University of Cincinnati

Date: 3/26/2014

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

It is entitled:
Investigating early writing through two frameworks: Quantitative intervention research and qualitative cultural-historical analysis

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Investigating Early Writing through Two Frameworks:
Quantitative Intervention Research and Qualitative Cultural-Historical Analysis

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Of the College of Allied Health Sciences
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Abstract

The effect of a process approach to early writing in which children created storybooks through drawing, writing and narration was investigated. A 5-month collaborative, classroom-based intervention with nine African American children in an urban Head Start classroom was implemented. Two analyses were conducted. The first investigated pre- and post-intervention differences using measures for early writing forms and spoken narrative development (macrostructure and microstructure). The results indicated a significant difference between pre- and post-intervention measures for macrostructure development. Clinically significant gains ranging from small to large effects were found within all measures. Results suggest that a process approach through storybook writing led to gains in early writing and narrative development. The second was a qualitative, sociocultural analysis, using cultural-historical theories of learning to reconceptualize early literacy development. This analysis examined literacy practices, what counted as literacy development, and redefined development as transformation through participation within this intervention setting. Video and audio recordings, interviews, and writing artifacts were re-examined from the original study. The results of this qualitative, classroom case study analysis illustrate how specific ideology and research frameworks that propose a one-size-fits-all approach to literacy and development conflicted with and constrained the varied paths of diverse learners. This analysis challenged ideologies of individuality, notions of universality, and a “fix-it” mentality of the intervention that unknowingly perpetuated deficit views of young, diverse children and may further contribute to the homogenization and standardization of early literacy programs and early childhood classroom practices.
Acknowledgements

I am so very grateful to have had the opportunity to engage in this amazing research experience. There are so many people who this gratitude should be extended to and I am hopeful that my mind is able to keep up with my heart so I am able to acknowledge them all. Although this dissertation is a reflection of my independent work, it was truly a collective and collaborative experience and would not have happened if it were not for the influences, encouragements, sacrifices and labors of a multitude of people. I am so fortunate to have had so many amazing professional mentors and personal heroes and heroines to guide me, lift me, and sometimes carry me along this journey.

First, I would like to thank Dr. Nancy Creaghead, who is so much more than a dissertation chair to me. She is a friend and confident, as well as an amazing mentor. I am so grateful not only for her guidance, but also her patience, her understanding, and her kindness. Although it has taken some time and growth on my part, I am even thankful for her painfully numerous track changes and her frequent curt but constructive feedback. This has been quite a journey and I’m so thankful that you were always there to lead me down the path until the end. I’m so glad that you decided to hire me for your private practice ten years ago and that we have been connected ever since. You will always be so near and dear to me on so many levels.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Jory Brass who served as a committee member for my dissertation, although he was so much more. Jory introduced me to a theoretical framework of literacy learning that conflicted with my current ways of thinking. This simultaneously challenged everything I thought I knew about literacy learning and intrigued me to want to learn so much more. I cannot even begin to envision where my research directions would have led me if I had not taken your course and if you had not so generously offered to guide me down this path to expand my knowledge in both literacy theory and practice. I know I have often joked that you “ruined my life” by complicating my research goals; (see no comma splice) however, I know that the opposite is really true. You have enhanced my professional life in
ways that I am sure I have yet to fully understand. I am so humbled by your kindness and guidance and grateful for your unending support.

I would also like to thank Dr. Jo-Anne Prendeville and Dr. Cheri Williams who also so kindly participated on my dissertation committee. You were both always available when I had questions and provided me with so much valuable feedback along the way. I am so grateful to have gotten to know each of you better through this process and I’m so very hopeful that these relationships grow on both a professional and personal level.

There were also many other faculty and friends who contributed to my growth professionally and personally. Dr. Lesley Raisor-Becker and Dr. Sandra Combs were first friends when I came into this doctoral program, but also provided me so much professional mentoring and guidance. I have always been so thankful that you were both there as I pursued my academic goals and aspirations. Your support, friendship and mentoring have always meant so much to me. I am also so indebted to all of the friends that I have made through fellow doctoral students, especially those in my cohort who will be forever friends. Specifically, I want to thank Debbie Elledge and Emily Hasselbeck. I cannot begin to imagine going through the rigors of this program without you. Thank you for holding me up during times when I could not do it on my own. I also want to thank the research assistants who have helped me along the way: Jenna Peters, Abby Ray, Kaitlyn Spradling, Scarlett Stamper, and Rachel Walter. I will be forever indebted to you for all of your hard work. You are all amazing and I wish you the very best in your future careers as speech-language pathologists. Finally, I want to extend a special thanks to Dr. Sarah Whitton of the Psychology department, one of my statistics professors, at the University of Cincinnati for consulting with me on my statistics when I was in over my head. I am so thankful for your expertise and your willingness to help me.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Head Start center that graciously offered to let me conduct my research at their site. It was an amazing experience, and I am especially grateful for the
classroom teacher (who I refer to as Rochelle in my study) and the fifteen fabulous, smart, talented and loving children that let me engage in their worlds for six months. I will never forget all the stories, the drawings, the enthusiasm, and the hugs that we shared while embarking on this journey. You will all be embedded in my heart forever.

Last, but most importantly, I am so grateful for my family’s love, understanding and especially their sacrifices during the last four-plus years. I started this doctoral program with a supportive husband, Rob, and a doting two-year old daughter, Abigail, who is now seven. Throughout the process, we also added a delightful baby boy, Austin, who is now the two-year old. Although I know it has been challenging, Rob has been such a solid support system through all the ups and downs. Often I think he is the true hero in this process because I could not have done this without his numerous sacrifices and his unending love. My family was often the only thing that maintained my sanity throughout this rigorous and challenging doctoral program. I would also like to thank my mom who is always there to encourage me and cheer me on, I’m so thankful for your unconditional love and support. Of course there are so many other family members who are so influential and I cannot possibly name you all, but I’m so grateful for the love and support from my siblings, Deron and Claire, and also my step mother Susie. I love you all. Finally, I want to acknowledge two angels that always served as inspiration when the going got tough. I knew that if I could get through the losses of two of the most important people in my life, my son Wyatt and my father Randy, I could get through anything. In the big scheme of challenges, this completion of a doctoral program was the small stuff. Dad and Wyatt, you will always be in my heart and will forever serve as my inspiration to continue on my quest to be the best that I can be. I am so incredibly grateful to all who supported me on this fabulous (yet challenging) journey. Thank you all for the love. Thank you all for the sacrifices. Thank you all for believing in me.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction and Literature Review

Research in the area of early childhood literacy is abundant. The rationale for early literacy research is largely founded on the principles of emergent literacy, a critical period of development in the early years, and attempts at meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse group of children in our society (Gillen & Hall, 2013). The research within the field of early literacy is diverse and is framed by different theoretical frameworks and research methodologies (Orellana & Peer, 2013; Gillen & Hall, 2013). This dissertation explores some of this methodology, theory and ideology of early writing research and educational practices. This exploration is navigated through the implementation of one classroom-based project on early writing which is investigated through two papers that examined an instructional strategy of process writing (Calkins, 1994; Ray and Glover, 2008) through two differing methodological and theoretical frameworks. The first study is a quantitative, quasi-experimental investigation of the outcomes of this early writing intervention in a Head Start classroom. The second study is a qualitative case-study analysis of the same project from a cultural-historical framework of learning and development (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). To understand the nature of each of these studies, a literature review that explores how early writing has been practiced and researched is warranted.

Early Exploration of Early Writing Development

One of the earliest documented studies regarding early writing was conducted by Hildreth (1936) and it continues to be cited in current research on early writing as the first study to discuss developmental stages of writing with young children. In this study, Hildreth investigated the name writing abilities of 170 children ages 3 to 6 and described the characteristics of the name writing features across seven levels, which were identified by six month increments throughout the age range. To determine what was most representative within these age ranges, she arranged the writing samples in order of maturity with criteria for legibility, spacing, spelling evenness and alignment. She then located the median paper within each
age range to be representative for each particular age group. This study was important during the time that it was written because until then little research was conducted in regard to early writing development of preschool-aged children. At this time, the reading readiness theory (for a historical review see Teale & Sulzby, 1986) was predominant and it was generally thought that children first learned to read and then learned to write. Therefore, there was little focus on writing until well into the elementary grades after children were conventionally reading. This study provided evidence that young children do possess knowledge about writing and has been influential in guiding future researchers as they investigate the development of early writing (for example, Bloodgood, 1999; Clay, 1975; Cruikshank, 2001; Levin, Both-De Vries, Aram & Bus, 2005; Lieberman, 1985; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011a, Sulzby, Barnhart, & Heishma, 1989).

**Reseaching the Intentions and Developmental Progressions of Early Writers**

Marie Clay was additionally influential in bringing attention to the early writing experiences of young literacy learners. In her pioneering work, *What Did I Write?* (1975), she studied the writing samples of children between the ages of 4:10 and 7 years of age and found there was a substantial amount of variability among children’s early writing products. Clay concluded that children’s writing was intentional (their marks had meaning to their users), even at a beginning scribbling stage, and that children use beginning codes such as scribble writing, linear mock writing and mock letters, and eventually conventional letters. She refuted, however, the idea of a specific acquisition sequence that would describe a linear or fixed progression of learning that all children must pass through to acquire conventional literacy skills. She further concluded that children’s writing development was an important contributor to overall literacy development. This conclusion was influential in shaping research directions to not only include early writing, but also to investigate the relationships between writing and reading (for example, Bloodgood 1999, Diamond, Gerde, and Powell, 2008; Shatil, Share and Levin, 2000; Vernon and Ferreiro, 1999).
Marie Clay was additionally crucial in leading the way in the emergent literacy movement. The term “emergent literacy” was first conceptualized by Marie Clay in her doctoral dissertation research (Clay, 1966) in which she began emphasizing the importance of developing literacy skills during early childhood. This emergent literacy framework was important because it widened the scope of research in childhood writing to include preschool writing (Rowe, 2008a). Within this emergent literacy framework, the focus shifted from a maturation view of literacy development to a perspective that interpreted the cognitive hypotheses of children as they approached reading and writing. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) conducted a study in which children ages 4 to 6 were asked to write dictated words or sentences and then read them back. The researchers concluded that children form an invented hypothesis in which they construct their own knowledge through developing and testing hypotheses about writing by experimenting with different ways of writing. Ferreiro and Teberosky described a sequenced progression of children’s constructions and tests of these alphabetic hypotheses. Some of these hypotheses included expectations about the size of letters and words, that words will be comprised of different sets of letters, and that letters stand for syllables (opposed to sounds). This study was foundational as it provided additional evidence for learning about how children’s early writing developed as well as supported a constructivist framework for how children test hypotheses in regard to print as opposed to using direct imitation to reproduce adult versions of print. This research further provided a framework for researchers in early writing to investigate young children’s understanding that the marks they make on the page carry meaning which prompted researchers to include a focus on young children’s intentions when writing (Goodman, 1986; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Schickedanz, 1990).

