I, Maria A Centeno, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication Sciences and Disorders.

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Student's name: Maria A Centeno

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Nancy Creaghead, Ph.D.
Committee member: Jo-Anne Prendeville, Ed.D.
Committee member: Allison Smith, Ph.D.
FACTORS RELATED TO EARLY WRITING DEVELOPMENT

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by

María Adenies Centeno Vázquez

B.A. University of Puerto Rico, 1993
M.S. University of Puerto Rico, 1995
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Committee Chair: Nancy Creaghead, Ph.D.
Committee: Jo-Anne Prenderville, Ed.D.
Allison Breit-Smith, Ph.D.
Abstract

Purpose: The purpose was to determine preschool children's changes in name writing and to examine the talk and interactions that children engaged in while writing during a six-week language and literacy program.

Method: Subjects were twelve preschool children, ages three to five, who participated in a summer Language and Literacy Enrichment Group which included daily name writing and journal writing opportunities. Children's name writing samples were collected during the daily routine in the classroom. Name writing scores from the first day were compared with scores on the last day of the summer program. Name writing skill was assessed using a name writing scale. Samples were examined to determine whether children who participated in the program exhibited changes in name writing skill when they participated in daily sign in. Each child’s utterance during journal writing was transcribed and coded for participant’s interactions and purpose. Children’s written products from the initial journal completed the first day and the final journal completed the last day of the program were analyzed to identify changes.

Results: A paired t-test revealed significant changes in children’s name writing scores from the first to the last day of the program. Changes included increase in number of marks and letters. The largest number of child to adult interactions during writing involved the children commenting about their writing or requesting help.

Conclusions: Results suggest that children who participated in a language and literacy preschool program that included daily opportunities for emergent writing activities such as name writing exhibited growth in their name writing skills. Adults and speech language pathologists have an important role in creating classrooms environments that facilitates emergent writing. The importance of adults’ role in providing children opportunities, encouragement and motivation is indicated.
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Chapter I

Introduction

Spoken and written language development share a common path to literacy (Catts & Kamhi, 1986). Both modalities share many aspects, including semantic and syntactic rules, pragmatic functions, and cultural context. The same depth of language processing skills are responsible for spoken language and written text (Cain & Oakhill, 2007). Research about language development and literacy in the preschool years has received attention (Cabell, Justice, Zucker & McGinty, 2009; Puranik, Lonigan & Kim, 2011), but interest in emergent writing has not received the same attention as reading. The importance of book reading has been widely acknowledged, and much research has examined its usefulness as well strategies for using books to support language and literacy (Aram & Biron, 2004; Sulzby & Teale, 1991); however, emergent writing is also important but has received only recent attention (Cabell, Justice, Zucker & McGinty, 2009). Development of writing skills at an early age is associated with good reading and writing during the school years and with success in school (Nixon & Topping, 2001; Whitehurst, Epstein, Angell, Payne, Crone & Fischel, 1994). Writing can be used to measure literacy skill development and complexity (Nixon & Topping, 2001).

Children’s interactions with print at home lead them to acquire their initial knowledge about symbols and letters. Many preschoolers interact with writing from an early age starting with relatives at home. Those early interactions with writing and the learning process will be related to their immediate environment. Preschool children create and discover writing through exploration of their surroundings, and their initial writing attempts will depend upon the opportunities to interact with literacy and individual experiences. Exposure to writing activities
gives children the opportunity to practice literacy skills from their own perspective (Bloodgood, 1999).

One of the earliest meaningful writing activities children are exposed to is to identify and write their names (Bloodgood, 1999). Initial recognition of a child’s written name may start as early as the toddler age at home as a result of baby items with the child’s printed name on them such as bibs, cups, bedroom décor, toys etc. (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004). Later during preschool, children encounter multiple chances to observe, practice, and learn to write their name. Research has shown that the writing skills that typically develop during the preschool years include name writing, drawing and writing related to story book reading (Cabell, Justice, Zucker & McGinty, 2009). Children who attempt to write their name at an earlier age are more likely to attempt writing in other preschool writing tasks (Bloodgood, 1999). Name writing skills have also been shown to be related to the development of reading skills (Haney, Bissonnette & Behnken, 2003; Welsh, Sullivan & Justice, 2003), and name writing promotes the development of writing in general (Levin, Both, Aram & Bus, 2005).

Language and literacy development during the preschool years is critical because the skills that are learned during this time set the stage for school success. Prevention, early identification of language impairment in preschool, and intervention help to decrease learning problems that may be detected later in elementary school (Justice, Bowles & Skibbe, 2006; Justice, Invernizzi & Meier, 2002). Therefore early literacy programs have been developed to promote the development of skills related to reading and writing. Preschool children’s experiences at school are another important source of literacy and learning experiences that provide them with new and different opportunities to increase their literacy knowledge. A print rich preschool setting includes a literacy environment to stimulate and support emergent writing.
behaviors by providing exposure to print, writing tools and materials, meaningful writing activities and learning opportunities.

Classroom experiences include social contact with peers and teachers. The interaction between the social aspect and the literate environment promotes opportunities to communicate and to use language in a variety of ways. Dyson (1993, 2003) observed that children’s interactions while writing included frequent discussions with one another, seeking approval, commenting about their productions, asking for help, and other social interactions. Using writing to communicate or to create meaningful products is one of the venues for children to use their language and literacy knowledge to relate to others. Observations of children in the preschool setting and their interaction with that environment provide information about relationships between the emergence of literacy and learning experiences and opportunities.

Research related to early literacy programs has examined outcomes in areas such as reading, phonological awareness (sound recognition), letter recognition and oral narrative skills (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan & Colton, 2003; Justice, Invernizzi & Meier, 2002). While there has been little investigation of emergent writing (Aram & Biron, 2004; Hammer, Lawrence & Miccio 2007; Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan & Colton, 2003), De Baryshe & Gorecki (2007) found that preschoolers who participated in a literacy program, show gains in emergent writing skills. Preschool children can learn, develop and refine language and literacy skills, including writing, during regular classroom routines if the preschool program’s curriculum and the teacher’s goals provide the necessary tools and experiences to help children achieve the expected goals and if experiences in the classroom include contact with print and writing activities. Writing opportunities in preschool may include formal structured activities such as tracing letters or copying and non-structured activities such as spontaneous drawing and writing
at the writing table or daily journal activities. During spontaneous writing time children are free to interact and to create writing products on their own. Freedom during writing activities facilitates the opportunity for children to practice their writing skills while enjoying the process. Sharing information with peers, asking the teacher for help, and imitating others’ products are some of the activities that can result in a personal and positive writing event for the child. The process of transforming children’s language knowledge into written representation and how that representation changes in relationship to the events occurring during writing provides the basis for the studies described in this dissertation.

Preschool teachers are important in teaching and developing emergent writing skills at early ages. During classroom activities teachers have opportunities to encourage emergent writing skills while communicating with children. Emergent writing and reading development occur simultaneously, interacting with each other (Clay, 1975; Teal & Sulzby, 1995). Children rely on teachers for providing feedback, answering questions and modeling to practice their writing skills. Their experiences are enriched by the adult writing behaviors, meaningful context and functional writing activities (Schickedanz, 1999; Clay, 1987). Therefore, teacher’s knowledge about emergent writing supports their effectiveness in helping children during writing. Teachers may benefit from information about effective teacher-directed instruction of emerging literacy skills, including writing (Hawken, Johnston & McDonnell, 2005). The results of this research can help improve teachers’ knowledge about emergent writing skills.

During recent years, opportunities for emergent writing have been included in some language and literacy enrichment programs to stimulate the reading and writing skills of preschool children, but it is not a common practice among preschool programs (Watson, Layton, Pierce & Abraham, 1994). Writing representations are one reflection of a child’s emergent
literacy knowledge in the target areas of phonological awareness, print concepts, alphabet knowledge and literate language. (Justice, Invernizzi & Meier, 2002; Welsh, Sullivan & Justice, 2003). Therefore, observations and descriptions of children’s writing process and products during their regular daily routines in a preschool language and literacy program can provide further information about emergent writing. Obtaining additional knowledge about emergent writing will provide early childhood educators, other professionals and researchers with data to help improve children’s literacy environments and to enhance writing opportunities. This information can guide teachers and speech language pathologists in how to create and plan literacy-related goals in emergent writing for children in relationship to their developmental skill level. The purpose of this research was to examine the emergent writing behaviors of preschool children during a language and literacy program.

Two studies that examine preschool children experiences while in a language and literacy program are presented in this dissertation. Collection of written artifacts and videos of children during name writing and journal writing provide the data for analysis. The description of talk and events during writing activities provides qualitative data about emergent writing. Data analysis will provide information about early writing development and name writing specifically. The first study examined changes in preschool children’s emergent writing skills using name writing products. The second study examined changes in emergent writing skills using daily journal productions, and the study also described the talk related to writing while children were engaged in the writing activity.
Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter includes a critical review of the literature related to emergent literacy and emergent writing in relation to early literacy activities in preschool classrooms. The literature reviewed and discussed in this chapter is organized into the following sections: emergent literacy, school and adult practices for supporting emergent literacy, early writing experiences, practices for supportive emergent literacy in schools, name recognition and name writing, and writing as a social tool.

Emergent Literacy

Researchers from education, psychology, linguistics, speech-language pathology and other disciplines have addressed emergent literacy from their varied perspectives. Despite differences among them, the emergent literacy concept has been used to describe how the acquisition of literacy occurs as a developmental continuum at early ages in children’s lives as a result of experiences at home and school. Emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing and the environments that support their development (Sulzby, 1989; Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Justice (2006) defined emergent literacy as the reading and writing behaviors of young children before they become readers and writers in the conventional sense.

The initial learning about literacy that starts during the time before formal instruction will support the development of reading and writing in school (Stahl & Miller, 1989; van Kleeck,
Whitehurst & Lonigan (2002) described emergent literacy skills as developmental precursors to formal reading that have their origins early in the life of a child. The emergent literacy acquisition process is enhanced by exposure to reading and writing in diverse forms through informal print related experiences provided by the environment (family, culture, daycare centers, and preschools). Children’s development of emergent literacy will then be nourished from contributions of their environment, personal experiences and their individual strengths, resulting in the bases for the development of formal literacy acquisition (Dickinson & Tabors, 1991). During the acquisition process children start their journey to become literate by demonstrating interest in print forms, imitating reading behaviors with familiar storybooks, interacting with writing artifacts, expressing language through diverse forms, and play involving language related activities. Those initial attempts to be literate initiate the emergent literacy process.

Researchers have investigated different aspects of emergent literacy including school and teacher practices; children’s vocabulary development, spelling, phonological and print awareness, reading and early writing acquisition. In the 1970’s Marie Clay described and developed the emergent literacy perspective as a concept of study in the field of early reading and writing. Her interest in describing children’s development of literacy skills resulted in several papers and books on emergent writing (Clay, 1975; 1982; 1987). She presented descriptions of literacy acquisition and its relationship to language development. Clay explained that reading and writing are related and develop simultaneously. She stated that the development of writing skills provides children the opportunities to explore print and to communicate in a different way (Clay, 1987).
Emergent literacy is an important area of preschool development. Children begin preschool with different literacy skills and knowledge about print, and the school is responsible to foster and to enhance children’s experiences to increase their literacy skills.

**Early Writing Experiences**

Writing is one aspect of literacy that is affected by early experiences at home and school (Bloodgood 1999). Children make discoveries about writing during a trial and error process, exploring and constructing their writing products. Early experiences in life help children acquire knowledge related to writing in their natural environments (Justice, 2001; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Every child’s experiences are different, and their personal characteristics will differ in relation to the environment that surrounds them. For that reason researchers need to consider the sociocultural perspective embedded in the different social practices that will influence children’s responses to writing opportunities (Gee, 2002). Young children’s observation of the function of writing used by adults, independent exploration of print and writing, representation and hypothesis testing and social interaction with more competent writers are some of the factors that motivate the emergent writing process (Nixon & Topin, 2001). Children may interact with their parents in daily activities such as writing letters, notes, grocery lists, bill payments and drawing initially just by observing. If writing artifacts are available continuously and if the family environment provides literacy related opportunities, eventually children will interact with writing acts (Shickedanz, 1990). Once the interest for writing is initiated the adult can promote and encourage additional experiences and opportunities for the child’s writing development to increase. Children’s personal experiences can influence their development of emergent writing skills (Sulzby, 1996, Dyson, 1993). As Dyson (1991) stated “developing control over written
language, however, is not dependent only upon interaction with media but also upon their interaction with other people” (p. 110).

Peer influences

Peer influences can impact children’s literacy development and the creative process. Research in the area of social interactions helps us to understand the relationship between peer communicative and literacy development. Nixon and Topping (2001) examined how classroom arrangements enhance opportunity, resources, modeling, purpose and motivation to support emergent writing of children in their first year of schooling. The study also assessed the additional impact of a form of structured peer interaction between emergent writers and older children with writing delay. From 58 children, 10 aged five were selected to receive the additional structured peer interaction. These children were paired with a tutor who was a year older. During six weeks the intervention was designed to incorporate enhanced opportunities and purpose for writing and structured peer support. Four major strands were used: development of a writing center, creation of a literate play area, teacher valuing and encouraging writing, and structured peer interaction. Observations were made to assess implementation integrity during the activity, and assessment of writing was used to measure improvement by comparing groups. An assessment tool for the writing samples was synthesized from other scales. One point was given for each of 17 features, grouped into three areas: understanding that writing conveys meaning, understanding that the message must be on paper, and elaboration of text. Statistically significant improvements were observed for all the emergent writers, but greater gains occurred for the children in the structured peer interaction. The results give support to the author’s proposal that paired writing is a useful framework for effective collaboration among children. The authors stated that results have a strong implication for pedagogical practice, especially
changes in teacher role and behavior in the emergent writing classroom. In contrast to a traditional emergent writing classroom, while writing in the paired situation, children discussed their product with their peer, and the teacher was not part of the creative process. Therefore the teacher changed her role by looking at the written product as audience and providing the children a real sense of purpose for the written activity. This study supports the need for more research looking at teacher’s roles, behaviors, and interactions with students during writing in addition to providing opportunities for writing. Children from this study were slightly older than preschool children. Research into the applicability of this intervention with preschool children would be informative as to whether peer interventions worked at that level.

