Investigation of Teaching Strategies Used in First Grade Classrooms that could be Applied in Physical Education to Support the Development of Literacy Skills

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Investigation of Teaching Strategies Used in First Grade Classrooms That Could Be Applied in Physical Education to Support the Development of Literacy Skills

by

Marjorie Oster Robinson

May 2003

A thesis submitted to the Department of Physical Education and Sport of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Education
Investigation of Teaching Strategies Used in First Grade Classrooms that Could Be Applied in Physical Education to Support the Development of Literacy Skills

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been completed without the help of many special people. My deepest appreciation and gratitude goes to the following people who in their own unique way, contributed to this thesis:

➢ Sue C. and Sue D. who opened their classrooms to me and never complained when I asked one more question.

➢ Dr. Luz Cruz, Dr. Susan Novinger and Dr. Cathy Houston-Wilson, my thesis committee, who guided me through this process, provided encouragement, and excellent academic advisement.

➢ My husband, Jim, my sons, Tucker and Corey, and my parents, Nan and Carl Oster, who supported me every step of the way when I decided to go back to school.
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Abstract

This thesis focuses on strategies used to teach first graders literacy skills that could be implemented in a physical education program that would benefit the development of both physical education skills and literacy skills in first graders. Qualitative research was selected to be the method of investigation and data collection consisted of observations, interviews, and document analysis. The review of literature includes literature related to the integration of academics into physical education, national and state standards for physical education and language arts, how children gain literacy skills, the practical application of integrating language arts into physical education, and the effect that integrating language arts has on the acquisition of physical education objectives.

Two first grade teachers were selected and volunteered to participate in this study. I observed six times in each of their classrooms and interviewed each teacher three times during the observation process. Three students from each classroom were interviewed to get a student’s perspective on learning literacy skills. The data were analyzed for strategies that were common to both classrooms. These common strategies were then measured against criteria for implementation in my physical education. Three strategies were selected to be implemented and had support in professional literature. I implemented the three strategies with the two classrooms in which I observed and in two additional first grades. All of these classes were videotaped and the videotapes were analyzed by two Language Arts experts for the effectiveness and usefulness of implementing the selected strategies.
The three strategies implemented were the use of a K-W-L chart, reading aloud books related to physical education, and providing a print rich environment. The Language Arts experts determined that these three strategies were effective and useful strategies, benefiting both physical education and language arts. These three strategies also have support in the professional literature.

Future research in this area may result in additional classroom strategies being identified for use in the gymnasium. This study may also encourage physical educators to observe what strategies are being used in their schools and adapt these strategies for use in their classes.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

Learning to read and write are key objectives for children in first grade. Instruction within first grade classrooms is focused on guiding students towards the literacy skills, strategies and dispositions that are needed to be successful readers and writers. A current trend in education is to include a language arts component in all curriculum areas so students are immersed in a language arts-rich environment for their whole school day. This practice has been referred to as integration and more recently the term “content-literacy” is being used to describe this planned opportunity to read, write, speak and listen in all academic areas of a student’s school day.

Integration of language arts into all subject areas is a hot educational topic. The New York State Education Department’s English Language Arts philosophy states that all teachers are responsible for supporting the literacy skills of students. (New York State Education Department, 2002). Placek and O’Sullivan (1997) describe the wide range of options that physical education has to integrate its program with other content areas. The reinforcement of language arts skills within a physical education program has been a focus of physical education literature in recent years (Hengstman, 2001). Physical educators do not have to look far to find suggested ways to incorporate language arts into their programs (Cooke & Ahrens, 1997; Griffin & Morgan, 1998). For example, Cone and Cone (2001) list approaches to use when working with classroom teachers (e.g. planned meeting times to meet with classroom teachers) and on-going strategies to use in the gymnasium (e.g. labeling equipment).
Are there techniques and strategies that are being used by classroom teachers who are teaching reading and writing on a daily basis that could be used in the gymnasium setting to support the literacy development of students? For example, knowing how a classroom teacher introduces new words to students may be beneficial to the physical education teacher and to the students when new words are introduced in physical education. What cues and strategies are being used in the classroom for helping students develop their listening and speaking skills that could be carried over into the gymnasium? Instead of thinking of integration only in terms of content areas, is it possible to integrate the strategies that classroom teachers are using into physical education lessons in support of developing literacy skills?

With an emphasis on integration, the question arises whether integration of subject areas outside the physical education realm will compromise the attainment of physical education objectives. Will physical education students in an environment rich with language arts stimuli make the same progress towards physical education objectives as those students in a more subject-contained environment? Preschool children were studied to measure the effect of integrating language arts with their physical education program (Connor-Kuntz, Dummer, 1996). This research concluded that there was no compromise in the motor skill improvement when the motor skill program was conducted in a language-rich environment. Connor-Kuntz also concluded that no additional instructional time was required to achieve the motor skill objectives while working within the language-rich environment. Activities are abundant regarding how to integrate language arts into physical education, but are not research based.
Because physical education teachers are schooled in the field of physical education, not literacy, physical educators may be lost as to how to carry out directives from state level education departments which say language arts needs to be a component in all areas throughout a student’s day. What can veteran first grade teachers share with physical education teachers that would allow literacy development to occur in the physical education setting without disrupting a physical education curriculum? If physical educators were made aware of strategies and techniques used in first grade classrooms, could they adopt and/or adapt these strategies and techniques for use in the gymnasium? Time needs to be spent in first grade classrooms, observing what is being done to teach students how to read, write, listen and speak and then interpreting these observations into usable strategies for physical education.

There are many theories about how best to teach children the language arts skills they need. There are experts and research to support skills-based instruction. There are also experts and research to support a more meaning-based approach to literacy instruction. Researchers and teachers who support a meaning-based approach to literacy point out that the meaning-based approach includes skills instruction. Physical educators most likely do not have the background knowledge or experience to get into a reading theory debate, but would benefit from seeing what classroom teachers have found to be effective strategies in the teaching of language arts skills, finding support for these strategies in relevant research, and then transferring those strategies to the gymnasium setting.
Title

Investigation of teaching strategies used in first grade classrooms that could be applied in physical education in support of the development of literacy skills.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyze strategies used to teach language arts skills in two first grade classrooms and determine if and how these strategies can be implemented in a physical education program in support of state mandates that language arts be included in all content areas.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this thesis:

Content Literacy is defined “as the ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline.” (Buell, 2001).

Integration is defined as using a physical education program to teach concepts from other subject areas such as language arts (Placek, 1997).

Language Arts is defined as the school curriculum areas particularly concerned with the development and improvement of reading, writing, speaking and listening (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Literacy is defined as,” The ability to communicate in real-world situations, which involves the abilities of an individual to read, write, speak, listen, view, and think.” (Cooper, 1997, p.7)
Research Hypothesis

There are research-based strategies being used in classrooms to teach young children language arts skills that could be applied in a physical education program to support the acquisition of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of students without compromising the acquisition of physical education goals.

Delimitations

This study will be based on the following delimitations:

1. This study will be limited to two first grade classes in an elementary school in upstate New York.
2. Two qualified classroom teachers will be observed teaching language arts.
3. There are 22 students in each of these first grade classes.
4. I will do all of the observations and interviews.
5. This study will cover a seven-week time span.
6. Each classroom visitation/observation will last approximately 60 minutes.
7. Two language arts experts will authenticate strategies being applied in physical education classes.

Limitations

This study will be based on the following limitations:
1. Language arts instruction is on-going throughout the school day, and I will be limited to a one-hour observation period, once every four days.

2. Family home environment as well as social and cultural situations may influence the language development of students.

3. The size of this study is limited to two first grade classrooms.

4. The relatively short length of time in which this study is conducted is a limitation.
Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of literature relevant to integration of other subject areas into a physical education program, the process of how children learn to read, write, speak and listen, and how strategies from this process could be incorporated into a physical education program. Key literature subtopics include integration of academics in physical education, national and state standards for physical education and language arts, how children gain literacy skills, the practical application of integrating language arts in the gymnasium, and the acquisition of physical education objectives.

Integration of Academics in Physical Education

Because the current educational focus is on integration across curriculum areas, researchers in the field of physical education have examined what integration looks like in the gymnasium. Placek and O’Sullivan (1997) examined the concept of internal and external integration of physical education. They defined internal integration as expanding a traditional skill oriented physical education program to include cognitive and affective components. Cognitive components might include things such as an understanding of how to do a skill, or being aware of the rules or history of a sport, whereas affective components would address things such as sportsmanship and the enjoyment of physical activity. External integration was described as the integration of physical education with other subjects. This external integration could take two forms according to Placek and O’Sullivan. One form is
when physical education is the primary focus and the second form is when other
subject areas become the primary focus with physical education in a supporting role.

Rauschenbach (1996) looked at the advantages of integration and defined how
quality integrative activities might look. Rauschenbach presented specific integrated
ideas for science and social studies with physical education, with benefits for the
students both cognitively and physically. He noted that integration opportunities
could provide classroom staff with an appreciation of the physical education program.
Integration can also support the diverse learning styles of students while providing an
active learning environment, especially for the kinesthetic learners (Gardner, 1993).
Rauschenbach stressed that integration is a two-way street and that while physical
educators can support classroom initiatives, classroom teachers can integrate physical
education components into their daily program. Integrative activities fall into three
categories according to Rauschenbach: embedded tasks, practice tasks, and discovery
tasks. He defined an embedded task as one where other subject areas were integrated
into regular, routine activities in physical education. When other subject matter was
integrated into motor skill activity, he labeled these practice tasks. Discovery tasks
required a higher level of thinking and encouraged students to look for relationships
between physical education and other subject matters. The example Rauschenbach
gave for discovery tasks was discussing how levers worked (science) during a
tumbling unit. He gave concrete examples of how each of these categories can be
incorporated into a physical education program.

Werner (1994) explored the play of preschool children and how this play
could serve as a vehicle into the various subject areas of a preschool curriculum. He
noted that play is the work of young children and should be taken very seriously.

Werner highlighted a preschool curriculum used in South Carolina for its commitment to movement experiences throughout the child’s day, with movement being integrated into all areas of instruction. Werner suggested that teachers read any of the numerous children’s books in which action words are a key part of the story and encourage the young children to act out the story. This will allow the children to internalize any new movements, words and concepts (over, under, through, around, etc). Owocki states, “Play is like a gold mine for its potential for facilitating literacy” (1999, p.3). Owocki supports this statement by pointing out that play is what children are used to doing and it provides an environment conducive to risk-taking.

Opportunities abound for building on a child’s prior knowledge in a play situation, a key component of Piaget’s learning theories (1969).

“Learning to move -- moving to learn” is the motto of the integrated physical education program of Riley and Cardillo (1998, p.7). They define some of the benefits and goals of an integrated physical education program, leading to the conclusion that children learn best when they are actively involved with their learning. Riley and Cardillo provide two examples of physical education lessons integrated with a physical science unit used in the classroom. These lessons were on the water cycle and climates around the world.

With physical education being cut or severely reduced from the school day, Smith and Cestaro (1996) outline ten points to making a physical education program indispensable. Two of the ten points relate to integrative activities and reading. By educating the whole child (cognitively, affectively, and physically), not just the
physical body of the child, physical education becomes a supporting spoke in the wheel of education.

National and State Standards in Physical Education and Language Arts

With an emphasis on integration, and a priority on language arts in the elementary schools, it is important for physical education teachers to not lose focus of national and state physical education standards. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (1995) has published seven content standards for physical education. These standards are related to each grade level, kindergarten through grade twelve, with sample benchmarks for specific grade levels. Many states have adopted these standards as their state standards. More specifically, New York State has three broad standards for physical education with performance indicators for what students should be able to demonstrate at the elementary, intermediate, and commencement levels (1996). Physical education teachers are now being held accountable for guiding students towards the achievement of these physical education standards.

