Tracy would ask the students to think

of a word that started with the same sound as a letter "l". The kids then had to say a word

before being excused from the large group area. This type of activity was sometimes

paired with writing the letter on the teacher's dry erase board. Tracy had students who

were English language learners (ELL) in the classroom. She struggled with developing

activities that would draw these students into the class activities and assist them in

learning more vocabulary. Through a series of meetings with a consultant from the area

education agency, Tracy was able to develop ways in which to include the ELL students

into large group activities in order to develop their language skills. With one student in

particular, Tracy not only focused on developing language skills, but also building the students' self-confidence. When talking about one boy, Luis, Tracy explained:

> "Every morning we have a time to share and he (Luis) raises his hand sometimes, but then when I call on him he just puts his head down and doesn't want to say anything. Today I had him come over and sit on my lap and asked him what he wanted to say. He said I want pizza. It wasn't the normal kind of thing the kids share…but we were so excited so I said o.k., say it out loud. He said pizza out loud and everybody cheered for him. He's starting to be encouraged about that and we were just talking about shapes and colors and he knew one of them. He raised his hand and he said heart. He was so excited and he was just really proud."

Tracy's anecdote about Luis demonstrated her commitment to finding ways to meet the various learning needs of students in a diverse classroom. Other examples of Tracy's teacher-child interactions about literacy included facilitating activities during center time. For example, students would ask Tracy how to spell specific words. She would assist the child in sounding out a word so they could write it out on their own.

The question I sought to address was how do teachers implement literacy skills in the preschool classroom? What I had expected find was a consistency between the activities presented in the classrooms and teacher expectations based on the use of a prescribed curriculum. However, what I found were two very different classrooms that employed a variety of strategies to facilitate the development of literacy skills. Why was it that there was such a difference between the two classrooms?

Literacy Activities

The most frequent activities from my observations were alphabet knowledge and print recognition. Most phonological awareness activities included rhyming and singing activities. My classroom observations and field notes were consistent with the findings of Hawken, Johnston and McDonnell (2005). They found that phonological awareness activities received the least amount of attention from Head Start teachers in their study of

literacy views and practices. In addition, the current study demonstrates that Head Start teachers are aware of the importance of early literacy skills. However, the way in which the skills were implemented in the classroom varied depending upon the personal and professional experiences of the teachers.

Teacher knowledge acquisition

Both teachers discussed how their teacher training programs prepared them for teaching. It was in these teacher training programs that Amy and Tracy developed the basis for their own instructional styles. For example, each participant talked about their student teaching experiences and what they learned from their supervising teachers. Amy spoke specifically about the way in which her supervising teacher managed reading groups and working with individual children. Amy used these same techniques when managing her classroom during center time activities. Amy was able to provide varied literacy activities for her students by planning ahead and understanding the differences among students in her classroom.

Tracy took her student teaching experience and applied certain pieces to her instructional strategies. She discussed how her experiences included the expectation of using worksheets as the primary instructional material for young children. Tracy took the good and bad things from her student teaching experiences and used this knowledge in planning her classroom activities. Tracy also planned activities that could be successfully completed by the students in her classroom with their varied level of skill development.

The responses from the teachers demonstrated that pre-service training was one of the most influential pieces in explaining how a teacher implemented literacy skill instruction in the classroom. The teachers did not speak specifically about a literacy class

that they had during their teacher education programs. Rather they spoke about specific

hands-on learning experiences they had during student teaching. The student teaching

experiences set the tone for how literacy activities and instruction were carried out in

both classrooms.

<div align="center">Implications and Conclusion</div>

Student needs

The needs of the students in both classrooms were a challenge to the teachers

when conceiving and planning literacy activities. The ages of the students ranged from

three to five. As a result, the teachers spoke of children who needed basic social skills

and an understanding of classroom routines. In contrast, both teachers worked with

children who had higher level skills and who needed challenging activities. Teachers

spoke of trying to keep up with the required data collection for the Creative Curriculum

Developmental Continuum (Dodge, Colker &Heroman, 2001) and find time to plan for

their students.

