Universal Pre-Kindergarten and the Students Enrolled

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Universal Pre-Kindergarten and the Students Enrolled

by

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Chapter One: Introduction

Walking into my classroom, you will meet fifteen three, four, and five year old students with an eagerness to learn. You will see them sprinkled around the classroom interacting with each other in a number of different ways and through various learning activities. The students can be seen playing in the kitchen, writing with crayons, markers, or colored pencils at the restaurant in an attempt to take a classmate’s order, building large cities out of blocks, making a dress for a princess out of a mound of clay, or flipping through pages of a colorful story in the book center. All of these activities as well as a number of others make up the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program in my classroom.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) is a state funded program that allows students to attend part or full time (determined by the district) pre-kindergarten, through their local school district, at no charge to the families (New York State United Teachers [NYSUT], 2009). The program assures that those teaching these classes must be certified by their state to teach early childhood education. The program and curriculum create an early entry point to education and work to close the achievement gap ever present in the early elementary grades (Nelson, 2006). The anticipated function of this program is to better prepare students for kindergarten in all areas of development, be it social, emotional, or academic (New York State Department of Education, 2009).
Problem Statement

One of the biggest problems in education today is having children enter kindergarten with different bases of knowledge. This proves to be a problem because teachers spend much of the year working to get students on the same page so that all are ready to learn. Not only is this a problem for the teachers of these students, but also the community in which these students live (Coeyman, 2008; Powell, 2010). To combat this problem, New York State, along with six different states across the country, has created a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program that has been in place since 1998, to help students better prepare for kindergarten (NYSUT, 2009).

Significance of Problem

It is important to research the benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten because, although the program was started in 1998, there are still educators and parents who question its reliability (Morrissey, Lekies, & Cochran, 2007). If there are proven benefits from this program, and these benefits are not specifically researched and shared, many parents may fail to see its purpose, and in turn may withhold their children from the program. In addition, if specific benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten cannot be demonstrated, school districts may not be willing to allocate the state provided funds to implement the program in their districts.

Many researchers have studied the benefits of preschool programs and the differing effects these programs have on later student achievement (Bailet, Repper, Piasts, & Murphy, 2009; Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2006; Neuman, 1999; Wong, Cook, Barnedd, & Jung, 2008). Research has shown that when young
students are enrolled in an emergent literacy intervention program, they are likely to have significant gains in regard to the critical emergent literacy skills necessary to be successful in school (Bailet, Repper, Piasts, & Murphy, 2009). As students at each grade level are expected to perform at higher levels, it is important for all students to get an early start in developing their literacy skills (Nelson, 2006). Therefore, this study considered what effects, if any, one Universal Pre-Kindergarten class had on six children’s early reading and writing development, in terms of letter recognition and sound and rhyme awareness. The study also worked to observe the different types of literacy activities present in one Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom, and finally, to attempt to determine students’ opinions towards reading and writing based on their classroom experiences.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study, then, is to research the benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and answer the question: What reading and writing development can be observed in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom? The research for this study was done through observation and assessment of a group of students enrolled in the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program through a local suburban school district. This particular group of Universal Pre-Kindergarten students attended the program through a community-based organization near the local school district; although the program is housed in a different location, it encompassed the same curriculum as other Universal Pre-Kindergarten classrooms in the district.
Rationale

As a Universal Pre-Kindergarten teacher, I do everything I can to prepare my students for kindergarten. However, I often see students who need early intervention go without it. I have conducted this research to determine to what extent this program effects early literacy success for my students. In doing this research, I have explored the effect that this program has on the children enrolled. In addition, the results may inform parents and school district officials of any identified benefits of this Universal Pre-Kindergarten for these children.

Summary

Overall, Universal Pre-Kindergarten has been created to help all students enter kindergarten eager and ready to learn (New York State Departure of Education, 2009). However, the extent to which the program is or is not meeting the needs of the students enrolled is unknown. Therefore, using data collected during this study, I was able to gather information that can be shared with school districts, teachers, and parents of young children, to show social, emotional, and academic skills developed by children in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom during this study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Universal Pre-Kindergarten is a relatively new trend in education today, and has been around only a short time when considering the many different changes public education has gone through since its creation. The information and research available pertaining to Universal Pre-Kindergarten is limited and tells us only a little about the different aspects of the program as a whole, as well as its effectiveness. However, the limited research that was collected is compiled here to explain the proposed benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten, opposition to the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program, the history of early childhood education, and an explanation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten

The benefits of high quality early childhood education and Universal Pre-Kindergarten

In many different circumstances, Universal Pre-Kindergarten has been seen to be educationally beneficial to students. The created program hopes to improve students’ development of language and communications skills, creative and critical thinking skills, as well as promoting the normal development of large and fine motor skills. It is through the above mentioned skills that the program also works to develop age appropriate social and emotional behaviors (New York State Department of Education, 2009). When improving students both socially and emotionally, their literacy ability, in turn, is naturally improved. Although the program has shown its effectiveness with all different types of students, specifically, the program has been
students are enrolled in an emergent literacy intervention program, they are likely to have significant gains in regard to the critical emergent literacy skills necessary to be successful in school (Bailet, Repper, Piasts, & Murphy, 2009). As students at each grade level are expected to perform at higher levels, it is important for all students to get an early start in developing their literacy skills (Nelson, 2006). Therefore, this study considered what effects, if any, one Universal Pre-Kindergarten class had on six children’s early reading and writing development, in terms of letter recognition and sound and rhyme awareness. The study also worked to observe the different types of literacy activities present in one Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom, and finally, to attempt to determine students’ opinions towards reading and writing based on their classroom experiences.

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seen to help students in poverty as well as those students struggling with reading and those students with learning disabilities.

Many times students in poverty face different educational challenges than those students who are born without financial hardships. A study done by Muennig, Schweinhart, Montie, Neidell (2009) began in 1962 and examined the lives of 123 African American students who were born into poverty and were seen to have a high risk of failing in school. At the ages of three and four the students were divided into two different groups; those who received education from a high quality preschool program and those who received no preschool education. The participants in that study who are still accessible are continuing to be tracked and observed based on the effectiveness of the high quality preschool program in which they were enrolled. The researchers concluded that by age forty, students enrolled in the preschool program were 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school and be employed, earning more than $20,000 a year. Those who were not enrolled in the high quality preschool program were 19 percent more likely to be arrested before they turned 40 years of age.

Not only have programs similar to Universal Pre-Kindergarten been seen to be successful in helping students from poverty, but have also been seen to help struggling readers, as well as those with learning disabilities also benefit from the early intervention provided by these programs. In a study conducted by Bailet, Repper, Piasts, and Murphy (2009) the impact that an early literacy intervention program had on students who were identified to be struggling readers before they
entered kindergarten was researched. The overall purpose of this study was to assess the efficacy of the created intervention program that had been designed to teach emergent literacy skills to preschoolers who were at risk of failure; these students showed delays in the acquisition of critical early literacy skills. The participants in this study came from 38 private preschool and child care centers in a large city in the United States. From these 38 childcare sites, 200 students were chosen, based on the fact that upon taking the pre-test these students elicited results that would make them at risk to reading failure upon entering kindergarten. At the time of the initial screening, the participants were all four years of age and consisted of male and female students of multiple ethnicities. The data was collected using an early childhood literacy assessment entitled, “Get It, Got It, Go!” The assessment tested the students' print awareness, letter naming ability, and phonological awareness and was administered three times during the study. The participants in this study were assessed a second time after receiving instruction from the created literacy intervention program. The students made significant gains in all areas of the assessment after being assessed a second time. The overall results of this study concluded that students who received an intervention in literacy at an early age will prove to be more prepared for kindergarten than they would have been had they not received instruction guided by the results of the assessment.