New York State also has standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and similar to the physical education standards, the ELA standards are broken down into elementary, intermediate and commencement levels with corresponding performance indicators. The New York State Education Department published their philosophical beliefs relating to English Language Arts, including statements that “...English Language Arts learners must be exposed to regular and varied opportunities to read, write, listen, and speak,” and “...teachers in all content areas share responsibility for
the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking competencies”
(http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/ele/elarg.html, 2002) These two beliefs clearly indicate that physical educators now have a responsibility to include a language arts component into their program.

How Children Gain Literacy Skills

Learning to read does not start when a child starts school. A child’s journey towards literacy begins with the first interactions the child has with adults and the native language. Two psychologists, Jean Piaget (1969) and Lev Vygotsky (1978), developed theories about child development, addressing the issues of cognitive development and language acquisition. These theories are used today to support educational decisions. According to Piaget and Inhelder (1969), learning occurs when children add to their current thinking or something happens to drastically change their thinking and very young children do this by acting and reacting to their environment. Piaget outlined stages of development through which children progress and how children accommodate and assimilate new concepts into their current cognitive structures at these different developmental stages. Piaget labeled these four stages or periods (and approximate corresponding ages) as sensorimotor period (0-2 years), preoperational period (2-7 years), concrete operations period (7-11 years), and formal operations period (11-15 years). Each of these stages is characterized by a higher level of thinking. Wadsworth (1978) further describes these periods as being sequential, meaning that all children move through these periods in the same order, but at different rates.
Activity or interaction of the child with his/her own environment is a key premise of Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. Children construct their knowledge of the world based on their interactions with the world. The term “constructivism” is used by educators to define Piaget’s concept that children gain new understanding by building on prior experiences and knowledge (Sowers, 2000). Piaget and Inhelder (1969) theorized that language development is a result of these interactions as young children try to verbalize what they are experiencing. Piaget observed that a child’s level of language acquisition was determined by the period or stage of development in which that child was currently functioning.

Piaget identified two distinct levels of language, one being egocentric speech, predominant in preschool children and the other being socialized speech, which emerges in the concrete operations stage and is more interactive with another human being (Pflaum, 1986). Young children use speech to further define their interactions at that moment (Sowers, 2000). In preschoolers and early primary aged students this can take the form of talking to oneself, or about oneself, in other words, egocentric speech. As children get older, their speech becomes less self-centered and more interactive with those around them, in other words, socialized speech.

Vygotsky’s research (1978) concluded that learning takes place because of adult interventions and social and cultural interactions. According to Vygotsky, children learn when they are in a “zone of proximal development”. Christie, Enz, and Vukelich (2003) defined this zone of proximal development as “a stage at which a child has partially mastered a skill but can use this skill only with the help of others” (p.2). Children functioning in the zone of proximal development are able to
accomplish tasks that they could not accomplish independently. This zone of proximal development goes beyond the mastering of skills alone and also applies to the development of an understanding of concepts. The intervention by adults (or older children) allows the child to link the information they were lacking with what they already know, resulting in new learning. As a child’s language develops, adults can model language use, support a child’s attempts with language and provide the missing components as a child expands their language base. Vygotsky’s theories about learning and language acquisition are centered on both the social and cultural interactions children have with their environment. This cultural interaction shapes not only the child’s language, but shapes what the child knows about language and about using language. Syntax and pragmatics of language are examples of components of language that can be influenced by a child’s culture. “...all children come to school with a language base, and this base may or may not match the base on which the school is trying to build” (Cooper, 1997, p.9). The challenge to schools is to work with the language base the children bring with them and build literacy activities around that base (Cooper).

Both Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1978) describe learning as taking place when current knowledge is modified by newly acquired understandings. Children and adults continue to learn as new data is processed within the context of prior knowledge. The base of prior knowledge expands allowing for further interpretation of new information. “Background knowledge is one reason why children who read the most (or travel the most) bring the largest amount of information to the table and thus understand more of what a teacher or textbook is teaching” (Tralease, 2001,
When children come to school with narrow or limited stores of prior knowledge, it should be the goal of the school to build and expand on whatever the child brings, recognizing the individual differences and experiences in prior knowledge (Cooper, 1997).

The process of becoming literate, being able to read and write, begins with a child’s oral language development (Harris, 1995). Sowers (2000) outlines five components of language that children progress through on their way to mastering a language. Infants begin by making sounds, which progresses into developing a vocabulary of words. These words then come together in sentences. Once children are forming sentences they start to understand and use more complex morphemes such as adding “ing” to words or “s” to make a plural of a word. The fifth stage of language acquisition, and the most difficult to master is the pragmatic component, or the ‘social” component. This involves tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions. As children move through these progressions of language development, they find a variety of reasons to use language. Children use language to tell their thoughts, to get things they need, and to get new information (Christie). Cambourne (1988) outlines seven conditions that make language acquisition possible. These conditions are immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, use, approximation, and response. For most children, the family (however defined) provides some or all of these conditions in varying degrees that allow most children to learn to talk without formal instruction. Vygotsky (1978) also made the strong connection between social (family) interactions and learning.
Children can learn at a very young age that oral language corresponds to written language, whether it is through environmental print (cereal boxes, traffic signs, etc.) or through books that are read to them. Just as oral language development varies from child to child, so does written language development. Additionally, children experiment with oral language as they learn to speak and the same experimentation process goes on as children are learning to read and write (Bromley, 1992). The principles of the conditions of learning that Cambourne (1988) applied to spoken language can also be applied to acquisition of written language, and family can play an important role as children start to learn about print.

As young children begin to learn to read and write, they acquire some basic concepts of print. Some of the concepts that are grasped early are that print has a purpose and function, that there are recognizable and reoccurring logos, symbols, and alphabetic letters, that these symbols and letters correspond to sounds the child can make orally, and that there are rules about how to put it written form (e.g. left to right, top to bottom) (Christie, 2003). The significant adults in a child’s life may have read to that child on a regular basis or had the child help write a thank-you note or grocery list, all activities that introduce a child to the idea that print has meaning and there are rules that go along with print. Many children come to school with these understandings as a result of interactions with written words, spoken words and with the adults in their lives, supporting Vygotsky’s learning theory (1969).

First graders, like prekindergarten and kindergarten children, tend to spend a great deal of time exploring print as they learn about reading (Freppon and McIntyre, 1993). The challenge for first grade teachers is to support young children as they
move through the stages of emergent literacy toward independent literacy (Christie, 2003). Christie suggests that teachers need to provide functional literacy activities such as print seen in the children's environment (environmental print), print related to classroom activities, the sharing of quality literature, combining play with literacy activities and connecting literacy with the writing experience.

Curricula for teaching primary-aged children to read and write have changed over the years. There has been debate surrounding the merits of a skills-based curriculum versus a meaning-based curriculum. Weaver (1998) outlines a balanced reading program that places the teaching of reading skills as one strategy of a literature-rich school experience. Weaver adds that the teaching of reading skills can and should also occur in the home to support a child's journey towards literacy. Weaver maintains that finding meaning in text should be the focus when teaching reading. McIntyre and Freppon's research (1998) suggests that reading skills instruction can successfully be integrated in a whole language classroom, thereby eliminating the need to debate the merits of exclusively using a skills-based only curriculum or a whole language curriculum. Kaufman (2002) discusses the huge number of methods and strategies that are available to teachers of young children. She outlines strategies such as shared reading, word walls, center activities and small group reading instruction (including specific reading skills lessons). Kaufman recognizes the value of all of these strategies and the importance of finding the strategies necessary to meet the diverse needs of all her students. Shared reading is defined as instructional strategy in which the teacher involves a group of children in the reading of a book in order to help them with concepts of early literacy (Harris,
1995). Some of the conditions of learning (Cambourne, 1988) support the shared reading strategy. Conditions such as immersion, demonstration, use, and response can be integral parts of the shared reading experience. Instead of debating whether reading should be taught with a skills-based curriculum or a meaning-based curriculum, Freppon and Dahl (1991) discuss the merits of incorporating skills instruction in a meaning-based program. This research suggests that it is possible to infuse skills instruction into a whole language classroom to develop independent readers who can decode new words and maintain a high level of comprehension. Dahl and Scharer (2000) examined eight classrooms that met certain criteria to be labeled as whole language classrooms. In all cases, skills instruction was one component of the reading and writing instruction and occurred within the context of reading and writing lessons and activities. They believe that their research should end the thoughts that skills-based instruction and meaning-based instruction are at opposite ends of a teaching spectrum when in reality, the two co-exist in whole language classrooms today.

Research supports the notion that children who come from families where reading and writing are valued, bring more prior knowledge that is valued by schools to reading instruction in a school setting (Christie, 2003; McGee, 2000; Sowers, 2000). Children who have access to books and are read to on a regular basis are a step ahead in acquiring school-based literacy compared to children who do not have these opportunities. These children have a significant knowledge base from which to build new knowledge and have had the social interactions with more experienced adults, which as Vygotsky theorized, was key to learning.
Practical Application of Integrating Language Arts in the Gymnasium

Literature abounds on how to integrate language arts into the physical education program at an elementary level. Cooke and Aherns (1997) describe their Rotate and Read set up where students rotate through a variety of stations and must read the learning cards to know what to do. This system works for a variety of units as well as a variety of grade levels.

Griffin and Morgan (1998) outline a selection of physical education activities that support language arts skill development (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). These activities cover a range of motor skill objectives and are categorized by large and small space activities. An example of these activities is Create a Game, where students work collaboratively to invent a game and then need to provide a written description of the game along with the rules.

At the elementary level, gaining literacy skills is a crucial milestone and physical educators have supported this goal. The book, Movement ABC’s (Hengstman, 2001), is dedicated to supporting primary level teachers as they teach young children the alphabet. Movement activities are provided for each letter of the alphabet and are designed to be quick activities or the focus of a whole class period.

As children get older, reading and physical education can continue to support each other. Van Oteghen and Mahood (1995) studied middle school students and found that they enjoyed reading sports-related books. These students were found to read self-help or improvement books that related to sports in which they were
involved. The authors stressed that the reading of sports books could lead to integrated activities with other academic areas. Finding books that the students enjoy and making them readily available were key components to the success of integrating reading and physical education according to Van Oteghen and Mahood (1995). Vigil and Edwards (2002) discuss the importance of incorporating sports fiction into a physical education program and the benefits that can be derived. These authors mention the fact that sports fiction may build on a child’s interest in a sport and provide opportunities for critical thinking.

For physical education teachers wondering where to start with integrating literature into physical education, the research of Schumacher (1999) could be useful. Schumacher (1999) surveyed elementary physical education teachers for the resources they used in their classes. Schumacher then compiled an extensive bibliography of books, poems, and songs, which may be helpful to a teacher attempting to integrate language arts into a physical education program. This bibliography includes the title, author, brief annotation, appropriate grade level and suggested activities for each entry.

With all these ideas for how to integrate language arts and physical education, what impact will this integration have on the attainment of physical education objectives?

Acquisition of Physical Education Objectives

The research supports integrating physical education with other subject areas and provides many concrete examples of how to do it. Research on the effect this
integration has on the acquisition of physical education objectives is limited to the
work of Earle (1981) and Connor-Kuntz and Dummer (1996). Earle’s work focused
on integrating selected listening and reading objectives with motor development
objectives with kindergarten, first, and second grade students. At the end of the ten-
week study, involving 155 children, Earle concluded that measurable gains could be
made in both language arts objectives and motor skill objectives when language arts
objectives were integrated into a physical education program. Notably, the students in
the experimental group (receiving the added language arts component) made similar
gains in their motor development as students in the control group (not receiving the
language arts integration component).

