

Franklin University

FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange)

---

Urbana University Master's Theses

School of Education

---

2008

## Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Use and Effectiveness of the Phonics Dance with Kindergarten through Grade Three Students

Angela Longmire  
*Urbana University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fuse.franklin.edu/urbana-theses>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Longmire, Angela, "Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Use and Effectiveness of the Phonics Dance with Kindergarten through Grade Three Students" (2008). *Urbana University Master's Theses*. 64.  
<https://fuse.franklin.edu/urbana-theses/64>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange). It has been accepted for inclusion in Urbana University Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange). For more information, please contact [fuse@franklin.edu](mailto:fuse@franklin.edu).

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE USE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF  
THE PHONICS DANCE WITH KINDERGARTEN THROUGH  
GRADE THREE STUDENTS

Submitted to the Faculty of Urbana University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education  
College of Education and Sports Studies  
Department of Graduate Studies

By  
Angela C. Longmire  
Urbana University  
Urbana, Ohio

2008

Approved: 4/25/2008  
Advisor: Michael R. Gaud, Ph.D.

FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	
Statement of the <b>Problem</b> .....	3
Significance of the Study.....	3
Questions to be <b>Investigated</b> .....	4
Definition of <b>Terms</b> .....	4
Research Procedures and Methodology.....	7
<b>Assumptions</b> .....	7
Limitations.....	7
Delimitations.....	8
II. RELATED RESEARCH AND LITERATURE.....	9
III. PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY	
<b>Subjects</b> .....	23
Instrumentation.....	23
<b>Procedures</b> .....	24
IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA.....	25
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	
<b>Summary of Findings</b> .....	30
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	31
<b>Implications</b> .....	31
Recommendations and Future <b>Research</b> .....	32
Appendices	
Appendix A-Teacher Survey.....	36
Appendix B- Survey Letter for Administrators.....	39
Appendix C-Administrator Notice of <b>Mailing</b> .....	41
Appendix D-Survey Cover Letter.....	43
Tables	
Table 1-Student <b>Surveys</b> .....	34
Table 2-Teacher Survey.....	36
References.....	45

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

One in four children in the United States grow up not knowing how to read while one in twenty adults were illiterate (NCES, 2006). As a result, many students and adults struggle throughout their lives (NICHD, 1997). In response to this need, teachers constantly search for ways to improve their students reading and achievement. At the elementary school level, one such strategy has been the use of phonics.

Phonics programs have varied greatly and controversy has grown regarding the variety of ways in which phonics are utilized to improve students' learning and achievement. Historically, whole language phonetic concepts have been taught. Still, research has shown that phonics cannot be taught in a whole language format. Rather phonics has shown to be effective when taught in an explicit way where students have had the opportunity to manipulate words, such as *The Phonics Dance* (Dowd, 1999). The purpose of this study was to determine elementary teacher perceptions regarding the use and effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance* (Dowd, 1999).

#### Significance of the Study

Elementary teacher, Virginia Dowd of Troy, Ohio created *The Phonics Dance* in 1999. *The Phonics Dance* has been used regionally in elementary grades for several years and has developed a significant regional following. The spiraling language arts program incorporated movement, special chants, and repeated practice. It was based on the supposition that teachers could not teach a concept briefly of students were to gain

understanding of that concept as part of their permanent memory (Dowd, 1999). Therefore, the program stressed that students must practice the sounds of the alphabet, diphthongs, diagraphs, and phonemes repeatedly over extended time in order to become better readers and writers (Dowd, 1999). Significantly, while many studies have examined the various phonetic methods for improving reading and writing no research previously has endeavored to examine the use and effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance*.

#### Question to be Investigated

1. What were elementary (K-3) teacher perceptions regarding the use and effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance*?

#### Definition of Terms

**Hunks and Chunks** Hunks and Chunks are synonymous terms referring to letter combinations that make up r-controlled vowels, variant vowels, diagraphs and diphthongs.

**Hunking and Chunking** A decoding strategy that trains the eye to look for letter combinations and their sounds in words rather than individual sounds.

**National Reading Panel (NRP)** A national reading group that publishes professional quality writing and reviews research on how children learn to read and determine which methods to teaching are the most effective based on research.

**Rimes** Rimes are familiar letter combinations or word parts. Rimes are often referred to as word families, phonograms, or the chunk of a word. One decoding skill taught in *The Phonics Dance* is to look for the onset and the rime. There are 37 common rimes identified that make up many of the high frequency words many primary students need to be able to read.

**Six Steps to Literacy in the Primary Grades** These six steps are part of *The Phonics Dance* philosophy of literacy. This way of thinking includes developing sound attack, the use of a word wall, creative writing, student/teacher conferencing, treacherous word training, and daily reading of various types of literature.

***The Phonics Dance*** This is a language arts program that teaches children decoding techniques to use in their reading. Forty different hunks and chunks are incorporated in *The Phonics Dance* with each chunk having its own chant and movement. It breaks down words into chunks rather than just letters with individual sounds, which makes it easier for students to decode words. It was done in approximately ten to fifteen minutes each day as part of a primary lesson in a word study branch of language arts.

**Treacherous Word Training** A technique used to help students develop their vocabulary by looking for “hunks” and “chunks” in the decoding process. Students are taught to find consonant clusters (blends), rimes, variant vowels, and smaller words within words.

Phonemes	The 44 units of spoken language. Phonemes are spelled in more than one way. An example is an as in “rain,” “make,” “eight,” and “day.” (Holten, 2004)
Graphemes	The 26 letters of written language.
Phonemic Awareness	A foundational area that must be established before phonics instruction can be taught.
Phonological Awareness	A foundational area that must be established before phonics instruction can be taught.