Wilson Greene (2006) describes the many benefits that Universal Pre-Kindergarten has on students with learning disabilities in his article entitled, *Universal Preschool: A Costly But Worthy Goal.* Children in a high quality preschool
program are less likely to repeat grades, need special education, or get into future trouble with the law (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). High quality programs have produced short-term gains in cognitive functioning and longer-term gains in school achievement and social adjustment (Sawhill, 1999).

Similar to Greene's findings is research conducted by Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, Gibbs, and Flowers (2008). These researchers created a unique curriculum and assessments to intervene early in the lives of students with learning disabilities in hopes of positively affecting their reading ability. The writers of this study created a curriculum containing objectives and lessons that were to be administered to the participants; they wanted to learn whether the created early literacy experiences have a positive impact on the students' reading ability. An example of some of the objectives created are that the administrators hoped to see their students read vocabulary sight words, point to sight words to complete sentences, and point to words as a teacher reads them aloud.

The participants in this study consisted of 23 students enrolled in kindergarten to fourth grade – many of them with significant learning disabilities. The population consisted of both male and female students, twelve having an African American ethnicity, eight with a Caucasian ethnicity, and three listed as having 'other' ethnicity - all different socio-economic statuses. (Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, Gibbs, & Flowers, 2008). Before the students started the study, they were administered two different assessments; the Nonverbal Literacy Assessment and the Woodcock
Language and Proficiency Battery. After the students participated in lessons from the newly created curriculum, the outcomes were measured again by administering the same two assessments. The general results of this study showed that the students showed an increased score from the pre to post-test after the early literacy curriculum was implemented. These students also showed more growth than those in the control group who experienced no direct instruction. Overall, research in all areas shows students with learning disabilities or those who struggled with reading that received a quality intervention program, such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten, at an early age were more likely to be successful as they continued to advance educationally (Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, Gibbs, & Flowers, 2008).

Lastly, Universal Pre-Kindergarten has been shown to significantly improve students’ literacy abilities prior to the start of kindergarten. A report by the National Research Council (1999) states that research consistently demonstrates that the more children know about language and literacy before they arrive at kindergarten the better equipped they are to succeed in reading. A study conducted by Neuman (1999) was designed to monitor the effects of reading aloud to children and providing them with numerous chances to interact with children’s books during their time spent at their childcare centers. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of an intervention targeting economically disadvantaged children in childcare centers.

The participants in the Neuman study (1999) were enrolled in 50 different childcare centers within the metropolitan area of Philadelphia. Along with these participants, there were also five centers not participating in the Read Aloud Program,
which counted for 20 classrooms of 100 children – this was going to be the control
group for the experiment. Prior to the implementation of the Read Aloud Program,
students in both the experimental and control groups were pre-tested using six
different assessments: Environmental Print, Letter Name Knowledge, Concepts of
Print, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Concepts of Writing, and Concepts of
Narrative. The Read Aloud Program consisted of providing the centers with high
quality texts so that the students were surrounded by rich texts. The teachers in these
centers were also trained in implementing frequent successful read aloud sessions to
their students. After the instruction was complete and the teachers had ample
opportunities to read to the students, they were again post tested. The results of this
study showed a number of different findings. When both groups of students were
given the post-test of each of the assessments, each group in every area showed
improvement; however, those who were involved in the Read Aloud Program showed
a greater improvement than those who were not involved in this program.

On a whole, research has shown that students benefit from a quality early
childhood education program, including or similar to Universal Pre-Kindergarten.
Those students who enter the world in poverty have shown to be at risk for failure in
education having shown to benefit from a high quality preschool program. Research
has also shown that students who have been labeled with a learning disability, as well
as those students who have been labeled as struggling readers benefit from an early
intervention program though Universal Pre-Kindergarten. In helping all students,
specifically those mentioned above, Universal Pre-Kindergarten not only works to
benefit students overall academic performance, but also the literacy ability of all children involved (Bailet, Repper, Piasts, & Murphy, 2009; Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, Gibbs, & Flowers, 2008; Neuman, 1999).

**Opposition to the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program**

Although many proposed benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten can be assumed from earlier research, some educators, researchers, and parents continue to question its reliability (Morrissey, Lekies, & Cochran, 2007; Finn, 2010). In addition, some districts are unable to implement the program for a number of different reasons (New York State United Teachers, 2009).

Although funds for Universal Pre-Kindergarten are available to every district in New York State, a large number of these districts rejected the money allotted to them and turned down the opportunity to create such a program. Many district officials feel as though the proposed benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten are outweighed by the fact that the districts do not have sufficient space and do not feel as though they would benefit from adding additional space to encompass the program. Many districts feel as though the funds provided them are not sufficient enough to start a program or are uncertain that the state will continue the funding being provided. Also many districts face parent opposition to the implementation of a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program in fear that the districts are going to be unable to handle additional responsibilities (New York State United Teachers, 2009). It can be seen that, although it appears as though there are a number of benefits to the
implementation of a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program, some districts feel as
though these benefits are still not enough.

Another argument against Universal Pre-Kindergarten is that educators and
researchers feel as though a targeted pre-kindergarten program would better meet the
needs of the students most at risk, rather than providing a universal program - open to
all students. Chester E. Finn (2010) argues that a target pre-kindergarten program
would better meet the needs of all students for a number of different reasons. First, in
the United States, the majority of three and four year old children are attending, in
some way, a pre-kindergarten program. These programs provide a complex and
vibrant market in the United States and will slowly be pushed out if Universal Pre-
Kindergarten becomes the main form of early childhood education. Additionally, he
argues against the implementation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten due to the small
population of children in need of the comprehensive support the program can provide.
These children, he argues, need intensive intervention, not two hours a day at age
four. Finn (2010) believes that if the goal of Universal Pre-Kindergarten is to give
children an early start at education, the intervention needs to begin when these
children are younger.

It can be argued then, that although Universal Pre-Kindergarten has a number
of proposed benefits, these benefits do not outweigh the fact that the program may
push out the already thriving preschool programs across the United States. It is these
preschool programs that, in part, help the economy grow and change. It is also stated
that the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program is not enough to truly help the at-risk
children entering kindergarten. These children need more intensive assistance that cannot be found within Universal Pre-Kindergarten.

The History of Universal Pre-Kindergarten in New York State

The idea surrounding the creation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten came to life in September of 1996, when the current Lieutenant Governor, Betsy McCaughey Ross, released a report entitled, *Preparing for Success: Expanding Pre-Kindergarten and Educational Daycare*. Her report purposed to expand the current Experimental Pre-Kindergarten (EPK) program that was already in place in New York State. However, rather than simply expanding the program to all students, Ross suggested specifically expanding the program to reach all low-income four-year-old students with the goal of eventually reaching all four-year-old students regardless of income (Mitchell, 2004).