More recently, the research of Connor-Kuntz and Dummer (1996) measured
the effect of adding a language arts component to a preschool physical activity
program. Their research included children from three different preschool settings with
a total of 72 children participating in the eight-week study. The authors concluded
that the language arts component could be integrated into a physical activity program
without increasing instructional time and without compromising physical activity
objectives. Comparable gains in motor skill development were documented in both
the control group and experimental group in this study. The experimental group,
receiving the language arts enrichment had the added benefit of measurable gains in
their knowledge of language concepts and labels.
Summary

The research supports the value of integrating language arts into physical education. There are a variety of ways this integration can take place. Would it be more beneficial for students if these literacy skill activities that were part of the physical education program, had a similar look and feel as in the classroom? Are there strategies being used in first grade classrooms to teach language arts skills that could be transferred to the gymnasium in support of students’ language arts development? What expertise can first grade teachers pass along to physical education teachers as literacy skill development is incorporated into physical education? This is the focus of this thesis.
Chapter 3 - Methods and Procedures

The decision was made to approach this thesis project from a qualitative research design when it was determined that the best way (and maybe the only way) to get the information needed to support the purpose of the thesis was through observations and interviews. Merriam (1998) describes qualitative research as being a form of inquiry taking place in a natural setting. Merriam concludes that the field of education is the ideal setting for qualitative research because educational practices can be explained and defined in the actual context in which the practices are occurring. Case studies are one method of qualitative research and Merriam defines case studies as “intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system” (p.19). Yin (1994) proposes that research that seeks answers to “how” and “why” questions be approached through descriptive case studies. Qualitative research is not new to physical education. Siedentop and Tannehill (2000) note that the early research that was conducted on teaching physical education used quantitative methods but since the 1980’s research has moved to using the qualitative approach and now qualitative approaches are the dominant method when studying the teaching of physical education.

Qualitative research uses data collected from observations, interviews, and related documents. By using all three vehicles for data collection, validity for the findings can be established (Merriam 1998).

This case study focused on the strategies and techniques used to teach literacy skills in two first grade classrooms. Live classroom observations, teacher interviews, student interviews, document analysis relating to literacy and to physical education,
and videotaped physical education lessons were used to determine if and how observed strategies and techniques can be supported in the gymnasium. This chapter will provide descriptions of the classroom teachers and the students, the initial visits, the procedures of this study, and how the data were analyzed.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of two first grade teachers at Greece School, and the students in each of those teacher’s classrooms. These students were six to seven years old and there were between 20 and 22 students in each classroom. I was the observer and interviewer for this study and was also the physical education teacher for these students. This school was located in Western New York. According to the Basic Educational Data System, Fall 2002, Greece School had 834 students (426 boys and 408 girls). The ethnic breakdown was 88.4% White, 5% Hispanic, 3.2% Black, 2.3% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Thirty percent of the school population received free or reduced lunches.

Description of Classroom Teachers

Two first grade teachers were selected and volunteered to participate in this study. These teachers were considered “veteran” teachers, each having a minimum of fourteen years experience teaching at the first grade level with additional years of teaching at other grade levels. The two selected teachers were active in professional development opportunities related to reading and language arts. A Letter of Consent
was obtained from both of the participating classroom teachers. A copy of this letter is included in Appendix A. The teachers’ names were changed for privacy and security reasons.

Mrs. Cedar was one of the participating teachers in this study. She brought twenty years of teaching experience to her classroom, with fifteen years being at the first grade level. Prior to coming to the first grade level, Mrs. Cedar taught for five years in special education at the primary and middle school level. Mrs. Cedar was one of six first grade teachers, and was the teacher with the most years of experience at this level. There were 22 students in her classroom, which she described as being an inclusive classroom (see Interview notes). There were some special needs children who were labeled with a handicapping condition, and other children who were not labeled but benefited from the support of the consultant teacher and the teaching assistant who worked in this classroom on a part-time basis. Mrs. Cedar perceived her strengths as being in the areas of classroom management and literacy. She thought she worked well with students with special needs and with all parents. Mrs. Cedar’s personal philosophy about teaching children to read is based on the premise that children need many and varied exposures to language and books, both in school and at home. She considered herself a whole language teacher, who uses a variety of strategies to get all the children in her class to be readers and writers. Mrs. Cedar took advantage of many of the professional development opportunities offered at both the school and district levels and has benefited from the sharing of ideas with colleagues whether it is at formal “Coffee Talks” or informally in the halls.
The second teacher participating in this study was Mrs. Davis, a teacher with fourteen years of experience at the first grade level and six years of teaching at other grade levels before settling into first grade. Mrs. Davis described her classroom as being a classroom with a heterogeneous mix of 22 students (Interview notes). She had 4 very low students who had learning problems that were compounded by behavioral problems. Mrs. Davis had 3 students who were also part of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Mrs. Davis had the support of a teaching assistant for one hour a day during a portion of the Language Arts block. She perceived her teaching strengths as being good with classroom management and at integrating the content areas with Language Arts. Mrs. Davis’s personal philosophy about teaching children to read was to use a multi-approach, meaning, exposing children to a variety of literature styles, combining reading with writing and finding what interests and excites each and every child (Interview notes). She believed that the more experiences a child had the better reader that child became. Mrs. Davis implemented this philosophy by reading different pieces of literature to her students (e.g. fiction, non-fiction, poetry). Mrs. Davis participated in many after-school study groups offered by the school district. She subscribed to several teacher magazines, which provided her with both the latest teaching research and creative ideas to use in her classroom.

Description of Students

The students who participated in this study were the children in the two selected first grade teachers’ classrooms. These children had a wide range of
academic levels and competencies in English. These children were also students in my physical education classes.

Each classroom teacher identified three students in her class to participate in an interview session as part of this study. One low level reader, one medium level reader and one high level reader were selected from each class to answer questions about what language arts activities they enjoyed and what activities they believed help them become better readers and writers. The classroom teachers administered the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to all students and the score from the DRA was used to identify the low, middle, and high-level readers. The DRA is administered throughout the year to adjust a child's reading program when necessary. The interviews were conducted after all of the observations had been completed, and I individually interviewed all the students in a nearby conference room at the school.

Letters of Consent were signed by the parents/guardians of each child who participated in the interview portion of this study. Each interviewed child signed a child-friendly Letter of Consent. Copies of these Letters of Consent are included in Appendix A. A list of Interview Questions is included in Appendix C. All students’ names are changed for privacy and security reasons.

Initial Visits

I informally conducted two classroom observations prior to beginning the data-collection phase of this study, one observation visit in each of the two first grade classrooms. The purpose of these preliminary observations was to familiarize myself with the classroom layout and the procedures and routines of the classroom. These
early visits also allowed for the students to become used to my presence in their classroom during their language arts time and to feel comfortable with my role change from physical education teacher to classroom observer. These initial visits also allowed me to practice effective note taking and to determine the best location from which to make my observations. My goal was to be an observer, not a participant in the classroom activities. The students questioned my presence in each classroom during these initial observations and the classroom teachers explained that I was doing a college homework project and would be in the classroom for the next few weeks and the students never questioned my reasons for being in their room again.

Procedures

Case study data was gathered through classroom observations, teacher interviews, student interviews, interviews with language arts experts, and the gathering of related, pertinent documents. Two veteran first grade classroom teachers were selected to participate in this study based on their years of experience and their exemplar reputations as teachers. The two first grade teachers participated in three one-on-one interviews with me. Each of these interviews was tape-recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription. The purpose of the first interview was for gathering general information about the teacher, her classroom and students, and her thoughts about teaching language arts to first graders. This interview was at a mutually agreed upon time, in each teacher’s classroom and took place prior to the first formal classroom observation. A list of initial interview questions is included in Appendix C.
I conducted classroom observations after the initial teacher interviews. These observations took place approximately once every four days in each of the two classrooms for approximately sixty minutes each. The observations occurred during the first grade language arts time block and continued for seven weeks (each of the classrooms being observed six times). The purpose of these classroom observations was to document strategies and techniques used in teaching literacy skills to first graders and how these strategies worked. I recorded this data by hand, writing detailed notes in a spiral notebook, using a modified shorthand method. These handwritten notes were transcribed into my computer each evening after an observation.

The second teacher interview was conducted mid-way through the observation process. The questions asked of the teachers were generated as the observation process progressed and were in response to and related to what was observed. The questions were posed to clarify what was observed and the reasoning behind the use of some of the observed strategies and techniques in the classrooms. Questions were also asked about what changes the classroom teacher had made in the lesson plans for language arts instruction as a result of how the students were responding to instructional practices that were used. A separate list of questions was developed for each classroom teacher based on what was observed. The interview question lists are included in Appendix C.

The third and final teacher interview was conducted at the conclusion of the six-week observation period. Again, the questions were designed to define and clarify what was observed during the period since the second interview. This interview session was to ensure that I had a clear understanding of what was observed in the
proceeding seven weeks. Again, an individual list of interview questions was
developed for each of the two teachers. The lists of the final interview questions are
included in Appendix C.

The student interviews were conducted at the conclusion of all the
observations. The six students selected to be interviewed (three from each classroom)
were individually interviewed in a conference room just down the hall from the
children’s classrooms. The interviews lasted approximately 10-15 minutes and took
place within the first hour and a half of the school day. All of the students were asked
the same set of key questions. Specific probes were asked as necessary. The interview
was tape-recorded and some notes were taken during the interview, but most of the
students were distracted if they saw me writing. I depended on the tape recordings of
the interviews to do the transcriptions. The list of student interview questions is
included in Appendix C.

At the completion of the classroom observations and interviews, the strategies
and techniques observed were analyzed for possible application in the gymnasium.
When looking at all the strategies, I looked for common strategies being used
regularly in both classrooms. The common strategies were measured against three
criteria that were developed to select the strategies for implementation in physical
education. These criteria will be further described in Chapter Five, Analysis.

Three of the observed strategies, which met the criteria for selection and were
supported in the professional literature, were field tested in my first grade physical
education classes. First grade students at Greece School attended physical education
once every four days, with each session lasting 55 minutes. The strategies were
implemented with the two classes I observed and with two other first grade classes. This field-testing occurred during the first grade class's regularly scheduled physical education time and was incorporated into a three-lesson unit on basketball. All of these classes were videotaped when the strategies were being implemented.

Two language arts experts analyzed the videotape for the appropriateness and effectiveness of these strategies when used in the gymnasium. One of the language arts experts served as a mentor teacher in the field of language arts for the school district in which this study was conducted. The other expert was the Director of Language Arts for this same school district. Both of these individuals provide many language arts training programs for this district and surrounding school districts. Comments from these experts contributed to the conclusions that are drawn from this study.

All the notes from the classroom observations and tapes from the interviews have been transcribed and are available. All signed and dated letters of consent are also available.

Throughout the observation process, documents were located to support the language arts strategies being used in the classrooms. These documents were gleaned from professional journals, current textbooks and teacher guides, and from the Internet. These documents provided validity to the strategies that were observed and were not a leading source of data but were rather a supporting source of data.
Data Analysis

The ultimate goal of the data analysis in this thesis is to ascertain if there were any strategies currently being used in the identified first grade classrooms that could feasibly be applied in a physical education program. Data analysis for this case study research was ongoing throughout the research period. Data were generated from three different sources:

1. Observations (twelve total live classroom observations)
2. Interviews (teacher, student, and language arts experts)
3. Professional documents (educational research, textbooks, journal articles)
4. Triangulation of the three previous sources

As data were gathered it was analyzed so that focus could be maintained on the purpose of this study. The data (observation notes and interview transcriptions) were organized chronologically. The data were analyzed for recurrent themes or categories of information that led to the development of suggested classroom strategies that could be transferred to the gymnasium setting. Professional documents related to the teaching of reading and writing are provided to justify the information gathered from observations and interviews. Experts in the field of language arts provided feedback to triangulate the data from the classroom to the gymnasium. The analysis of the data collected will be discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter 4 - Results

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of the observation and interview process. Information will be presented in a narrative style and will include a description of the classrooms, and a summary of the observations and the interviews with the teachers and the students.