Sulzby et al. (1989) conducted a study to uncover the development of children’s early writing skills in compositional activities. They investigated the developmental patterns of writing and rereading of 123 kindergarten children across group and individual contexts as the children were asked to write and reread stories of their own composition over a full school year. The authors described a general developmental
pattern of writing, which included drawing, scribbles, letter-like units, copying and invented spelling. They further concluded that scribbling still occurred in first grade, as it occasionally appeared in the writing of children who used other “higher level” skills such as invented spelling. The authors also found that invented spelling occurred far later than they expected, as most five year olds produced invented spelling for isolated words or brief phrases; however, when creating sentences and more complex stories, their writing included less mature forms. This research was important as it investigated young children’s writing in a meaningful context: composing stories. Furthermore, The Writing Forms Scale developed in Sulzby et al.,(1989), as well as other similar developmental writing scales, has been used in subsequent studies to discuss and measure the progression and development of young writers (for example, DeBaryshe et al, 1996; Sturm, Cali, Nelson, & Staskowski, 2012). This developmental scale was also used in this dissertation to measure change in writing forms from the pre- to post-intervention period as detailed in the first paper.

The emergent literacy perspective continues to be a foundational framework for much of the research that is conducted within the realm of early writing today, including research that looks into instructional approaches and contexts in which children learn to write (for example, Aram & Levin, 2004; Craig, 2006; Jones, Reutzel, & Fargo, 2010;). Researchers and educators continue their efforts to find the best approaches to support children in acquiring specific skills in early writing that will lead to later conventional writing or literacy in general.

**Linking Early Writing to Later Literacy Development**

In respect to early writing, research has often focused on investigating how writing abilities in young children are related to other areas of literacy development. In these studies the researchers have made the case for developing a child’s skills in early writing to improve the performance of other precursory skills that will lead to conventional literacy skills. For example, Bloodgood (1999) studied the name writing abilities of children in their classroom setting. She examined the parallels of early name writing abilities to
other areas of early literacy and found that 4- and 5-year old children’s ability to produce their name in writing was correlated with alphabet knowledge, recognition of words, and concept of word (ability to track words with fingers). She concluded that early writing gives young children opportunities to explore “what they understand about literacy, perfect letter formation, and move toward making associations between letters and sounds” (p. 364).

Vernon and Ferreiro (1999) investigated the literacy skills of 54 Spanish speaking kindergarteners from low socioeconomic backgrounds in the same school in Mexico. The children were individually asked to write seven different common nouns and then asked to read them back while pointing to the letters they were reading. The researchers classified the writing samples into six different writing levels. The children were subsequently asked to segment different nouns (through both pictures and written words) by syllables and phonemes. The researchers found a strong relationship between levels of writing development displayed by the children and their phonological awareness skills.

Shatil, Share and Levin (2000), investigated the writing and literacy skills of 317 children in Israel at two points in time: the end of their kindergarten school year and the end of their first grade school year. In the kindergarten year, the children were asked to write three pairs of dictated words. The researchers used these writing samples to develop a scale that encompassed thirteen developmental phases for categorical reference of the samples. Other kindergarten measures included alphabetic variables (letter naming, initial consonant matching, phoneme blending, and initial consonant isolation) and socioliteracy variables (parent print exposure, shared reading at home, and concepts of print). First grade measures included untimed oral word reading, timed oral word reading, sentence comprehension, expository and narrative text comprehension and measures of spelling. They concluded that kindergarten writing abilities were significantly correlated with first grade abilities for decoding, spelling and reading comprehension.

Diamond et al. (2008) explored the writing skills of Head Start children. They investigated the writing of these children through both written forms (e.g., letters and letter-like shapes) and writing
processes (e.g., linear versus scattered shapes or letters) with a name writing task. They found that children who demonstrated more sophisticated writing through the name writing task knew the names of more letters, understood more about print concepts, and were more sensitive to initial sounds of words.

These studies, along with others with similar results (Blair & Savage, 2006; Levin et al., 2005; Molfese, Beswick, Molnar, & Jacobi-Vessels, 2006; Welsch, Sullivan & Justice, 2003) demonstrate the importance of engaging young children in early writing skills. These studies suggest that developing early writing skills may impact the development of other early literacy skills to facilitate later literacy learning.

**Instructional and Classroom Approaches in Early Writing**

Although name writing and word writing are often the early writing tasks investigated in research, researchers have identified a need to further explore early writing activities that extend beyond name writing and tracing letters to encourage the written language development of young children for communication and composing in early childhood settings. Researchers have sought to determine what writing practices or instructional methodologies seem to be most beneficial in developing these comprehensive early writing concepts that support both code-related and meaning-related literacy skills development.

In line with the emergent literacy theory and its emphasis on environment playing an important role in literacy learning, researchers have investigated the effects of early writing activities that have been developed in a meaningful context, often the classroom. For example, Neuman & Rosko (1992) conducted a qualitative study of thirty 3-4 year old children who participated in a preschool classroom program two to three days a week for seven months. This classroom was a state-funded multicultural preschool program and a federally funded Even Start program in a diverse low- to middle-income community. Three play settings that included literacy-related objects and props were constructed in the classroom. The settings were a post office, a restaurant, and a doctor’s office. Examples of props included pencils, markers, paper, appointment books, calendars, bank checks, menus, order pads, envelopes, stampers, and books. They
found that as the children participated in these play settings, they engaged in purposeful uses of writing and reading such as sharing information, making transactions, authenticating information, remembering, making choices, and organizing their activity, “reflecting approximations of literacy activity in everyday life” (p.30). They concluded that this context promoted meaningful situations for literacy learning, access to literacy tools, a variety of ways to use literacy, and literacy-related activities with peers.

A more recent study focused on the comparison of two literacy approaches to highlight the importance of providing a comprehensive approach that included both code-related and meaning-related skills in context (as opposed to isolated skills instruction). Craig (2006) compared a contextualized classroom writing approach with a structured metalinguistic games approach with kindergarten children to investigate early literacy outcomes. The writing group participated in interactive writing in which the teacher and children worked collectively to generate text as a group. The results of her study found no statistical differences between the groups in regard to code-related skills such as phonological awareness and spelling; however, there was a statistically significant difference in reading passage comprehension, with the writing group demonstrating stronger performance. Studies such as these are important in the area of early writing as they emphasize an authentic and meaningful context to engage young children with the early production of text.

The whole language movement (Goodman, 1989) in primary and secondary educational settings also contributed to classroom approaches for early writing and research regarding effective practices. The whole language theory emphasizes using language, including written language, in meaningful and purposeful contexts and can include a variety of curricular literacy activities and instructional practices such as process writing (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006; Sowers, 1985). Process writing approaches are often termed “writing workshop” in which the focus is creating a classroom environment that is conducive to learning conventional forms of writing that students will eventually engage in (Graves, 1979; Calkins, 1980, 1994; Ray & Glover, 2009). The focus is often on
developing skills such as topic choice, drafting, revising, writing conventions, and authoring for audience feedback. For example, Calkins (1982) investigated the writing development of a child across third and fourth grade through a longitudinal case study design. She documented how through writing workshop the student went about planning her writing, learned to revise, developed the executive functions of writing, and internalized strategies for writing and revision. Calkins found that as the student incorporated the strategies involved in the writing workshop process, with a focus on the revising process, her writing products improved.

Freppon, McIntyre and Dahl (1995) conducted a two-year qualitative study that investigated the writing of eight low-income children participating in skills-based or whole language instruction during kindergarten and first grade. The skills-based program emphasized regular writing practice with a focus on accuracy, writing mechanics and neatness. The whole language writing program emphasized meaningful and functional writing interactions to engage children in the writing process, including developing skills for syntax and writing mechanics through journal prompts or self-selected topics. The results demonstrated similarities between the two groups in that they all produced letter strings, drawing and writing, labeling, lists, narrative prose, genre writing and declarative statements in their writing samples at the end of first grade. At the end of first grade, the whole-language group produced writing samples that were longer and more complex. Only the children in the whole-language group produced story-like writing and story writing. The authors concluded that “children interpret their instruction personally, and rich writing experiences help children learn to see themselves as writers” (p. 161).

Chapman (1996) explored writing workshop as an approach to early writing for personal and functional reasons (in contrast to the use of worksheets and framed sentences) with six children in a first grade classroom across an entire school year. Throughout the year she collected 724 writing samples (about 113 or more per child). She analyzed these writing samples by examining the topics (genres), functions (purpose of the children’s writing), and structures (organization, syntax). The overarching findings
were focused on the genres that the children produced. Examples of genres used included chronologies (using actions described in a sequence), descriptions (identification or comments about an object), word plays (listing letters or words, rhyme, and alliteration), and interactions (using their words to communicate with others to interact). The findings of the study indicated that at the end of the school year the genres that the children used increased from four to fourteen as evidenced through their writing samples.

Although the work of process writing theorists has had a large impact on the instructional writing process in elementary schools and beyond, the research has been limited and has been criticized as simply reporting and describing the process (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006) through studies of a descriptive nature. There has been substantially less research that explores measurable outcomes of the writing process approach as it is often difficult to control for all the variables when studying a classroom instructional approach; however, a few researchers have investigated writing workshop through quantitative methodology.

Varble (1990) compared the outcomes of writing workshop and traditional writing instruction with 120 second grade and 128 sixth grade students. Writing samples were collected at the end of the school year and were rated for quality of content (developed ideas, varied details, clear purpose, organization, sophisticated language expression, and awareness of audience) and mastery of mechanics (spelling, punctuation, complete sentences, variety of sentence structures and grammar). She found that the writing samples of the second grade writing workshop students were stronger in meaning and content; however, there was no difference in writing mechanics. She found no significant differences between the writing samples of the two groups of sixth graders.

Hertz and Heydenberk (1997) investigated the writing outcomes of 19 kindergarten students in a classroom that participated in writing workshop for five months. The researchers compared pre- and post-test writing samples from the classroom writing workshop. The results indicated a significant growth in measures of invented spelling, number of words written, the ability to express a meaningful message in
writing, and the ability to write stories in a linear format as measured by a modified version of Clay’s (1979) Rating Technique for Observing Early Writing Progress.

Jones et al. (2010) conducted an experimental study that compared interactive writing (another classroom approach to writing that involves children and teacher co-creating texts as a group with a focus on both writing forms and composition) to writing workshop with 151 kindergarten children. They found that both approaches resulted in significant growth in measures of phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and word reading.

More recently, this approach of process writing has been modified to engage preschool-aged children in writing workshop formats to provide a more comprehensive context for early writing (King, 2012; Kissel, Hansen, Tower & Lawrence, 2011; Ray & Glover, 2009). For example, King (2012) conducted a yearlong qualitative study with 12 children engaging in writing workshop in a preschool classroom. The writing workshop process for her preschool classroom consisted of journal writing time, journal sharing time and writing conferences. The teacher/researcher described in detail her instructional methods as well as the children’s performance within these three practices. She highlighted how the children were successful in the open-ended writing format as it fostered 1.) the development of understanding letters and concepts of print, 2.) the development of a student constructed informal sharing time at the table to claim ownership of their work and ideas, and 3.) the transformation of writing conferences to include peers that was less formal than teacher-led conferences. King concluded that although these preschool children had not mastered the craft of writing, they were beginning to develop their understanding about what it means to be a writer.

Kissel et al. (2011) conducted a six-year qualitative ethnographic study within one grant funded preschool classroom that used writing workshop. The children were identified as coming from low income backgrounds. The researchers collected data through field notes, interviews and writing artifacts. Through the instructional structure of writing workshop, the teacher provided the children with a “gathering” experience (read-aloud, conversation or outdoor exploration), modeled writing on a large chart in front of
the students, encouraged children to share their ideas for writing through talk, moved them to a table for writing together, and incorporated sharing through an author’s chair format. The researchers focused on three themes within this qualitative study: “1.) interactions among children challenge their writing identities, 2.) interactions among children introduce new possibilities in their writing, and 3.) interactions among children with more knowledgeable peers help push writers forward with their writing acquisition” (p. 432). The researchers’ findings concluded that the peer interactions produced through the writing workshop process influenced both the children’s writing processes and writing products.