Soon after the release of Ross' (1996) report, it was discussed at the New York State Assembly by speaker, Sheldon Silver, and it was then that questions began to arise about the formation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and what the program would entail. It is because of this speech that Assemblyman Sheldon Silver is credited as being an advocate for Universal Pre-Kindergarten and is recognized for continuing to provide unwavering support for the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program (Pre [K] Now, 2009).

After hearing from Sheldon Silver, advocates for early childhood education began to react in hopes that the idea behind Universal Pre-Kindergarten would gain more support in New York State. Through a strong push from organizations and
advocates for early childhood education, a meeting was held in Albany in February of 1997 to discuss the benefits of a program such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten. Discussed at this meeting was the recently released Carnegie Corporation Report entitled, *Years of Promise*, which suggested the need for investment in the earliest years of learning (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994). Also a speaker at the same meeting presented on the success of Universal Pre-Kindergarten in Georgia and the benefits that arose from implementing such a program. This particular meeting fueled the push for Universal Pre-Kindergarten in New York State.

Later that year, the New York State Legislature enacted a list of educational reforms that was later signed into law by Governor George Pataki and was referred to as Learning, Achieving, and Developing – by Directing Education Resources (LADDER). The bill included amendments to current pre-kindergarten programs in New York State but also included implementations to all levels of early childhood education. The bill pushed for funding to allow reduced class sizes in kindergarten through third grade, as well as incentives for full-day kindergarten and a five year commitment to fund Universal Pre-Kindergarten (Mitchell, 2004). The Universal Pre-Kindergarten program created with this particular legislation was a half-day program that worked to be accessible to all four year old students and also mandated that a small percentage of the classrooms would be housed in a non-public school setting through contracts with local school districts. The legislation set a time frame for allowing the program to meet all requirements (Pre [K] Now, 2009).
Along with specific legislation that guided the implementation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten legislation was also set forth that specifically listed the goals of the program. Legislation stated that the New York State Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program must

- Provide an age- and developmentally-appropriate curriculum and activities which are learner centered.
- Provide for the development of language, cognitive, and social skills.
- Ensure continuity in the program with instruction in the early elementary grades.
- Encourage children to be self-assured and independent.
- Utilize staffs who meet the qualifications set forth by the Board of Regents.
- Provide strong parental partnerships and involvement in the implementation of participation in the plan.
- Provide staff development and teacher training.
- Establish a method for selection of eligible children to receive the program services where there are more eligible children than can be served in a given school year. (Mitchell, 2004)

After the legislation was passed it was up to each individual school district to make decisions regarding the implementation of Universal Pre-Kindergarten. Each school district is responsible for appointing a Pre-Kindergarten Policy Advisory Board to recommend whether the district should implement the created program. The board is responsible for creating a plan for implementation and its recommendations for how to employ the program if the district so chooses.

Finally, after much excitement, the New York State Department of Education allotted $67 million dollars in funding for Universal Pre-Kindergarten, first allocated during the 1998-1999 school year (Mitchell, 2004). During the first year of implementation, 65 school districts served more than 18,000 children. A large
percentage of children were severed in non-public school settings as required by legislation. These settings included childcare settings, Head Start programs, preschool special education, and private parochial schools (Pre [K] Now, 2009).

However, the funding and implementation wouldn’t last long; the purposed budget presented in 1999 called to reduce the funding allocated to the program and in turn would eliminate Universal Pre-Kindergarten in New York State, due to the fact that there was not enough money available to continue to support the program. In response to this proposal the Emergency Coalition to Save Universal Pre-Kindergarten and Reduced Class Size was created. The members of this group advocated for the budget to remain the same and for funding to remain constant. Through numerous defeats, the program continued to thrive and was pushed through legislation in 2003. Through the use of petitions, letters to the government, and rallies, Universal Pre-Kindergarten continued to be supported and funded (Mitchell, 2004).

Universal Pre-Kindergarten has been in operation in New York State since the legislation was passed in 1997. Through the work of numerous early childhood education activists, as well as Assemblyman Sheldon Silver and Governor George Pataki, Universal Pre-Kindergarten is still implemented in many school districts across New York State, despite efforts to cut the program’s funding and in turn eliminate it all together.
New York State’s Universal Pre-Kindergarten Explained

The New York State Department of Education defines Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) as a state-funded program that provides educationally-based, high-quality instruction to four-year-old children. This state-funded program is available to all public school districts in New York State. Recently, every public school district received an allotment of funds to establish or maintain a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program; however, only a small number of school districts chose to accept those funds and implement this early learning program. Not every district in New York State chooses to implement Universal Pre-Kindergarten because, although the program is state-funded, there are still alarming aspects to the cost of its implementation that they feel outweigh the proposed benefits of the program.

The New York State Department of Education (2009) reports that in New York State the school districts that choose to accept funding and choose to participate in the program can offer instruction to any student that resides within the participating district and who is four-years of age on or before December 1st, or otherwise eligible to attend kindergarten the following school year. The instruction must be given by a New York State certified teacher with a teaching certificate valid for service in the early childhood grades. The programs may be offered at school sites, as well as eligible outside agencies that house different types of early childhood programs. Regardless of the setting, whether taught at the school district or another Community Based Organization (CBO), the program must operate a minimum of two and one-
half hours per day, five days a week, for a minimum of 180 days per year and fall between July 1st and June 30th as does the public school.

Despite the particular setting and schedule, the Universal Pre-Kindergarten provides purposeful, child-centered activities and age appropriate instruction to ensure the children’s active learning. The program must provide research-based early intervention practices for its students to assure that they receive a sound educational beginning. The program curriculum is created with the goal of helping students develop language and communication skills, creative and critical thinking skills, as well as the normal development of large and fine motor skills. It is through the above mentioned skills that the program also works to develop age appropriate social and emotional behaviors (New York State Department of Education [NYSDE], 2009).

Overall, the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program has been created to help students close the achievement gap, in all areas of development, which exists between the different students entering kindergarten. This program is designed to better prepare students not only for kindergarten, but in all future educational settings. As stated by the New York State United Teachers Union (2009), the primary purpose for Universal Pre-Kindergarten is to provide four-year-old children access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs that prepare them for future school success by developing strong foundational skills in early literacy and numeracy.

The overall purpose of Universal Pre-Kindergarten in New York State is to provide all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, the opportunity to be enrolled in a state funded, high quality early childhood education program. Every
school district in New York State has been allotted funds to form and implement a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program. The states that choose to accept these funds and create a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program are held to strict guidelines for both employment of teachers, implementation of curriculum, as well as administering an overall sound education to all enrolled students.

Summary

Taken as a whole, it can be seen that there are a number of proposed benefits to implementing a high quality early childhood education program such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten. As stated, Universal Pre-Kindergarten began in 1996, has been in operation since its creation and has been working to strengthen the educational foundation for all children (Mitchell, 2004). This program works to close the achievement gap present in the early grades and to better prepare students in all developmental areas (Nelson, 2006; New York State Department of Education, 2009). However, there are those who oppose the program and disagree with the belief that Universal Pre-Kindergarten is the best solution to the problems seen in early education (Finn, 2010; Morrissey, Lekies, & Cochran, 2007). Overall, it is the goal of all educators to meet the needs of all students’ and Universal Pre-Kindergarten is just one tool being used by New York State to complete this goal.
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to research the benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten. Universal Pre-Kindergarten is a state funded program that allows students to attend either part or full time pre-kindergarten, through their local school district, at no charge to the families. The program assures that the teachers leading the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program must be certified by their state to teach early childhood education. The program and the curriculum create an early entry point to education and work to close the achievement gap in the early elementary grades (Nelson, 2006). The function of this program is to better prepare students for kindergarten in all areas; social, emotional, and academic.

