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## **Implementing Authentic Literacy Centers in a Kindergarten Classroom**

Isabella Haeger

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Implementing Authentic Literacy Centers in a Kindergarten Classroom

by

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A capstone thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Literacy Education.

Hamline University  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
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Capstone Project facilitated by Professor Julia Reimer

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## Dedication

To my parents:

Thank you for inspiring me to follow my dreams and work hard to achieve those dreams.

I could not have gotten to this point without your support and encouragement.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The beginning of the year for kindergarten students is an exciting and nerve-racking time. Students are entering the school with various backgrounds and experiences from the first few years of their lives. Yet, there are many crucial milestones set for the academic year ahead. I am writing this capstone to research how to establish an intentional, literacy-rich learning community within the classroom. The question I will be researching is; *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?*

This will be my second year teaching kindergarten and my learning from last year has sparked this research question in my mind. Last year, I developed targeted, meaningful literacy tasks and routines to support each student in my classroom. This process took some time to develop; therefore, I am curious on best practices to begin the year and how those can deepen student learning by the end of the year. I firmly believe that when high expectations are set from the start, students are more willing to take risks and push themselves. Literacy centers create an opportunity for intentional differentiation that can support tiered interventions specific to each student (Burke & Baillie, 2011). As I begin this upcoming school year, I hope to engage every learner in my classroom and begin utilizing quality instruction to increase literacy development.

### Chapter One Preview

In this chapter, I will highlight my journey and interest in this question through my personal and professional experiences. Next, I will share my school's current curriculum for literacy work stations and how I would like to adapt that this school year.

Lastly, I will share why creating a literacy-rich learning community from the beginning is so essential for every kindergarten student. I will share my goals for the school year to support the literacy development and engagement in my classroom.

### **Personal Background**

Growing up, I always enjoyed school and reading was my favorite subject. I was fortunate to have influential teachers that supported my love for learning, and my goal is to do the same for my students. Looking back on my education, the activities that stood out to me involved constant peer collaboration and connecting the learning with my background. In particular, I vividly remember being able to write personal stories and getting to share those stories with my classmates. This writing activity was intriguing to me because I felt heard and seen by others at school. I also was able to learn about my peers and practice the skills that we learned. I realize how impactful meaningful literacy activities can be on student motivation and engagement. On the other hand, my younger brother had a more difficult time acquiring foundational literacy skills. Our family read and developed a home literacy environment that was the same for both of us, but he was not developing the skills at the same rate. I watched our parents collaborate with teachers at school to support his specific learning and increase his confidence. These different experiences with literacy acquisition have motivated me to be thoughtful about creating a safe and meaningful learning community in my classroom.

### **Teaching Experiences**

Professionally, I have always been intrigued by literacy development, especially within the primary years. A course that I took in my undergraduate education program sparked my passion for literacy as we learned about phonemic awareness and phonics

development. I was amazed at the way that English is acquired and taught to students with unique backgrounds, such as students with limited or interrupted formal education. After graduating with a degree in elementary education, I received a job teaching third grade. We started the year with virtual learning due to the pandemic. Creating an engaging online community with students consisted of constant collaboration and allowing students' voices to be lifted. Due to enrollment, I was later moved to 5th grade during my first year of teaching. In this position, I learned so much about the progression of literacy skills and how interconnected they are to create a full understanding of reading, writing, and speaking. I worked with students to increase comprehension and fluency throughout the year, while also supporting students that had gaps in their foundational literacy skills. I collaborated frequently with our reading specialist to identify learning tasks that would meet the wide range of needs in my classroom. From this experience, I learned about the importance of using resources that match students' emotional and academic needs.

Then, I was fortunate to receive a job in kindergarten, which had been a dream come true for me. I was eager to work with primary students to develop a solid foundation for their academic journeys. Last year, I worked hard to plan intentional literacy lessons that were differentiated to meet the needs of each learner. I did independent research on ways to increase student motivation during reading groups. I created and planned kinesthetic and auditory stations for students to practice their skills with peers. Students were highly engaged in literacy tasks such as building sight words, partner reading, and word wall writing. These are tasks and resources that I would utilize again during this year. I saw huge academic growth due to our cohesive literacy



community. Although I was successful with finding meaningful stations last year, I still believe that there are quality literacy center ideas that I have missed. I am wondering how I can connect with every learner in my classroom and instill confidence with literacy.

### **Current Literacy Curriculum**

The curriculum that our district utilizes introduces literacy rotations after weeks of independent practice. As student reading stamina increases, we introduce more challenging learning tasks. This is the time that students are switching through differentiated stations around the classroom and working with their peers. Last year, I found that literacy stations increased student engagement and meaningful experiences with reading and writing. We implemented a writing center, independent reading center, and teacher-guided center. Students were motivated by choices at the writing center that allowed them to reflect on their own backgrounds. At the independent reading center, students chose books that connected with their interests. The teacher-guided station was used for targeted and differentiated instruction for small groups. I found that the tasks that were most supportive and motivating to my students were ones that involved hands-on work or sharing with peers. I will keep this in mind as I am researching effective literacy centers. I am still curious how I can deepen this learning experience for each learner in my classroom. This is what has driven me to research *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?*

### **Rationale**

Starting the year by providing a safe and supportive literacy environment allows students to flourish. Students are engaged when they are able to share their ideas and

participate in an authentic way. Educational theorist Piaget, found that children learn best with impactful experiences that allow for connection with peers (Kracl, 2011). When teachers are thoughtful about creating intentional experiences for students, their motivation for learning is boosted. Literacy centers create an opportunity for students to receive instruction that is geared towards their needs and participate in purposeful work. Furthermore, literacy-rich environments allow for continuous and foundational learning to occur. Centers are authentic experiences to practice the skill that they had just learned in whole group instruction and apply it to their individual goals. Being able to internalize and apply their knowledge allows for more meaningful learning (Diller, 2003). This research will drive my instruction to include more purposeful learning tasks and support every student.

### **Vision**

I have learned about effective instructional practices to increase literacy understanding; in addition, the environment in which students are learning can enhance their knowledge. Literacy-rich environments support engagement in each component of reading, writing, and speaking. I hope to find and implement literacy work stations that meet my students where they are and include their interests. These rotations will support development of early literacy strategies. Shannon Kelley quotes, “The development of oral language skills, understanding of the alphabetic principle, and knowledge of print concepts are the greatest predictors of children’s future reading ability” (e.g. Burns et al., 1999; Snow, 2006; Strickland et al., 2004). At the kindergarten level, these foundational skills must be fostered to boost student achievement. The findings of my project will be implemented into my classroom and shared with my fellow teachers. As we are

beginning our school year, the work will be applicable to primary grade levels. I will provide concrete ways that teachers can create and set up a community that allows for collaboration, student voice, and inclusion of students' learning styles.