Although there is clearly established research in the area of early writing that has shaped educational practices and instructional methods, early writing is still far less researched compared to research focused on early literacy interventions targeting the skills needed for reading. In the area of writing research as a whole, children under five years old are among the least studied groups of children (Juzwik et al, 2006). Furthermore, according to a study by Gerde, Bingham, & Wasik (2012), teachers may provide the materials for early writing in their classrooms, but they do not always know how to integrate writing into their preschool curricula and engage early writers in daily writing activities. More research is needed to investigate specific instructional approaches for young learners to support educators in teaching early writing in an authentic and comprehensive context.

The research outlined in the first study of this dissertation addresses the gaps in the research on exploring the outcomes of instructional methods of early writing with a focus on a process writing approach. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of a process approach to early writing in a preschool classroom for promoting language and literacy skills specific to early writing development, macrostructure narrative performance, and microstructure narrative performance. This study explored quantitative outcomes of a process writing instructional approach in an early childhood Head Start classroom, in which children created their own books through drawing, writing and narration.

Sociocultural Research and Early Writing
Aram and Levin (2011) discuss the shift in early writing research from the constructivist model based more on Piagetian constructs and emergent writing frameworks to a more sociocultural Vygotskian construct of early writing which involves the social processes of family, peer and community roles in early writing learning. The focus in this framework of early writing research is shifted from the child’s hypothesis or intentions according to their individual cognitive processes to how early writing occurs collectively between children and those in their communities (Rowe, 2013). According to a review of writing research conducted by Juzwik et al. (2006), this research that investigates the social practices of writing and the contexts in which they are formed was the most prevalent form of writing research at the onset of the 21st century.

This shift in literacy research as a whole began over three decades ago (Gee, 2002; Heath, 1983; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013; Scribner & Cole, 1978; Street, 1984). At the time, researchers became interested in determining the ways in which literacy is defined and used as social practices by various communities. This shift occurred as an awareness was evolving regarding the importance of the interactions between language, culture and development (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013). This change moved away from the “autonomous” model of literacy that viewed literacy as cognitive skills that were unidirectional in nature to an “ideological” model that views literacy practices as related to the cultural and social structures of a society (Street, 1984).

According to sociocultural theorists, literacy learning cannot be separated from the context of the cultural practices from which it is developed, and through this means of research, cultural practices of particular communities become the main focus of early literacy development and understanding the nature of literacy (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). According to Barton and Hamilton (1998), literacy practices are defined as “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives” (p. 6), or more simply, how and why people use literacy. Barton and Hamilton (1998) explain that literacy practices are more than specific skills that are individually acquired; instead they are described as the
literacies that exist among people, within groups and communities that are shaped by social rules and community values. In other words, reading and writing are always situated within social practices, contexts and purposes. Due to this shift in focus from the individual to the group, there was also a shift in research design, as investigators implemented more qualitative studies with an ethnographic analysis that involved describing and interpreting cultural practices of language and literacy within defined groups (Taylor, 1983; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1982; Scribner & Cole, 1978).

Within this sociocultural framework, early writing can be looked at as an area of focus; however, the writing process is viewed as being inextricable from the larger social and cultural context and communicative purpose (Ivanic, 2004). Sociocultural researchers who choose to focus on early writing understand that the writing events being investigated are embedded in a larger sociocultural construct that are shaped by a particular community's social goals and values. The shift that occurs specific to early writing is that the researcher is no longer looking at devising pedagogical methods to influence early writing or attempting to understand the “intentionality” of the child's individual writing processes, instead she is documenting and analyzing how children participate in particular literacy practices “to the extent that they identify themselves with the values, beliefs, goals and activities of those who engage in those practices” (Ivanic, 2004; p. 235). Therefore, within this process, learning is not necessarily derived from explicit instruction but through participation in practice.

This sociocultural movement began to move away from the emergent literacy perspective which tended to view literacy as a neutral practice and often devalued the literacy practices of linguistically and racial minority groups by privileging the values of white, middle-class communities (Cushman, Barbier, Mazak, & Petrone, 2006; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013). From this desire to challenge the deficit perspectives, which primarily defined literacy as school-based literacy, rose researchers who were interested in family and community literacies. These researchers investigated the language and literacy practices that were valued in families and community contexts that may or may not be valued in the school setting (Cushman
et al., 2006). From this perspective, children develop and learn literacy in respect to the ways in which their parents need and use literacy (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983). Furthermore, sociocultural researchers claim that all children are ready to learn upon school entry, however, some children bring to school with them different experiences with literacy and varying practices for learning than the ones that hold value in school (Orellana & D’warte, 2010).

**Family and Community Literacy Practices**

One of the foundational studies that provided a clear vision of this sociocultural stance was by Heath (1983) who compared the literacy practices of three communities with different social and linguistic environments (mainstream White, working class White, and working class Black). She investigated how these varying practices differently affected the children’s transitions into schooling. This study was conducted over the course of 10 years and provided a substantial amount of ethnographic detail regarding the language and literacy practices of these three distinct communities in the southeastern United States. Heath provided contrasting accounts of how language and literacy were learned within each community context. For example, in the mainstream White community, children heard fairy tales in the home; they wrote fantasy stories; and they were familiar with answering questions when both parties already knew the answer. In the working class White community, stories were read with a focus of fact over fiction, and invented stories were generally seen as lies. In the working class Black community, reading was a public activity; teasing word plays were common exchanges; and elaborate oral narratives that featured family members and friends were common. This study was monumental in illustrating that each of these communities displayed rich literacy practice; however, it was only the mainstream White community who demonstrated literacy practices that were commensurate with the school literacy practices and therefore led to increased success with schooling.

Specific to early writing, Heath (1983) discussed the children’s interactions with print prior to school entry. For example, in the working class Black community, younger children watched others read and write
in a variety of contexts; however, they were not given explicit instruction or guidance by adults in these activities. Instead, they often practiced these literacy activities with informal supervision by older children in the community. For these children, talk surrounded the text and context was essential to their interpretation of print meaning. In this community adults used writing (from most frequent to least) to serve as a memory aid (telephone numbers, notes on calendars, as a substitute for oral messages (greeting cards, letters), financial reasons (checks), or for public records (church bulletins).

Although studying these “out-of-school” (Spence, Knobel, & Lankshear, 2013) and family literacy practices is crucial in the eyes of the sociocultural researcher (Hicks, 2002; Reyes, 2006), studies of this nature involving preschool aged children is still an under researched area (Spencer, Knobel, & Lankshear, 2013), and studies discussing the early writing practices within family and community contexts is lacking even further (Rowe, 2013).

Classrooms as Communities of Practice

Sociocultural researchers are also interested in studying the classroom context as its own cultural community and conducting qualitative and ethnographic studies of the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which literacy practices develop within schools (Dyson, 2003; Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992; Larson, 1999). In this research, an alternative view of learning and development is revealed in which learning is no longer seen as an independent or isolated activity, but it is viewed within the context of participation in any “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991; p.98). Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize that learning is taking place even if there is or is not intentional instruction, as learning through “legitimate peripheral participation” is viewed as “an aspect of all activity”(p.38). When we use this concept of legitimate peripheral participation and attempt to apply it to the activities occurring in the early childhood classroom, we can view the child as the “newcomer” who is learning to participate in the community of practice of the classroom setting, and even more specifically within the early literacy practices that have been established within that particular community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003;
Manyak, 2001). Sociocultural researchers are interested in unpacking what and how children learn within the cultural context of school, as well as how identities are shaped as children additionally learn what counts as reading and writing within the school walls. According to Rowe (2013), it is important to uncover within these studies what literacy behaviors are valued, in what settings different literacies are valued, and how talk, materials and spaces define who is a reader and a writer within the classroom context.

For example, Gutiérrez (1994) examined three different elementary classrooms with Latino children engaging in writing process over a three year ethnographic study. She explored how the varying community contexts for learning to write in these separate classroom settings influenced what these language minority children learned about literacy. She was specifically interested in exploring how students “acquire situated understanding of what counts as literacy in particular classrooms” (p.338) through teacher use of “instructional scripts”. The three instructional scripts in journal sharing that were discussed in these findings included recitation, responsive and responsive-collaborative. Gutiérrez illustrated through descriptive analysis the variations between these instructional scripts as they become shared knowledge among the members of each of these classrooms. For example, she indicated that for the “recitation” classroom the implied goal was for the students to contribute “right” answers to specific questions, for the “responsive classroom” the implied goal was a combination of right answers and developing shared understanding, and for the “responsive/collaborative” classroom the implied goal was an emphasis on developing shared knowledge. This study serves to illustrate that although the teachers in these classrooms were essentially following the same pedagogical instruction of writing process, what really informed students’ participation was how the teacher presented and instructed this journal sharing and what the teachers counted as literacy within this literacy practice.

In a similar vein, Wohlwend (2009) investigated how specific discourses of learning to write can be overlapping in a classroom context and can create “dilemmas” for early childhood teachers when attempting to assess young children’s writing. She named six different, and potentially conflicting,
discourses in early writing assessment that teachers may be exposed to due to standardized benchmarks, pre-service education and professional literature, among other influences. Through ethnographic data from a kindergarten classroom, Wohlwend (2009) analyzed teacher and student actions and discussed how these different discourses, often implemented according to the writing practices the teacher valued, influenced what literacy practices in early writing were recognized as the accepted ways of doing things in a specific classroom. The six discourses described in this article include maturation, skills mastery, intentionality, multimodal genres, social practices and sociopolitical discourse. These discourses differ greatly in their definitions of writing, how they position the child, how they position the teacher and what is the focus of the instruction and assessment itself. She concluded that discourses such as maturation and skills mastery were primarily used in this classroom as these were the frameworks that underpinned the school district’s assessment framework of developing rubrics, instructing to benchmarks, measurable scoring of writing samples, and filling out report cards which conflicted with other writing discourses that may have provided the teacher alternative means of assessing the writing of the children in her classroom.

Rowe (2008b) conducted a nine-month ethnographic study of 2-year-old children’s interactions with adults in a preschool classroom as she shifted the analysis from the individual child’s writing behaviors to how even the youngest learners began to determine “what counts” in a literacy context. She documented how these children learned the “social contracts” of the procedures, roles, reading and writing processes, and ideologies valued by their teachers and others in their classroom environment. Her findings concluded that these 2 year old children were learning from adults’ implicit or explicit instruction regarding the expectations in early writing which included boundary contracts, distinctive-forms contracts, text-ownership contracts, and texts as social tools contracts, to name a few.

Dyson and Smitherman (2009) explored the influences of language within the context of early writing in the classroom and how cultural mismatches can influence a child’s cultural identity and views of what counts as language and literacy in school. This study focused on teacher-child interactions during
writing workshop in a first grade classroom. This analysis was drawn from a larger ethnographic study, and this particular case study focused on one child and how her African American Language (AAL) influenced her writing process. This home language, which should be a resource for her when learning to put her thoughts on paper, became a burden for her when she was continually corrected by her teacher to fix her grammar to make it sound “right”. At the end of the school year, a book was read to Tionna that was written in AAL. Most likely due to these exchanges between the student and the teacher on the “correct” way of producing written language throughout the school year, she evaluated this text and indicated that “some words need to be fixed”. Tionna concluded that this writer, who speaks and writes in Tionna’s own language (and the language of her family and friends) isn’t saying it “right”. The authors concluded that more information is needed to educate teachers and inform instruction when working with children from varying linguistic backgrounds to encourage (not discourage) language diversity throughout the school curriculum.