Research Question

In this study, I have explored the following question:

- What reading and writing development can be observed in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom?

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of six students all together, three boys and three girls; all are three, four, or five years of age and plan to enter kindergarten next year. Participants come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and consist of a number of different ethnicities. All students come from the same suburban western New York school district and are all enrolled in the same Universal Pre-Kindergarten class.
The second group of students, those interviewed, was chosen from the larger group of the six participating students. I chose, at random, two males and one female to be interviewed. These three students all come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, as a means to eliminate possible bias. I chose this district and these students because of convenience and accessibility. I have ensured the confidentiality of the participants through the use of student numbers.

**Position of the Researcher**

I am currently in the final semester of graduate studies for a master’s degree in childhood literacy. I currently hold an initial New York State teacher certificate in Inclusive Childhood Education, Grades 1 through 6, with a concentration in English. I have spent the last three years of my career teaching Universal Pre-Kindergarten in a community based organization for the Brockport Central School District.

**Criteria for Trustworthiness**

This study is valid due to persistent observation, a triangulation of data sources, and dependability of the completed research. The students were observed on three different occasions, each observation lasting approximately fifteen minutes. Three of the six participating students were also interviewed for purposes of this study; the interview lasted approximately ten minutes.

In completing this study there was a triangulation of data sources to validate the findings. Three different sources of data collection have been used, a formal literacy assessment referred to as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Pre-Kindergarten (PALS – PreK), three different student observations, and three
student interviews. All sources of data were combined to produce the findings derived from this study.

Finally, the research completed for this study is dependable. Within the study there is a detailed description of the research process and all the steps followed to ensure the data collection methods present are trustworthy. I have also worked to make sure that each student and his or her name is kept confidential when completing my research to ensure that I was free of any possible additional bias.

Data Collection

I have used three primary data collection instruments to understand to what degree Universal Pre-Kindergarten effects a child’s reading and writing development. One form of data collection was done using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Pre-Kindergarten (PALS - PreK). In October, the students were administered this assessment; they were then administered this assessment one more time for purposes of this study. Of the eight different subsections of this assessment, the students were only assessed in four of the eight areas. The four subsections were then analyzed for purposes of this study.

These four subsections focus primarily on alphabet knowledge and rhyme awareness. When assessing the students’ alphabet knowledge they were asked to name all 26 letters of the alphabet, in both upper and lower case form. The students were also asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters, as well as three different digraphs.
Through the assessments, the students were tested on rhyme awareness by looking at a set of three different pictures. Students were asked to identify the one that rhymes with the target picture.

The second instrument I used as a means of data collection were three informal observations of the six participating students during literacy instruction. During this time, I took anecdotal records recording the students' interactions with different elements of their reading and writing development.

The third and final instrument I have used in my study is a student interview (Owocki & Goodman, 2002) that was completed with three of the six participating students. Through this interview I asked students general questions about their personal opinions on different early literacy topics. Overall, I have collectively looked at all three forms of data and analyzed the information I have collected.

**Data Analysis**

The data that was collected throughout this study is both qualitative and quantitative. Three different sets of data have been collected and analyzed to triangulate that data in order to confirm the findings. When analyzing the data collected from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Pre-Kindergarten, I have calculated the mean score for each of the four categories. I have then compared the mean score of the participating students to the predetermined scale set by the school district. The students have been rated either below average, average, or above average. This assessment was completed twice, and the results have been compared to see if there was growth in the students' scores. The second and third
sets of data were collected through observation and interview. Both the data collected from the observations and the interviews was analyzed to see the different early learning activities that took place in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom. I have looked at the individual work of each student and analyzed their interview responses. The data collected from these two instruments was gathered as qualitative data.

**Time Schedule**

The research for this study began in January of 2011. The students were assessed prior to the beginning of the study in November and then again in February of 2011. The students were observed three times during this four month period. Data analysis began after all data had been collected and was completed in February of 2011.

**Procedures**

1. First, I administered the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Pre-Kindergarten.
2. The six participating students were then observed during literacy instruction on January 10, 2011.
3. The students were then interviewed a month later on February 7, 2011, during literacy instruction.
4. The final observation was done on February 14, during a classroom literacy activity.
5. A week later I met with three of the six participating students and conducted an interview with each student.

6. After the final observation and interview I re-administered the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Pre-Kindergarten.

7. After all forms of data were collected I spent the next two weeks analyzing the data and compiling the results.

Limitations

Several limitations bind this study. Most significantly, all participating students attended the same Universal Pre-Kindergarten program voluntarily. Therefore, the parents who chose to enroll their students have already shown an understanding of the importance of early education and literacy; consequently, the results reflect a narrow sampling.

Second, I was the only observer and may have been limited in my ability to see beyond my own perspectives, which in turn may have affected the way in which I observed my students.

Third, this study was limited because this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom was the only environment in which the students were observed. Therefore, this study alone cannot claim that the reading and writing developments made by these students were due to the activities present in this classroom. Factors outside the Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom could have contributed to the students’ learning as well.
Lastly, a final limitation of this study is my relationship with the children. Since I am the students’ classroom teacher, they knew my beliefs about the importance of reading and writing; therefore, when interviewing them they may have been unwilling to discuss their true feelings about reading and writing.
Chapter Four: Results

As stated, this study was conducted to determine to what extent Universal Pre-Kindergarten affects a child’s reading and writing development, in terms of their letter recognition and sound awareness abilities. Throughout the time in which this study was completed, student progress was monitored using three different types of assessment: a formal literacy assessment, informal observations, and a student interview.

Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Pre-Kindergarten

The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen tool is used to determine a student’s literacy knowledge by having them complete, with an administrator, a number of different literacy activities. The six students in this study were asked to complete four of the eight parts of the assessment: upper-case alphabet recognition, lower-case alphabet recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness. The students were given the assessment in October and then again in February. At each testing point, both in October and February, the school district has set up benchmarks for each student to meet – the students will be rated below average, average, or above average based on the results of the assessment.
District Benchmarks for Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October Benchmark</th>
<th>February Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Awareness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School District Benchmarks for the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening

Based on the benchmarks set by the cooperating school district for the October assessment, a student with a score of 12 has achieved an average score, a student with a score of less than 12 has scored below average, and a student with a score of more than 12 has scored above average. Similarly, in February, a student with a score of 26 has achieved an average score, a student with a score of less than 26 has scored below average, and a student with a score of more than 26 has scored above average. The numerical score is found by combining the scores of each section.

Student One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October Assessment</th>
<th>February Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Sound Awareness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student One’s Results on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen

The first student assessed obtained a score of 30 on the initial assessment completed in October; therefore, this student initially obtained above average results. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was
able to correctly identify 20 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 10 of 26 letters. The student was not yet aware of any letter sounds; however, when completing the ‘Rhyme Awareness Assessment’ the student was able to correctly identify 4 of 10 rhyming words.