#### Research Procedures and Methodology

This quantitative study surveyed kindergarten through grade three elementary school teachers regarding their perceptions of the use and effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance*. The Perception of Teaching Statistics Survey (Mills, 2007) was adapted for use in the study. Following the development of the study instrument, it was expert reviewed and piloted with a small group of practicing teachers. The survey was then mailed to a purposive sample of building principals whose buildings were known to participate in *The Phonics Dance* program and the principals were asked to distribute the surveys to teachers who were using *The Phonics Dance* in their classrooms.

The study survey utilized a Likert type scale with the addition of two open-ended questions. Study results were tabulated in a spreadsheet and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Results of the study were reported as percentages after the data analysis was completed.

### Assumptions

1. Participants responded to the survey honestly and openly.
2. Survey questions accurately assessed teacher perceptions of *The Phonics Dance*.

### Limitations

1. Teacher experience with *The Phonics Dance* varied within the sample.
2. The researcher had limited time to complete the study.
3. The researcher chose to ask for teacher perception and not student performance.

### Delimitations

1. Due to the early age of the program, the teacher sample size was limited to regional schools within the state of Ohio.
2. Participants were limited to teachers of grades kindergarten through third grade.



## Chapter Two

## RELATED RESEARCH AND LITERATURE

“For many students the act of reading is not one that comes easily. Reading does not come naturally to everyone” (Samanich, 2008, p.88). O’Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, and Frankenberger (2003) found that if children have not learned to read smoothly by the age of eight, they would struggle with reading throughout their lifetime. Heilman (2002) said, “The power and beauty is held hostage by the unknown words that interrupt the melody of language” (p.21). The National Reading Panel (NRP) reviewed literature to determine effective reading instruction concluded, “Various types of systematic phonics approaches are significantly more effective than non-phonics approaches in promoting substantial growth in reading” (NICHD, p.6).

Likewise, Holten of The National Right to Read Foundation wrote, “Teach the alphabetic code system of our English language and children will read” (Holten, 2004, p.1). “While students are in the process of learning how to read they need self-sustaining activity until they make it to the next level, which is reading. Readers can deal independently with the printed page” (Heilman, 2002, p.21). Stein, Johnson, and Gutlohn (1993) found two strategies of effective reading programs being explicit phonics instruction and a strong relationship between the phonics instruction and the words of the text selections in student reading materials. Samanich (2008) conducted a recent study with results that support explicit, direct, small-group instruction in phonemic awareness and letter-sound recognition as vital factors of an early reading intervention program. The NICHD (2007) found that explicit instruction in the key parts of reading, including

phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension was the best approach to teaching most children to read.

### Alphabetic Code/Coding

Reading involves a human-created language code system that children must learn in order to read (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, Stahl, 1998). A critical fundamental of learning to read is realizing that letters of the alphabet, either by themselves or with other letters, stand for sounds or phonemes. This understanding of phonemes has also been referred to as the alphabetic principle (Holten, 2004). The language we speak is actually made up of smaller pieces of sound called phonemes. A key component of learning to read is the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds. This concept is phonemic awareness. Phonemes or individual sounds make up spoken words in a particular order (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, Stahl, 1998). The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2007) found that phonemic awareness has been taught and learned using activities such as rhyming games. After students have awareness of print, they need to gain alphabetic knowledge or recognition. *The Phonics Dance* program suggests that students learn to read by utilizing the alphabetic principle or practicing the association of letters and their corresponding sounds on a daily basis in a period of approximately 15 minutes (Dowd, 1999). Vaughn and Linin-Thompson agree that phonological awareness should be taught for 15 to 20 minutes daily in kindergarten and first grade.

In phonological awareness, students learn these sound attack strategies to help them manipulate words. The goal of phonemic awareness is to develop independent word recognition or decoding strategies and automaticity (Vaughn & Linin-Thompson, 2004).

## Decoding

Decoding was another reading strategy that researchers believed as vital to help children read unknown words (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, Stahl, 1998; Vaughn & Linin-Thompson, 2004). Children decode or look at a group of letters or letter patterns to determine the meaning of unknown words (Vaughn & Linin-Thompson, 2004). As students develop decoding and automaticity they can fluently read words containing common word families and spelling patterns (NICHD, 2000; TEA, 2000). Students must start reading decodable text and work with word families, spelling patterns, and onsets and rimes when beginning to learn to read. These sound attack strategies allow students to sound out words, identify, segment, and blend syllables, the onset and rime, and phonemes (Dowd, 1999). After understanding and learning to read simpler words students have to focus on the structural analysis of a word in order to understand the word as a whole (Vaughn & Linin-Thompson, 2004).

Students consistently performed “Working with Words” activities on a weekly basis and data collected at the end of each quarter indicated a significant increase in phonemic awareness and phonetic skills between the second and third quarter as well as the fourth quarter. The student’s scores increased from 81% in the second quarter to 98% in the fourth quarter. Students also showed growth in decoding skills in the third quarter when participating in word building activities along with the school’s basal reading program (Biallas, Dunn; 1999). One goal of the *Phonics Dance* includes daily review and introduction of various sound attack strategies (Dowd, 1999). According to Dowd (1999), reading is a difficult process because 84% of the words in the English language are

phonetically correct but the 16% that are not phonetically correct appears in all types of literature 80% of the time. Hence, children benefit from learning how to hunk and chunk words in order to more easily decode text.

### Reading Fluency and Comprehension

Fluency is another area of reading research that has been thoroughly investigated. Fluency is more than just pronouncing or knowing words. Fluency includes being able to read quickly and recognizing words and their meanings. Fluency involves saying words with feeling and emphasizing the right word or phrase so the sentence sounds normal (NICHD, 2007). The method of repeated reading increases reading fluency and does not require unusual equipment and can be implemented easily into a classroom (Nicholson, 2006). Compan, Iamsupasit, Samuels (2001) study suggests in order to retain information, teachers must repeat instruction, or review concepts multiple times to retain it in our long-term memory. The author of the *Phonics Dance*, Ginny Dowd (1999) found great value in the daily repetition of skills. A recent study conducted by Moore (2007) examined the effect of student fluency on levels of comprehension.

