A Kindergarten Teacher's Exploration of Independent Learning Activities

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A Kindergarten Teacher’s Exploration of Independent Learning Activities

by

Nicole A. Vaughn
August 2012

A thesis submitted of the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Today like every day during my kindergartners’ independent learning activity time, I took out four copies of a Level A text and placed them on the table. On this day, the text was *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* (Carle, 1988) from my schools’ kindergarten book list based on the Fountas and Pinnell’s (1996) guided reading program that I deemed an appropriate text to support my students’ emergent reading abilities. I called the four group members together to meet at my guided reading table while their peers continued to independently work on a variety of activities related to the topic of the week: the farm. I created farm learning activities that encouraged students to practice their reading, writing, math, and art skills. These learning activities were an important part of the school day because my students had opportunities to practice the skills and review the topics that we’ve learned previously in class. Each student was afforded learning opportunities to make his/her learning more concrete and pertinent.

After each student found his/her special seat at the table, I briefly introduced the book to the students, keeping in mind the meaning, language, and visual information in the text as well as the knowledge, experience, and skills of the students as readers. After introducing the book, the students and I discussed the importance of using pictures in the text as a strategy to help them problem-solve unknown words (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). I instructed each student to silently read the text into the whisper phones until I asked him/her to quietly read to me.
I asked one of the students to read to me and as the child began to whisper read, I looked up from the guided reading table and saw that one of the boys at the computer center was not on the website activity that he had logged into that morning. I then turned my focus to the independent writing group where it appeared the students had finished early because two girls had handed their papers in and were starting to interrupt their neighbors.

I knew I should have attended to the student who was reading to me by taking a running record; however, several thoughts and questions were running through my mind: *Have I created learning activities that are engaging and meaningful for all of my kindergarten students? Are my students on task? What more can I do to ensure that my students are provided with developmentally appropriate and differentiated activities?*

I forced myself to focus my attention back to the student who was reading aloud. I designed this daily morning block with my co-teacher to provide our students with the opportunity to meet with each teacher in a small-group setting so we could attend to their reading behaviors and provide feedback accordingly. I dealt with my concerns for the independent learning activities when my guided reading group was over; I owed it to the students at my guided reading table to give them my undivided attention. In a whole group setting, I expressed my concerns about what I observed during the independent learning activities and together the students, my co-teacher and I reviewed the procedures and rules of each learning center.
Significance of the Problem

Guided reading is an essential component of a balanced literacy approach in literacy and language arts, which includes several kinds of reading and writing activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) are well-respected in the field of literacy education for their contributions to literacy instruction and reading programs. Teachers in school districts nationwide incorporate their guided reading program into their English Language Arts (ELA) block. According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996),

Guided reading is a context in which a teacher supports each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. The teacher works with small groups of children who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support. The ultimate goal in guided reading is to help children learn how to use independent reading strategies successfully. (p. 2)

The school district in which I am employed places a lot of emphasis on what should be taught during small-group sessions to support a reader’s development. As I mentioned previously, when I meet with guided reading groups I am supposed to be focused on listening to the student as they whisper read to me, but all I can think about is what the rest of my students are doing and what they are learning as they work independently.
Through my research of independent learning activities (Diller, 2003; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Guastello & Lenz, 2005; Nations & Alonso, 2001; Opitz & Ford, 2004; Owocki, 2005; Rog, 2011; Witherell, 2007), it was evident to me that there are a variety of activities that teachers implement into their instruction that provide developmentally meaningful and appropriate independent work for their students within the different content areas. Content specific learning activities provide meaningful experiences and possibilities for students to actively participate in their learning and extend upon information that they have learned previously (Diller, 2003; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Rog, 2001).

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) define literacy centers as “a physical area set aside for specific learning purpose. The center has appropriate materials to enable children to explore and work independently (as individuals or with partners or small groups) and behave as active learners” (p. 49). Rog (2011) highlighted how learning centers have long been a popular structure in kindergarten classrooms for independent learning. Center activities might be literacy-based during the literacy block or might include dramatic play or exploration centers (Rog, 2011). Each independent learning activity encompasses unique approaches to holding students accountable for their learning and requires a significant amount of planning on behalf of the teacher (Rog, 2011). According to Rog (2011), “literacy center activities might include reading around the room, reading from leveled books in browsing boxes, building words from magnetic letters, playing matching games with words and pictures, or writing cards and letters to classmates” (p. 87). Literacy center activities call upon students to learn
routines rather than activities. Rog states that, “routines are habits of mind that are self-directed and self-monitored, as opposed to teacher-created, isolated activities” (p. 87).

Opitz and Ford (2004) identified learning centers and independent projects as ideas for meaningful independent activities during small-group reading instruction. The researchers mention a variety of centers: classroom library, writing, drama, listening, literature response, poetry, and spelling/word work.


A literacy work station is an area within the classroom where students work alone or interact with one another, using instructional materials to explore and expand their literacy. It is a place where a variety of activities reinforce and/or extend learning, often without the assistance of the classroom teacher. (p. 2)

In literacy work stations, teachers place an emphasis on modeling and students take responsibility for their own learning (Diller, 2003). This guarantee for independence utilizes work stations such as classroom library, book work, writing, drama, ABC/word study, poetry, computer, listening, puzzles and games, and buddy reading (Diller, 2003).

Guastello and Lenz (2005) presented the idea of the “kidstation model [that provides] students with opportunities to use their creative abilities and modality
preferences to demonstrate what they have learned” (p. 47). Within the kidstation model, Guastello and Lenz reveal a multitude of activities that students can participate in under the following kidstations: Kidstation 1: Word recognition, vocabulary development, and literal comprehension (e.g., word sorts, word walls, concept maps, character mapping), Kidstation 2: Response to literature (e.g., setting maps, open-mind portraits, response journals), and Kidstation 3: Critical analysis and evaluation (e.g., writing a review of a book, write a new ending, how did the story make you feel?). Learning activities, no matter what the model, must afford opportunities to differentiate learning and self-regulation (Guastello & Lenz, 2005).

The issue of finding the right independent learning activities for my kindergarten students was essential at the beginning of the school year because it was eminent that routine and independent work expectations are set immediately. I recognized that the centers and/or workstation model provided a model for students to follow throughout the ELA block while my co-teacher and I meet individually or with small groups of students. If my students do not actively engage in learning activities while they are away from my co-teacher or me, they may be consistently off task or even disrupting the learning of their peers. I cannot be right by my students’ side; there are 19 of them and only one of me and another teacher in the room, so I want to create and implement individual learning activities that keep my students actively engaged and hold their attention while I am conducting guided reading groups.

I wanted to help my kindergarten students learn to participate in independent learning opportunities and experience learning activities that build on concepts or
topics we have worked on previously. I wanted to help my students engage in independent learning activities that help them recognize what they know and how they can actively participate in their learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose for conducting this study was to help me gain insight and understanding of the types of independent learning activities that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful for my kindergarten students during the guided reading ELA block. Every Friday afternoon, in addition to creating guided reading lessons for our guided reading groups, my co-teacher and I spend time brainstorming ideas and creating materials for independent learning activities that incorporate topics from previous ELA, math, and social studies content area lessons.

During two of my long-term substitute teaching placements in both a kindergarten and first grade classroom, I created and implemented learning centers as the probationary classroom teachers had instructed me to do. Just as I do now in my own classroom, each week I decided what eight centers I wanted to create learning activities for and setup throughout the classroom in the designated areas. In those settings, I found learning centers fairly easy to setup and manage throughout the school year for both myself as the teacher and for my young students.

In my current probationary teaching position I travel between two elementary schools. At one school I provide early intervention pull-out services for kindergarten and first grade students. At the other elementary school I co-teach in a blended
kindergarten classroom during the English Language Arts (ELA) block. During this
time, we have the students engage in independent learning activities and participate in
writer’s workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

In my kindergarten classroom, my co-teacher and I implement independent
learning activities where my students rotate to four different independent learning
centers throughout one week. On Tuesday, typically day one of our rotations, we
spend approximately three to five minutes explaining each center, modeling the
activity, and answering any questions the students have. Each day the students must
listen to what center they must independently and/or collaboratively complete. We
frequently use the following independent learning centers: computer, ABC/writing,
word work, poetry, listening, and math center.

For the computer center, the students participate and engage with a variety of
computer programs: Microsoft Word, Starfall, and Tumble Books. When working on
Microsoft Word the students often type the kindergarten high-frequency words, color
words, friend’s names, or even sentences. Starfall is a program online that has a
variety of literacy activities and games. The Tumble Book Library (Tumble Book
Library) is a program that my school district purchased, that enables the students to
follow along to a visual storybook as a voice reads the text to them. After listening to
the story, the students take quizzes or play games related to the text that they listened
to until I ring the bell to signify clean up.

At ABC/Writing center, the students practice their handwriting skills. The
students work with magnetic letters, foam letters, traceable cards, Wikki Stix, and
other manipulatives to become more familiar with letter formation as well as identifying the names and sounds of each letter. The manipulation of letters and words can be integrated later in my students’ reading and writing experiences. In addition to working with the letters of the alphabet, the students work to increase their fluency with reading and writing words through their use of letter stamps, scrabble tiles, play dough, rainbow words writing the word wall words following a rainbow color pattern on paper or whiteboards. Towards the middle to end of the year, the students begin to create sentences through shared writing experiences and/or generate their own sentences to accompany a picture(s).

The word work center provides students with opportunities to investigate and understand word patterns rather than memorize unconnected words. Each week a group of words are selected to represent a particular spelling pattern. The students must become word detectives and engage in ongoing attempts to make sense of word patterns and the relationships between one another. Activities within the word study center include word sorts and word hunts within the classroom. Within this center the students practice hearing and recording the sounds within words.

The poetry center provides opportunities for students to explore and discover language. The poems within this center pertain to the particular holiday, season, or month. Each student receives a copy of the poem which they glue into their poetry journals and there is a large copy for the entire class. Within these reading experiences students are encouraged to apply a wide range of reading strategies such as connecting background knowledge, creating visual imagery, inferring, making
predictions, asking questions, etc. The students create pictures to accompany each new poem within a poetry journal.

Much like the computer center, the students at the listening center sit at a table and follow along in a book as a person’s voice reads the text. Once the story is finished, the students draw a picture and/or write a sentence explaining their favorite part of the story, how the story made them feel, or how they would change the ending.

The math center activities are from the Envision Math Program (Pearson Education, 2010) that teachers in my school district use. The students play games with a partner and work with math manipulatives (e.g., counters, coins, blocks). I incorporate re-teaching activities for those students who, after I assess them, have shown areas of need within the math content we are learning in class. In the math center, the students have encountered the games and activities prior to rotating through this center.

Through this six week research study, I intended to answer the research questions:

How are independent learning activities developmentally appropriate for kindergartners to promote literacy development?

What types of independent learning activities promote the literacy development of kindergartners?

I designed this study to extend the research related to guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Owocki, 2005; Rog, 2001; Witherell, 2007) to incorporate the other students in the classroom who are not with the teacher. It is my
hope to discover independent learning activities that can provide my kindergarten students with opportunities to practice a range of integrated literacy skills in authentic and meaningful ways.

I anticipated that researching questions relevant to my literacy instruction would improve my ability to collect and analyze the qualitative data I gathered through observations and interviews with students. I also anticipated that the data that I collected would positively contribute to my development as a literacy educator, and enable me to closely observe some of my kindergarten students participating in the independent learning activities focused on integrated literacy practices that I’ve co-created and co-implemented within the classroom.

**Study Approach**

Throughout this research study I followed a qualitative research design over a six week time frame. As the teacher-researcher, I created this study to disclose the participation in and perspectives of three students on independent learning activities at the kindergarten level. In addition to gathering data from my students, I evaluated and analyzed the independent learning center activities that my co-teacher and I currently implement into our ELA block.

The student participants were my kindergarten students. In order to solicit student participants, I sent home a letter to each parent/guardian informing him/her of the research that I would be conducting in my classroom (see Appendix A). From the group of responses, I randomly selected one student from each center activity group. I
anticipated using three student participants. If I selected a student and the next student was in that same center group, I selected a new student’s name. I had the parents/guardians complete the informed consent form (see Appendix B).

I planned to gather data on independent learning activities through student interviews, observations, and by collecting student work samples. I transcribed the student interviews verbatim.

Through the interview process with my students (see Appendix C), I focused on their perspective of how engaging and meaningful they found the independent learning activities. I observed my students three times a week while they were participating in different independent learning activities. I collected a variety of student work completed during the learning centers in addition to the information I gained from observations and student interviews.

As I indicated earlier, I co-teach with a general education teacher. I anticipated that this setting would not enable me to step back and observe my students without interruptions during the guided reading block. I solely videotaped my student participants and transcribed the video tapes. As I watched the video, I took field notes accordingly (see Appendix D).

After I completed a daily observation of my students in the independent learning activities, I reflected upon each observation in my research journal. I anticipated reflecting upon my students’ behaviors, interactions with their peers, and how they participated and completed the tasks at hand within the different learning center rotations.
Rationale

The main goals of this study were to help me gain perspective, clarity, and insight into independent learning activities that kindergartners participate in while my co-teacher and I work with guided reading groups. I anticipated that a qualitative approach would enable me to observe my kindergarten students as they participated in the independent learning activities that I’ve co-created with the general education teacher.

During the student interviews, I asked the students to explain the independent learning activities they complete during guided reading and their feelings about such activities. I used open-ended questions with the student participants to enable the opportunity for full, meaningful responses. The questions I asked within the student interviews explored the students’ personal perspectives on the independent learning activities.

In addition to interviewing the participants, I observed the three students during the independent learning activities as well as the peers who they interacted with during their independent learning center groups. This phase of data collection was important because it enabled me as the teacher-researcher to visually see how my students engaged and participated in the different learning activities my co-teacher and I implemented.

The process of interviewing and observing participants enabled me to gain insight into how the students participated in and viewed a variety of independent learning activities.
Summary

In my school district, my colleagues and I are required to provide guided reading instruction to our kindergartners; however, we are not instructed on specific ways to engage our students in independent or small group work activities. At times, my co-teacher and I struggle to identify and create a variety of independent learning activities that our kindergarten students can participate in during our guided reading period. Although we have a filing cabinet full of such activities, we often feel as though we could incorporate more developmentally appropriate and differentiated independent learning activities for the students. The independent learning activities are an issue that is constantly on my mind.

Through research in conjunction with my study, I hoped to discover ways for the current independent learning center activities within my classroom to better meet the strengths and needs of my students while my co-teacher and I are meeting with guided reading groups.

I expected to gain new perspectives to help make the independent learning activities that my co-teacher and I create developmentally appropriate and engaging for our kindergarten students. From the findings of this study I hoped to gain a new perspective on independent learning activities at the kindergarten level. I wanted to discover ways to engage the rest of my kindergarten students in literacy activities that extend and enhance their literacy development while my co-teacher and I work with our guided reading groups.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to contextualize my research, I reviewed and synthesized literature related to different types of independent learning activities made available to kindergarteners. The array of independent learning activities showcased how diverse independent and small-group literacy activities are for young children. Kindergarten teachers consult research on early literacy instruction to determine what is developmentally appropriate and meaningful for their young learners.

The purpose of this research study was to help me learn about a range of independent learning activities that I might use to provide my kindergarten students with opportunities to practice integrated literacy skills in authentic and meaningful ways. In this chapter, I discuss aspects of early literacy instruction, guided reading within the balanced literacy approach, managerial shifts to student independence and accountability, and an array of independent/small-group learning activities.

Early Literacy Instruction

Each fall kindergarten students around the world start school. Kindergarten is a time of new adventures and excitement for young learners mainly because for many students this is their first school experience, and formal learning is fresh and new for them (Cohen, 2008). The first day, first month, and first year of schooling are crucial; a child’s experience in kindergarten lays the groundwork for continuing social, emotional, and cognitive development through the school years (Rog, 2001). Learners
must be provided with a first year experience that is warm with love, busy with activity, and rich with meaning (Rog, 2001).

The term *emergent literacy* was coined by Clay (1991) to describe and define the ongoing and developmental process of understanding and using written language from birth until independence (Rog, 2001). Neuman and Roskos (1998) suggested that the term *emergent* may be inappropriate, because it implied that literacy has a beginning point. They proposed that *early literacy* is a more suitable term to describe a process that is ongoing and continuous throughout a lifetime (Rog, 2001). Whether the term *emergent* or *early literacy* is used, both research and practice confirm that, although not all children develop at the same time and rate, most children go through a similar sequence of developmental stages as they grow (Rog, 2001). Early literacy educators must consider the gradual intellectual growth of students and incorporate activities that follow within the predictable patterns and stages of learning (Rog, 2001). As Rog (2001) indicated, “children are active learners who construct their own understandings about the world as they experience new things and interact with others” (p. 5).

Kindergarten students come to school with a wide range of background knowledge and skills. Rog (2001) reminded educators that this diversity among students must be taken into account when teachers plan for whole-group, small-group and independent learning activities. An exemplary kindergarten program according to Rog (2001) is

Structured in such a way as to respect the learning processes of each student
and help them reach their full potential. It acknowledges that all children will be at different stages of development and require different instructional strategies. And, at its heart is a teacher who has thorough knowledge of the curriculum, the learning process, and the children involved. (p. 6)

Diller (2003) suggested that teachers link the learning activities to their teaching; "when student practice is directly tied to instruction, [the teacher] apparently get more bang for [her] teaching buck" (p. 9). According to Rog (2001), "the kindergarten program must provide not only a print-rich environment, but also carefully organized learning experiences" (p. 6). Some strategies for literacy instruction in kindergarten included interactive read-aloud, shared reading, independent reading, modeled writing, shared writing, independent writing, and language play (Rog, 2001; Routman, 2000). Rog (2001) stated that "all of these literacy instruction strategies combine to form a balanced literacy program that promotes both skills development and desire to read" (p. 6).

**Instructional and Managerial Approaches**

Rog (2001) believed that it is the teacher's job to set challenging yet attainable learning goals for his/her students, and support and guide them as they progress toward those goals. According to the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1998), learning goals form the core of the developmentally appropriate curriculum. Developmental learning means that each child will progress at his or her own rate; therefore, it is
important that teachers respect individual differences and to set challenging but achievable learning goals for each student (Rog, 2001). An effective teacher of early literacy:

- Understands and acknowledges the developmental nature of literacy learning,
- Expects all children to achieve success,
- Accepts individual differences and rates of progress, and
- Provides scaffolded instruction to help each student reach the next level of independence (IRA, 2000).

The concept of scaffolding was based on the research of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), who theorized that there is a zone of proximal development between what a child can do independently and what he or she is able to do with the assistance of someone more knowledgeable or skilled (Rog, 2001). The teacher is often the more knowledgeable and skilled other with whom the learner works, although a peer at times may be the more skilled other. The release of responsibility by the teacher is gradual and appropriate for each learner. Scaffolded activities begin very guided and modeled by the teacher. As the learner becomes more skilled and confident, he or she will participate in shared learning experiences gradually taking more responsibility for his or her learning. Once the learner is able to independently complete activities, the learner will take responsibility for his or her learning.

Strickland and Morrow (1989) indicated that “it is important that early literacy instruction offer rich demonstrations, interactions, and independent explorations” (p. 6). The implementation of managerial routines and expectations are vital within a kindergarten classroom. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) explained that “children respond
to orderly and predictable environments and expectations that help them manage their

time and behavior” (p. 69).

Effective early literacy instruction can look different depending on the
perspectives and teaching philosophies in place within a primary grade level. Within
my research of early literacy instruction I found limited information and research
related solely to independent or small-group learning activities for kindergarteners. It
is my hope that my research study will shed some light on the topic of early literacy
instruction at the kindergarten level.

Guided Reading within the Balanced Literacy Approach

Austin and Morrison (1963) conducted the first research on reading
instruction study by surveying more than 1,000 U.S. elementary school administrators
about reading instruction. After analyzing the findings, Austin and Morrison
concluded that elementary school reading programs were substandard in general and
were not capable of preparing students for future literacy demands. The researchers
found a high reliance on ability grouping. Austin and Morrison also reported that
within reading lessons, teachers separated learners into three groups often labeled as
the poor, average, and good readers. The students’ ability to move to a new reading
group throughout the school year was extremely difficult due to the students’
bindings of the initial classification of placement within these groupings. Austin and
Morrison found “teachers who [ignored] the concept of individual difference” (p.
219). From the findings, Austin and Morrison recommended that teachers use a wider
variety of instructional approaches and more flexible grouping plans, as difference will exist in any group despite efforts to achieve homogeneity.

Since the 1960’s, educators have turned to a balanced literacy approach also referred to as a balanced reading approach (Cowen, 2003). According to Cowen (2003),

A balanced reading approach is research-based, assessment-based, comprehensive, integrated, and dynamic, in that it empowers teachers and specialists to respond to individual assessed literacy needs of children as they relate to their appropriate instructional and developmental levels of decoding, vocabulary, reading comprehension, motivation, and sociocultural acquisition, with the purpose of learning to read for meaning, understanding, and joy. (p. 10)

Balanced literacy encompasses shared, guided, and independent reading and writing learning opportunities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The balanced literacy model and essential literacy skills are typically introduced in kindergarten (Cohen, 2008; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Each phase of the balanced literacy approach involves a different amount of teacher and student responsibility; as students’ progress as readers, more responsibility is gradually released from the teachers until the students have reached independence (Johnson, 2008). The incorporation of whole-group, shared, guided, and independent reading and writing opportunities occur throughout the school day (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).
Based on research published by the New Zealand Department of Education in the 1980s, Fountas and Pinnell (2011) further developed the guided reading approach through research and practical work with teachers over the past two decades. Fountas and Pinnell believe that the ultimate goal within the balanced literacy program is for students to become self-managed learners who can take over the process of learning for themselves. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) defined guided reading as:

A context in which a teacher supports each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. The teacher works with small groups of children who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support. (p. 2)

Iaquinta (2006) stated that “within the guided reading process and in a truly balanced literacy program, how [teachers] teach is as important as what [teachers] teach” (p. 417). The teacher’s goal is to strive to provide the most effective instruction possible and to match the difficulty of the material with the student’s current abilities (Iaquinta, 2006).