### **Conclusion**

Each student deserves to learn in a safe and supportive classroom community. Students that have had little home exposure to literacy deserve a space that is full of enriching activities that align to each component of literacy. Literacy-rich classroom environments are essential, as they create opportunities for authentic experiences and for students to apply their knowledge in various ways. Teachers can create a supportive environment by introducing literacy centers that include student interests and meaningful tasks. The research on *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?* will provide specific ways that teachers can create a community that is inclusive for each and every learner.

Chapter two will contain literature reviews on the research of literacy work stations, such as the effects that they have on student learning, as well as specific ideas to establish a collaborative learning community. I will highlight research on the importance of each station and provide examples of learning tasks that support each foundational skill. Chapter three will share the findings of the research in the format of a website, therefore educators can utilize it within their own classrooms. Lastly, Chapter four will document the result of the project and how the research was adjusted throughout the writing process.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

The literature review's purpose is to address the question: *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students?* The information provided will support educators in implementing meaningful literacy centers for emergent readers. Kindergarten students come to school with a wide range of experiences and interests. Integrating their backgrounds into the learning from the start can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that can positively impact their educational journey.

This chapter will reflect on the importance of creating authentic learning experiences to support development of foundational literacy skills through an examination of research on this topic. First, the necessary skills of emergent readers and writers will be established. After that, authentic learning and promoting student voice and choice will be highlighted as ways to engage every learner in the classroom. Next, the centers of reading, writing, word work, and listening will be noted and with a detailed explanation of how each center is critical in supporting emergent literacy. Literacy centers allow students to receive differentiated instruction, which motivates and builds confidence in all learners. Lastly, the use of intentional assessments to plan instruction in literacy centers will be addressed. Authentic literacy centers are effective in engaging and motivating primary students to develop important reading and writing skills.

#### Emergent Literacy

Early interactions with language make an immense difference in a child's literacy understanding. Emergent literacy skills are: alphabetic knowledge, concept of print, and phonological awareness. Best practices in emergent literacy have been found to be explicit and systematic letter-sound instruction, use of high-quality materials, and intentional planning (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). Educators can create a supportive literacy environment that promotes all components of emergent literacy and provides meaningful opportunities for the skills to develop interconnectedly.

### ***Alphabetic Knowledge***

Jones et al. (2012) describe alphabetic knowledge as a solid understanding of letter names and sounds in the alphabet, as they make up words. Students are able to recognize that letters make up the alphabet and represent specific phonemes. According to Jenner (2021), as emergent readers are being introduced to the alphabet, teachers should plan instruction that is personalized to this developmental stage. Instruction should be brief and explicit while explaining the uppercase and lowercase version of each letter. Students should be able to name the letter and its sounds, find it in a story, and write the letter. Introducing both uppercase and lowercase letters, especially for letters that are visually similar, is beneficial (Jenner, 2021). Incorporating handwriting into letter-sound recognition is also essential to student understanding. All of these learning experiences deepen students' alphabetic knowledge.

### ***Alphabetic Principle***

Alphabetic principle is the understanding that written letters have specific sounds that they represent (Foorman et al., 2003). Emergent readers must have the foundational knowledge that letters represent spoken sounds. Explicitly teaching letter-sound

relationships allows students to apply those patterns to familiar and unknown words. Instruction might begin with continuous consonant sounds, such as m, r, s, and t (*The alphabetic principle*, 2018). Integrating routine practice with letters and their sounds during the emergent stage of reading and writing establishes a foundation for phonological awareness.

### ***Phonological Awareness***

Phonological awareness is an essential skill that emergent readers need to be successful decoders. Phonological awareness is the ability to hear units of sound within a word (*Phonological Awareness*, 2021). To show understanding of phonological awareness, students must be able to identify and manipulate parts of words. Introducing rhyming words is a supportive learning task to develop phonological awareness, as students are finding or making words that have the same ending sound (Rohde, 2015). According to Anthony & Francis (2005), practicing sound manipulation with emergent students is immensely beneficial. Research has shown that phonological awareness development follows a sequential pattern that demonstrates how students progress with these skills. First, students are able to identify small units of sounds within the words. They are able to manipulate syllables before manipulating onsets and rimes. Lastly, students will be able to blend and segment parts of a word (Anthony & Francis, 2005). Educators can utilize this sequence to plan targeted instruction and various rich opportunities to practice phonological awareness. A necessary step of phonological awareness development is mastery of phonemic awareness.

**Phonemic Awareness.** According to the *The Report of the National Reading Panel* (2000) phonemic awareness is students' ability to manipulate parts of a word. To

evaluate the importance of phonemic awareness, the National Reading Panel conducted a meta-analysis of research that has been conducted. Results demonstrated that the overall effectiveness of explicit phonemic awareness instruction for young learners was positively correlated. Typically, direct instruction that focused on one to two phonemes at a time was found most beneficial for student understanding (*The Report of the National Reading Panel*, 2000). Teachers should plan intentional phonemic awareness lessons to support students' literacy development. Gambrell and Morrow (2011) documents that phonemic awareness develops gradually for students through repetitive early literacy experiences. Examples of activities that promote phonemic awareness include nursery rhymes and practice with alliteration through word play (Gambrell & Morrow, 2011). Phonemic awareness is an important literacy skill that requires meaningful practice and repetition. Another crucial literacy skill for emergent students to develop is the concept of print.

### ***Concept of Print***

Knowledge of print concepts include understanding that letters make words and those words build sentences. Also, concept of print entails understanding that words in the text have meaning (*Concepts of print*, n.d.). Supporting the concept of print in the classroom can be done through explicit instruction. Lovelace & Stewart (2007) studied 11 preschool students' print awareness development through explicit shared readings. Results demonstrated that when the teachers repeatedly referenced concepts of print while reading various genres, students' understanding and application of print concepts were increased. Consistent practice with concepts of print provide an important foundation for emergent students' reading development.

Overall, emergent literacy encompasses knowledge of alphabet, phonological awareness, and concepts of print. Students' experiences with emergent literacy skills can differ immensely, therefore kindergarten teachers should provide opportunities for meaningful practice in the classroom. These skills can be fostered through intentional practice at literacy centers.

### **Literacy Centers**

Literacy centers are specific places around the classroom when students work in small groups on various literacy-based learning tasks. Typically, students are rotating through each center while the teacher delivers personalized reading instruction to one small group (Stout, 2009). A writing, reading, listening, and word work station are common for the independent work centers that students participate in. Diller (2003) documents that literacy stations are meaningful ways for students to independently practice skills while also receiving differentiated instruction. Teachers should explicitly model each option at the centers and provide support, so students can work successfully on their own. Modeling each rotation allows students to understand their roles at the centers and increases their self-efficacy during this time (Diller, 2003). Promoting independence and providing various learning tasks related to literacy is engaging for all students.