This study investigated the use of a reading intervention activity using a combination of word practice activities to build fluency including word flashcards, model reading, reading aloud and partner reading. After this fluency intervention was implemented, all six students involved in the study demonstrated an increase in the number of correct words read per minute as reading fluency. The students' rates of comprehension increased along with their levels of reading fluency (Moore, 2007). Another study by Primeau (2007) revealed students and teachers alike found the strategy

of reading aloud valuable. Nicholson (2006) also found a connection between oral reading fluency and an increase for words read per minute. Nicholson's experience with three students involved in a case study showed fluency training was effective. The third grade low readers' fluency scores increased when the method of repeated reading were used as one component of reading (Nicholson, 2006). The NICHD (2007) found while a reader continues to increase phonics skills, he or she develops reading skills to become a more confident and fluent reader. Students acquire automaticity and fluency through repeated reading practice. Third grade students were significantly better at finding errors in text than students in the non-repeated conditions (Compan, Iamsupisit, Samuels; 2001).

### Reading Comprehension and Movement

Researchers believe that incorporating movement into classroom instruction allows students to learn and retain more concepts. Moving to a rhythm or chant imbeds the concepts taught (Jensen, 1998). Brain-based research focuses on how a child's brain receives and processes information (Jensen, 1998). Block, Parris and Whiteley (2008) used a new kinesthetic method called Comprehension Process Motions (CPMs). This study revealed the addition of CPMS, a type of kinesthetic learning, supplementary to a single layer teaching strategy added a new dimension of understanding for finding the main idea, predicting, inferring and clarifying. This kinesthetic technique helped students outperform significantly on a statewide mandated test of explicit and implicit comprehension when taught the same processes using CPMs compared to teaching with a single layer comprehension technique. Overall, "Comprehension Process Motions can

make abstract, meta-cognitive aspects of comprehension processes visible, understandable, and accessible” to elementary readers (Block, Parris & Whiteley, 2008, p.461). *The Phonics Dance* involves the use of movement, chants and rhymes to review and practice short and long vowels, digraphs, diphthongs, and variant vowel sounds reinforced during whole-group learning. Peebles (2007) research has shown necessity of movement in literacy education. “Incorporating movement into fluency instruction enhances the brain’s capacity to learn and also holds the motivational appeal to endure intensive and extensive repeated reading methods. Movement holds the key to connecting struggling students to the art of reading fluently and motivating them to read over and over again” (Peebles, 2007, p.581).

### Reading Vocabulary

Another very important part of learning to read is having knowledge that a word has meaning. The words we know are called our vocabulary (NICHD, 2007). Cunningham (2000) recommends using a language arts program where students manipulate words and play games using word walls. Researchers have studied developing vocabulary with word wall words (Biallas, Dunn, 1999; Cunningham, 1995). Phonics programs that use word wall words or high frequency words as part of the vocabulary instruction have been effective in helping students develop comprehension and meaning of words (Jorm, 1983; Stanovich & West, 1989; Ehri, 1991). The word wall technique has helped children learn sight words. A word wall contains high frequency words and other environmental print such as predictable charts, songs and poems, which are used as resources as children write independently (Jorm, 1983; Stanovich & West,

1989). In *The Phonics Dance*, teachers present high frequency words also known as sight words weekly (Dowd, 1999). Teachers introduced and focused on approximately five new sight words each week. These new words were practiced and memorized by playing language arts word games and other daily activities (Dowd, 1999; Cunningham, 1995). Cunningham (1995) agreed the brain learns through patterns instead of rules. Some methods of instruction have included the teaching of phonetic rules. Other methods of phonics instruction have involved teaching students to use word families or the onset and the rime of words. When teachers have taught students to consider the onset and the rime of a word they have trained them to identify words that end with the same word family, which in turn helps them to decode other words in a context of text.

The gap in the literacy achievement among students disappeared as all the children participated in the word wall activity and felt successful. Students at lower reading levels learned common letter patterns and their sounds. The more difficult words practiced in word wall activities also challenged students at higher achievement levels (Cunningham, 2000).

A study by Rasinski and Oswald (2005) examined the effects of making and writing words (MWW), a variation of a making words study by Cunningham and Cunningham (1992), on second grade students' word learning. The students that received treatment made significant gains in decoding in comparison to a similar group of students receiving an analytical traditional approach. MWW has lead to some amazing gains in students' word recognition development when used in a consistent manner in the classroom (Rasinski & Oswald, 2005). A study conducted by Eldredge (2005) suggested phonics knowledge and word recognition are precursors to fluency. The data implies a



causal effect on their reading speed and accuracy growth and phonics knowledge has a causal effect on students' word recognition growth (Eldredge, 2005). "Programs that focus too much on the teaching of letter-sound relations and not enough on putting them to use are unlikely to be very effective" (NICHD, 2008, p. 3). *The Phonics Dance* focuses on learning letters and relationships as well as utilizing them in text. One of *The Phonics Dance* steps of literacy includes applying these letter-sound relationships accurately and fluently in reading and writing activities.