The ultimate goal of guided reading is to lead to student independence while reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), guided reading:

- Gives children the opportunity to develop as individual readers while participating in a socially supported activity;
- Gives teachers the opportunity to observe individual students as they process new texts;
- Gives individual readers the opportunity to develop reading strategies so that they can read increasingly difficult texts independently;
- Gives children enjoyable, successful experiences in reading for meaning;
- Develops the abilities needed for independent reading;
- Helps children learn how to introduce texts to themselves (pp. 1-2)

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) reminded educators that guided reading is only one component of a balanced literacy program. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) stated:

A child might spend between ten to thirty minutes a day in a focused reading group that is organized, structured, planned, and supported by the teacher.

During the rest of the day, that same student will participate in whole-group, small-group, and individual activities related to a wide range of reading and writing, almost all of which involve children of varying experiences and abilities (p. 21).

Every kindergarten child is entitled to a balanced instructional program that includes daily experiences of being read to and independently reading meaningful and engaging stories and informational texts, daily opportunities and teacher support to do many kinds of writing for different purposes, and extensive opportunities to work in small groups for focused instruction and collaboration with other children (IRA & NAEYC, 1998; Rog, 2001).

The shift in literacy instruction to hold students accountable for their learning while the teacher works and conferences with small groups of students is becoming more prevalent at the primary level (Rog, 2001). A flexible framework is useful in conceptualizing the curriculum for teaching literacy in the primary grades (Rog, 2001). It is a way of promoting early literacy through the incorporation of a range of reading and writing activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Within a balanced literacy
program teachers provide a variety of literacy experiences and opportunities for their students to refine their thinking (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). A collaborative framework for literacy learning includes reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing or writing workshop, and independent writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Within the four kinds of reading and writing, teachers provide four levels of support:

- **Within reading aloud and shared writing opportunities teachers provide full support.** The teacher models and demonstrates the processes of both reading and writing.
- **Within shared reading and interactive writing there is a high level of teacher support.** The teacher models and demonstrates the processes of both reading and writing but also involves individual children. There is some group problem-solving and a lot of conversation.
- **Within guided reading and guided writing or writing workshop there is some teacher support needed.** Children generally solve their own problems in reading and writing with teacher assistance and/or feedback. The teacher provides specific instruction in mini-lessons and conferences.
- **Within independent reading and independent writing there is little or no teacher support.** As readers and writers students are able to independently solve problems when reading for meaning as well as compose writing. (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996)

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) endorsed that educators design and organize a learning environment in such a way that “the setting is safe and supportive and enables all learners to develop confidence, take risks, learn to work independently, and develop social skills” (p. 43). The goal of a balanced literacy program is to help students to become self-managed learners who can take over the process for themselves in a classroom that is organized for student independence (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Routman (2000) reminds educators that “the trick is knowing how and
when- and for how long- to provide just the right amount of support that allows the learner to assume increasing control of the task” (p. 25).

**Managerial Shifts to Student Independence and Accountability**

Routman (2000) discovered an overreliance on whole-group instruction made it easier for educators to manage reading groups and the remaining students in the class. Much of Routman’s thinking has been influenced through her collaboration with teachers in their classrooms, exploration of new ideas with authors, dialogue with teachers and parents across the country, listened to educators speak at conferences, and engaged in lively discussion and debate with other authors, editors, and educators through e-mail, faxes, letters, and phone calls (Routman, 2000).

Routman worked with teachers of grades ranging from kindergarten to high school English and discovered that the teachers relied on busywork or independent worksheets; students were expected to complete this seatwork and individual projects while they were away from the teacher. While students received individualized support from teachers in their small reading groups for approximately 66-88 minutes per week, Routman found that they were spending about 132 minutes away from their teacher. Researchers have concluded that more emphasis must be placed on what the remaining students in class are expected to do while the teacher conferences with guided reading groups (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998; O’Donnell and Hitpas, 2010; Routman, 2000).
The release of control to students and sharing managerial tasks within a classroom can be difficult for teachers of any grade level (O’Donnell & Hitpas, 2010). From their study of learning centers in a kindergarten classroom, O’Donnell and Hitpas (2010) found that learning centers as a method of learning not only gave students more power, but created a sense of self-confidence. O’Donnell and Hitpas pointed out that through the use of learning centers teachers can hand over control to kindergartners and still have a very productive learning environment. By providing choice and individual accountability options, teachers can be responsive to their students’ needs and do not always have to be in control (O’Donnell & Hitpas, 2010).

Rog (2010) believed that teachers may feel pressured to use more seatwork due to the recent demands placed on accountability for student performance. According to Guastello and Lenz (2007), “the emphasis in education today and probably well into the future is accountability” (p. 47). Accountability pressures result from mandated statewide testing (Reyes, 2010). Much like in the business world, accountability is a systematic issue and it must be understood in terms of a systems approach if it is to truly work in any group, family or organization (Staub, 2005). Staub (2005) used the term “chain of accountability” to refer to a system of individuals, linked in a chain of mutuality. Like a chain, each individual’s accountability can only be as strong as the weakest link within the system (Staub, 2005).

This analogy holds true within the field of education. In the past, educators have turned to learning centers, writer’s workshop, and independent projects to keep
students busy. Meaningful and purposeful instructional designs are beginning to replace busywork due to the emphasis administrators are placing on curricular expectations, student engagement, and learning experiences.

Independent/Small-Group Learning Activities

There are logistical, managerial, and curricular issues that evolve as teachers create a type of independent learning activity (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). No matter what types of independent learning activities an educator uses, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) recommended spending the first six weeks establishing routines for independent learning before pulling small guided reading groups. According to Fountas and Pinnell (1996), “[teachers must] introduce one center at a time, explicitly demonstrating and practicing the routines for using it with the children” (p. 49). The authors recommend that the teacher not introduce a new activity until the students fully understand how to use the one introduced before (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The students will be introduced to the centers gradually in order to establish ways of working there as well as a comfort and understanding of expectations of routines before they are left on their own (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Learning Centers

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009) has long held the position that:
Both child-guided and teacher-guided experiences are vital to children's development and learning. Developmentally appropriate programs provide substantial periods of time when children may select activities to pursue from among the rich choices teachers have prepared in various centers in the room.

(p. 2)

Learning centers have long been a popular structure for independent learning in kindergarten classrooms (Rog, 2011). According to Rog (2001), "learning centers are purposefully planned classroom areas where children can work with hands-on materials to guide their own learning" (p. 34). The kindergarten classroom should contain learning centers with materials specifically designed to encourage young learners to read and write (Rog, 2001). Learning centers are a small area in which students can select from teacher prepared activities to practice and apply the skills they have been taught (Ford & Opitz, 2002; Nations & Alonso, 2001).

The number and type of centers in a kindergarten classroom will vary from one class to another (Rog, 2001). Whatever the number or type of center in use, Rog (2001) advocated that curriculum objectives and standards should be the foundation of the learning center plan. Centers provide independent, constructive learning opportunities for students (Rog, 2001). Rog provided a list of different types of learning centers that a kindergarten teacher could incorporate into his/her instruction:

- **Literacy Centers**: reading corner, writing spot
- **Discovery and Exploration Centers**: math, art, multicultural, science, seasonal, theme
- **Dramatic Play Centers**: carpentry, grocery, kitchen, pet store or vet’s office, restaurant, hospital

Pool and Carter (2011) recommended the use of a computer center as an additional way teachers can provide a print-rich environment to encourage children with a range of literacy skills. Other learning center activities that Rog (2011) discussed were reading around the room, reading from leveled books in browsing boxes, building words from magnetic letters, playing matching games with words and pictures, or writing cards and letters to classmates. These different types of learning centers create a classroom environment to teach kindergarten students independence and collaboration (Rog, 2001).

Rog (2001) provided the following reasons for using learning centers:

- Provide opportunities for children to explore, discover, and create
- Give teachers freedom to work with small groups and individuals
- Accommodate different learning styles and intelligences
- Teach independence and collaboration
- Teach children to manage time, make choices, and use resources wisely
- Promote teamwork and group activities
- Develop both literacy and specific subject skills. (p. 34)

Cowen (2003) believed that within the balanced reading approach reading/learning centers provide students with opportunities for exploration and discovery in all areas of the language arts as well as managing individual and differentiated instruction.

Reyes (2010) enhanced her kindergarten classroom learning centers to help motivate students through the use of hands-on activities and engage those students “who were off-task and those who finished their work early” (p. 95). After several weeks of observing her students and taking anecdotal notes on student’s actions and
conversations during learning center time Reyes (2010) developed learning center extensions. These extensions are thematic, open-ended activities that challenge all children to continue their learning after they complete the fundamental learning center tasks (Reyes, 2010). Children are encouraged to explore the extensions in the centers freely, and inquire, investigate, and record their findings rather than just complete an activity in a specified time frame (Reyes, 2010). Reyes found the learning center extensions were an effective way to master academic standards and foster developmentally appropriate practices for differentiated levels of learners (p. 95). As Rog (2011) stated, “any independent routine is appropriate for the rest of the class during small-group reading instruction as long as it is curriculum based and focused on student learning” (p. 86).

**Literacy Centers**

Ankrum and Bean (2007) presented literacy centers as “a popular spin-off of learning centers that requires children to work independently or in small groups on literacy related activities” (p. 140). A number of stations around the room are generally organized with literacy-related materials, and the literacy centers present the curriculum-based activities to the children on a weekly basis (Ankrum & Bean, 2007).

According to Nations and Alonso (2001, p. 5), a literacy center is a place or activity that:

- Invites students to practice and apply strategies that have been taught and modeled in shared and guided literacy lessons
- Promotes reading, writing, speaking and viewing
• Allows students to manipulate language in both oral and written form
• Engages the learner through interaction
• Exposes students to a variety of text
• Provides open-ended activities for students
• Enables the teacher to assess and evaluate the students' use of literacy strategies

Nations and Alonso (2001) recognized literacy centers as an important element of a successful balanced literacy program because they provide opportunities for students to practice skills and strategies that teachers have modeled and taught within the balanced literacy framework. Nations and Alonso (2001) stated that "centers will be more effective if the activities enhance and extend the literacy experiences students have engaged in during readers' and writers' workshop" (p. 4).

These literacy center invitations to independent learning take the form of centers related to alphabetizing, book review, build-a-sentence, computers, handwriting, independent writing, listening post, map attack, post office, research, stamp collecting, word games (Marriott, 1997). The following table summarizes the literacy centers and the purpose of each center as identified by Nations and Alonso (2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Center</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Library</td>
<td>Provides students with a variety of print and genre to practice reading skills and strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Increases speaking, reading and writing vocabulary. Allows students to self-monitor fluency and progress in reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Response</td>
<td>Gives students the opportunity to authentically respond to a text they have read or heard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Encourages students to read and perform various poems with fluency and expression. Exposes the struggling reader to rhyme, rhythm, and repetition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research | Integrates the study of science and social studies into the literacy hour. Provides children time to interact with non-fiction text.
---|---
Spelling/Word Work | Allows students to manipulate letters and words which can be integrated into their reading and writing experiences.
Writing | Provides opportunity for children to practice the writer’s craft and target skills through self-selected topics and methods of presentation.

*Source:* Nations and Alonso (2001)

**Table 2.1: Literacy Center Activities and their Purposes**

Other literacy centers that are regularly used in elementary classrooms include overhead projector, book nook, big books, book buddies, ABC center, word building, and computer (Ankrum & Bean, 2007). The activities within the literacy centers can be tiered to provide differentiated practice of reading skills and strategies and/or reinforcement of skills taught in whole class or small groups (Ankrum & Bean, 2007).

Nations and Alonso (2001) recommended adding other student centers during the literacy block, especially within early childhood classrooms, such as art, blocks, housekeeping, dramatic play, and math. Whatever center students are engaged in, Nations and Alonso pointed out that the use of centers can break down when materials are misused, limited, or unfamiliar. Students must be taught to take responsibility for their learning environment before they can be expected to learn independently. Through proper modeling and guided practice students can come to learn the teaching procedures for material use and expectations of independent work (Nations & Alonso, 2001). According to Falk-Ross (2008), literacy centers enable
students to take a hands-on approach to learning, and provide students with the opportunity to make use of their various learning styles.

Marriott (1997) cited several advantages of carefully crafted independent learning centers including they give teachers large blocks of uninterrupted time to work with small groups of students and create ongoing opportunities for one-on-one instruction, individualized conferences, and both formal and informal assessment. Within these different types of literacy centers students experience three rigorous criteria— independence, sustainability, and meaningfulness, which is said to ensure that students will enjoy and benefit from these activities over long periods of time (Marriott, 1997).

Ford and Opitz (2002) stressed that the instruction happening away from the teacher, such as that in literacy centers, “must rival the power of the instruction that takes place with the teacher” (p. 710). In order for center learning to have this kind of power and be successful, the following must be considered: (a) decision making must be grounded in assessment, (b) activities must require students to interact with print while reading and writing, (c) curriculum goals must be accommodated, (d) tasks developed must be doable for the student and valued by the teacher, and (e) centers must be structured for independence, equity, accountability, ease of planning, and must be routine based (Ford & Opitz, 2002; O’Donnell & Hitpas, 2010).
Literacy Work Stations

As a third grade teacher, Diller (2003) was approached by the director of kindergarten in her school district and asked to develop a new approach to learning centers that would better meet the needs of all students. Diller changed the name from literacy centers to literacy work stations to show that the focus would be on the child’s work (Diller, 2003). Diller’s (2003) presentation of the differences between literacy work stations and traditional learning centers is shown in Table 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Literacy Work Stations</strong></th>
<th><strong>Traditional Learning Centers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials are taught with and used for instruction first. Then they are placed in the work station for independent use.</td>
<td>New materials were often placed in the center without first being used in teaching. The teacher may have shown how to use the materials once, but they were often introduced with all the other new center materials at one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stations remain set up all year long. Materials are changed to reflect children’s reading levels, strategies being taught, and topics being studied.</td>
<td>Centers were often changed weekly with units of study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stations are used for students’ meaningful independent work and are an integral part of each child’s instruction. All students go to work stations daily.</td>
<td>Centers were often used by students when they “finished their work.” Centers were used for fun and motivation, for something extra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials are differentiated for students with different needs and reading levels.</td>
<td>All students did the same activities at centers. There was not usually much differentiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher meets with guided reading groups during literacy work stations.</td>
<td>If the teacher met with small groups, each group often did the same task.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Diller (2003)*

**Table 2.2: Differences between Literacy Work Stations and Traditional Learning Centers**

Within the work stations model Diller (2003) suggested that a teacher can set students up for success by considering what students pay attention to and what engages them. An increase in students’ attention to tasks can be achieved by having
students play a game, make something, talk with a partner, tell a story, have a job to do, move, and do something new (Diller, 2003). According to Diller (2003),

A literacy work station is an area within the classroom where students work alone or interact with one another, using instructional materials to explore and expand their literacy. It is a place where varieties of activities reinforce and/or extend learning, often without the assistance of the classroom teacher. It is a time for children to practice reading, writing, speaking, listening, and working with letters and words. (p. 3)

Diller (2003) also recognized that, “choice is an important feature in making literacy work stations successful” (p. 4). A station should include a variety of things for students to choose from, but there shouldn’t be so many choices that the students feel overwhelmed (Diller, 2003). Diller advised educators to aim for what she called “controlled-choice,” and provide several choices of activities within a work station. During literacy work stations students are provided with learning opportunities to engage in meaningful and independent practice.

Diller presented the classroom library, big book, writing, drama, ABC/word study, poetry, computer, listening, puzzles and games, buddy reading, pocket chart, creation, science/social studies, and handwriting work stations. Diller suggested how to adapt traditional kindergarten centers to fit within the work stations model due to the value of play that exists within traditional kindergarten centers to develop language and literacy concepts. These traditional kindergarten centers include housekeeping, block, and sand or water center. The model presented by Diller has the
potential to increase opportunities for students’ literacy developed during centers activities if teachers create meaningful work stations that promote student learning and independence.

**Kidstations**

Kidstations are a newer model of independent learning activities in existence that emphasizes a focus on those students who are not meeting with the teacher (Guastello & Lenz, 2005). Guastello and Lenz (2005) provided a kidstation model that they believe addresses the challenges teachers face when attempting to manage the guided reading and independent work groups in their classrooms. According to Guastello and Lenz, “the term *kidstation* is used in this model rather than *center* for a practical reason” (p. 146). Traditionally, teachers create centers in areas of the classroom separate from where students gather and have a specific function, but because teachers are often challenged with the lack of space in their classroom, Guastello and Lenz suggested placing portable kidstations where students gather in groups. Guastello and Lenz (2007) indicated that “the kidstation models provide students with opportunities to use their creative abilities and modality preferences to demonstrate what they have learned” (p. 47).

Guastello and Lenz (2007) made it clear that teachers need to change the students’ mind-set; the activities within the kidstation model are not “busy work” but, rather, extensions of their guided reading session. Table 2.3 provides the five-day
model created for implementing guided reading and the kidstations (Guastello & Lenz, 2007, p. 48).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>Kidstation One: Word Study</td>
<td>Kidstation Two: Understanding the Literature</td>
<td>Kidstation Three: Responding to Literature</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kidstation Three: Responding to Literature</td>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>Kidstation One: Word Study</td>
<td>Kidstation Two: Understanding the Literature</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kidstation Two: Understanding the Literature</td>
<td>Kidstation</td>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>Kidstation One: Word Study</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kidstation One: Word Study</td>
<td>Kidstation Two: Understanding the Literature</td>
<td>Kidstation Three: Responding to Literature</td>
<td>Guided Reading</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Guastello and Lenz (2007)*

**Table 2.3: Five-Day Implementation Model for Guided Reading and Kidstations**

The students’ work at the kidstations is evidence or proof that they can apply the skills they are being taught (Guastello & Lenz, 2007). Each kidstation within the five-day model revisits important information and concepts from a text. Some of the tasks created for the groups are often based on the observations made by a teacher as the students read with during guided reading (Guastello & Lenz, 2007). Guastello and Lenz (2007) mentioned that students initially work independently in the beginning of the process and most of the time; however, when each student has demonstrated responsibility and accountability and when a project lends itself to it, group work can be initiated.
Teacher feedback is an important part of the kidstations model (Guastello & Lenz, 2007). Upon completion of each kidstation the teacher collects, checks, and responds to student work. The following day, the students review the feedback before beginning their next kidstation task (Guastello & Lenz, 2007). The tasks within the kidstation model reinforce understandings and elaborate on skills previously taught. Table 2.4 presents additional skills and activities for three of the kidstations for students’ grades 1-3 (Guastello & Lenz, 2005, pp. 150-151).

### Additional Skills & Activities for Kidstation 1: Word Study (Grades 1-3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Recognition</th>
<th>Vocabulary Development</th>
<th>Literal Comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word posters</td>
<td>Word sorts</td>
<td>Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word clusters</td>
<td>Literal meanings</td>
<td>Construct story map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word sorts</td>
<td>Figurative meanings</td>
<td>Character mapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word walls</td>
<td>Concept maps</td>
<td>Create pictures or a comic strip to retell the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling patterns</td>
<td>Possible sentence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Words I want to learn to spell”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Additional Skills & Activities for Kidstation 2: Responding to Literature (Grades 1-3)

*Response to Literature*

- Story boards
- Story quilts
- Setting maps
- Open-mind portraits
- Writing retellings of stories
- Response journals

### Additional Skills & Activities for Kidstation 3: Elaboration (Grades 1-3)

*Critical Analysis and Evaluation*

- Writing a review of a book
- Write the story from another point of view
- What did you learn from the book?
- Write a new ending
- How did the story make you feel?

*Source:* Guastello and Lenz (2005)

Table 2.4: Additional Skills and Activities for Kidstations 1-3, Grades 1-3
The incorporation of individual presentations each week is a unique attribute of the kidstation model (Guastello & Lenz, 2007). According to Guastello and Lenz (2007),

The presentations help students come to understand how effective communication skills are an integral part of their literacy development as well as learn the elements necessary for effective oral communication, [a presentation] could be a simple prop or puppet animated by a first grader as he recites a fairy tale and talks about the character in the tale or something similar to a show-and-tell by a second grader who creates a flip book to illustrate and retell the sequence of events in a story. (p. 55)

The presentation aspect benefits not only the students who have developed the task but also the students observing the presentations because watching and listening to their classmates give the presentations is a means of sharing ideas and is motivational (Guastello & Lenz, 2007).

Guastello and Lenz (2007) explained how a kindergarten student might make a picture or use a computer software program such as Kid Pix Studio to show how he or she would grow pumpkins in his backyard within the presentation cycle of kidstations, so it is evident that the kidstations model could be modified for kindergarten students. As teachers begin to implement the guided reading groups with the appropriate activities in the kidstations, the element of accountability must be clearly established and maintained no matter the grade level (Guastello & Lenz, 2007).
Daily Five

As classroom populations become more diverse with students with unique backgrounds, needs and strengths, new instructional and management practices will be developed in the field of education (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Educators are looking for ways that hold students accountable for their learning. An emphasis on student independence can be found within structures, such as the Daily Five (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Based on the work from literacy learning and motivation researchers such as Brophy (2004), researchers Boushey and Moser (2006) created a series of literacy tasks that students complete daily while the teacher meets with small groups or confers with individual students. The Daily Five consists of five tasks: read to yourself, read to someone, work on writing, listen to reading, and spelling/word study (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Boushey and Moser (2006) stated that “it is this explicit teaching and practicing of behaviors that sets the Daily Five apart from the other management systems” (p. 6).