Drawings are part of children’s early writing experiences. Coates (2002) examined drawings collected together with transcriptions of children’s descriptions of their drawings. The participants were a sample of twenty children aged 3 to 7 years studied in their classrooms. The research looked at the symbolism contained within the pictures and the stories children told about the picture. The most frequent finding was the descriptive nature of the children’s narratives about their completed pictures. Children’s talk and drawing seemed to be related to their interactive discussions with peers. Coates concluded there was evidence of the stated intention and the influence of peers altering both content and direction of drawings. The author noted that on some occasions children produced dramatization in the form of sounds and movements in their conversations about the drawings. Results support the idea that peers and the social environment influence the writing/drawing productions of children. In another study Coates (2002) mentioned that it was impossible to separate the talk from the drawing process. Children’s talk during writing/drawing with peers offered insights into their social, communicative skills and written products.
**Drawing and writing**

During the emergent writing process children’s drawing may be a precursor to their writing or develop simultaneously with scribbles and writing-like marks. Levin & Bus (2003) stated that writing can emerge from drawing writing like productions in preschoolers. Coates and Coates (2006) investigated the relationship between children’s narratives and their drawing process. The study focused on two age ranges (3 to 4 years and 4 to 5 years). The subjects were from two different SES levels, both mainly Caucasian. They were supplied with drawing media and asked to make images of the topics of their own choice three times across a school year. The researchers were immersed in the context as participant observers. Narrative observations occurred during each drawing episode with pairs of children. The areas investigated and described were the talk related to the subject matter, the social talk, the interaction with an adult, the stages of drawing development, use of color, emergent writing, common themes, influences, and children’s creative conceptual development. Researchers found that drawing in pairs may provide a focus for the development of a range of creative skills. Children’s pictures showed the way in which a discussion can influence the direction that drawings take. The researchers discussed how elements from the pictures provided clues about children’s interests and that such information enhances the understanding of how they relate to elements of the school curriculum. They stated that the pictures testify to a child’s developing awareness of writing, showing two distinctive forms of marks which separate letter forms from symbolic representations. They indicated that the insights to be gained from encouraging children and teachers to work together are multiple and have the possibility to help teachers assess children capabilities and knowledge.

Levin & Bus (2003) studied the writing and drawing produced by 48 children, ages 28 to 53 months. Children were divided into three age groups of equal size. Israeli and Dutch
preschoolers and their mothers were asked to classify their products as drawing and writing. The drawing task included a free drawing and drawing eight specific referents (e.g. baby, mother, sun, flower). The writing task included name writing and writing the eight words that were the drawing referents. The writing scale was composed of three sequential general schemes: graphic, writing-like, and symbolic. The authors developed a drawing scale that reflects the completeness of drawn representations. Scores on writing and drawing were correlated; their products (Israeli children in comparison with the Dutch children) were analyzed and compared. Results revealed that children’s drawings became easier to recognize as drawing from writing, and the meanings of drawings were clearer as the children got older. The results suggest that children’s early writing and drawing products provide information about their level of writing sophistication.

*Writing phases*

Early scribbles and writing attempts are as different as children are, but in general some children create their products to resemble pictures while others resemble writing (Schickedanz, 1990). Sulzby (1990) described children’s writing development as a continuum from scribbles, to letter-like forms, to random streams of letters to invented spelling. Children can differentiate their drawing from their writing, but the adult may not always be able to differentiate it (Schickedanz, & Casbergue, 2004; Levin & Bus, 2003). The caregiver or teacher must stay close to the child when they are writing to be able to understand the child’s meaning, purposes and the events that promoted the writing. Writing and practicing with letters will help the writer to improve the orientation of the letters, increase the accuracy in making lines and allow experimentation with new letters. Once children start practicing writing in different settings, depending upon the situation, they will decide to use more or less refined writing. Some children will choose to use scribbles to pretend to be writing as fast as an adult when playing with peers;
while other times the same children will carefully write short words in a precise manner.

Children’s written products will vary according to their purpose, independently of their maturity level. Hayes & Flowers (1986) described the phases (planning, translating and revising) of the process of writing as important to consider when assessing the writer’s product. Therefore it is important for researchers to observe children while writing to adequately describe the child’s skill level and productions.

Preschooler’s interest in writing and the use of the necessary tools is common; the curiosity to interact with writing may start as soon as the child starts to grasp objects to imitate adults’ actions (Schickedanz, 1999). The adult’s role in providing opportunities and events to encourage writing experiences will result in children’s knowledge and attempts to write. Learning to write is a journey that starts early and continues through elementary school.

The description of the changes and stages from the first attempts at writing to conventional writing attempts will help to assess the child’s levels of literacy development in relation to writing. The use of specific stages and descriptions of writing development can help to identify children’s writing skills level. Therefore research in this area of literacy is essential to obtain more information about writing development and writing production. Most of the literature regarding stages of writing is related to development of spelling (Richgels, 2002). Gentry (1982) presented a model of the developmental stages of spelling in relation to writing. Each stage represents how the speller conceptualizes spelling in qualitatively different ways throughout his or her spelling development. Gentry’s stages are: pre-communicative, semi-phonetic, phonetic, transitional, and conventional. The use of Gentry’s stages to describe writing development has been widely used, but they are more appropriate to school age children. The
earliest stage does not include the initial attempts and the evolution from children’s initial productions like scribbles, drawings and marks to the pre-communicative stage.

Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) described five emergent writing phases. The phases: scribbling, letter-like forms, syllabic representation, transitional and alphabetic writing. Sulzby (1985) identified six broad categories of writing development to describe the early writing attempts of kindergarten children. The categories are writing via drawing, writing via scribbling, writing via making letter like forms, writing via reproducing well learned units, writing via invented spelling and writing via conventional spelling. The ages associated with the categories range from two to six.

Schickedanz (1990) described six writing stages. Stage 1 is the Scribbling stage that represents a child’s first attempt at reproducing writing. Stage 2 is the Linear/Repetitive Drawing stage where children’s scribbling has been refined to look more like standard writing. Stage 3 is the Letter Like Forms Stage where children’s writing looks very close to actual printing. Stage 4 is the Letters and Early Word-Symbol Relationship when children are beginning to reproduce letters and often use a single letter to represent an entire word. Stage 5 is Invented Spelling when children demonstrate that they have constructed some sound letter relationships. Stage 6 is Standard Spelling where children recognize that words have a standard spelling. Spelling skill is related to emergent writing development and higher levels of writing skills.

The research of Borzone & Signorini (1998) examined the variations in children’s early writing forms and the relationship among different writing forms in Spanish. The purpose was to explore the forms of writing produced by kindergarten children who had received no formal instruction in phonological awareness, reading and writing. Participants were 26 (mean age 5:5
years) kindergarten children in Argentina. Testing took place over a two month period after the beginning of the school year. The children were tested individually in three to four sessions of 15 to 20 minutes each. The children were not receiving formal reading and writing instruction since this instruction was not included in the kindergarten curriculum. Children were assessed in ability to match initial sounds in words, ability to segment words into phonemes, knowledge of sound letter correspondences and performance on word writing and text writing tasks. Results suggested that, in the process of writing acquisition, children move back and forth across forms of writing. There were differences between the forms used to write words and text, suggesting that children used a less mature form to accomplish a more complex task. The results indicate that the children’s predominant forms for writing were letters-patterned and letters-random. The authors stated that the acquisition of writing skills seems to develop from a non-analytic approach to print, which reflects sensitivity mainly to its visual and graphic features, to an analytic approach, when the child begins to establish some correspondences between the phonological structure of words and the graphic units. This study provides data about Spanish speaking children’s writing acquisition, suggests that there is interplay among different types and levels of knowledge, knowledge about print, the phonological structure of words, sound letter correspondences, and the cognitive demands of the tasks.

At present there are few commonly used developmental descriptions of the earliest writing developmental stages. Most researchers agree that writing development can be divided in two broad phases (Schickedanz, 1990; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011). The first phase from birth to age three is described as the time when children explore writing by scribbling and marks. During the second phase from age three to six controlled scribbling starts; print, linearity, orientation and letter like forms get more precise (Morrow, 2009).
Emergent literacy and emergent writing in Preschool

Emergent literacy practices have increased to provide children with opportunities to participate in language and literacy environments in different contexts. The preschool environment provides opportunities for children to interact with each other through meaningful activities that include, print and language enriched experiences. The interaction with writing and other literacy related forms helps children acquire and develop new knowledge. Besides the familiar environment, school provides opportunities and experiences to encourage children’s emergent literacy skills. Classroom environments rich in literacy experiences provide children linguistic, social and academic opportunities to develop literacy skills (Aram & Biron, 2004; Aram, 2006). The literacy environment provided by the school setting should give children meaningful experiences to stimulate emergent writing among other literacy areas (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998).

Wells’ (1985) landmark research studied early language and how it will later affect children’s achievement in school. He studied 32 children from a larger language study for over ten years, and later followed a smaller sample of children from fifteen months up to age 10 in a longitudinal study composed of observations, language assessment and family interviews. Results from the study revealed no significant differences between the rate of language development of middle and lower class groups of children (up to age to five). The same results were found for the quality and quantity of their conversational experiences. Results in the area of literacy revealed that lower class children did suffer from linguistic disadvantage, as a consequence of their limited use of these skills by the absence of books and literacy experiences. Data supported the relationship between oral language and literacy development. Wells (1985) suggested that it is important to recognize these differences and to help these children increase
their language by providing meaningful communicative interactions with more mature communicators. Therefore, when working with children it is important to support their oral language growth and to help them experience written language through reading and writing. Wells stated that children can learn and develop literacy skills through meaningful interactions with adult communicators during natural opportunities in the classroom setting. The teacher’s role of providing an environment where collaborative learning can occur is a good strategy that will foster children’s literacy needs and skills.

Emergent literacy practices and programs are available in diverse inclusive contexts such as classrooms, homes, and traditional clinics. The variety of services includes direct service and indirect services through consultation and collaboration with teachers, professionals, and parents (Justice, 2006). A variety of strategies and interventions have been developed to increase children’s skills through emergent literacy interventions. Dialogic reading (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) is an example of an intervention that has been used to support emergent literacy. During dialogic reading the child learns to become a storyteller and the adult assumes the role of an active listener. Programs designed to foster phonological awareness skills are another example of strategies used to promote emergent literacy.

Preschool programs and curriculum are designed to provide opportunities for children to develop many important skills. Writing opportunities are among the daily activities related to literacy that children can experience in preschool environments. Aram & Biron (2004) compared reading and joint writing interventions. The researchers examined the effects of daily adult-child activities in promoting skills related to reading and writing. The aim was to investigate what daily interactions with preschoolers should emphasize in order to equip them with necessary writing skills when they start formal schooling two or three years later. They compared two joint
group interventions, one focusing on language and storybook reading, and the other on alphabetic skills and writing. The participants were 71 preschoolers in Israel who were divided into three groups, one group that participated in each intervention and one control group of 24 children. Pre and post testing evaluated phonological awareness, word writing, letter knowledge, orthographic awareness, listening comprehension, receptive vocabulary, and general concepts knowledge. Both programs involved creative activities. The joint writing program (focusing on alphabetic skills and writing) included letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and functional writing activities. Results revealed that children in the two literacy programs had significantly progressed significantly more than the control group on phonological awareness and orthographic awareness tasks. The joint writing group significantly outperformed both the joint reading group and the control group on phonological awareness, word writing, orthographic awareness, and letter knowledge. The youngest children (ages 3-4) gained as much from literacy programs as did older children (ages 4-5) on all measures assessed in the program. Aram & Biron (2004) stated that in contrast to the wide agreement on the prominent role of joint storybook reading in promoting literacy, they found that joint writing was even more successful in enhancing the basic literacy skills needed for the acquisition of reading and writing. They noted that literacy programs incorporating writing activities may potentially promote these alphabetic skills for preschoolers as young as 3 years of age, and may modify their school success. The authors claimed that joint writing activities can influence both written language knowledge and spoken vocabulary.

DeBaryshe and Goreckis (2007) evaluated the effectiveness of a preschool emergent literacy enrichment curriculum. Participants included 126 Head Start children, teachers and parents. Three conditions were created; experimental literacy, experimental math, and control.
The curriculum activities included daily journaling. The pretest battery consisted of three measures (Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test, Test of Early Reading Abilities 3, Preschool Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing), and a posttest battery consisted of these measures and a fourth measure, of emergent writing which was scored based on Sulzby et al,’s (1989) levels. The researchers scored emergent writing samples at posttest only; as no pretest writing score was available they used the raw score from the Test of Early Reading Abilities 3 (TERA 3) alphabet subscale, which were the most closely related skills for which a pretest measure was available. Children were asked to write a list of all the words or letters they knew and their name; later at posttest the sample was scored for the level of emergent writing based on Sulzby et al. (1989), the number of unique recognizable upper and lowercase letters, and the number of unique recognizable words written using either conventional or invented spelling. The scores were converted to z scores and summed to form a composite writing score. The results revealed the largest gains for the children in the experimental literacy conditions for the areas of phonemic awareness and emergent writing; they also made greater improvements in reading than the children in the math condition. Some of the literacy experiences participants engaged in during the study included: introduction to the grapheme \( m \), encouragement to try to write a recognizable version of the letter, and prompting to write a story in their journal. The results suggested that addressing and encouraging several literacy related skills simultaneously helped to increased children’s progress.

Stellakis and Kondyli (2004) studied children’s early attempts to write by comparing their reading and writing. The researchers’ aims were to compare literate performance (writing and reading) across two different text types (list and message), and to examine the extent to which preschool attendance for one year affected literate performance. Participants were 172
children (ages 47-71 months) in, Greece. The participants were divided into three groups according to the age and the years of kindergarten attendance. Data was collected at the beginning of the academic year; observations took place in two sessions, a week apart. The researchers engaged the children in meaningful communicative practices that could lead to writing and reading a text. The children wrote two types of texts (a list and a message). At the end of the session they were asked to read their writing to the class. Children’s writing was classified using a modified version of several category systems (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982 and Sulzby, Barnhart and Hieshima, 1989). The categories were: (1) Story related drawings: The child draws. May write his/her name but there are no other marks except from drawings. It is not considered writing by the children themselves. (2) Scribbling: The child writes scribbles, which are arranged in rows across the page, and in many cases they are composed of loops and tall sticks repeated over and over again or imitate handwriting. The children characterize these scribbles as writing. (3) Letter like forms: The child writes with marks that resemble manuscript or cursive letters, but may also include geometrical schemes, flags, and small drawings. (4) Letter strings I: Writing is composed of the letters of the alphabet. In many cases the majority comes from the name of the child. Most letters are usually in upper case, and the letters cover the entire row. Children of this category seem to have understood the principle of internal qualitative variations, according to which signs or letters should be different in order to be readable. (5) Letter strings II: Writing is composed of the letters of the alphabet, and words of groups of three to eight letters, which implies that children have understood not only the principle of internal qualitative variations but also the principle of minimum quantity, according to which a certain number of signs or letters constitute a word. (6) Partial alphabetic or alphabetic writing: The child knows that letters represent phonemes and tries to hear them and then to write them down.
(Stellakis and Kondyli, 2004, p. 133). The Spearman Correlation Coefficient Test showed a statistically significant correlation between writing and reading performance in all three groups, meaning that those children whose writing had been classified as more mature also demonstrated more mature reading performance. The authors stated that the primary challenge for teachers is to create a classroom environment that facilitates children’s participation in literacy activities through play, with the teachers as facilitators and participants rather than instructors. The study stressed the role of authentic literacy practices to facilitate literacy. Results highlighted the importance of providing literacy experiences in a more natural and socio-cultural context where adults and participants worked together.