### Reading/Writing Connection

It is important to review high frequency words and language arts concepts to become a fluent reader and writer. Patricia Cunningham, one of the pioneers of the Four Blocks balanced language arts program, believes manipulating words and playing games using word walls have helped students to read words with common rimes (Cunningham, 2000). The most effective phonics instruction occurs within the context of relevant reading and writing activities. The best phonics instruction happens within reading and writing contexts. Specific work with words is essential, but it is also important to see how words work in the context of reading and writing (Pressely, 1996). Bailey, Borcrak, and Stankiewicz (2002) agreed strategic and creative phonics instruction with the support of modeling of the writing process and adequate time for children to involve in meaningful writing activities resulted in an increase in students' use of phonics skills and improved student writing abilities at all ages. Young writers need daily writing activities to help with invented spelling, proofreading skills, and proper sentence structure.



Writing helps children make connections and gain understanding of the alphabetic principle or sound and letter combinations. Creative writing allows students to make a personal connection (Love, Burns & Buell, 2007). Love, Burns, and Buell (2007) concluded writing activities are an essential part of a quality literacy program. Writing affords children the opportunity to learn about the forms of print around them including writing and alphabet systems. Several researchers have found revising and editing students with an emphasis on structure, spelling and punctuation helped them become better writers (Bailey, Borcrak & Stankiewicz, 2002; Love, Burns & Buell, 2007). "The more kids write the better readers they become and the more kids read the better writers they become" (Dowd, 1999, p. 5). Students need daily practice reading. It gives students the opportunity to improve their ability to read and write. Reading should take place in many settings including chorally, alone, and in pairs (Carbo, 1995).

Students who read daily in a variety of ways including, but not limited, to independent, group, or partner reading have benefited from this type of grouping. Varied reading approaches have been highly suggested to foster a successful understanding of what is being read (Beneventi, McEndollar & Smith, 2002; Langenberg, 2000). Dowd (1999) found a vital step of literacy was a balanced reading approach requiring teachers to vary reading practice activities and having students read a variety of ways on a daily basis.

### Explicit Strategy Phonics Instruction

Teachers have historically focused on whole language concepts as well as explicit, systematic phonics approaches (Heilman, 2002). The National Reading Panel

(2006) concluded specific and systematic phonics programs are all considerably more effective than non-phonics programs. Jensen's (1998) findings largely support that these relationships should be taught in an explicit, systematic way. Systematic phonics instruction helps prevent reading difficulties among at risk students and aids in the remediation of reading difficulties in disabled readers (NICHD, 2006). Mesmer and Griffith, (2005) declared explicit, systematic phonics instruction is effective in helping meet various levels of student development. This systematic phonics instruction incorporates scope and sequence for the delivery of content and a mixture of word-study activities. This direct form of teaching phonics promotes responsibility and student engagement.

National committees have formed to help research phonics instruction. The National Reading Panel (NRP) published a report in 2000 that stated phonemic awareness was a significant predictor of student reading success in the future (NICHD, 2000). In a longitudinal study of an explicit phoneme, training combined with phonics reading instruction helped young children at risk of reading failure (Hatcher, Hulme & Snowling, 2004). "A reading program that contains a highly structured phonic component is sufficient for most 4.5-year-old children to master the alphabetic principle and to learn to read effectively, without additional explicit phonological training." On the other hand, "for young children at risk of reading delay, additional training in phoneme awareness and linking phonemes with letters is beneficial" (Hatcher, Hulme & Snowling, 2004, p. 338). "Students must also be proficient in the ability to analyze, sequence, and remember individual sounds that create a word" (Appleton, Karlson & Mendez, 2002, p. 26).

Phonics instruction improves children's reading comprehension ability as well as their

decoding and word-reading skills for younger students and reading disabled students (NICHD, 2006). The evidence is conclusive that teaching phonological awareness to young children greatly makes learning to read possible (NICHD, 2000). “This study is distinctive in that it compared explicit decoding. Children in the implicit phonics group consistently performed more poorly than the other groups in reading and spelling words” (Christensen & Bowey, 2005 p.342). Dowd (1999) found in order for some students to learn to read, it was necessary to utilize daily, explicit, precise phonics instruction.

### Balanced Approach

A balanced reading approach has been viewed as the best avenue to pursue in aiding students to succeed as readers (Cunningham, 2000). Primary students learn how to read, decode, and spell better when taught via a balanced approach (Biallis & Dunn, 1999). A phonics program must be balanced and fun (Carbo, 1995). Carbo (1995) further concluded a teacher cannot use phonics worksheets excessively and suggested only spending several minutes each day on phonics lessons. It is important to have students experience reading in many different settings in conjunction with reading conferences with the students (Dowd, 1999). Carbo (1995) concur that reading aloud to students is vital. Weekly reading conferences allow for individualization of students’ reading instruction and improve students’ motivation through guiding and supporting the choice of reading materials. A balanced approach to literacy including teacher directed reading instruction, self-selected reading, word skills lessons and writing mini-lessons lead to significant improvement in students’ motivation and reading ability (Mackh, 2003).

In summation, a balanced reading program that includes phonics instruction has been the topic of reading research in recent years. "Various types of systematic phonics approaches are significantly more effective than non-phonics approaches in promoting substantial growth in reading" (NICHD, 2000, p.93). However, *The Phonics Dance* program has not been researched for its use and effectiveness. There is a need for more research to be conducted regarding teacher's perceptions of the used and effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance*.

## Chapter Three

### PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY

#### Subjects

This descriptive study drew its sample from 10 urban and rural public school districts in Southwest and West Central Ohio. One school was located in a rural area. Eight of the schools were mid-sized urban districts and one school was an urban district located on the edge of a large city. All 10 of the schools surveyed were Title I eligible schools. Teachers of students in grade levels kindergarten through third grade were part of this study. There were 120 surveys sent. Since *The Phonics Dance* is a regional program, a convenience sample was taken. Teacher experience varied from novice to veteran. Participants actively used *The Phonics Dance* for at least one year within their classroom.