Boushey and Moser (2006) began with a teacher-driven model that relied on busywork and artificial reading and writing activities; however, they slowly progressed through centers to where they are now, with the Daily Five. According to Boushey and Moser, “the Daily Five is a student-driven management structure designed to fully engage students in reading and writing” (p. 12). The Daily Five:

- Rely on the teaching of independence
- Manage the entire literacy block
- Allow for three to five focus lessons and more intentional teaching
- Provide students substantial time to read and write
- Allow for the integration of reading and writing
Incorporate a variety of clearly defined instructional routines that accelerate learning
- Build stamina to ensure longer periods of time students successfully read and write
- Articulate student behaviors that culminate in highly engage learners
- Teach students to understand and monitor their literacy goals (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 13)

Boushey and Moser (2006) mentioned that the Daily Five is the largest part of the literacy curriculum each day. It is the structure that enables all children to do meaningful work independently as the teacher works in small groups and with individual children (Boushey & Moser, 2006). As the teacher works in small groups or confers with or assesses individual students, children cycle through Daily Five activities of their choice (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

Boushey and Moser (2006) introduced the foundations for meaningful content instruction tailored to meet the needs of each learner. The foundations of this explicit modeling practice incorporate the principles of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory (Boushey & Moser, 2006). The activities and expectations within this structure stem from Boushey and Moser's determination “to find a more effective way to help children be independent with meaningful activities, allowing [teachers] to work uninterrupted with small groups and individuals” (p. 7). Within the Daily Five skills are taught and practiced until the behaviors become habits and what Boushey and Moser call “default” behaviors (p. 7). They recognized that each group of students is different therefore they recommended that teachers spend at least 20 days building community, defining and practicing behaviors, building stamina, and assessing the needs of the particular group of students. The goal of the Daily Five is
to have every child become engrossed in his or her reading and writing (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

Conclusion

Guided reading provides a time for teachers to create independent and/or small-group learning activities that students can complete while they are not meeting in the small guided reading group. The use of learning centers, literacy centers, work stations, kidstations, and the Daily Five have evolved to hold students accountable for their learning as well as provide developmentally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences for students at various grade levels.

My review of literature revealed a variety of independent learning activities that students can complete independently while their teacher is working with a small group of students on reading instruction. The development and management of independent learning centers poses a significant challenge to teachers. Ankrum and Bean (2007) alleged that “there are a variety of approaches that teachers employ; it is important that teachers select a management technique that is comfortable and matches their teaching style” (p. 140).

Research has linked independent learning activities to increased student accountability and motivation for students to actively participate in their learning. However, the approaches in which kindergarten teachers can go about implementing and maintaining specific independent learning activities has not been studied in great detail. Further studies in kindergarten classrooms are needed in order to help
kindergarten teachers create developmentally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences for the students whom they are not meeting with during guided reading small group instruction. I anticipated that the findings from my study would contribute to the literature regarding independent learning activities at the kindergarten level.

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

Introduction

Through this six-week study I hoped to discover developmentally appropriate and meaningful independent learning activities that my co-teacher and I could use in our kindergarten classroom during the guided reading English Language Arts (ELA) block. I explored the following research questions:

How are independent learning activities developmentally appropriate for kindergartners to promote literacy development?

What types of independent learning activities promote the literacy development of kindergartners?

Participants and Context

The participants were students within a public school in western New York. Within this K-6 elementary school there is an average of five classes per grade level with approximately 20 students per classroom. The three kindergarten students I interviewed were students in my kindergarten classroom. I had 10 boys and 9 girls in my classroom; two students had Individualized Education Plans (IEP). The students
participate in guided reading instruction daily as required by the school district; however, the classroom activities varied according to preference of each teacher and the unique needs/strengths of the students.

I selected the participants using convenience sampling. I observed three students within different independent learning groups. I sent the inform consent form to all of the students' parents/guardians in my class and informed them of the purpose as well as the procedures of the six-week study (see Appendixes A and B). Once I received the forms back from the student’s families, I got the statements of assent for the interviews and observations from the students (see Appendixes E and F). Upon receiving the proper informed consent needed for the student participants, I randomly selected the three student participants.

My Positionality as the Researcher

As the teacher-researcher, it was important that I consider my own positionality within the context of my research. I am a middle-class, 24 year old Caucasian woman. I am a special education teacher living in western New York; I've lived in this area all my life. I received my Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education and Special Education from The College at Brockport in May 2010 and my Master’s Degree in Literacy Education at the same university in New York State in 2012. I hold New York State initial certifications in the following areas: Early Childhood Education (Birth-Second grade), Childhood Education (First-Sixth Grade),

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Students with Disabilities (First-Sixth Grade), Literacy Education (Birth-Sixth Grade) and Health Education (Kindergarten-Twelfth grade).

This is my first year in a probationary special education teaching position. The school year prior I had long-term substitute teaching positions in kindergarten and first grade classrooms where I setup weekly literacy and learning centers during my guided reading block of instruction. Presently, I teach nineteen kindergarten students’ ages five to six; some of the students within my classroom receive direct and indirect special education services from me, their case manager. It is important to note that my co-teacher and I have students with emotional needs some who had their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) revoked upon entering kindergarten.

My educational philosophies help form the methods through which I approach my literacy instruction, conduct my classroom environment, and set expectations for my students as independent learners. In my roles as a special educator and classroom teacher, I must motivate my students and provide them with learning opportunities to work independently on activities that consider their unique learning skills and needs. Routman (2000) believed that without student engagement learning is limited. My co-teacher and I believe that our young learners must have autonomy and choice within our classroom to expand upon and discover new learning. Within the independent learning center activities that my co-teacher and I create, we provide our kindergarten students with scaffolded and differentiated learning experiences that promote their independence and active participation in their learning. My co-teacher and I incorporate the concept of scaffolding based on the research of Vygotsky (1978) and
his idea of the zone of proximal development for each learner. We create learning activities and experiences that take into consideration what a child can do independently and what he or she is capable of doing with teacher assistance.

I value lifelong learning and hope to pass this along to my kindergarten students through the means of developmentally appropriate and engaging learning activities. Rog (2001) reminded me that as an educator of young learners, especially those with special needs I must create a learning environment with activities and experiences that allow each learner to progress at his or her own rate. I respect those individual differences and work with each learner to set challenging, yet achievable learning goals to help him or her reach the next phase of learning development. Personally, I feel that independent learning centers promote student autonomy and knowledge. I incorporate centers into my daily guided reading instructional block of time because I feel that it gives my students learning opportunities to indorse learner independence. The work of Fountas and Pinnell (1996) has guided my instructional approaches to literacy education. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) discussed the importance and means of effective instruction during guided reading as well as the instructional time that students are not working in a small group with a teacher.

At the end of each week, I sit down with my co-teacher to create independent learning activities for the following week for each center rotation. As we discuss what topics we would like the students to practice and review, we also consider the different levels of understanding that our students have reached over the past week.
The grouping of students during center activities is not static. While we try to establish some stability within the groups, the groupings are flexible and shift over time. Each independent center group is made up of four to five students; these groups usually change every month. The students in each group are heterogeneously mixed: gender, levels of understanding, maturity. The heterogeneity of our center groups continues when considering the format and/or expectation within a center activity.

My co-teacher and I create differentiated learning activities for our students; the activities we create meet the students where they are within their levels of understandings of topics. The differentiated learning activities are created using baseline data and our observations of the students from the previous week.

In addition to the baseline data gathered each week, my school district requires that each quarter classroom teachers gather data on each student’s letter, sound, and sight word recognition through a variety of assessments, such as the Letter Identification Assessment (Letter ID). My co-teacher and I refer to this data as well as other assessments and anecdotal notes to inform our instruction and the independent learning activities that we create for centers. An example of such use of assessments and incorporation of differentiation is within a computer center activity where students are expected to type and read the twenty-five kindergarten sight words, those students who have a firm understanding of the sight words (i.e., identified 20 or more words on the Letter ID assessment) should go beyond typing and reading the words. We would expect them to create and type sentences using the twenty-five kindergarten sight words within the 35-40 minute center activity.
I am personally invested in this research study, as I hoped to gain a better perspective of how the study participants negotiate independent learning activities on a daily basis.

**Data Collection**

I collected data through the use of student interviews and observations. Each source of data helped me gain a more well-rounded understanding of developmentally appropriate independent learning activities within a kindergarten classroom. I used a research journal to log the information I collected and to reflect on the data collection process.

**Student Interviews**

I conducted interviews with student participants in my office. The interviews were one-on-one and semi-structured. I used predetermined questions for each participant interview to help guide each conversation (see Appendix C). The student participants had the opportunity to control the responses they provided during the interview process. I followed up on what the participants said by asking for clarification, seeking concrete details, and requesting stories (Seidman, 2006). I actively listened and moved each interview forward as much as possible by building on what the participants shared (Seidman, 2006).

During each interview, I audio taped the conversations that I later transcribed and analyzed. I anticipated that the student interviews would take approximately 10
minutes due to the smaller quantity of questions on the student interview protocol. There was the possibility that I would conduct follow-up interviews with the participants in order to clarify student responses and/or themes as they emerged.

**Classroom Observations**

In addition to the participant interviews, I planned on scribing field notes during my observations in my kindergarten classroom during independent learning activity rotations (see Appendix D). Each week I observed my student participants while they rotated through the independent learning activities with their group mates. I intended to observe each student participant at least six times within the six week time frame. In addition to making field notes, I intended to record each observation with my video camera, which I transcribed at a later date.

As a non-participant observer, I collected information in the classroom setting and aligned the data from my field notes and the student interviews. The observation data enabled me to see how my kindergarten students interacted with the activities and their peers during the independent instruction of the guided reading block of ELA instruction.

**Research Journal**

I used a research journal to document my thoughts and understandings throughout the research process. Borg (2001) stated that “the collective message emerging from [the research journal] is that reflective writing can provide much
insight into the personal and often implicit process, which teachers experience in their work and development” (p. 157). The reflective writing that I did within the research journal was a useful tool for both promoting and understanding the work within my study (Borg, 2001). I referred back to my writing within the journal and reflected upon patterns and my own understandings throughout the study.

**Data Analysis**

It took six weeks for me to gather data from the observations and interviews. The information gathered is categorized and coded by me personally.

**Student Interviews**

I interviewed each participant and followed the interview protocol for student participants accordingly. I explained the objective of the interviews to each interviewee. I used the written prompts to guide the interviews. When necessary I followed-up as much as possible; I asked for clarification, specific examples, or stories. I asked open-ended questions and avoided leading questions. I wanted to be as unbiased and avoid influencing the direction a participant response took. I acknowledged the participants, and sought consent for follow-up interviews if necessary.

I transcribed each participant interview. I referred to the audiotapes from the interviews, and transcribed each participant’s responses verbatim. I read and reread the interview transcripts. I coded the data for the students’ perspectives on
independent learning activities used during guided reading. I anticipated that the coding process enabled me to develop categories and potential themes among the students' perspectives.

Classroom Observations

When analyzing the video tapes of the learning activities, I coded based on student engagement, perspectives, and evident learning experiences. While I read and reread through my observation field notes, I looked for patterns of behavior of individual students as well as behaviors that were common between or among the three student participants. I combined aspects of the observation data with the student interview data as a way to triangulate my data to further reveal the students’ perspectives in regards to independent learning activities.

Research Journal

I regularly used my research journal as a form of reflective writing to promote the development of my ideas and understandings I reached during the research process.

Procedures

Week One
- Conducted three classroom observations of Becca. I observed her during math center, writing center, and word work center. (January 25, 26, and 27)
Week Two
- Conducted three classroom observations of Abby. I observed her during word work center, computer center, and poetry center. (February 1, 2, and 3)

Week Three
- Conducted three classroom observations of Adam. I observed him during poetry center, word work center, and math center. (February 8, 9, and 10)

Week Four
- Conducted three additional classroom observations of Becca. I observed her during word work center, writing center, and computer center. (February 14, 15, and 16)
- Administered first student interview with Becca. (Friday, February 17, 2012)

Week Five
- Conducted three additional classroom observations of Abby. I observed her during word work center, math/science center, and writing center. (February 28, 29 and March 1)
- Administered second student interview with Abby. (Thursday, February 29, 2012)

Week Six
- Conducted three additional classroom observations of Adam. I observed him during poetry center, word work center, and computer center. (March 6, 8, and 9)
- Administered third student interview with Adam. (Friday, March 9, 2012)

Criteria for Trustworthiness

I was determined to conduct this research study in an ethical and unbiased manner. It was eminent that I, as the teacher-researcher, accurately report the findings and my interpretations of the data. In addition to gathering data through student interviews, I persistently observed each student participant six times during independent learning activities. I engaged in a process of triangulation with the participant interviews, observations, and the research journal as a way to further
reveal my participants perspectives on independent learning activities. I used this variety of data collection techniques to ensure that my research practices were trustworthy.

The themes and patterns that I discovered through the data analysis process are grounded in the data that I collected from those student participants who I interviewed and observed. I intended to carry out this research study in six weeks; I anticipated observing three times a week in addition to conducting interviews with my participants and looking through my data collection. The duration of the research process promoted prolonged engagement, which increased the validity of my research design and in turn, my findings.

Limitations of the Study

Through the methods discussed above, I conducted research in an unbiased matter. I do however acknowledge the fact that limitations existed. This was a very small-scale study, and as such, it enabled me to draw only tentative conclusions. It represented the participation and perspectives of three kindergarten students. The interviews I conducted with my participants were through a qualitative method for gathering data. At times I prompted participants for explicit information, which in turn had the potential to alter their responses. I informed each participant of the purpose for the interview prior to beginning the open-ended questions. I explained to the participants that I would keep their responses confidential and they would not be critiqued based on their replies.
I triangulated my findings from the observations and participant interviews to reduce the amount of researcher influence. Through triangulation, I gained a more, well-rounded look at the participation and perspectives of the participants. I incorporated the participant interviews into my research study due to the fact I hoped to gain insight into the perspectives of students.

Chapter 4: Results

I believe that independent learning activities can be a meaningful, engaging way to invite young students to be accountable for their own learning and make connections with content they have previously learned. I find that when students are given the opportunity to actively participate and interact in activities, they are building on academic and social skills at an independent level. Whether students are independently navigating through a computer program or working with a partner to sort words by a specific pattern, independent learning activities provide learning experiences that foster the independent initiation and completion of tasks, student accountability, and build upon previously learned content.

The purpose of this study was to discover developmentally appropriate and meaningful independent learning activities that I can use in my kindergarten classroom during the guided reading English Language Arts (ELA) block. Through this qualitative study, I investigated how three of my kindergarten students participated in and interacted with the center activities in my classroom.
Throughout this six week study, I sought to answer the following research questions:

How are independent learning activities developmentally appropriate for kindergartners?

What types of independent learning activities promote the literacy development of kindergartners?

Each of the three kindergarten students offered insights into how students at various ability levels participate in independent learning centers. I observed each student six times during center activities, spending between thirty to forty-five minutes each time. I also conducted a ten minute interview with each student regarding his/her perceptions of the center activities.

In this chapter, I present the case studies of the three student case studies. I discuss each student observation in depth and reflect upon the students work within each center activity as compared to district kindergarten expectations and to that of their peers. After presenting each case study, I provide a cross-case analysis in which I make comparisons between and among the case studies of the students. I discuss insights that came about from my observations of the students as well as the student interviews that I conducted.
Student Case Studies

Becca

"Centers are fun! They are really cool."

Becca’s response when asked about her work in centers, February 17, 2012

Each Monday prior to my first observations of the three students, my co-teacher and I presented the four chosen center activities for the whole week to the students. Within this 10 minute presentation of the activities, the students learned the expectations and objectives for each activity and had opportunities to ask questions about what we expected.

Math Center

I first observed Becca on January 25, 2012. The whole group was sitting on the carpet waiting for my co-teacher to announce the center activity groups. Becca sat "crisscross applesauce spoons in the bowl" waiting to hear what center activity her group would be participating in for that day. When my co-teacher announced that Becca’s group was at the math center completing the part, part, whole mat, Becca quickly walked to get her supply box and sat at the table closest to the word wall. While Becca waited to get the appropriate supplies from the teacher, she used a pencil to write her name on her paper.

As my co-teacher reminded the students of the different ways that they would be completing their part, part, whole mats, Becca sat quiet, attentively listening to the directions. Students would complete this activity one of two ways. Three students in
Becca’s group were instructed to “pull a number tile (1-9) from the paper bag one at a time and place that number within the roof to represent the whole number.” The students were then expected to draw one red circle to show one part of the number selected, and then determine and how many yellow circles would represent the other part and draw it accordingly.

Becca and another student in her group were instructed by my co-teacher to use two dice instead of the number tiles. With these dice Becca’s group had to roll and write the whole number rolled in the roof of the part, part, whole mat. The students could choose to illustrate the two parts as the dice represented or they could choose another way to demonstrate the whole number.

Once Becca’s teacher walked away to check-in with the other center groups, Becca picked up her two dice and rolled a six: three and three. After Becca rolled, she placed her finger on top of the dice to match her counting one-to-one with the dots shown on her dice. Becca picked up her pencil and wrote the number six in the roof of her mat to represent her whole number. She then proceeded to draw three red circles and three yellow circles to represent the two parts of her whole number. She repeated this process for the number seven, yet when she came to the number twelve she experienced a little bit of difficulty. Becca rolled two sixes and repeatedly counted her dice at least three times.

Following the “ask three before me rule” that we’ve implemented within the center expectations, Becca turned to her neighbor to the right of her who was completing the same version of the activity and asked her to count how many she had
rolled. Her neighbor responded "twelve," and Becca said "I got twelve, too. Thank you!"

Within each turn, Becca chose to represent her whole number just as the dice had represented (see Figure 4.1). Becca used close to thirty minutes to complete this activity. She took her time to draw each part to represent the whole number.

![Figure 4.1: The Results of Becca's Part, Part, Whole Mat- Math Center](image)

When she finished the activity, she placed it in her mailbox and returned to her table to clean up her supplies. She asked her group, "Does anyone need help?" and a boy responded "Yes." Becca moved her chair closer to this boy and they worked together to complete two of his mats until the teacher rang the two-minute warning bell. At this point, Becca’s whole group finished up their last mat and began putting away their supplies. Becca returned her chair to its appropriate place at the table and she stood behind it waiting for her center group to be instructed to return to their tables.
Writing Center

The second time I observed Becca was on January 26, 2012 during writing center. In this center, Becca and the other four students were asked to complete a sentence by writing about something that happened in the month of January. This *In January, we...* writing is a part of a project that my co-teacher and I put together to send home as a gift to the families at the end of the year to demonstrate how far the students have come as writers and showcase what we have done throughout the school year.

Once again, at the beginning of the week, my co-teacher and I presented the writing center activity, and as a class we discussed and brainstormed different events that happened during the month of January. I wrote down the three different ideas—played outside, learned about Martin Luther King Jr., and made a New Year’s resolution—the students generated in three different colors on chart paper and hung it near the alphabet carpet. This chart provided ideas that the students could refer back to when they were in writing center.

When my co-teacher instructed the class to disperse to their assigned center activity for that day, Becca retrieved her pencil box and sat at the alphabet carpet. At this center, Becca had access to a parent volunteer, Miss Jamie. Becca got right to work without any reminders. She wrote her name in the upper left hand corner of the paper and looked at the chart of sentence ideas. She said “We played outside,” and started to stretch the word played. Becca initially heard the first four letter sounds (p/l/a/y) and wrote them on the bottom of her paper. She repeated the /d/ sound
several times, yet referred to the chart to see what letter(s) came at the end of the word played.

Becca finished writing the word played, placed her two left fingers down to provide a space in between her words, and started to write the word outside. Becca regularly referred to the chart to write the word outside; however, I heard her trying to stretch the word to hear some known sounds. She verbalized the sounds of /t/, /s/, /i/, and /d/.

After writing the word outside, Becca put a period at the end of her sentence and reread her sentence aloud to Miss Jamie, “In January we played outside.” Miss Jamie asked Becca, “What types of things did you do outside with the class?”, and Becca responded “built a snowman with Jared’s red scarf, made snow angels, and rolled up snow.”

It took Becca approximately seven minutes to write her sentence and read it to the parent volunteer. For the remaining twenty-five minutes Becca quietly drew, labeled, and colored her picture (see Figure 4.2). When my co-teacher rang the two minute warning bell, Becca finished drawing the stars in her picture and put her supplies back in her supply box. Looking at her picture and pointing to her words, Becca had a large grin on her face as she read her sentence aloud to her group. It appeared to me that she was so proud of her work.
In January we...

The writing and illustration that Becca produced represents a kindergartener’s work that exceeds the district expectations set within the second quarter. Within the composition section of the second quarter writing curriculum, the learning objective is for students to draw and writing using letters or words to communicate for different purposes (e.g., tell stories, communicate feelings, provide information) as well as the use of punctuation marks (.,?!”) and try them in their own writing. Becca included a topic appropriate sentence, spacing, and punctuation. Becca’s writing also surpassed the second quarter handwriting-lowercase letters learning objectives: forms manuscript lowercase letters, which begin on the head line (l k b h t f); forms manuscript lowercase letters, which begin on the mid line (c o s v w r n m i u x z); forms manuscript lowercase letters (a d g q); forms manuscript letter e; forms below base line letters (p y j g q). As I look at the third quarter district expectations, it is apparent that Becca is working towards the end of kindergarten writing goals. The district expects the students at the end of the third quarter to write
correctly own first and last names and the names of some friends or family, use capital letters in the beginning position in a few familiar, known proper nouns, use letters, sounds or words to label pictures, and use appropriate spacing between letters and sounds. In Becca’s picture, she correctly and appropriately labeled the three friends that she drew. It is evident through Becca’s independent writing sample that the writing center activity was appropriate for her skill level, yet it had the potential to challenge her writing abilities even more. Becca presented the confidence and independent writing skills necessary to produce meaningful and productive work.