As a result, the teachers reported that they did not have the time to develop new

activities and lesson plans as they desired. The teachers felt pressure to complete the

required student assessments which left them little time to plan multi-faceted literacy

activities that would be appropriate for the varying levels of student skills in the

classroom. Student needs dictated what activities were introduced in the classroom, but it

did not always link back to literacy activities.

Curriculum

The Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (Dodge et al., 2001) was

chosen by the Head Start agency as the tool for gathering student skill development and

progress data across its regional classrooms. Although both teachers were a part of the same Head Start region, each had a different understanding and comfort level with using the Creative Curriculum (Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2002) as a guide for classroom activities and student assessment. Amy felt at odds with the required curriculum in her understanding of and expectation for data collection. She reported that she had never received any specific training from Head Start regarding the use of the curriculum and did not feel that there was support for training that could assist her in implementing the curriculum further in the classroom.

On the other hand, Tracy felt very comfortable with using the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (Dodge et al., 2001). She expressed frustration with changes that did not allow for specific functions of the computer software to assist her in her classroom planning. Tracy had a defined process for gathering information about the students in her classroom through the required anecdotal notes. Amy was able to demonstrate student progress through student work samples, but did not necessarily have a multitude of anecdotal notes for each child.

Again, the purpose of using a tool such as the Creative Curriculum (Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2002) was to provide teachers with a guide for implementing developmentally appropriate activities within the classroom. The piece of the Creative Curriculum (2002) materials that was used most in both classrooms was the lesson planning form. Both teachers filled in the boxes on the lesson planning forms and used it as a guide for the week's classroom activities. The amount of detail on the forms varied between the classrooms. The materials that were used were acceptable as a basic planning form. However, the forms did not lend themselves to being specific about literacy skill

development and in particular, print recognition, writing skills or phonological awareness.

Early literacy skill development is an essential element in early childhood education. These skills include print recognition, phonological awareness, writing skills and reading comprehension. Although activities and strategies to encourage literacy skills vary according to the needs of the students, the participants in this study did what they felt was appropriate for their students according to their needs. In addition, the implications of this study also address the pre-service and in-service training that teachers receive.

Pre-service training

Throughout their teacher education programs, Tracy and Amy had a variety of experiences. It was clear from their stories that the impact of the student teaching experience was the one that influenced their current teaching style and approach to literacy skill development. They looked to their supervising teacher as the person with a large base of experience that could guide them on what should take place in their classrooms.

When Amy planned center time activities, it was based on the thematic unit approach that had worked in the kindergarten room she had been in as a student teacher. The thematic approach allowed her to integrate literacy activities on varying levels within the classroom. Through previous experience in a successfully run classroom, Amy could take basic literacy activities and adapt them for her students' needs. Amy's approach to literacy development was one that integrated books in multiple ways throughout the school day, but in a planned manner that introduced concept development. Although

Amy expressed that she felt "thrown into" things at Head Start, she also had the natural ability to be a creative teacher who planned activities according to her students' abilities and interests. Amy actively sought ways to integrate literacy into the classroom setting.

Tracy's experiences as a student teacher led her to develop very specific thoughts on what she did and did not want to do in the classroom. Tracy's approach to literacy instruction is what I consider traditional. By this I mean books were read at group time and literacy activities were planned as something special. For example, one small group activity included having students paste letters on a paper in order to spell a word.

Whereas Amy's literacy activities were integrated in a variety of ways through every center time activity, Tracy focused on individual interaction as a means to facilitate learning. There was a typical writing center and book center in the classroom, but books were not strategically placed in other places throughout the room to promote any incidental interactions with books. This approach to literacy was in part due to her previous student teaching experiences. What does this mean for student teachers?

Teacher education institutions must make sure to provide the best, high quality student teaching experiences possible. Students should be paired with experienced teachers who are able to show student teachers how to integrate literacy activities in creative ways in order to meet the diverse learning needs in the classroom. My personal experience with student teaching in a third grade classroom led me to the field of special education. It was a marginal experience that demonstrated to me that I needed a more diverse population of students to work with rather than those students in a typical elementary school classroom. Institutes of higher education have to be purposeful in planning experiences and practicum. Supervising teachers need to have knowledge of

best practices and current research and actively facilitate the integration of meaningful literacy experiences in the classroom.