Similar to these sociocultural studies that investigated the cultural contexts of the classroom to further understand the nature of literacy learning in the early childhood context, the second study presented in this dissertation explores learning and development through a cultural-historical theoretical perspective (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), which falls under the overarching sociocultural framework. Through this theory, literacy learning is examined as situated within the setting from which it is produced and in relation to the values and goals that exist within the particular community of practice from which they are developed (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Gee, 2002). This study is designed to re-examine the original quasi-experimental intervention study of early writing with a Head Start classroom that was presented in the first paper. I examined literacy practices within this newly established community of practice, nested within an already established community of practice of the classroom environment. Through a sociocultural framework, researchers posit that classrooms are comprised of multiple communities with varying resources that come together to create their own community of practice.
Within this classroom setting, certain types of repertoires for acting, talking, and learning are established where children, as peripheral participants in this official classroom culture, begin to develop understandings of specific literacy practices, what their roles are as literacy learners and what counts as literacy within a certain community of practice (Rowe, Fitch, and Bass, 2001). Through this alternative definition of development and expanded methodology, my intent was to provide researchers and educators further insight and understanding of how experimental, intervention research designs in early literacy can serve to constrain the learning of young children by using specific measures and definitions of literacy and development that define what counts as literacy learning. I aimed to illustrate that when we as researchers frame our research methodology differently, using different definitions of learning and development, we can transform our former deficit ideas of diversity to realizations of linguistic, social and cultural resources.

**Institutional Ideology and Early Writing**

To extend the research on literacy practices in schools, researchers have also investigated how local uses of and participation in writing are part of larger institutional ideologies that are both social and political in nature (Dyson, 2010; Kontovourki & Siegel, 2009; Manyak, 2001; Rowe et al., 2001). Within this work, researchers attempt to uncover the ideological nature of literacy learning in schools and how the privileging of certain types of literacy allows for the maintenance of power, which is influenced by larger political institutional contexts. According to Smagorinsky (2011), educational contexts come packed with ideals about what a society and a proper citizen within that society should be. From those ideals are concepts and values of “optimal development” that provide a foundation for the social enculturation of meeting these developmental goals.

Rowe et al. (2001) examined a first grade classroom engaging in writing workshop. They were interested in exploring how the power and identity of these first graders was present within the cultural context of the classroom specific to writing and how the children responded to being positioned as specific types of writers. An initial finding was that children who exhibited the literacy practices that were most
valued by teachers (who held the most power in the classroom) quickly moved into the more powerful positions within the context of the writing workshop. For example, children who could perform the best invented spelling independently were often established as the best writers in the class, and children who struggled with spelling were identified as the worst. Therefore, within this community of practice, the children began to respond to each other in terms of these evolving social roles and identities. The findings indicated that as children in this classroom were attempting to navigate this power structure they adopted one of three major stances: 1.) performed expected literacy behaviors and subsequent roles, 2.) challenged the roles and attempted to introduce acceptable alternatives, or 3.) rejected the official classroom culture and refused to fully engage. The authors concluded that these identities, roles and positions of power that children develop in the classroom are often reflective of the larger world outside of schooling that also privilege certain language and literacy users (favoring those that most closely mirror school-based reflections of language and literacy).

Kontovourki and Siegel (2009) investigated a kindergarten classroom in a school district that served a low-income bilingual community. The school district had recently implemented a mandated “balanced literacy” curriculum which consisted of writing workshop, read-alouds, word study, guided reading groups, and other instructional practices. This balanced literacy, although mandated, is “rooted in the progressive tradition of meaning-and-process pedagogies” (p. 31). The aim of this study was to explore how this policy serves to construct what counts in literacy teaching and learning. Although the balanced literacy program was a shift away from the scripted literacy program previously enacted at this school, there were still specific definitions tied to institutional ideologies for concepts of literacy, teaching, and learning that dictated this balanced literacy curriculum’s “one size fits all” model. Within this balanced literacy curriculum there were specific routine and behavioral expectations set up to promote self-discipline and encourage individual performance. Sometimes these behavioral expectations took precedence over the actual engagement with reading and writing activities. There were also very specific definitions of what
counts as literacy within this curriculum that were explicitly and implicitly communicated to the children through a focus on particular reading and writing conventions. For example, in writing workshop there were expectations that the children use words (instead of drawing or other modalities) to convey meaning, that a certain number of pages was necessary to constitute a “good” story, and that written stories should be developed with specific story grammar elements to count. These expectations promoted school-based literacy as being a universal construct that all children should acquire as a singular definition of literacy. This perspective has potential to leave out other literacies that children might come to school possessing. The classroom teacher in this study was aware of some of these institutionalized expectations of what it meant to “do literacy” and she attempted to fully use resources that extended the curriculum to allow students to connect individually, amongst themselves, and with others beyond the classroom. The teacher was able to do this because of the open-ended activities that the balanced literacy created; however, she was also aware of the need to expand this space to include flexibility, textual and symbolic play, and children’s cultural resources that local and national mandates, institutional ideologies and specific definitions of literacy do not always allow.

Dyson (2010) examined the concept of “copying” in two classrooms, one kindergarten the other first grade, engaging in writing workshop. She discussed how the concept of copying, what is allowed and what isn’t, is constructed differently within different pedagogies and fluctuating discourses in education. She explained how copying was used as a specific instructional strategy in a previous study (Dyson, 1984, 1985) as it had been viewed as a necessary precursory skill to developing later writing. Throughout the current study, copying had new meaning as the pedagogical strategies for teaching writing changed. In the two classrooms she examined, copying was seen as problematic, as it might be viewed as a child being unable or not wanting to think for himself. In this writing environment, children were expected to do their own work, use their own ideas, and refrain from co-construction of texts in their writing workshop environments. Dyson draws links between this promotion of self-expression honored in writing workshop
and the institutional ideologies of individualism and ownership. When investigating the children’s participation in writing; however, she illustrated how the children shared and talked about each other’s work and how that talk often led to the sharing of ideas, topics, and even words that could have been categorized as unvalued forms of copying. Her findings suggest that children’s participation in the complex dialogic act of writing is greatly influenced by their individual agency and their social desire to being engaged in a world shared with others.

My second study builds on this line of research. This subsequent cultural-historical examination of the intervention community of practice in the Head Start setting serves to understand the ideological underpinnings of the intervention design and the assumptions that frequently accompany these intervention research practices. Through this classroom case study examination I intended to provide researchers and educators further insight and understanding of how experimental intervention research designs in early literacy and their underlying assumptions, that are often reflective of the larger societal macrostructure, use definitions of development that may limit views of literacy which further contribute (often unknowingly) to perpetuation of deficit views of diverse learners. Research exists that explores the ideological nature of classroom literacy and educational approaches (as illustrated and cited in this section). Some researchers have embarked on critiquing certain aspects of intervention such as early intervention (Luke & Luke, 2001; Pithouse, 2008) and “response to intervention” (Artiles, Bal, & Thorius, 2010; Klingner & Edwards, 2006); however, research investigating the assumptions and ideological underpinning of intervention studies (through their own data) of early literacy are currently non-existent. The second paper of this dissertation provides insight into unpacking assumptions and ideologies reflective in specific research methodology by examining a research study of that design as it unfolds through the videotaping of the entire 6-month study.

**Diverse Learners Come with Cultural Resources**

Another area of interest within the realm of sociocultural research is investigating how children’s “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992) can be used as a resource or asset in
bridging to school-based literacy practices (Heath, 1983; Moll, et al, 1992; Orellana, 2001; Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001). In this context, researchers are seeking to identify the cultural resources of the children and/or their families and ways to use these resources to facilitate instruction in the classroom or after school programs. Moll et al. (1992) explored a methodology of combining education and anthropology to study households and classrooms through ethnographic observations, open-ended interviewing and case study analyses. In this study, 10 teachers were trained as qualitative, ethnographic researchers and each visited three households of children from their classrooms. The emphasis for this investigation was placed on identifying “strategic knowledge and related activities essential in households’ functioning, development, and well-being” (p. 139). Through teacher/researcher collaborations along with the families, this study investigated the resources that many working-class households, which are often deemed as lacking in specific knowledge and experiences, possess in reference particularly to a family’s social and labor histories. As the teachers themselves participated in this research, they were able to use this gained information to integrate these funds of knowledge into the classroom curriculum.

Cummins, Chow, and Schecter (2006) used an "additive" lens to discuss a research project in which the families of young children with a variety of language backgrounds (over 40 languages represented within this Canadian school district) were used as classroom resources to support an early literacy project within the school. The original goal was to provide dual-language books with audio recordings in both languages between school and home to both support the child’s first language in the home as well as provide English grammar, vocabulary and text structure supports. While waiting for these books to be ordered, a different process emerged. Students from one class began to develop and write their own dual-language books to be photo-copied and sent home to younger children. To gain a broader audience for these books, a website was created that displayed these dual-language stories (http://thornwood.peelschools.org). Parents were enlisted to assist in providing audio-recordings of these stories in both languages, and parents came to school to do storytelling in their home languages and used
a variety of cultural tools in doing so. Within this evolved project, home languages were valued, parents were seen as valuable resources and these combined avenues were used as bridges to support school-based literacy practices.

More specific to the preschool setting, Souto-Manning (2010) explored teacher education in a Head Start setting in which a curriculum was created by two teachers and a teacher educator. This curriculum was informed by both home and school literacy practices and challenged “ethnocentric definitions of literacy” (p.150) to make early learning experiences meaningful to all children. The teachers in this study participated in three to four home visits each with the 37 families in their classrooms. However, instead of providing the families with instructions on how to do literacy in the home or inquiring about what school based literacy practices were occurring at home, the teachers asked the children to show them around, to talk about the things that they did well, and talk about the things that other family members did well. The teachers then used this information (through field notes and photographs taken) to inform their classroom literacy practices. To illustrate through one example, as it relates more specifically to early writing experiences, the teachers began giving the children a choice between telling the stories “from their heads (or hearts)” (p. 170) or putting them on paper. Through this choice the teachers were honoring a home literacy practice of oral storytelling. In doing this, the teachers saw the children’s engagement in this classroom practice evolving as the stories became more complex and the children began weaving other practices such as drawing or using tools for sound effects to add further layers into their sophisticated stories. Souto-Manning stressed the importance of not only using the children’s cultural resources as “stepping stones” but additionally allowing children to continue to develop these home literacy practices in school alongside the more traditional literacy practices of schooling.

**Multimodality and Expanding Views of Literacy**

Building on the concept of identifying and using children’s cultural resources, sociocultural researchers are increasingly investigating the multimodal features that are present in early childhood writing practices.
(Kress, 2013; Rowe, 2013; Siegal, 2006). According to Rowe (2013), who has conducted a review on the research in early writing from 2000 to 2011, this interest in multimodality has been “the most dramatic research trend in the last decade” (p. 435). Researchers are interested in uncovering how young children use varying semiotic systems, including talk, gestures, drawing, singing, and dramatic play, in their writing (for example, Arthur 2001; Dyson, 2003; Lysaker et al., 2010; Wohlwend, 2011). In contrast to looking at children’s accompanying semiotics as less mature and more child-like or simply a step towards more dominant forms of writing, sociocultural researchers view this multimodality in young children’s writing through more expansive definitions of composing. When the literacy practices of children are reduced to school tasks and conceptions of literacy, we might miss out on the richness of literacy practices engaged in beyond schooling (Orellana & D’warte, 2010) that use multiple sign systems. Furthermore, more and more researchers are interested in how having a repertoire of semiotic practices, instead of being dependent on print-only textual representations, might be advantageous for the increasing demands of multimodal textual experiences in 21st century literacies and technologies (Orellana & D’warte, 2010; Rowe, 2013). The research in this area focuses on the strengths and benefits of the use of these multimodal ways of early writing when they are valued as additive to their literacy repertoire, as opposed to more monomodal views of print-centered conventional literacy that exclusively focus on “the basics” (Flewitt, 2013; Rowe, 2013).