Skills students would normally practice with worksheets can be made more interactive at the work stations (Diller, 2003). Interacting with literacy skills in different ways supports students' understanding and confidence with them. Nations and Alonso (2001) note that the basis of literacy centers is that they encourage students to practice strategies and skills taught in whole group instruction, engage learners through interactive



activities, and expose students to a wide range of materials. Literacy centers are an effective instructional strategy aimed at providing students with meaningful learning experiences.

The Daily Five created by Boushey and Moser (2007) is a common literacy center framework used amongst elementary educators. The five centers mentioned are read to someone, read to self, word work, work on writing, and listen to reading. Teachers should spend the first few weeks establishing solid routines to build students' independence with each center (Boushey & Moser, 2007). Daily Five provides a manageable structure that promotes independence, choice, and engagement in all aspects of literacy development.

### **Authentic Learning**

Authentic learning involves solving real world experiences, integrating meaningful conversations, applying students' experiences, and including students' learning styles. To encourage motivation and engagement in literacy, teachers can establish authentic learning environments.

Authentic learning focuses on solving real world problems. (Lombardi, 2007). Students should understand direct connections between the content they are learning and their own lives. One example of authentic learning comes from a study conducted by Lee and Goh (2012) in Singapore which allowed primary students to participate in an authentic community learning project. The study involved 42 students between the ages of four and six years old. Students created their own pretend food stalls to learn and practice how coins are utilized. This authentic learning experience incorporated play and collaboration, which was motivating for emergent learners. According to the authors, the authentic experiences provided by the teachers increased students' creativity, problem

solving skills, and engagement with the content (Lee & Goh, 2012). Therefore, when the content is applicable and relevant to students' lives, they are more invested and eager to learn.

Meaningful conversations to support oral language development is another way to support authentic learning experiences. Boyd & Galda (2011) describe "real talk" as discussions that connect learning to students' personal experiences and extend their thinking. When students have thoughtful discussions with their peers, they are able to engage deeper in their learning. Teachers can further these conversations in the classroom by modeling the use of authentic questions during discussions that follow the natural dialogue (Boyd & Galda, 2011). Supporting real talk in the classroom can relate students' learning experiences to their backgrounds. Authentic learning is a way to engage all learners in the classroom and inspire them to connect their knowledge with their real-world experiences.

### **Student Interests and Learning Styles**

Students' interests should also be implemented into lessons to increase motivation and engagement. Researchers in education have found that when students' interests are utilized into content, their knowledge and engagement are increased (Hidi, 2000, as cited in Shen & Chen, 2006). When students' interests are implemented into instruction, they are more motivated and eager to learn. Further, Robertson and Padesky (2020) observed a fifth grade teacher utilize a student's interests to support his comprehension and decoding strategies. The teacher found specific materials that were geared towards topics that were motivating for the student and then implemented those materials in his word work. By the end of observation, the student's motivation and achievement in reading

were increased (Robertson & Padesky, 2020). Intentionally integrating students' interests into learning is engaging to all students.

Similar to students' interests, students' learning styles is a way to increase authentic learning in the classroom. Learning styles are how students gather and process information (Pashler, et al., 2008). Each learner connects with content in different ways, therefore planning instruction to engage those learners is beneficial. A study by Dunn et. al (1990) followed over 100 middle school students to identify if learning style based instruction supported student achievement. Students began by identifying what their learning styles preference was and then educators were able to plan content that reflected that preference. Researchers found that creating opportunities for students to learn through their preferred learning styles boosted their achievement and engagement (Dunn et al., 1990). Creating an experience in the classroom that is personalized to students' learning styles makes learning more meaningful and increases students' understanding.

Furthermore, Erickson and Wharton-McDonald (2018) write that integrating skills-based learning tasks coupled with autonomous motivation into the classroom creates powerful literacy opportunities for emergent students. Skills based learning allows students to consistently practice an essential literacy skill in meaningful ways. For example, planning a lesson when students can sort pictures by their sounds is supportive for phonological awareness (Erickson & Wharton-McDonald, 2018). Autonomous motivation is when students participate in behaviors that align with their intrinsic goals for themselves (Hagger et al., 2014). Aligning students' goals and interests into literacy experiences motivates students immensely. Additionally, providing choice within those literacy tasks allows students to feel in control of their learning.

## **Student Voice and Choice**

Lifting students' voices and creating choices in the classroom can increase their sense of belonging and passion for learning. Turner and Paris (1995) share that the 6 C's of motivation are choice, challenge, control, collaboration, constructing meaning, and consequences. Giving students' choices with their work increases their motivation with the task. Developmentally appropriate challenges and control within literacy work allows students to engage deeper with the content. Collaboration is essential to encourage students to work together and hear new perspectives (Turner & Paris, 1995). The 6 C's of motivation are important to boosting students' engagement in literacy.

There is no question that student voice and talking are critical dimensions that support student achievement (Policastro et al., 2020). When students have a say in their learning, they are more motivated to continue challenging themselves. Student voice is incredibly important because students are experiencing lessons differently than teachers and can provide diverse perspectives (Parr & Hawe, 2020). Providing a safe space for students to share their ideas creates a more inclusive and collaborative community. Within literacy centers there are frequent opportunities for students to talk about their reading, share their writing, and collaborate with word work. All of these experiences allow students' interests and connections to be heard.

Literacy centers also encourage students to choose work that is motivating to them and continue to practice personalized skills. Walker (2003) highlights how giving students' choices within their learning allows them to spend more effort and challenge themselves on the task they select. Examples of choice within literacy centers are allowing students to pick their own independent reading books, choosing a writing

prompt, or which word work activity best meets their interests. Creating opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge in various ways, supports their views of themselves as content experts. Effective literacy centers have options for writing that are geared towards students' interests and word work that correlates with their learning styles. Overall, providing space for students' voice and choice to be uplifted supports an engaging classroom environment.

### **Components of Literacy**

Integrating all literacy components into the classroom promotes an engaging literacy-rich classroom. The eight essential pillars of literacy instruction include: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, language, and knowledge building (Alexander, 2022). Literacy centers create opportunities for students to practice these necessary skills in authentic ways.

### ***Reading***

Literacy centers allow opportunities for students to receive specified reading instruction in small groups. Reading groups can be made based on the skills that students are working on. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) suggests that reading groups should be made flexible and should be re-evaluated often to ensure that students are receiving appropriate instruction. With current assessment data, each center can be easily differentiated to support the specific skills that students need more practice with. Supporting students' needs within reading can increase their confidence and motivation.