**Word Work Center**

During my third observation of Becca on January 27, 2012, her group was assigned to the word work center at table number four. As she had done in the two previous observations Becca retrieved her pencil box and got right to work. Within the word work center, the students were expected to independently label a picture of a winter scene by saying and recording the sounds within the different words. Almost immediately after sitting down at the table and taking out their supply boxes, Becca’s four group mates started excitedly talking about the different objects that they each saw in the picture. Becca first contributed to the conversation consecutively sharing “bird, candy cane, snow, hat.” As she shared her responses, she used one-to-one correspondence and excitedly pointed to each picture she identified. Some of the other children mentioned the same objects that Becca did, such as *hat* and *bird*; however, it did not appear to bother her or prompt her to respond in a negative way.
After naming the objects, the students sat quietly at their seats attempting to independently stretch the letter sounds in the words the best that they could. Becca started labeling the winter scene at the left side (bird, tree, hat, snowman). As Becca labeled each picture, she whispered the sounds that she heard in each word. For bird, she repeatedly whispered “/b/, /r/, /d/, bird.”

Two students in Becca’s group started to get off-task talking about different flavored candy canes that they had during Christmas time. Becca looked up from the table and appeared as if she wanted to contribute to the conversation, yet looked back at her work and continued to label the picture (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4).

Figure 4.3: Winter Scene- Word Work Center
The students were instructed by my co-teacher to share their pictures and labels once they were done. Becca was the first to share her picture with her group. One student told Becca “I like how you wrote neat. I can read the word hat. I like it.” This positive feedback immediately made Becca smile, and take further pride in her work. The students continued to share their work and provide feedback for approximately five more minutes until the two minute warning bell rang and the students began picking up their area. Becca raised her hand when another girl was sharing in her group and when called on said, “I wrote bunny too. Not rabbit! That’s funny!” The girl responded with “Yup!” and the group continued to share.

Becca’s ability to stretch each word and record the letter sounds that she heard was wonderful to observe. We encourage our kindergarten students throughout the
school year to attempt unknown words and do so by hearing and recording the letter sounds that they hear when they whisper and stretch the words independently. Becca regularly stretched the word once aloud before starting to write the letters that she heard. For example, as Becca attempted the word tree, she stretched it “/t/,, /r/, /ee/” and wrote tre. Becca looked at the way she had written tree for several seconds and added the second e after referring to the December Words Chart in the classroom above the cubbies where the word Christmas tree could be found. Becca used her environmental print to help monitor and self-correct her writing. Not only can Becca stretch words to make them sound right, but she is starting to cross-check to make sure that her words look right as well. It is evident from Becca’s writing that she independently hears the consonant letter sounds in words and hears some of the vowel sounds. As Becca experiences additional phonics and reading instruction that presents the long vowel sounds, Becca’s writing abilities will continue to progress.

Word Study Center

My second week of observations of Becca began on February 14, 2012. The day prior to my observation, Becca and the class previewed the center activities and expectations for the week with me and my co-teacher. On her first day of center rotations, Becca’s group was instructed to go to table four to play Blast Off! This activity was a part of the word work center in which they took turns pulling kindergarten high-frequency words (an, so, in, and, like, do) out of a bag, reading the
word, and appropriately writing it in the box that corresponds to the word (see Figure 4.5).

In addition to reading and writing the sight word, Becca and two other students in her group were expected to use the word that they pulled in a sentence. They had the choice whether or not they wanted to write the sentence on a small whiteboard (see Figure 4.6). This extension encouraged Becca and the other students to go beyond their recognition of the sight words and use them in context: a sentence.

I approached Becca’s group as they were setting up the materials and provided each group member with their number in order; Becca was assigned number three. When I walked away and the materials were in place, the five students appropriately took turns and shared the materials. After each student pulled out the word he/she showed it to his/her peers and read the word. During this activity, Becca stood behind her chair. Each time Becca pulled a word, she verbally shared her sentences instead of writing it down.

At one point, Becca reminded the others to work quietly because it was apparent that she felt that they were starting to get a little loud as compared to the whisper voices that were expected of the students during centers. She also reminded her neighbor at one point to “write the word like in that box” and she pointed to the corresponding box on the game board. This activity was game-like and engaged each student within Becca’s group. The students regularly commented on what word was winning while grinning ear to ear. Becca’s group continued this activity until they were dismissed to clean up and get ready for lunch.
During this word work activity Becca and her peers had an opportunity to practice their academic and social skills. It can be difficult for some students to take turns and share materials independently; however, Becca and the other students within her group completed their work in a socially and academically appropriate
manner. Becca’s oral sentences for the different sight words were semantically and for the most part syntactically correct. Each time Becca pulled a new sight word, she was able to independently generate a sentence orally to her group mates. This activity kept Becca engaged and it called upon her to challenge herself to independently generate her sentences.

Writing Center

The following day, February 15, 2012, Becca’s group was at the writing center. The fill-in-the-blank writing activity for this week was based on the Valentine’s Day theme. The students were expected to write I have ______ (number) _________ (color) hearts. There were five pages within this writing packet where the students were expected to count the number of hearts and decide what color the hearts on that page would be. There were elements of choice within this activity; however, it was structured so that the students had to fill in the blanks within their sentences and make the picture match their words. There was a teacher sample available for the students to look at; however, they were instructed not to copy each page word for word. In the classroom the students also had access to the color chart in case they had difficulty writing the color words.

Becca sat at the writing table and got right to work writing her name on the front cover. On the first page of her packet Becca wrote I have 1 red heart. Becca took her time to form each letter correctly and have appropriate spaces between her words. She took her time to outline her picture in red crayon and color it in neatly.
When she was coloring in her picture she stated aloud to herself, “Oops, I forgot the period. There we go!” This behavior showed me that she was able to monitor her own writing and make corrections when necessary.

Becca looked around the room and walked over to my co-teacher to show her the writing that she had done so far. The teacher commented on her neatness and matching the picture to the words, and reminded her to stay in her seat and raise her hand if she had a question or wanted to share her work. Once back at her seat, Becca continued to work through each page in her packet: *I have 2 prpl (purple) hearts, I have 3 gren (green) hearts, I have 4 blue hearts, and I have 5 yellow hearts.* On each page Becca took her time to match her words to her picture.

Just as the two minute warning bell rang, Becca got out of her seat and stood behind my co-teacher to show her finished product. My co-teacher asked Becca to read her sentences aloud. After Becca shared her work, my co-teacher instructed Becca to place her work in her mailbox and wash up for lunch. Becca cleaned up her working space, returned her supplies to her table, and placed her finished work in her mailbox.

For the duration of this center activity Becca remained focused and attentive to the writing task at hand. She was able to independently generate five sentences according to the expectations set, and create illustrates to match her sentence. Becca’s writing indicated that she was able to independently record the letter sounds that she heard.
Computer Center

My last observation of Becca was on February 16, 2012 during computer center. Becca and her group were instructed to go to Starfall and complete the Valentine activity as well as the February calendar activity. Each student had previously been instructed during morning work to log on to his/her account and double click on Starfall to open the main program. Becca successfully and independently logged on to her account and opened Starfall. When her group was asked to go to the computers, Becca immediately put her headphones on and double clicked on the Make a Valentine activity. As part of the activity, Becca worked on using the connecting words and and because. Becca created the sentence using the programs prompts: Be my valentine because you share. As her computer read the sentence aloud to her in her headphones, she whispered along.

After Becca created her sentence, she navigated to the February Calendar activity where she reviewed the days of the week and important events/holidays that happen in the month of February. As Becca clicked on the links and dragged the icons where she was instructed by the program, she read aloud “Today is Thursday, February 16, 2012.” Becca and her neighbor frequently whispered to one another where to click or how to get to the particular section of the program with which they were engaged. During my observation, I recorded that Becca and her neighbor conversed a total of eighteen times throughout the thirty-five minute activity. These conversations were brief. Neither student appeared to be distracted or off-task.
When the two minute warning bang rang Becca immediately exited out of the Starfall program, logged off, returned the head phones to the computer monitor, and stood behind her chair. When Becca saw that her neighbor was having difficulty logging off, she reached in front of the child, said “Here!” and clicked on the box to log off. The other child did not respond. Becca returned to her chair and waited for her group to be dismissed for lunch.

It was evident to me that Becca feels comfortable and confident when working at the computer. The computer procedures appeared to be second nature for Becca at this point in the school year. She was able to appropriately and independently navigate through the educational site. Becca remained on task and engaged with the various activities until she was dismissed.

Within the different independent learning activities, I observed Becca to be competent both academically and socially. She regularly served as the leader and/or role model within her group. Becca produced meaningful work that she was proud to share and bring home to her family. It was evident to me that Becca had both internal and external motivation to complete her work in a timely manner. She had an overall positive attitude toward the different center activities that she completed and experienced during the six classroom observations.

The work products that Becca produced met and/or at times exceeded second quarter curriculum expectations set by the district. Becca regularly comprehended the task at hand and completed her work to her fullest potential. She was able to apply her new found knowledge as well as activate her background knowledge to complete
the activities. Within the different extension and engaging activities, I observed that Becca was able to apply the new knowledge and content that she learned from previous week's instruction to efficiently and effectively complete each independent learning activities.

**Becca's Interview**

I interviewed Becca on February 17, 2012, the Friday after my last classroom observation of her. During the interview, I asked Becca to explain certain procedures that students are expected to follow during center activities and her overall perception of centers. I found it difficult to have Becca elaborate on some of her answers. I feel that age and maturity played a huge factor in the responses that I received. For example, when I asked Becca if there was a center that she thought we should include that we don't already have she said "No!" I believe that it was difficult for Becca to dive deeper into her thinking to explain her responses. Although I believe some of her responses were difficult and/or limited, Becca was able to communicate that the computer center was her favorite. She stated "I liked to play the games. I get to practice typing. I like Starball, Tumblebooks, and typing the star words."

In regard to Becca's understanding of center expectations, she stated that if she has a question during centers she must "raise [her] hand" and "ask three before me." My co-teacher and I have set this expectation to help reduce the amount of times students are out of their seats seeking adults to answer their questions. On most occasions students within the different center groups are capable of answering a question. In our classroom, we say "ask three before me;" me standing for the adults in the room. Becca was able to explain that when she finishes a center early there are different expectations in place for each center. She stated "It's different for the centers. Some I can do activity packets or read a book." Becca also
mentioned that she works with her peers/friends during centers by “helping them.” She said that “she helps them finish their work at the end.” Becca appears to be content with the activities that are in place for centers as well as the expectations that are set in place. Based on my classroom observations of and interview with Becca, she appears to be comfortable independently working within the different center rotations. The independent learning center activities seem to provide an instructional time for Becca when she can independently extend upon her learning and challenge herself, all of which she enjoys.

**Abby**

*"I really like [centers]. They are fun!"

Abby’s response when asked about her work in centers, February 29, 2012

**Word Work Center**

I first observed Abby on February 1, 2012, which was the second day of center rotations. My co-teacher and I had presented the center activities and expectations for the week on Monday of that week, and we provided the students with opportunities to clear up any questions. Abby and the rest of the students had gathered to the alphabet carpet to hear what center they were assigned to for that ELA center block. As my co-teacher announced each group Abby listened carefully for her name and center activity. As soon as Abbey heard her name she smiled and looked back in the direction of table number four, yet did not move until she was dismissed. After each group was called, the students were dismissed to get their supply boxes if necessary and go to the appropriate location within the room. Without needing a reminder, Abby quietly stood up from the carpet, walked over to table number four,
which was designated to the word work center, and picked out the purple game piece for herself and placed it at the starting point.

![Follow the Path Board Game - Word Work Center](image)

**Figure 4.7: Follow the Path Board Game - Word Work Center**

The word work activity that Abby’s group was working on was recognizing and identifying the twenty-five kindergarten sight words using the Follow the Path Game Board. I selected the game board template from the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) Resources CD-ROM. Abby’s group members each picked a color game piece and put their pieces next to Abby’s on the game board. My co-teacher walked over to the group and established the order in which the students would take their turns. Abby was assigned third in order, and she moved her purple game piece and the other game pieces accordingly. One of the boys went to yell at Abby for touching his piece, yet didn’t when he recognized that she was moving the pieces into the right line order.
Throughout the activity, Abby sat quietly at her seat waiting her turn. Abby rolled the dice, instantly counted "Six - one, two, three, four, five, six", and moved her piece accordingly in an effortless motion. When Abby moved her piece on the new sight word she would read the word to her group, "Like. I like like. (laughing) Your turn!" I noticed some instances when Abby pointed to the words on the game board with her finger as a way to show one-to-one correspondence. Just as many of the other students in her group did, Abby regularly referred to the classroom word wall and large stars on which she could find the twenty-five sight words. The word wall and stars provided Abby and the other students in environmental references and resources.

Abby and her group played the game three different times, and all appeared to remain engaged; however, on the fourth game Abby appeared to be bored with the activity and/or hungry because it was so close to their lunch time. She stood behind her chair and kept looking at the classroom door I suspect waiting for the lunch monitor to walk in to dismiss the students to wash up for lunch. Although she appeared to be somewhat withdrawn from the activity, she regularly took her turn and participated in the group. When prompted by the lunch monitor Abby helped clean up her center, put her materials away, and get ready for lunch.

Throughout the activity Abby remained actively engaged in her learning without having to produce a paper product or visually show her learning. Abby successfully and independently remained on task throughout the entire activity. It was evident to me that Abby and her group mates clearly understood the directions and
expectations of the sight word game. Abby was independently able to complete this activity without adult assistance. The fact that my co-teacher established the order in which the students took turns I believe alleviated some potential problems amongst the group trying to decide who would go first. Abby and the others were assigned a number in order and they respected which number they were given. When it was not Abby’s turn she attentively listened and sat appropriately.

Each turn that Abby took she was able to independently and quickly recognize the different sight words. There was not one instance was she was unsure of a word or misidentified a word. When reading some of the words Abby applied the one-to-one correspondence strategy that she’s been taught during whole and small group reading instruction.

In addition to Abby’s academic knowledge and skills, she was able to appropriately interact with her peers. Never did she skip someone’s turn or provide an answer for her peers. She respected each group mate’s turn and sat accordingly while the others played the game. My co-teacher and I expected our kindergarten students to participate in activities that call upon them to take turns, share, and respect each other’s thinking time.

After observing Abby’s quick responses and knowledgeable answers for each turn, I believe that she would have benefited from an additional step and/or more challenging sight words. The additional expectation to create a sentence with the sight word chosen would have facilitated Abby’s ability to put the sight word in context as well as enable Abby to practice her writing skills, such as capitals and lowercase
letters, punctuation, and hearing and recording letter sounds. Although my co-teacher and I did not design this center activity to help move Abby to the next level or present a difficult challenge, she was ready and willing to participate in the group activity and remain task oriented throughout.

Computer Center

The following day, February 2, 2012, I observed Abby during the computer center in which she and her group mates were instructed to complete the Groundhog’s Day activity before they were able to independently navigate through different activities within the Starfall website. Before some of her peers in her center group grabbed their personalized logon cards or sat at their computer, Abby had typed in her user name and password without her logon card, logged on, clicked on the Starfall icon, and opened the Groundhog’s activity on the Starfall website. As the program loaded, Abby put on her headphones and stood at her computer. At times Abby read along with the program, “Thursday, February 2nd, 2012. Groundhog, groundhog, what will you see? Groundhog, groundhog, please tell me! (laughing and smiling)” Abby accidentally clicked out of the Groundhog activity before it was done, “Oops. Oh no!” but she quickly found her way back to the page that she left off on.

After Abby finished the Groundhog activity, she was able to choose what activity(s) she wanted to complete until the end of the ELA center block of time. She chose to click on a few of the play activities where she worked with word families (-an, -at, -en, -et, -ig, -ip, -ot, -og) and she read along with some of the books that
corresponded with the word family play activities, such as *Zac the Rat, Peg the Hen, The Big Hit*. While Abby was listening to and reading quietly along with *Peg the Hen*, she pointed to her neighbors screen and said “Look I am on that, too! It’s so funny. Go back to the beginning and we will listen to it at the same time.” She and her neighbor giggled as they listened to the same story and their computer screens showed the same sequence of events. This continued to happen with *The Big Hit* and the play activities for –ot and –og. Although Abby and her neighbor were talking and giggling at times, they remained on task and completed the various activities on the Starfall website. At no point did they distract their neighbors or other center groups, nor did they require adult reminders to stay on task or quiet down. When my co-teacher rang the bell to signal the completion of centers, Abby immediately clicked the red exits to exit out of each program, logged off of her username, and stood behind her chair as she hung the headphones on the computer screen.

Based on my observation of Abby it is evident to me that she was comfortable and confident navigating her way on the computer. Her computer skills supersede what the district expects from kindergartners at the end of the school year. At the end of kindergarten, students are expected to be able to independently log on to their username with or without the use of a logon card. Abby has memorized her username and password as well as internalized the procedures to navigate her way to the Starfall online program.

In regard to Abby’s reading abilities, she was able to independently follow and read along with the computer program. At no point did Abby have to click on the
words and have them repeated to her. This shows me that Abby was able to quickly identify known words, such as *me* and *you*, which are kindergarten sight words and independently read and solve unknown words. This computer center activity kept Abby and the other students engaged. Abby independently and actively participated in the Groundhog’s Day activity that reviewed the information that we as a class had previously discussed about the holiday and what had happened with the groundhog that same morning. In addition to the review of Groundhog’s Day, Abby was able to practice and reinforce some of the different word families that she’s been presented to throughout the school year.

**Poetry Center**

Abby and her group were instructed to gather their pencil boxes and meet the parent volunteer, Miss Jamie, at the front table near the word wall. The poem for this week’s poetry center was titled *Here’s a Little Groundhog*; a continuation of the Groundhog’s Day theme for the week (see Figure 4.8).
Once each student was sitting at the table, Miss Jamie instructed the group to "take out your pencils and get ready to locate star words within the poem." Abby got her pencil and put her pencil box on the ledge of the wall behind her seat. She read the title of the poem aloud "Here, Here's a Little Groundhog." Miss Jamie reinforced Abby's reading, "Very good! Let's all read the title and the poem together once before we start looking for our star words." Abby read along with the group and kept pace with her peers even though she was able to read at a faster rate as she proved in her reading of the title. Miss Jamie asked the group, "What star words do you see in the poem?" Some of the students shouted out different words go, a, no, here, but Miss
Jamie reframed her question and directed it at Abby, “Abby tell me one star word that you see.” Abby looked at her poem and circled a in the first line of the poem and responded to Miss Jamie by saying “a, it’s right here (pointing).” Abby pointed to her neighbor’s paper when he couldn’t find the first line. Her neighbor had circled the word a in the title, but not in the first line of text. Miss Jamie then prompted another student to locate another star word, and the student identified and located go. While the other students were circling go, Abby said, “There is one more and it’s NO! (saying is loud and excited) The n and o are big. Capitals. See. (pointing to the last line and circling NO!) No rhymes with go. No, go.” Miss Jamie reinforced Abby’s observation and stated that “words in poems rhyme like Abby pointed out. Good job Abby.”

Abby asked Miss Jamie, “Can I cut the poem and use my glue for my journal?” Miss Jamie instructed the students to cut around the outside edges of the groundhog poem and glue it on the next blank page of their poetry journals, and then draw a picture to match the poem. Miss Jamie asked, “Should you draw a picture of a balloon or a clown?” All of the students responded, “No! (giggling)” Miss Jamie continued and asked the group “What pictures could we draw to match the poem?” Some students shouted groundhog and sun. Abby responded “His hole.” She told Miss Jamie, “The groundhog sees his shadow, but has to come up out of his hole first to see it.” Miss Jamie nodded and encouraged the students to get to work cutting, gluing and coloring.
Abby took her time to cut around her poem; carefully making sure not to cut any of the words. Abby put little blots of glue in each corner of her poem and placed in on the next blank white page of her poetry journal. At this point Abby was silent focusing on her work. Abby read the poem one time silently to herself and she moved her finger across the page before she started to draw her picture. Abby’s picture incorporated the groundhog in his hole, his shadow, the sun, and a cloud. She used five different colors to complete her drawing (blue, black, grey, brown, and yellow); she followed the teachers’ expectation, if you are five years old, then you must incorporate five different colors into your artwork.

When Abby finished her picture she put her supplies away and asked her neighbor, “Do you want to read with me?” Her neighbor responded, “Yes!” The girls softly read the poem aloud together two times. Abby pointed to her neighbors picture and said “Your sun looks really good! Isn’t my sun cool, too?” The student nodded with a smile on her face. After the girls second reading of the poem, the lunch monitor began dismissing students to clean up and get ready for lunch.

Abby’s work within this activity revealed to me that she is knowledgeable of the kindergarten sight words as well as the reading behaviors she needs to use to appropriately monitor her reading of texts. When Abby read the title aloud to the group she was able to self-correct her reading of here to here’s as it’s worded in the title. She then went on to read the poem at a consistent pace with the ability to read all of the words. In addition to Abby’s reading behaviors, she was able to take turns identifying the sight words and contributing to the group discussion. Abby was able
to complete her drawing independently without adult support or reminders to complete her work. Abby’s behaviors showed me that she is able to appropriately interact with her peers and initiate buddy reading.

Abby’s reading behaviors as well as her observations about the poem revealed that she is meeting the district ELA benchmarks for the quarter. Within the ELA benchmark under the area of genre study—poetry, Abby was able to identify and produce spoken words that rhyme in grade level poetry and identify repeated sounds and phrases in poetry. Abby’s reading behaviors demonstrated her ability to read fluently: read familiar kindergarten-level texts at the emergent level and read kindergarten sight words automatically within grade level texts. Abby’s participation in this center revealed that the activity challenged her to meet grade level expectations within the ELA kindergarten curriculum as well as interact socially with her peers during the group work.

**Word Work Center**

My second week of observations of Abby began February 28, 2012. The center activity that Abby’s group was assigned was the word work center. At this particular center the students were given the beginning and ending letters of words and they had to determine what picture was associated with the middle letter/sound of the word (e.g., c__t; a picture of a cat would be fit in the middle box). The students were given twenty-five different beginning and ending letter boxes, and were asked to match as many of the pictures as they could within the center time frame.
Once Abby heard her name called to complete the word work activity, she waited for her group to be dismissed from the carpet where my co-teacher was announcing the different center rotations for the day. When Abby arrived at the table she asked her neighbor, “Can I have the scissors, please? I want the red ones.” As soon as her neighbor handed her the scissors, Abby got right to work cutting out each of the twenty-five pictures. As Abby cut each picture, she set her scraps to one side and set her pictures in a pile to the other side. She named some of the pictures as she cut truck, cat, dog, pig. Other than identifying some of the pictures to herself as she cut, Abby remained quiet. At times, Abby stood out of her seat while she cut, yet she never left the table expect to throw away her scrap paper in the recycling bin.