Similarly, the student obtained a score of 57 on the February assessment meaning that child is still scoring above average. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 25 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 20 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate 3 letter sounds when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters, as well as three different digraphs. Again, when completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 9 of 10 rhyming words.

It can be seen that this student improved in all four areas of the formal assessment. The student’s initial scores, as well as, his secondary assessment results placed the student above average in literacy knowledge.

Student Two
The second student assessed obtained a score of 66 on the initial assessment completed in October; therefore, this student initially obtained above average results. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 26 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment the student was able to identify 20 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment the student was able to correctly articulate 13 letter sounds when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters, as well as three different digraphs. When completing the ‘Rhyme Awareness Assessment’ the student was able to correctly identify 7 of 10 rhyming words.

Similarly, the student obtained a score of 98 on the February assessment, meaning that he or she is still scoring above average. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 26 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 26 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate 24 letter sounds when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters as well as three
different digraphs. Again, when completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 10 of 10 rhyming words.

It can be seen that this student improved also in three areas of the formal assessment; however, since the student already obtained the maximum score in the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the score did not change. The initial scores, as well as the secondary assessment results, placed the student above average in literacy knowledge. **Student Three**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October Assessment</th>
<th>February Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Case Letter</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Case Letter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Sound Awareness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Three's Results on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen**

The third student participating in this study obtained a score of 21 on the initial assessment completed in October; therefore, this student initially obtained above average results. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 16 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 5 of 26 letters. The student was not yet aware of any letter sounds and was not able to correctly identify any rhyming words.

Similarly, the student obtained a score of 39 on the February assessment meaning that he or she is still scoring above average. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 20 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the
student was able to identify 14 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate 3 letter sounds when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters as well as three different digraphs. Again, when completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 2 of 10 rhyming words. The student did not meet the February benchmark on the Rhyme Awareness Assessment.

It can be seen that this student improved in all four areas of the formal assessment. The initial scores, as well as the secondary assessment results, placed the student above average in literacy knowledge.

**Student Four**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October Assessment</th>
<th>February Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Sound Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Four’s Results on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen**

The fourth student assessed obtained a score of 54 on the initial assessment completed in October; therefore, this student initially obtained above average results. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 26 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 23 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate one letter sound when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case
letters as well as three different digraphs. When completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 4 of 10 rhyming words.

The student obtained a score of 62 on the February assessment meaning that he or she is still scoring above average. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 26 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 23 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate 4 letter sounds when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters as well as three different digraphs. Again, when completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 9 of 10 rhyming words.

It can be seen that this student improved in both areas of the formal assessment – Rhyme Awareness and Sound Awareness. Due to the fact that the student already obtained the maximum score in the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the score did not change. The child failed to improve in the Lower Case Letter Assessment, and the score remained the same. The initial scores, as well as the secondary assessment results, placed the student above average in literacy knowledge.

*Student Five*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October Assessment</th>
<th>February Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Case Letter</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Case Letter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Sound Awareness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student Five’s Results on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen*
The fifth student participating in this study obtained a score of 15 on the initial assessment completed in October; therefore, this student initially obtained above average results. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 9 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 1 of 26 letters. The student was not yet aware of any letter sounds but was able to correctly identify 5 rhyming words. The student did not meet the initial benchmark in the Lower Case Letter Assessment.

The student obtained a score of 40 on the February assessment meaning that he or she is still scoring above average. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 13 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 11 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate 7 letter sounds when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters as well as three different digraphs. Again, when completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 9 of 10 rhyming words. The student did not meet the February benchmark on the Rhyme Awareness Assessment.

It can be seen that this student improved in all four areas of the formal assessment. The initial scores and the secondary assessment results placed the student above average in literacy knowledge. The student is now meeting and surpassing all benchmarks.
**Student Six**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October Assessment</th>
<th>February Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Case Letter</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Case Letter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Sound Awareness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student Six's Results on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen*

The sixth student assessed obtained a score of 27 on the initial assessment completed in October; therefore, this student initially obtained above average results. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 14 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 7 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate 3 letter sounds when asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters as well as three different digraphs. When completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 2 of 10 rhyming words.

Similarly, the student obtained a score of 66 on the February assessment meaning that he or she is still scoring above average. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 26 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the student was able to identify 21 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly articulate 9 letter sounds when asked to produce the
letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters, as well as three different digraphs. Again, when completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the student was able to correctly identify 10 of 10 rhyming words.

It can be seen that this student improved in all four areas of the formal assessment. The initial scores as well as the secondary assessment results placed the student above average in literacy knowledge.

_Mean Score for Students Participating in the Study_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>October Assessment</th>
<th>February Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Case Letter Recognition</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Sound Awareness</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhyme Awareness</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Mean Student Results from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screen_

It can be seen that the students assessed obtained a mean score of 35.9 on the initial assessment completed in October; therefore, overall these students obtained above average results. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, on average the students were able to correctly identify 18.5 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the students were able to identify 11 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the student were able to correctly articulate, on average 2.8 letter sounds when there were asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters, as well as three different digraphs. When completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the students were able to correctly identify 3.6 of 10 rhyming words.
Similarly, the students obtained a mean score of 58.1 on the February assessment meaning that they are still scoring above average. When completing the Upper Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the students were able to correctly identify, on average, 22.6 of 26 letters. When completing the Lower Case Letter Recognition Assessment, the students were able to identify, on average, 19.1 of 26 letters. When completing the Letter Sound Awareness Assessment, the students were able to correctly articulate, on average, 8.3 letter sounds when they were asked to produce the letter sounds of 23 upper-case letters, as well as three different digraphs. Again, when completing the Rhyme Awareness Assessment, the students were able to correctly identify, on average, 8.1 of 10 rhyming words.

It can be seen that the six students assessed improved in all four areas of the formal assessment. The initial scores, as well as, the secondary assessment results placed them above average in literacy knowledge.

**Observation and Anecdotal Record**

Throughout the study the students were observed on three different occasions, during various literacy activities. All six students were observed at some point through the three observations; however, not all students were observed during each observation. The reason for this being that it was easier to observe two to three students at a time to ensure that appropriate data was collected. Each observation was performed for fifteen minutes at a time or until the literacy activity ended. Throughout the observation anecdotal records were taken to record the students' interactions with literacy as well as their interactions with their peers during various
literacy activities. The first observation was completed on January 10, 2011, the second four weeks later on February 7, 2011, and the last on February 14, 2011.

**Observation One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Activity</th>
<th>Observation Of Teacher</th>
<th>Observation Of Student Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • The students at the table are given an abundance of small puzzle letters. | • Throughout the observation the teacher assistant can be seen walking around the room observing the students' interactions with the letters. She can be heard consistently prompting them to stay on task and create familiar words from the letters given to them. | **Student Four**<br>• The student in the class is observed sifting through the letters placed in front of him looking for letters that he can connect to spell his name.  
• As the student is looking through the letters, he is announcing the letters that he is coming across.  
• The student then begins to connect a string of letters. The letters he connects do not make a word; however, he pretends to read them as if a word has been created. He yells, “I spelled read!” |
| • The students are seated at rectangular tables, heterogeneously, in groups of six. | • While the students are interacting with the literacy materials the teacher assistant can be seen assisting Student Four with understanding that each letter makes a sound and to assist him in his attempt to make meaning of what he has created. | **Student Five**<br>• The student is observed stringing together... |
| • The students’ ages ranged from 3 to 5 years old. | | |
The observation lasted approximately fifteen minutes. All students in the class, sixteen at the time of the observation, were given puzzle letters and asked to manipulate them to create familiar words, such as their name or other words seen in the environmental print in the classroom. Throughout the observation the teacher
walked the room prompting students to stay on task, as well as questioning what they were creating with their letters. The students could all be seen interacting in different ways – many of the students appeared to be on task; however, others appeared to be confused.