Description of Classrooms

Room 77- Mrs. Cedar

Mrs. Cedar’s first grade classroom was a bright room with an eastern exposure, which, on sunny days allowed a lot of natural sunlight to fill the room in the morning hours. The door to the room was in the northwest corner and the children’s mailboxes were at the entrance to the room. Supplies for the lunch count and attendance were on top of the mailboxes. The windows were along the eastern wall of the room, the chalkboard was along the southern wall, the bulletin boards were along the western wall and the coat hooks and storage were along the northern wall. The students sat at 6 tables that were arranged in a horseshoe shape. There were no more than 4 students at a table and each child had an assigned seat. On the back of each student’s chair was a seat pocket, which held that child’s supply box. On each table was a box of paperback books. The teacher had a desk in the southeast corner and at the end of her desk was a smaller desk belonging to the student teacher. The American Flag was hanging off the south wall near the teacher’s desk. There was a large open area adjacent to the open end of the student table arrangement and this area was covered with a rug. A full-sized rocking chair was on the rug next to an
easel holding a pad of chart paper. A teaching assistant had a desk along the west wall near the door. Four computer stations were also set-up along the west wall. There were several bookcases and file cabinets that formed a partition separating the computer area from the rest of the room. The walls were covered with words, posters and student work. Above the coat hooks were the color words (blue, orange, red, etc.) made from letters cut out of the corresponding color of construction paper. Above the chalkboard on the south wall were two alphabet displays with a separate poster for each letter. One display showed the correct way to print each letter as well as a picture of an object that started with that letter of the alphabet. The second display showed only the vowels, the sounds they make and a picture of an object that has that sound in its name. One of the bulletin boards on the west wall held the calendar, a counting chart for the number of the days we had been in school, and a poster for each of the four “specials” (physical education, art, music, and library). The other bulletin board along the wall had a variety of displays related to themes in current areas of study (balance, friendship, etc). Letters of the alphabet also lined the top edge of the chalkboard and under each letter were words that started with that letter. Each student’s name was also listed under the starting letter of that name. This display was the word wall for the class. A pocket chart was suspended from a frame near the teacher’s desk and the lines of a poem were placed in the horizontal pockets of this chart. The poem changed themes throughout my observation period (Groundhog’s Day, Valentine’s Day, Presidents, etc.). A table was positioned in front of the coat hooks and was labeled “Writing Center”. Paper, pencils, and worksheets describing the editing process were included at this table. I frequently sat at this table for my
observations if the students were not using it. There was a kidney-shaped table in the southwest corner where Mrs. Cedar met with reading groups or students worked on projects. There were boxes of books and bookcases all around the room, on the windowsill, on the floor, in the corners, etc. Student work was displayed in the northeast corner above the drinking fountain. Student work was also displayed in the hallway outside the room. This could be described as a print-rich environment (Harris and Hodges, 1995). See the photo for further details of this classroom.

View of Mrs. Cedar’s classroom. Photograph #1

Room 76 – Mrs. Davis

Mrs. Davis’s room was another print-rich environment, as evidenced by absence of open wall space in this room. The door into this room was in the southeast corner and the students’ mailboxes were located by the door. The western wall was a window wall and the view from the window was of a grassy area with trees and a bit
farther out, the bus loop. The children sat at tables, with four students per table. There were six tables, arranged in two rows of three. Each child had an assigned place at a table and the tables were numbered. Each of the children’s chairs had a blue seat pocket hanging off the back of the chair to hold the child’s supplies. On each wall was a directional sign (N, S, E, W). The American flag was hanging in the northwest corner, above the teacher’s desk. A bookcase was in this corner and was overflowing with books, papers and games. The shelf by the windows was covered with baskets of books. Each basket had a label on it identifying what type of books were in the basket (number, rhymes, etc.) There was a kidney-shaped table near the windows that was used for small group reading instruction. Above the coat hooks on the south wall were the color words, with the letters for each word cut from the corresponding color of construction paper. The shelf above the coat hooks was filled with file boxes of books and materials for various themes (e.g. careers, dinosaurs, Japan). The east wall was lined with two bulletin boards with four computer stations in front of the bulletin boards. The calendar was on one bulletin board and the theme of the second bulletin board changed as curriculum themes changed (balance, family, etc). The north wall was covered with a chalkboard. On the chalkboard was a poster about how many books each child had read, the Pledge of Allegiance, posters of social skills themes (respect, kindness), and books related to the current science topic. The teacher had a rocking chair on a rug in front of the chalkboard. This rug defined an area for large group activities. Next to the rocking chair was an easel with chart paper. A number of file cabinets and free standing bookcases were scattered around the room. For further details, see Photograph #2.
The following common attributes were present in both of these first grade classrooms:

1. Books were readily available all around the rooms.

2. Words were in abundance (number words, color words, spelling words, sight words).

3. Each child had a space of his/her own.

4. Planned daily routines were followed.

5. There was a common space for large group activities.

6. Each room could be described as a print-rich environment.

7. Computers for student use were part of each room.

8. A teaching assistant spent a portion of each day in each classroom.
Observation and Interview Summaries

The following is a summary of the six observations and three interviews that took place with each of the classroom teachers in each of the two classrooms rather than a day-by-day account of the classroom activity. Because most of my observations took place at the same time on observation days, I usually saw the same routines and procedures for that portion of the language arts lesson. Generally, the language arts lessons continued after I left the room and were structured differently from my observation time.

Observations in Mrs. Cedar’s Classroom

Five of my six observations in this classroom were from 9:00-10:00 AM, which meant I saw the same portion of Mrs. Cedar’s language arts program, the large group instruction. On one occasion I observed from 10:00-11:00 AM, where I was able to observe her reading groups and center activities.

Usually when I entered the room, the students were completing their morning work (journal writing, worksheet, reading). Mrs. Cedar would call the students to the rug area where they participated in the “calendar time” segment of their morning routine. This consisted of identifying the day and date, what the weather was like and what “special” the class would be attending that day (physical education, art, library, or music). The students then counted how many days they had been in school. The goal was to get to 100 because on the 100th day of school there was going to be a party. After determining the number of days the children had been in school, Mrs.
Cedar incorporated a mini-math lesson into calendar time by having the children figure out how many more days until the 100th day. When the students came up with an answer they whispered it to their neighbor and if they didn’t agree, they both had to refigure the problem. Mrs. Cedar waited only a minute or so until the whole class agreed on the correct answer. After calendar time, Mrs. Cedar introduced the topic of the day. I observed lessons on Martin Luther King, Jr., snakes, presidents, friendship, and dental care. These lessons started with a discussion about what the students already knew about the topic. Mrs. Cedar used a K-W-L Chart, a three-columned chart where the children listed the following:

1. What they **Know** about the topic
2. What they **Want** to learn about the topic
3. What they **Learned** about the topic

The third column was filled out either mid-way through a multi-day lesson or at the end of the lesson or unit of study. For the multi-day lesson and project on snakes, each student did their own personal K-W-L chart after Mrs. Cedar modeled how to complete the chart. The K-W-L charts for the other topics I observed were done as a whole class project. After two-thirds of the K-W-L chart was completed, a story on the same topic was introduced. Sometimes this was a book that Mrs. Cedar read aloud to the class and other times it was a chapter from, *McGraw-Hill Reading*, the reading textbook used by first graders at Greece School. When Mrs. Cedar was doing a read aloud, the students sat on the rug and listened attentively. On several occasions, one boy was unable to respectfully sit with his peers and he was told by Mrs. Cedar to sit in his chair at the table to listen to the book. On all occasions, this
boy complied with this directive and was able to focus on the remainder of the story from his seat, where he could see and hear clearly. When using *McGraw-Hill Reading*, the story was first read as a shared reading activity. In this activity, each child and Mrs. Cedar had a copy of the book, opened to that day’s selected story. As Mrs. Cedar read the story, the children followed along with their finger under the words that Mrs. Cedar was reading (tracking). The children read along when they knew the words, and if they didn’t know the words they just followed along with their finger. Whether doing a read aloud or shared reading activity, Mrs. Cedar paused at various points in the story to ask questions about the story. These questions were used to check for student comprehension and usually fell into one of the following categories:

1. “Why’ questions to see if students understood what had happened and why it had happened
2. Prediction questions to see if students could figure out what was going to happen next, based on what had happened so far
3. Clarification questions to be sure students had the correct understanding of a word, sentence, or situation
4. “Has this ever happened to you” questions to get students to make a personal connection to the story

After the story portion of the lesson, a related literacy project followed. For example, after doing a K-W-L chart on snakes, and reading a chapter in *McGraw-Hill Reading* on snakes, the students began a multi-day project of writing their own
individual snake articles. Mrs. Cedar said that the student-generated articles would be put together to form a class newspaper on snakes. The students thought this was an exciting project. The children began this project by re-reading the snake story in *McGraw-Hill Reading* and taking notes about facts that they learned while reading the story. Note-taking was a skill that was necessary for many of the standardized tests the students would be taking in later years, beginning with the Second Grade Common Embedded Tasks (CET) assessment. Mrs. Cedar placed about a dozen other snake books around the room and the children were encouraged to read those and gather more snake facts for their articles. Mrs. Cedar presented a rubric for how these articles would be graded. She only explained the criteria for getting a “4”, the highest possible score, because she wanted all the children to work towards that level. The rubric was new to the children but was enthusiastically received and throughout the writing process, the children were comparing their work to the rubric to see if they included all the components necessary to get a “4”. After gathering data from *McGraw-Hill Reading* and other sources, students sat down to write their article. On a previous day, Mrs. Cedar had demonstrated the writing process of starting with a main idea sentence, following that with supporting details and concluding with a closing sentence. The students used their notes to come up with ideas for their sentences. Many students struggled with the difference between a main idea and supporting details and Mrs. Cedar gave many and varied examples to explain this concept. Once students completed their draft of the article, and had it approved by Mrs. Cedar or the teaching assistant, Mrs. Smith, the students were given a special piece of paper on which to write their final copy and to draw an accompanying
illustration. All these works were displayed in the hall for a few days and then were put together into a class newspaper. This was a project that was worked on during two of my observation sessions. An interesting note, during many of my observations the literature being used was non-fiction. Mrs. Cedar tried to present a balance of fiction and non-fiction and the students in her class were able to identify which books and stories were fiction and which were non-fiction. Non-fiction literature was a big component of future English Language Arts exams and it was introduced in kindergarten and by first grade students appeared very comfortable reading and writing non-fiction.

During some of my visits, I observed the introduction of the spelling words for the week. The foundation of the spelling list came from McGraw-Hill Reading, with additional words added by Mrs. Cedar as needed. The children were responsible for learning a new list of spelling words each week. When the children were working on writing projects, they were expected to spell correctly any words that could be found around the room on the word wall or in the themed bulletin boards. I observed children using the word walls without a prompt from Mrs. Cedar, because by this time of the school year, the children knew where to look for the correct spelling of some words.

During the large group language arts portion of the morning, while Mrs. Cedar was teaching, Mrs. Smith, the teaching assistant, called children one by one to her desk for individual book consultations. Children in this classroom took a book home each evening to encourage parents and children to read at home. The children selected the book they wanted to take home from a collection of books that were appropriate
for their reading level. After having had the book at home for an evening (or more), the children would read the book to Mrs. Smith, answer a few questions and then make another selection. Mrs. Smith kept a record of what books each child read and when they were completed. Mrs. Cedar strongly believed there were many benefits to having children read and be read to in the home.