The school setting is usually print enriched; teachers and peers provide models and meaningful occasions to promote writing activities (International Reading Association, 1998; Schickedanz, 1999). It is important that the classroom tools for writing are available and ready for children to interact with them (Schickedanz, 1999). During interactions in the classroom setting children’s literacy knowledge increases and evolves as a result of the experiences and opportunities provided by adults. Development of literacy skills and the how to learn are among the purposes of preschool programs. Stellakis & Kondyli (2004) stated that reading and writing development is a strictly interrelated process, and pre-school education reinforces literacy by creating contexts of de-contextualized language use. They suggest to approach children from what they know and to give them opportunities to communicate by writing. Therefore research examining children’s interactions during writing experiences would provide additional information about reading and writing development. Developmental scales and formal testing to accurately assess and describe children’s emergent skills are needed.

**Name Recognition and Name Writing**
It is frequent for children to relate the initial letter of their name to other words and names of objects, actions and ideas that start with their initial letter. After children learn to recognize the first letter of their name, it is common to find them pointing to every sign or print where the letter is presented, saying “That’s my letter”. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) stated that the child’s own name serves as a model for writing, as a first stable written string, and as a prototype of all subsequent writing, often fulfilling a very special function in their psychogenesis. Preschool centers encourage children to write and practice their names; children also continue to interact at home in literacy related activities where name writing is prompted.

Researchers agree that development of name writing is an important step to literacy development (Clay, 1975; Hildreth, 1936; Lieberman, 1985). Hildreth, (1936) studied children’s writing to describe the developmental sequence in name writing. Subjects were 170 children between the ages of three and six. The participants were tested individually; the writing sample was taken after a series of tests and games. They were asked to write their name and any letters or numbers that they could make. The samples were arranged in order of maturity according to the following criteria: legible letters, spacing, spelling, evenness and alignment. The median quality for each group was found by locating the median sample. Improvement in other areas such as motor control, adjustment to writing, willingness to respond, posture, use of the writing instrument, eagerness to write, speed and pleasure shown in the activity were observed. Results indicated that writing of all the children tested in any age group tended to become more uniform from child to child in the older age groups. The researcher stated that children’s name writing improves steadily from age three to age six without any direct instruction in writing and that it is a significant developmental sign.
Bloodgood (1999) studied the emergent literacy skills of sixty seven children, ages 3 to 6. The research studied early name writing skills in young children as well as literacy skills such as word concept, spelling, word recognition, and phonological awareness. Observations and interviews complimented the data gathered by the assessment. The researcher assessed pre- and post- early literacy skills with a battery of tests including tasks to assess name writing skills, alphabet knowledge, spelling, phonological awareness, reading ability and writing sample. The assessments were administered to individual children in a quiet setting during three to five 15-20 minute sessions. The literacy assessment used was a modification of the McGuffey Reading Center’s Assessment of Literacy Acquisition (ALA: Invernizzi & Bloodgood, 1991). The name writing was scored using Hildreth’s (1936) seven point scale which is a description of seven developmental levels of name writing. For the writing sample, the children were asked to draw a picture and write a story on a topic of their choice. The writing samples were examined to determine the relative frequency of name letters and the prevalence of specific letter patterns. Qualitative data was described (e.g., degree of motor control; handedness; use of letters, mock letters, scribble), and products were evaluated for sophistication of content, degree of writing development, and name-letter content. Qualitative information was gathered from observations and interviews to children’s mothers about home literacy experiences. Consistency was evident between name production and name dictation. The author stated that identification and formation of the letters were part of the literacy repertoire for most of the children. Significant correlations were found between children’s name writing representations and their performance on several emergent literacy skills such as word concepts, spelling, word recognition, and phonological awareness. Results suggested that home literacy experiences play a significant role in children’s emergent writing and reading skills. Bloodgood (1999) stated that children’s initial knowledge
about reading and writing will support and influence the learning process in the classroom setting and suggested that the ability of children to write their name seemed related to other literacy competencies and reflect motor and graphic control, awareness of literacy function, metacognitive and metalinguistic knowledge.

The National Early Literacy Panel (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 234 longitudinal studies about early literacy. The report represents a systematic and extensive synthesis of the published research literature concerning children’s early literacy skills. It summarized data showing the relationship between children’s early abilities and skills and later literacy development. It also summarized experimental data on the impact of instructional interventions on children’s learning. Results showed that among typical children six variables were identified to be correlated with later literacy and those variables also consistently maintained their predictive power even when other variables (IQ and SES) were present. One of the six variables is writing or name writing (the ability to write letters on request or to write one’s own name). This variable consistently predicted later literacy achievement for both preschoolers and kindergartners.

Welsh, Sullivan and Justice (2003) examined whether children’s name writing representations reflected their emergent literacy knowledge in print and phonological awareness. The participants were part of a preschool literacy screening program of 3,546 four-year old children. The participants were administered the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Preschool (Invernizzi, Sullivan & Meier, 2001). Four groups were created based on the level of their name writing representations and later compared for performance on alphabet knowledge, concept of word, print knowledge, rhyme awareness, and beginning sound awareness tasks. The participants were asked to draw a self-portrait and to write their name on a paper. Name writing
was scored on a seven point continuum based on work by Lieberman (1985). The results revealed significant differences between the four name-writing groups on each of the dependent measures (alphabet knowledge, concept of word, print knowledge, rhyme awareness, and beginning sound awareness tasks). Analysis of the data suggested that the sophistication of name writing representations reflected children’s abilities across a variety of literacy tasks. Their findings suggested that name writing appears to reflect print related knowledge. Therefore name writing appears to be an appropriate and necessary task for supporting literacy development. Welsh, et al. (2003) found that children who were able to correctly write their names showed high accuracy rates on tasks examining awareness of rhyme and beginning sounds, knowledge of uppercase letters, and recognition of the concepts and functions of print. For future research the authors suggested that evidence from qualitative analyses of children’s writing production may provide additional support for the idea that children’s writing serves as an indicator of general literacy knowledge.

Haney & Bissonnette (2003) investigated the relationship between name writing and early literacy skills in kindergarten students. They developed a measure of name writing proficiency (Name Writing Scale). The participants were 162 students, ages 5 through 6 attending 11 kindergarten classes at two schools in Georgia. Children were administered a battery of tests during the spring semester of the school year. Assessment took approximately 25 minutes. No significant gender differences were found on the measure of name writing. Results revealed that name writing was significantly correlated with word and non-word identification. The results suggested that name writing skills appear to be related to the development of basic reading skills. The authors stated that using the Name Writing Scale with preschoolers would provide additional insight into the connection between name writing skills and the development
of beginning literacy skills. They found that name writing skills were related to the development of reading skills and that name writing was significantly correlated with word identification.

Cabell, Justice, Zucker and McGinty (2009) aimed to (1) characterize the name-writing abilities of preschool age children with language impairment; (2) identify those emergent literacy skills that are concurrently associated with name-writing abilities; and (3) compare the name-writing abilities of children with language impairment to those of their typical language peers. The participants were 59 preschool age children with language impairment and 23 typical language children. The children with language impairment were enrolled in a larger study of early literacy intervention for children with language impairment, and the children with typical language were recruited using flyers. The researchers administered a battery of emergent literacy and language assessments, including a task in which the children were asked to write their first names. Results showed that the name writing abilities of preschoolers with language impairment were associated with their skills in alphabet knowledge and print concepts. The authors concluded that children with language impairment lag significantly behind their typical language peers in name writing abilities. Findings also provide support for the assertion that name-writing abilities among 4 year olds with language impairment primarily reflect print-related knowledge rather than oral-language-related knowledge or phonological awareness. The authors stated that results suggest two directions in the developmental relationship between name writing ability and alphabet knowledge such that children’s knowledge of letters aids in their name writing. Authors explained that children’s active encoding of letters in the act of writing likely helps to increase alphabet knowledge.

Cabell and colleagues (2009) found that name writing ability represents an important aspect of emergent literacy development and likely reflects children’s print knowledge. Speech-
Language Pathologists are encouraged to address the print related skills of children with language impairment within their clinical interventions to actively cultivate emergent writing skills.

Name writing scales have been designed and used in research, but scholars and researchers still are looking for an appropriate assessment of name writing skills. Hildreth (1936) investigated developmental sequences in writing and found that name writing levels may be used to assess children’s literacy development. Blodgood (1999) used Hildreth’s (1936) name writing developmental level for research on name writing while Welsch, Sullivan and Justice (2003) used the Name Writing Task Scoring Continuum (from Lieberman, 1985). Haney and Behnken developed the Name Writing Scale to qualitatively assess the developmental progress of young children’s name writing skills. They use a point system looking for changes in alignment on paper, capitalization, spacing, size of letters and correct spelling.

The development of name writing has been described as a progression from circular scribbles to continuous linear scribbles, letter like forms and letters in the correct order, and that progression is similar to other aspects of writing development. Other areas that are described from the development of name writing productions are the degree of letter reversal, use of space on the page, firmness in control and speed of writing. The knowledge of their names plays a significant role in children’s early writing development prior to their awareness of letter sound connections. Teachers use children’s names to help them learn literacy related skills like alphabet and letter names because it appears to help children grasp and manipulate written language concepts. Therefore scholars have studied emergent writing and name writing to describe children literacy development from early stages.
Writing as a social tool

Adults’ cultural beliefs and conceptions about children’s emergent literacy skills will result in the amount and kind of experiences they will provide to children at early ages. The National Early Literacy Panel report (2004) suggests the need for future studies of early literacy skills looking at the impact of early intervention programs, particularly on groups of children who are second-language learners and groups of children raised in poverty.

Besides being a meaningful activity for children, drawing and name writing usually are the earliest and most interesting activities related to formal letter writing attempts (Bloodgood, 1999; Levin, Both, Aram & Bus 2005; Welsh, Sullivan & Justice, 2003). Children’s opportunities and chances to encounter and to practice name writing are endless, providing constant exposure to print and oral forms of their name. Children encounter everyday experiences with family and within the social community related to literacy. Those experiences will greatly differ due to the diversity and individuality within communities and families. Every family will impact their members according to their beliefs and social rules, and the community will also influence their lives through media, sports, politics, religion, etc. Therefore children’s early literacy practices will be nourished as a result of their social reality.

Dyson (2003) studied how culture and popular literacies influences the school culture and childhood. She described the written language development of a group of children inside their culture at school. Her research goals intended to identify how and what children in media-saturated times use into their written language. The researcher collected observations, interviews and recordings of 20 first graders during the academic year and presented the influence of children's lives, church, hip-hop songs, rap music, movies, TV, traditional jump-rope rhymes, the
words of professional sports announcers, and radio deejays--upon school learning and the writing process. The major findings revealed that children build upon what they know, and their constructions occur from their learning experiences. Some of the major implications are that teacher’s sensitivity to children’s culture should be encouraged; children need open ended composing periods; it is important to have an inclusive approach to the communicative arts; play and time to explore and to create are crucial for children. Results supported the idea that children’s background and experiences are vital for the learning process. Dyson stated that teachers’ sensitivity can increase by looking children not just as students, but as people with intertwined lives as friends, peers, and community participants in a culturally and socially diverse world.

Dyson (2002) examined the nature of change in children’s written language use over time. The purpose of the study was to look at how children’s writing and composing took place over a year period. Observations included descriptions of children’s interactions and interactive play during writing times. Descriptions included the classroom dynamic and the teacher routines. The author presented and described the children’s symbolic repertoires in their written representations. She stated that “results describe the symbolic and social dynamics that help explain the changing nature of young children’s use of written language in their lives together as children as well as students” (p 138). Dyson concluded that teachers should acknowledge that children’s symbolic resources reflect not only their past experiences and foundation but their future as literacy learners. Therefore teachers should embrace the complexity and diversity of the children’s symbolic repertoires to support their learning strategies.

Dyson (1992, 2002) has suggested that emergent writing reflects children’s use of a social tool that mediates human experience and interaction. As any communication form, writing
is a social constructed form that enables humans to generate and transmit information to others. Children use writing to represent their ideas and to interact with other people (Dyson, 1993). The opportunities to learn about literacy at home and community will be highly influenced by the cultural group the children belong to. The children’s writing practices will be socially determined by their cultural knowledge about how to encode messages and the particular purposes or necessities to communicate through writing in their community. At the same time children from a specific cultural group could have different experiences within their family environment, resulting in a diverse learning process. Therefore children’s interactions with literacy at early ages will be determined by the family’s cultural beliefs and traditions. The development of literacy precursors could be a way to prevent difficulties and to help children to be prepared to succeed in school. Schools should be prepared to value and include the families’ beliefs in their classrooms.

When children start school, they will bring their knowledge and experiences about writing to a new environment where the writing opportunities will differ from previous experiences (Dyson, 2003). The home and school environment will help children to contrast both environments to combine the learning experiences that each place provides. Peer interactions will contribute to each child through the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Children’s interactions with one another help them explore and understand the process and purposes of writing (Morrow & Sharkey 1993; Teale 1995; Schickedanz 1999). When children are writing with one another, they discuss more about the content and the vocabulary of their productions than the formal aspect of writing. It is common to find children in their classrooms interacting with adults and teachers when writing, but they are typically working more on structure and formal style where instructions, corrections and modeling are frequent events. Different kinds of
social interactions during writing provide children with a variety of opportunities to construct knowledge about writing from different perspectives. The interaction with peers and adults will help children to understand the purposes of writing as well as the mechanics through the modeling and literacy opportunities shared together (Teale 1995; Yaden & Tardibuono 2004).

Yaden and Tardibuono, (2004) studied the early writing development of 47 Spanish speaking preschoolers in Los Angeles. Participants were the children in two 4 year old classrooms. The children were assessed in Spanish and were asked to write their names, the names of parents or other family members, four high frequency words, three familiar but less frequently heard words, and one sentence. Later the children were asked to read their productions. Analysis was performed based on the classification system used by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982). The children’s performance on the general writing tasks and the name writing task were classified into one of five, hierarchical general writing and name writing levels. The study draws upon findings of similar studies (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1982; Flippo, 1998) designed to compare some of the patterns found in Latin American children’s early writing with those from similar backgrounds in an urban area in the United States. The authors wanted to find out how children interpret their own writing, to identify whether their interpretations follow a pattern of development and to investigate if appropriate instructions assist children in moving conceptually toward conventional understandings of the writing process. The researchers stated that there is a steadily emerging capability of young children from high-poverty, multilingual environments when exposed to emergent literacy activities and adults who encourage them to explore writing through a wide variety of literacy interactions (p. 52). The authors mentioned that teachers and aides modeled literate activities, served as an appreciative audience for various literacy performances by the children, and worked alongside the children. Therefore they showed
that the type of instructional environment, theory, and practices are essential, but only one part of
the learning equation. The authors suggested that preschoolers are also influenced by their family
background, language interaction patterns, cognitive capabilities and behavioral habits in their
learning process.