In-service training

Both teachers were disappointed with their limited opportunities to access age appropriated information for expanding activities within their classrooms. They had the option to access workshops or conferences outside of Head Start; however, neither teacher chose to use these opportunities. This was due to the fact that they had a very limited pool to draw from for substitute teachers. As a result, if the lead teacher was gone from the classroom and a substitute was not available, the classroom would be closed for the day. Any days the classrooms were closed were then added on at the end of the school year. This was not an incentive to seek additional training.

The lack of motivation or access to in-service opportunities was a factor in how literacy activities were developed by the teachers. During one interview, Amy told a story about a former colleague who took a position with a local school district. Amy felt frustrated because her former colleague was receiving training and support in new curriculum and classroom practices when she was not.

In-service opportunities should be based on the needs of the teaching staff, as well as the needs of the students. Amy asked for more training in the required curriculum and was not able to find any help. She wanted to be able to provide more activities to her students based on the current research in the field and developmentally appropriate practice recommendations. At one point, Amy compared her in-service experiences to those of a colleague employed as a preschool teacher in a local school district. This comparison left Amy questioning whether or not Head Start was on the cutting edge of

research in the field. This comparison also left her feeling unappreciated. Amy wanted to be able to integrate new ideas, especially those involving literacy into her classroom curriculum.

Tracy also felt the lack of well-planned in-service training in her daily classroom activities. Although Tracy spoke of and showed me one literacy activity that had been a product of a workshop from years past, she was unable to pinpoint any training in the past two years that enabled her to do her job better. As I discussed, it was evident that Tracy used a very traditional format for literacy skill development and did not always think outside the box for opportunities to integrate literacy activities in other ways in the classroom. Tracy felt she was using the best methods for introducing literacy skills; however, as a seasoned teacher, I could see a number of areas that would have benefitted from supplementation. The teachers did not receive feedback on the use of literacy in their classrooms and there was little incentive to seek out new ideas or research on what should be taking place in the classroom.

The issue of using Creative Curriculum (Dodge, Colker & Heroman, 2002) was one that presented challenges for both teachers. Tracy's and Amy's Head Start agency should have provided additional training at varying levels to assist teachers in developing their understanding of the curriculum. When considering literacy activities, teachers should be given very specific training on how to tie literacy into the thematic units recommended by the authors of the Creative Curriculum (2002). A clearer vision for use of the curriculum and feedback to teachers from supervisors would provide a vehicle for improvements within classrooms.

The teachers met challenges within the classroom with little support from their lead agency. The feelings of frustration that Amy and Tracy expressed were not unusual in the educational realm. How do administrators or agencies support teachers in the classroom?

Administrative support

Administrators support teachers by providing consistent, constructive feedback that assists teachers improve their skills. Neither Tracy nor Amy had an administrator/supervisor that was "present" in their classroom. By "present" I mean a supervisor who observed instruction on a regular basis and was able to provide feedback that allowed a teacher to improve her teaching skills. Amy spoke of a supervisor who walked through the classroom on occasion. There was no evaluation of Amy's teaching skills or time spent on the classroom issues that Amy was dealing with on a daily basis, such as challenging behaviors. Tracy expressed the same concern with a lack of supervisory input in her classroom. Both teachers shared that they wanted to do the best they could, but that they felt there was not support for making changes.

Overall, literacy skill activities were taking place in a variety of ways in both classrooms. The teachers implemented the strategies they felt worked best with their students, such as large group read alouds, story boards, word webs, peer and teacher facilitated learning. The participants in this study knew what the basics were for literacy skill instruction, although there was not always a clear understanding of why an activity was chosen for their students. Planning was completed with the idea that the activities needed to speak to the children's interest, as well as meet their needs at varying skill levels. Activities were not thought of as speaking to reading comprehension,

phonological awareness or print recognition. The teachers introduced activities because they were activities that were always used in preschool classrooms.