Establishing a positive mindset associated with reading is beneficial to emergent readers. In a study that observed the impact that early readers had on their outlook at school, Cobb (2014) found that students who began with a positive idea about reading

were more engaged and motivated. The author notes primary students were seen reading for fun, sharing books they enjoyed with peers, and bringing in books from home to share with the class (p.92). Creating a solid foundation about reading is incredibly important to students' perspective on learning. To increase confidence with reading, literacy centers allow students to engage with reading skills in various contexts. A few ways that students can connect with reading during centers is through independent and partner reading.

**Independent Reading.** Independent reading is a time for students to select meaningful texts and read on their own. Establishing a routine time for students to quietly interact with texts can support their motivation with reading. Increasing students' engagement with independent reading in school can support their motivation to read outside of school as well. A research study followed 53 fifth grade students who kept logs of how much students read during their free times. On average, students read for ten minutes a day during their free time. This motivation to read on their own, led to a positive increase of student reading performance (Anderson et al., 1988, as cited in Cullinan, 2000). When students are able to read alone and on their own terms, their confidence and reading level increases.

Another way to motivate students to read is by providing access to culturally relevant texts in the classroom. Bishop (1990) writes how literature can be mirrors of personal experiences and window to other perspectives throughout the world. Utilizing literacy materials that showcase diverse experiences allow students to see the world in different ways. Culturally relevant texts connect students with their backgrounds and experiences with the stories (Alanis, 2007). Students' unique perspectives are lifted within culturally relevant texts. Specifically, these intentional texts can connect with

emergent bilingual students (Ebe, 2015). When students feel represented in the stories, they feel valued and more engaged in the learning. Providing stories that are interesting and inclusive to all learners captures students' excitement towards reading.

**Partner Reading.** Partner reading is an opportunity for students to read texts with a classmate and discuss story components. Talking and reading with a partner is an effective instructional strategy as students are able to hear diverse perspectives and problem solve together (Pilonieta et al., 2020). When students read stories with a partner, they are able to decode and analyze the text in a collaborative way. Partners can be established with mixed-level groupings or with students at the same reading level. Both experiences allow students to communicate and share their thoughts while reading. When partner talks were explicitly taught and modeled, kindergarten students were more thoughtful about their metacognitive comprehension strategies (Pilonieta et al., 2020). Implementing engaging discussions during literacy centers that support their knowledge of comprehension is an authentic learning experience.

The reading center can be independent or with a partner. Students have the option to choose texts that are geared towards their interests. Culturally relevant books are utilized to connect with students' backgrounds and motivate their reading. Providing a time and space for students to engage with reading in various ways is supportive to their literacy development.

### ***Writing***

Learning to write is an essential part of literacy development, especially in the primary grades. Encouraging students to become writers from the first day engages them in the function and form of written language (Martinez & Teale, 1987). Kindergarten

students enter the classroom with a wide range of writing experiences. Some are in the preliterate stage, they are drawing and making symbols for letters, and others are entering the emergent stage. The stages of emergent writers are strings of letters, groups of letters, labeling pictures, and environmental print (*Curriculum, instruction, and assessment*, n.d). To support students' writing development at literacy centers, educators should encourage brave spelling (defined in the forthcoming section) and plan meaningful learning tasks.

**Drawing.** Emergent writers begin by drawing pictures and symbols before writing words and sentences. In a study by Levin and Bus (2003) preschoolers' understanding of writing versus drawing was measured. Participants were asked to describe their drawings and recognize the work they had done. As they got older and had more writing experiences, researchers saw their drawings turn into symbolic representations of letters. Researchers note that supporting drawing during the age range of 2- 4 years old supports future writing development (Levin & Bus, 2003). Kindergarten teachers can increase writing engagement by fostering opportunities for students to draw as a form of communication.

**Brave Spelling.** Emergent writers' use of brave, or inventive, spelling can foster confidence and motivation for writing. Inventive spelling is when students use their knowledge and experience of letters and sounds to spell words. Explicitly teaching students to persevere and write the letters that they hear in a word independently allows them to develop a growth mindset and self-regulation (Schrodt et al., 2020). Brave spelling allows students to metacognitively think about letter-sound correspondence and solve problems. Recent research findings note that primary educators should encourage students to use metalinguistic skills that promote in-depth oral and written learning



experiences. Further, brave spelling creates meaningful opportunities to collaborate with peers and utilize various strategies that can be applied to writing (Albuquerque & Martin, 2021). Brave spelling is modeled to the whole group and then practiced independently every day. Teachers can support brave spelling by providing sentence frames with high frequency words and utilizing questioning techniques to build confidence in their writers. In literacy centers, students are prompted to spell words on their own using resources at the station. Instilling writing confidence in primary students will help them maintain motivation and engagement during literacy, while also fostering a growth mindset.

**Authentic Writing.** Writing is a way for students to communicate their own experiences and ideas. By encouraging writing, students are able to share their voices and deepen their understanding of written language (Martinez and Teale, 1987). Allowing choice at the writing center prompts students to lift their voices and connect their experiences into the classroom. Students should have the option to choose writing tasks that are meaningful to them. Martinez and Teale (1987) also share that real world writing tasks have been proven to be most effective in students' writing development. Examples of real-world writing tasks are making lists, writing letters, and personal stories. Authentic writing tasks are motivating to students, as they demonstrate how writing is utilized outside of the classroom.

**Sharing.** Finding time to lift students' voices in the classroom is essential to their sense of belonging. During the writing center, students should have the opportunity to share their stories and experiences with their peers. This creates a collaborative and inclusive community. Collaborative learning is important to include with writing because it prompts students to engage deeper in their writing and make meaningful connections

with their peers (*Collaborative Learning*, 2020). Teachers should allot time for learners to discuss and interact with each other at the writing center to promote collaboration and a positive learning environment.

Planning a targeted and meaningful writing center for students increases their motivation and engagement with written language. Snyders (2013) notes that a writing workshop that welcomes choices, sharing, and feedback every day supports students' writing development. Including students' interests and experiences into the writing center is an effective way to boost engagement in literacy.

### ***Listening***

Mastering letter-sound automaticity is critical to ultimately becoming a fluent reader (Clemens et al., 2017). Being able to identify each letter's name and sounds sets a solid framework for students' ability to decode words. The three characteristics of fluency are accuracy, rate, and prosody. Accuracy is how many words students are reading correctly. Rate is the amount of words per minute that students are accurately reading. Lastly, prosody is defined as reading text with expression (*Components of fluency*, 2022). Each of these aspects of fluency should be fostered in an emergent literacy classroom.

A listening center in the classroom supports students' fluency development and creates a safe reading environment for each learner. Students can choose a story that is engaging and listen to a fluent reader, which supports their understanding of what fluency is. Stories that are played on the audio tapes should capture students' interests, background, and communities (Brown Hoffman & Cipollone, 2021). When students feel

represented with the literacy materials, they are engaged and motivated to continue reading.