Rowe (2008) studied the social contracts about written text that two year olds and their
teachers were negotiating in a preschool writing center. The participants in the study were 18 two
year olds, two classroom teachers, and a teacher-researcher. The curriculum developed for the
children emphasized developmentally appropriate, play-based activities with research-based
perspectives on early literacy learning. In this study, writing was viewed as a social practice
shared with other members of children’s writing communities rather than as an individual
achievement as it has been described in many accounts of children’s early writing (Dyson, 1993;
Purcell-Gates, 1996; Wells, 2008). Two year old children negotiated social contracts in relation
to their representations during writing events with adults. The researcher described some of the
social contracts the children were learning as they interacted with adults at the writing table.
Nine social contracts related to text production and use were implicitly or explicitly negotiated
during writing table events and were beginning to guide children’s participation in writing. The
social contracts were labeled as Boundary, Message, Distinctive-forms, Text-as-object, Text-
ownership, Text-centrality, Figure ground, Reader-text and Distinctive-meanings. The contracts
described children’s understandings of material features of written texts, the ways that writing
was used to represent meaning, differences between writing and others systems. She described
the social interactions and negotiations created by children and teacher during writing activities
as important. The “Boundary contract” is an example of one the social contracts presented by
Rowe. Violation of the boundary contract will happen when the child draws across several
pieces of paper, and then the adult will suggest using one piece of paper at a time; the expected behavior is for the child to confine marks to a single sheet of paper. The term social contracts was used to draw attention to the ways children’s knowledge about writing is socially negotiated, collectively constructed and related to their writing practices. Rowe intended to find out what children are learning about writing at early ages. Rowe found that at the times when only children were working at the writing table, their texts combined a variety of media and were strongly influenced by the types of materials available. There was some talk among them, but mostly they were engaged in parallel play with mutual awareness. This finding contrasts with the collaborative talk and writing observed among elementary school writers (Dyson 1997, 2003) as a result of the developmental and age differences of the participants. The researcher stated that children’s participation took a different character when a teacher was present. The 2 year olds in the study were just beginning to learn about written texts as cultural objects. The author stated that this view of children’s literacy knowledge broadens current understandings of children’s early writing within the field of emergent literacy. The findings focus the research attention on the interactions through which these youngest children begin to learn about writing. It is suggested that the focus on social participations is particularly important for the study of younger preschoolers who are just beginning to take part in classroom writing events. Future research should be designed to address the trajectory of children’s literacy learning until the preschool years. She recommended focusing future studies more on describing the social and cultural basis for interactions in home and school settings. Rowe mentioned that future research to study what younger preschoolers are learning and doing is needed and will be better than assessing their learning against previous categories generated from other work with older children.
Kuvshinoff (1993) developed an ethnographic study to describe what occurs when children with learning disabilities in a whole language classroom, engage in writing. The author described oral language that surrounded journal writing in a class of young children identified as learning disabled, and examined the relationship between the students’ talk and their written products. The participants included the teacher, her classroom aide and nine children (ages 6-7). The children’s writing efforts and the talk that accompanied those efforts were the main source for data. The data collection lasted for a total of ten months. The researcher observed and collected data during journal writing and during writing workshop from September through December one to three times weekly at different times during the school day. Kuvshinoff classified children’s talk surrounding writing by creating codes to describe the talking. The author results indicated that the talk which surrounded journal writing did affect the texts produced. Oral language functioned as a tool which provided students support in adjusting the form and content of their journal entries. Implications for teachers are to allow and encourage social interaction during personal journal writing.

The school’s role in providing appropriate experiences in relation to emergent writing is important. The research suggests that at school, the classroom environment should provide natural opportunities to interact with writing. The activities provided to stimulate emergent writing and literacy development should be meaningful and culturally appropriate to motivate children to participate and practice. Teachers should also be able to assess children’s level of skills or appropriately describe children’s emergent writing behaviors. The use of an appropriate assessment tool to describe children’s emergent writing skills would give teachers enough information to create and plan literacy related goals for children in relation to their developmental skill level. Cabell (2009) recommends to scale up evidence based emergent
literacy assessment and intervention, including an analysis of early writing skills as one part of a comprehensive language assessment.

Summary

We know that language and literacy develop simultaneously. The development of emergent literacy starts early in children’s lives at home and in preschool classrooms. The number of children who have not acquired the foundations of language for learning in school has increased (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2003; NRP, 2000; Douglas and Montiel, 2008). Preschool programs have been created to provide children with language and literacy curricula to develop and to mature their skills. It is important that children receive appropriate language and literacy experiences in these preschools. Research in such areas is a necessity. The studies included here focused on the emergent writing process including the areas of name writing, journal writing and social interactions during writing times. Various studies have provided information on the emergent writing skill of young children, but few on describing the process of writing production when it occurs.

Research has established that literacy programs incorporating writing activities may potentially promote alphabetic skills for preschoolers. We know that the use of research-based literacy enrichment curricula help to achieve and develop emergent literacy skills. A limited amount of research has focused on describing writing during the creation process. A great number of research projects in the emergent writing area have looked at the written product itself but only a few have considered the events surrounding the act. In this study the events, comments and social interactions resulting in writing will be observed, recorded and analyzed.
The National Reading Panel Report (2000) presented findings about the effective strategies for teaching children to read, but the area of writing was not studied because of the lack of adequate number studies to analyze. This demonstrates the need for more research studies in emergent writing development. Several researchers have decided to modify previous systems because there is not a sufficiently broad system to classify children’s writing from their initial attempts. Most of the existing systems provide stages, levels, categories and descriptions of the developmental continuum of writing but do not provide clear descriptions of the earliest stages in emergent writing. Emergent writing development should be clearly described from the first print attempts of toddlers to the conventional writing of letters by kindergartners. Professionals and teachers could benefit from more research-based information about the writing development process.

Research has shown that there is a relationship between name writing skills and children’s literacy development. Most research in this area has been performed with kindergarten children. The studies presented in this document investigate younger children, age’s three to five. Research has supported the idea that children’s background and experiences are vital for the learning process, and that the family’s and teachers’ role in supporting children learning is fundamental. However, there is not enough evidence about how teachers encourage and support preschool writing experiences. During journal writing, children have the opportunity to use oral language to accompany their writing task. Children’s journal writing opportunities may include spontaneous speech and talking with peers or adults, and those oral productions in some instances affect the text produced.

The purpose of this research was to address some of these research needs by examining the emergent writing behaviors of preschool children during a language and literacy program.
Two research projects resulting in publishable papers to be submitted to national journals are described.

The first study “Changes in Children’s Name Writing during a Preschool Language and Literacy Program” examined changes in preschool children’s name writing skills using name writing products. The second study “Factors Related to Early Writing Development during a Preschool Language and Literacy Program” examined changes in emergent writing skills using daily journal productions, and the study also described the talk related to writing while children were engaged in the writing activity.
Chapter III

Changes in Children’s Name Writing During a Preschool Language and Literacy Program

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose was to determine preschool children's changes in name writing during a six-week language and literacy program.

Method: Subjects were twelve preschool children, ages three to five, who participated in a summer Language and Literacy Enrichment Group which included daily name writing opportunities. Children’s name writing samples were collected during the daily routine in the classroom. Name writing scores from the first day were compared with scores on the last day of the summer program. Name writing skill was assessed using a name writing scale. Samples were examined to determine whether children who participated in the program exhibited changes in name writing skill when they participated in daily sign in.

Results: A paired t-test revealed significant changes in children’s name writing scores from the first to the last day of the program. Changes included increase in number of marks and letters.

Conclusions: Results suggest that children who participated in a language and literacy preschool program that included daily opportunities for emergent writing activities such as name writing exhibited growth in their name writing skills. Adults and speech language pathologists have an important role in creating classrooms environments that facilitates emergent writing.
Language and literacy development during the preschool years is important because the skills that are learned during this time set the stage for school success. Prevention, early intervention and identification of language impairments in preschool help to decrease learning problems that may be detected in elementary school (Justice, Invernizzi & Meier, 2002; Justice, Bowles & Skibbe, 2006). Therefore early literacy programs have been developed to promote the development of skills related to reading and writing.

Studies related to early literacy programs have examined outcomes in areas such as reading, phonological awareness (sound recognition), letter recognition and oral narrative skills, but there has been comparatively little investigation of emergent writing (Aram & Biron, 2004; Hammer, Lawrence & Miccio 2007; Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan & Colton, 2003; Nixon & Topping, 2001; Aram & Biron, 2004; Puranik, Lonigan & Kim, 2011). Research related to emergent literacy and previous national reports consider writing, to a limited extent (Bloodgood, 1999, Yang & Noel, 2006). The National Reading Panel’s Report (2000) does not include writing and does not mention writing as an important predictor of reading achievement or school success; however, Gerde, Bingham & Wasic, (2012) stated that writing is a critical emergent literacy skill that lays the foundation for children’s later literacy skills and reading achievement. Bloodgood (1999) suggested that exposure to writing activities gives children the space to practice literacy skills from their perspective, and that space is provided by strong language and literacy preschool programs. In evaluating the effectiveness of a preschool emergent literacy enrichment curriculum that included activities related to emergent writing, De Baryshe & Gorecki (2007) found that participants showed gains in emergent writing skills. The results suggested that the use of a research based literacy enrichment curriculum which included writing helped to achieve and develop emergent literacy skills.
Studies suggest that name writing provides a connection for children to learn about many aspects of literacy (Bloodgood, 1999; Nixon & Topping, 2001). Writing representations are one reflection of a child’s emergent literacy knowledge (Welsh, Sullivan & Justice, 2003), and children who attempt to write their name at an earlier age are more likely to attempt writing in other preschool writing tasks. Cabell, Justice, Zucker and McGinty (2009) found that name writing ability represents an important aspect of emergent literacy development and likely reflects children’s print knowledge. Haney, Bissonnette & Behnken (2003) investigated the relationship between name writing and early literacy skills in kindergarten students. The authors found that name writing was significantly correlated with word and non-word identification. The authors stated that using the Name Writing Scale (Haney, Bissonnette & Behnken (2003) with preschoolers provided additional insight into the connection between name writing skills and the development of beginning literacy skills. They found that name writing skills were related to the development of reading skills and that name writing was significantly correlated with word identification. Levin, Both, Aram & Bus (2005) compared two to five-year old children’s name writing to their writing of dictated words. They found that children were more advanced in writing their names than in writing dictated words. Results suggested that providing name writing opportunities for young children could promotes the development of writing in general.

The development of name writing has been described as a progression from circular scribbles to continuous linear scribbles, letter like forms, and letters in the correct order, and that progression is similar to other areas of writing development. The critical ages for emergent writing extend from the late toddler stage through five years (Clay, 1987; Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004). The initial steps in emergent writing progress from the development of marks as the first intentional attempts to convey meaning to the use of lines with purpose to write.
letters. Early writing skills develop during an exploration process when children express themselves through drawing, writing letters, words or a mix of the two. Research has shown that writing skills that develop during the preschool years can include name writing, drawing, and writing related to story book reading or to personal experiences.

The development of writing skills is associated with reading and writing experiences in home and school environments (Nixon & Topping, 2001; Whitehurst, et al., 1994). Nixon & Topping (2001) observed significant gains for emergent writers during classroom writing tasks with structured peer interactions. The authors stated that peer interactions can contribute to motivation and social interactions during learning and writing related activities.

A preschool program can provide the elements that nurture emergent writing, but the role of the preschool teachers is important in developing emergent writing skills at early ages. An effective preschool writing program is dependent on the ability of the teachers to encourage children to participate in authentic literacy related activities. Puranik & Lonigan (2011) suggested that teachers can also encourage children’s knowledge of basic writing features by highlighting specific characteristics observed in their children’s scribbles (such as linearity). Teachers may benefit from information and observation of effective teacher-directed instruction of emerging literacy skills, including writing (Hawken, Johnston & McDonnell, 2005). Recent work indicates that many early childhood programs offer children materials and tools for engaging in writing activities. Early childhood educational settings hoping to support children’s literacy development must provide multiple opportunities for children to observe teachers modeling writing, provide teacher support and scaffolding for children’s writing attempts and engage children in meaningful writing activities. Specifically results from a national survey of Head Start teachers suggest the importance of research in emergent writing to improve teacher
prompted name writing in the classroom (Hawken, Johnston & McDonnell, 2005). Speech-language pathologists have the opportunity to collaborate with teachers in providing emergent literacy enhancement strategies in the classroom. Knowledge about emergent literacy and strategies for encouraging emergent writing can support teachers in providing a language rich environment in the classroom that includes emergent writing skills.

Evidence to support changes in children’s name writing as a result of preschool name writing experience is not available, nor do we know what teaching methods and experiences might be effective. The aim of this study was to explore preschool children’s changes in emergent writing during a six-week language and literacy program. Daily samples of name writing were examined to determine whether children who participated in the language and literacy preschool program over a six-week period exhibited changes in name writing during the daily sign in activity.

**Methods**

**Participants**

The participants in this study were 12 children ages 3 to 5 years (five girls and seven boys). There were five 3-year olds, five 4-year olds and two 5-year olds. They were English speaking children who participated in a six-week summer Language and Literacy Enrichment Group in a university clinic in a large Midwestern city. Participants were recruited as a convenience sample during the registration process for the Language and Literacy Enrichment Group (LLEG) program. Children who were both typically developing and those who were at risk for language delay were included in the program. By agreeing to fill out the cover letter and
by signing the consent documents, parents consented for their children to participate in the research study.

**Setting**

The Language and Literacy Enrichment Group (LLEG) is a research based program that has occurred during the summer over the last eight years. LLEG is designed to promote early language and literacy skills for children ages 3 to 5 years and to support children with language concerns. In the summer of data collection, children came twice a week for two hours in classes of six children and three adults. The adults were a senior undergraduate and two first year graduate students (their training included courses in linguistic and child language development). During the program the children had opportunities to experience a range of print in the environment which is rich in literacy activities related to play, joint book reading, and writing opportunities. The classroom setting included areas for reading books, pretend play, manipulatives, toys and puzzles, sensory table, writing, arts and crafts. The classroom was divided into several areas: reading area with a small bookshelf, a toy cabinet, a location for whole group activity (usually for opening and closing group), a writing center with paper, crayons, markers, pencils, letter stickers, stencils and letter shape stamps, (square shape table), a sensory table, a pretend area, and a round worktable (for snack, journal writing and crafts).

