

CHAPTER 1

Chapter One gives an introduction to the following action research study. The chapter will provide an introduction to integrating visual arts in the classroom to teach basic literacy skills including: word families and rhyming words. The chapter also discusses the problem statement, statement of purpose, and rationale behind the following action research. The chapter will offer a brief introduction to the study, the background for the study, the participants, the research questions for the study, and the method by which the study will be completed.

Pre-school is the starting place for children on their journey through school. It is at this first start that children can begin progress toward academic success, or it is here that they may begin to show signs of academic challenges. This action research intervention will address the impact of teaching with visual arts to help Pre-Kindergarten students (ages four and five) understand and remember important skills on which they can build every day (Parsons, 2005). This means that this action research study will set out to identify whether using visual arts in teaching instruction has a positive effect on Pre-K student academic achievement with rhyming words and word families (Smilan & Miraglia, 2009). In essence, visual arts can be described as forms that create works that are primarily visual in nature, such as ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts, photography, video, film making, and architecture

(Unbound Visual Arts, 2012). This action research study will use different media of visual arts to reach all aspects of student learning. For this reason, this project is focused on providing

learners with effective ways of teach (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In addition, through the use of painting, sculpture, decorative arts, and creativity in the Pre-K classroom, the needs of each child will be met when learning rhyming words and word families. My goal for this project is for my

→ how/why are you making this a distinct item?

Can you think of a more narrative way to introduce your work? This is the 1st we hear your voice. What do you want us to know? What's the story?

Can you provide an example of this? Tell us a story.

Can you demonstrate this? That seems like a tall order

I don't follow.

is this the thrust of your study?

students to have a memorable and enjoyable learning experience that prepares them for their academic careers (Richards, 2003)

In addition, Antilla (2013) explains that “the ability to read and process information is a necessary part of our educational experience. The teaching of reading and writing is key for the formation of literacy as young children attend school, through adolescence, and finally as they emerge as competent and educated adults. Literacy is now, more than ever, essential for basic survival on a day-to-day basis. The student that struggles to read will struggle in all subject areas, affecting and perhaps perpetuating negative attitude towards reading and school in general” (p. 5).

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Therefore, it is an essential part of learning to read that Pre-K students learn rhyming words and word families so they can build on those words to help them begin to read. On the same token, the visual arts aspect of my action research project, being creative is an important part of who we are as individuals and when we take this opportunity away from our children, we may be taking away their future. I believe it is vitally important to use strategies like incorporating visual arts within the classroom to help teach early literacy skills to Pre-K students before they enter the elementary setting so they are set up for success (Richardson, Sacks & Ayers, 2003).

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Statement of the Problem

The ability to read and comprehend are both essential skills for students to become successful and productive citizens in today’s society (Tucker, 2017). In everyday life we are required to read and comprehend what we are reading at some point during the day. But if our students do not have the skills to learn how to begin reading through learning rhymes and word

families then they cannot even begin to comprehend. Learning early literacy skills in Pre-K should indeed be an enjoyable experience for all students, and learning about word families and rhyming words can create a foundation for beginning to read that student will continue to build on throughout their years of schooling (Bara, Gentaz, Cole & Sprenger-Charolles, 2004). Using visual arts to help teach these skills is a bonus to help students have an enjoyable experience of learning literacy skills, as opposed to getting frustrated through using traditional methods such as flash cards and/or worksheets (Wurst, Jones & Moore, 2005). Punzalan (2018) states that, “children do learn well through play and experimentation, and visual arts techniques can be used to encourage this learning across all curriculum areas. Using visual arts in different learning areas helps students to participate, and this will develop their confidence. As they enjoy doing artwork, their knowledge and abilities also escalate” (p. 22).

you need to establish why-

formatly

In my own Pre-K classroom, our philosophy focuses on the Reggio Emilia approach: we view our students as individuals who are curious about their world and have the potential to learn from everything that surrounds them (Van Dijk & Jochems, 2002). We also use the Montessori approach, in which our students make creative choices in their learning, and I, as their teacher, provide opportunities for them to do this (Puzalan, 2018). Because of these approaches, it is a struggle to incorporate those traditional methods of teaching, such as small and whole group instruction, to teach my students these basic literacy skills of rhyming words and word families. It is a struggle because it is hard to get them to sit down and focus on the instruction because they are used to exploring and discovering on their own. The last thing my students want to do is sit down and focus on an activity at the table when their classmates are free exploring on their own (Baker, 1992).

you could argue that Reggio Emilia & Montessori are both traditional approaches.