Updated technology allows students to listen to audiobooks and watch the words become highlighted as they are read to also support vocabulary development. Beschorner and Hutchison (2013) note that use of iPads applications can allow students to read, write, and listen simultaneously. Students can follow along with an audio book by listening to the story be read and read the words at the same time. Digital talking books have been found to support reading instruction by providing accurate pronunciation and interactive ways to demonstrate comprehension of the stories (Holum & Gahala, 2001). Utilizing technology for the listening center also boosts student motivation as they are able to choose a book that is interesting to them. This increases students' engagement as they want to understand all of the story components.

### ***Word Work***

Students acquire word knowledge through repetitive and meaningful practice that allows them to understand the word structures (Templeton, 2015). The word work station includes a variety of hands-on learning tasks that deepen students' letter and word knowledge. Word studies involve decoding words, pronunciation of words, and their meanings (Park & Lombardino, 2013). Word work can be specified to each student in the classroom and after explicit instruction can be a center with a variety of student choices. High frequency words, phonics, and vocabulary are essential themes that are present at the word work center, as they are integral to emergent readers' literacy understanding.

**High Frequency Words.** High frequency words are the most common words used in texts, such as “the” or “and.” Research has found that there are thirteen high

frequency words that take up 25% of all texts (Johns & Wilke, 2017). To show mastery of high frequency words, students will be able to read them automatically. Increasing understanding of high frequency words can deepen reading engagement and comprehension of texts. Students can practice reading and writing each high frequency word during literacy centers. Finding high frequency words in their own texts or building them with tiles is an effective and authentic way for students to engage with each word.

**Phonics.** Phonics is defined by the National Literacy Trust as reading phonemes, or sounds, that are connected with graphemes, letters, and blending them together. In kindergarten, the development of phonics is crucial to students' literacy foundation. Systematic phonics instruction involves following a sequence of instructions to build off students' prior knowledge and support their understanding of the language (Ehri et al., 2001). Students go through a planned sequence of lessons that increase their awareness of sounds and word patterns in texts. There are a variety of ways to teach phonics to students, yet synthetic phonics instruction has been proven to be most effective. Synthetic phonics encourages learners to separate sounds of a word and blend them together (Ehri et al., 2001). Educators should be giving students several opportunities in different contexts to practice letter-sound correspondences.

One motivating way to practice phonics skills is with word sorts. The *Words Their Way* (Bear et al., 2012) highlights qualities of meaningful emergent word sorts. Emergent readers should have explicit practice with oral language, word structures, and sounds in words. Concept sorts are a way for primary learners to find similarities and differences between words and letters (Bear et al., 2012). Sorts are hands-on and are easily differentiated to match the phonics skill that students are working on. Word and letter

sorts are interactive learning tasks for students to practice word structures and letter sounds.

Blending and dictation are key components of phonics instruction. Blending is when students string together the sounds to read a word (*Literacy leadership brief*, 2019). Students should receive authentic practice with blending, as it is a necessary beginning skill of phonics. Dictation is having students speak sounds and parts of the word. This is beneficial because it helps students become familiar with common word patterns and spellings (*Literacy leadership brief*, 2019). Creating experiences with blending and dictation for emergent readers is important to their phonics development.

The word work center provides opportunities for students to practice blending and dictation, which are essential to systematic phonics instruction, as well as, connecting with high frequency words. Students can have options to interact with these skills in hands-on ways. Examples of this could be with letter tiles, magnetic letters, or elkonin boxes. Providing choice and repetition at the word work center increases students' independence and engagement. Word work allows students to deepen their understanding of phonics and high frequency words when educators plan authentic experiences for them to practice each skill.

**Vocabulary.** It is well noted that vocabulary instruction in the early grades is a predictor of success of reading in later grades (Loftus & Coyne, 2013). Emergent students are acquiring new words every day as they absorb information in their learning environment. Direct instruction on vocabulary words is necessary for all students, especially students who are entering the classroom with little experience with academic vocabulary. Silverman (2007) completed a study in five kindergarten classrooms with

participants being English only speakers and English language learners. Teachers utilized storybooks and pictures to teach vocabulary words to students. It was found that English Language learners' knowledge of the vocabulary words grew immensely by the end of the study. The routine and explicit instruction with visuals was effective in furthering students' vocabulary learning.

Literacy centers are an opportunity for students to practice vocabulary words in meaningful contexts. Students can find vocabulary words in choice texts, write stories with the vocabulary words, or use them in peer to peer discussions. Pictures can be easily posted at a center to encourage use of the vocabulary words. Finding opportunities for students to utilize vocabulary words in real-contexts is meaningful to their literacy development.

### **Differentiation**

Effective literacy instruction involves planning intentional support for the specific students in the classroom. Students are entering kindergarten with a variety of skills and experiences with language, therefore instruction needs to be differentiated. Burke and Baillie (2011) write that, "Learning centers allow for varied instruction by using different kinds of literacy materials that may be at different levels, by matching tasks and activities to student's levels, interests, and preferred modes of learning, and by allowing for small-group instruction" (p.4). Teachers are able to plan lessons that support each student while also allowing choice and student voice in the learning process.

### ***Multilingual Learners***

According to the National Center of Education Statistics (*English learners in public schools, 2022*), the number of multilingual learners in Fall 2019, increased by 4.5 million students to 5.1 million. Therefore, intentional multilingual instruction is necessary to support each learner. Proctor et al. (2021) write that multilingual instructional strategies, such as opportunities for dialogic approaches and multimodal texts and scaffolds, increased student engagement and comprehension. Educators should plan various meaningful learning experiences with the same skill to reach all learners.

In literacy centers, multilingual students are working with peers, so there are dialogic approaches embedded within each rotation. A study completed in Texas (Hernandez, 2021) focused on over 100 first grade bilingual students' language acquisition after literacy centers were implemented. Data was collected at the start and middle of the year to analyze students' reading achievement scores. Researchers found that bilingual students' accuracy, fluency, and comprehension were improved through the use of literacy centers. Learners can collaborate and share at the writing, word work, or partner reading center. Also, literacy centers provide experiences with multimodal texts and personalized support as students are gaining independence with skills they have been explicitly taught. Centers engage and motivate all students in the classroom by creating meaningful learning moments.

### ***Special Education Students***

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, IDEA, (*About IDEA, 2022*) requires all students to receive free and public education. IDEA also states that students must receive their education in the least restrictive environment available. Establishing a literacy-rich classroom environment that is inclusive to each learner is

incredibly important. Studies have shown that students with disabilities are often missing out on meaningful literacy experiences that promote independence and are interactive (Katims & Pierce, 1995). Thus, educators should be planning more intentional learning tasks that include the variety of students in the classroom. Research has found that effective literacy strategies for students with support needs are repeated readings, graphic organizers, and a time delay (Toews & Kurth, 2019). Special education students deserve to have similar opportunities for authentic literacy experiences in the classroom.