During the daily routine, children had the opportunity and were encouraged to participate in dialogic book reading and to explore language and literacy related activities throughout the classroom areas. The writing center provided opportunities for children to interact with writing artifacts while working on drawing, handwriting and or letter formation activities of their choice. As in all the areas in the classroom, writing activities varied from week to week. Children were
encouraged to explore writing and were free to interact spontaneously with writing materials at any time. The physical environment provided opportunities to interact with their written name during the day (i.e. their journals were labeled, sometimes depending on the day’s activities children’s name were print and were part of the room décor). The classroom setting included a print rich environment and great amount of articles were labeled (including snack items, schedules and crafts). Initially during the daily routine, children were asked to write their name on the sign-in sheet, without assistance. The children also had the opportunity to write their name and to write about the day’s events during the Journal Writing time. Every day children participated in a Journal Writing activity for 15 minutes. During Journal Writing the children received their journal and were asked to draw a picture and write a message or a story on a topic of their choice.

**Data collection**

Data was collected each day during the duration of the program (twelve days) through the daily name writing activity (sign in sheet). After Children entered classroom, they were received and greeted by an adult who encouraged them to sign in. Sign-sheets were on the table next to a pencil for children to sign in. Children’s name was printed on the sign in sheet for them to sign in next to it. Children were expected to write their names without help but were supervised by the adults. Adults provided instructions, modeling, or directions as the child or situation demanded. Diverse situations included when children were not paying attention to the activity or were interested in playing with toys and needed additional prompts to finish the task. Adults’ interactions included providing comments and praise about children’s performance. Each child individually signed and the activity lasted a maximum of one minute. No opportunities to practice ahead of time were given. All sign in sheets were photocopied at the end of each day.
Copies of written products completed by the children were dated, labeled and chronologically filed.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of the children’s name writing was assessed using the Name Writing Scale (NWS) developed by Haney, Bissonnette & Behnken (2003). The NWS is a scoring criteria scale with up to ten points to score a name writing attempt. Each scoring criterion received one point. The criteria for scoring include: recognizable letters, all letters present, name spelled correctly, capitalization, letter formation, size of letters, spacing, fine motor control, lack of reversals and name written on line (Appendix A). The total score was obtained by adding all points; no partial points were given. The numerical results from the scale were used to identify changes in name writing skills by comparing the number of recognizable letters and/or written words, the number of attempts to attach writing to drawing, changes in the shape, size, and direction of scribbling of children productions.

The ten scoring criteria of the NWS were divided into three domains: mechanics, spatial organization, and spelling. The three domains were used to identify the children’s strength areas in name writing skills. Mechanic-related skills include recognizable letters, letter formation, and lack of reversals. Spatial organization skills include size of letters, spacing, fine motor control, and name writing on the line. Spelling skills include all letters present, name spelled correctly, and capitalization.

All name writing samples, including drawings, scribbles, letters and attempts at written script, were observed to identify changes over time. Samples from the first day were compared to those of the last day to identify differences in the written products.
Reliability

The research assistant and the author independently coded the name-writing samples for each of the participants’ pre and post productions for reliability purposes. All scoring sheets from the research assistant and author were compared looking for differences in total points. Comparison of participant’s scores was performed included looking at each scored item to identify whether the research assistant and the author have given points for the same items on the scale. An 85% agreement for the coders was accomplished. Any coder differences were discussed and resolved, and the resulting score for each child’s name writing production was agreed on by both coders.

Results

The aim of this study was to examine whether children who participated in a language and literacy program exhibited changes in emergent writing skills by comparing their name writing products at the beginning and end of the program. Children’s name writing scores from the first day were compared with scores of the last day of the summer program using a paired sample t test. Comparison of name writing from the first and last day as reflected by scores on the NWS were significantly different $t=3.0$, $df=11$, $p<.010$, with higher scores on name writing on the last day (Table 1). Eleven participants received the same or higher scores on their last product when compared with their first name writing product; one participant scored two points lower on the last name writing product when compared with the initial score. Increase of one or more points were obtained by seven of twelve (58.33%) participants. The participant with the greater increase scored five additional points when compared with the initial score.

Domains
Examination of the NWS scores of each participant identified the number of criteria met (points) within each domain (mechanics, spatial organization, spelling) for the pre and post products. Five of twelve (42%) children showed positive changes in mechanics, five of twelve (42%) children showed positive changes in spelling and, three of twelve (25%) children showed positive changes in spatial organization. Four of the seven participants who demonstrated increased scores, showed gains in the Mechanics and Spelling domains. Their products presented an increase in amount of recognizable letters, their last day letter formations resemble real letters, started to use first letter capitalization and lack of letter reversal. One of these seven children showed gains in both the Spelling and Spatial Organization domains. The child’s written product included her name spelled correctly and improvement in spacing between letters on the last day product. One of the children showed gains in both the Mechanics and Spatial Organization domains by demonstrating use of recognizable letters, improvement in letter formation, spacing and writing on line. One child showed gains in the Spatial Organization domain. This child’s last day writing was less wavy. Spacing, Letter Formation and Lack of Reversals were most frequent areas of gain. The Spacing criteria within the Spatial Organization domain showed most improvement across children’s gains (Table 1).

**Additional Observations**

Children who did not present gains in their written products received a score of 0 on the NWS even though they complied with the instruction to sign in and made mark(s) on the sign in sheet. Comparison of written products from the first and last day also revealed changes in the writing of these children with zero scores. Four children did not present writing like products in their first-day products but made marks or scribbles on the sign-in sheet that resulted in zero scores. Each of the four demonstrated additional marks or scribbles in their last-day products
when compared with their first. One child presented longer scribbles and another demonstrated bigger and greater extension of scribbles; however, the products of these two children continued to be scribbles and did not reflect gains in any domain, thus resulting in zero scores. One child who had a 0 scores on the first day, demonstrated some intention to trace his name (last day score 2), and another wrote the first two letters of her name (last day score 5).

Examination of children’s name writing products revealed an increase in writing-like products, including the number of mock letters and letters (eight children). During the last day one child included the first letter of her middle name, and another child included his complete last name whereas on the first day they only wrote their names. Two of twelve children increased awareness of directionality of their scribbles (from left to right).

Age related scores and changes over time were observed (Table 1). Four of the five 3-year olds received 0 scores on Day 1, and two of these remained at 0 on the last day. None of the seven 4 or 5-year olds scored 0 at either time. The three oldest children (4;11, 5;8, 5;9) received scores of 8, 9 or 10 on the first and last day. Three 3-year olds and three- 4-year olds demonstrated increased scores during the program. The scores of three of the youngest children did not change from 0, and the scores of the three oldest children were at or near ceiling on day 1 so that no change could be achieved.

Discussion

Positive changes were observed in preschool children’s written products during a name writing activity which was part of their daily routine over six weeks as evidenced by the significant change in scores on the NWS. The consistent name writing practice appears to have helped some children learn and manipulate the mechanics and spelling aspect of their name.
The name writing skill practiced in the classroom setting seemed to evolve as a result of the experiences and opportunities provided by adults and the print rich classroom environment. Therefore the primary recommendation for adults and speech language pathologists is to create a classroom environment that facilitates authentic emergent writing and literacy activities, specifically opportunities for name writing. These results support previous literature regarding the importance and effectiveness of creating emergent literacy interventions to enhance children’s development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Welsh, Sullivan, Justice, 2003).

The participants in this preschool classroom were immersed in language related activities that included writing opportunities like the sign in sheet. The results of this study suggest that children’s name writing, changed significantly during a short period of time when they were given consistent opportunity for practice. These findings support literature regarding emergent writing that considers name writing as an important strategy to promote the development of writing in general (Levin, Both, Aram & Bus, 2005).

Young children can benefit from being encouraged to scribble and pretend to write in natural environment (Puranik & Lonigan, 2009). Results suggested that adult’s interactions which provided support to children were important in keeping children motivated to finish their written products. The language and literacy program provided children with varied, motivating and natural opportunities to interact with print and writing tools to stimulate language and emergent literacy and authentic opportunities for name writing. The results of this study suggested that participation in a language and literacy enrichment program that includes writing opportunities as part of the regular daily routine of the preschool classroom may foster emergent writing skills.
Limitations and future research

One limitation of this study is that there was limited information about other factors that may have affected the children’s name writing at the beginning and during the program such as literacy experiences at home and previous literacy experiences at day care. Children who were both typically developing and those who were at risk for language delay were included in the program as well as children across the age range from 3 to 5 years, preventing analysis of writing at specific ages. The actual names of the children (e.g. short - Max versus long - Charlotte) could have affected their scores because the complexity and amount of letters, therefore for children with a higher percentage of letters in their names could be difficult to write it completely. The scale used in the study includes a scoring criteria which requires that all name letters must be present to score one of the criteria and that may be one limitation.

This study examined one aspect of emergent literacy – name writing. Because children may use different writing forms for different tasks, future studies should include a broad range of tasks to examine emergent writing in order to determine how specific writing activities in preschool impact children’s writing. Comparison of early name writing samples to longitudinally collected writing samples (e.g. from preschool to third grade) may further determine the relationship between an early emergent writing skill and later literacy development.

The adult’s role of encouraging and prompting children to perform the writing activity is suggested as being essential for children’s growth. The adults provided the instructions, materials and motivation required to help children sign-in. Adults’ interactions included providing comments and praise about children’s performance, therefore future studies should examine adult’s specific interactions with children during name writing activities that promote growth.
Overall, the findings of this study suggest that during a preschool language and literacy program children exhibited changes in their name writing skills. The intentional facilitation of name writing skills might support the development of literacy skills in preschoolers (Haney & Behnken, 2002). Therefore the inclusion of name writing sign-in activities that provide daily opportunities for developing literacy skills in a natural environment should be considered as a good strategy for adults to include in their classrooms.
References


Table 1. Individual children’s name writing scores from sign-in sheet on the first day in week 1 and last day in week 6 and domain and specific criteria on which individual children made gains from the first day to the last day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Name writing Score Week 1</th>
<th>Name writing Score Week 6</th>
<th>*Gains in Mechanics Week 6</th>
<th>*Gains in Spatial Organization Week 6</th>
<th>*Gains in Spelling Week 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3;3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>LF</td>
<td>SP, FMC</td>
<td>CAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>RL, LF, LOR</td>
<td>SOL, NWOL</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>RL</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>CAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>LF</td>
<td>SOL</td>
<td>ALP, NSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>LOR</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<tr>
<td>4;7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>4;9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SOL</td>
<td>NSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5;8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5;9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mechanic domain: (RL) recognizable letters (LF) letter formation (LOR) lack of reversals

*Spatial organization domain: (SOL) size of letters (S) spacing (FMC) fine motor control (NWOL) name written on line

*Spelling domain: (ALP) all letters present (NSC) name spelled correctly (C) capitalization
Chapter IV

Factors Related To Early Writing Development During a Preschool Language and Literacy Program

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the talk that children engaged in while writing and the changes in children’s writing during a Preschool Language and Literacy Program. The interactions among children and adults while engaged in daily journal writing as well as the journal writing products were examined.

Method: Subjects were 12 preschool children, ages 3 to 5, who participated in a six-week summer Language and Literacy Enrichment Group which included daily journal writing. Each child’s utterance during journal writing was transcribed and coded for participant’s interactions and purpose. Children’s written products from the initial journal completed the first day and the final journal completed the last day of the program were analyzed to identify changes.

Results: The largest number of child to adult interactions during writing involved the children commenting about their writing or requesting help. Changes observed in children’s writing from the beginning to the end of the program included increase in number of marks and letters.

Conclusions: Outcomes suggest that children who participate in a preschool program that includes daily opportunities for emergent writing activities may exhibit changes in emergent writing skills. The importance of adults’ role in providing children opportunities, encouragement and motivation is indicated.
Introduction

Researchers and educators are interested in how reading and writing develops in young children, and research regarding emergent writing has increased during the past two decades (Nixon & Topping, 2001; Aram & Biron, 2004; DeBaryshe & Gorecki, 2007; Puranik, Lonigan & Kim, 2011). There is increased interest in identifying writing stages quantitatively (Gentry 1982; Sulzby, 1989; Cruikshank, 2001; Levin, Both, Aram & Bus, 2005; Martins & Silva, 2006) and describing children’s writing skills (Dyson, 1993; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Coates, 2002). Descriptions of emergent writing skills include letter formation, linearity, directionality, spacing, and spelling among other related skills children demonstrate in their products (Yaden & Tardibuono, 2004; Nixon and Topping, 2001; Borzone & Signorini, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996).

Emergent literacy development, including emergent writing development during the preschool years, is critical because the skills that are learned during this time set the stage for school success (Justice, Bowles & Skibbe, 2006; Justice, Invernizzi & Meier, 2002). Therefore early literacy programs have been developed to promote the development of skills related to reading and writing. The literacy environment provided by the preschool setting should offer meaningful experiences to stimulate emergent reading and writing (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). Research has shown that classroom environments that are rich in literacy experiences provide children linguistic, social and academic opportunities to develop their literacy skills (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, & Colton, 2003; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Wasik, & Bond, 2001).

The relationship between spoken and written language is well documented (Schickedanz & Casbergue, 2004; Kaderavek & Sulzby, 2000). Adults and the social environment influence children’s writing products. Coates (2002) noted that it was impossible to separate the talk from
the drawing and writing process and that child talk during writing with peers offered insights into their social, communicative skills and written products. Like reading, writing skills begin as children interact with adults, materials, and print environment (Clay, 2001). Through interaction with more mature writers, children better understand the purposes of writing as well as the mechanics (Yaden & Taribuono, 2004). When working with young children it is important to consider both spoken and written language and support their spoken language growth within the context of reading and writing because children’s development of literacy skills may benefit when more competent peers or adults provides or scaffold abilities while children are engaged in a purposeful tasks. Wells (1985) demonstrated that children develop literacy skills through meaningful interactions with adult communicators during natural opportunities for rich communication. Thus the teacher’s role in providing an environment where collaborative learning can occur is important in fostering children’s literacy skills.

Emergent literacy strategies for teachers to use to support children’s language skills and emergent literacy have been developed. Preschool teachers are also important in teaching and developing emergent writing skills at early ages. During classroom activities teachers have opportunities to encourage emergent writing skills while communicating with children. Emergent writing and reading development occurs simultaneously, interacting with each other (Clay, 1975; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). Children rely on teachers for providing feedback, answering questions and modeling to practice their writing skills. Their experiences are enriched by the adult’s writing behaviors, meaningful context and functional writing activities (Schickedanz, 1999; Clay, 1987). Therefore, teacher’s knowledge about emergent writing supports their effectiveness in helping children during writing. Aram & Biron (2004) examined the effects of daily adult-child activities in promoting skills related to early literacy among preschoolers. They
found that when a preschool program’s curriculum includes writing and literacy, children can learn, develop and refine language, literacy and writing. Writing opportunities in preschool may include formal structured activities such as tracing letters, copying, or daily journal activities, and non-structured activities such as spontaneous drawing and writing at the writing table.