Student Four appeared to be on task throughout the activity. He looked through the letters inventively for ones he would need to spell out his name. He was calling out the familiar letters as he saw them. It appeared as though he had then forgotten what he was looking for and began to connect a string of letters together. He then gave these letters meaning and pretended to have created a sentence. Similarly, student five began to unsystematically string letters together; however, rather than attempting to give meaning to the letters, she counted them. The last student observed appeared to be unsystematically connecting letters together too; however, when prompted she responded that she was ‘Making a football team!’ It is clear that this student was confused about her responsibilities during this task.

**Observation Two**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Activity</th>
<th>Observation Of Teacher</th>
<th>Observation Of Student Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The students are seated at the table and given magnetic letters.</td>
<td>• Throughout the observation the teacher assistant can be seen walking around the room observing the students' interactions with the letters. She can be heard consistently</td>
<td><strong>Student Four</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The students are heterogeneously grouped at rectangular tables in groups of seven.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Prior to beginning the activity the student was heard yelling to the teacher, “Is this a little ‘n’?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The students’ ages range from four to</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Student Five</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The student uses her name-tag to assist her with the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
five years of age.

- Prior to the activity the students’ name-tags were placed at the table and they were asked to take a seat where they see their name.

- Prompting them to stay on task and create familiar words from the letters given to them.

- The teacher assistant can be seen helping Student Five search for the letters in her name. However, she is pulled away by another student attempting to build a word that he has noticed on a poster in the classroom.

- The student places corresponding letters on top of the letters written on her name-tag.

- After finding the first two letters the student sits asking for assistance in finding the other letters she needs.

Student Five

- The student quickly spells out her name and recites the letters aloud as she shares it with her classmate.

Student Six

- The student begins placing letters over her name-tag in an attempt to spell her name, but gives up after only finding three of the seven letters needed.

February 7, 2011 – Observation

The observation lasted approximately fifteen minutes and all students were engaged. Prior to the activity beginning, a student was heard calling out to ask a question about a letter that he had found. Throughout the observation, the teacher walked the room prompting students to stay on task and questioned what they were creating with their letters. Student five spent her time attempting to spell her name.
She began to use her name-tag as a guide and worked to place all the corresponding letters over the letters printed in front of her. After only finding the first two letters, she began to ask her classmates for assistance. Similarly, student three begun to place letters on top of her name-tag, but gave up after only finding three letters; she did not ask for assistance. On the other hand, student six quickly spelled out her name. After spelling out her name, she called out the letters consecutively.

*Observation 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Activity</th>
<th>Observation Of Teacher</th>
<th>Observation Of Student Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The students are all gathered at the carpet with a large number of children’s books for them to ‘read’ independently or in groups, as they chose.</td>
<td>• The teacher is reading aloud to a small group of students from a book that they all showed interest in.</td>
<td>Student One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• These books are all ones that the students have been introduced to previously. Many of them have been read aloud in the classroom.</td>
<td>• She often has to pause and redirect a small group of boys sitting close to her.</td>
<td>• This particular student can be seen flipping quickly through the pages of a text entitles, <em>The Day it Rained Hearts</em> written by Felicia Bond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are thirteen students in the classroom.</td>
<td>• The teacher assistant can be seen reading to another group of students. As she reads, more students begin to gather around her for an unplanned read aloud.</td>
<td>• He doesn’t appear to be attempting to read the words, but instead quickly glancing at the illustrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are both male and female students present.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• When finished with this book, he picks up a text that appears to have more interest to him – <em>Thomas the Train Search and Find</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The students’ ages range from four to five years old.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• This text has no words, but asks the readers to find</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pictures hidden through the book.

- The student looks intently at this text until they are asked to put the books away.

**Student Two**

- This student is sitting with a classmate looking at a text entitled *Clifford's Valentine* written by Norman Birdwell.

- The two flip through the pages and make up words to correspond with the pictures on each page.

- The students do this together for approximately four minutes before they finish the book and choose separate books to look at independently.

**Student Three**

- This student has trouble staying focused.

- She picked up a text entitled, *Go Dog Go* written by P.D. Eastman.

- The student looks at the book for only a couple of seconds before closing it and moving to
February 14, 2011 - Observation

The observation lasted approximately seven minutes. The students begun to lose interest at this time and were redirected to another activity. In the time given, the three students, although all participating in the same activity, chose to interact with the texts in different ways. It appeared as though the first student preferred to work independently. He did not seem to interact well with the first text and quickly looked through it so that he could move on to something more enjoyable. The student enjoyed looking at the second text because it was interactive and allowed him to interact with a text that he could understand.

The second student worked well with his peers to look at a story together. This text had been previously read in the classroom, and the two children worked together to remember the words that corresponded with each picture. They were able to properly identify every illustration in the text.
The third student found it hard to get on task and did very little interacting with the text she had chosen. She was redirected two different times; however, she was still unable to stay on task.

**Student Participant Interviews**

In the process of completing this study, three different students were interviewed. The students were asked ten different questions in which they were required to give a response.

*First Student Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Student Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is your favorite thing to do while you are at school?</td>
<td>My favorite thing to do at school is play with the bins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you think reading is fun? Why?</td>
<td>Yes, because I like stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you think writing is fun? Why?</td>
<td>Yes, because I want my mom and dad to be happy, I write my name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you think you are a good reader? How do you know?</td>
<td>Yes, I’m very good at reading Ten Apples Up on Top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you think you are a good writer? How do you know?</td>
<td>Yes, because I can write my name and Danny’s name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What is reading?</td>
<td>You have to look at the words and know them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What is writing?</td>
<td>Writing means you have to write your name or other people’s names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you think your teacher likes to read and write?</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Why do you read?</td>
<td>Because I’m very good at reading Ten Apples Up on Top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Why do you write?</td>
<td>Because I like to write.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student Two Interview*
Throughout the interview, it appeared as though the student was confident in the answers given. The student had very strong opinions about himself as a reader. It can be seen that in questions four and nine he was most comfortable when talking about the text, *Ten Apples Up on Top*, written by Dr. Seuss. This is a rhyming book that had previously been read in the classroom.