After Abby had cleaned up the scrap paper and put her scissors back into the scissor basket, Abby told her neighbor, “Let’s put the pictures in a row so we see them. Like this.” Abby laid her pictures out in rows on the table so she could easily see and access each picture to match them up in the correct box. Two of the students looked at Abby’s arrangement of pictures and they mimicked her saying, “Look at them all. I want to do that, too!” Abby quickly identified matches, “/tr/, /ck/, truck, truck!” She searched through her pictures, located the truck, and glued it into the corresponding box. For the next box Abby tried a variety of vowel sounds in the middle box, “/pl/, /i/, /nt/, /pl/, /e/, /nt/, /pl/, /a/, /nt/. Plant.” Again, Abby located the plant picture, confirmed her guess, and glued it into the correct box. Abby continued to stretch the letter sounds and try the different vowel sounds until she made a word that she was familiar with. In addition to Abby’s strategy of solving each letter/sound
box, Abby's apparent method of choice to complete the five page packet was to complete one page at a time. She completed page one successfully (see Figure 4.9).

Upon completion of page one in her packet, Abby continued to stretch the initial and final letter sounds to help determine the appropriate picture. When Abby came to the box with d ___ g, she searched through her pictures and picked up a picture of a dog and a picture of a shovel in dirt. After a few seconds of looking at the two pictures, she raised her hand. When my co-teacher walked over to Abby's center group, Abby said “I need help. I don’t know if it’s dog or dig.” My co-teacher prompted Abby to
brainstorm other possibilities for the picture of the shovel in dirt because dog was the correct answer. Abby said, “Umm...shovel or mud or dirt. (Turning to the third page) Oh it could be dirt. /d/, __, /t/, /d/, /dr/, /t/, dirt. Dirt. I think dirt will fit.” “Wow,” said my co-teacher, “What a great job you did looking further into your packet to try and solve the problem of where this picture would go” (handing the picture of the shovel in dirt to Abby). From then on Abby continued to independently stretch the beginning and ending letter sounds to match each picture accordingly.

When the two minute warning bell rang, Abby had two pictures left: a plum and a can. It was apparent to me that Abby wanted to finish before all of the students had to clean up their center to get ready for lunch, so she quickly flipped through the pages of her packet and correctly glued the pictures of the plum and can into their boxes; “/pl/, /m/. Plum! (Abby glued the plum picture on page three) /kl/, /n/. Can! (Abby glued the can on page four)” With a sigh of relief, Abby put the cap on her glue stick, wrote her name on her packet, and looked around to see which of her peers had finished the center. “I am done, too!” Abby told her neighbor with a smile on her face. When I released each center group to get ready for lunch, Abby appropriately walked to her mailbox to hand in her paper and washed up for lunch.

This center activity enabled each student to set a goal for themselves and try to complete as much of the packet as they could. Abby set her sights high as she worked diligently to complete her entire packet before the center block was over. As she completed the packet, Abby was able to independently stretch the initial and final letter sounds as well as brainstorm and determine which picture corresponded to each
blank box. Abby demonstrated her ability to achieve grade level curriculum learning objectives: segment spoken words into component sounds (phoneme segmentation and phonemic awareness). Abby only required adult support once to help problem solve. It was evident to me that Abby was more than capable of solving each blank box. The pictures incorporated into this particular activity were easily identifiable by Abby.

When Abby established her method of organization to complete the activity and made it known to her peers in a respectful manner, she demonstrated her role as a leader in the group. Abby’s work ethic was a great role model for the other students to follow, if they so chose. In addition to Abby’s observable work ethic, Abby was also a role model in the sense that she correctly followed my co-teachers and my expectations: sat quietly in her seat, raised her hand when she had a question, and independently stretched each letter sound and identified each picture. Never once did I see Abby’s eyes glance at others students work to copy or use as a reference. Abby successfully completed this activity independently.

Science Center

The science center for this particular week of observations was based on the theme for the week: Dr. Seuss. As a class, we had read several Dr. Seuss books, including *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* (Seuss, 1949), which follows the adventures of a young boy who must rescue his kingdom from a sticky substance called “oobleck.”
When the students were dismissed on this particular day, I followed Abby’s
group to the word wall table because our parent volunteer had called in sick. I made
an announcement to Abby’s group to “Grab your pencil boxes and art smocks before
you meet me at the word wall table.” Each student including Abby quickly followed
those directions and met me at the table with their art smocks on. Abby said, “Mrs.
Vaughn, I know what we are making. Mark told me! Oobleck.” I confirmed Abby’s
statement, “That’s right Abby. Today we are going to be scientists who form
predictions and make oobleck just like in the book. Abby would you like to be our
recorder today?” Abby replied, “Yup!” I went on to ask, “Ok. Who knows what a
prediction is?” A student in the group answered, “To guess.” I confirmed, “Yes. We
are going to predict or guess what items we think will sink or float in oobleck. Let’s
name the different items that we will be working with today. Follow along and read
the different items. (students read along) Penny, paperclip, yarn, toothpick, marble.”
Abby shouted, “Oh the marble will definitely sink. It’s heavy!” I responded, “Oh
great guess, but wait for the rest of the group because we are going to vote and
whichever prediction gets the most votes, sink or float, will be recorded on our
predictions sheet. You can only vote once for each item.”

I told Abby, “After each vote, you have to decide which prediction received
more votes and circle either sink or float.” Without any questions, Abby grabbed her
purple crayon and waited patiently to circle the predictions. I held up each item as the
students were asked to raise their hand quietly to vote. Miraculously the students
voted the same, whether it was by chance or they each copied one another’s votes.
After the voting was completed, I handed out a coloring page to each student while I retrieved the ingredients to make the oobleck. Abby quietly sat and independently colored her picture green to resemble the oobleck from the story. Abby was able to wait patiently. When I returned three minutes later with the supplies, I asked the students to “put your pencil boxes and papers on the floor. Let’s put this newspaper down to cover the table. Sometimes oobleck makes a mess.” The students helped me with the newspaper and put their pencil boxes away. Abby asked, “When do I have to circle the results?” I responded, “As soon as the oobleck is made you will need to get your crayon ready as we complete the experiment. Are you ready my little scientists?” “Yeah!” the students replied. I handed the measuring cup full of water to Abby, a spoon to her neighbor, green food coloring to another student, and a bowl full of corn starch to the next. Each student had a job in creating the oobleck. I asked Abby to add the water, helped the other child pinch in a few dabs of food coloring, and helped the last mix the ingredients together. The students including Abby all had great big smiles on their faces and made comments, such as “Ooh!, Gross!, Cool!”

“Now we are ready to check our guesses!” said Abby picking up her purple crayon. Ok, Mrs. Vaughn let’s test the penny. Can I do it?” “Sure Abby,” I replied. “Let’s all pay close attention to what happens to the penny when Abby gently places the penny on top of the oobleck.” Abby gently placed the penny on top and the penny sank. “It sank,” the students yelled. “We were right!” Abby said. The students were excited to confirm their prediction. I called on another student to place the paperclip in the oobleck, but before he did so I asked Abby to “remind the group of our
prediction.” “We said sink for the paperclip,” Abby said. The student placed the paperclip in the oobleck and it “floats,” said the boy. “We were wrong.” I responded, “Scientists are not always right when they make predictions, so it’s ok that our guesses are not always right.” The students continued to take turns placing the remaining items in the oobleck and Abby appropriately completed the actual results column of the worksheet (see Figure 4.10).

![Figure 4.10: Recorded Group Oobleck Predictions/Results-Science Center](image)

Upon completion of the oobleck predictions sheet, I applauded the students and said “What are great job we did little scientists. We did wonderful with our predictions. Dr. Seuss would be proud!” I then went on to scoop out each portions of the oobleck for each child and for the remaining five minutes I encouraged them to manipulate the oobleck with their fingers and hands on the table. “Friends you can
take this oobleck home in a bag. When you hear the warning bell, place your oobleck in the Ziplock bag. I will write your name on the bag and zip them up. After you’ve washed your hands and put your art smock away, you can come and get your bag of green oobleck from me,” I directed. “Any questions?” The children all responded, “No!” and began to eagerly play with the oobleck. Abby giggled and smiled as she first touched the oobleck. “It’s wet, gooey, smooth. Like glue,” she observed. I encouraged Abby and the students to identify other comparisons of the way the oobleck felt and looked. Abby was the first to respond, “Well, it feels like syrup, play dough, clay, gum and it looks slimy.” “Wow those are great comparisons,” I agreed. For the remaining time, Abby independently manipulated the oobleck until the two minute warning bell rang. Without hesitation Abby put her oobleck in the Ziplock bag, pushed her chair in with the clean hand, stood in line at the sink to wash her hands, and returned to the table to retrieve her oobleck once her art smock was put away. Abby gathered her bag of oobleck and her pencil box, put their away and sat quietly waiting to go to lunch.

The science center is always flexibly worked into our center rotations, so it’s fun to observe the student’s responses to the different experiments that we perform together. Abby demonstrated her ability to think like a scientists within this experiment and work together to make predictions. The kindergarten science curriculum my school district does not focus specifically on the different phases of matter; however, kindergarten students must identify the properties of objects using their senses, specifically color, odor, sound, hardness, and taste. This science center
activity called upon Abby and the others to use their sense of touch and sight to make predictions and manipulate the material to brainstorm comparisons. Within this activity, Abby was able to challenge herself to identify various comparisons amongst oobleck and other substances/materials, such as glue and syrup. Abby appeared to be engaged throughout the entire activity and she was able to extend upon what we’ve already discussed in class about using our different senses to identify properties such as sticky, smooth, cold, wet.

Abby once again portrayed herself as an independent worker who was able to follow multiple step directions and appropriately interact with her peers: take turns, share, and listen. She appropriately accepted her roles in the small group and completed the work asked of her. The expectations appeared to be clearly established and appropriately followed through on by each student in the group. Abby and the other students demonstrated activation participation in their learning and they remained engaged throughout the center rotation.

Writing Center

On March 1, 2012, I was able to observe Abby in the writing center for my last observation, a center I had not observed her working in before. The center’s activity went along with the Dr. Seuss theme as well, yet my co-teacher and I created it with all of his books in mind. My co-teacher and I created four different silly sentences with rhyming words and sight words, just as Dr. Seuss’s writing entailed (see Figure 4.11). We cut up each sentence and placed the words in a color coded
envelope along with a copy of the complete sentence highlighted in the same color as
the envelope. We encourage the students to use the sentence silly sentences sheet that
we created as a reference, but once they completed each sentence they could
challenge themselves to create their own silly sentences with the different envelopes
or generate –at and –an words on the whiteboard.

Figure 4.11: Dr. Seuss’s Silly Sentences –Writing Center
Due to one student being absent the day of this activity, Abby’s group only had three students, so two of the students worked side by side to complete the activity whereas Abby chose to work independently. Abby gathered one of each envelope: blue, yellow, orange, and pink and sat by herself at the corner of the alphabet carpet. She took out all of the words for the blue sentence: *The dog on a log met the hog in the fog*. Abby put the words across the carpet, so that she could see and read each one. She looked at the eleven different words and grabbed the word *The* and placed it on the left side of her carpet signifying the beginning of her sentence. Abby’s eyes moved from the sample sentence to the words on the carpet. She placed the word *log* as the second word in the sentence, but quickly exchanged it for the word *dog*. Abby pointed to the two words in her sentence: *The dog*. She continued to use her one to one matching and recreate the sample sentence. It took Abby about four minutes to complete the sentence. Once Abby completed the first sentence, she read the sentence
quietly to herself while pointing with her finger under each word, "The dog on a log met the hog in the fog." (see Figure 4.13)

Figure 4.13: Abby's First Silly Sentence Recreation (Blue) - Writing Center

After Abby read the sentence to herself, she began to take her sentence apart and place the words back into the blue envelop. As she pushed the blue envelop to the side, she grabbed the yellow envelop and spilled the word contents onto the carpet in front of her: *May, I, play, all, day, at, the, bay?* Abby turned all of the words so that they faced the correct directionality. When she could see all of the words, she pointed to the word *May* and placed it to the left side once again to signify the beginning of her new sentence. She then went on to pull the word *I* from the pile, "I," she said and placed it next to the word *May*. Abby originally did not leave a space between the words, yet as she reread the sentence with her finger underneath the words, she placed her two fingers (pointer and middle) after the word *May* and moved the place the word *I* on right side of her middle finger. She continued to reference the sample silly sentence and pull the words accordingly to fit within her sentence. After each word was pulled, she placed her two fingers to provide space and reread the sentence to herself in her head. My co-teacher walked over to check in on Abby's group just as
Abby had completed her second sentence (see Figure 4.14). Abby raised her hand and asked, “Can I read this to you?” “Of course you can Abby. Let’s hear it!” my co-teacher responded. “May, may, I play all day at the bay?” read Abby. “May, play, day, and bay rhyme.” “What a wonderful observation Abby. What letters do those four words end with?” asked my co-teacher. “Y, no ay. /ay/” said Abby. “Keep up the great work Abby. Try the next sentence,” my co-teacher requested.

Abby continued to work diligently on the next two sentences: The fat cat with the hat sat on the mat. (pink) and I ran by the tan man in the van. (orange). Just as she had done with the other sentences, she arranged the words in front of her, referred to the sample sentence, and reread her sentence multiple times during the creation process. After independently reading her final sentence, Abby returned the words to the orange envelope, placed the four envelopes back into the pile, and raised her hand. My co-teacher walked over to Abby, and Abby asked “Can I write -at and -an words on the board now?” “You created and read the four different silly sentences?” my co-teacher inquired. “Yes,” Abby replied. “You can use the Expo markers on the board to write the words. Challenge your brain and come up with as many real words as you can. No silly words for this activity. Okay?” “I can do that,” Abby said.
Abby searched through the Expo marker bin underneath the whiteboard and pulled out a purple and red marker. She went on to independently create six -at words and five -an words before the lunch monitor came into the classroom (see Figure 4.15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-an</th>
<th>-at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>cat</td>
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<tr>
<td>man</td>
<td>fat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fan</td>
<td>sat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>bat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tan</td>
<td>mat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.15: Abby’s –an and –at Word List- Writing Center Additional Activity

As Abby wrote each of the words, she always said the word part first, “-an, can!, -at, fat!” I observed her letter formation and noticed that she correctly formed each letter according to the paths that we’ve taught her. There were no letter reversals or confusions with letter sounds that could be seen from her independent work. After writing mat under the -at column on the whiteboard, Abby placed the cap back on the markers, returned the markers to the appropriate bin, and walked up to the lunch monitor. She asked, “Can I wash my hands for lunch now?” The lunch monitor nodded her head and Abby began her pre-lunch routine.
Within this last observation, there was not a lot dialogue that I was able to record due to Abby working independently at the carpet without a partner or partner volunteer there to ask her questions or converse with her. I immediately noticed Abby’s awareness and correct use of capital letters at the beginning of her sentences. One of the school district’s kindergarten writing goals for the quarter was to use capital letters in the beginning position of a word in addition to use appropriate spacing between letters and words, which Abby appropriately did within her recreated sentences and writing in the additional activity. Abby’s reading and recreating of the silly sentences also revealed her understanding of when reading English we go left-to-right and top-to-bottom and we writing using left-to-right and top-to-bottom direction. If necessary kindergarten students are provided with lined paper and/or pocket charts to help guide and establish a starting point for the sentences directionality; however, Abby did not require such a guide. She was able to successfully and independently recreate the four different sentences without guidance as well as participate in the additional independent activity.

It is not uncommon for kindergarten students or students in any grade level to choose to work by themselves instead of in a group. Within this observation, I recognized that Abby did not need to use peer visual reminders to stay on task or the expectations of the activity. My co-teacher and I established the routines and expectations of the writing center activity, which enabled Abby to remain independent throughout the entire thirty minute span.
Abby’s Interview

I interviewed Abby on February 29, 2012, the Thursday before my last classroom observation of her. During the interview, I asked Abby to identify her favorite center and explain what she likes most about it. Without hesitation Abby replied “I like computers because it is fun and I play with the computer at home.” Abby then went on to identify what she does if she has a question or trouble with a center. Abby was then able to identify the center that she has trouble finishing and presents difficulties at times: “Sometimes word study sorts. They are long and hard sometimes.” It was unfortunate that I was unable to observe Abby participating in the word study center when a word sort was involved to observe any difficulties she may experience during such an activity.

When I asked Abby to provide any more information about her work in centers, Abby had some difficulty stating “I don’t know. I really like it. Just fun! Some have things I like, like computer.” I then went on to ask Abby if she had any suggestions of a new center(s) that we don’t already have in the classroom. With a big smile on her face she said, “Hmm...Oh I know. I would have some puzzles and board games. That’s fun!” This response revealed to me that Abby is somewhat aware of herself as learning and of the things that she enjoys.

Abby comes across in my observations as a confident and independent student. Through my observations of and one-on-one interview with Abby, she constantly met the classroom and activity expectations that I and my co-teacher established. Abby was regularly engaged and participating in the variety of activities during my observations. The center activities that did not challenge Abby enough or did not keep her actively engaged, provided me with an insight that my co-teacher and I need to establish additional challenges within the center activities and/or create extension activities that the students can independently
complete as the other groups finish their activities. The independent learning center activities provided an independent learning time in which Abby applied her new found knowledge and previous background knowledge to complete tasks. I would like to see Abby continue to challenge herself with additional extensions that my co-teacher and I create for her and other students like Abby who are ready and willing to accept academic challenges successfully.

Adam

"I love centers! They are fun. I like to do work by myself!"

Adam’s response when asked about his work in centers, March 9, 2012

Poetry Center

The first day that I observed Adam was the second day of center rotations on Wednesday, February 8, 2012. While my co-teacher had the attention of the entire class sitting quietly on the alphabet carpet, she announced the center rotation groups for the day. When Adam’s group was dismissed, without hesitation he gathered his supply box and met his group mates at the front word wall table; the designated area in the room for the poetry center. Adam took out his pencil and began writing his name. As he wrote his name on his paper, he sang under his breath, “The first thing on your paper is your name. The first thing on your paper is your name. Put your pencil right by it, and sit nice and quiet. The first thing on your paper is your name.” He finished singing the song as his other peers chimed in and wrote their names on their book as well.
As soon as the students finished singing the song, my co-teacher walked by the group and asked, “Does anyone have any questions of our Book of Snow Poems?” The students all replied, “No!” All except Adam. In an almost panic stricken tone Adam asked, “What do we do if we don’t finish? Will I do it during quiet work time?” My co-teacher responded, “Yes Adam. That’s right, but if you work real hard you will be able to finish before lunch. How does that sound?” In a much calmer tone Adam replied, “Ok. I will work so hard!”

The poetry center activity for this week was a book full of snow poems, titled My Book of Snow Poems. There were three poems for the students to complete by the end of the rotation. The students were previously instructed to read each poem two times independently or with a partner, locate all of the sight words by highlighting or underlining each word, and drawing a picture to match each poem. Adam turned in his booklet to the first poem, It Is Snowing (see Figure 4.16). He silently read the poem to himself using one-to-one correspondence and pointing as he read. Prior to his second reading he reached in his supply box and took out his yellow crayon to use as a highlighter. Adam then began his second reading at a slower pace stopping at each sight word (“star word”) to highlight the word. He continued to read the passage in a whisper almost silent voice; however, when he came to a sight word he read the word aloud and highlighted it with his crayon, “Soft and. And! (highlighting the word and). Quiet snowflakes. Soft and. And!” (highlighting the word and). He continued this work pattern as he read through the remaining lines of the poem.
After Adam identified the sight words within the first poem of the packet, he grabbed his blue crayon and began drawing star like snowflakes all around the outside of his poem. “It’s snowing, it’s snowing. Ahh it’s snowing,” Adam said. “Look at all of my snow!” he instructed his neighbor. “Wow,” she replied “Good job Adam. Do you like mine?” Adam glanced at her work and replied “Yes. Good job too! Your stars look like mine.” Adam stood behind his chair and continued to draw endless amounts of snowflakes on his paper. He began to sing, “It’s snowing, it’s snowing. The old man is snoring.” His peers giggled and two of the students started to follow along. “It’s snowing, it’s snowing. The old man is snoring.” After two times of singing the song aloud with one another, the music and noise drifted, and Adam turned his page to the next poem.

![Image of Adam's It Is Snowing Poem]

Figure 4.16: Replica of Adam’s It Is Snowing Poem- Poetry Center

Adam took out his yellow crayon and placed it at the top of his paper. He then began to point under each word as he whisper read to himself the poem Build a Little Snowman (see Figure 4.17). I could only make out a little of what he read to analyze his independent reading behaviors (i.e., solving unknown words, monitoring and self-correcting). When Adam came to the word starting in the first line of the text, he
placed his right reading finger over the –ing ending and focused his attention on breaking apart the word start. “/St/, /ar/, /t/, /Star/, /t/, start, starting. Starting with his feet.” After breaking apart the word starting into parts that he knew, Adam continued quietly reading the poem to himself. On his second reading of the poem, Adam picked up his yellow crayon and highlighted the sight words that he came upon as he read. When he recognized and located each sight word he read them aloud as he highlighted them with his crayon. He appeared to be excited and proud of himself for finding the sight words so quickly within the different lines of the text.