On one occasion I observed in Mrs. Cedar’s room during her small group reading sessions. The class was divided into four reading groups and Mrs. Cedar worked with one group and Mrs. Smith worked with another group. The other groups work on their center activities. A description of center activities will follow the reading group description. Mrs. Cedar started her group out with a “warm-up” book. This was a book that had been read and mastered by the students in a prior reading group session and built the reader’s confidence for new material to be presented. After the warm-up book was successfully read, Mrs. Cedar presented a new book to the group and put a paper with Velcro dots on it in the middle of the table. The children looked at the cover of the book and read (or tried to read) the title. The group looked through the book at the pictures, describing what they saw and what they thought might be happening in this fictional story. Mrs. Cedar also questioned the children about what they knew about the topic of the book. After this picture-walk was completed, the students began reading. When a student came to a word he/she did not know, he/she tried a variety of strategies to figure out the word. When the word was correctly identified, Mrs. Cedar asked the student how he/she figured out the word. The child identified the strategy, or strategies he/she used and Mrs. Cedar attached matching strategy cards to the Velcro dots on the paper. This was used a
visual reminder to the students about what strategies they know how to use. During this time, Mrs. Smith worked with another group on their sight words. There was a list of 100 sight words, or high frequency words that first graders in this district were expected to know by the end of their school year. These were words that appear regularly in print and used regularly in the students’ writing and may not follow the decoding strategies that the students were learning. The first grade 100-word list is included in Appendix D. After the sight word review, Mrs. Smith assisted the group with a worksheet on contractions. These groups met approximately 20 minutes with the adult, before moving to the independent center activities.

Students not involved with Mrs. Cedar or Mrs. Smith at a reading group were working independently on their center activity folders. Within each folder was a collection of worksheets that related to a variety of literacy activities around the room. The students had learned about and participated in these centers since September and were familiar with the expectations at each center. There were certain centers that each student was expected to complete during the week and others that were optional. For example, several centers had activities that were related to that week’s spelling words, others focused on a writing project, one center used the computers where students read stories and answered comprehension questions, and one center used a magnetic board with magnetic letters to help develop an understanding of concepts such as contractions and blend sounds. Students worked through their center folders, choosing which activities they wanted to do and in what order. Mrs. Cedar checked these folders on Wednesday or Thursday of each week to measure student progress. Students who were not using their time wisely and were
not going to get the minimum number of centers completed, had to use their playtime on Friday to complete the work. This consequence motivated most of the children to get more than the minimum number of centers completed by Friday.

Mrs. Cedar maintained four reading groups throughout the year, but the membership of the groups was fluid as the children’s reading abilities improved. Each reading group met with either Mrs. Cedar or Mrs. Smith each day for about 20 minutes. Mrs. Cedar planned the lesson that Mrs. Smith taught and the groups alternated days with Mrs. Cedar and Mrs. Smith, thereby allowing Mrs. Cedar to have contact with each student in a small group setting every other day.

Observations in Mrs. Davis’s Classroom

All six observations in Mrs. Davis’s classroom took place from 9:00-10:00 AM, which allowed me to observe the same portion of her language arts time block, the small group instruction. The structure of the morning was basically the same on each of my observation days, however, the content changed.

When I entered the room the students were either finishing up their morning work (e.g. journal writing, writing sight words on cards, reading) or participating in the calendar time portion of their morning routine. There was a large monthly calendar on one wall and for each day in January, each child had written a New Year’s resolution. After the class reviewed the day and date on the calendar, the child who wrote that day’s resolution stood up in front of the class and read the resolution out loud. The two resolutions I heard were from boys who both wanted to practice their snowboarding more! The class then determined what “special” they had that day
(physical education, art, library, or music), if there was anything different happening that day (e.g. assembly, party, guest) and concluded by talking about the weather.

Mrs. Davis called the children to the rug area, by table numbers, at the conclusion of calendar time. Once the students were settled on the rug, she introduced or reviewed the center activities for the day (center activities carried over for 2 days). Mrs. Davis managed her center activities differently than Mrs. Cedar. While two reading groups were working with Mrs. Davis and the teaching assistant, Mrs. Crane, the other two groups worked on the center activities, each group working on one center activity per day. Center activities concentrated on spelling words, a poem, vowel sounds, or consonant blends. For example, one center activity provided the opportunity for students to practice their spelling words. Mrs. Davis pre-packaged plastic zipper bags with a spelling word list, plastic letter tiles with Velcro dots on the back and a paint stirrer with Velcro dots on one side. The children looked at the first word on the spelling list, found the letters to spell that word and then attached the letters in the correct order on the paint stirrer. They then moved on to the next word. Another center activity involved identifying the vowel sounds in words. A worksheet was provided with pictures of words that all had the same vowel in them. The students cut out each picture and glue it onto another piece of paper under the heading of “long” or “short” depending on what sound the vowel makes. Words such as hat, cape, hand, and bake would be included on one worksheet and the students would have to determine whether to glue the picture in the “long a” column or the “short a” column. These were familiar activities with the words in the activity changing.
A typical reading group lesson began with a review of some of the sight words. Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Crane each had a ring of sight words and the two middle-level groups went through about the same number of words. The higher reading group had a larger number of words to go through and the lowest group had a smaller group of first grade words and reviewed some of the 26 words from the kindergarten curriculum. The sight word review did not take long and the groups quickly got into the current book they were reading. Before a new book was introduced, Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Crane asked the children what they knew about the topic of the new book (e.g., pandas, fathers). A picture walk through the book followed this discussion. The children looked at the pictures on each page and tried to predict what was happening in the picture and what the story was about. Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Crane also used this time to introduce new words that were in the story. After the picture walk, students frequently partner-read the book; meaning one partner would read one page while the other partner followed along by tracking the words with his/her finger. Partners switched roles with each page. Partners were also able to help each other figure out unknown words. While partner reading was going on, Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Crane would listen in on each group to see if they needed assistance.

Once the book had been read, Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Crane asked questions to check for understanding. Questions were also asked to identify the main idea and support details. Mrs. Davis frequently used the chart paper easel to keep track of student information either before or after a story was read. Mrs. Davis found it helpful to the students if she used different colored markers when recording the student responses to comprehension questions. For example, Mrs. Davis would use a blue
marker to write the main idea of the story (as described by the children) and would use a green marker to write the supporting details as supplied by the students. Follow-up activities included a writing activity (either as an individual project or a shared writing project), reading additional books on the same topic, or activities to reinforce a concept or skill emphasized in the book (e.g. long and short vowels, consonant blends).

Each student had a Response Journal and I observed this being used in a variety of ways. Frequently, before a book was read, but after the picture walk, the children were asked to make an entry in their Response Journal about why they wanted to read that particular story or what questions they had about the book. Other times the Response Journal was used to reflect back on the story and the children were asked to write about what they liked about the story, or about a favorite character. The children had an opportunity to share their journal entries, sometimes with the whole group and other times with a partner.

The time spent on a book varied from book to book and from group to group. I observed a lower level reading group go through 2 books in one lesson, because both books emphasized the same phonic skill (consonant, vowel, consonant, silent “e” pattern), while a higher level group took several days to get through a book because of discussions about the story as it progressed and more involved opportunities to respond to the story.

After about 25 minutes, the groups switched. The reading groups working with the adults returned to their tables and worked on their assigned center activity.
and the students who had been working at their tables moved to work on the rug with Mrs. Davis or to the kidney-shaped table with Mrs. Crane.

After the next two groups had about 25 minutes of small group reading instruction, Mrs. Davis called all of the children to the rug. Each child brought his or her center activity work. Mrs. Davis recognized some of the students who had done a good job on the center activity work for that day. Mrs. Davis collected the students’ work to check it over.

The students were divided into four reading groups for most of my observation time, but in early February, Mrs. Davis rearranged the class into five groups (Interview Notes). When asked why she made this change, she explained that she had a few really high readers who would benefit from some higher-level books and challenges and now that she had a student teacher, she could manage five groups. Mrs. Davis said her reading groups fluctuated throughout the year, especially when reading suddenly made a connection with a child, she wanted to have the flexibility to move that child to a more appropriate group.

Mrs. Davis planned the lessons that Mrs. Crane taught and Mrs. Crane kept track of what material was actually covered in the lesson and the progress the individual children were making. Mrs. Crane spent about one hour each day in this classroom and it was always during the small group reading instruction.

These classroom summaries are typical of a day’s activities in each classroom, but are not actual representations of any one day. These observations were compiled over six visits to each classroom and details not observed were acquired during the interview sessions.
Chapter 5 - Classroom Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data that were collected and highlight the common attributes of literacy instruction in the two observed classrooms. These common attributes were determined by examining the data (observation field notes and interview transcriptions) for common strategies or themes apparent in both of the first grade classrooms. This chapter will examine the commonalities in the classroom settings, the common materials and support available to the teachers and students in the observed classrooms, and the teaching strategies common in both rooms. Following the narrative on the common qualities in the classrooms, the criteria used to select the strategies to implement will be presented. The chapter will conclude with the identification of the selected strategies. Although there were unique traits and characteristics in each classroom, there were common strategies and methods being used by both teachers.

Commonalities in Classrooms

Both classrooms were welcoming environments to young children. There were colorful displays around the rooms with these displays frequently featuring student work. Books galore seemed to fill the shelves and corners of the rooms. Each room had an arrangement of student tables so each child had a workspace to call his/her own and a large open area, covered by a rug for large group instruction. Both teachers had a rocking chair by this rug area, which gave the room a very comfortable, homey feeling. Bulletin boards in both rooms were used as instructional tools and changed regularly as instructional themes changed. A monthly calendar had
a prominent position in each room and was part of the daily routine in both classrooms. A pad of chart paper supported on an easel was the preferred method for writing information for the class as opposed to the blackboard, which was used as a bulletin board for more permanent displays. Both teachers were observed flipping back through the pad of chart paper to find a lesson to which they wanted to refer, which may be an advantage over a blackboard. Technology was evident in both classrooms and the two teachers used the computers to support the language arts curriculum. Each teacher had a desk, but rarely spent any time there during my visits and the desk was generally covered with books and student work. A kidney-shaped table provided another teaching space in each classroom and was used for small group reading instruction during my observation time. Written words also filled each classroom. Posters, charts and bulletin boards were filled with words the students were learning. Number words, color words and students’ names were visible around the rooms if students needed help with reading or spelling those words.

Common Materials and Support

The students and teachers in the two classrooms had access to many of the same teaching materials. Each child had a copy of the reading anthology, *McGraw-Hill Reading*. Children had their own copy of a workbook in which to practice their printing. I only observed this being used once in Mrs. Cedar’s room. A large number and variety of leveled books were available to each teacher at Greece School. These books were stored in a book room where teachers could go to sign-out the books they needed for their various reading groups. Recently, the school library reopened after
being closed for most of the school year due to a major construction project at Greece School and it now provides a large number of age-appropriate books and videos. During my observation period, Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Cedar were dependent on the public library to supplement their own classroom book collections. Because both of these teachers had many years of teaching experience at the first grade level, they each had large collections of books for student use. These books were acquired from various book clubs for students and teachers and from personal purchases made by the teachers over the years. A first year teacher may not have the benefit of a collection of books similar to the ones of Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Cedar.

Instructional materials were everywhere one looked in both classrooms. Things such as small chalkboards, tape recorders and headphone, blocks, crayons, games, books, and magnetic letters filled every available space in these rooms.

Both Mrs. Cedar and Mrs. Davis had the support of a teaching assistant during part of their language arts time. However, Mrs. Davis only had the benefit of a teaching assistant for one hour each morning. Mrs. Cedar had the support of a different teaching assistant for a larger portion of the day because of some of the identified needs of the students in her class. I observed both teachers using the teaching assistant to teach a small group reading group, with plans designed by the classroom teachers. Both teaching assistants appeared very competent in their abilities to deliver instruction to all levels of readers.
Common Teaching Strategies

Even though the observations for this thesis occurred in two separate classrooms with two different teachers, there were common teaching strategies observed in the classrooms. Both teachers had “morning work” at the students’ seats so they had a project to begin working on when they entered the classroom first thing in the morning. The children were in the routine of sitting down and getting started on this work as soon as they put away their coats and book bags. Both teachers had large and small group language arts activities. Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Cedar both divided their students into small reading groups, based on their current reading level.

Everyday, each reading group met with either the teacher or teaching assistant. Reviewing sight words was an important part of each reading lesson. Taking a picture walk through a new book before reading it was a common occurrence in both classrooms. This strategy allowed children to predict what the book may be about and was an opportunity to activate prior knowledge.