#### Instrumentation

Instrumentation used in the study was adapted from Teacher Perceptions and Attitudes about Teaching Statistics in P-12 Education study (Mills, 2007). The survey was designed to determine teacher perceptions regarding the effectiveness and use of *The Phonics Dance*. Questions were divided into categories around specific phonics strategies. The survey consisted of 23 items. Twenty-one were Likert style questions where participants responded by circling strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Two items were open-ended questions. The survey was expert reviewed and piloted before use.

### Procedures

Teachers were asked to complete surveys placed in their mailboxes by building principals. Each principal then mailed back the surveys in a self-addressed stamped envelope following a two week time period. Responses were scored using a four point Likert scale. The average of each item was found and the response was converted into a percentage.

## Chapter Four

## ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

To find out teacher's perception of *The Phonics Dance* a convenience sample was taken. The study population was a group of elementary and special education teachers of students in grades kindergarten through third grade. There were 67 females and one male included in the study. One hundred twenty surveys handed out to participants at ten different elementary schools and 92 of those surveys were returned to the researcher. Of the ten school districts surveyed, nine were urban and one was a rural district. The research group consisted of 92 teachers, of which 91% were currently using the *Phonics Dance*. This resulted in a return rate of 77% for all surveys sent out to participants. Upon receiving the completed surveys, nine of the respondents either 'disagreed' or strongly disagreed' that they currently use the *Phonics Dance* as part of their curriculum. This reduced the number of surveys considered legitimate for the study to 83, which designates 70% of the surveys as valid and the focus of this study. Of all the teachers completing surveys, 19% were kindergarten teachers, 41% were first grade teachers, 21% were second grade teachers and 19% were third grade teachers. Of the 83 respondents that were currently using *The Phonics Dance*, 80% 'strongly agreed' and 20% 'agreed' they were using it as part of their curriculum.

The survey questions were divided into five basic groups; comfort level of teachers using this program, teacher training, student benefit and student performance, application of the six steps of literacy and student enjoyment. The first group of questions focused on the comfort level of the teachers using *The Phonics Dance*. The survey showed that 98% of the teachers involved in the study liked teaching *The Phonics Dance*.

A small amount of the teachers surveyed, 4% agreed they sometimes had a hard time understanding *The Phonics Dance*. Only, 1%, of the teachers 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' they saw no value in teaching *The Phonics Dance*. With only 1% of teachers in agreement there was no value in teaching *The Phonics Dance*, that means that 99% of the respondents felt there was value in teaching this program. This idea was mirrored in several open response answers. One subject wrote, "(It is a) great program, relates to students' interest, and is better than learning boring phonics rules." Another subject also felt there was great value in this program and stated, "I have used *The Phonics Dance* for seven years now. The students make solid connections between the Dance and word attack! I have found it more beneficial than any other program I've used." A large percentage of subjects, 95%, concurred they felt comfortable teaching *The Phonics Dance* in their classroom.

The second category of interest looked at in the survey is the teacher training aspect. Participants indicated that 91% of them felt they were properly trained to teach *The Phonics Dance*. In fact, one respondent affirmed, "Yes, *The Phonics Dance* was adopted as part of our curriculum three years ago. I have been to all of Ginny Dowd's training classes and even visited her first grade classroom in Troy. We use (*The Phonics Dance*) with our basal Harcourt trophies." However, one subject stated in an answer to an open-ended question, "I was told that I had to do it without any training. I have the CD and play it occasionally in class throughout the year." It was surprising to find out, 28% of the subjects either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that their training in college did not prepare them to teach phonics. When teachers were asked if they felt they need more training in *The Phonics Dance*, the results were somewhat contradictive of one another.



A large majority of the teachers, 91%, felt they had been properly trained to teach *The Phonics Dance*. One participant confirmed, “I believe if *The Phonics Dance* is taught properly, after proper training, is very effective for elementary aged kids. The kids begin using it on their own.” Yet, 31% of the teachers felt they needed more training in *The Phonics Dance*.

Another group of questions in the survey focused on the student benefit and performance of students. A large amount of teachers, 96% believed their students see how *The Phonics Dance* can be used in their reading and writing. A significant number of teachers surveyed, 98%, circled ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that their students used concepts learned in *The Phonics Dance*. In fact, 94% of the teachers’ ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ their students “hunk” and “chunk” words in the decoding process. Similarly, when teachers were asked about the carryover and application of the concepts taught and reviewed in *The Phonics Dance*, a large amount of respondents, 84%, agreed they have witnessed their students “phonics dancing” as they read or write. Also, 97% of the subjects concurred their students used concepts learned in *The Phonics Dance* in their reading and writing. This group of questions also indicated teachers’ perception of how students respond to *The Phonics Dance* program. In fact, not all of the either respondents, 100% ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ students in their classrooms liked *The Phonics Dance*.

A fourth focal point of the survey was student enjoyment. A little more than 88% of the teachers believed students in their classrooms enjoyed learning the six steps of literacy in *The Phonics Dance*. All 100% of the teachers surveyed observed their students enjoyment of the daily review and/or instruction of high frequency words and

daily language arts concepts. The same percentage of the respondents, 100%, were in one accord about their students enjoying varied independent, group, and partner reading in correlation with teacher chosen and/or student selected reading materials.

The fifth focus of the study was student benefit and performance. Astoundingly, 100% of the teachers believed most of their pupils would master concepts learned in *The Phonics Dance*. Some of the concepts taught in *The Phonics Dance* that included sound attack, student-teacher conferencing, varied reading groupings, and high frequency word work. Teachers were asked about their perception of their students' benefit from the daily review of sound attack strategies of consonants, short and long vowels, diagraphs and variant vowel sounds, 100% of the participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed.' A large percentage of the educators, 96% stated their students "hunk" and "chunk" words in the decoding process. Furthermore, 93% of the respondents agreed their students benefited from the student-teacher conferencing recommended in *The Phonics Dance*. The bulk of the teachers surveyed, 99%, also agreed their students benefited from the daily instruction and/or review of high frequency words and daily language arts concepts. Similarly, 99% of the educators involved in the study believed the *Phonics Dance* improved student performance on district and state tests. This idea was supported in an individual's response, "Students are able to sound out many difficult words, able to spell words (and have increased) oral reading fluency scores on Dibels."