These studies build on ideas of hybridity and “third space” (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) which incorporates the child’s capacity to use cultural resources of their unofficial worlds to intersect with the official practices of the classroom to create this third space (Wohlwend, 2008). According to Gutiérrez (2008), it is within this alternative and transformative space, where conflicts of official and unofficial practices experience a variety of interconnections, that learners experience a new form of participation which has the potential for more dynamically influencing learning and development of all children.

In Dyson’s most well-known study, The Brothers and Sisters Learn to Write (2003), she explored the developmental path of early writing experiences through a lens that deviates from the traditional
developmental trends as she investigated the writing experiences of first grade African American children in a writing workshop classroom environment. She placed emphasis in examining how children’s cultural resources, in the form of media and pop culture influences (video games, television shows, music, dramatic play, etc.), reflect on a child’s writing process in regard to school demands instead of how school practices influence the developmental progress of the child’s literacy path. Dyson illustrated through her research design that children do not generate text in a systematic, linear fashion, but through a developmental process that is constantly reorganizing and “recontextualizing” (p. 15) literacy practices and textual tools from events occurring inside and outside of official school practices. The findings are summarized as it is concluded that these events of writing composition displayed by the children in her study “revealed the potential hybrid nature of even the earliest of children’s written texts; those texts could be situated within overlapping social worlds, which themselves drew upon a diversity of cultural texts, including those of the popular media” (Dyson, 2003, pp. 106-107).

Wohlwend (2011) studied the cultural context of a kindergarten classroom and investigated play as a form of literacy in which children make meaning through participation within peer and school cultures. This classroom was selected through purposeful sampling procedures to identify a classroom with child-directed literacy play periods. Through ethnographic analysis over the course of an entire school year, Wohlwend discussed how a permeable curriculum, which allows for play, peer culture, popular culture and media toys to intersect with the school culture (as opposed to keeping them separate), adds to the literacy curriculum. For example, these kindergarten children incorporated their favorite media characters and stories into writing workshop to author stories and plays. Within this context, which Wohlwend coined the “playing/writing nexus”, children were given the opportunity to go back and forth from their play to their texts, as one medium influenced and enhanced the other. As the practices of play through peer culture and writing through school culture intersected, narratives often became more complex and the desire to manipulate traditional storylines and revise self-authored stories became common classroom practices.
The second study of this dissertation addresses the last two sections in reference to exploring the cultural resources and multimodalities of young diverse learning by investigating what other literacies the children in the classroom engaged in that were not acknowledged by the intervention design and larger institutional definitions of literacy and development. Through this analysis of the intervention design, I aimed to explore the various cultural resources that the children brought into the intervention context and to further identify which of these resources counted in the official practice of “doing early literacy” and which resources held little or limited value in this intervention community.

In summary, the two papers presented in this dissertation evolved from analyzing the collected data from the original design and investigating it through two often contrasting research methodologies and theoretical frameworks. The first study aimed to address the need in early writing research to explore outcomes of instructional methods of early writing, specific to a process writing approach. This study explored quantitative outcomes of a process writing instructional approach in an early childhood Head Start classroom, in which children created their own books through drawing, writing and narration. The second study aimed to re-examine the quasi-experimental intervention study of early writing that was presented in the first study. I examined literacy practices through a cultural-historical theory of learning and development (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), investigating this new writing practice as it was incorporated into an already established classroom community of practice. The goal of this examination was to understand the ideological underpinnings of the intervention design and further explore the definition of early literacy development to include a more culturally sensitive view of learning.

Although the two papers presented through this dissertation explore different methodology and theoretical frameworks, they also have the potential to inform each other. These two studies, when presented as separate entities, provide researchers insight into how each paper might inform the early literacy field in regard to the distinct frameworks in which they are analyzed and written. However, each of these analyses in and of themselves may be somewhat limiting as neither study on its own provides us with
a comprehensive understanding of what occurred within this community of practice and how it can contribute to the research methodologies and pedagogical practices in early writing. These two studies presented side by side in this dissertation have potential to guide researchers in a proposed new direction in early literacy research. The merging of these methods and frameworks presented within these two papers could serve to facilitate development of strategies for outcomes of pedagogical practices, a more complex understanding of early literacy learning and development, and how to best meet the needs of young diverse learners.
CHAPTER II

Investigating a collaborative classroom-based process approach to early writing:
Exploring outcomes for early writing and spoken narratives

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Abstract

Purpose:
The effect of a process approach to early writing in which children created storybooks through drawing, writing and narration was investigated in an urban Head Start classroom.

Method:
A 5-month collaborative, classroom-based intervention with nine African American children was conducted to examine effects of a process writing approach on early writing and narrative development. This study investigated pre- and post-intervention differences using measures for early writing forms and spoken narrative development (macrostructure and microstructure).

Results:
The results indicated no statistically or clinically significant differences between the average writing score of early writing forms. A modest clinically significant effect for highest writing form was demonstrated through a small effect size. A significant difference between pre- and post-intervention measures was demonstrated for macrostructure development, which was supported by a large effect size. There were no statistically significant differences in narrative microstructure elements from pre- to post-intervention; however, effect sizes within these measures ranged from moderate to large, indicating a clinically significant effect to some degree on all microstructure elements assessed.

Conclusions:
Results demonstrate that a process approach to early writing is a context that significantly influences growth in self-generated fictional narrative production. Clinical implications suggest that process writing with adults assisting children in creating books is an effective context for collaboration and classroom-based language and literacy instruction in a preschool setting.
Children who have difficulty with early literacy skills almost never catch up to their peers in conventional literacy acquisition (Juel, 1988), and they are at-risk for needing special education services (Lentz, 1988; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Links between early language skills and later literacy development have been established in the research literature (Justice, Bowles, & Skibbe, 2006; Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002). Researchers have also identified a relationship between identified language disorders and early writing difficulties in young children (Cabell, Justice, Zucker, & McGinty, 2009; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011). Although the research exploring the connections between spoken language and early writing abilities is still in its early stages, there is robust documentation of the relationship between language disorders and academic writing skills for older children (Dockrell, Lindsay, Connelly & Mackey, 2007; Gillam & Johnston, 1992; Juel, 1988). These associations between language and writing leave speech-language pathologists (SLPs) with recommendations to incorporate writing, even early writing, into their service delivery but little information about how to do so.

Researchers in early literacy often explore the print outcomes of early writing (Bloodgood, 1999; Cabell et al, 2009; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011); however, there is a further need to investigate early writing activities that extend beyond name writing and tracing letters to explore the early composition skills of young children. Process approaches to writing (Calkins, 1980, 1994; Graves, 1979; Ray & Glover, 2008) change the focus of early writing from an emphasis on print and word forms to highlight the bigger picture of writing composition and illustrate how children can begin generating texts and corresponding narratives, even at a young age. The current study explores the outcomes of a process writing instructional approach in an early childhood Head Start classroom, in which children created their own books through drawing, writing and narration. This study investigates early writing beyond transcriptions and mechanics, focusing on other areas of language and literacy development, namely narrative development.

**Importance of Early Writing**

Early writing and literacy. Emergent literacy is defined as those skills that are foundational to
learning to read and write (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Therefore, skills in emergent literacy education include developing not only skills necessary for reading success but also those for writing. Evidence suggests that there is a specific correlation between early writing skills and later reading success (Aram & Levin, 2004; Bloodgood, 1999; Cabell et al., 2009), which necessitates the exploration of emergent literacy approaches that include early writing. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002), only 28% of U.S. fourth grade students and 31% of U.S. eighth grade students scored at a proficient level in writing on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Statistics such as these draw attention to the need for increased research in effective classroom practices for writing, beginning with our youngest learners.

Early literacy literature demonstrates that there is not one single predictor of early literacy development. Instead a vast array of skills are foundational to the development of early and later literacy development in children, including both code-related (i.e., alphabet knowledge, letter-sound recognition, phonological awareness) and meaning-related skills which have spoken language precursors such as vocabulary, syntax and discourse development (NELP, 2008; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). There is far less research measuring the outcomes of early writing interventions compared to the large amount of research focused on early literacy interventions targeting the skills needed for reading. The small body of research conducted in the area of early writing indicates that this complex task of generating early text may provide young children with a context that is predictive for developing an array of literacy skills, potentially influencing both code-related and meaning-related skills development (Aram & Biron, 2004; Blair & Savage, 2006; Craig, 2006; Vernon & Ferreiro, 1999).

The majority of studies investigating early writing have demonstrated outcomes exploring relationships with code-related skills. Bloodgood (1999) examined the parallels of early name writing abilities to other areas of early literacy and found that 4- and 5-year old children’s ability to produce their name in writing was correlated with alphabet knowledge, recognition of words and concept of word (ability
to track words with fingers). Vernon and Ferreiro (1999), when investigating the literacy skills of 54 kindergarteners, found a strong relationship between levels of writing development, as measured through word writing, and phonological awareness skills. Diamond et al. (2008) extended these findings by exploring the writing skills of Head Start children. They found that the children who demonstrated more sophisticated writing through a name writing task knew the names of more letters, understood more about print concepts and were more sensitive to initial sounds of words.

There are a small number of studies that have found relationships between writing and meaning-related literacy skills which have foundations in spoken language development (Hindman, Conner, Jewkes, & Morrison, 2008; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Craig (2006) compared a contextualized classroom writing approach with a structured metalinguistic games approach with kindergarten children to investigate literacy outcomes. The writing group participated in interactive writing in which the teacher and children worked collectively to generate texts as a group. There were no statistical differences in code-related skills such as phonological awareness and spelling; however, there was a statistically significant difference in reading passage comprehension, with the writing group demonstrating stronger performance. Hooper, Roberts, Nelson, Zeisel and Fannin (2010) investigated what potential preschool predictors were correlated with elementary school narrative writing skills. When looking at measures of phonological awareness, language abilities (through standardized language measures), pre-reading skills (letter and word identification), and early writing concepts, it was found that only language abilities and pre-reading skills predicted the rate of growth in writing.

These studies serve as indicators that early writing experiences are important in the development of overall language and literacy acquisition and serve to facilitate the development of emergent literacy skills that are not exclusive to early writing skills. These studies suggest that an emphasis on emergent writing could be an important tool in developing later literacy skills which include both code- and meaning-related skills. However, according to a study by Gerde and Bingham (2012), teachers may provide the
materials for early writing in their classrooms, but they do not always know how to integrate writing into their preschool curricula and engage early writers in daily writing activities. There is little research on the outcomes of specific instructional approaches for young learners to support educators in teaching early writing in an authentic and comprehensive context.