Literacy centers create a space for each learner to be supported and engaged at a level that is targeted for them. Centers are a way to offer a nurturing and engaging environment that scaffolds students' learning (Genisio & Drecktrah, 1999). Each center should have flexible seating, choices, and differentiated tasks that meet students where they are. The experiences should match students' learning styles and capture their interests. Differentiation is easily included within literacy centers as it allows students to participate in similar learning experiences with skills that are suited for them.

### **Assessment**

To maintain effective literacy centers, assessment is needed to consistently monitor students' knowledge and areas for growth. Dixon and Williams (2002) communicate that constant data collection and reflection are an extremely important part of assessments. There are two main types of assessments: summative and formative. Both serve as important tools to create intentional lessons with personalized support for students.

Summative assessments are a more standardized end of the unit assessments that provide an overall picture of student understanding. Johnston and Costello (2005) write



that summative assessments are ways to look back on learning to analyze student growth. These can be utilized in literacy to plan meaningful next units of study that connect with students' prior knowledge.

Formative assessments are quicker check-ins with students that can relate to a smaller, more specific skill. These assessments are more forward looking and take place in the middle of learning (Crooks, 1988 as cited in Johnston & Costello, 2005). Examples of formative assessments are exit tickets, hand signals, or conferring sessions. Formative assessments are effective ways educators can connect with students during lessons and provide meaningful feedback.

Literacy centers provide frequent opportunities for students and educators to check understanding and provide feedback. Educators can assess and connect with students at each center by checking their work that is produced. Assessments are needed to ensure that instruction is meeting students' current academic needs and growth. Summative and formative assessments should be integrated into effective literacy centers.

### **Conclusion**

Through the literature review, research has shown that authentic literacy centers are needed for emergent learners, as they are entering the classroom with a wide range of literacy experiences. Students in kindergarten are evolving through the emergent literacy stage and require intentional literacy lessons to support their development. Authentic learning significantly elevates student engagement and creates meaningful connections between students' learning and their personal experiences. Educators should plan instruction that supports the needs of all learners and literacy centers is an optimal opportunity for that. Student choice and voice are critical to create motivating lessons.

The essential literacy centers of writing, word work, reading, and listening were discussed. Lastly, differentiated supports within literacy centers were highlighted to ensure that each learner is receiving personalized instruction.

Chapter Three will synthesize the research information from chapter two to develop resources for elementary teachers to use to create meaningful literacy centers. The project will describe ways that educators can implement literacy centers to best meet the needs of the students and utilize effective literacy strategies. Using the research question: *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?* to plan interactive literacy centers that reach all learners. Background research for the importance of literacy centers will be summarized. A detailed guide to finding resources and facilitating each center will be provided within the website. Specific learning experiences that connect with key emergent literacy components will be shared, as well as, possible adaptations to prompt more student voice and choice.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

While researching the question, *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?* I was inspired to think deeper about ways to create a supportive and literacy-rich learning environment. I have observed that establishing meaningful literacy experiences for emergent readers and writers from the start is challenging, yet immensely beneficial. One aspect that is the most challenging is meeting students where they are and planning differentiated work that is also engaging. As students are entering school with such a variety of literacy experiences, creating a solid foundation for skills to develop is important. It is important for kindergarten teachers to know the foundational skills that are necessary for students to develop and ways to promote these skills. Therefore, I have created an organized website for teachers to utilize when planning these meaningful lessons.

The website was created on google sites to allow teachers to navigate it easily and use it at a time that is convenient for them. Explicit materials and relevant research will be outlined. Kindergarten teachers, multilingual teachers, and title 1 teachers can implement these resources to engage emergent students.

In this chapter, learning theories that support meaningful literacy centers will be mentioned. Then, the setting and audience intended for this project will be described. After that, the details of the project will be listed with the goals in mind. The timeline for implementation and assessments utilized to monitor success of the website is noted later

in the chapter. Each section will provide specific details around planning authentic literacy centers in a kindergarten classroom.

### **Research**

Learning theories that support meaningful literacy centers in the classroom are Piaget's cognitive development theory (1962), Vygotsky's social learning theory (1978), and Clay's emergent literacy theory (1991). First, Piaget noted that children make meaning based on their own experiences and ideas (Kidd et al., 2021). This project allows students to interact with literacy skills in authentic contexts and connect their learning with their own lives. Literacy centers also provide opportunities to have differentiated literacy experiences. This is closely related to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which states that children learn from those around them. The people around the students can provide scaffolding to increase confidence and mastery of a specific skill (Kidd et al., 2021). Within literacy centers, educators provide scaffolding at each workstation that is suited for students' individual needs. Literacy centers will be introduced with a slow, gradual release to allow students time to feel comfortable working independently. Clay's emergent literacy theory also emphasizes the importance of teacher scaffolding for young learners. She studied early learners in New Zealand and found that each student was entering school with different literacy experiences (Crawford, 2010). This project integrates students' interests, backgrounds, and personal experiences into their learning at a developmentally appropriate level. Clay also found that primary students benefit from authentic learning experiences in all aspects of literacy: reading, writing, and speaking (Crawford, 2010). At literacy centers, students have daily practice with each essential skill of early literacy.

Several theorists support the foundational components and learning tasks of literacy centers. They are designed to increase student motivation, engagement, and meaningful learning associated with essential literacy skills. The project is geared towards literacy centers in kindergarten and allows for adaptation to meet the needs of each learner.

The website provided is designed with the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2006) guidelines in mind. First, it is suggested that a website's content is useful and engaging to the audience (p.26). The website is created to be easily implemented and applied to primary grade classrooms. Another guideline mentioned was that the pages should be laid out to support comprehension (p.44). The information will be laid out in an organized manner.

### **Setting and Audience**

The website and materials for this project will be implemented into a suburban elementary school in Minnesota, with students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Currently, there are 80 kindergarten students at this school. Seven percent of students are Asian, 19% are Black or African American, 5% are Hispanic/Latino, 6% are two or more races, and 62% are White (Public School Review, n.d.). Within the school, there are five kindergarten teachers, two multilingual teachers, and three title 1 teachers that all support students. All kindergarten teachers implement literacy centers into their literacy block daily. The professional development project will support teacher's current practices by allowing easy differentiation and deepening students' understanding of literacy concepts. The website will inform educators about the importance of authentic literacy centers to meet the needs of each learner. According to the Minnesota Report Card (MDE, n.d.),

74% of students met the standards in reading. The school does receive Title 1 funding to support students who might need extra support with reading skills. Important teaching practice within the district is an emphasis on incorporating the 4 Cs: collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication. These are easily included within literacy centers as students are sharing with each other, participating in open-ended learning tasks, and applying their knowledge to their own lives. Literacy centers allow kindergarten students to receive targeted instruction and meaningful early literacy experiences that make a difference in their educational journey. This website will provide specific literacy center tasks for primary teachers to implement into their classrooms.