During spontaneous writing, children are free to interact and to create writing products on their own. Freedom during writing activities facilitates the opportunity for children to practice their writing skills while enjoying their products. Personal and positive writing events are created by sharing information with peers, asking the teacher for help and imitating others.

Development of literacy skills is among the purposes of preschool programs. A print rich preschool setting includes a literacy environment to stimulate and support emergent writing behaviors by providing exposure to print; writing tools and materials; meaningful writing activities; and learning opportunities. DeBaryshe and Goreckis (2007) compared a research based literacy enrichment curriculum were children received early literacy instruction, and parents and children completed supplementary learning activities at home with a regular Head Start curriculum. Their results suggested that the use of a research based literacy enrichment curriculum can help to achieve and develop emergent literacy skills including writing. High quality preschools are print enriched. In these programs, teachers and peers provide models and meaningful occasions to promote writing activities (International Reading Association, 1998; Schickedanz, 1990); tools for writing are available (Schickedanz, 1990; Yaden & Tardibuono, 2004) which include literacy related materials such as labels, signs, name cards and letter shape stickers; and books to provide an adequate environment to experience literacy related opportunities. It is through the interaction with writing opportunities and materials within the classroom that children’s literacy knowledge evolves. It is critical for the preschool teacher to
provide an adequate literacy enriched environment to encourage early literacy development. (Guo, Justice, Kaderavek & McGinty, 2012).

Aram & Biron (2004) considered which daily school interactions with preschoolers should be emphasized to enhance their readiness for formal reading and writing acquisition. Results revealed that in contrast to past research regarding the prominent role of joint storybook reading in promoting literacy, joint writing was even more fruitful in enhancing literacy skills needed for the acquisition of reading and writing. They noted that literacy programs incorporating writing activities may promote alphabetic skills for preschoolers as young as 3 years of age and possibly modify the trajectory of their school success.

During preschool writing activities, children can enjoy and share learning opportunities while performing literacy related tasks. Stellakis & Kondyli (2004) studied children’s early attempts to write in relationship to literacy practices in preschool. The researchers’ examined whether one year of preschool enhanced literate performance. The researchers engaged the children in meaningful communicative practices that could lead to writing and reading a text. Children’s writing was classified using a modified version of several category systems (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982 and Sulzby, Barnhart and Hieshima, 1989). Results suggested that reading and writing development occurred simultaneously, and the teachers and context were crucial. The authors stated that the primary challenge for teachers is to create a classroom environment that facilitates children’s participation in literacy activities with the teachers as facilitators and participants rather than instructors. They emphasized the role of authentic literacy practices to facilitate literacy and suggested approaching children from what they know and giving them opportunities to communicate by writing. Examination of children’s interactions with adults and
peers during writing would provide additional information about the role of meaningful interactions during writing development.

Children’s early literacy practices can be nourished as a result of their social reality. Social interactions among children and teachers are part of the school atmosphere, and influence among peers and adults can shape learning outcomes. Nixon and Topping (2001) examined how classroom interactions through collaboration, support writing opportunities by providing resources, models, purposes and motivation for young children to engage in emergent writing. They specifically assessed the additional impact of a structured peer interaction between emergent writers and older children with writing delays. Results supported the author’s proposal that paired writing is a useful framework for effective collaboration among children. Coates and Coates (2006) investigated the relationship between children’s narratives and their drawing. They investigated talk related to the subject matter, social talk, interaction with an adult, stages of drawing development, use of color, emergent writing, common themes, influences, and children’s creative conceptual development. The researchers found that drawing in pairs provided a focus for the development of a range of creative skills. They stated that the pictures testified to a child’s developing awareness of writing by showing two distinctive forms of marks which separate letter forms from symbolic representations. They indicated that the insights to be gained from encouraging children and teachers to work together are multiple and have the possibility to help teachers assess children’s capabilities and knowledge. Kuvshinoff (1993) described spoken language that surrounded journal writing and the relationship between the students’ communication and their written products in a class of young children identified as learning disabled. The results indicated that the talk which surrounded journal writing did indeed affect the texts produced. Spoken language functioned as a tool, which prompted the students to
adjust the form and content of their journal entries. She suggested that teachers should allow and encourage social interaction during personal journal writing. Dyson (2003) described children’s social and communicative interactions and interactive play during writing. Her findings supported the notion that children’s writing is related to their background and prior experiences. The author concluded that teacher’s sensitivity to children’s culture can influence interactions, children need open ended composing periods, it is important to have an inclusive approach to the communicative arts, play and time to explore and to create are crucial.

Preschooler’s interest in writing and use of writing tools may start as soon as the child starts to grasp objects to imitate adults’ actions. Children’s written products will vary according to their purpose, independently of their maturity level, but description of the changes and stages from the first attempts at writing to conventional writing attempts can help to assess child’s level of development in relation to writing. At present there are few commonly used descriptions of the developmental stages of writing (Morrow, 2009). Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) described five emergent writing phases scribbling, letter-like forms, syllabic representation, transitional and alphabetic writing. Sulzby (1985, 1985) identified six broad categories of writing development drawing; scribbling; making letter like forms; reproducing well learned units; invented spelling; and conventional spelling. Schickedanz (1990) described six writing stages. Stage 1 is the Scribbling stage that represents children’s first attempt at reproducing writing; Stage 2 is the Linear/Repetitive Drawing stage where scribbling has been refined to look more like standard writing; Stage 3 is the Letter Like Forms stage where writing looks very close to actual printing; Stage 4 is the Letters and Early Word-Symbol Relationship when children are beginning to reproduce letters and often use a single letter to represent an entire word; Stage 5 is Invented Spelling when children demonstrate that they have constructed some sound letter
relationships; Stage 6 is Standard Spelling where children recognize that words have a standard spelling.

Despite the argument that experiences and interaction with adults and peers are related to the writing process and products, the literature on collaborative writing includes few reports of its use with preschoolers (Nixon & Topping 2001). The purpose of this study was to address this gap. There were two research aims. First, this study described preschool children’s talk during the writing activity in a six-week language and literacy program. The study evaluated the type of talk children and adults engaged in during the daily journal writing activity. Second, this study examined children’s emergent writing skills and changes in the writing from journal writing products.

Methods

Participants

The children in this study were 12 children ages three to five years (five girls and seven boys). There were five 3-year olds, five 4-year olds and two 5-year olds. They were English speaking children who participated in a university’s six-week summer Language and Literacy Enrichment Group. The university was in a large Midwestern city. Children were recruited as a convenience sample during the registration process for program. Children who were both typically developing and those who were at risk for language delay were included in the program. Parents gave consent by completing the cover letter and signing the consent documentation during registration.
Setting

The Language and Literacy Enrichment Group (LLEG) is a research based program that has occurred during the last eight summers. LLEG is designed to promote early language and literacy skills for children with and without language concerns, ages 3 to 5 years. In the summer of data collection, children came twice a week for two hours. Each class consists of six children and three adults. The adults were a senior undergraduate and two first year graduate students (their training included courses in linguistic and child language development). During the program, the children had opportunities to experience a range of print in the environment, joint book reading, and writing opportunities. The classroom setting included areas for reading books, pretend play, manipulatives, toys and puzzles, sensory table, writing, arts and crafts. The classroom was divided into several areas: reading area with a small bookshelf, a toy cabinet, a location for whole group activities (usually for opening and closing group), a writing center with paper, crayons, markers, pencils, letter stickers, stencils and letter shape stamps, (square shape table), a sensory table, a pretend area, a round worktable (for snack, journal writing and crafts).

During the daily routine, children had the opportunity and were encouraged to participate in dialogic book reading and to explore language and literacy related activities throughout the classroom areas. The writing center provided opportunities for children to interact with writing artifacts. As in all the areas of the classroom, writing activities varied from week to week. Children were encouraged to explore writing and were free to interact spontaneously with writing materials at any time. Initially, during the daily routine, children were asked to write their name on the sign-in sheet, without assistance. The children also had the opportunity to write their name and to write about the day’s events during the Journal Writing time. Every day children participated in a Journal Writing activity for 15 minutes. During Journal Writing the children
received their journal and were asked to draw a picture and write a message or a story on a topic of their choice.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted during the daily journal writing activity for the duration of the program (six weeks). The children were videotaped during the entire two hours of the preschool program twice a week during the six weeks, including the times when writing activities occurred. The writing activities were videotaped in order to examine the possible interactions among participants and adults. Each videotape was dated, labeled and transcribed. After transcribing the tapes each utterance was coded. All writing products from the journal writing times were photocopied at the end of each day. Copies of written products completed by the children were dated, labeled and chronologically filed.

**Data Analysis**

The audio and video recordings of the children’s writing and the talk which accompanied those efforts were the source for data analysis. Data analysis included observing the videos of the children during their journal writing times. Examination of the interactions between children and the interactions between children and adults in the classroom were completed for all journal writing times. Transcripts of the children’s talk during journal writing were completed from the videos. Coding of children’s talk during journal writing was completed from the transcripts. The second source of data was the written products collected during Journal Writing from the first day and last day of the program. The following analyses were completed.

**Type of Talk and interactions**

Analysis of interactions included the number of adult turns and the number of child turns. The interactions were classified as Child-Adult (child initiated the interaction), Adult-Child
(adult initiated the interaction), Child-Child (child initiated the interaction with peer), and Child (self).

The Talk during Journal Writing was described. Talk included any type of talk (i.e. modeling, acting out actions related to a story, questions, requests, adult prompts) that accompanied children’s written activity throughout the Journal Writing time. Observation notes of each session included: date, observed event, children involved, key words, codes related to the content, and copies of children’s written products. After being transcribed and checked, the coding of each child’s spoken production was completed. Each child’s Talk during journal writing was identified and counted. All children’s Talk was coded using the codes included in Table 1 which were adapted from Kuvshinoff (1993) with the addition of two more codes (show/share and make sense codes).

Writing Samples

Writing samples from the daily Journal Writing activity were examined to identify and describe changes. The drawings, scribbles, mock letters, recognizable letters and/or written words, attempts to attach writing to drawing, changes in the shape, size, and direction of scribbling or letters, or any attempt at written script were subject to analysis and comparison. The daily journal writing products were classified within the six categories of children’s early attempts at writing from Sulzby (1985). The category descriptions included a scale from 1 to 6 with 6 being the high level for the category (see Table 2). Sulzby’s categories were used to describe the writing skills demonstrated in each of the 24 journal writing products. The initial journal completed during the first week and the final journals completed during the last week of the program were analyzed to identify changes. Samples scores from the first day were compared to those of the last day using a paired sample t test.
Reliability

The research assistant and the investigator independently scored the 24 children’s’ daily writing journal samples. Any coder differences were discussed and resolved, and the resulting score for each child’s product was agreed on by both coders. An 85% agreement for the daily writing journal analysis was achieved. The research assistant and the investigator independently coded all children Talk. If there were discrepancies between them, the final code was based on agreement reached in discussion. An 85% agreement for the spoken production was also achieved.

Results

Interactions

This study examined children’s interactions while engaged in writing, including the partner with whom they interacted. Results from the video observations revealed the following types of Interactions: Child-Adult, Adult-Child, Child-Child and Child (self) (Table 3). Child-Adult Interactions accounted for 50.53% of the total number of Interactions; Adult-Child Interactions represented 38.19% of the Interactions; Child-Child Interactions represented 5.36%; and Child (self) productions represented 5.90%. The combined number of Child-Adult and Adult-Child Interactions represents 88.72% of all of the interactions.

Types of Talk

Children’s spoken utterances during the daily journal writing sessions, defined as single words, phrases or sentences, were counted and coded (Table 4). The mean number of all children’s spoken utterances per writing session was 83.45. The mean of spoken utterances per child during each writing session was 8.16. Each utterance was coded with one of the thirteen
codes described in Table 1 (Kuvshinoff, 1993). The highest percentage of spoken utterances by children was coded as Topic Related Talk (24.72 %). The lowest percentage was coded as Evaluating Others (0.54%). The following are the other codes used to describe children’s Talk in order of frequency: Off Topic (16.44%), Materials (12.63%), Topic Selection (11.11%), Metacognitive (7.29%), Mechanics (6.86%), Evaluating Self (5.11%), Show/Share (3.81%), Defending (3.15%), Making Sense (3.15%), Verbal Play (3.15%), and Planning (1.96%). Eleven of twelve children used the following types of talk; Topic Related, Off Topic, Materials, and Topic Selection. Evaluating Self and Metacognitive Talk were used by ten of twelve children. Show/Share Talk was used by nine of twelve children. Mechanics and Verbal Play Talk were used by eight of twelve children. Seven of twelve children used Making Sense, Defending and Planning Talk. Evaluating Others Talk was used by five of the twelve children.

Child-Adult Interactions represented the largest percentage of all of types of Interactions. The largest number of Child-Adult Interactions included talk about the child’s product and the writing process which included the use of Topic Related Talk, Off Topic Talk, Topic Selection, Metacognitive, Mechanics, Evaluating Self, Show/Share, Defending, Making Sense, Verbal Play and Materials. Children requested adults’ attention and assistance while writing. The adults responded to children’s requests, questions, and comments by providing support or help as the context demanded. Children often initiated adult interactions by asking for help with spelling and to request materials. Children often commented about the theme, storybook or other play activities they were engaged in before writing time. An example resulted in the following exchange: Child: “Look, This is me!” (while scribbling around a drawing of a face) Adult: “That’s you?” Child: “Yes, look.” Adult: “What is that?” Child: “Those are tears.” Adults: “Why are these tears?” Child: “Cause I’m crying.”
The second largest percentage of interactions was Adult-Child Interactions. During many of the Adult-Child Interactions, the adult made inquiries about the child’s written product. Sometimes, if the child did not respond, the adult offered a possible interpretation of the child’s product, expecting that the child would accept or discard the interpretation. Adults also, provided instructions, directions and modeling for the children, which often changed the writing product. These Adult-Child Interactions provided opportunities for the adult to promote emergent writing skills. During the Adult-Child Interactions, children talked and commented about topics related to their writing process. They asked for adult help to spell words and find materials. Adults provided encouragement for children to complete their writing by asking about their writing ideas, complementing children’s products, expanding utterances, rephrasing or repeating the child’s utterances, and through nonverbal means such as smiling and nodding in an approval manner as the context required. Examples of Adult-Child Interactions were: Adult: “How do you spell boat? /B.b.b/. (adult repeated the sound and wrote the letter on a paper while child was writing on his journal) B, very good. So write a B up here.” (child wrote the letter) “Very good. So, what comes next? What comes after B? /O, O/, What letter is that?” (child kept writing) Child: “Now what?” The child’s product included scribbles and the word boat. The resulting written product was directly related to the adult’s prompting and modeling. Other purposes for Adult-Child Interactions were directives, commands or suggestions which served to encourage children to work in their journals. An example was: Adult: “You guys get to draw a picture of your favorite thing you did today” Child: “This is playdoh”. Another example was: Adult: “What do you need to write with? What do you need to say?” Child: “Please, can I have a pencil”. Third example was: Adult: “What was your favorite thing today?” Child: “A ride in the train” Adult: “Riding in the train? Ok. Keep drawing!”
Child (self) Interactions represented the third largest percentage of interactions. Child (self) Interactions included the following types of talk: Topic Selection, Topic Related, Metacognitive, Verbal Play, Off Topic, Making Sense and Evaluating Self. An example of Child (self) Interaction was, Child: “Ah! Ah!” (while writing). Another example was: Child: “Yeah”

Child-Child Interactions represented the lowest percentage of interactions. Child-Child Interactions were mostly with the intention to share or comment about their products. Children’s utterances to their peers during writing time included the following types of Talk; Topic Related, Off Topic, Topic Selection, Materials, Verbal Play, Show/Share and Evaluating Others. An example of Child-Child Interaction was: Child: “(child’s name) Sit next to me” Another example was: Child: “Look, I’m making a boat!”