With a smile on his face, Adam reached for his crayons and began to draw three circles all of different size to represent the body of his snowman. Adam got out of his seat and walked over to the classroom library where various books, fiction and non-fiction, related to the topic of winter were available for the students. Adam flipped through a book with the snowman on the cover; he appeared to be searching for a visual reference to draw a snowman. After a minute of searching through some of the classroom library books, Adam returned to his seat and quietly continued to add details to his drawing. He drew a red scarf, a carrot nose, and two eyes on his snowman. Adam ran his finger under the last line of text and drew a picture of a sun in the upper right hand corner of his paper.
Build a Little Snowman

Build a little snowman, starting with his feet.
Put on lots of snow, and pat it all so neat.
Then make a round ball, and put it up on top.
Then the sun will come out, and make this snowman hot.
(I'm a Little Teapot)

Figure 4.17: Replica of Adam’s Building a Little Snowman Poem- Poetry Center

After putting a few finishing touches on the second poem, Adam put his crayons in his supply box except for his yellow crayon and he turned to the last poem. Without hesitation Adam initiated his first reading of the poem Sliding (see Figure 4.18). Adam whisper read the poem to himself and pointed under each word as he read. His reading finger slid from one word to the next without him pausing and trying to solve the words. Prior to starting his second read he picked up his yellow crayon and began to read the poem aloud, “Sliding. CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH, Up. Up! (highlighted up) the. The! (highlighted the) hill we. We! (highlighted we) go. Go! (highlighted go). Wow there was one, two, three, four stars words,” he commented on to his neighbor showing her the yellow highlights in his poem. She did not respond to Adam, she just smiled and returned to her picture of a snowman. Her lack of response did not prompt Adam to show another peer, he continued to read the poem and did so silently except for when he came to a sight word. “The! We! Go!” he identified.

At the stage of which he was expected to draw a picture to represent the poem was when the two minute warning bell rang. Adam immediately stood behind his
chair, grabbed his red crayon, and began to draw a rectangle to initiate his drawing of a sled. He then added black stripes in the middle and draw was appeared to be a green hill underneath the sled. Adam appeared to feel a sense of rushing because he did not color in the sled nor the hill unlike his other drawings where he took his time and added great detail. “Done! I am done. Lunch time!” Adam said. He put his supplies away and stood behind his chair waiting to be dismissed for lunch.

**Sliding**

*Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, Up the hill we go.*

*Sliding, sliding, sliding, sliding Down the hill we go.*

*(Row, Row, Row, Your Boat)*

Figure 4.18: Replica of Adam’s *Sliding* Poem- Poetry Center

Adam’s work within my first observation revealed that he is a determined worker who produces meaningful work within the specified center rotation time. It was apparent that Adam enjoyed working in a parallel manner with his peers. Although Adam worked independently on each poem, he quietly initiated a few interactions with his peers. The group of students Adam worked with reciprocated the need for independent time to read through the poems, locate the sight words, and draw pictures to match. The students each demonstrated the ability to respect the need for a quiet work space for that of themselves and their peers. Adam did not appear to be fazed when other students turned the pages of their poems to signify that they had moved onto the next poem. At times Adam’s eyes shifted to his peer’s papers and
others looked at his paper; however, there were no signs of copying taking place.

Each student produced work that they were proud of and could call their own.

In regards to Adam’s reading behaviors, he demonstrated the motivation to read. A learning objective for kindergarten students under the motivation to read curriculum unit lesson is for students to demonstrate an interest in reading a range of kindergarten-level texts from a variety of genres, such as poems. As Adam read through each snow poem he seemed engaged. As Adam read he also revealed his well-developed knowledge of the kindergarten sight word list. There was not one sight word that Adam missed within the three different poems. He was able to correctly identify and read his sight words. Under the unit lesson of fluency, kindergartners as expected to recognize and identify 25 sight words in an isolated manner. Adam’s reading behaviors within this center activity revealed his ability to go beyond recognizing words in isolation. He was independently able to identify sight words within a text.

In addition to his sight word reading, Adam revealed his ability to break apart unknown words by searching for word patterns or parts that he was familiar with. This was seen when Adam paused at the word *starting* and covered the –ing ending. He broke the word *start* into familiar letter(s) sounds and was able to successfully work through the word. Adam’s reading behaviors and ability to independently work side by side with his peers revealed the appropriateness in the expectation and length of the activity created as well as the center group allocated.
Word Work Center

The following day I observed Adam in the word work center where the activity called upon the students to sort pictures by the ending sound of the corresponding word (see Figure 4.19). Prior to assigning the center rotations and dismissing the center groups, my co-teacher announced to the class that due to the morning assembly centers would be shortened to twenty minutes. She instructed them to “get as much work done. Whatever we don’t finish can be completed during quiet time after lunch. No worries!” Adam and his group mates met at table number four, grabbed a piece of green construction paper, a sorting worksheet, and began cutting. Adam cut out the letters s, r, b, and m and glued them along the top of his paper before he cut the remaining pictures out.

He placed each picture on the construction paper to represent the pictures that were done being cut. Adam sat quietly and cut each picture. It was apparent that he wanted to take his time and cut along the black line. After Adam cut out the pictures, he stood, pushed his chair in, and walked over to the recycling bin to throw away his scraps. Without distracting any of his group mates he sat back at the table and began to identify the names of each picture, and as he did he placed them under the corresponding letter sound. “Bus. /s/. S.” Adam glued the picture of the bus under the letter s. He continued to identify the pictures, “Robe. /r/. R.” He glued the picture of the robe under the letter r, but quickly picked it up and read it again, “Robe. /b/. B.” Instead of gluing the picture of the robe underneath the letter b, he placed it off to the
side and search through the remaining pictures to locate a picture word that ended with the letter r. “Door. /r/. R.”

Adam continued on with his technique of reading the picture word, identifying the ending sound and ending letter, and gluing the picture under the appropriate ending sound category at the top of his paper. Adam did not appear to have trouble identifying the picture word or identifying the ending letter sound. He completed the ending sound sort with about three minutes to spare.

Figure 4.19: Adam’s Ending Sound Sort- Word Work Center

When Adam realized that he had no pictures left, he put the cap on his glue stick, pushed his chair in, and walked over to the sink to wash the glue off of his
hands. When he returned to the table, my co-teacher rang the two minute warning bell. Adam walked up to my co-teacher and said “I am done.” “We only have about two minutes left before we wash up for lunch, so can you read each column to me?,” she inquired. Adam read through each column, “B, bath, I mean tub. Crab. Cob. Web. Robe…” “Great work Adam. You can go place your sort in your mailbox and wash your hands for lunch.” Adam responded, “I already washed my hands. I washed off the glue. Can I get my lunch bag?” My co-teacher replied, “Yes, please. Thank you Adam. Great work today in centers.”

Within this particular observation I was able to observe how Adam handled the stress of a shortened work rotation. In my previous observation of Adam he has sought reassurance of what the consequence would be if he did not complete a center activity within the specified center rotation time. He did not overt any concerns or demonstrations of the need for reassurance. Adam worked diligently to complete the word work activity.

As Adam completed the ending sound sort, he demonstrated his ability to independently monitor his work and self-correct when necessary. Adam was able to hear when a picture word did not belong in a particular ending letter sound column. Another observation of Adam’s work style was his ability to independently decide to organize his work in such a manner where he identified and glued the ending letter sounds at the top of his paper first to represent the four columns that all other picture words would be sorted after he cut them out. This demonstrated Adam’s unique learning preferences and approaches within this particular activity as compared to his
other peers who cut all of the pictures out first then glued as well as those who cut and glued, cut and glued, cut and glued until they ran out of pictures. Although each student approached the process of this activity differently, they each produced a meaningful product to showcase their ability to hear and recognition ending letter sounds.

**Math Center**

For my third observation of Adam he was assigned to be part of the math center activity. The following week the students had worked with geometric shapes in whole group mini lessons and hands-on application activities: identifying a shape based on the number of sides, number of corners, and the length of sides. The math center activity, *My Shape Book* called upon all students to count the number of sides and corners for triangles, rectangles, squares and circles. The last page of the shape book was created to provide a challenge for those students with a higher level of understanding as observed by me and my co-teacher. The challenge asked the students to draw a picture using only triangles, circles, rectangles, and squares (see Figure 4.20).
As my co-teacher announced center group rotations, Adam sat patiently waiting to hear his name and group called. Adam’s center group was dismissed last because their assigned center location was on the alphabet carpet where the whole class had met to hear their assignment for centers. Adam and his group mates walked to their tables to retrieve their supply boxes. On his way back to the carpet Adam gathered an arm full of five clipboards, one for each student in the group. As he handed out the clipboards, some students replied “Thanks Adam or Thank you!” and Adam just smiled.

As Adam stood on the outskirts of the alphabet carpet he appeared to be scanning the carpet for the right spot for him to complete his work. Adam walked over to the letter v and sat down. He immediately got to work writing his first and last name on his paper. Adam picked up his blue crayon and drew a circle around the title
of the book. As he drew the circle, he looked around at his peers and saw that some of them had already written their names and moved onto the first page of the book that had them identify the number of sides and corners of a triangle. This visual cue or prompt from his peers guided him to independently put his crayon away and initiate the completion of the book work before he colored.

To help Adam count the number of sides and corners he used his pointer finger as a one-to-one correspondence. He silently counted three sides on the triangle. Although he was silent, I could read his lips, "one, two, three" and he wrote the number three corresponding blanks on his paper. His formation of the number three was incorrect, yet he did not realize. As Adam started turning to the next page, my co-teacher walked by and prompted Adam to examine his formation of the number three. She explained, "Remember Adam, around the tree, around the tree, that's the way to make a three! Watch me as I write it with my highlighter. Around the tree, around the tree, that’s the way to make a three!" She repeated this explanation as she wrote the number three once more on the second line. "You try," she said. Adam picked up his pencil and began tracing the yellow highlighter marks as he said, "Around the tree, around the tree, that’s the way I make a three!" "Great work Adam. You can continue working in your packet!"

Adam turned to the next page that asked him to identify how many sides and corners a rectangle had. He once again used his fingers to point to the corners and sides of the upper right rectangle. His finger followed along as he silently counted and his lips read, "One, two, three, four." Adam then wrote the number four on the
two corresponding lines within the sentence and turned to the square page. Adam’s eyes went straight to the large square on the page and he immediately wrote the number four on each line without counting or using his finger. Adam’s first formation of the number four seemed sloppy for his liking, so he erased and made another attempt. Appearing satisfied with completing the square page quickly, he turned in his book to the circle page. Adam stared at the four circles on the page and touched each one, but never appeared to be counting. He formed a circle figure with both of his hands and stared at the circle formation that he had created. With a frown, Adam wrote the number zero on both lines and raised his hand. It took a few moments before my co-teacher noticed that Adam’s hand was in the air, but he waited patiently for a teacher to come by. “Adam do you have a question?” my co-teacher asked. “I don’t get it. I don’t see any sides or corners in the circles. What’s wrong?” Adam replied. My co-teacher explained, “Adam great observation. You are right. Circles do not have corners or sides. There are no flat parts on a circle, so that means no sides and no corners.” Adam said, “Oh. Zero?” “Yes sir,” she said. “Your are right. Zero.” Although Adam’s question was answered it took him a few seconds before he allowed himself to turn the page to complete the challenge.

About seven minutes remained before the students would begin getting ready for lunch when Adam began working on the challenge page. “Rollercoaster,” he said to himself as he started drawing his picture. After drawing the curved lines, he drew slashes through each one and created rectangle-like figures. He then went on to draw a picture of himself and labeled his picture with the word me above the head. Adam
added three circles to his picture as well as a large rectangle in the upper right hand corner that he dissected in order to create two squares. He scooted his way across the carpet to another boy and said, “Look at my rollercoaster. It’s a lot of rectangles. Do you see my rectangle?” The boy nodded and pointed to several of the rectangles in Adam’s drawing. “I like your rollercoaster. I will draw one too. Watch this. Zoom, zoom, yeah!” the boy exclaimed. Adam and the boy giggled. Adam continued adding more slash marks in his drawing to create more rectangles. Adam closed his packet and walked over to his supplies on the carpet. My co-teacher rang the two minute warning bell. Adam turned to the first page in his book and took out a green and orange crayon. He quickly colored in three triangles and threw the crayons back into his supply box. “Done!” he said. He walked his packet over to my co-teacher and explained, “I didn’t finished coloring. Can I do it at home?” “Sure,” she said “that’s no problem. Let me just check your answers quickly and then you can put it in your mailbox.” She quickly checked each page in his book and commented on his challenge page, “I like your drawing Adam. I can see triangles, rectangles, circles, and a lot of rectangles. You are an artist. You definitely passed the challenge” and he gave him a high-five. With a smile on his face Adam walked to his mailbox and handed in his book before he began getting ready for lunch. He did not return his supply box to his table; however, one of the girls in his group gathered Adam’s supply box and returned it for him.

According to my school district’s kindergarten math curriculum, students are expected to be able to describe two-dimensional shapes based on characteristics (such
as sides), including circle, triangle, square, and rectangle. Adam was successful in his independent attempts to identify the number of sides and corners of such shapes in addition to using one-to-one correspondence to help him track his counting. Adam completed this activity without depending on referring to others work or requiring frequent teacher support. He did however benefit from the social cues of his peers in order to complete his work in pencil first before coloring the shapes in his book. Adam regulated his behaviors in accordance to the activity expectations set and the reminder her received from his peers visually in his environment. In addition to Adam’s ability to demonstrate his understanding of shapes and their characteristics, he was able to successfully complete the challenge activity. Adam created a final product that he was proud of and that he completed independently within the center rotation time frame.

Poetry Center

This was the second time that I was able to observe Adam as he completed the independent learning activity in the poetry center. I began observing Adam after he had sat at the word wall table with his supplies and cut out the One, Two, Buckle My Shoe poem that he would later glue into his My Poetry Journal (see Figure 4.21).
After cutting out the poem and appropriately placing his scrap paper in the recycling bin, Adam turned to the next blank white page in his poetry journal. Adam uncapped his glue stick and made a large x with it on the back of his paper. He then used his hands to flatten out the poem to glue it in his journal on the blank page with the title placed appropriately on top. Adam finished gluing in his poem before his peers, so he chose to independently read the poem while he waited for the others to finish.

Although Adam did not read out loud, he used his right pointer finger as a one-to-one correspondence for each word in the text. My co-teacher walked over to
Adam’s group as he read the poem. She announced to the group, “Because Tuesdays is our day that there is no parent volunteer I am going to work with the poetry center today while Mrs. Vaughn does reading groups.” “Cool!” said a student. “Woohoo!” said another. My co-teacher went on to explain, “While I help some of you finish cutting and gluing please try your best to read the poem One, Two, Buckle My Shoe to yourself, just like Adam was doing as I walked over to the table.” Adam began to reread the poem using his pointer finger to follow along.

After Adam’s initiation of his second time reading the poem, my co-teacher asked the students to “put your supplies away and just get out your pencil.” As a group, the students and my co-teacher read the poem together in unison. “Great reading!” my co-teacher said. “Let’s be mathematicians and write the numbers above the number words written out. One, Two. Write the number 1 and 2 over the number words.” She provided prompts to a few students and then encouraged the students to independently search for the number words as they read the poem by themselves and write the numbers above each word and she’s rotate to check-in. As Adam read through each line, “Three, four,” he pointed to the number word, read it out loud and wrote the corresponding number on top of the word. He continued this process to complete the poem. As Adam wrote the number six, he reversed its formation. He incorrectly formed the number eight as well, writing it on a rotated slant as can be seen in his work sample.

As each student in Adam’s group finished writing the numbers above each word, my co-teacher prompted them to “reread the poem, but this time search for all
of your star words and circle them.” Adam quickly searched through the poem not appearing to do so in any particular order. He first located and circled the word A in line ten of the poem then moved onto the words at and the in line four. He continued on in a random identification process and circled my in line two then finished with up in the sixth line of the poem. Although Adam did not locate the star words in directionality order that followed along with the reading of the poem, he correctly located the five different star words within the poem.

While Adam waited for the others to finish locating the star words, he put his supply box back on his table and closed his poetry journal as my co-teacher instructed him to do. When Adam returned to the table my co-teacher said, “Boys and girls, we have about nine minutes before lunch.” “Yeah!” the students replied. “We are going to play a number matching game,” she explained. “On the cards Mrs. Vaughn and I have written the number words and the numbers 1-10. We are going to turn all of them over and you will have to locate the match of the number word with the correct number. Raise your hand if you’ve played the game Memory before with your friends or family.” All of the students including Adam raised their hand with smiles on their faces. “Great,” she said. “This game is number Memory. Once you and your partner have found all of the matches, put the cards face down and try to find the matches again until you are dismissed for lunch. Any questions?” None of the students raised their hand with questions, so my co-teacher assigned Adam to work with the boy in his group and the three girls worked together in a group.
Adam took the deck of cards from the teacher and started to lay out each number card face down on the desk. His partner tried to take the pile away from him to help; however, Adam pulled his hand back and said “I have to do it. You can next time. It’s my turn first, but you can go first.” After Adam placed each card face down, he said “Go!” His partner found the number word ten and the number 8. “Nope!” Adam said. “My turn!” Adam turned over the number word six and the number 2. “Ugh! Man!” Adam said. Adam continued to wait his turn and attempt to remember where certain number words and numbers were positioned within the deck. Before the cleanup bell rang, Adam was able to correctly match ten and 10, six and 6, three and 3, and four and 4. “Good game,” Adam said as he started to put his cards back into the game envelope.

The various expectations and steps within this particular poetry center activity(ies) did not appear to be too much for the students including Adam to handle within the specified time frame. Each student was able to complete each step at their own pace and were provided with the needed scaffolds. Through my observations of Adam and his work samples, I saw a need for some additional support with the formation of the numbers six and eight due to reversals and rotated formations of those numbers. I do not believe that Adam requires intensive formation supports; however, he would benefit from differentiated activities to address his number formations. After Adam glued in the poem and read through it several times, he demonstrated his understanding of directionality of text. Not only did Adam glue the poem in his journal with the title on top, he read along with his finger from left to
right, top to bottom just as the district expects of kindergartners at the end of the school year within the curriculum reading standards. Adam demonstrated his ability to independently read through texts, which revealed that he has built up stamina to read for a sustained period of time. Adam independently completed the poem activity as well as collaboratively worked with his partner complete the number Memory game.

Word Work/Computer Center

During my fifth observation of Adam, he was part of the word work/computer center group. Within this center the students were given a picture sort for the ending sounds: b, l, s, d, k, n, t, p, m, g, r, and f. This particular independent learning activity was unique than my other observations of Adam due to the collaborative nature. Unfortunately I was unable to retrieve a copy of Adam and his partners’ final work product due to the completion of this activity on the iPad; however, I printed a copy of the Smartboard slide format (see Figure 4.22).

My co-teacher explained to the class, “Centers will be shorter today due to the assembly, so get as much of the activities done as you can and we will have some time during quiet time to finish our work. Listen for your name and what center activity you’re in today.” As she read through the list of centers and names of students in each, Adam listened attentively sitting crisscross applesauce. Adam’s group was called to be part of a new center activity in the word work/computer center. The third grade technology classroom teacher lent three iPads to our
kindergarten class for the week, so my co-teacher and I created an ending sound sort Smartboard activity for them to complete with a partner. The Smartboard activity that we created was composed of twenty-nine different slides that called upon the students to identify how each letter sounded at the end of a word, sort pictures that had the same ending sound, and sort pictures by differentiating between three different ending sounds in a chart.

When Adam’s name was called to be part of this group he smiled so wide and appeared to be very excited with his placement within this activity. Adam looked at a girl in his group and asked her “Will you be my partner?” She said, “Yes!” My co-teacher asked Adam’s group to meet her up at the front carpet where she would provide further directions and support. Adam stood by his partner, held her hand and walked over to the front carpet.

My co-teacher turned an iPad on after each center group was clearly established, and she sat with Adam’s group on the carpet. “Boys and girls just like we showed you on Tuesday, you are going to find this ending sound sort activity on the home screen. Double click it like this and it will open.” She doubled clicked on the icon and the first slide titled What is the ending sound? appeared with the picture of a tub and the letter b right beside it. “What is this a picture of?” asked my co-teacher pointing to the tub. “A tub,” Adam replied. “Tub,” she repeated with an emphasis on the /b/ sound. “/b/, B,” said one of the students. “Great. Tub. Tub ends with the letter b, /b/. After you and your partner(s) finish each slide together you will press the arrow in the bottom left hand corner to advance the screen to the next activity page,
like this.” She advanced her screen to the next activity. “Any questions?” she asked. Adam asked, “What if we don’t finish?” “Remember,” my co-teacher said. “We will have more time to work during quiet time, so work very hard with your partner to get as far along in the slides as you can. Any more questions?” There were no more questions from Adam’s group, so my co-teacher asked the students to pair up. Adam and his partner sat side by side holding hands and Adam extending his arm to retrieve the iPad that my co-teacher handed him. “Cool!” he said as he turned the iPad on and doubled clicked on the activity icon just as was demonstrated earlier by the teacher.