### **Project Description**

The project aims to provide educators with specific background knowledge and resources to implement authentic literacy centers in a kindergarten classroom. Authentic and meaningful literacy centers were created for an entire school year. The writing, word work, reading, and listening centers will be explicitly laid out on the website with materials to enhance each workstation. Each literacy center is geared towards developing a specific emergent literacy skill. The number of students at each center is determined by class size and targeted skill that students are working on. Every learning task is directly aligned to the Minnesota State English Language Arts standards for kindergarten. There will be a subpage for each literacy center as well as a background research section and an

assessment page (Figure 1).

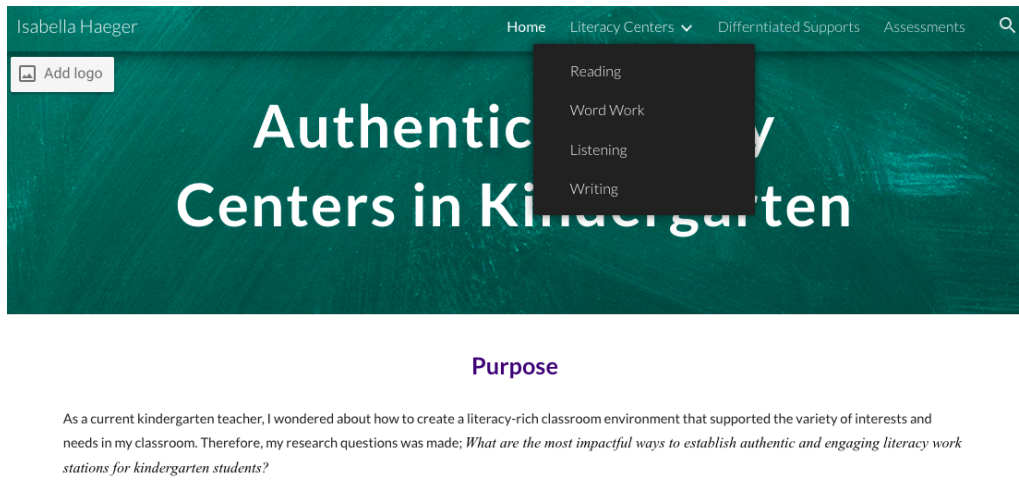


Figure 1.

Also, materials for small-group instruction will be highlighted. Literacy skills can be adjusted based on class and individual needs; however, the website establishes a framework for meaningful learning experiences.

Assessments within literacy will allow differentiated instruction to occur. Fastbridge fall early reading data, as well as formative assessments on letter names, letter sounds, and concept of print will inform the teacher what skills might need extra support. Differentiated supports will be intentionally planned within each center based on formative and summative assessments in literacy. The literacy centers resources provided will utilize formative assessments to check understanding and adapt instruction as needed.

The purpose of this project was to create an inclusive and supportive literacy environment at the beginning of students' educational journey. The website describes background knowledge on literacy centers for educators to utilize. Literacy centers provide personalization based on students' unique needs, authentic experiences with

essential skills, and student choice and voice to be lifted. Teachers will be able to use the materials provided to plan intentional literacy instruction for every student in their classroom.

### **Timeline**

I began thinking about literacy centers in the Fall of 2022 when implementing them into my classroom as the curriculum stated. With the variety of literacy experiences in my classroom, I wondered how I could engage each learner more deeply in the skills and provide meaningful instruction that was targeted to the skill they were working on. The research question; *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?* was then formulated. After that, I began researching various studies, theories, and journals that discussed instructional strategies that were supportive for emergent readers and writers. Student voice and choice were important to my research, as I know how motivating inclusion of these are for early learners. I started to prepare the project in November 2022 by describing the setting, audience, and timeline for the intended literacy resources to be implemented.

The project will be integrated in Fall of 2023. The website will be shared as a part of the literacy planning for the upcoming school year and will be shared with primary teachers and title teachers. It is recommended that literacy centers are introduced in the middle to end of October to allow kindergarten students time to acclimate to new school routines and procedures. Literacy centers will take place for 45 minutes each day, while students are rotating to experience each one.

### **Assessment**



Authentic literacy centers are analyzed through formative and summative assessments. Formative assessments include the fall fast bridge early reading data to assess letter names, concepts of print, letter sounds, and onset sounds, teacher observations of blending and segmenting phonemes, and writing samples. Progress monitoring is used for students that are identified as some or high risk on the first fast bridge assessment. This occurs weekly and allows the teacher to track students' understanding with a specific skill. Onset sounds, letter names, and letter sounds, are common progress monitoring assessments utilized in kindergarten. Once students have shown mastery three weeks in a row, they can be released from the progress monitoring group. Each one of these assessments informs next steps for teachers to take with students.

The summative assessment that students will participate in is the spring fast bridge assessment. This captures essential literacy skills that students acquire through the kindergarten year. Sight words, decodable words, and phonics will be assessed. Further, students writing samples will be collected and shared as a portfolio to document their growth throughout the year. One sample per week will be collected and observed by the teacher. By the end of the year, students will have several different writing pieces that cover a variety of genres.

Feedback from the teachers that are implementing centers with the use of the website will also support further adaptations. Halfway through the year, teachers will participate in a survey about how the centers are going and what suggestions they have. Then, at the end of the year, teachers will participate in another survey after utilizing the materials and learning throughout the entire school year. This data and feedback will

provide specific ways to improve professional development and knowledge about literacy centers in the classroom.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter described the project aimed to support primary teachers in planning meaningful literacy centers in the classroom. Literacy centers allow personalization of skills and engagement in unique ways. Students have choice and independence within literacy centers which increase their motivation. The setting and audience of the project were noted in the next section of this chapter. Formative and summative assessments will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy centers. The timeline for introducing literacy centers was also mentioned. These should be slowly taught beginning in October and continue throughout the entire school year. The website with explicit materials and research will be shared in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four will document how to integrate literacy centers into the classroom and provide specific learning opportunities at each center. The website will be organized for ease and application for primary grade teachers. Personal reflection and professional learning throughout this project will be described. Significant research throughout this process will be highlighted and related to the final project.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Capstone Reflection

The final chapter of my capstone will be a share of my reflection of learning and conclusions on my project for authentic literacy centers in a kindergarten classroom. My wondering about creating a literacy-rich environment that meets the needs of all learners in my classroom led me to my research question; *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?* With this in mind, the goal of the project was to provide primary grade teachers with background knowledge and resources for implementing literacy centers in the classroom at the beginning of the year. The research that is shared provides in depth understanding about the benefits of literacy centers for emergent students.