You might need to spend some time discussing how recognizing rhyming words are a developmentally appropriate skill for pre-K. Currently, half of my class struggles with both recognizing and producing rhyming words. Reg + Mont would have a lot to say about that.

words, as well as recognizing word families and producing words for a specific word family.

These students do not understand the concept of coming to the table to sit down for a few minutes to learn these skills. Using the Reggio Emilia and Montessori approach at Ivy Brook

Academy, our students are more inclined to learn on their own when it feels right for them, to discover and explore, and our parents are less likely to help with these skills at home because

they do not want to pressure their children to produce these skills, preferring for them to discover

them on their own. This lack of developmental readiness for these literacy skills can be attributed

to the philosophies that we use within our school. Moreover, the other half of my class can

produce and recognize rhyming words and word families because they have either learned these

skills at home or they came from a different school that uses more of the traditional approach.

According to Galvez (2018), learners respond to information differently. Thus, it is often to the advantage of the teachers to use many different formats and modes to teach the subject matter of a lesson. Since my school uses the Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches, as opposed to much of the traditional methods of teaching, using visual arts to teach rhyming words and word families to my students will follow the philosophies of these approaches hence solving the existing gap in learning in schools, meaning that my students will be able to explore using visual arts to help learn rhyming and word families freely on their own, as opposed to sitting down and learning them through direct instruction.

As stated above, using Reggio Emilia, I view my students as individuals who are curious about their world and have the potential to learn from everything that surrounds them, and using the Montessori approach, my students make creative choices in their learning in my classroom. I will be able to stay away from the traditional ways of teaching of relying mainly on textbooks

Can you spend some time on what the research literature says pre-K learners need?

and/or worksheets, emphasizing mainly basic skills that involve mastering new language and word forms and assessing through tests. This will allow my students to explore and allow me as their teacher to create opportunities for them to learn rhyming words and word families through using visual arts in my classroom (Smilan & Miraglia, 2009).

I'm unclear about this connection still. I don't disagree,

Research Questions

The purpose of this study will be to determine the impact teaching with visual arts has on helping students understand and remember the important skills of rhyming and word families. This action research study will identify whether using visual arts in instruction had a positive effect on student academic achievement in literacy. My research questions for this study are as follows:

but you need to explain this more clearly.

- What impact will decorative arts have on student achievement of **producing and recognizing rhyming words**?
- What impact will painting and sculpture have on student achievement of **producing and recognizing word families**?

use consistent language - Is it visual or decorative?

These questions will help the researchers to understand the importance of visual arts in improving the mastery of new language and techniques that help to improve one's competence in their skill.

Theoretical Framework

Visual arts are at the heart of the theoretical framework of this study. I wanted to make sure that for my particular study that I focused on my student's success coming from working/producing visual arts to learn literacy skills verses it being just the physical motion of doing the artwork in which helps the students learn literacy skills. Using artwork to teach content

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can make it a carrier of multiple meanings that can stimulate understanding and emotion (Pelowski et al., 2016). Using art can also impact what we see, influence changes in students visual or perceptual experience involving new attention to physical aspects of what is being taught (Pelowski et al., 2016). When using visual arts to teach basic literacy skills studies show that it is not just physical motions taking place but that the brain is actually processing information differently. The use of visual arts helps one to “process and make sense of what would otherwise be chaotic and overwhelming” when it comes to a new array of information such as basic literacy skills (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 55).