Adam’s partner asked, “Can I hold the iPad too? Take turns.” “We can switch after each letter sound, ok?” Adam replied. “Ok!” his partner said. Adam and his partner said “Tub. /b/.” and his partner advanced to the next slide with the iPad in Adam’s lap. The next slide titled Which pictures have the same ending sounds? directed the students to drag the pictures with the same ending sound to the box. The picture will disappear if it is incorrect! The pictures on the slide were of a crab, heart, bib, moon, web, and car. “You go first,” Adam told his partner. The student pressed the picture of the web and dragged it into the blank box. The students giggled and it was Adam’s turn. Adam first clicked on the picture of the moon, but then quickly moved his index finger to the bib and said “Bib,” as he dragged it appropriately into the box. Adam and his partner watched the picture of the bib appear in the box and they giggled once again. Adam and his partner continued taking turns and collectively correctly dragged each picture to the blank box: web, bib, crab.
Adam advanced the activity to the next slide and said “Ball. L. /l/.” The slide was titled What is the ending sound? with a picture of a baseball and the letter l adjacent to it. Adam’s partner repeated Adam’s sentence and she advanced to the next slide titled Which pictures have the same ending sounds? that directed the students to once again drag the pictures with the same ending sound to the box and if they were correct, the picture would appear in the blank box. Adam said, “I am going first. Here hold this.” He handed the iPad to his partner and clicked on the wheel and said “Wheel. /l/” as he dragged the picture of the wheel in the box underneath the picture of the baseball. The picture of the wheel appeared in the box and Adam’s partner took her turn dragging the picture of the moon into the box; however, her image disappeared due to the incorrect ending sound. “No. It’s not moon,” said Adam. “Moon. That’s an m. Watch.” Adam clicked on the doll and said, “Doll.” Adam dragged the picture of the doll into the box and it appeared. “Find the last one,” Adam directed his partner. She looked at the pictures remaining: heart, pencil, car, moon. She clicked on the pencil and dragged it into the box. “Good job!” said Adam. His partner advanced to the next slide titled What is the ending sound? where a picture of a house and the letter s were placed beneath the title. Adam’s partner advanced to the next slide where the students once again had to drag the pictures with the same ending /s/ sound to the box. The pictures provided were of a dress, moon, horse, web, wheel, pencil, and mouse. Adam and his partner continued taking turns to appropriately identify the pictures with the ending sound of s: dress, horse, and mouse. Adam appropriately dragged horse and mouse, and his partner identified the
picture of the dress correctly without any mistakes being made during each attempt. After the previous six slides working with the ending sounds of the letters b, l, and s the students advanced to a slide that directed them to *Drag each picture to the box that has a picture with the same ending sound.* The slide was divided into three different columns with the picture of the tub, baseball, and house at the top of each column. On the sides of the columns were pictures of a bus, candle, sub, nurse and bell. Adam’s partner took her turn first and clicked on the picture of the bus and attempted to drag it into the column with the tub, but Adam reminded her that “bus ends with s not b.” Adam’s partner listened to Adam’s reminder and she appropriately dragged the bus underneath the picture of the house. Adam clicked on the bell and dragged it into the appropriate column. After his partner placed the picture of the candle in the correct column, Adam clicked on the picture of the nurse and said “My mom’s a nurse. Nurse. /s/. S.” He dragged the picture into the appropriate column and continued to provide support to his partner. “Sandwich?” his partner asked, but she didn’t know where to put it. Adam said, “I think it’s a sub, /b/.” “B,” said his partner and she placed it underneath the picture of the tub.

The format of the activity remained the same for the remaining ending letter sounds: *What is the ending sound?*, *Which pictures have the same ending sounds?*, and *Sort the pictures by ending sound!* Adam and his partner problem-solved and worked through four additional slides for the ending letter sounds of d and k until they heard the cleanup bell ring. Adam reminded his partner, “We can work on this together after lunch. Let’s sit on the carpet to finish. Press the button to turn it off.”
His partner responded with a nod and followed his directions to turn off the iPad. Adam and his partner walked together to a table at the front of the room where the other iPads were and he gently placed it on the table.

![Figure 4.22: Ending Sounds Smartboard Format - Word Work/Computer Center](image)

I caught up with Aidan the following morning to see if he and his partner had finished the activity during quiet time. He responded, “No. We worked on it for play time. It was fun!” After observing Adam and his partner complete this activity and following up with Adam the next school day, I realized that this activity may have been too lengthy for the specified time frame within the center rotations. The amount of time it took for Adam and his partner to complete the activity was unique to them as learners, so I almost believe that it’s better to have more work within this particular
activity than to not have enough to keep the students engaged. Adam and his partner appeared to be actively engaged in the activity and his comment on how much fun it was reinforced that the students did not mind dedicating a little of their place time to complete the additional slides. As a new center activity, I believe that the iPads were a huge success and I would not hesitate to incorporate them again. Adam and his partner revealed that they were able to appropriately manage the technology as well as take turns with one another to use the iPad. It amazes me how quickly Adam was able to turn the iPad on and off, locate the activity icon, and setup the activity for he and his partner. His brain when it came to technology reminded me of a sponge. I was amazed by their collaboratively and engaged participation throughout the duration of the activity. Once again, I wish I was able to provide a visual to better support the format of the activity and how Adam’s partnership faired with the activity.

Computer Center

On Friday, March 9, 2012 I conducted my final observation of Adam. When I began observing Adam, his group had already been instructed by the parent volunteer, Mrs. Frey to walk over to the computer that they had signed on during morning work and chose one of the three choice activities. On the way over to his computer, Adam grabbed his nametag from his seat, which he would later use as a visual resource for the sight words. The Tuesday prior to this observation my co-teacher and I instructed the students that they had a choice between three different activities while they
rotated through computer center: Type to Learn program, Starfall website, or type the twenty-five kindergarten sight words and color words in Microsoft Word.

Without hesitation Adam double clicked on the Microsoft Word icon on the desktop and selected the font Comic Sans MS. His choice was to type the sight words and color words (see Figure 4.23). Adam placed his nametag on top of the computer modem on the table and began typing his sight words: Come, I, no, see, in, etc. After each word Adam typed, he hit the space bar several times before typing the next sight word. His typing order of the sight words resembled that of the order on his nametag. As Adam typed a few of the words, he read them quietly to himself: “am, /a/, /ml. M!” “my, /ml, ly/, my!” “/y/, umbrella, /u/, up.” After Adam typed all twenty-five sight words, he pointed to each word with his pointer finger and counted using a one-to-one correspondence. He checked to make sure that he did not exclude any sight words from his independently typed list. With a smile on his face after counting all twenty-five sight words, he highlighted the words and changed the font color to orange; a skill which he and the other students who had mastered the basic computer skills (i.e., logging on, locating icons, typing letters and words) learned from me a month prior in the computer lab.

Adam pressed the return key and began typing his color words. He first started with the color word red. As he typed the word he said, “Red. /r/, /el, /di. Now I’ll make you red.” He highlighted the word red and changed it to the color red. As he continued to type the other color words he regularly referred to the color/shape poster on the wall behind the computer center. Adam appropriately referenced the poster and
spelled each color word correctly as well as changed the font color to symbolize the color word that he had typed; however, he left out the color word yellow. Adam’s eyes squinted as he pointed in the air and whisper counted the number of color words on the poster; “Nine.” He then went on to count the number of words on his screen, “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Oops. Yellow!” Adam typed the word yellow and changed its color appropriately. The format of his typing had been slightly altered due to the double space that he place between the color word purple and yellow, yet this slight discrepancy did not bother Adam.

Adam raised his hand waiting for a teacher to come around to print it for him and provide feedback. Mrs. Frey walked over to Adam and said, “Wow Adam you are done already? Great typing. Mrs. Vaughn asked for you to read me your sight words. Can you do that?” Adam replied, “Sure. Come, I, no, see, in, a, the, like, an, no that’s am, my, go, can, is, me, at, we, he, so, it, and, do, an, you, to, up.” Mrs. Frey smiled and said, “You are so smart. Instead of printing your paper out right now, I want to give you Mrs. Vaughn’s challenge. Try to type sentences using your sight words and color words.” Adam smiled, “I can do that.” He changed his font color back to the original orange color and said, “My name is [Adam] will be my first sentence. My…” and Adam began typing the sentence. Mrs. Frey walked away. As Adam typed, he appropriately incorporated spacing between his words and a period at the end of his sentence. He then went on to type the sentence I like red. Adam looked to his left at a student named Maria and began typing the sentence, I like Maria. Adam smiled after typing a period at the end of his sentence, change the color of the
font to green, and tapped Maria on the shoulder. “Look,” he said. Maria read the sentence, giggled, and returned to her Starfall activity.

Adam sat for a minute trying to brainstorm another idea for a sentence; he sat quietly. He then began typing *I can see the cat. I can see Maria.* Once again, Adam tapped his neighbor on the shoulder to show her that he wrote about her again, and she smiled saying “When I type I will type your name [Adam].” Adam smiled and pressed the return key. He began typing *I can,* but before he could finish typing the word can my co-teacher rang the two-minute warning bell and asked the computer center to “raise your hand if you are done and an adult will come around to print your paper to the computer lab.” Adam raised his hand and waited for Mrs. Frey to press print. After Mrs. Frey printed Adam’s typing, she asked him to “exit out of the program and log off before you wash up for lunch.” Without a blink of an eye, Adam exited out of the program and logged his computer off before any of his group mates quit their computer programs. Adam stood behind his chair silently and waited for the lunch monitor to dismiss him to get ready for lunch.
A district expectation for kindergartners at the end of the school year is for the students to recognize and write the twenty-five kindergarten sight words, which Adam revealed he was more than capable of as he typed the words in isolation and also used them appropriately within his sentences. He also demonstrated his phoneme isolation skills in which he said the beginning, middle, and ending isolated sounds within words, which is a learning objective within the phonological and phonemic awareness unit lesson. Although Adam interrupted Maria a few times during my

Figure 4.23: Adam's Typed Sight Words and Sentences- Computer Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sight Words</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>I like red. I like Maria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>I can see the cat. I can see Maria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My name is Adam.
observation, his interactions with her were appropriate to the effect that he did not
distract her for a lengthy period of time and he was able to return to his work
immediately after their interactions. Adam once again demonstrated his ability to
independently complete the activity without teacher guidance or peer support.

Adam’s Interview

I interview Adam on March 9, 2012, the Friday of my last classroom
observation of him. Within the interview Adam revealed his love for the poetry
center. He said, “I like drawing the pictures to match.” In his own way I felt that
Adam revealed that he had a creative side that he felt he could express within the
poetry center. Adam stated that he loved center because “They are fun! I like to do
work by myself.” Adam expressed his desire for times within the instructional day to
be given opportunities to independently complete activities at his own pace and in his
own way. I went on to inquire if he works with his friends during centers, and if so,
how. He responded, “Yes, I help them. Sometimes I work with a partner to finish
something.” He also mentioned earlier in the interview that if he has a question with a
center “You can ask a friend.”

When asked if there was a center that he had trouble finishing, he replied
“No.” It was evident that Adam felt that he was given enough time and/or was able to
successfully complete the center activities within the set amount of time. I tend went
on to ask Adam if he had any suggestions of a new center(s) that we don’t already
implement in the classroom. He said, "Playdough." I asked, "What would you want us to do with the playdough?" "Make letters and words," Adam answered.

From my observations and interview of Adam I find that he is an independent student with strong academic skills that he appropriately applies within the different center tasks. When I observed Adam, he regularly abided by the classroom expectations set for independent center work. He constantly appeared to be engaged and participating in a variety of academic activities. Adam rose to each challenge set in his path to extend further upon his learning and skills. Just as my observations of Abby revealed, Adam’s work within the centers provided me with the insight that students with higher levels of understanding and skill levels must be given regular opportunities to be challenged and further engaged.

Looking Across the Student Case Studies

Research Questions: How are independent learning activities developmentally appropriate for kindergartners to promote literacy development?

What types of independent learning activities promote the literacy development of kindergartners?

Looking across the student case studies, I see similarities among the students’ participation in and interactions with the various independent learning activities. Observing each of these students during center rotations within my classroom during the ELA block, each student demonstrated the ability to independently and actively participate in a variety of independent learning activities to extend upon their previous learning: word work center, math center, science center, computer center,
writing center. Each student engaged in both strictly independent as well as collaborative learning experiences with their peers during centers.

When I interviewed each student, all three stated, in some form or another, that they enjoy centers and are knowledgeable of the classroom/center expectations that my co-teacher and I have established since introducing the center rotations and activities into our classroom. For example, Becca and Abby both reiterated the phrase, "Ask three before me," which is a saying we use during centers where students are expected to ask three of their peers in their center group for help if they have a question prior to seeking adult assistance. Adam also stated that "You can ask a friend," which implied the same expectation. When each student was asked what they do when another student is misbehaving or not doing their center activity correctly, each said some form of tell the teachers or ignore the other student.

The students uniquely answered my question of what they do when they work with a peer/friend. Becca stated, "I help them finish their work at the end." Abby mentioned that she sometimes helps. "I help them work or sometimes ask them questions," Abby said. Adam stated, "Yes, I help them. Sometimes I work with a partner to finish something." Although centers are termed as independent learning activities, my co-teacher and I create a variety of learning opportunities for students to engage in collaborative learning experiences; however, the three students did not mention working collaboratively with their peers or as a team to complete a task. This made me question if we’ve established a learning community where the students feel
successful and engaged when working with their peers, and not solely alone for the thirty-forty minute center rotations.

I loved the suggestions for future centers that both Abby and Adam provided. Abby suggested a “game center,” that would have puzzles and game boards, whereas Adam suggested “play dough” to make letters and words. Taking the students suggestions my co-teacher and I could create developmentally appropriate games and play dough activities where the students would be asked to extend upon previously learned information or complete as a can do activity versus the must do activities, such as the center they have been assigned. These suggestions gave me something to reflect upon and think about further.

**Benefits of Independent Learning Center Activities**

The common thread between each observation and student interview was that independent learning center activities provide experiences for the students to be engaged and extend upon their learning. Each student expressed their love for centers, which was apparent when I observed them smiling and giggling as they engaged in the various center activities. This type of engagement encourages students to take ownership of their learning and provide meaningful learning opportunities for students to actively participate in their learning. It also supports students’ abilities to independently transfer and apply previously learned concepts. Student engagement allows students to be motivated as they make deeper connections between their new
and prior knowledge. Together this helped foster students development of a deeper understanding of the topics being covered during whole and small group mini lessons.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Through my observations of and interviews with three of my kindergarten students, I was able to attain insight into what the students were doing during each independent center activity as well as the areas in need of improvement regarding the management and instructional approach to such independent learning activities.

Throughout my study, I sought to answer the research questions:

How are independent learning activities developmentally appropriate for kindergartners?

What types of independent learning activities promote the literacy development of kindergartners?

I examined how my kindergarten students interacted with and participated in the independent learning center activities that my co-teacher and I created. More specifically, I wanted to discover if the center activities we’ve created were developmentally appropriate and how and if they provided opportunities to extend student learning and reinforce academic skills taught in previous whole and small group mini lessons.

In this chapter, I present conclusions to my research questions. Based on my conclusions, I discuss the implications for student learning as well as the implications for my teaching. After presenting my conclusions and implications, I make
recommendations for future research, and reflect upon the ideas and concepts behind the origin of my thesis.

Conclusions

Clearly Established Teachers’ Expectations and Scaffolding of Procedures Ensured Student Success During Independent Learning Activities

Routines and set classroom expectations are at the root of independent learning center activity successes. I suspect that without the scaffolded learning opportunities that my co-teacher and I provided our students during the first two months of the school year to establish classroom expectations and center expectations, that the learning atmosphere during the center rotations would have been full of confusion and required frequent monitoring or redirection. My co-teacher and I taught our students to respect the learning of their peers and of themselves. We made each student aware of the important contributions that would help foster a community of learners: work quietly, give their best effort, and work well with their peers.

Once we had established the basic classroom rules and expectations for behaviors, my co-teacher and I were able to extend such expectations to the introduction of each independent learning center. Within each center activity, we expected the students to learn the procedures for task completion and the steps they’d take to have their question(s) answered. My co-teacher and I established the rule “Ask three before me” to help alleviate the constant need for student questions to be answered by an adult and for the disruption of guided reading instruction to take
place. The students were expected to ask three peers a question before they could approach a teacher for support. Our students came to the understanding that each student had an important role in the community of learners. Not only were the students in charge of their learning and final products, but they also had an important role to play in the learning of their peers. My co-teacher and I asked each student to provide support to his/her peers when it was necessary and when he/she was able as well as contribute to a collaborative yet peaceful classroom environment. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) reinforced the idea of scaffolding and establish expectations when they stated that “children respond to orderly and predictable environments and expectations that help them manage their time and behavior” (p. 69).

My co-teacher and I established the directions and expectations for each center activity the Monday or Tuesday prior to our students working independently to complete the tasks. Through a modeled exposure and review of each activity, my co-teacher and I provided the students with opportunities to preview the activities ahead of time as well as ask questions about the task. At times, the students engaged in shared practice of a center activity where they were asked by my co-teacher and me to provide a model of a behavior/strategy, provide feedback, or volunteer answers.

It is important to note that my co-teacher and I did not immediately push the students into the activities with the expectation that they would read all directions and independently complete the tasks without first exposing them to the activity and reviewing the topic that we had previously worked with in class. Each independent
learning center activity as well as the classroom expectations were scaffolded by me and my co-teacher to help establish clear and concise expectations.

**Use of Independent Learning Activities Held Students Accountable for their Learning**

From conducting this study, I recognized how some independent learning activities can provide kindergarten students with learning opportunities and experiences that enable them to be in charge of their own learning. O’Donnell and Hitpas (2010) supported the idea of student accountability by recognizing that the use of learning centers as a method of learning not only gave the kindergarten students in their study more power, but created a sense of self-confidence in the students.

During the center work in my study, there was not always an adult supervising an activity or providing feedback. Even at the age of five and six, kindergartners can be held accountable by their teachers to actively and independently participate in their own learning; to engage in extension activities and activate their knowledge both prior and newly acquired. I designed each center activity so the students could work diligently to complete the tasks within the specified time frame following the established directions. Although my co-teacher and I monitored the time frame, it was up to the students to determine what they would do during their time: abide by the expectations or not, complete meaningful work or not.

With accountability come parameters for autonomy and choice. I recognize that when students have learning opportunities in which they have choices, they are more likely to take pride in their work and feel a sense of accountability for and
responsibility to complete a task. This was true during my observation of Becca in the word work center when her group was independently hearing and recording the sounds of words within the winter scene. I observed Becca take responsibility for her own work and independently determine how she wanted to label her picture. When one of the girls in Becca’s group shared that she had written “bunny” instead of “rabbit” next to the picture, Becca raised her hand in excitement and shared, “I wrote bunny too. Not rabbit! That’s funny!” Becca’s immediate response revealed that she had made a connection with other students in her group; however, she independently chose how and what to label her picture.

In addition to the opportunities for autonomy and choice, the students were involved in experiences in which they were encouraged and motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically to complete their work to the best of their ability. For example, there were a few instances when Adam asked, “What do I do if I don’t finish?” To me, his question stemmed from his commitment to take responsibility for his learning and the need to review the expectations for completion of required tasks. At the end of each student observation, I recognized that the each one was proud of his or her work and that wanted to share it with peers and teachers.

Use of Independent Learning Activities that were Engaging and Hands-On Promoted Student Learning

After observing and interviewing three of my kindergarten students, it was evident to me that each student loved the different centers and looked forward to participating in the various activities four times a week. During some of my
observations, I noted the smiles across the student’s faces and the giggles that stemmed from their enjoyment with an activity or pleasure with himself/herself for completing a particular task. The three students each stated that the centers are “fun;” each provided his/her own reasoning for his/her response. Becca’s reasoned “They are really cool!” whereas Abby stated more concisely that “Some have things I like, like computer.” Adam the independent component of the activities, “I like to do work by myself.”

The majority of the learning activities I observed incorporated manipulatives and opportunities for the students to use their hands. From rearranging Dr. Seuss sentences to completing activities on the iPad or computer, the students worked regularly with manipulatives and participated actively in independent learning activities, both mentally and physically.

Throughout the study, I observed how the students remained task oriented and participated in the six different independent center rotations. At no point was there a need for an adult to provide constant supervision, whether it was from a teacher or a partner volunteer, nor was there a need for an adult to intervene due to inappropriate behaviors, such as off-task or misunderstanding the activity expectation/directions. Whether the three students worked independently or collaboratively, they were able to adhere to the expectations that my co-teacher and I had established and complete the activities according to the directions provided by me and/or my co-teacher. Very rarely did I observe that the students were confused about an activity or were missing materials that prevented them from completing their work.
If and when a student finished a center activity early, the student moved to a challenge activity that my co-teacher and I had established or one of us provided such a challenge in the moment. At no point were any of the three students sitting at their center location with nothing to complete.

**Teachers' Use of Differentiated Independent Learning Activities Challenged Each Student**

In addition to the elements of autonomy and choice, students require and deserve differentiated instruction that provides learning opportunities that meet them at their unique level of understanding and ability. Reyes (2010) enhanced her kindergarten learning centers through the use of hands-on activities to further engage those students “who were off-task and those who finished their work early” (p. 95). There were instances when Becca, Abby, and Adam completed center activities at a quicker rate than that of some of their peers, even when my co-teacher and I included extensions for their levels of understanding in the activity. For example, when Adam was working at the computer center during my last observation, he had typed the twenty-five kindergarten sights words and was able to correctly identify all twenty-five to Mrs. Frey, so instead of printing his work at that moment Mrs. Frey presented a challenge activity that I had prompted her to extend to those students who correctly identified their sight words. The challenge was for Adam to type sentences using his sight words and color words. When the challenge activity was extending to Adam he smiled and responded that he would complete the challenge. Prior to the end of the center rotation, Adam was able to independently type five sentences using sight
words and color words. This extension activity called upon Adam to go beyond recognizing and/or writing his sight words, but to use them within a sentence. This challenge helped Adam build from one sight word to a sentence using multiple sight words and/or color words.

Reyes (2010) found that learning center extension activities were an effective way to help students master academic standards and foster developmentally appropriate practices for differentiated levels of learners. Reyes (2010) developed learning center extensions based on observing her students and taking anecdotal notes on the student’s actions and conversations. The extension activities she created were thematic, open-ended activities that challenged all children to continue their learning after they completed the fundamental learning center task (Reyes, 2010).

Whether the students were provided with different hands-on manipulatives or a different expectation within the activity, the students each created a finished product that reinforced the same skills and knowledge of a topic. The differentiated instruction aligned complexity to the readiness levels and learning needs of the students. Such lessons enable teachers to plan different kinds and degrees of instructional structures and supports, based on each student’s level of understanding and readiness. I believe that teachers need to meet their students where they are in their level of understanding. Rog (2001) reinstates the importance of activities that are curriculum based and focused on student learning, and are structured in such a way that respects the learning processes of each student and helps them to reach their
fullest potential. Rog (2001) acknowledge that all students are at different stages of development and require different instructional strategies.