The teachers in this study were meeting the literacy needs of their students through a variety of activities. They used the skills they learned in their pre-service activities as a starting point and then adjusted their programs as necessary. Both teachers expressed interest in developing their teaching skills further, as well as integrating current research into their classroom instruction. Both teachers would have been interested, eager participants in workshops focused on developing the literacy skills of their students.

The teachers were open to acquiring additional skills and knowledge but needed a planned and supported way to go about taking part in learning opportunities. When considering teacher knowledge acquisition, the narratives from both participants clearly pointed to pre-service experiences as a basis for what and how they chose to teach. Institutions of higher education must remain diligent in providing high quality student teaching experiences.

In conclusion, the process of interviewing and observing the project participants made me look more in-depth at my own teaching practices. It raised my sensitivity to the classroom teachers that I work with and encouraged me to ask them about their professional development needs. If society wants to retain highly qualified, dedicated teachers there needs to be a discussion about ways in which to keep teachers highly qualified. Even in organizations such as Head Start, there needs to be a comprehensive, thoughtful plan for professional development. It is through meeting the needs of teachers that we will continue to provide quality learning in the classroom.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 4 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

General Discussion

The participants I worked with throughout the study were able to share their experiences from their professional and personal landscapes (Clandinin & Conelley, 1999). The experiences of the teachers changed on a daily basis and participants were able to reflect upon the changing needs of their students and themselves during our monthly conversations. The research questions to be answered addressed differentiated instruction, literacy skill development and teacher knowledge acquisition. However, the overall themes that emerged throughout the narrative process were those of teachers in need of support. Gonzalez, Brown, and Slate (2008) studied teacher attrition in Texas. The themes that these researchers found among teachers included administrative factors, student discipline and low salary (Gonzalez, Brown & Slate). These factors were similar to those discussed by participants in the current study. The teachers struggled with the emotional and behavioral needs of their students and lack of support from administration. Salary was discussed but was not a factor in either teacher's decision to consider employment outside of Head Start. How did the themes represent differentiated instruction and literacy skill development?

Differentiated instruction

One theme that ran throughout the study was that of the emotional and behavioral needs of the students. The teachers often felt distressed over what they perceived to be ineffective teaching or classroom management on their behalves. This was not the case. The teachers were creative and used the resources they knew to be available to them and their classrooms. Landry, Swank, Smith, Assel and Gunnewig addressed the relation

between children's social-emotional development and reading success in their 2006 study. They developed a model to encourage the use of both social and cognitive skills when teaching literacy skills. Through a model such as Landry et al.'s (2006) the teachers in the current study may be able to take their knowledge to the next level and become more confident in their skills.

It was clear that DI was taking place in the classrooms. However, teachers did not have the vocabulary to describe their practices in a manner consistent with Tomlinson's (1999) principles of DI. When looking at the themes related to DI, it was evident that teachers had to address the social and emotional needs of students before moving onto more academic skill areas. Consistent with DI was teacher respect for students, collaborative partnerships in the classroom and the creation of a safe environment for students. Attention to content, process and product was not as evident, but the teachers were trying to implement using assessment and curriculum to drive instruction.

Literacy skill development

The study focused on five areas of literacy skill development: oral language development, phonological awareness, print recognition, reading comprehension, and writing skill development. All of these skills need to be incorporated into a child's daily activities in order to provide multiple opportunities for practice (Wolfe & Nevills, 2004). The teachers were providing varied activities in their classrooms based on the needs of the students.

Activities such as singing, rhyming, and reading aloud were prevalent in the both classrooms. Teachers worked to provide multi-level activities for children who were needing skill development in different areas. The way in which the teachers were able to

personalize instruction by taking advantage of teachable moments also provided a link between literacy skill development and differentiated instruction. It was clear that participants knew what was important to teach even if they were not clear on the concepts of content, product and process (Blaz, 2006).