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to pre-lit
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Creating artwork can become an experience in itself where one can go through a series of information-processing stages, focusing largely on perceptual attunement to various formal factors in art (Silvia, 2006). Based on these information-processing stages Silvia (2006) states that through learning other subjects using visual arts, one's brain can begin “cognitive mastering,” in which one creates and/or discovers meaning by making interpretations, associations, and links to existing knowledge. Also, using visual arts to learn helps to “motivate learning, thinking, and exploring, actions that foster the growth of knowledge” (Silvia, 2006, p. 140).

Tucker (2017) states that “Art can act as a universal language for students who cannot yet read, who may be emergent readers, or may be struggling with proficiency.” Using visual arts to help teach basic literacy skills such as word families and rhymes can be an alternative method to help students learn the necessary skills they need to begin reading. After thinking about the current philosophies of my preschool in which we use the Montessori approach which views students to be capable of making creative choices in their learning and the teacher provides opportunities for them to do this, incorporated with Reggio Emilia approach which is developed

How
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on the belief that the students are curious about their world and they have the capability to learn from everything that surrounds them I wanted to find a way to incorporate the visual arts in my

literacy small group time. I then made the decision to learn more about integrating visual arts into teaching literacy skills and how implementing these ideas could effectively help my students with learning rhymes and word families.

Bara et al., (2004) discovered that the factors on influencing reading lie in the development of meta-phonological abilities, which are abilities that allow children to identify phonological components of linguistic units and manipulate them. They go on to discuss further research that the students have a hard time establishing a connection between a visual image of a word and the auditory image. For example, using clay to sculpt different things from a specific word family such as the word family -at, they may sculpt a cat, a rat, and/or a bat to show they know these words all belong with the -at word family. Bara et al., (2004) state that “with the intervention of visuo-haptic and kinesthetic exploration of letters and the ability of merging visual and tactile perceptions of both virtual and real objects, and kinesthetic exploration of letters in a training to develop phonemic awareness, knowledge of letters, and letter/sound correspondence for kindergarten students these skills will help them understand the alphabetical principle” (p. 6).

Richardson, Sacks, & Ayers (2003) have explained that “visual arts, such as drawing and soft sculpture, also enhance writing skills by encouraging creative thinking” (p. 6). Kelly (1999) & Forsten (2004) explain that “mathematics can be more engaging to students when drawing is included in problem-solving techniques” (p. 6). In addition, Stellflue, Allen, & Gerber (2005) found that “botanical science can be more engaging when a connection with 3-D art is established” (p. 6). Phillips (2019) asserts that “decades of research have provided more than a

sufficient amount of data to prove that arts education impacts everything from overall academic achievement to social and emotional development and so much more” (para 2).

A visual arts literacy instruction offers students other opportunities to display their learning via alternative methods (Tucker, 2017). Murray & Brightman (1996) found that “an interactive approach to learning and teaching in visual arts education increases the interchange between all subjects in the educational process, and promotes critical and creative thinking by using active, student-centered teaching strategies such as active, experiential, independent, investigative, cooperative and problem-solving learning” (p. 76). Smilan & Miraglia (2009) and Van Dijk & Jochems (2002) explain that using visual arts in the classroom “also leads to a better understanding of the subject matter, a better ability to synthesize and integrate learning material, increased motivation, higher order cognitive skills, greater retention of material and more positive attitudes (p. 75). Arts activities can serve as “effective learning tools as students become actively engaged in a learning project” (Gullatt, 2008, p. 18).

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Purpose of the Study

In my research, I plan to be an insider who collaborates with other insiders. My research will contribute to the knowledge base, enable me to improve or critique my practice, and facilitate my transformation in using visual arts to teach rhyming words and word families to my students. In essence, power dynamics help to ensure that learners have mastered new set of skills that improve and promoting their learning processes (Bloom, 1965). The key stakeholders involved in this action research study would be my co-teacher and I, who are seeing the decrease in student achievement in recognizing and producing rhyming words and word families, as well as my students, who are in need of using visual arts to learn these skills of producing and recognizing rhyming words and word families for academic achievement in literacy. My

administrators are also stakeholders and will want to see the results of the study to see if any changes can be made in the classroom and/or school based on the results. The final stakeholders involved in this action research study are my students' parents, who will strive to see the academic achievements that will be made using visual arts to teach rhyming words and word families during the action research study. In addition, Ahmet (2016) argues, "the fusion of arts with core content is important because, rather than seeing humanities or science as knowledge on a page, something to be recited in an exam, students see far greater benefits when art reflects life and makes knowledge, stories, and facts come alive. Art brings color, life, and interpretation to those things." (para. 11).