An analysis of the application of the six steps of literacy was addressed in the study. The application of the six steps of literacy must be demonstrated in students' reading and writing skills. A participant responded regarding the application of this

program, "My perception is based upon letter sound assessments and observations of how my students apply sounds to words when writing."

Another concept that emerged in the short response answers was the importance of daily repetition for success of the program. Some of the same teachers made observations about the effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance* in relation to it being repeated every day, involving movement, and chanting. The repetitive use of the chants was reflected in this statement, "My students learn letters and sounds quicker and have a higher ability to sound out words in reading and writing. The repetition each day works!" This remark as well as many others was a testament to the repetitive element suggested by the creator of the program. A large majority of the participants indicated in their open-ended responses that they used the program on daily basis.

## Chapter Five

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

## Summary of Findings

A majority of the teachers felt comfortable teaching *The Phonics Dance*. Many of the teachers also felt they were properly trained to teach *The Phonics Dance*. Although, 30% of the respondents felt they were not properly trained to teach phonics in general. In addition, 31% of the teachers believed they needed more training in *The Phonics Dance*. This indicates that even though 91% of teachers felt properly trained to teach *The Phonics Dance*, they were not initially comfortable teaching basic phonics concepts. This shows a need for more training in how to implement this language arts program so it can be better utilized in the future.

Teachers found students enjoyed many activities practiced in *The Phonics Dance*. This study also confirmed students genuinely enjoyed varied reading groups when paired with teacher chosen and/or student chosen material, daily word work on high frequency words and daily language art concepts. Students thoroughly enjoy learning sound attack strategies of consonants, short and long vowels, diagraphs and variant vowel sounds through movement, chants, and written activities. *The Phonics Dance* was considered an effective tool when considering student enjoyment.

A third major theme gleaned from this study is student benefit and student performance. A large percentage of teachers believed student performance was improved on district and state tests because of *The Phonics Dance*. Some of the evidence for this claim is that 96% of the same teachers stated their students “hunk” and “chunk” words when decoding words. When students are able to use sound attack strategies and “hunk”

and “chunk” words easily this positively affects reading fluency and comprehension because students no longer have to think about decoding words and can think more about the meaning. In addition to better reading proficiency, students were more successful in their writing abilities, both fiction and non-fiction, because of skills learned in *The Phonics Dance*.

### Conclusion

Teachers perceive *The Phonics Dance* in a favorable manner concerning student enjoyment. Many teachers agreed their students liked *The Phonics Dance*. *The Phonics Dance* is a successful program because students enjoy learning using various methods to practice essential phonics skills.

Ultimately, teachers felt students utilized the concepts taught in *The Phonics Dance* in their personal reading and writing assignments. Educators recognize this program has made a difference and has improved scores on various district and state assessments.

### Implications

This study finds teachers need to have additional training in *The Phonics Dance* in order to feel more comfortable with instruction of the program. Most of the teachers in this study believed they were comfortable teaching *The Phonics Dance*, but for those who did not more training in college teacher training classes and training of *The Phonics Dance* program would be suggested. As presented in the analysis of the results, one respondent articulated the need for proper training in *The Phonics Dance* in order for the

program to be successful. This is true of any program. In order for a curriculum to be fruitful, teachers need proper training.

In many of the open responses, teachers primarily made remarks about the learning letters and sounds and the daily chanting of the hunks and chunks to help with decoding words. Some respondents even wrote comments about using the chants in writing, but rarely spoke of using the other memorable rhythms for learning other language arts concepts including the parts of speech. Teachers have implemented the components of the program that were most pliable to them and left out other vital parts that more fully complete this program. Educators may need to consider taking a closer look at applying the program more completely by seeking training and being willing to try new hands-on techniques and rhymes available for use in *The Phonics Dance* reference manual. Teachers also should not be hesitant to ask other colleagues how they are implementing the concepts taught in *The Phonics Dance* to get new ideas and put more of the instructional techniques of this program into practice.

#### Recommendations and Future Research

A recommendation for teachers using this program would be to use it fully. The author of the program intended the program be used as a tool and be incorporated throughout the entire day. It suggested that teachers take advantage of other trainings made available for Math Mania and the writing workshops designed to help a teacher fully implement the program the way the creator utilizes it in her classroom.

A recommendation for the author of *The Phonics Dance* would be to require individuals to a certain amount of training in using the curriculum before they use it in

their classroom. This requirement of training before use would provide teachers with more understanding of the program and how to apply it in a variety of classroom settings. The suggestion of requiring training in this program before using it in a classroom would allow teachers to feel more comfortable and confident in the product and its ability to increase reading skills and test scores.

Future research could include distributing the survey to a more diverse group of teachers. Surveys could be distributed to teachers outside the immediate regional area within the state to other areas. This variation of the study may also include distributing the survey to a larger number of teachers. Surveying a larger number of teachers may show different results.

Surveys could also be dispersed to teachers of students with special needs in future research. It would be interesting to find out how teachers are modifying *The Phonics Dance* instruction and which remediation techniques have been utilized for students with disabilities.

A third consideration for future research would be to modify the survey to include more information on teaching students with disabilities. It would also be beneficial to know how teachers have modified *The Phonics Dance* and implemented it to assist struggling readers to learn and remediate sounds and decode. It would be interesting to know more about the effect that the repetitive chants and movement have on students in general as well as students with disabilities.