Teacher knowledge

In addition to the challenges the participants faced in the classroom, they also felt the need for high quality professional development. Participants expressed their lack of enthusiasm in the professional development activities provided by their Head Start agency. Participants felt as if they had no voice in how their limited time was spent on expanding their learning. They wanted opportunities for collaboration with other teachers, networking opportunities and support from the agency in choosing their own learning experiences. The participants had the opportunity to select their own professional development activities that could be paid for by agency fund. However, any learning opportunity offered during the school day was often passed by and not considered as a real option. The reason for this was that if a substitute teacher was not found, the classroom would have to close for the day and another day would be added on at the end of the school year. This discouraged the participants from seeking out opportunities for professional development. Fry discussions that some of the most common forms of teacher mentoring that take place include mentoring, planning time with other teachers and support from administrators (2007). My discussions with the participants did not bring forth evidence of mentoring or planning time with other teachers. Support from administrators was minimal and most often in the form of a brief

classroom visit. There was little mention of any mentoring or constructive conversations about classroom challenges.

In addition, both participants spoke of their student teaching experiences as the main way in which they were exposed to teaching practices. It was through field experiences and practica that the participants developed their thoughts on how a classroom should be managed, how literacy skills should be taught and what the role of the classroom teacher should be in the lives of students. These experiences speak to the need for high quality student teaching experiences and teaching training programs that are responsive to the needs of future teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study focused on the implementation of differentiated instruction and literacy skill development in the preschool classroom. The themes that emerged from the study focused on the needs of the teachers including professional support and high quality student teaching experiences. Future research should focus on determining the qualities of teacher training programs ensure well-trained, high quality teachers. Agencies, such as Head Start, need to continue reviewing the processes they use for creating professional development activities in order to make sure that programs match the needs of their teachers.

Teachers are implementing literacy skill instruction in a manner that is consistent with what research says are promising practices. However, research will need to explore the way in which support is provided to teachers, especially those teachers in positions working with children who have significant needs, such as those children in Head Start programs.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol One

Participant Name:
Date of interview:
Time of interview:
Place:

Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.

    - Where did you grow up?

    - What is your family like?

2. Describe what you remember as your first, early experiences with books and literacy.

    - Did you have opportunities to go to the library?

    - Were there books in your house?

    - Did your parents read with you?

    - Tell me about your favorite books or literacy type activities.

3. Discuss your literacy experiences once you entered the school system.

    - Tell me about any teachers that impacted your reading experiences.

4. Discuss why you got into teaching.

    - Explain any family ties to the educational system.

5. Additional questions related to demographic information or early literacy experiences will be added and revised throughout the initial interview.

Interview Protocol Two

Participant name:
Date of interview:
Time of interview:
Place:

Questions:

1. How do you choose which parts of the curriculum are the most important to teach?

   • Are there certain Head Start requirements you must use when planning the teaching of certain subject matter? (ie: math, science)

   • Describe any materials you use, such as teacher resources to plan.

2. Where/how have you received information to help you make decisions about what should be taught in your classroom?

   • What did you learn in your preservice program regarding subject/curriculum components in the classroom?

   • Describe any previous experiences you had teaching (ie: student teaching) that influence how you make these decisions.

3. Describe how you choose to implement a literacy curriculum in the classroom.

   • Are there certain literacy components you look for? (ie: print awareness, comprehension, phonological awareness, letter recognition)

   • How do you focus on particular literacy skills?

4. Additional questions based on classroom observation.

*Questions based on DI principle that the teacher is clear about the most important pieces of the subject to be taught.

Interview Protocol Three

Participant Name:
Date of interview:
Time of interview:
Place:

Questions:

1. Describe the kinds of assessments that you use when planning your instruction.

    - Do you do any assessment of children at the start of the year?
    - Tell me about any assessments you use to determine a child's level of literacy skills.
    - If you do not use any formal assessments, describe the informal measures you use to determine literacy skill level.

2. Where/how have you received information to help you make decisions about what how to assess children?

    - What did you learn in your pre-service program regarding assessment for young children?
    - Describe any previous experiences you had teaching (ie: student teaching) that influence how you assess children.

3. Tell me about how you use assessment information to plan activities/instruction for the children in your classroom.

    - Describe an appropriate literacy activity that you would use in the classroom.
    - How would you determine if the activity were successful and emphasized the skills you intended?