Both teachers used some form of a K-W-L chart to see what the children thought they knew about a certain topic and to determine what they wanted to learn about the topic, and to get the children excited about the new topic. By completing the “What we Learned” column of a K-W-L chart, teachers assessed student learning.

Reading groups in both classrooms used a variety of reading strategies to read the appropriate books (e.g., shared reading, partner reading, read alouds). Both teachers taught a variety of decoding skills to help children figure out unknown words. Some of these strategies included sounding out the word phonically, looking
at the picture for a clue, skipping the word and seeing if the rest of the text provided a clue, and looking for a smaller known word within the unknown word.

All students worked on independent center activities when their group was not with an adult. Center activities provided students with the opportunity to independently practice various literacy related concepts or skills such as spelling words, consonant blend sounds, and rhyming words. Although the management of these centers looked different in the two classes, the content and purpose of the activities were similar.

Both teachers correlated a writing activity with many of the stories that were read either in small reading groups or as a whole class. These writing projects ranged from simple one sentence entries in a personal journal to full-page articles, displayed in the hall. Students were frequently asked to read a story and then write about their personal experiences related to the story.

Read alouds were important parts of the literacy experience in both classrooms. Mrs. Cedar and Mrs. Davis spent part of every day reading aloud to their students. Some books were part of the curriculum and other books were read just for the pure enjoyment that can come from reading and listening to a good story.

Weekly spelling words were part of the language arts program in both first grades. Spelling words were included in the center activities as well as in the books that were selected for each reading group. Both teachers strongly encouraged their children to study the spelling words at home, but both teachers believed that there was minimal support for this at home. Weekly spelling tests were given in both classrooms.
Both first grade teachers had many routines and procedures associated with their language arts lessons with which the children were familiar and comfortable. For example, the students in Mrs. Davis's class knew the procedure for switching from center activities to reading groups and this transition took place efficiently and with minimal reminders to students about what was expected. The students in Mrs. Cedar's class were familiar with the routine of reporting to the teaching assistant to do a follow-up activity with their take home books and then returning to the current class activity. The language arts lessons seemed to flow smoothly because of these routines and procedures.

There were many commonalities in the two first grade classrooms I observed. Selecting strategies to implement in the physical education program at Greece school was the next step in this research project.

Criteria for Implementation in Physical Education

Although numerous strategies were observed in the two first grade classrooms, all of them certainly were not appropriate for implementation in the gymnasium. An ongoing process of data analysis was used to evaluate the many strategies to determine which of the strategies, if any, would be suitable for use in the gymnasium. Three criteria were used to select the strategies to be implemented in the physical education program at Greece School. These three criteria were defined in order to maintain the focus on the purpose of this research project.

The three criteria were:
1. The strategy needed to have a purpose that could be related to physical education.

2. The strategy needed to be easy to implement with a minimum amount of additional time or specialized materials.

3. The strategy needed to produce benefits to the physical education program.

The first criterion was if the strategy had a purpose that could be related to physical education. Presenting a list of spelling words in physical education and testing the students on those words may not lead to the attainment of any physical education objectives. However, using a strategy that activates a child’s prior knowledge about a physical education topic may be beneficial to students as they work towards achieving New York State Learning Standards. For example, being aware of what a class of students already knows about the muscles in the body could and should be used as the building blocks for future lessons on the muscles. Allowing students to share what they know also allows students to make a connection with the theme or topic and create some interest in upcoming lessons. Therefore, in order for a first grade classroom strategy to be considered for physical education implementation, the strategy had to have a purpose that correlated to physical education goals.

The second criterion was the ease of implementation of a particular strategy, ease from the standpoint of time and materials. If a strategy was time consuming to use, and if the gains did not justify the lost physical activity time, the value of that strategy would have to be questioned. Additionally, if very specific classroom
materials were needed to implement this strategy, would the use of that strategy be limited because of limited supplies available to the physical education department? For example, if I wanted to use the class set of the book, *Let's Jump*, in a physical education class, but that was a set that was already being shared by six other first grades, would the first grade team be willing to share?

The third criterion that the observed strategies were measured against was the actual benefits that would be reaped by implementing a particular strategy. The physical education standards need to be the key focus of a physical education program, recognizing that if physical education standards were not addressed in the gymnasium, they probably would not be addressed anywhere else in the school. Any strategies that are “borrowed” from first grade language arts lessons need to have first and foremost a benefit for physical education, while in support of literacy. All the observed strategies were analyzed from the perspective of benefits to physical education, recognizing the fact that many strategies that were effective in a first grade language arts lesson would not be appropriate to use in physical education lesson because of the specificity to literacy. For example, taking time to do a class writing project about basketball may help develop a child’s writing skills but would it take away from the time a child has to learn to move with and control a basketball, a skill she/he would only learn in the physical education setting.

As data were gathered (field notes, interview notes) they were continually analyzed for the appropriateness for application in a physical education class. The following section will describe the strategies that met the three criteria presented above.
Table #1 - Common Strategies and Implementation Criteria

The following table illustrates which Physical Education criteria each common strategy met.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Strategies observed in both classrooms</th>
<th>Criteria #1-Purpose related to Physical Education</th>
<th>Criteria #2-Ease of implementation</th>
<th>Criteria #3-Benefits for Physical Education program</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming environment</td>
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<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abundance of books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workspace for each child</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large group area</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulletin boards</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart paper for large group instruction</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer stations</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print-rich environment</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching assistant support</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sight words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-W-L Charts</td>
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<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent “center” activities</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlated writing activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read alouds</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly spelling word lists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines and procedures</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table #2 - Reference Points for Common Strategies

The following table illustrates where the common strategies were either observed or referred to in an interview session (See Observation Notes and Interview Notes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Strategies observed in both classrooms</th>
<th>Mrs. Cedar</th>
<th>Mrs. Davis</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming environment</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abundance of books</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workspace for each child</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large group area</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulletin boards</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly calendar</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart paper for large group instruction</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer stations</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print-rich environment</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading textbooks</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching assistant support</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning work</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight words</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-W-L Charts</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading groups</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent “center” activities</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlated writing activities</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read alouds</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Routines and procedures</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selection of Strategies

After evaluating all the observed strategies in terms of the three criteria, three strategies appeared to be feasible to implement and to benefit students in physical education. Each of these three strategies was observed being used on a regular basis in both first grade classrooms. The following strategies were selected for implementation in my physical education setting:

1. Use of K-W-L charts at the beginning of selected units
2. Read alouds of topic related books
3. Providing a print-rich environment

Activating prior knowledge was a consistent component of any introductory lesson in both classrooms. Whether a formal K-W-L chart was used or a less formal question and answer session with the children and teacher, finding out what the children already knew about a topic was a priority before moving into the topic. The K-W-L strategy was used in a variety of situations, whole class, small group, and individually.

Read alouds were part of the literacy instruction in both classrooms and a component that truly engaged all the students. Most times the teacher sat in her rocking chair with the children gathered around her while she read the story. The teacher would hold the book in a manner which allowed the children to see the pictures and the print as the teacher was reading and soon after the story started the children were engrossed in the story. Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Cedar would occasionally
pause in the story to ask a question to check the children's comprehension, to predict what might happen next, or to allow the children to make a personal connection between the story and their own lives. Mrs. Cedar and Mrs. Davis were also good readers, using animated voices to bring the book to life for all the listeners.

As explained in the classroom descriptions, both rooms were rich with words. Labels, spelling words, number words, color words, rhyming words, adorned all the walls in the rooms. Words frequently used in student writing were posted in both rooms so the students could easily find the correct spelling of these words. Procedures were written and posted, as were class rules and the Pledge of Allegiance. Books, poems, and student writing samples were displayed prominently around both rooms.

These three strategies were taken from the first grade classrooms and implemented (or field tested) in the gymnasium with the two observed first grade classes and the two additional first grade classes at Greece School.
Chapter 6 - Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implementation of the three selected strategies in my physical education program. The sub-topics presented will be implementation of strategies, student response to strategies, feedback from literacy experts, and recommendations.

Implementation of Strategies

The three strategies selected from the first grade classrooms to be implemented in the gymnasium were the use of a K-W-L chart at the beginning of a basketball unit, read alouds to the students as a cool-down activity, and providing a print-rich environment.

Using a K-W-L chart (or a modified version) was a strategy that was observed in both first grade classrooms and is supported in professional literature. The use of K-W-L charts is not new to classroom teachers (Ogle, 1986). Christie et al. (2003) defined a K-W-L chart as “a strategy for facilitating comprehension” (p.342). Ogle states that this K-W-L strategy is not limited to reading groups but can be used in all content areas. Cooper (1997) describes the purpose of the first two columns as being a method to activate the students’ prior knowledge and give them a reason for investigating the topic further. In the classrooms, K-W-L charts were used before a new reading and writing project was started. My first grade physical education students completed the first two columns of a K-W-L chart at the start of a three-lesson basketball unit. Students shared what they knew about basketball and what they wanted to learn about basketball. I wrote the responses on a piece of chart paper.
titled “Basketball K-W-L chart” and the document from each class is in my possession. A transcribed copy of one class’s K-W-L chart is included in Appendix D. When I presented the basketball K-W-L chart to four of the first grade classes, the students were all familiar with this activity and I only needed to give a brief explanation as to how and why we were doing the chart. The students freely shared their knowledge (mostly accurate, sometimes not) and had their own ideas about what they wanted to learn about basketball. We filled in this chart after a vigorous warm-up game and this quieter activity provided a recovery period for the students in addition to stirring their interest in basketball and activating their prior knowledge. Completing the first two columns of this chart took no more than ten minutes of our 55-minute lessons. Lesson plans for future lessons were modified based on what the students said they knew and what they wanted to learn. This chart was referred to in subsequent lessons when a concept or skill was taught that was listed in the column about what the children wanted to learn. At the end of the unit, we revisited the chart and completed the third column entitled, “What We Learned”. Because of skill progressions, I included the sub-title of “What We Improved” with this column, recognizing that skill mastery was not the objective of some of the basketball skills at this level. The children were able to accurately recall the skills and concepts that were worked on during the basketball unit and accurately reported on what they had learned about or improved on in the sport of basketball. The K-W-L chart was a common thread throughout the basketball lessons and provided a starting point, a reference point in the middle and was an ending point at the conclusion of the third lesson.
Reading a book aloud to the children was the second strategy I implemented as a result of my observations, interviews, and document research. Both classroom teachers had daily read aloud time and five of the six students I interviewed said that someone regularly read to them at home (Observation notes and Interview notes), showing that the students were quite familiar with a read aloud experience. Cambourne (1988) describes teacher read alouds as, "a powerful demonstration of the language of texts, of how reading 'works', and what reading can be used for" (p.90). *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (Trelease, 2001) is a best-selling book describing why reading aloud to children is so important, how to read aloud, and what to read to children. Trelease dedicates a whole chapter to the "Do's and Don’ts" of reading aloud to children, including such things as do set aside time each day to read aloud and don’t read too fast. Prior to initiating this thesis project, I was reading a picture book to my students as the cool down portion of the physical education class.
However, as a result of my observations, interviews and document research, I realized my reading aloud could be so much more if I made it an interactive read aloud.

McGee and Richgels (2000) describe an interactive read aloud as being a story where the children answer teacher-posed questions or make comments about the story. The questions are planned in advance and require the children to use critical thinking skills. Comments about a story can be made verbally or written in some kind of response journal. Verbal and written responses were observed in both the first grade classrooms during read aloud times. Two of Cambourne’s conditions of learning, demonstration and engagement, support a reading aloud situation. When children are listening to a read aloud story, they are getting a demonstration of the how to read and how the language works. Children become engaged in a story when they are asked questions about the story or are asked for their opinions or predictions about the story.