Future research may include test results from the Ohio Writing Diagnostic Test for second grade. This study could compare student success in reading and writing on the Ohio Reading and Writing Achievement Test (OAT) at a third grade level. The scores of

students' that have been taught *The Phonics Dance* would be compared to the students' scores on the reading and writing OATs to the students' scores on the OAT that have not been taught phonics concepts through *The Phonics Dance*.

In an extension of this investigation, researchers could also study the significance of phonics in teacher education programs for early elementary or upper elementary teachers. The amount of early reading intervention and phonics instruction for elementary teachers in teacher education programs and student achievement on phonemic awareness subsection of the Ohio Reading Achievement Test would be the focus for a study of correlation.



## Appendices

1

Appendix A  
Teacher Survey

### Perception of the *Phonics Dance* Survey

Please circle one of the following choices. Please write a short response to answer the open ended questions.

SA - Strongly Agree    A – Agree    D – Disagree    SD - Strongly Disagree

#### Years of Teaching Experience:

1 or less    2-5    6-10    11-15    16- 20    21- 25    26- 30    more than 30

Grade Level Taught:    Kindergarten    1<sup>st</sup>    2<sup>nd</sup>    3<sup>rd</sup>    Sex: male or female

---

- |    |   |   |    |   |
|----|---|---|----|---|
| SA | A | D | SD | 1. I use <i>The Phonics Dance</i> as part of my curriculum.   |
| SA | A | D | SD | 2. I like teaching <i>The Phonics Dance</i> .   |
| SA | A | D | SD | 3. I see no value in teaching <i>The Phonics Dance</i> in my classroom.                                     |
| SA | A | D | SD | 4. I am comfortable teaching <i>The Phonics Dance</i> in my classroom.                                      |
| SA | A | D | SD | 5. Sometimes, I have a hard time understanding <i>The Phonics Dance</i> concepts.                           |
| SA | A | D | SD | 6. I feel that I have been properly trained to teach <i>The Phonics Dance</i> in my classroom.              |
| SA | A | D | SD | 7. My training in school did not prepare me to teach phonics.   |
| SA | A | D | SD | 8. I feel that I need more training in <i>The Phonics Dance</i> .   |
| SA | A | D | SD | 9. Students in my classroom do not like <i>The Phonic Dance</i> .   |
| SA | A | D | SD | 10. Students in my classroom see how <i>The Phonics Dance</i> can be used in their reading and writing.     |
| SA | A | D | SD | 11. Students in my classroom use concepts learned in <i>The Phonics Dance</i> in their reading and writing. |
| SA | A | D | SD | 12. I see my students "Phonics Dancing" as they read and/or write.  |

- |    |   |   |    |  |
|----|---|---|----|--|
| SA | A | D | SD | 13. Students in my classroom enjoy learning the Six Steps of Literacy in <i>The Phonics Dance</i> .  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 14. My students benefit from the daily review of sound attack strategies of consonants, short and long vowels, diagraphs and variant vowel sounds. |
| SA | A | D | SD | 15. My students benefit from the daily review and/or instruction of high frequency words and daily language arts concepts.                         |
| SA | A | D | SD | 16. My students' writing skills (both fiction and nonfiction) are improved because of skills learned in <i>The Phonics Dance</i> .                 |
| SA | A | D | SD | 17. My students benefit from the student-teacher conferencing recommended in <i>The Phonics Dance</i> .  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 18. My students 'hunk' and 'chunk' words in the decoding process.  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 19. My students enjoy varied independent, group, and partner reading in correlation with teacher chosen and/or student selected reading materials. |
| SA | A | D | SD | 20. I believe that most of my students will master concepts learned in <i>The Phonics Dance</i> .  |
| SA | A | D | SD | 21. I believe <i>The Phonics Dance</i> improves student performance on district and state tests.   |

22. On what is your perception of the effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance* based?

---

23. How do you use *The Phonics Dance* as part of your language arts curriculum?

---

**Appendix B**

**Survey Letter for Administrators**

February 24, 2008

Dear Administrator,

I am currently working on my thesis project as one of the requirements of my master's of education degree at Urbana University. In a quest to find out about and utilize the best reading resources available I am conducting research on a program currently being used in your district. *The Phonics Dance* is a relatively new language arts program that teaches students reading and writing strategies by teaching concepts through the various intelligences. I would like your permission to send a survey to be completed by your teachers who use *The Phonics Dance* in grades K-3.

Should you be willing to have your teachers participate in this study, please send a reply via email indicating the number of surveys needed. The information from this survey will greatly assist me in obtaining teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance*.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this educational endeavor.

Thank You,

Angie Longmire

v

Appendix C

Administrator Notice of Mailing

February 29, 2008

Dear Administrator,

Thank you for agreeing to ask your teachers to participate in my study of the effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance* in grades K-3. If you have not yet received the surveys you should receive them within a few days. Please use the enclosed pre-paid envelope to return the completed surveys by March 11.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to help me get the surveys completed and returned in a timely manner. Without your help, the research on this program and the completion of my thesis project would not be possible.

Thank you for helping make my educational study a reality.

Sincerely,

Angie Longmire



Appendix D

Survey Cover Letter

Dear Colleague,

In a quest to find out about and use the best reading resources available I am conducting research on a program currently being utilized in your district. *The Phonics Dance* is a relatively new language arts program used to supplement or be primarily used as part of another language arts curriculum. The information from this questionnaire will greatly assist me in obtaining teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of *The Phonics Dance*. Please complete this survey to help me complete a course for my master's degree in education from Urbana University.

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to complete this questionnaire. Please return this survey to your administrator on or before March 9, 2008. It will serve as the primary source of information for my study.