4. Additional questions based on classroom observation.

*Questions based on DI principle that there is no separation between assessment and instruction.

Interview Protocol Four

Participant Name:
Date of interview:
Time of interview:
Place:

Questions:

1. Describe how you work with student differences in the classroom.

   - Discuss the kinds of differences you encounter in student learning and what has been the most difficult to work with in the classroom.

   - How do you build on student differences so that every child can learn?

2. Where/how have you received information to help you make decisions about addressing student differences in the classroom?

3.
   - What did you learn in your pre-service program regarding student learning differences?

   - Describe any previous experiences you had teaching (ie: student teaching) that influence how you work with students who have different learning needs.

4. Tell me about your experiences with students who are on IEPs.

   - Describe any assistance you receive in the implementation of IEPs.

   - Give examples of how you have had to make accommodations or modify activities/materials to meet the needs of students.

5. Additional questions based on classroom observation.

*Questions based on DI principle that the teacher understands student differences and is able to build on these differences.

Interview Protocol Five

Participant Name:
Date of interview:
Time of interview:
Place:

Questions:

1. Tomlinson (1999) states that differentiated instruction should focus on content, process and product and how to adjust them. Discuss what that statement means for you as a teacher.

    • How do you adjust content? Is this based on student assessment, previous teaching experiences, or information from colleagues?

2. When thinking about literacy activities, describe how you modify the content, process or product for children.

    • Where/how have you received information about making accommodations/modifications in the classroom?

    • Tell me about a time when you assisted a child in modifying a product so that the child could show their learning, even if it was not in a traditional sense.

3. Discuss your thoughts on the idea of teachers and students as collaborative partners in learning.

    • Describe how this is possible in the early childhood classroom.

    • Explain how a child could act as a collaborative partner in the classroom. .

4. Additional questions based on classroom observations.

*Questions based on DI principles that the teacher focuses on content, process and product and how to adjust them in the classroom. The question also includes reference to the DI principle that teachers and students are collaborative partners in learning.

Interview Protocol Six

Participant Name:
Date of interview:
Time of interview:
Place:

Questions:

1. Discuss how you can focus on student growth in the classroom.

    -   Tell me about your integration of assessment information in the student growth process.

2. Personalized instruction is about teachers knowing, understanding and accepting a student's abilities, strengths and weaknesses (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Explain your understanding of personalized instruction.

    How does your personal teaching philosophy impact how you run your classroom?

    Describe how you use student learning characteristics to prepare activities that are individualized.

3. Describe how it is possible to respect a young child's literacy skills. In what ways do you meet them at their level and challenge them to do more?

    -   How are reading comprehension skills increased in the classroom?

    -   Discuss how you might or do integrate print awareness, letter recognition and phonological awareness into student learning activities.

4. Additional questions based on classroom observations.

*Questions based on DI principles that the focus of the DI classroom is on the student and student growth while respecting the work in which students participate.

Interview Protocol Seven

Participant Name:
Date of interview:
Time of interview:
Place:

Questions:

1. Describe how you structure your daily schedule and activities.

    •   What opportunities are there for flexibility within the schedule?

    •   Discuss any times that you have had to adjust your schedule to accommodate the learning needs of the students.

2. Tell me about the type of approach you use in creating your classroom environment.

    •   Discuss any guidelines or resources you have used in shaping your classroom.

    •   Where/how have you received information on setting up a classroom?

    •   Tell me about any classrooms you have been in that have impacted how you designed your room.

3. Discuss the ways in which literacy skill development is integrated into your classroom environment.

    •   Explain why you have or have not chosen to place print materials in the classroom.

    •   Tell me your thoughts on how you think children and their parents interpret the print materials you display in the classroom.

4. Additional questions based on classroom observations.

*Questions are based on DI principles that a DI classroom is flexible and that a learning environment should be interactive.

APPENDIX B

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Participant name:
Date:
Time:
Place:

1. List visual evidence in the room that demonstrates print awareness activities. This may include posters/written materials on classroom walls, student work, and books. Indicate if the classroom appearance changes over time.