**Process based writing.** A process approach to writing allows for an expanded focus on the comprehensive task of writing composition and is commonly referred to as writing workshop (Calkins, 1994). Although a comprehensive approach such as writing workshop is often implemented in the primary and secondary grades (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006), there is much less guidance in the literature about how to approach writing with our youngest learners. This approach to writing traditionally includes teacher led tasks such as mini lessons (to teach specific writing conventions) and conferring with students, as well as student directed tasks such as open-ended writing and sharing their work from an author’s chair (Calkins, 1994). When working with young learners, these tasks are often adapted to fit the needs of the beginning writer. Ray and Glover (2008) lay a foundation for providing process writing for young children which involves children creating their own picture books. These educators explain that picture books provide a familiar context for young children to begin experimenting with early composition skills. They argue that unlike early writing tasks that focus on functional writing, such as making grocery lists and sign in sheets, compositional writing goes beyond basic transcription skills and assists young writers with bringing meaning to the page and thinking deeper about the process of writing as a whole.

Although process writing is often viewed as the “gold standard” for writing instruction in schools (Jones, Retuze and Fargo, 2010), most of the literature on this approach consists of instructions of how to conduct writing workshop (Lamme, Fu, Johnson, and Savage, 2002). There is substantially less research that explores language or literacy outcomes of the writing process approach. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Writing, students (fourth, eighth and twelfth-grade) who
had teachers using particular elements of process writing were better writers and displayed higher average writing ability (Goldstein & Carr, 1996). There are existing qualitative studies that provide some insight to the influence of writing workshop (Graves, 1994; King, 2012; Kissel, Hansen, Tower and Lawrence, 2011); however, only a handful of studies have explored quantifiable outcomes. Varble (1990) compared writing workshop to traditional writing instruction in second grade writing samples. She found that the writing from the writing workshop group was stronger in meaning and content; however, there was no difference in writing mechanics. Hertz and Heydenberk (1997) investigated the writing outcomes of 19 kindergarten students in a classroom that participated in writing workshop for five months. Compared pre- and post-test writing samples indicated a significant growth in measures of invented spelling, the number of words written, and “ability to use written language to express a meaningful message and to write stories in correct directional form” (p. 209). Jones et al. (2010) compared interactive writing (another classroom approach to writing that involves children and teacher co-creating texts as a group with a focus on both writing forms and composition) to writing workshop with kindergarten children. They found both approaches were conducive to significant growth in phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and word reading.

In an overview of the research on writing from 1999 to 2004, Juzwik, Nystrand, Kelly, and Sherry (2006) indicated that preschoolers and younger children were among the least studied groups in the areas of writing research, as they found only 33 studies within this age range compared with 307 for elementary aged children. Hence, our earliest learners are the least studied in the area of writing as a whole, and research investigating the language and literacy outcomes of process based writing approaches with preschool-aged children is almost non-existent.

**Importance of Early Narrative Development**

A process approach to writing looks at the entire process of writing, which can include the production of narratives (spoken or written), especially within certain genres of writing. These contexts might include the generation of stories (fictional narratives) and production of personal narratives. There is
a strong connection between the spoken and written language skills of children, especially at a young age (Eisenberg et al., 2008). The literative language of young children’s productions of early narratives will most likely be reflected in their written narratives as well. This literative language is displayed through grammatical sophistication which is more evident in decontextualized talk versus contextualized talk (Curenton, Craig & Flanigan, 2008). Narratives are present in a variety of contexts in school curricula including book reading, storytelling, summarizing, reporting and writing (Hughes, McGillivray, & Schmidek, 1997; Terry, Mills, Bingham, Mansour & Marencin, 2013) and are therefore important for academic success. In addition, early narrative skills are predictive of later literacy skills (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Feagans & Applebaum, 1986; Tabors, Snow & Dickinson, 2001), and narratives are among the best predictors of a child language disorder (McFadden & Gillam, 1996; Paul, Hernandez, Taylor, & Johnson, 1996; Catts, Fey, Zhang, & Tomblin, 1999). In examining the language skills of kindergarten children, Fazio, Naremore and Connell (1996) determined that story retelling was the best predictor of the academic status of the children in relation to remediation needs. In a longitudinal study, Griffin, Hemphill, Camp and Wolf (2004) found that children’s narrative abilities at age five were significant predictors of their reading comprehension skills and written narrative skills at age eight.

**Fictional narratives.** Narratives are defined as at least two utterances produced in a temporal order about an event or experience (Hughes et al., 1997). Personal narratives are defined as recounts of past experiences and fictional narratives refer to generated stories that are made up or stories that are retold by children (Hughes et al, 1997). Consideration of fictional narratives of preschool children is predominant in the research connecting narratives with later literacy development. Researchers often use fictional narratives to evaluate story grammar and story structure elements (Hughes et al., 1997); however, research investigating preschool children’s fictional narrative productions through wordless picture books and story retellings are more frequently targeted in than story generations (Merritt & Liles, 1987; Lever & Senechal, 2011). This may be due to the inability to control for the large variability of characteristics
possible in an open-ended task such as a made-up story generated by a young child, which makes the retelling more easily measurable and comparable for analyses (Hughes, et al., 1997). Although picture book elicitations and retellings may provide the researcher with more sophisticated results in structure, complexity and content (Merritt & Liles, 1989; Lever & Senechal, 2011), measures of self-generated stories may capture a more accurate picture of a child’s ability to tell a fictional narrative as opposed to demonstrating memory and comprehension of a story’s elements and ability to tell them back (Lever & Senechal, 2011). Ultimately, when the demands of schooling require children to produce written narratives through composition, children will be required to generate stories on their own.

There are a limited number of studies that have investigated the effects of using generated stories in narrative productions. Merritt and Liles (1987) investigated the differences between story generation and story retell tasks with school age children with and without language disorders. The results indicated that the children with language disorders produced fewer complete episodes and fewer story grammar elements in both contexts; however, in the story generation task there was not a difference between the total number of main and subordinate clauses of the two groups whereas there was a difference in the story retell task. This finding indicated that the language impaired children produced less talk (as evidenced through incidence of clauses) when a story model was given for the retelling task, in contrast to a story probe given for generating stories. Swanson, Fey, Mills and Hood (2005) investigated the effects of a narrative-based language intervention program with 7-8 years old children with specific language impairment. The willingness to participate in the presented tasks (story retell, story generation, and sentence imitation) was addressed in the discussion section of this study, and the authors concluded that story generation was favored by all of the children in the study because “they could talk about their own experiences, knowledge and interests” and “they did not have a specific story they were supposed to replicate” (p. 139). This finding is important in the area of intervention and sustaining attention with young children. Keeping them interested and engaged when participating in language and literacy tasks, especially over time, is critical in
providing successful intervention. There is a need for further investigation of the efficacy of engaging children, even young children, in the production of self-generated fictional narratives.

**Narrative intervention.** There is a limited body of research that has investigated teaching narrative strategies to school-age children, and it has been primarily with children with language impairment. Klecan-Aker, Flahive and Fleming (1997) taught 15 elementary-age children with learning disability story grammar elements through story scenarios over the course of 16 weeks and found that these children told more complex stories following intervention than children in a control group. Davies, Shanks and Davies (2004) found that 5-7 year old children made significant improvement in quality of storytelling when participating in a 3-month intervention that consisted of teaching story grammar elements to produce both retellings and child-generated stories. Swanson et al. (2005) provided a six-week narrative-based language intervention for ten 7-8 year old children with specific language impairment which included story retell and story generation from a picture task. They concluded that there was a clinically significant improvement in the children’s narrative quality.

The research on interventions or instructional processes focusing on preschool narratives is even more limited. Haywood and Schneider (2000) investigated the outcomes of teaching narrative production to 13 preschool children with language impairment. The intervention consisted of a focus on story grammar elements through identifying, sorting, and sequencing pictures. Twelve (12) of the 13 children showed improvement in their fictional narrative productions elicited with picture prompts. Spencer and Slocum (2010) investigated an intervention with five “at-risk” preschool children enrolled in Head Start. The intervention focused on teaching story grammar elements through pictures to generate personal stories. The children’s narrative scores significantly increased from pre- to post-test performance. Aside from these two studies, there is limited research available to determine what instructional practices are effective and advisable to implement in the early childhood classroom to encourage narrative development that has been touted as being vital in order to enhance preschool-aged children’s early language and literacy skills and
influence their later literacy development. There is adequate research available that identifies the relationships between narratives and literacy; however, there is a need for research to identify what strategies are most effective for further developing the fictional narrative skills of preschool children, especially within the classroom setting.

**Collaborative Classroom-Based Services**

The role of the speech-language pathologist (SLP) is often to teach speech and language skills that are linked to literacy and academic success. According to the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) (2001) the SLP’s role with respect to reading and writing includes fostering language and emergent literacy acquisition, identifying children at-risk for reading and writing difficulties, and providing support to general education teachers. To provide these services that are educationally relevant and support curriculum development, classroom-based collaborative services are often regarded as best practice for the school-based SLP, including in preschool settings.

Although classroom-based services are recommended as best practice, in a recent online survey by Brandel and Loeb (2011), only 25% of SLPs in preschool settings reported that they provide classroom based services for even the “least severe” children. Furthermore, SLPs often have a difficult time defining their role in the classroom context and maintaining a therapeutic focus (Ehren, 2000). Although research exists to demonstrate the effectiveness of collaborative classroom approaches (Farber & Klein, 1999; Hadley, Simmerman, Long, & Luna, 2000), intervention to support language and literacy development in classroom based contexts is currently an underdeveloped area in the clinical research (Farber & Klein, 1999; Whitmire, 2002). There is a growing body of research claiming the importance of early spoken language and literacy development for both language and literacy outcomes; however, there is far less research that serves to assist SLPs and other educators in providing the most effective intervention and instructional practices for young learners to acquire these skills. Additional studies are needed to investigate classroom-based practices that are conducive to developing early language and literacy skills in
a collaborative, educationally relevant and authentic context. It is important for researchers to provide evidence regarding effective classroom based services that are contexts for providing therapeutic intervention, as well as providing support for teachers in fostering both spoken language and literacy development for children who may be considered at risk.

**Purpose**

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of a process approach to early writing in a preschool classroom for promoting language and literacy skills specific to early writing development, as well as spoken macrostructure and microstructure narrative performance. The following research questions were explored:

1.) Is there a difference between the pre and post intervention writing represented in the books the children created through a process approach to writing as measured by the Writing Forms scale (Sulzby, Barnhart, & Hieshima, 1989)?

2.) Is there a difference between the pre- and post-intervention macrostructure elements represented in the stories the children created and narrated through a process approach to writing as measured by using The Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) (Petersen, Gillam & Gillam, 2008)?

3.) Is there a difference between the pre- and post-intervention microstructure elements represented in the stories children created and narrated through a process approach to writing as measured by language analysis using Systematic Analysis of Language Transcription computer software (Miller & Iglesias, 2008)?

**Methods**

**Participants**

Thirteen (13) children enrolled in one full day Head Start classroom in a mid-sized city in the Midwest were included in the process writing activities that occurred in the classroom. However, due to attendance and therefore incomplete data for the study duration, only 9 children were included as
participants. The participants were 5 girls and 4 boys ranging in age from 3 years 2 months to 5 years 3 months with a mean age of 4 years 5 months (SD= 8.67 months) at the beginning of the study. The participants were from low income homes as determined by their qualifying enrollment in a federally funded Head Start program designed for children living in poverty. All of the participating children were African American. None of the children were receiving speech and language or other educational services that were documented or supported by an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and they all passed Head Start mandated screenings, including speech, language, and hearing, as documented by the Head Start center.

Prior Writing Experiences

Prior to the beginning of the study, journal writing in the classroom was a curricular activity that was designated according to the center-wide lesson planning guide as a weekly activity. During journal writing time, the classroom teacher directed the children to the classroom tables and instructed them to trace or copy letters, the child’s own name, and words in traditional “composition” notebooks with rule-lined pages. These letters, names, and words were modeled for the children in a variety of ways such as: 1.) printed in the child’s book by the teacher, 2.) printed on an index card placed on the table near the child (i.e., a name card) 3.) printed on a dry erase board centered in the classroom for all the children to see, or 4.) printed on a word wall or chart fixed onto a classroom wall.