It can also be noted that throughout the interview the student had a strong opinion about himself as a writer. He spoke confidently when giving his answers and was able to support each one in a way that made sense to him. When reading the responses given for questions three, five, and seven, the student often associated writing with that of writing his name or another familiar name.
**Second Student Interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Student Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is your favorite thing to do while you are at school?</td>
<td>Play with toys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you think reading is fun? Why?</td>
<td>A little bit. I like it a lot, because I love reading!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you think writing is fun? Why?</td>
<td>Yes, I like to draw some things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you think you are a good reader? How do you know?</td>
<td>Yes, I’m trying to read. I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you think you are a good writer? How do you know?</td>
<td>Yes, because when I was a baby I used to scribble and I don’t do that anymore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What is reading?</td>
<td>Learning words on a book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What is writing?</td>
<td>When you try to stay in the lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you think your teacher likes to read and write?</td>
<td>Yes, my mom too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Why do you read?</td>
<td>Because I’m trying to learn words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Why do you write?</td>
<td>Because I want to color.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Four Interview**

Throughout the interview, the student was a bit hesitant in responding to the questions. It appeared as though he was either confused regarding what was being asked of him or unsure of an appropriate response. When asked about reading, it appeared evident that the student was unsure of his reading ability. The child’s uncertainty can be seen in questions two and four. When reading the response given to questions six and nine, he seemed to think of learning words when discussing reading.
When discussing the writing process, the student appeared to be more comfortable in his responses. It was clear after the interview that the student associated writing with one’s ability to color; this association can be seen in his responses to questions three, five, seven, and ten.

**Third Student Interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Student Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is your favorite thing to do while you are at school?</td>
<td>Do projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you think reading is fun? Why?</td>
<td>Yes, because I like to do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you think writing is fun? Why?</td>
<td>Yes, because it’s so fun and you let us do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you think you are a good reader? How do you know?</td>
<td>Yes, because I just know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you think you are a good writer? How do you know?</td>
<td>Yes, because I draw with crayons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>What is reading?</td>
<td>When you read good you read the words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What is writing?</td>
<td>Drawing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Do you think your teacher likes to read and write?</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Why do you read?</td>
<td>Because it’s good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Why do you write?</td>
<td>Because I’m a good writer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Five Interview**

During this interview, the student appeared to be a little confused; however, she was able to give confident responses. It can be seen that when asked about reading the student was not able to give concrete answers to the questions; this can be seen in her responses to questions two, four, and nine. Many of her answers did
not respond to the questions asked. However, it does appear as though she enjoyed reading and saw it as a positive part of literacy.

The student was able to give more concrete and confident answers to responses about writing; this can be seen in her answers to questions five and seven. After reading these responses it appears as though the student associated writing with drawing. Overall, it appears as though she was better able to define writing than reading.

**Summary of Students One - Six**

Throughout the study, three different types of data were collected. Data was collected through the use of a formal assessment known as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening in which both upper and lower case letter recognition were assessed as well as sound and rhyme awareness. Data was also collected through the use of informal observations during three separate literacy activities in which a number of different students were observed participating in a number of different activities. Finally, data was collected through the use of student interviews with three of the six participating students. They were each asked ten literacy related questions. When the three sources of data were triangulated and analyzed an abundance of useful information was collected.

Throughout the study, Student One improved in all areas of the assessment: upper case letter recognition, lower case letter recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness. This same student was observed in the February 14, 2011, observation quickly flipping through the pages of a Valentine’s Day text entitled _The
Day it Rained Hearts. When he finished looking through this text, he becomes interested in a ‘search and find’ text about Thomas the Train that captures his interest until the end of the observation. Student One was not interviewed for the purposes of this study. It is clear, that in terms of the reading and writing through the course of the assessment, Student Two improved in lower case letter recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness. He correctly identified all 26 letters during the October assessment and the February assessment. This student was observed during the February 14, 2011, observation, sitting with a classmate looking at a text entitled Clifford’s Valentine. Student Two, along with a classmate, created a story to correspond with the pictures on each page. The students worked together for approximately four minutes until they choose separate books to look at independently. Student Two was interviewed for the purposes of this study and showed through his response to the interview questions that he thinks of reading and writing to both be enjoyable activities. He feels as though he is good at both reading and writing and sees a purpose for both. It is clear, that in terms of the reading and writing development of Student Two, he made gains in a number of different areas.

Throughout the study it can be seen that Student Three improved in all areas of the assessment: upper case letter recognition, lower case letter recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness. Student three was observed on two different occasions, first being February 7, 2011, and then again on February 14, 2011. During the first observation, the student can be see placing magnetic letters over the corresponding letters in her name tag in an attempt to spell out her name with the
letter pieces. However, the student gives up when she is only able to find three of the seven letters needed. During the second observation, the student appeared to have trouble staying focused. She was redirected a number of times and seemed to get little done. For the purposes of this study, Student Three was not interviewed. It is clear, that in terms of the reading and writing development of Student Three, she made gains in a number of different areas.

Through the course of the assessment, Student Four improved in lower case letter recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness. The student correctly identified all 26 letters during the October assessment and the February assessment. This student was observed on two different occasions, the first on January 10, 2011, and then again on February 7, 2011. During the first observation, the student was observed looking through a pile of puzzle letters that had been placed on the table in front of him. He was calling out letters as he sorted through them. The student was then seen stringing together numbers in random order in an attempt to make a sentence. When he thought he was done, he then shouted to his classmates, “I spelled read!” During the second observation, the student was briefly observed asking the teacher if he was correctly identifying one of the magnetic letters. Student Four was interviewed for the purposes of this study. During the interview, the student stated that he believed reading and writing to both be fun activities. He also appeared to confuse the idea of coloring with that of writing, but stated that he believed himself to be a good writer. He then stated that he was learning to read and was still working to read the words in books. Overall, the student appeared to have a simplistic idea
of reading and writing as it pertained to him. It is clear, that in terms of the reading and writing development of Student Four, he made gains in a number of different areas.

Throughout the study, Student Five improved in all areas of the assessment; upper case letter recognition, lower case letter recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness. This same student was observed twice, once during the January 10, 2011, observation and then again on February 7, 2011. During the first observation, the student was observed stringing together a number of letters that appeared to contain no meaning or words. The student was then observed counting the letters she had collected but made no attempt to identify the letters or create meaning. During the second observation, the student was seen using her name-tag to assist her with the spelling of her name. The student placed corresponding letters on top of the letters written on her name-tag. After finding the first two letters, the student sat waiting for teacher or peer assistance in finding the other letters needed to complete the spelling of her name. Finally, Student Five was interviewed for the purposes of this study. During the interview, the student stated that she enjoyed both reading and writing but does not give much of an explanation as to the purposes of reading and writing and appeared to be unsure when answering the questions asked. It is clear, that in terms of the reading and writing development of Student Five, she made gains in a number of different areas.

Throughout the study, Student Six improved in all areas of the assessment: upper case letter recognition, lower case letter recognition, letter sound awareness,
and rhyme awareness. This same student was observed twice, once during the January 10, 2011, observation and then again on February 7, 2011. During the first observation, the student was observed connecting random letters together and stated, ‘I am making a football team!’ The student was then seen conversing with another student about what she was creating. During the second observation, the student was briefly observed spelling her name with the magnetic letters and recited the letters aloud as she shared with a classmate. Student Six was not interviewed for the purposes of this study. It is clear, that in terms of the reading and writing development of Student Six, she made gains in a number of different areas.

Conclusion

The study attempted to answer the question, ‘What reading and writing development can be observed in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom?’ Overall, each student participant involved in the study showed growth in reading and writing development in each area assessed. The students were also observed participating in a number of different literacy activities in which they can be seen interacting with literacy in three different scenarios; these three instances presented a number of different types of reading and writing development. Finally, three of the six students were then interviewed and given an opportunity to express their opinions about literacy and their reading and writing development.
Chapter Five: Discussion

This study attempted to examine what reading and writing development can be observed in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom. The purpose of this study was to learn the different types of reading and writing development observed in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom. In doing so, this study observed authentic reading and writing activities that Universal Pre-Kindergarten provides in order to develop, in its students, positive beliefs towards reading and writing. Through a careful analysis of all findings, three different conclusions can be made and in turn two implications for teaching can be formed.