My read alouds became interactive read alouds and the children became actively engaged in the stories. From my interviews with the students, it was apparent that the children valued the read aloud time. All children said it was an enjoyable time for them and most of the children could remember the name or topic of a story that had been read recently (Interview transcripts).

During the basketball unit, I read *Pig at Play*, a story about a pig that tried out for a basketball team and did not make it on his first try. Several of the skills (shooting, passing) and concepts (perseverance, giving best effort) that were part of our basketball unit were mentioned in this book. I read the book several times prior to my first class read aloud and formulated three questions to ask at various points in the story. The children were also asked to look at the title and cover of the book and
predict what the story might be about. The read aloud routine is familiar to the students and they were quickly engaged in the story. The last five minutes of the physical education class was allocated for reading aloud. The children had appropriate responses to the questions and made connections between the story and what they had done in physical education class that day. Christie et al. (2003) and Sowers (2000) provide skills and strategies for successful interactive read alouds. For example, the suggestion is made by both authors to try to make connections between the story and the child’s own experiences.

The third and final strategy that was “borrowed” from the first grade classrooms and implemented in physical education was to provide the students with a print-rich environment in the gymnasium. Motivation to learn to read and write is key to acquiring these skills according to Cooper (1997) and this motivation can come from an environment that is rich in print. Bromley (1992) describes a print-rich
environment as being the one of the motivating factors in children becoming independent readers. Print in a classroom can come from many sources. For a study on the print environments in kindergartens, Beagle and Dowhower (1998) define print as falling into one of three categories: student created, teacher created, and commercially created. Their research shows that much of the commercially created print is non-instructional in nature and is more for decoration. Christie et al. (2003) uses the terms environmental print and functional print to describe the types of print found in a classroom. Environmental print is the print that children see in their everyday lives, including such things as signs for their favorite fast food restaurant, road signs, and the carton from which they pour their milk every day. Functional print is connected to school activities. Examples of this are labels on items in the classroom (computer, blackboard, closet), calendars, schedules, and lunch choice lists. Christie et al. describes functional print as being both practical and educational.

In the gymnasium I introduced print to the students in a variety of ways. A word wall for basketball was developed, signboards were used to highlight that day’s activities, directional words were placed on the walls, and posters were used in stations to enhance the physical activity at a station. Immersion is one of Cambourne’s conditions for learning (1988) and Cambourne writes about how visual immersion (filling walls with words, charts, poems, posters) is a component of literacy learning. Word walls have been used in classrooms for many years and for a variety of reasons (Brabham and Villaume, 2001). Mrs. Cedar used her word wall to post the high frequency words the children needed to learn and other words and names that the children regularly used in their writing. These students were expected
to spell a word correctly if it appeared on the word wall. Word walls are newer in physical education, and Siegel (2000) explains that physical education word walls help students to be aware of the vocabulary specific to physical education (e.g. locomotor movements, sports skills) and vocabulary that crosses different content areas (e.g. straight, curved, zigzag). The words on the basketball word wall were generated from the terms the children gave during the K-W-L activity and from lesson plans. The photo below shows the Basketball word wall.

Basketball Word Wall. Photograph #5

Signboards were placed by the door to indicate the activities for the day. The children regularly asked me, “What are we doing in gym today?” The signboards answer this question for the students. Pictures accompany most of the words on the signboards so that if a student cannot read the words, he/she may be able to figure out the activity by the picture. These plastic signboards are re-usable and are cleaned off with a wet cloth or by placing the sign under running water. The signboards are
placed in a slot on the top of a cone and are very portable. I have also used these signboards to label stations and to give directions at stations. See the photo of an example of how signboards are used in the gymnasium.

![Signboards in the gymnasium. Photograph #6](image)

As in the classroom, it is helpful to have the gymnasium walls labeled with north, south, east, and west signs. Because of directional signs in the gymnasium, children in my classes can be directed to line up along the north wall or place their scooters along the west wall. The children learn about the relationship between the directions and learn to recognize the directional words. For certain activities, I label the corners with northeast, southeast, northwest, and southwest signs. This is a concept that elementary students learn in their classrooms and can be useful to physical education while supporting language development and social studies concepts.

Posters are another form of print that can be useful in the gymnasium. In a fitness unit, a poster of the various muscles in the human body was posted in one of
the fitness stations. Students were expected to locate the muscles that were used in
certain fitness exercises and name the muscles. A series of 10 Healthy Habits posters
were used to help young children think about things they can do to keep healthy.
Colorful pictures of animals are accompanied by words to describe the healthy habit
on each poster. Using both the words and picture clues, the students were able to
identify the healthy habit.

The above strategies were all implemented in my physical education classes in
a one-month time span. Documentation of these strategies is on digital photos and
videotape.

Student Response to Strategies

Student response to the implementation of new teaching strategies was
positive. Because the strategies had a purpose related to physical education, students
did not wonder, “Why are we doing this in gym?”

Because the K-W-L chart was a familiar activity from their classrooms, the
students fully participated in the discussion and seemed to love being able to share
what they knew about basketball. The videotape of the K-W-L activities shows that
the children were engaged in the discussion were comfortable with using the K-W-L
chart.

Reading a book related to physical activity has been a popular activity at
Greece School. In the student interviews, many of the children were able to identify a
story that had been read and all the interviewed children had positive comments about
the time we spend on a story (Interview notes). When a story had not been planned
for one day, the students usually asked why there was not a book to read and seemed disappointed with the answer, whatever it may be. Making the read alouds interactive was positively received. Videotapes of the interactive read alouds show that the children were listening intently to the story and enthusiastic about answering questions related to the story. Most of the time, at the completion of a book, the children all had a story to tell me that related to the book.

The use of the signboards has almost eliminated the question, “What are we doing in gym today?” The children do not ask because they know that the day’s activities will be posted on the signboards and they are excited to discover the activities for themselves. I overheard one boy tell the boy in front of him to not tell him what the signboards said because he wanted to read them himself. Then used in a station set-up in the gymnasium, the signboards have allowed the children to feel a sense of independence as they move from station to station and to read for themselves what they are to do, without having to ask me or another student.

The word walls have been popular and the children have come up with a couple of games on their own to play if they need to wait in line at the door at the end of class. For example, the students look at the words on the wall and I give a definition of one of the words and the students need to come up with the word and then find it on the wall. The children have played an active role in the development of the word walls, which gives the children ownership of the material on the wall. For example, during our gymnastics unit as a new concept or skill was introduced and practiced, the skill was written on a strip of paper (by me or a student) and then a student hung the word on the wall after demonstrating that skill or concept.
The first grade strategies that were implemented in the physical education program at Greece School had no noticeable negative reactions from the students. Because they were familiar with the strategies, there was not a concern about using them in the gym.

Feedback from Literacy Experts

Feedback was solicited from two literacy experts to provide support for what was implemented in the gymnasium. The strategies selected for implementation were supported by current document research and the literacy experts were invited to share their professional opinions on implementation process in physical education.

The two experts are employed by the Greece Central School District, a large (almost 14,000 students), suburban, school district in Rochester, New York. Ms. Kathleen Pagano-Fuller is the Director of English Language Arts for the Greece Central School District. Ms. Pagano-Fuller was a classroom teacher for six years, teaching Pre-Kindergarten, 4th and 6th grades. She was a certified Reading Specialist eight years (K-12) and she served as an elementary school principal for eight years. Ms. Pagano-Fuller has been in her current position for four years. Mrs. Kathy Zodarecky is currently serving as an Elementary English Language Arts Teacher Mentor for the Greece Central School District. Mrs. Zodarecky has held this position for three years. Prior to her mentor teacher role, Mrs. Zodarecky taught elementary school for 26 years, two years at the kindergarten level, 11 years as a first grade teacher and the remaining years as a second grade teacher.
Ms. Pagano-Fuller and Mrs. Zodarecky both state that there is value in implementing the use of a K-W-L chart and read alouds in physical education, value for physical education and for language development (Interview notes).

Pagano-Fuller notes that K-W-L charts are an excellent way to start a unit and can be motivating to the students and when used properly can guide instruction. Zodarecky supports the use of a K-W-L chart because it activates a child’s prior knowledge and research shows that when children are able to attach new learning onto what they already know, it is a more powerful experience. Zodarecky points out that a K-W-L chart is a visual aid that can be used throughout a unit (before, during, and at the end). Pagano-Fuller notes that a Think-Pair-Share activity can enhance the benefits of a K-W-L chart by ensuring that all children are thinking about the topic and having a chance to share their ideas. Both Zodarecky and Pagano-Fuller describe the benefits of and reasons for using a K-W-L chart in physical education are the same benefits and reasons that it is used in a first grade classroom.

The read aloud portion of the videotape brought similar responses from the two literacy experts. They note that the book that was read, Pig at Play, was a natural fit for physical education and while reading it provides students with a language experience it also supports physical education goals. With interactive reading, Pagano-Fuller takes questioning to check for student comprehension to another level. She suggests that higher level thinking questions can be asked (e.g. How do you know something happened?), and critical and creative questioning allows students to assume the role of the character in the story. Zodarecky confirms that teacher judgment must be used to determine how many times to pause in a story to ask a
question, and when the questioning interrupts the flow of the story. After watching
the implementation videotape, Pagano-Fuller states that the prediction questions used
at the beginning of a story are a research-based strategy for increasing comprehension
of the story. Zodarecky and Pagano-Fuller note that read alouds in physical education
inform children that there are books written about sports and that reading is not
something that is only done in the classroom. Content literacy is important as
children realize they can learn about the world around them by reading. Zodarecky
elaborates on that thought by noting that children can learn about some aspects of
physical education by reading books.

Pagano-Fuller sums up her reaction to the videotape of first grade language
arts strategies being implemented in the gymnasium by stating that it is important for
children to see language and literacy being used in all areas of the school day.

Teacher Response to Implemented Strategies

I felt confident in implementing the strategies of using a K-W-L Chart,
interactive read alouds, and a print-rich environment because I had seen all three
strategies successfully implemented in both classrooms. The strategies enhanced the
physical education lessons without detracting from the acquisition of the physical
education objectives. All three strategies continue to be used in my physical
education lessons. The more I use these strategies, the versatile the strategies become.
For example, the students continued to add to a baseball word wall as we read
baseball-related books during a striking unit. When the students identified a new
baseball word in a book, it was added to the word wall, providing an opportunity to revisit and add to the word wall.

**Recommendations**

The purpose of this thesis was to observe what strategies were being used in first grade classrooms determining if any of the strategies could be applied in a physical education setting and then implementing some of the strategies. I would recommend that physical educators visit the classrooms in their schools to see what is being taught and how it is being taught. I would also recommend that physical education teachers talk with classroom teachers about things that could be done in the gymnasium to support language and literacy while not compromising physical education objectives. The strategies I implemented may be specific to my school, but with research supporting such strategies, other physical educators may find that these same strategies are being used in classrooms in their school, thereby making the information from this study applicable to other settings.

Creating a print-rich environment, using K-W-L charts and reading aloud to children were all strategies that had benefits for both physical education and literacy development. There may be other strategies that could be transferable to the gymnasium, but the only way to see these strategies in action is to visit a classroom and watch how a classroom teacher uses them. Professional judgment will have to be used to determine which strategies are appropriate for use in physical education.