Five of the nine children, as well as the classroom teacher, who participated in the process writing activities had also been participants in a preliminary study for six weeks, from May to June 2010. This prior study compared early writing outcomes in two experimental classrooms and two comparison classrooms. The experimental condition, in which these five children were participants, consisted of using the same writing process instruction outlined in the current study. However, the teacher indicated that she had not been using the process writing instruction for the six months prior to the beginning of the current study (June to January), and had continued to engage the children in the mandated journal writing activities described above for writing instruction in the classroom.
Procedures

**Collaboration.** The classroom for this study was chosen as a convenience sample because the classroom teacher volunteered. A service delivery model that included collaboration between the teacher and the SLP in the classroom was used to assist the children with the writing process (ASHA, 1991). To begin the process writing approach a 45 minute meeting was held before the first session in which the SLP provided the teacher with information regarding an alternative approach to early writing that included language goals and extended beyond transcription and mechanics (see Appendix B). The classroom teacher provided information about the center-wide curriculum, working within the scope of the educational expectations of the center’s administration and the children’s parents, and meeting the individual needs of the children in her classroom. Throughout each session, the SLP and the teacher consulted with one another regarding how to best teach and guide the children within the writing process model. The teacher and the SLP met briefly after each session to discuss progress, concerns or adaptations needed to meet the needs of the children, and they made adjustments accordingly.

**Process-based writing approach.** Two times a month, for five months, the children created short books during 30-60 minute structured writing times in the classroom. Both the teacher and the SLP provided support and instruction for the children as needed for: topic generation, drawing pictures, writing a message to go along with the pictures, and developing the narrative of their stories. The books were teacher led each session and instructed the children to write a story of their choice, giving them the following initial instructions each session: 1.) Write the title and the author’s name on the front cover, 2.) draw pictures to help tell the story as an illustrator would do, and 3.) write a message on the pages to help tell the story as an author would do. The teacher and SLP used books from the classroom as examples to show the children how the author and the illustrator use both pictures and words to tell their stories. The teacher assisted half of the children at one table and the SLP assisted the other half at another table. The children who were at the table with the teacher or with the SLP varied from session to session, as the
teacher split up the children so that she spent equal time with all children across the sessions.

At the beginning of the session, the teacher and the SLP used starter questions such as “What are you going to write about today?” and “What is your story going to be about?” Throughout the session, the teacher and SLP posed questions to the children regarding their intentions specific to their drawings and their writing, such as “Tell me what you are writing about”, “What are you drawing?”, and “I see you wrote words in your book, tell me what it says”. Throughout the process of creating the books, the teacher and SLP asked the children questions and included comments to encourage expanding on the story they were creating such as, “What is going to happen next?”, “What is the princess going to do in your story?”, “Where is your mom going?”. Throughout the session, the teacher and SLP included prompts or questions to encourage adding print to the page such as “Can you write a message on that page to help tell your story?” or “Could you put writing on your page to go with your pictures?”. For example, the children were encouraged to write scribble wavy lines or letter-like symbols as a message to enhance their stories or they might be guided to use copying, elements of phonological awareness, or invented spelling to write a word that represented what was drawn on that page (Sulzby et al., 1989). The teacher and SLP used further prompts or questions to encourage print production such as “Where could we find that word in the classroom?” or “What is the first sound you hear in that word?”, while directing children to access the print from around the room to write a desired word (i.e., a child’s name card, a classroom book, an alphabet chart, etc.). They helped children spell requested words as they wrote them in their books.

When a child indicated that he or she was finished with their book, the teacher or SLP encouraged the child to read the book to her. The child was prompted, “Tell me your story”. The adult encouraged the telling by using responses such as “Uh-huh”, “What happened next?” and repeated what the child said to provide encouragement to continue with the entire story, while providing as few interruptions as possible. When the children were finished, the teacher and the SLP collected the books for data analysis.

Data Collection
One time per month, data was collected from each child’s written product obtained from the classroom instructional session. After the classroom instructional session had ended, an audio recording was obtained from each child in a quiet room with only the child and the researcher present. The child brought his or her book into the room to tell the researcher the completed story. The researcher used the prompt: “Tell me your story” and used follow-up prompts to encourage the children to tell the story. As the children were telling their stories from the book, the researcher encouraged them to continue by providing responses such as “Uh-huh”, “and, “What happened next?” or repeating what the children said. According to Peterson and McCabe (1983), responses such as these have encouraged children to continue their narratives without giving them cues regarding expectations of the narrative structure. The written artifacts (the books) were collected from the children.

Data Analysis

The following data were examined to measure changes in writing skills and in macrostructure and microstructure of narrative production from the beginning to the end of the five month intervention period.

Writing. The writing artifacts were scored using a 12-point Forms of Writing scale (Sulzby et al., 1989) for assessing emergent writing skills (see Appendix A). This Forms of Writing scale was developed to describe the developmental writing patterns of kindergarten children as they wrote and reread their self-generated stories throughout an academic school year (Sulzby, et al., 1989). The scale includes a hierarchical score system that begins with a score of 1 for drawing only and ends with a score of 12 for conventional spelling. The other scoring categories included scribble-wavy, scribble-letter-like, letter-like units, letters-random, letters-patterns, letters-name elements, copying, invented spelling-syllabic, invented spelling-intermediate, invented spelling-full, and conventional. This scale was chosen because of the wide scoring range (12 points) and opportunities for documenting growth within categories for the short duration of this study. For example, there are two different scores for “scribble”: scribble-wavy (2 points) and scribble-letter-like (3 points). This scale was used to score each page of the children’s books. Two
separate measures were then obtained. First, an average writing score was calculated by obtaining the mean score across pages of the book. There were a total of 8 opportunities for a score in each book. If a child left a page blank, this page was not scored nor calculated into the average writing score. This average writing score was calculated for a comprehensive score of the child’s entire book to account for potential variation of writing forms from page to page. Second, a highest writing score was recorded based on the highest single page score evidenced in the child’s created book. The average writing score and the highest writing score were both used to document changes in the writing samples from the first session to the last session of the intervention based on the highest single page score evidenced in the child’s created book.

**Narrative macrostructure.** The audio-recordings of the stories were transcribed and scored for the analysis of narrative macrostructure elements using the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) (Petersen, et al., 2008). The macrostructure of a narrative includes its overall organizational pattern and its structural characteristics (Hughes et al., 1997). The INC includes categories for measuring complexity of narrative components such as characters, setting, initiating events, internal responses, plans, action_attempts, complications, consequences, narrator evaluations, formulaic markers, temporal markers, and causal adverbial clauses. This scoring system was chosen because it allows for identifying incremental changes in the complexity of narrative production skills that are useful in determining progress in narrative development over the short duration of this study. For each category, a rating scale is used that begins with 0 and has a maximum score of either 2 or 3. Then a composite score is calculated to reflect the overall complexity of the narrative. According to Petersen et al. (2008), the INC was found to be a tool that can be scored consistently, can be used across varying elicitation formats, and has high correlations with the Test of Narrative Language (Gillam & Pearson, 2004). Although the preliminary study to assess the reliability and validity of this tool was originally conducted for children between 6 years and 9 years of age, the INC has been used with minimal modifications to demonstrate progress in preschool children’s retelling skills as a result of narrative intervention in recent research (Spencer & Slocum, 2010).
Narrative microstructure. The audio-recordings of the stories were transcribed, segmented into C-units and coded using the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT) computer software (Miller & Iglesias, 2008) as a means of analyzing the microstructure elements of the narratives. The microstructure of a narrative is the syntactic and semantic structure that contributes to its complexity and cohesiveness (Hughes et al., 1997; Terry et al., 2013). The analysis included spoken language measures of 1.) total number of Communication Units (C-units): a measure of productivity in which the narrative is segmented into C-units (each independent clause and its modifiers), and the sum of these units is calculated, 2.) Mean Length of C-units in words (MLCUw): a measure of structural complexity in which the number of words in each independent clause and its modifiers is calculated and averaged, 3.) Number of Different Words (NDW): a measure of lexical diversity in which the total number of different words in the narrative is calculated, and 4.) Total Number of Words (TNW): a measure of verbal productivity in which the total number of words in the narrative are calculated. Research indicates measures of narrative microstructure are correlated with children’s language and literacy skills (Justice, Bowles, Kaderavek et al., 2006). Additional research indicates that TNW and NDW are among the most reliable and consistent measures when assessing narrative samples that are as short as one to three minutes in length (Tilstra & McMaster, 2007; Heilmann, Nockerts, & Miller, 2010), as are most of the narratives produced in this study.

Pre- and Post-Intervention Measures

The data for analysis were obtained from the audio recordings and written samples that were collected at the conclusion of each instructional session. The pre-intervention data were obtained from the first instructional session in January and the post-intervention data were obtained from the last instruction session in May. The pre- and post-intervention analyses included writing and narrative macrostructure and microstructure measures to indicate performance change as an outcome from the intervention. These analyses were chosen to provide outcome measures that were specific to the children’s products derived directly from the instructional sessions.
Reliability

All transcription, coding and scoring was conducted by the primary investigator and four research assistants. Two research assistants were trained to transcribe and code narratives via SALT. This training consisted of at least 10 hours of reviewing transcription procedures and practicing sample transcripts from the SALT manual. To establish interrater reliability, 10% of randomly selected samples were transcribed and divided into C-units by a transcriber who did not perform the initial transcription. Interrater reliability was 97% for the SALT transcription and C-unit entry. This reliability check included the dividing of C-units and agreeability on all words within the C-unit. Two different research assistants were trained to score the narratives with the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC). They were provided at least four hours of scoring practice narratives. The interrater reliability was 86% for the INC total score for 10% of the narrative transcripts. The primary investigator independently scored the writing artifacts with the Sulzby et al. (1989) scale. A research assistant was provided over one hour of training using this scale to score examples of children’s writing that were not part of this study. To establish interrater reliability, this research assistant re-scored 10% of the writing samples. The interrater reliability was 94% for the overall score of the writing samples. For all three measures, when disagreement occurred, both coders reviewed the transcripts to determine an agreed-upon score.

Statistical Design

This study design used a small sample (one classroom, N=9) for preliminary investigation of outcomes related to a process writing approach in an early childhood classroom. Other researchers have used and recommended these smaller sample studies to explore the “feasibility” of an intervention which has the potential to provide evidence of clinically important changes in subject outcomes by evaluating effect sizes (Apel, Brimo, Diehm, & Apel, 2013; Katz & Carlisle, 2009; Robey, 2004). Using effect sizes allows for the acknowledgement of the potential intervention effects of smaller studies to inform studies of a larger scale. This approach provides an alternative to the possibility of throwing out results of smaller
sample studies that may display little to no statistical significance but may display an effect size relevant to changes in performance that could have clinical relevance.

Statistical significance can be inflated or deflated by sample size. If a sample is large enough an effect may be shown to have statistical significance, even if the effect is trivial. Alternatively, a small sample may have effects with clinical importance that do not reach significance due to the low number of participants (Meline & Wang, 2004). By using the effect size, the focus is exclusively on the size of the difference which is an important component to interpreting and reporting effectiveness and is “better evidence for clinical practice” (Meline & Paradiso, 2003, p. 276). In this preliminary investigation, effect sizes (Cohen’s \( d \)) were calculated to serve as an estimated “threshold for clinical significance” to inform future larger-scale investigations (Buzzella, Whitton, & Tompson, 2012; Apel et al., 2013).