Sincerely,

Angie Longmire

## References

- Appleton, B., Karlson, S., Mendez, D. (2002). *Improving student reading by implementing phonics programs*. Unpublished master's thesis, Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight Professional Development.
- Armstrong, S., & Rentz, T. (2002). *Improving listening skills and motivation*. Unpublished master's thesis, Saint Xavier University.
- Bailey, S., Borczak, C., & Stankiewicz, A. (2002). *Improving student writing skills through the use of phonics*. Unpublished master's thesis, Saint Xavier University.
- Beneventi, A., McEndollar, L., & Smith, D. (2002). *Improving the development of students' reading skills*. Unpublished master's thesis, Saint Xavier University.
- Biallas, L., & Dunn, S. (1999). *Phonemic awareness and phonics: building blocks for better reading, decoding, and spelling*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Saint Xavier University.
- Block, C.C., Parris, S.R., & Whiteley, C.S. (2008). CPMs: a kinesthetic comprehension strategy. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(6), 460-470.
- Burgess, K. A., Lundren, K. A., Lloyd, J. W., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). *Preschool teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices about literacy instruction* (Report No. CIERA-2-012) Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED452513).
- Carbo, M. (1995). What every principal should know about teaching reading, part 2: Whole language vs. phonics. *Instructional Leader*, 1-12.
- Christensen, C. A., & Bowey, J. A. (2005). *The Efficacy of Orthographic Rime, Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence, and Implicit Phonics Approaches to Teaching Decoding Skills*. Scientific Studies of Reading. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ717979)
- Compan, B., Iamsupasit, S., & Samuels, Jay. (2001). Effect of repeated reading and self-directed behavior on reading skills and generalization of the reading skills of third-grade hill tribe students. Unpublished manuscript.
- Cunningham, P. M. (2000). *Phonics they use: Words for reading and writing*. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc.
- Dowd, V. A. (1999). *The phonics dance: Six steps to literacy in the primary grades*. New Carlisle, Ohio

- Eldredge, J. L. (2005). Foundations of fluency: an exploration. *Reading Psychology an International Quarterly*, 26(2), 161-181.
- Groff, P. (1998). Where's the phonics? Making a case for its direct and systematic instruction. *Reading Teacher*, p. 138. Retrieved December 28, 2007, from Academic Search Complete database.
- Hatcher, P. J., Hulm, C., & Snowling, M. J., (2004). Explicit phoneme training combined with phonic reading instruction helps young children at risk of reading failure. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45(2), 338-358.
- Heilman, A. W. (2002). *Phonics in proper perspective*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Holten, A. J. (April 6, 2004). Children are best taught how to read by learning sounds of letters. The National Right to Read Foundation. Retrieved January 1, 2008, from [http://www.nrrf.org/article\\_holten\\_4-6-04.htm](http://www.nrrf.org/article_holten_4-6-04.htm)
- Jensen, E. (1998). *Teaching with the brain in mind*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Langenberg, D. N. (2000). Findings of the national reading panel. *Reading Rockets*. Retrieved December 31, 2007, from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/318>
- Literacy Statistics: Why learn to read early? (n.d.). Retrieved January 1, 2008, from <http://www.begintoread.com/research/literacystatistics.html>
- Love, A., Burns, M. S., Buell, M. J., Writing: Empowering literacy in young children.
- Menzies, H. M., Mahdavi, J. N., & Lewis, J. L. (2008). Early intervention in reading from research to practice. *Remedial and Special Education*, 29(2), 67-77.
- Mills, J. (2007). Teacher perceptions and attitudes about teaching statistics in P-12 education [Electronic version]. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 30(4), 16-34.
- Moore, S. L. (2007). *The effects of an oral reading activity on rates of oral reading*. Unpublished master's thesis, The Ohio State University.
- National Institute of Child Health & Human Development. (n.d.). Retrieved July 21, 2008, from <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/findings.cfm>
- National Institute of Child Health & Human Development. (n.d.). Retrieved November 28, 2007, from [http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/national\\_reading\\_panel.cfm?renderforprint=1](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/national_reading_panel.cfm?renderforprint=1)

- National Institute of Child Health & Human Development. (2000). Acknowledgements & members of the National Reading Panel: Part II: Phonics Instruction.
- Nicholson, A. L. (2006). *The effects of repeated readings on the fluency scores of low ability third grade readers*. Unpublished master's thesis, Bowling Green State University.
- Peebles, J. L. (2007). Incorporating movement with fluency instruction: a motivation for struggling readers. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(6), 578-581.
- Pressley, M., Rankin, J., & Yokoi, Y. (1996) A survey of instructional practices of primary teachers nominated as effective in promoting literacy. [Electronic version]. *The Elementary School Journal*, 30(4), 363-384.
- Primeau, J. M. (2007). *What types of read-aloud practices do secondary teachers engage in? What are the students' perceptions of the secondary read-aloud practice?* Unpublished master's thesis, Bowling Green State University.
- Rasinski, T., & Oswald, R. (2005). *Making and writing words: constructivist word learning in a second-grade classroom*. Taylor & Francis Group. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ717979)
- Samanich, T. T. (2003). *The effectiveness of the Scott Foresman early reading intervention program on improvement of phonemic awareness and decoding skills for a sample of at-risk kindergarten students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University.
- Stahl, S. A. (1992). Saying the "p" word: Nine guidelines for exemplary phonics instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 618-625. Retrieved January 2, 2008, from <http://www.oplin.org>
- Stein, M., Johnson, B., & Gutlohn, L. (1999). Analyzing beginning reading programs the relationship between decoding instruction and text. *Remedial & Special Education*, 20(5), 275.
- Vaughn, S., & Linan-Thompson, S. (2004). *Research-based methods of reading instruction: Grades K-3*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.