First, in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom, it can be concluded that the students' reading and writing development was changed in terms of their letter-naming ability and also their rhyme and sound awareness. Second, it can be observed that through the use of different authentic literacy activities students interacted with teachers and peers to develop their reading and writing abilities. Finally, it was observed that some of the students in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom have developed positive beliefs in terms of their reading and writing development.

Through the above mentioned conclusions, two implications can be drawn. First, authentic literacy experiences are essential in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom. Second, through the use of teacher support and guidance, the young children in this classroom can develop their reading and writing abilities.
Conclusions

Throughout the study, data was collected through assessment and observation of six different students, and then later an interview was conducted with three of the participating students.

One conclusion drawn from this study was that the students showed growth in their letter recognition and letter sound and rhyme awareness. The first set of findings that were gathered from the information collected during the formal assessment, entitled the "Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Pre-Kindergarten," in which students were assessed regarding a number of different literary concepts. The assessment covered the students' upper and lower case letter recognition skills, as well as their letter sound awareness and also their rhyme awareness. After an analysis of the October assessment results, all six students' scores showed that they were achieving above average results when entering the classroom. When given the same assessment again in February, these six students remained above average in all areas. In turn, all six students' scores improved drastically from October to February with each meeting and surpassing the preset benchmark. As in prior research, (Browder, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Courtade, Gibbs, & Flowers, 2008; Bailet, Repper, Piasts, & Murphy, 2009) this study found that students maintained an above average assessment score. The early literacy curriculum in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom entails involving students in authentic literacy experiences as often as possible. These experiences may consist of a read aloud, letter manipulation, shared reading and writing experiences, as well as an attempt to
develop an overall understanding of what it means to read and write. Through the assessment of these students, it was observed that they made significant gains in their letter recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness; however, I can not imply cause and effect for purposes of this study.

A second conclusion drawn from this study was that through the use of different authentic literacy activities students interacted with teachers and peers to develop their reading and writing abilities. The students in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom were observed manipulating letters in an attempt to build a familiar word. During this activity, the teacher could be seen assisting the students in building familiar words or creating meaning for something they had created. The students could also be seen independently looking at different children’s books. They were observed creating a story from a book full of pictures, and attempting to read aloud to a peer. The teacher at this time was seen interacting with students in an unplanned read aloud of a Valentine’s Day story.

A report by the National Research Council (1999) states that research consistently demonstrates that the more children know about language and literacy, in terms of knowledge about letters, rhyme awareness, beginning sound awareness, and print and word awareness before they arrive at kindergarten, the better equipped they are to succeed in reading. As shown in previous studies (Neuman, 1999, Ostrosky, Gaffney, and Thomas, D.V. 2006), when students are given opportunities to participate in different types of literacy activities, such as shared reading and writing, letter manipulation, and read aloud experiences, they begin to better understand
important literacy concepts. Students were observed manipulating letters in a number of different ways, as well as interacting with a number of different books. It cannot be stated that the students’ authentic literacy experiences caused the previously stated gains in their letter recognition, letter sound awareness, and rhyme awareness; however, the two were observed simultaneously in the classroom. The findings in this particular aspect of the study help to show that Universal Pre-Kindergarten provides a means for students to interact with literacy in a number of different authentic situations.

A third and final conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that some students in this Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom have developed positive beliefs about their reading and writing development. As seen in a previous study (Chapman & Tunmer, 2003), students who express an early positive outlook on reading and writing and who show early success tend to hold these beliefs throughout the literacy experiences. The findings of this study suggest that Universal Pre-Kindergarten has worked to develop positive responses toward learning form some of the students involved. It can be seen through an analysis of the student interviews that all two of the three students express positive beliefs towards reading and writing and believe themselves to be successful readers and writers. Although one student appears to be confused about his abilities as a reader or writer, he is still young and is still working to develop a concrete set of beliefs. It may be common for young students to believe themselves successful at most things; through the use of Universal Pre-Kindergarten these beliefs can be made concrete and strengthened throughout the later grades.
**Implications for Teaching**

The implications generated from this study suggest that students in this early childhood education classroom are developing literacy ability. Through the use of authentic literacy experiences, student reading and writing development is strengthened (Neuman, 1999). It is these authentic reading and writing experiences that are essential in the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Classroom. It can be seen in this classroom through the completion of these activities and teacher assisted support and guidance throughout these literacy experiences that students positively interact with literacy and develop their reading and writing abilities. This study has helped to imply that in my Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom I will continue to provide my students with authentic literacy experiences because they may be the most beneficial to a student’s reading and writing development. When students are exposed to letters in various forms, as well as a number of different types of texts, as seen in this study, they are able to make connections and develop letters knowledge and rhyme and sound awareness. In turn, if these experiences are provided and students feel successful they will be more likely to have a positive attitude towards literacy that will continue as they grow older. The implications gained from the study, as well as similar studies done (Neuman, 1999; Chapman and & Tunmer, 2003) are not only implied for teachers of Universal Pre-Kindergarten, but for all teachers. It is important that students are exposed to positive authentic literacy experiences.
**Recommendations for Future Research**

After carefully reviewing the findings in this research, there are a number of different possibilities for future research in this same subject area. Universal Pre-Kindergarten is a relatively new trend in education around the United States; therefore, leaving a lot of room for more significant research to be done.

One recommendation for future research that can be drawn from the results of this study would be to do a similar study; however, have a control group of students who did not attend a Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program. In doing this you would be able to assess both groups of students and see the difference in assessment results between the students who attended a Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program with those who did not attend such a program. Overall, if conducted on a large scale, these findings might help to determine whether Universal Pre-Kindergarten played a role in the development of the reading and writing development and the assessment results.

Similarly, a longitudinal study could be conducted that not only assessed and observed students in Universal Pre-Kindergarten, but also follows them through Kindergarten and other grades to see the types of progress the students continue to make. It would also be interesting to see how these students compare academically, in the later grades, with students who did not attend a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program.

Also, this study primarily dealt with the academic impact that Universal Pre-Kindergarten has on students' reading and writing development. An additional study could be done on the social, emotional, and developmental effects Universal Pre-
Kindergarten has on the students who attend the program. Little to no research has previously been done in this area; therefore, any research would help to better inform both parents and educators on the proposed benefits of the program.

Finally, this study simply focused on the students enrolled in one Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program. It would be beneficial to the field to see the effectiveness of multiple Universal Pre-Kindergarten programs. In doing this, the findings can be more tangible and, in turn, more reliable.

Overall, this study focused on the reading and writing development of six students in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program. The purpose of this study was to research the benefits of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and answer the question: What reading and writing development can be observed in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten classroom? Through the use of three different assessments, both formal and informal, the students in this classroom were assessed to determine the literacy development present in this classroom. Through the use of several different authentic literacy experiences, the students’ reading and writing development has grown in terms of their upper and lower case letter recognition as well as their letter sound and rhyme awareness.
Work Cited