Moreover, throughout my academic career from as early as elementary school through college, I have always used visual arts to help me remember facts, process information, and complete projects. Whether it be doodling pictures beside words to help me remember definitions or creating a song to help me remember the order of events for history, using visual arts or just the arts in general has always helped me achieve in different subject areas because it allowed me to express myself through the learning, which then helped me with remembering things. As a personal example and reflection in high school, I was taking my history class, and we were learning about the 1920's. We were able to pick an influential person during that time, and we could use the arts to describe the person and what made them influential. I remember painting the famous jazz singer Billie Holiday, who re-made the song "Stormy Weather," which was a famous jazz song throughout the 1920's. We then as a class had a 1920's theme night when other students and parents could see our works of art or performances (some students sang or danced). I was able to share the information about how influential jazz was during the period of the 1920's and share some of the famous jazz musicians and singers from that time period. I

shared this information without even having notecards in front of me because I had obtained the information through creating the art to go along with it. Through my high school arts experiences, through my college experiences with visual arts as my minor, and through many other experiences, I feel very strongly about how important it is to incorporate the arts in the classroom with other core subjects. In addition, Constantino (2002) states that, “instead of dichotomizing the value of the arts as intrinsic or instrumental, perhaps it is better to conceive of the arts as an essential component in an interdisciplinary curriculum in which every subject contributes to the cognitive restructuring process that generates future learning” (p. 11).

In this action research study, the formal authority will be related to the teachers and administration being involved in the study as the research takes place and we are all collaborating with each other and participating in the research. They will have an impact throughout the study by providing feedback, looking at the data, and making decisions. In this action research study, the informal authority will be impacted through my thinking as the teacher, planner, and one who implements the project. I will have an impact on this study because I will know who needs more support in literacy and whom to target more with this study.

I have a mixture of beliefs when it comes to my educational philosophy. I believe children learn through all types of experiences from hands-on to direct instruction, which is why I believe in using the following philosophies: With that being said, I do not believe these standards should be taught strictly through direct instruction and completely disciplined because students do not all learn the same way. This is where my philosophy takes the progressive approach in believing that children should have a say in their learning through testing experiments by using hands-on learning, experiencing by doing rather than being told what to do,

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details

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and asking questions about what interests them (Diehl, 2006). Lastly, I believe in a touch of the humanist philosophy in which students are self-motivated to achieve their highest level of achievement. They have personal freedom, choice, and are responsible for what they want to focus on in their own learning (Diehl, 2006).

All of these philosophies together I believe create a perfect balance within the classroom and combined remind me of the teachings I do today at the preschool level. We have structured, direct instruction of collaborative themes such as fall, safety, and community helpers, which we teach directly to our students as a whole group or in small groups using lesson plans provided for us. We also plan small group lessons in which our students are working to reach a common goal of mastery in one particular standard in math or ELA. These ways of teaching remind me of ^{how?}essentialism. Then we have time in which our students are shown how to use new materials and ^{why?}are free to explore them on their own, which reminds me of the progressivism (McLeod, 2019).

Lastly, during our students' outside time or free time within the classroom, they are able to have personal freedom, choice, and responsibility in taking care of the items they wish to explore.

This reminds me of humanism. In ^{how/why}my school, we call this type of teaching a mixture of traditional teaching, the Reggio Emilia approach, and the Montessori approach, which correspond with essentialism, progressivism, and humanism: they all have similar qualities, just different names (Diehl, 2006).

This feels constructivist

I like to call this philosophy: The Human Progressive Essential philosophy, the perfect combination of philosophies to create the perfect learning environment for all of our students. My beliefs of progressivism and my belief that hands-on learning is vitally important in the classroom align with incorporating visual arts within the classroom while teaching literacy.