**Relationship Between Talk and Writing Products**

Children’s Talk surrounding the journal writing activity reflected a variety of types of Talk that could be related to or influence journal writing products. The following describes how children used each of the types of Talk in the order of frequency of use. The type of Talk most frequently coded from children’s utterances was Topic Related Talk. Topic Related Talk was related to a topic or illustration included in the journal writing product. An example, from one child’s daily journal, can be described as Writing via Drawing. Her product was a drawing of a girl with a big open mouth and a small body next to a smaller girl. There were two little squares at the right side, and a heading word, “book”, at the top of the paper. The child’s comments coded as Topic Related Talk were: “This is, this is my little tongue. I put something in my mouth. This is Mom and this is me. This is a blueberry pancake.” During the child’s Topic Related Talk the purpose was to discuss information related to the written product. In this instance the Topic Related Talk did not influence the child’s product, but the discussion was
related to the written product. It demonstrated her interest in her topic and the drawing as well as the relationship between her drawing and her experience. The following utterances are another example of Topic Related Talk: Adult: “My favorite thing today was…” Child: “Smile!” Adult: “Smiling?” “What else did we do today that you liked?” Child: “Playing with play dough,” Adult: “Can you write play?” (while child was drawing a smile), Child: “No.” Adult: “What letter does play start with? (While child was writing) That’s right. What comes next?” During the previous example, the Topic Related Talk was started by an Adult-Child Interaction which encouraged the child to write about earlier classroom events. The result was a child’s product related to the Topic Related Talk.

During writing, children had discussion or conversation which did not relate to the writing products. In those cases, the adult’s typical response was to provide redirection or to encourage children to start or keep working. The Off Topic Talk did not influence the children’s product. The following is an example of Off Topic Talk: Adult: “What did you draw?” Child: “I’m picking my nose” Adult: “Picking your nose? That was your favorite thing?” (child did not stop the action) Adult: “(Child’s name), don’t pick your nose.” (child started to draw). In this case, the adult’s redirection, returned the child to the task. In another example one child’s Off Topic Talk was a Child-Child Interaction about where he was sitting: Child: “(Child’s name) sit by me” (but the other child did not respond, and they continued working on their journals). The following is another example of a Child-Child interaction which began at the beginning of the daily journal writing time: Child: “My journal is yellow” (the other child did not answer).

Materials Talk was third in frequency of occurrence of children’s talk during journal writing. Purposes included complaint about a broken pencil, asking to share materials, asking for writing materials such as the child’s journal, paper, or pencil. A Child- Adult Interaction that
resulted in Material Talk included the following child’s request: “I need the sharpener” Another example of Material Talk occurred during an Adult-Child Interaction; Adult: “How many pencils do we have?” Child: “Two” Adult: “Two pencils?” Child: “I was giving that to her.” (while pointing to other child) Adult: “Thank you” This sample showed the intention of the child to share. In another example of Materials Talk: there was a direct effect on the written product due to the relationship between the writer and the writing material (pencil). After opening his journal the child asked the adult, Child: “Please can I have a pencil?” Adult: “Here’s your pencil.”

Topic Selection Talk was fourth in frequency of occurrence of children’s talk during journal writing. Topic Selection Talk was coded when the child wrote or drew about what they were saying. An adult initiated the interaction in the following example of Topic Selection Talk; Adult: “So you’re going to draw a picture of what your favorite thing today was?” Child: “My favorite, my favorite thing, umm, umm, the guy driving the train crashed.” The written product included circular scribbles, some mock letters and the letters t and a representing the word “train.” Another example of Topic Selection Talk was during a day when the theme of the week related to washing hands, brushing teeth and taking a bath. The children had the opportunity to interact with a variety of activities such as pretending to bathe a baby doll, read books related to hygiene etc. While writing in his journal, the child started to talk about the theme of the day. The child initiated a Child-Adult Interaction with Topic Selection Talk: “Ummm I like to do umm the washing the babies. Brushing the doll’s teeth.” The written product, which was related to the Topic Selection Talk, included a drawing of a girl, the word “wash”, the child’s name and some scribbles.

Children’s Metacognitive Talk provided information regarding their knowledge of the writing process and was fifth in frequency of occurrence of children’s types of talk during
journal writing. Sharing insights about their writing included comments directed to adults or themselves. Talk like “I don’t know how to do that,” or “I only can make it like this,” were coded as Metacognitive Talk. Child-Adult and Adult-Child interactions that resulted from the Metacognitive Talk were evident by the resulting comments or modeling provided from adults to address the child concern about their skills. An example of Metacognitive Talk was: Child: “I don’t know how to make a monkey.” (said while working on his journal) Adult: “I don’t either; I just try. (and the adult started modeling drawing a monkey) That’s my monkey.” The child did not answer and kept drawing. Later at the end of the writing time, an adult praised the child saying, “I like your picture,” and the child answered, “There’s a monkey I made.” The child’s drawing can be described as a happy face with arms and legs. The previous example suggested that the Metacognitive Talk was related to the written product. Other Child-Adult Interactions coded as Metacognitive Talk initiated other interactions such as Mechanic Talk resulting in opportunities for adults to model how to write words or help with spelling.

Mechanics Talk was sixth in frequency of occurrence of children’s talk during journal writing. Comments about Mechanics influenced written products directly. Mechanics Talk resulted in Child-Adult Interactions and Adult-Child Interactions. The questions and comments related to mechanics that children and adults produced varied (i.e. “What this spell?” “How do you spell?” “Now what?” “How you draw it?” “How you write a b?” “If you make a T like this, look like a line.”). An example from one child’s daily journal can be described as mostly scribbles and letter like products but the only written word: “boat”, was correctly spelled. That child’s Talk from that journal writing session was directed to an adult and coded as Mechanics: Child: “How do you spell boat?” The Talk coded as Mechanics Talk indicated intention to spell correctly and influenced the spelling in the child’s journal. During another instance the adult
was helping the child spell a word. Adult: “Can you write it? What letter does it start with?” Child: “Umm P.” Adult: “That’s right, so write a P. What comes next?” (while slowly pronouncing the word “play”). Child: “L.” Adult: “That’s right!” The Mechanics Talk provided opportunities for adults to deliver knowledge about spelling and letter formation related to emergent writing skills. Adults answering children’s questions about spelling, gave children opportunities to copy letters from their examples, spell words pronouncing each letter slowly, provide instructions on which part of the paper to write their letters (to write letters together to form a word), provide constant feedback and positive comments on children products. Questions about spelling were the most frequent kind of Mechanics Talk children produced.

Evaluating Self Talk, which was seventh in frequency of occurrence of children’s talk during journal writing, was most often self-directed but also interactive. An example of a child’s Evaluating Self Talk was: “I’m not writing! I’m not writing!” Other Evaluating Self Talk examples were: Child: “Done, I’m very done. I did it!” Most of the Evaluation Self Talk identified in the sample were classified as Child (self) Interaction. Evaluating Self Talk influenced children’s products as a result of opportunities to revise or change their actions.

Comments were coded as Show/Share Talk when children wanted to show or talk about their products. Show/Share Talk was eighth in frequency of occurrence of children’s talk during journal writing. Examples of Show/Share Talk are: “Look, I’m making a boat.”, “Look what I made.”, “This is play-doh.” These examples of Show/Share Talk were related to children’s products but were not reflected in what they wrote or drew because children shared their products after they created them, and the conversation did not result in changes or additions to their products. Another example of Show/Share Talk, however, was reflected in the child’s product: Child “Look what I’ve done” Adult: “and what is your favorite thing that you did
today?” Child: “This is happy face and look at this a face.” Adult: “Ok, but what did we do today that was your favorite thing?” As a result of the adult questions/redirection, the child both expanded her spoken language and started to write more. Children’s Talk was characterized by frequent use of descriptions of their completed products. Adults can use the opportunities provided by the Show/Share Talk to foster additional conversations about writing products to encourage children to enhance them.

Defending Talk happened as a result of a spoken interaction between an adult and child that involved defending the written product. Child Defending talk resolved the issue or resulted in some writing modifications (like adding another letter or drawing) to the product. The Defending Talk children used during journal writing did not influence their products because it occurred after the product was made. An example is; Child: “I don’t finish my art!” Adult: “It’s ok, we’ll finish it, next time, ok?” Child: No! I don’t want to!” Adult: “In a minute, we’ll finish that, sure.” Another example of Defending Talk about a written product was “No, that’s not. No, that’s not an airplane!” Defending Talk utterances were most frequent during Adult-Child Interactions.

Make Sense Talk was related to writing products. Make Sense Talk was frequent during Child-Adult Interactions. An example is the following: Adult: “You did a good job writing your name.” (the adult was writing the date on the paper) “Here you go.” (while giving the journal back to the child) Child: “What’s that you make?” Adult: “That’s the date. That’s the date for today.” During another writing time the following Child-Adult Interaction occurred; Child: “I can draw this.” (the child was primarily making scribbles) Adult: “Wow!” Child: “That’s an A!” Adult: “That’s an A? You’re right, that is an A.” Also comments like “This is not writing,” while drawing showed how children were starting to make sense of writing. Usually Make Sense Talk
was directed to adults who consequently had the opportunity to foster children’s learning about writing.

Verbal Play Talk was eleventh in frequency of occurrence of children’s Talk during journal writing. Most of children’s Verbal Play Talk was unrelated to their writing products. The Verbal Play Talk was commonly characterized by sounds, syllable repetitions or singing. Examples of Verbal Play Talk not related to products are the following: “Ah, ahhh”, “Fii fu fu fa”, “Boo”. Children produced these utterances while writing without a specific purpose or relationship to the product or writing process. These utterances were mostly Child (Self) Interaction. In a few instances Verbal Play Talk was related to the writing process or products. An example occurred when a child was working on her journal, and the theme of the day included trains. She produced “to, to, to, to, to” when trying to say choo, choo. Immediately the adult said “Did you mean like Thomas?” and the child repeated “to, to, to, to”. Another example of Verbal Play Talk happened when at the end of the activity, while writing, a child started to sing “Clean up, clean up everybody everywhere”.

A child’s description of the writing process in their journal could initiate or result in products that matched the plan. Planning Talk announced the possible writing results. A Child (Self) Interaction coded as Planning Talk was “This is going to be my next.” The written product was a result of the talk about the plan to write. Planning Talk like “I want to finish my picture” helped a child decide what to write about. Another example of Planning Talk was an Adult-Child Interaction that resulted in the following: Adult: “You’re going to draw a picture of what your favorite thing today was?” Child: “I’d love to draw, um to do, the train boxes.” Adult: “You liked the boxes, the train boxes? If you liked the train boxes then draw a picture.” The adult’s response to the child’s Planning Talk encouraged the child to start drawing. The child’s written
product included scribbles and square like scribbles. This interaction was also coded as Topic Related and Topic Selection Talk.

Evaluating Other Talk presented the lowest frequency of occurrence. Evaluating Other Talk reflected children’s interest in peers’ writing or products. Minimal occurrence of Evaluating Other Talk was seen in children’s talk. It occurred five times. An example of a child’s Evaluating Other Talk was “Look at (child’s name). He’s messy.” Another Evaluating Other Talk produced during a Child-Child Interaction occurred while children were drawing. A child looked to his peer’s drawing and commented but the other child did not respond. The child said: “This one is really good.” It was difficult to identify the possible relationship between the child’s Evaluation of Other and their own product. There was no evidence of effect of the Evaluating Other Talk on the other child. Evaluating Other Talk can provide opportunities to obtain ideas from peers about writing, but did not occur in this preschool setting.

The use and frequency of each type of talk varied. Some of children’s talk clearly influenced their writing products (i.e. Mechanics, Topic Related, Topic Selection). Other types of Talk served to initiate or maintain interactions, rather than directly influence the writing product (i.e. Verbal Play, Off Topic). The results suggest that the talk which children demonstrate while writing, can influence the product in different ways. It also varies from child to child. Schickedanz (1999) stated that children’s variations in rates of literacy development are due primarily to individual differences in children’s learning rates rather than to differences in children’s early literacy experiences, but these results show the adult’s comments and interactions influenced children’s products and provided opportunities for children to practice emergent writing skills.

Changes in Children’s Writing Level over the Course of the Program

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A second research aim was to determine whether children, who participated in the language and literacy program, exhibited changes in their writing skills over the course of the program. Comparison of journal products from the first and last day as reflected by category scores on the Sulzby Classification Categories revealed a significant difference $t=3$, df=11, $p<.01$, with higher scores on the last day (Table 5). All children scored in the same or higher categories on their last product when compared with their first product. The highest category children used by the most children on the first day was Category number 2: Writing Via Scribbling (41.66% of children). The highest category used by the most children on the last day was Category number 4: Writing via Reproducing Well-Learned Units of Letter Strings (41.66% of children).

Increase of one or more points as defined by highest category on the Sulzby scale use by the child were obtained by seven of twelve (58.33%) children. The mean increase was .83 for children’s written products, indicating an increase of nearly one category. One child initially produced only Writing via Scribbling (Category number 2), and at the end of the program produced Writing via Making Letter like Forms (Category number 3). Two children’s scores moved from Writing via Drawing (Category number 1) to Writing via Making Letter like Forms (Category number 3) in one case and Writing via Reproducing Well-Learned Units of Letter Strings (Category number 4) in the other. Three children’s’ scores moved from Writing via Making Letter like Forms (Category number 3) to Writing via Reproducing Well-Learned Units of Letter Strings (Category number 4). Another child started by Writing via Reproducing Well-Learned Units of Letter Strings (Category number 4) and in the final week was Writing via Invented Spelling (Category number 5).
Additional changes in journal writing products were observed, including increase in number of marks, scribbles, mock letters and letters. Journal writing products of seven children presented an increase in the number of mock letters and letters when comparing their first and last products. An increase in length and extension of scribbles was observed in the journals of two children.