Within the flexible groupings that my co-teacher and I had established, our students are able to complete activities designed in a format that meets their unique learning needs while at the same time enabled them to complete the same learning objective at the end of the center rotation. As I observed Abby in the writing center recreating silly Dr. Seuss sentences, she was able to independently and successfully write the sentences and then read them. In addition to recreating and reading the sentences, Abby was asked by my co-teacher to generate a list of “an” and “at” words with a partner on the whiteboard. I observed Abby and her partner understand and successfully complete the center activity. My co-teacher extended this challenge to Abby as a way to push Abby’s and her partner’s thinking about word parts and patterns beyond a text, and to help them generate their own list of words collaboratively. I observed that when reading the silly sentences Abby needed to attend to each letter sound within a word to solve unknown words. The challenge activity tested Abby’s understanding of changing the beginning letter sounds to create new words.

From my observations and research, I recognize that the concept of differentiated levels of tasks was reinforced throughout the study. I also recognize how essential it is for teachers to take a student’s readiness and level of understanding into account when designing instruction. I observed that my co-teacher and I recognized each student’s differences and set challenging yet achievable learning
goals for each student during the independent learning activities. I came to recognize that at times my co-teacher and I posed the differentiated tasks to our students as "challenges," to make them appear more appealing and/or engaging. The concept of a challenge within the independent learning activities does not extend beyond differentiated instruction; however, it did, within the context of the research study, provide moments for students at any level of understanding to have additional learning opportunities to extend and/or refine their thinking as well as have the potential to gain a deeper level of understanding. Such challenges were typically created on the fly based on anecdotal notes and observations; however, at times my co-teacher and I created possible challenge activities ahead of time.

It is important to note that while my co-teacher and I may have extended challenges to a student in one activity or one content area that does not necessarily mean that it would be appropriate for the student’s level of understanding for the next activity or in a different content area. I understand that each student and his or her level of understanding must be at the root of the independent learning center activities that I create for the center rotations.

Implications for Student Learning

Students Benefit from a Predictable Learning Environment

Through my study, I was curious to see if I provided students with a predictable learning environment, if they would be able to independently and appropriately complete activities within a specified time frame. It was evident that the
three students clearly understood the routines established within the different center rotations. At no point during my observations were any of the students unaware of the expectations set within both the center rotation block of their day or the activity directions at hand.

The students were aware of the locations of each center as well as the routines within each. For example, Abby was able to appropriately navigate her way through a variety of steps at the computer center. During my observation of her on February 2, 2012, Abby appropriately located the Star Fall icon and completed the Groundhog’s Day activity in addition to other activities on the Star Fall website. It was evident to me that Abby felt comfortable navigating her way through the desktop icons as well as through the Star Fall website.

My co-teacher and I never put the students into an activity without first previewing the task and directions as well as providing the students with opportunities to ask questions. We introduced each of the center activities in a scaffolded manner. I believe that the predictability of the environment promoted student comfort and a sense of security, which then fostered the independent initiation and completion of the different center activities.

Use of Independent Learning Center Activities Promote Student Engagement and Motivation to Learn

The findings from this study revealed that independent learning center activities promoted kindergarten students’ engagement and level of motivation. Rog (2001) stated that learning centers provide opportunities for students to explore,
discover, and create. Through their interactions in a variety of center activities, the three students I observed consistently demonstrated a motivation to learn and make further discoveries into their learning.

The students never completed the exact same activity. Even though some of the students I observed visited a center rotation more than once, each time the activities presented new learning objectives and activities in which to meet such objectives. For example, when I first observed Adam working in the computer center the learning objective for that particular activity was to become familiar with the keys on the keyboard whereas when Adam worked on the iPad with his partner they were expected to identify the ending sounds of words. Although Adam was at the same center rotation, my co-teacher and I provided him with different learning objectives to accomplish the designated time frame. Pool and Carter (2011) recommended the use of a computer center as an additional way for teachers to provide a print-rich environment to encourage students to work with a range of literacy skills.

During the study, each student exhibited a desire to participate in his/her learning process while demonstrating his/her knowledge. For example, Becca’s *In January we...* writing sample demonstrated her ability to transfer the information that we’ve learned from whole-group writing lessons to her independent writing pieces. Becca met the learning objective we set for this particular lesson: draw and write using letters or words to communicate for different purposes as well as the use of punctuation marks. Her writing went beyond the learning objective as well through her incorporation of labeling her picture. During my observation of Becca in the
writing center, not only was she willingly to independently participate in her learning process, but she also demonstrated her understanding of the concepts about print and how to incorporate them into her writing.

I observed that during the students’ time in the center that they did not require teacher prompts to initiate an activity or to remain on task. My co-teacher and I provided the students with learning opportunities that we believed would ensure their success through the allocation of tasks that were neither too easy nor too difficult for each learner. I believe that if the students are either frustrated or bored, their learning can be impacted negatively.

Active engagement and motivation stem from the inclusion of some autonomy and choice. Throughout the study, my co-teacher and I provided each student with opportunities of varied amounts of choice through careful consideration and planning. I recognize that this sense of autonomy motivated the students to participate and demonstrate their learning.

I also believe that it is important to give students a choice within the activities that they complete. Opportunities for choice encourage students to uniquely identify personal learning strategies and styles to demonstrate what they have learned. The allowance of flexible thinking and presentation may lead to new student insights and/or a deeper level of understanding. Such learning experiences may help students gain a deeper love for learning as well.
Use of Differentiated Instruction Appropriately Challenge Students and Promote Learning

Based on the work of Rog (2001), I came to understand that traditional teaching methods were historically inflexible and permanent whereas the developmentally appropriate and differentiated learning opportunities that each student was provided within my observations revealed how the kindergarten learning environment can be designed to address the variety of learning styles, interests, and levels of understanding of all students in the classroom. Through differentiated instruction each student's individual learning needs were addressed; each student accomplished the learning objective of the activity in his/her own unique style. My co-teacher and I created the center activities in such a way that considered the skills and experiences of each student within the various center rotations. From such adjustments I never observed student frustration or lack of motivation with a task. The students appeared eager to demonstrate their learning and apply an array of learning styles to various tasks.

The curriculum extensions and real world connections made for meaningful learning opportunities. The students were able to take what they had learned from previous mini lessons and apply this new found knowledge within different contexts. The students were able to do so with such activities as word sorts, work mats, iPads and computer programs, science experiments, and interactive games. Based on my observations, I would deem the use of such activities as capable of promoting the literacy development of kindergartners as well as their development within other content areas. Through the incorporation of the different set center rotations and ever-
changing activities, the students were each given experiences to focus on specified
learning objectives and curriculum standards all while actively participating and
working with hands-on manipulatives to extend such learning.

Rog (2001) encouraged the use of learning centers to accommodate different
learning styles and intelligences in which students were expected to manage their
time, make choices, and use resources wisely. The students took ownership of their
learning, were involved, and took control by using their unique individual learning
styles to access the tasks, interpret the materials, and demonstrate their knowledge
and learning.

**Implications for My Teaching**

**Establish a Developmentally Appropriate Learning Community in which Each
Student Plays a Vital Role**

Based on the findings from my research study, I believe that clearly
established independent learning activity expectations promote a learning community
in which each learner is aware, comfortable, valued and successful. It was evident
that my students understood the rules during center rotations and were able to
appropriately follow them to complete the center activity. Whether it be the “Ask
three before me” expectation or the standard that if work is not completed within the
specified center rotation, it will be done during quiet time or play time, which was
agreed upon by the entire class back in September. Within the development of a
classroom management system, each kindergarten student helped brainstorm
expectations and solidify a plan for how we should function as a community of learners.

I will continue to co-create expectations with my students that clearly communicate specific standards of behavior and learning; standards that call upon each student to abide by in order to create a community of learners. I will continue to foster a learning community where each student has a voice; a voice that is to be heard in a respectful and appropriate manner. Each student’s voice will be fostered within whole group, small group and independent learning activities, such as the independent learning centers.

Based on my observations, the expectations that my co-teacher and I developed with our students clearly communicated to each student that school is a place for learning; a place in which we provided developmentally appropriate instruction and an environment. This gave the students a structure to help them feel that our classroom environment was a safe and predictable place to learn.

**Kindergarten Students’ Independence can be Fostered Through the Use of Independent Learning Activities**

Student independence is also referred to as independent learning, lifelong learning, and learning to learn. All of these terms refer to a concept where students are involved in their own learning process. Within such a process, students as young as my kindergartners start to make meaningful connections with the world outside the classroom. During my observations, I witnessed my students taking responsibility for their thinking and learning on their own during the independent learning activities.
rather than relying on me and my co-teacher to do the thinking for them or even guide their thinking directly. One of the most important techniques for me as a teacher that I have learned through my studies in general and this study in particular is the notion of releasing the responsibility to my students. I cannot expect perfection and independence within the independent learning activities without providing an appropriate environment and time frame that scaffolds the development of independence and establishes the expectations within the independence center rotations.

I anticipate that I will continue to invest time at the beginning of the year as well as the beginning of each school week to show my students what and how they will explore within each center rotation through clear demonstrations and explicit teaching. Through frequent modeling and scaffolded instruction, I believe that students will gradually, and over time, be able to apply the strategies and learning styles while working independently.

Through their work in the various independent learning activities, my kindergartners demonstrated their ability to be self-reliant, independent learners. They took responsibility for their learning and independently identified different strategies to achieve their learning. When the students were independent, they appeared intrinsically motivated by the progress he/she made in his/her learning and were reflective throughout the process. Adam was reflective when he conferenced with his peers about the work that he had completed and the steps that he took to complete such tasks just as he had done within my second observation of him participating in
the poetry center. I believe that a classroom that provides learning opportunities and experiences that foster learners’ independent will help prepare students for a world that is ever changing; an environment that promotes the acquisition and application of lifelong learning skills.

Use of Differentiation Respects the Unique Learning Styles and Readiness of Each Individual Student

I believe that the extension activities that my co-teacher and I incorporated into the independent learning center activities supported student learning. There is a significant body of research related to differentiated and tiered instruction; research, which I need to delve into more deeply. Based on five years’ experience as the Project Challenge coordinator for the Pittsford (New York) Central School District, Pettig (2000) explains how to implement differentiated instruction. Pettig (2000) suggests that “teachers should find a buddy, align objectives, find out what students know, plan flexible grouping, encourage student responsibility, and provide choices” (p. 14). Richards and Omdal (2007) state that “tiered instruction is grouping students for instruction based on their prior knowledge in a given subject area” (p. 425).

According to Richards and Omdal (2007), “each tier should be constructed to be respectful of learners and to facilitate understanding, matching the learner’s challenge level, while addressing the curricular components of content, process, or product to be differentiated” (p. 426).

My co-teacher and I identify learning objectives for the week that we believed were developmentally appropriate for our students. We then used the objectives to
develop independent learning center activities that we felt were most appropriate and would foster student achievement. Once we had brainstormed the activities, we then generated ways in which to provide differentiated opportunities.

In my future work, I would like to develop a better understanding of a tiered lesson format for activities that would consider the unique readiness and levels of understanding of each individual student. Although I respect the range of knowledge and readiness my students possess, I would like to discover instructional approaches to meet the unique strengths and needs of each student.

I will continue to carefully plan out the independent learning center activities with my co-teacher. I think that careful consideration and development of various differentiated formats will help meet each student at their level of understanding and promote learning from that starting point. I will continue to use assessments, anecdotal notes, and observations to better inform my instruction and the creation of center activities to meet the needs of my students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Look At How Teachers Differentiate Independent Center Activities and the Impact on Student Learning

Although my co-teacher and I create the independent center activities together, we brought to the table two educational philosophies and teaching styles in which we consider to create differentiated lessons and activities. Instead of observing students in just my classroom, I wish that I had had the opportunity to observe
students in other kindergarten classrooms and collected work samples to understand a greater range of unique learning styles, readiness, and differentiated activities.

In addition to classroom observations, I believe that it would have been beneficial to conduct teacher interview to learn how they create developmentally appropriate and differentiate independent learning activities whether it be centers, workstations. I think it would be beneficial to create a research question centered around how kindergarten teachers differentiate independent center activities and the impact on student learning. The findings from this type of research question could promote a better understanding of what developmentally appropriate independent activities look like.

I think that a pre- and post-assessment each week of observations could be developed in order to track the progress of each student’s learning and extended knowledge of concepts taught during mini-lessons. The collection of observations, student work samples, pre- and post-assessments, and interviews could provide a well-rounded insight into differentiated independent center activities and their potential impact on student learning.

**Compare the Effectiveness and Quality of Various Independent Learning Activities: Centers, Kidstations, Workstations, Daily Five**

It is an educator’s choice within my school district to choose the classroom literacy activities that students will independently or collaboratively complete during the ELA block of time while guided reading groups meet with the teacher(s). If teachers are using one specific format of independent learning activities, the theory
and effectiveness are likely to vary. Parents and teachers want the instruction that’s best for their students. The format and incorporation of different activities and/or expectations within the various independent learning activities can greatly affect student learning.

In addition, I think that if teacher-researchers considered the strengths and weaknesses of each independent learning activity and compared them amongst one another, educators would be better informed on the type of activity format that it most appropriate to meet the unique needs of each learner within their classroom. The format and expectations set within independent center activities directly correlates to the impact on student learning.

**Increase the Duration of the Study**

I believe that it would be beneficial to increase the amount of time this study was conducted. An increased duration may warrant more conclusive and representative results. Conducting a study such as this over a year’s time would give the teacher-researcher more time to conduct student observations, collect student work samples, and interview the students. Looking at the students throughout an entire school year could provide data to track the progress of student learning and participation within the center activities as it relates to student readiness and expectations in place.

Due to the fact that I conducted this study in a six-week time frame, I was unable to fully determine how a center’s activities that I’ve co-created were
developmentally appropriate, especially for more than just the three students who I observed. Therefore, I believe if a researcher took more time, he or she would able to observe and interview additional students, which could provide insights representative of the developmental continuum of literacy development.

**Final Thoughts**

Independent learning activities are a daily happening in my classroom as are my initial nerves surrounding the implementation of each activity. Guided reading instruction is an essential component within the balanced literacy approach within my district and there are a variety of approaches in which a teacher can take to implement activities for students to complete when they are not receiving small group guided reading instruction from the teacher. I learned that a variety of independent learning activities promote the learning and literacy development of kindergartners. Presenting literacy and other content learning objectives within a variety of instructional styles provides multiple opportunities for students to be actively engaged and extend upon previously learned information.

I believe that it is important for teachers to brainstorm an array of activities that promote both student independence and learning while at the same time taking into consideration student needs and strengths. This provides instruction that considers the readiness and understanding levels of each student as well as holding students more accountable. Just as Fountas and Pinnell's (1996) literacy centers provide a physical area with materials to enable students to explore and work
independently as active learners, the independent learning activities that my co-teacher and I implemented did the same. My co-teacher and I implement many of the center rotations that were recommended by Diller (2003): ABC/word study, poetry, computer.

I've seen how capable kindergarten students are at taking responsibility for their learning and applying their own unique learning styles to contribute to their literacy development. A student's literacy development and learning is supported through a team effort and through a scaffolded model. Before teachers can push their students off the edge of independence in education, we must first provide them with a parachute that they feel safe to independently pull and initiate the jump towards lifelong learning. I believe that independent learning center activities promote student learning, motivation, and participation in their education.
December, XX, 2011

Dear Parent/Guardian,

In addition to being your child’s teacher, I am also a graduate student in the Department of Education and Human Development at The College at Brockport, SUNY. I am conducting a research study to examine how students respond to the independent learning activities they complete while I meet with small groups of students for reading instruction. I hope to learn about a range of independent learning activities that provide my kindergarten students with opportunities to practice a range of integrated literacy skills in authentic and meaningful ways.

If you grant consent for your child to participate in this study, I will observe him/her during our daily independent learning centers time two times over the course of the six week study. My observations will focus on your child’s understanding of the task and levels of engagement as he/she completes the independent learning activities. I will interview students at the completion of various independent learning activities. The interview questions will focus on the process of completing learning activities independently, and the child’s opinions about the activities. I will audio tape the interviews. I will take notes on a daily basis during our independent learning activities time for approximately six weeks.

The enclosed observation and interview consent forms include information about your child’s rights as a study participant, including how I will protect his/her privacy. Please read the forms carefully. If you are willing to allow your child to participate, please indicate your consent by signing the attached statements and returning them to me. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicole Vaughn
Graduate Student
The College at Brockport, SUNY

Dr. Don Halquist
Thesis Advisor
The College at Brockport, SUNY
Appendix B

CONSENT FOR OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEW OF STUDENT

The main purpose for conducting this study is to help me, Nicole Vaughn, gain insight and understanding into the types of independent learning activities that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful for my kindergarten students during the guided reading English Language Arts block. I am a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY as well as a teacher in your child’s kindergarten classroom.

In order to solicit student participants, I will send home a letter to each parent/guardian informing him/her of the research that I will be conducting in my classroom. From the group of responses, I will randomly select one student from each center activity group. I anticipate using three student participants. If I select a student and the next student is in that same center group, I will select a new student’s name.

If you agree to have your child participate in this research study and he/she is randomly selected, I will observe your child during his/her independent learning activity work time. Your child may also be randomly selected for an interview.

In order for your child to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in the study. If you would like for your child to participate, and agree with the statements below, please sign your name in the space provided at the end. You may change your mind at any time and your child may leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun. Your child can decline participation in the study even with your consent to participate.

I understand that:

a. My child’s participation is voluntary and he/she has the right to refuse to answer any questions.

b. My child’s confidentiality is guaranteed. Her/his name will not be recorded in observation notes. There will be no way to connect my child to the observation. If any publication results from this research, s/he would be identified by a pseudonym. Results will be given through the use of pseudonyms, so neither the participants nor the school can be identified.

c. There will be no anticipated personal risks or benefits because of participation in this project.

d. My child’s participation involves participating in regularly scheduled classroom activities in her/his kindergarten classroom.
e. The researcher will observe my child for twenty minutes during each independent learning activity rotation within the six week study. The researcher will video tape my child during the classroom observations.

f. The results will be used for the completion of a thesis paper by the primary researcher.

g. My child’s participation may involve being audio taped during an interview. It is estimated that it will take 15 minutes to complete the interview. The researcher will transcribe the audio tapes. There will be no way to connect my child to the interview. If any publication results from this research, he/she would not be identified by.

h. Data, audio tapes, video tapes and transcribed notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by the researcher. Only the primary researcher will have access to the notes, tapes and corresponding materials. The researcher will shred all data, audio tapes, transcribed notes and consent forms when the research has been accepted and approved.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to allow my child to participate as a participant in this study. I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my child’s participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. If you have any questions, you may contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nicole Vaughn</th>
<th>Dr. Don Halquist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Researcher, Graduate Student</td>
<td>Thesis Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College at Brockport, SUNY</td>
<td>The College at Brockport, SUNY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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I grant consent for my child to be observed and videotaped.

Signature of Parent/Guardian __________________________ Date: ____________

I grant consent for my child to be observed, but do not agree to have him/her videotaped.

Signature of Parent/Guardian __________________________ Date: ____________

I do not grant consent for my child to be observed.

Signature of Parent/Guardian __________________________ Date: ____________
I grant consent for my child to be interviewed and audiotaped.

Signature of Parent/Guardian ___________________________ Date: __________

I grant consent for my child to be interviewed, but do not agree to have him/her audiotaped.

Signature of Parent/Guardian ___________________________ Date: __________

I do not grant consent for my child to be interviewed.

Signature of Parent/Guardian ___________________________ Date: __________

Child’s Name ________________________________________
Appendix C
STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student Pseudonym: __________________________ Date: ______________

Thank you for talking with me about your work in the independent learning activities, also known as centers in our classroom.

1. Let’s begin talking about what center or centers you enjoy doing the most. In our class we have five centers—computer, ABC, math, word work, and listening. Is there one center that is your favorite? Tell me what you like most about that center.

2. What do you do if you have a question or have trouble with a center?

3. Is there a center that you have trouble finishing?

4. What do you do if you finish a center early?

5. Do you work with your peers/friends during centers? If yes, explain how?

6. What do you do if your peers/friends are misbehaving or not doing their center correctly?

7. What else would you like me to know about your work in the centers?

8. Is there a center you think we should have that we don’t? If so, what would that be?

Thanks again, for talking with me about your work.
Appendix E

STATEMENT OF ASSENT FOR OBSERVATION
To Be Read to Kindergarten Students

I am your teacher, but I am also a student at The College at Brockport, SUNY. I want to learn more about independent learning activities, and how you work during this part of your school day.

To learn about what you do, I would like to write in a notebook while you are working. If you decide to let me learn more about what you do during the activities, I won’t write down your name or let anyone else know who you are. When I write about you in my study, I will only say what you did and how you feel about the activities.

Your parent or guardian has given permission for you to take part in this study, but it’s up to you to decide if you would like to. If you would like to take part in my study, but change your mind later on, you can tell me that you have changed your mind. It is okay to change your mind at any time.

If it is okay with you for me to learn more about learning activities, you can write your name on the first line below. Under your name you can write today’s date, which is ____________.

Thank you very much,
Mrs. Vaughn

Name: ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________

Witness (over the age of 18): ________________________
Appendix F

STATEMENT OF ASSENT FOR INTERVIEW
To Be Read to Kindergarten Students

I am your teacher, but I am also a student at The College at Brockport, SUNY. I want to learn more about independent learning activities, and how you work during this part of your school day. I would like to talk with you to learn about what you think about the activities.

If you decide to let me talk with you, I will audiotape our interview. I won't write down your name or let anyone else know who you are. When I write about you in my study, I will only say what you did and how you feel about the activities.

Your parent or guardian has given permission for you to take part in this study, but it's up to you to decide if you would like to. If you would like to take part in my study, but change your mind later on, you can tell me that you have changed your mind. It is okay to change your mind at any time.

If it is okay with you for me to learn more about centers, you can write your name on the first line below. Under your name you can write today's date, which is __________.

Thank you very much,
Mrs. Vaughn

Name: ______________________________________

Date: ______________________________________

Witness (over the age of 18): __________________________
References


International Reading Association (IRA) & National Association for the Education of


Seuss, Dr. (1949). *Bartholomew and the oobleck*. Random House Books for Young