There is no experiment that can be done to get this information. It comes from taking time to observe and talk to classroom teachers who are considered exemplary
in their field. My experience had been that classroom teachers are willing to share what they are doing and are grateful for experiences that can be provided to children to support the development of their literacy skills.
Appendix A

Letters of Consent

Classroom Teacher’s Letter of Consent

January 8, 2003

Marjorie Robinson
SUNY Brockport
Department of Physical Education and Sport

Dear Teachers,

My name is Marjorie Robinson and I am the physical education teacher at Longridge School. I am also a graduate student at SUNY Brockport in the Department of Physical Education and Sport. In fulfillment of the requirements for my Master’s degree, I am doing a research study in the field of physical education. You have been selected to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is investigate and analyze methods and strategies used to teach literacy skills in the first grade and determine if and how these methods and strategies can be supported in the physical education program at Longridge School. Three of your students will be selected to be interviewed at the end of the observation period. If you agree to participate in this study, I would be observing you and your students once a week for six one-hour time blocks during your language arts time. I would be looking for possible literacy skill development techniques and strategies that you are using with your students that could be applied in a physical education program. In addition to having me observe in your classroom, you would need to participate in three interview sessions. The first interview would occur prior to the first observation and would allow me to gather professional information about you. The second interview would take place mid-way through the observation process and would be to clarify what has been observed. The third interview would occur
after the observation process was complete and would also be to clarify what was observed. You and I would mutually agree upon a schedule of interviews and observation dates falling within my research time frame. Interviews may be audiotape recorded to accurately transcribe your responses. A copy of the thesis proposal is attached to this letter for further details about this thesis project.

The benefit for your participation in this study is that your students may receive additional literacy skill development opportunities in their physical education program as a result of what was observed in your classroom. In addition, I may be of some assistance to you during the observation times.

The risks to you for participating in this study are minimal and do not extend beyond the normal risks of daily school life.

Confidentiality will be a high priority throughout this study. Your name, your students' names or the school district name will not be used in any of the data or publications connected with this research. Tape-recorded interviews will be kept confidential and will be transcribed only by the researcher. Transcriptions will use false names so as not to identify you.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty. Participation in this research project will not affect your job.

Dr. Luz Cruz, Assistant Professor in the Department of Physical Education and Sport, SUNY Brockport, will supervise this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at [contact information].

If you wish to be involved in this study, please sign the enclosed informed consent form and return it to me as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration of this important subject.
Consent to Participate

I consent to participate in the observation and interview process for the thesis project of Marjorie Robinson as outlined in the Letter of Consent dated January 8, 2003. I am 18 years of age or older and all my questions have been answered.

____________________________  ______________________
Signature of participant       Date
Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Marjorie Robinson and I am your child's physical education teacher at Longridge School. I am also a graduate student at SUNY Brockport in the Department of Physical Education and Sport. In fulfillment of the requirements for my Master’s degree, I am doing a research study in the field of physical education. Your child has been randomly selected to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyze methods and strategies used to teach literacy skills in the first grade and determine if and how these methods and strategies can be supported in the physical education program at Longridge School. Your child would be asked a series of questions about how they think they learn to read and write and what literacy activities they enjoy and feel help them the most as they are learning to read and write. I would be conducting this interview with your child and it would occur during the school day, at a time approved by your child’s classroom teacher. You would receive written notification of when this interview was to take place. The interview may be audiotape recorded so your child’s responses may be accurately recorded.

The benefit for your child is that he/she may make increased gains in his/her language arts skills, both at the present time and in the future as a result of a language arts enriched physical education environment.

The risks for your child are minimal and do not extend beyond the normal risks of daily school life.
Confidentiality will be a high priority throughout this study. Your child’s name will not be used in any publication. Audiotape-recorded interviews will be kept confidential and will not be made available to the public.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you chose to not have your child participate, they will not be penalized in any way. You may withdraw your child from this study at any time.

Dr. Luz Cruz, Assistant Professor in the Department of Physical Education and Sport, SUNY Brockport, will supervise this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 621-8520.

If you wish to allow your child to be involved in this study, please sign the enclosed informed consent form and return it to your child’s teacher. Thank you for your consideration of this important subject.

Consent to Participate

I give my permission for my child, ____________________________________________ to participate in the thesis project conducted by Marjorie Robinson as outlined in the Letter of Consent dated February 5, 2003. I am 18 years or older and all my questions have been answered.

__________________________________________________________  __________
Signature of parent/guardian                                      Date
Letter of Consent for Students

Statement of Informed Consent

To Be Read to First Grade Students

My name is Mrs. Robinson and you know me because I am your physical education teacher. I have a homework project for my college class and I would like your help. In the next few months I will be visiting your classroom to observe how your teacher helps you to learn to read and write. I am looking for things we can do in physical education to help you become better readers and writers. I will be asking you some questions about how you learn to read and write and what kinds of activities help you learn to do these things.

If you decide to let me ask you some questions, I will be writing down your answers and using a tape recorder so I can listen to our interview again if needed. When I write about what you tell me, I will identify you by a different first name only.

Your parent or guardian has given me permission to ask you questions for my project, but it is up to you to decide if you want to participate. If you decide to participate, but change your mind later on, you can tell your teacher or me that you have changed your mind. It is okay to change your mind at any time.

If it is OK for me to ask you some questions for my homework project, please write your name below. Under your name, please print the date. I will give you a copy of this letter.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Robinson
I give my permission for Mrs. Robinson to ask me some questions for her project, to audiotape record my answers, and to write about my answers in her paper.

Name

______________________________

Date

______________________________
Appendix B
### Appendix B

#### Observation Schedules

#### Proposed Observation Schedule

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Appendix C

Interview Questions

Classroom Teacher Interview Questions Interview #1

1. How many years have you been teaching? Teaching first grade?
2. Describe your classroom, i.e., self-contained, multi-aged, traditional, etc. Are there any special considerations (needs) or situations in your room?
3. What do you perceive as your strengths as a teacher?
4. What curriculum is currently used in this school district for Language Arts? How would you describe this curriculum?
5. How do you determine a child's reading level? What tools are used?
6. What is the range of reading levels in your classroom?
7. What is your personal philosophy or theory about teaching children to read, or how children learn to read?
8. Where do you get new ideas for helping children to listen, speak, read and write?
9. What does current research say about literacy learning and teaching? How do you find out about the latest research? How do you make sense out of conflicting research?
10. As a result of your years of teaching, what practices do you find particularly effective when teaching reading/writing?
11. With ESOL students, do your strategies change? If so, how?
12. Do you use movement at all in your lessons? If so, how?
Teacher Interview #2-Room 76

1. Tell me about the Teaching Assistant in your room. How often is she in the room and for how long?

2. Most days when I have arrived, the TA is working with one student. Is it always the same student? If not, how do you choose who will work with her? What is she doing with that child?

3. Reading groups- Does the student composition change in the groups? Why or why not?

4. Tell me about the “picture walks” that you take the students on before you read a new book. What is the purpose? Is this a fairly new strategy when teaching children to read or has it been around for a long time?

5. How much time do you spend with one reading group on average per day?

6. Tell me about the non-fiction book on Pandas. Was it a library book? Why was this selected? Do you always talk about Pandas with your students?


8. How often does your one student go to ESOL? Does he make up work he has missed in the classroom? If so, when and how? If not, why not? Do you and the ESOL teacher collaborate on lessons?

9. Order of reading groups and center work. Do some groups always see the teacher or teaching assistant first and then go do independent center work? Why or why not?

11. Main ideas and detail. What strategies do you use to get children to understand this concept? Is this a concept most children have by the end of first grade?

12. Do reading groups alternate between the teacher and teaching assistant? Do you provide the plans for the teaching assistant? Do you have any time to go over plans together?

13. Sight words seem to be an important part of the daily lessons. Where do they come from? How do you assess whether the students are learning them? What, if any opportunities do students have to practice these words outside of reading groups?

14. Journals-I have seen green journals and the black & white journals on the tables. What are these used for? How often are the children writing in them?

15. Poetry journals- What role does poetry play in the LA curriculum? What does poetry provide to the beginning reader? What kinds of things do you teach about poetry?

16. What do you do when students aren’t “getting” what you are trying to teach? Do you change your lesson plans?
Teacher Interview #2-Room 77

1. On the chalkboard, you have words under the alphabet letters. What are the criteria for putting words on the board?

2. Tell me about the boxes of books on the tables. What is the purpose, when are they used?

3. Student journals- you put a date stamp in them after a student entry, what happens to the journals next? Are they read by the teacher/

4. What is the correct term for when students read together out loud?

5. Tell me about the yellow book that the students use for some group reading activities?

6. Tell me about the Teaching Assistant's role in your language arts time? What is going on when she meets individually with students?

7. Some students were out with another teacher and you waited a lesson for them to return. Where were they (speech, reading support? and how often do they go/ Is there coordination between you and this teacher/?

8. What changes do you make in your lesson plans if you think students are struggling with a skill or concept?

9. Brain-Quest questions- How often do you do this and why?

10. During a spelling test, one student took the test with the TA. Is it always the same student and why is this student or any student doing this with her?

11. Printing book- Do you worry about how a child holds a pencil and why or why not?
12. In reading center time, tell me about the “warm-up” book. What qualifies a book to be a “warm-up” book?

13. Tell me about the red centers folders. How often does the work change? Is it the same for all students? What do you do with the work?

14. Sight words- How do you know what words should be sight words? Why are sight words so important? Has the educational theory about sight words changed over the years? Is there a district curricular expectation?

15. How many reading groups do you have in your classroom? Is that number decided by you, the curriculum, etc.?

16. The computer provides what language arts support? Specific programs? How much time do children get on the computer?

17. Is the KWL question series a familiar routine for the children? How do you use it? Before a reading or writing project?

18. The children seem to have a lot of prior knowledge about MLK. Was this typical or because some of the children had just read about MLK before completing the KWL chart?
Final Teacher Interview-Room 76

1. Week of Feb. 3rd, you said there were no spelling words that week. What are the circumstances around that?

2. One group read a book called, Let’s Jump. Is that a book that may be available to me for use in PE

3. How do you know what books you can make paper copies of?

4. You gave a heart compliment to the class one day when I was observing. What is that about?

5. One day you did an assessment piece with a student, over at that table in the corner. Do you remember what that was?

6. Is your lowest reading group working on the kindergarten sight words?

7. In one reading group, each child had a personal chart with dinosaur stickers on them. What is the story with that?

8. How often do you add words to the word ring?

9. Is there anything else that you would like me know about what you do in here that may be transferable to the gymnasium?
1. When I was observing, you presented a rubric for writing the snake story. Was this first time they used the rubric? What was their reaction to the rubric? How did the students score point-wise on the rubric?

2. What are all the reasons that children are pulled from your class?

3. What is the expectation for making up work?

4. You seem to have some paper copies of books that look like you copied them on the copier. Are there books that you can legally copy?

5. Can you think of any leveled books that might be appropriate for PE? Obviously I could look on this Reading A-Z website.

6. Are there any things that have gone on in your classroom related to language arts that I might not have observed but that you would like me to know that you do? Or are there things that you think could transfer to the gymnasium or things that you would like to see supported in PE?
Student Interview Questions

1. What type of activities do you like to do in school to help you to learn to read and write?

2. How do you/did you learn to read?

3. Are you reading a book at this time? Home? School? What is it? Why are you reading that book?

4. Do you like to have stories read to you? Why or why not?

5. How do you learn new words?

6. How do you feel about the books currently being read to you at the end of our physical education classes?
Appendix D
Appendix D

Instructional Materials

First Grade Sight Words

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97
What we Know about Basketball

- Dribble the ball and try to score a basket
- 2 teams play
- Try to get the ball from the other team
- Get points for a basket
- Be a good sport
- Wear a uniform—can be different colors
- Be fair
- Coach
- Referees
- Cheer
- Team with most points wins
- Moveable hoops
- Cheerleaders
- Played on a court

What we Want to learn about basketball

- How to dribble (esp. through the legs)
- How to jump high
- How to jump and shoot
- How to dribble
- Rules

K-W-L Chart Responses

Basketball K-W-L Chart

What we Learned about basketball

- Jump higher (towards the big hoop)
- Shooting
- Dribble between legs
- Spin on finger
- Dribbling with R and L hand
- Dribble and walk
- Passing (chest and bounce)
- Jump
- Run and dribble
- Follow the rules
- About the game
References


New York State Department of Education. (Fall 2002). *Basic Educational Data System School Data Form*. Albany, NY: The State Education Department.