Age related performance and/or change in writing over time was not apparent in this group of children. Three-year olds exhibited initial and/or final scores in Categories 1 through 4. Four-year olds exhibited Categories 2 through 5, with only one child producing writing in Category 5, Invented Spelling, on the last day. The two 5-year olds produced writing in categories 1 through 3 on the first and/or last day.

Discussion

Interactions between adults and children in this preschool program provided opportunities for children and adults to talk about a variety of topics and processes related to their written products. Children’s interactions with adults suggested that children find adults as important contributors to achieving their purposes through the writing process. The social context provided by peer interactions can have an impact on children’s opportunities to learn about writing and their products (Dyson 2003). The interactions among children in this study were limited and thus results do not support the notion that peer interactions influenced these preschool children’s products. The previous research examining interactions among children (Dyson, 2003; Kuvshinoff, 1993) has been limited to school-age children. This study findings are different may be because it focused on preschoolers. Additional research is needed regarding the age at which interactions among peers can result in writing change. A relationship between talk and text was demonstrated for the Talk categories of Topic Related Talk, Materials, Topic Selection,
Metacognitive, Mechanics, Evaluating Self, Show/Share, Making Sense, Verbal Play, and Planning, but was not demonstrated for all types of Talk produced by the children. Many of children’s written products indeed demonstrated that the discussions (Talk) can influence the final product. This study illustrates that the talk produced during journal writing helped children change the form and content of their written products. The use of different types of talk and differences in children’s written products suggest that adult interactions influenced the writing changes observed in the written products. Kuvshinoff (1993) and Dyson (2003) similarly found that talk which surrounded journal writing affected the texts produced for school age children.

Positive changes were observed in preschool children’s daily writing products recorded in their daily journal activities over the six week program. The daily opportunity to interact with literacy-related activities through journal writing appears to have helped children increase, explore and practice emergent writing skills which resulted in skills improvement. The use of writing activities, such as the daily journal, conducted in an environment that allows interactions among adults and children appears to be an effective way to further develop emergent writing skills. Adult participation with children, while producing journal writing products, is a useful opportunity to foster literacy skills. Interactions provided opportunities to engage in natural and context-related aspects related to writing. These interactions served as opportunities for adults to model and instruct children about the mechanics, spelling and spatial organization of emergent writing. The results of this study suggest that adults are important in supporting young children’s writing. These findings suggested that providing or enhancing opportunities, resources, modeling, motivation and support from adults can foster emergent writing skills. Nixon & Topping (2001) support this view that motivation and social interactions can impact the learning process of emergent writers. Adults and teachers should create opportunities in children’s
environments to facilitate literacy related activities like journal writing to promote children’s skills. Adults should be immersed as facilitators and participants rather than instructors to achieve and improve children literacy development. This study highlights the important role of literacy related experiences to foster emergent writing skills.

**Limitations and Future research**

This study included a group of only 12 children, ages 3 to 5, who were observed over a period of only six weeks. The program included children who were typically developing, those who were at risk, and those with language concerns. Exact diagnoses and developmental levels were not identified, thus preventing examination of the writing skills of typical children and those in specific subgroups. Additional subjects divided into groups of typical children at each age and children with language disabilities can provide more targeted information about writing development in preschool. Investigation of a larger sample of children, younger children, and children from diverse backgrounds, as well as observations and analysis of varied writing activities may provide additional information regarding the kinds of experiences that support emergent writing during the preschool years. In addition, the specific journal writing activity was the only activity observed and transcribed. Examination of other types of written products that occur in preschool would provide information about authentic writing by young children. In this study we described children’s writing changes only at the beginning and end of the program. Examination of the qualitative changes across daily writing products could demonstrate both the course of change and the influence of the classroom and communication on this change. Future research should examine the relationship between teacher’s interactions with children and children’s writing by comparing different levels of training, implementation of best practices and adult-child interactions during writing opportunities.
References


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Talk which deals with the materials used during journal writing, including writing utensils and paper. May be interactive or self-directed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>Talk that refers to the mechanics of writing, (i.e. letter formation). May be interactive or self-directed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating Self</td>
<td>Talk that is evaluative in nature and is about the author or the author’s work. May be positive, negative or comparative. May be interactive or self-directed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating Other</td>
<td>Talk which reflects an evaluation of another student’s writing process or product. May be positive or negative. Is interactive. May be offered spontaneously or in response to a request for evaluation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defending</td>
<td>Talk that involves defending one’s own, or another student’s written entry or illustration. Interactive in nature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metacognitive/</td>
<td>Talk by a student which indicates a self-awareness of knowing or not knowing information. Also includes insightful remarks about one’s own or another author’s writing process. May be self-directed or interactive.</td>
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<td>Metaprocess</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Talk which reflects the process of thinking through plans, and weighing choices. May be interactive or self-directed. May take form of question. Usually expressed in future (I’m going to …).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Topic Selection</td>
<td>Talk which announces what one is writing about or refers to the process of deciding upon a topic. May be interactive or self-directed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic related Talk</td>
<td>Talk that relates directly or indirectly to a topic or illustration of one of the students in the journal writing activity. Interactive in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Topic Talk</td>
<td>Talk which is unrelated to any of the journal topics written about that day. Is interactive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Play</td>
<td>Talk which includes sound play, word play, and singing. May be interactive, but is usually self-directed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sense*</td>
<td>Talk that includes discussion of how who achieved or gained a skill. Describes the process of making sense about literacy rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show/share*</td>
<td>Talk that relates directly to what the child wrote or draws. May be interactive by showing and telling about their product.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Writing via Drawing</td>
<td>The child uses drawing to stand for writing. The child is working out the relationship between drawing and writing, not confusing the two. The child sees drawing/writing as communication of a specific and purposeful message. Children who participate in writing via drawing will read their drawings as if there is writing on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Writing via Scribbling</td>
<td>The child scribbles but intends it as writing. Often the child appears to be writing and scribbles from left to right. The child moves the pencil as an adult does, and the pencil makes writing-like sounds. The scribble resembles writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Writing via Making Letter like Forms</td>
<td>At a glance, shapes in the child’s writing resemble letters. However, close observation reveals that they only look like letters. They are not just poorly formed letters, though, they are creations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Writing via Reproducing Well-Learned Units of Letter Strings</td>
<td>The child uses letter sequences learned from such sources as his or her own name. The child sometimes changes the order of the letters, writing the same ones many different ways, or reproduces letters in long strings or in random order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Writing via Invented Spelling</td>
<td>Many varieties and levels of invented spelling are demonstrated by children. Basically, children create their own spelling for words when they do not know the conventional spellings. In invented spelling, one letter may represent an entire syllable and words sometimes overlap and are not properly spaced. As the child's writing matures, the words look more like conventional writing; with perhaps only one letter invented or left out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Writing via Conventional Spelling</td>
<td>The child’s writing resembles adult writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Number of spoken interactions by initiator and addressee for each child during journal writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Child→Adult</th>
<th>Adult→Child</th>
<th>Child→Child</th>
<th>Child→Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>39.25</td>
<td>29.66</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Distribution of categories of talk during journal writing based on Kuvshinoff’s categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Number of Child Utterances</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Utterances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic related Talk</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>24.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Topic Talk</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>16.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>12.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Selection</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive/Metaprocess</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating Self</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show/share</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make sense</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Play</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. Each child’s initial and final writing category score based on Sulzby (1985)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Score from Week 1</th>
<th>Score from Week 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3;3</td>
<td>(3) Letter Like Forms</td>
<td>(4) Letter Strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;8</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
<td>(3) Letter Like Forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;9</td>
<td>(1) Drawing</td>
<td>(4) Letter Strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;9</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3;11</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;7</td>
<td>(3) Letter Like Forms</td>
<td>(4) Letter Strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;7</td>
<td>(4) Letter Strings</td>
<td>(4) Letter Strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;7</td>
<td>(4) Letter Strings</td>
<td>(5) Invented Spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;9</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4;11</td>
<td>(3) Letter Like Forms</td>
<td>(4) Letter Strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5;8</td>
<td>(1) Drawing</td>
<td>(3) Letter Like Forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5;9</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
<td>(2) Scribbling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter V

Conclusions

Writing opportunities provides children the chance to practice literacy skills from their own perspective (Bloodgood, 1999), and that chance is provided through strong language and literacy preschool programs (De Baryshe & Gorecki, 2007). The underlying purpose driving this study was to determine whether children who have participated in a preschool literacy program showed gains in emergent writing skills. Two different aspects related to the emergent writing process of preschoolers were explored. First, this study identified changes in children’s writing during a preschool language and literacy program, including examination of name writing and daily journal writing products. Second, the study examined the talk and the interactions that children engaged in during daily journal writing. The findings from this study support two general conclusions. First, positive changes in children’s writing can result from the opportunity to write consistently and with support during a literacy-rich preschool program. Children participated in daily name writing, and changes in name writing were observed. Likewise, children participated in daily journal writing, and changes in emergent writing products occurred. Second a relationship between the spoken interactions of adults and children and the children’s written products was observed.

The results of this study suggest that children’s name writing, changed significantly during a short period of time when they were given consistent opportunities for practice and support to write during a name writing activity which was part of their daily routine. The children in this study were immersed in language related activities that included writing opportunities like the sign in sheet. The consistent name writing practice appears to have helped some children learn and manipulate the mechanics and spelling aspects of writing their name as
evidenced by the significant change in scores on the NWS and observed changes in number of marks and letters. The name writing skill practiced in the classroom setting seemed to evolve as a result of the experiences and opportunities provided by adults and the classroom environment. These findings support literature regarding emergent writing that considers name writing as an important strategy to promote the development of writing in general (Levin, Both, Aram & Bus, 2005). The daily opportunity to interact with literacy-related activities through journal writing appears to have helped children explore, practice and increase emergent writing skills related to form. Young children can benefit from being encouraged to scribble and pretend to write (Puranik & Lonigan, 2009). Results suggested that adult support to children was important in keeping children motivated to finish their written products. The language and literacy program provided children with varied, motivating, and natural opportunities to interact with print, and writing tools.

Research suggests that effective emergent literacy practices with preschoolers are those that provide meaningful reading and writing experiences in a social-naturalistic context (Dyson, 2003, Nixon & Topping, 2001). The largest number of child to adult interactions during writing represented children commenting about their writing process. Many of children’s written products indeed demonstrated that the discussions can influence the final product. This study demonstrates that the talk produced during daily journal writing helped children change the form of their written products. Also the talk produced during daily journal writing influenced the content in the written products. The relationship between process-related talk and writing form and the relationship between topic-related talk and written content suggest that adult interactions influenced the changes observed in the written products of these children. Kuvshinoff (1993) and Dyson (2003) similarly found that talk which surrounded journal writing affected the texts.
produced by school age children. Interactions between adults and children in this preschool program provided opportunities for children and adults to talk about a variety of topics and processes related to their written products. Children’s interactions with adults suggested that children find adults as important contributors to achieving their purposes through the writing process. Results suggested that adults are important in fostering the development of emergent writing skills at early ages through conversations with children during writing.

This study highlights the important role of literacy related experiences to foster emergent writing skills. Findings suggested that providing or enhancing opportunities, resources, modeling, motivation and support from adults can foster emergent writing skills. Nixon & Topping (2001) & Dyson (2003) support this view that motivation and social interaction can impact the emergent writers. Adults should be immersed as facilitators and participants rather than instructors to create opportunities to facilitate writing activities such as journal writing to promote writing skills. Adults providing modeling and commenting about the mechanics, spelling and spatial organization while engaging in writing activities can influence the form of children’s products but also their emergent writing skills. When the adult interacts with the child during writing times they can use that opportunity to discuss and share about the topic of the child’s written product while it is being produced and that talk indeed can influence the final content of the product.

These results support previous findings regarding the effectiveness of creating emergent literacy interventions to enhance children’s development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Welsh, Sullivan, Justice, 2003). When speech-language pathologists collaborate with adults in the classroom, they can provide the necessary support to enable adults to implement language and literacy programs which include emergent writing.
**Future Research**

This study included a group of only 12 children, ages 3 to 5, who were observed over a period of only six weeks. In addition, name writing during sign-in and a specific journal writing activity were the only activities observed. There are many other areas for investigation of best practices for encouraging emergent writing. These include the sample of children, the types of writing opportunities and activities, and the role of the adult. Longitudinal studies that examine writing to from preschool to the early grades may further determine the relationship between early emergent writing skills and later literacy development.

The adult’s role of encouraging and prompting children to write is suggested as being essential for children’s writing skills growth. The adults provided the instructions, materials, and motivation required to help children sign-in and engage in journal writing. Adults’ interactions included providing comments and praise about children’s performance. Future studies should examine specific interactions between adults and children that promote growth.
References


Appendix A

Name Writing Scale (NWS)

The Name Writing Scale (NWS) was developed by Haney, Bissonnette & Behnken (2003). The NWS is a scoring criteria scale with up to ten points to score a name writing attempt. Total score is obtained by adding all points. No partial points are given.

Directions: Each criteria met earns one point.

___ 1). Recognizable letters (legibility)
___ 2). All letters present
___ 3). Name spelled correctly
___ 4). Capitalization
___ 5). Letter formation
___ 6). Size of letters
___ 7). Spacing
___ 8). Fine motor control (evenness and alignment)
___ 9). Lack of Reversals
___ 10). Name written on line

__________________________________     TOTAL SCORE

(1) Recognizable Letters (legibility): writing resembles letters rather than scribble or drawings; may be upper or lower case; should be able to read the letters without knowing child’s name; receives credit even if all letters in the name are not present; receives credit even if letters are reversed

(2) All letters present: letters do not have to be in the correct order; must have all letters in name or nick name for credit
(3) Name spelled correctly: capitalization does not matter; evaluate first name only; may be nick name

(4) Capitalization: first letter must be capitalized (even if it is not the correct letter for child’s name); additional letters must be lower case

(5) Letter formation: cannot have a mixture of print and cursive; no tails on letters if printed; lower case i and j must be dotted (circle instead of dot also receives credit); lower case t must be crossed; letters should have appropriate closure (i.e. p, b); cannot be mistaken for another letter (i.e., n vs. h)

(6) Size of letters: lower case letters should be smaller than upper case letters (height); all letters should fit on line provided; no extremely small letters, as to stand out; no extremely large letters, as to stand out

(7) Spacing: letters should be approximately equal distance apart; disregard spacing between first and last name (last name not evaluated)

(8) Fine motor control: quality of writing should not be too wavy; lower case letters should be evenly aligned even if they are not actually touching the line; pencil should not be too dark or too light

(9) Lack of reversals

(10) Name written on line: more letters are written on the line than not on the line provided