In this chapter, my personal reflections and learnings will be discussed. The literature review will be mentioned in correlation with the final project. Then, the project will be shared with the benefits and limitations, future learnings on this topic, and how this information will be communicated.

#### Literature Review Summary

The literature review focused on authentic learning, student voice and choice, and the essential components of early literacy. All of the literacy centers were also shared and research behind the benefits of them were highlighted. Authentic learning was meaningful to my professional development website. Authentic learning is creating real world experiences and conversations for students in the classroom (Lombardi, 2007). The learning tasks that are outlined on the website are engaging for primary learners. Literacy

centers are a meaningful way for students to connect their literacy skills with their interests and backgrounds.

Research from each component of literacy was also important to this project. First, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) reading foundations suggested that flexible groupings that are assessed frequently are a crucial piece of effective literacy centers. This was significant in the planning of the website because formative and summative assessments are listed and visuals for creating flexible groups are shared. The Daily Five model of centers supported the organization that the website has laid out. Boushey & Moser (2007) noted how teaching explicit routines and expectations promotes independence and choice within centers. Both of these frameworks guided the professional development website that was created.

The *Words their Way* curriculum and research was beneficial in finding authentic and engaging word work for kindergarten students. The concept sorts in this curriculum are a hands-on way for students to practice word structures and word patterns (Bear et al., 2012). These sorts are easily differentiated, so as students are progressing through skills at different rates, they can have word work that is personalized to them.

For the writing center, I researched the development of emergent writers. Brave spelling and scribbles are important stages for learners to go through as they prompt letter-sound correspondence understanding (Schrodt et al., 2020). At centers, students will have meaningful practice with brave spelling by using strategies that are taught in whole-group instruction. Additionally, emergent writers should have explicit practice with sentence structures (*Curriculum, instruction, and assessment*, n.d). This

understanding helped me find materials that support crucial writing skills for primary students.

While developing the listening center, it was clear that each characteristic of fluency: rate, prosody, and accuracy were needed to create enriching tasks (*Components of fluency*, 2022). The listening center is designed to have students listen to fluent readers read motivating texts. Using technology, students can see the words become highlighted as they listen. Afterwards, they are able to answer comprehension questions. Rate, prosody, and accuracy are developed by listening to a variety of texts that are selected by students.

The review of literature was significant to my learning about purposeful literacy centers. Authentic learning, student voice and choice, and each component of literacy was used intentionally when creating this project. The following sections recap this capstone project.

### **Major Learnings**

Since my undergraduate program, I have been very interested in the development of emergent literacy skills. As I learned quickly, the students in my classroom acquire those skills differently, therefore my instruction needed to allow for more choice and differentiation. Literacy centers were an instructional strategy that I was curious to learn more about. In addition, I was curious about the organization and materials used with literacy centers to make them sustainable and engaging for all learners. The curriculum that my district uses outlines research based small-group instruction, yet the independent work materials are limited. This was my starting point for my research. I have had meaningful discussions with my colleagues who have experienced similar wonderings

and together we collaborated on what authentic centers could look like. Being able to share resources was the idea that sparked the creation of my professional development website.

During the research process, I learned about the importance of emergent literacy skills developing together. Students in the emergent stage are making meaning of the language and materials around them, therefore the literacy tasks that are planned matter. A solid foundation of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness must be developed. Planning routine practice with phonological awareness and phonemic awareness is a necessary component to my instruction.

Lastly, researching authentic learning tasks for the classroom has allowed me to reflect on being more intentional about the activities that are chosen. Providing opportunities to have real talk and make connections between literacy and their own experiences is so beneficial for learners, therefore I plan to increase authentic tasks in my classroom. This project has increased my understanding of emergent literacy and the importance of meaningful learning for primary students.

### **Implications and Limitations**

While working on this project, I encountered some difficulties and reflections. I was hoping to have a wide-range of learning tasks available for primary teachers to implement throughout the year. However, with time limitations I was only able to provide a few meaningful activities for each center. Also, I know that each classroom is made up of unique learners, so I did not want to limit the opportunities for teachers, but instead provide some examples of learning tasks they could do. Another limitation of this project is that one of the formative assessments provided correlated with my district's curriculum.

If a teacher is using the website as a learning tool and does not have *Collaborative Literacy Curriculum* (Center for the Collaborative Classroom, 2021), they will need to find another formative assessment to support data triangulation. An implication of this project is that students are expected to have one to one devices. This allows students to participate in the listening center with the reading apps. My district gives each student an iPad, which is what they use while at the listening center. If a district did not have one to one devices, students could use a cd player and headphones to get a similar experience at the listening center.

### **Future Projects**

Through the next year, I plan to share this project with my grade level team and implement these centers with authentic learning at the start of the year. More research will continue to inform the implementation and learning tasks of literacy centers in the classroom. Culturally responsive pedagogy research and resources will be something that I use to adapt and plan literacy instruction to meet the needs of all learners. I will continue to follow this research to ensure I am planning materials that are engaging and supportive. Furthermore, I will encourage colleagues to consider applying authentic learning and centers to other disciplines. Authentic learning increases students' engagement and interest in the content, therefore it is beneficial to implement. The use of centers allows teachers to differentiate and plan hands-on learning while providing student choice and voice.

### **Benefits**

This project is beneficial to the profession because it is an easily accessible way for primary teachers to learn more about authentic literacy centers. The website

showcases research from each center and highlights a few authentic literacy tasks at each center. Teachers can use this project for planning and professional development of centers. The resources provided are flexible and can be differentiated to whichever level your students need. As literacy centers provide meaningful experiences with literacy, this may encourage classroom teachers to implement centers into other disciplines as well. Utilizing authentic literacy centers in the classroom will increase student engagement and motivation, so this project benefits learners also. Finding learning tasks that are intriguing for students makes a positive impact on their achievement.

### **Summary**

This capstone project and paper was guided by my research question; *What are the most impactful ways to establish authentic and engaging literacy work stations for kindergarten students that promote voice and choice?* In Chapter One, my personal background and experiences with this topic were shared. My attitudes towards reading during elementary school were associated with motivating literacy instruction. Then, Chapter Two consisted of a review of literature on the essential components of literacy, authentic learning, student voice and choice, and differentiation. Chapter Three detailed the project, resources, and timeline for the project implementation. Lastly, Chapter Four described my personal reflection, project benefits, limitations and implications, and summary of literature review. Completing this project has provided me with in-depth knowledge on emergent literacy components and research for meaningful literacy centers in the classroom. I am eager to share my learning with my colleagues and school to inspire others to integrate centers as well. In the future, I will continue adapting my



center instruction and implementation based on current research and knowledge of my students.

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