2. Describe aspects of the classroom environment that make it a respectful, collaborative and/or safe environment for learning.

3. Explain the activity(ies) observed. Describe evidence of:

   Teacher adjustment of content, product or process:

   Flexibility within scheduling, such as pace:

   Personalized instruction:

4. Describe activities in which the children are participating that include:

   Print awareness:
   Examples:
   - References print objects/materials in the room
   - Posters and books are present and in use in the room
   - Children's names on cubbies, bulletin boards

Letter recognition:
Examples:
- Children asked names of letters
- Activities in which the children produce letters (writing)
- Large group activities focused on learning letter names

Phonological awareness:
Examples:
- Teacher demonstrates blending strategies
- Children participate in rhyming
- Children participate in singing

Comprehension:
Examples:
- Reading aloud takes place in classroom
- Teacher participates in one-to-one shared book reading with children
- Children are asked to re-tell stories
- Teacher asks children open-ended questions about stories read at large/small group time

5. Other comments:

APPENDIX C

DATA ANALYSIS MATRIX

What does it have to do with the broader question?	Where will I find answers to my question in the data?	What are units of analysis to pay attention to?	What kind of information will I find?	How does this relate to the question?
What does differentiated instruction look like when teaching literacy skills in the preschool classroom?	-Memos -Fieldnotes of observations/ interviews -Reflections on student/ teacher interactions from observations -Artifacts from classroom demonstrating modifications, material adaptations or curriculum -Observation protocols -Interview protocols/audiotapes -Interview transcripts	-Teacher references to adaptations Modifications of materials -Child references to needing assistance	-Assessment practices -Use of teacher associates -Artifacts of material adaptations/modifications -Modifications of child/teacher schedules -Lesson plans	-Shows teacher knowledge of subject matter -Demonstrates if DI is being done in the classroom

This matrix is intended to provide an example of how I utilized the data that was

collected. The first box of the matrix is a statement of the research question. The second

box provides examples of where I found the data. Personal memos were used to write

about experiences that resonated with the question, emerging themes, and thoughts on discussions or observed happenings that demonstrate differentiated instruction. Fieldnotes were intended to capture aspects of the environment, additional questions and other thoughts that contributed to additional interview questions. Self-reflections on student-teacher interactions will gave me an opportunity to check myself for placing my own biases on the research, as well as gave me an opportunity to look for questions that needed clarification from previous interviews and observations. Artifacts from the classroom were in the form of photocopies of lesson plans, and samples of writing that students gave to me.

The units of analysis that I looked for included teacher references to material adaptations, curriculum adaptations and providing additional assistance to a child. Throughout the interview transcripts, I paid attention to how teachers answered questions about their classroom practices and how it all related to differentiated instruction and literacy development. While in the classroom, I noted student-teacher interactions that focused on assisting children in learning the material in varied ways.

Lesson plans provided information on whether or not teachers planned ahead for varying instruction and/or materials for students in the classroom. Flexibility in student and/or teacher scheduling was observed while I was in the classroom. Flexible scheduling included a teacher veering from the usual schedule to give children more opportunities to work on class projects or individual work. Flexible scheduling meant that not every child was doing the same activity at the same time.

All of this information assisted in answering the research questions. The interviews and classroom observations demonstrated evidence of teacher knowledge of

differentiated instruction and literacy skills. The actual classroom observations

demonstrated the connections between what the teachers discussed in interviews and

actual classroom practice. In addition, the data showed how teachers implemented

differentiated instruction when teaching literacy skills through activities such as center

times, and reading aloud.

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL FORM

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Assurances
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

DATE: 8 September 2008

TO: Susan A. Brennan
2706 NW 10th Court, Ankeny, IA 50023

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances

TITLE: **The Construction of Professional Knowledge in Early Childhood Literacy Practices**

IRB ID: **07-369**

Approval Date: 5 September 2008
Date for Continuing Review: 11 September 2009

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has conducted the annual continuing review and approved the modification of this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research.

- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing <u>any</u> changes** to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.

- **Immediately inform the IRB of** (1) **all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.

- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses,** unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website [www.compliance.iastate.edu] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

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