Overview of the Methodology

The study will be conducted specifically in the pre-school in which I teach 20 Pre-K students. In addition, I plan to collaborate with my co-teacher and my administrators at the school as well as work with parents of my students to achieve the goals of the study through conversations, meetings, interviews, and checklists. This action research study will use a mixed methods approach. According to Efron and Ravid (2013), “action research is usually defined as an inquiry conducted by educators in their own setting in order to advance their practice and improve their students’ learning” (p. 2). I chose action research because in order to make a change within my classroom that will affect my students and the practices of my own teachings, I have to be directly involved in the study. The mixed methods approach is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research practices. Using both qualitative and quantitative research practices, I am able to address all the questions and concerns in my study versus just using one approach (Treiman & Francis, et al, 1998).

Describe your approaches

The purpose of this study is to use the implementation of visual arts in the classroom to create better reading and language skills among my students (Catterall, 1998). When I am implementing my action research project, I will be asking questions and doing visual art projects that will allow for my students to use their declarative knowledge which is using any piece of information that can only be learned through memorization (Ahmet, 2016). They will have to use their declarative knowledge by producing and recognizing rhyming words and word families. They will have to use their procedural knowledge through sculpting, painting a picture, or using decorative arts. I will be using a checklist to see if my students they understand the concept being taught using the visual arts project verses them just doing art (quantitative research).

I will use the PELI (Preschool Early Literacy Indicators) assessments for my pre-intervention test and post-intervention test using their test as a guide to see where my students are throughout my research (quantitative research). When the results are in from my pre-assessments, I will then randomize the groups of my students into four groups of five students randomly split and not based on the data from the pre-assessments. This will allow for my intervention of using visual arts to be available to all students regardless of their ability levels. That way when I receive the results of the post assessment, I am really able to see if my intervention made a positive change on my students' abilities to learn basic literacy skills through using visual arts.

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Significance of Study

Students are no longer learning from just sitting at their desks and listening to their teachers lecture them. Students are doers who want to touch and feel things while they are learning. They want to be hands-on while they are learning. Therefore, why not use visual arts to teach them their basic literacy skills such as beginning letter sounds, rhyming words, and word families. Tucker (2017) states "By incorporating the arts into the classroom curriculum, students can have alternative methods to demonstrate learning, and it allows them to use their strengths to display their understanding (p. 12)." Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2006) have noted several challenges with teaching literature in early childhood preschool settings, such as: there is no universal literacy curriculum; there is no way to ensure the curriculum has addressed learning growth in the students (Wylie & Durrell, 1970).

With these challenges comes the reality that visual arts programs being underfunded and/or taken out of schools (Parsons, 2005). This is supported by the idea that "Many continue to believe that art is dominantly a matter of feeling, intuition, talent, or creativity, all understood as

these quotes are good but how do they help us understand pre-literacy development?

not including what we normally call thinking; hence, art still has a weak place in the curriculum”

(Parsons, 2005, p. 370). But “the arts are a fundamentally important part of culture, and an

education without them is an impoverished education leading to an impoverished society.

Studying the arts should not have to be justified in terms of anything else” (Hetland & Winner, 2001, p. 5).

I want to address the problem of ensuring that visual arts can be used to improve learning and how beneficial they can be for student achievement in combination with core subjects, especially literacy. The incorporation of visual arts into teaching literacy may help students who have not achieved with previous interventions make some improvements in their literacy academic performance. This is supported by the statement by Gibson and Larson (2007) which states that “If student cognitive development is foremost in the minds of educators, then learning experience should not be limited solely to those avenues offered by math, science, and reading” (Gibson & Larson, 2007).

Limitations of Study

A few limitations to my action research study would be the small size that I am working with, which is a sample of only 20. This may be a limitation exists due to a large enough effect on a whole school community because it is just in one class. Another limitation to my action research study would be the ages of the group I am studying, 4- and 5-year-old students. This can cause a limitation due to the fact that not all parents send their kids to a preschool, so the study may not affect enough students in that age group to make a change (Adams, 1990).

Dissertation Overview