**RESULTS**

The effects of a process writing approach were evaluated to determine if there were statistically and clinically significant differences from pre- to post-intervention using within group paired \( t \) tests and effect size calculations. Pre- and post-intervention measures were obtained across the following seven dependent variables: average writing score and highest writing score using Sulzby et al.’s (1989) Forms of Writing scale, Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) (Petersen et al., 2008), number of communication units (CU), mean length of utterance in words (MLCUw), total number of words (TNW), and number of different words (NDW). Means, standard deviations, and effect size for pre- and post-intervention outcomes are presented in Table 1. Although it is often necessary to provide a correction for using multiple \( t \) tests (such as a Bonferroni adjustment) to protect again a Type 1 error, it was not conducted for this small study. Due to the limited power of this feasibility study to detect true effects in relation to sample size, using a correction would have the potential to raise Type 2 error to unacceptable levels. Cohen’s (1988) recommendations for assigning clinical significance to the \( d \) scores were applied as follows: \( .20 \) represented a small effect, \( .50 \) a medium effect, and \( .80 \) a large effect.


**Writing**

Within group paired t tests did not reveal significant pre- to post-intervention differences for the average writing score calculated using the Sulzby et al. (1989) scale $t(8) = .126, p = .24$ or the highest writing score $t(8) = -.79, p = .45$. Effect sizes of the writing scores did not reveal a positive change in the average writing score; however, there was a small improvement in the highest writing score ($d = .29$). This indicates that as a group the children’s average writing score across the pages of their books did not increase. However, the effect size indicates that as a group the children showed some improvement in the highest form of writing produced at least once in their books. Figures 2 and 3 show the pre- and post-intervention measures for each participant for the average writing score and highest writing score.

**Narrative Macrostructure**

Within group paired t tests showed significant improvement from pre- to post-intervention on the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) (Petersen et al., 2008) composite score measuring narrative macrostructure performance $t(8) = -2.32, p = .049$. Effect sizes also demonstrate clinical significance with a large effect size ($d = 1.29$) representing a large improvement in the INC score from pre- to post-intervention. These results indicate that as a group the children created narratives that demonstrated increased complexity of story structure following the process writing approach. Figure 3 illustrates the raw INC composite score gains per participant at pre- and post-intervention.

**Narrative Microstructure**

Within group paired t tests revealed no significant pre-to post-intervention differences for narrative microstructure measures for number of communication units (CU), $t(8) = -.77, p = .47$; mean length of communication unit in words (MLCUw), $t(8) = -.19, p = .86$; total number of words (TNW), $t(8) = -1.40, p = .20$; and number of different words (NDW), $t(8) = -1.78, p = .11$. Effect sizes, however, demonstrate clinical significance for all narrative microstructure measures with a large effect size for NDW ($d = .79$), and moderate effect sizes for TNW ($d = .73$), MLCUw ($d = .61$) and CUs ($d = .40$). This indicates that as a group
the children created narratives that increased in structural and lexical complexity following the process writing approach.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this preliminary study was to evaluate the early writing and narrative outcomes of a process approach to early writing by analyzing pre- and post-intervention measures from a 5-month Head Start collaborative, classroom-based intervention. The first finding was that there were no statistically or clinically significant differences between the average writing score of early writing forms, using the Sulzby et al. (1989) Forms of Writing scale, present in the children’s books on the pre-and post-intervention measures; however, there was a small effect for the highest writing score of early writing forms, using the Sulzby et al. (1989) scale which indicates a modest clinically significant effect. The second finding was statistically significant gains in the narrative macrostructure characteristics from pre- to post-intervention which was consistent with clinically significant improvement indicated by a large effect size. The third finding indicated no statistically significant differences in narrative microstructure from pre- to post-intervention; however, effect sizes ranged from moderate to large, indicating a clinically significant effect on all microstructure elements assessed.

**Measures of Early Writing**

The pre- to post-intervention differences for average and highest writing score indicated modest gains. Further exploration into the individual scores for both of these measures provides more information regarding the findings. Figure 1 shows that three of the nine children did make gains in their average writing scores, which ranged from a gain of 1 to 3 points on the 12-point Sulzby et al. (1989) scale. A more in-depth look at the individual scores provides a potential explanation for why there was a decrease in average writing scores from pre- to post-intervention. Four of the six children who displayed more than a .5 point decrease in their average writing score had an increase in the occurrence of the score “1”, “drawing only” on individual pages throughout their books. For example, participant 3 had three scores of “1” pre-
intervention (with a potential for eight occurrences) and six scores of “1” post-intervention. Participant 8 had no scores of “1” pre-intervention and six scores of “1” post-intervention. Across all children, 25 of 72 book pages (35%) were scored as “1” at pre-intervention with 37 of 72 (51%) scored as “1”. at post-intervention. These results indicate that the children used more drawing and less writing in their books at the post-intervention assessment, suggesting that they may have been giving more attention to the drawings in their books to assist them in supporting their accompanying spoken narratives than providing specific writing forms on their pages. This finding is supported by other research in early writing (Puranik & Lonigan, 2011; Sulzby et al., 1989) which indicates that early writing performance by young children is often task dependent. For example, Sulzby et al. (1989) investigated the forms of writing kindergarten children used when writing a story and subsequently reading it to an adult, which was a task similar to the one used for the current study. One finding indicated these five year old children were able to use invented spelling for tasks such as writing isolated words or short phrases; however, they used it less for longer pieces of composition and often “used drawing as a means of writing” (p.9) for their stories. Specifically, this finding purports that when young children write, the task itself influences the level of writing that children may use. In the current study, as the children moved from a focus on writing forms through copying and tracing to a focus on both writing forms and story generation through spoken narratives they made choices about what to include in their books. As the children became more focused on the story telling (composing) aspect of their writing, as evidenced by gains in macrostructure elements, the number of writing forms they generated decreased. As in Sulzby et al.’s (1989) study, the children seemed to prefer the use of drawing as a form of writing to communicate their story rather than incorporating writing forms that were not yet able to convey their intended messages.

Another explanation for the lack of gains in writing forms is related to the prior knowledge of the children in this study. Before the intervention, there was a strong focus on the transcription skills specific to handwriting in the classroom. The children were involved in daily “journal writing” tasks that primarily
involved tracing or copying letters, the child’s own name, and words in notebooks. The amount of writing experience prior to the intervention impacted the highest writing score represented and the amount of growth potential available to this group of children, as many of the children began the study with a score within their age range that provided little opportunity for substantial gains. Figure 2 displays the pre-intervention highest writing scores for each child which illustrates the children’s prior knowledge of writing forms. Four of the nine children had a pre-intervention score of 7 (Letters: Name Elements) or higher, and these children did not demonstrate increased scores at post-intervention. Alternatively, three of the children who had lower pre-intervention scores (ranging from a score of 1 to 4) and only one child with a score above 4, made gains ranging from 1 to 6 points at post-intervention, which suggests that there was more opportunity for growth in writing when the pre-intervention score was in a lower range. Considering the young age of these children and their writing levels at the beginning of the intervention, it appears that there was not sufficient room for growth as a group because some of the children were already producing writing forms at, or close to, a ceiling level for their age. Further exploration of the effects of a process approach on early writing forms is warranted, as more substantial gains may emerge with children who have not had the same type of exposure to production of early writing forms as the children in this study.

**Measures of Narrative Macrostructure and Microstructure**

There was a statistically significant difference with a large effect size between the pre- and post-intervention for macrostructure elements show in the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) (Petersen, et al., 2008) composite scores over the five month period (Table 1). As demonstrated in Figure 3, INC narrative scores for 7 of 9 children improved. Additionally, although there were no statistically significant gains, there were clinically significant gains in all four microstructure measures (see Table 1). These improvements in microstructure performance indicate a growth in lexical diversity (NDW), productivity (TNW and CUs), and structural complexity (MLCUw). These gains illustrate that a preschool process writing approach, in which children are assisted in creating books, can be an effective context for eliciting and enhancing spoken
fictional narrative production. Beyond providing a context to put word forms on paper, this writing activity promoted the development of early spoken language skills, specifically narrative skills.

Many quantitative studies in early writing exclusively target measures related to the code-related skills of early and later literacy development, and the tasks generally focus on handwriting and spelling abilities (Bloodgood, 1999; Diamond et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2010). Despite research that indicates a strong reciprocal relationship between spoken and written language skills (Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010; Dickinson & McCabe, 2001; Scarborough, 2001; Shanahan, 2006), few early writing investigations include spoken language or meaning-related skills in their outcomes or correlational measures influenced by early writing activities. This relationship between spoken and written language has been demonstrated frequently through literacy activities that involve emergent reading activities, however the same connections are not as frequently extended to emergent writing activities. A study by Hooper et al. (2010), however, indicates that both pre-reading skills (measured by word and letter identification) and spoken language abilities (as measured by the CELF-3) significantly predicted the level of writing in grades 3-5. Although working on handwriting and spelling may have an immediate effect on code-related skills necessary for early reading and writing development, narrative construction through early composition activities, could have an additional impact on literacy outcomes such as written narratives in later grades. To further emphasize the relationship between spoken language development and writing abilities, investigations demonstrate a relationship between language impairment in both preschool-age children (Cabell et al., 2009; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011) and school-age children (Fey, Catts, Proctor-Williams, Tomblin & Zhang, 2004; Koutsoftas & Gray, 2012; Mackie & Dockrell, 2004) and their writing skills. A limited number of studies have demonstrated that when early writing activities shift the focus to a more comprehensive approach that emphasizes both transcription and composition skills, early writing activities can influence both code-related and meaning-related literacy skills. For example, Craig (2006) compared the outcomes of two interventions targeting literacy skills in kindergarten. An interactive writing
group where teachers and students created collective written texts was compared to a metalinguistic games group that had structured phonological awareness and alphabet training. There were no between group differences in phonological awareness or spelling; however, the interactive writing group demonstrated significantly greater progress on passage comprehension. Working on composition related tasks in the early years, even before a child is producing conventional writing, could support this reciprocal relationship between the code-related and spoken language skills that are needed to facilitate production of written language in the later years.

Researchers have identified links between early narrative productions and later reading skills (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Griffin et al., 2004; Kaderavek & Sulzby, 2000). There has been far less research that demonstrates a relationship between spoken narratives in the early years and writing. Griffin et al. (2004) indicate that control of text-level macrostructures through spoken narratives can lay a foundation for producing “longer and more explicit written texts, the kinds that are required in many academic settings” (p. 125). Their study specifically demonstrated a link between preschoolers’ spoken narrative skills and their written narrative skills at age eight. If early narrative productions are strong indicators of later literacy outcomes and are among the best predictors of a child language disorder (Bishop & Edmundson, 1987; Catts et al., 1999; Feagans & Applebaum, 1986; McFadden & Gillam, 1996; Tabors et al., 2001), researchers should explore instructional approaches that facilitate growth in preschool narrative production. However, the research dedicated to exploring preschool interventions for developing narratives is limited (Petersen, 2011). In other preschool and school-age narrative intervention studies, story grammar elements are often explicitly taught (Hayward & Schneider, 2000; Klecan-Aker et al., 1999; Spencer & Slocum, 2010) and story retelling is often the context for the creation of fictional narratives (Merritt & Liles, 1987; Level & Senechal, 2011). In the current study, story grammar was taught more implicitly through the scaffolding of questions as the children generated their own stories. The children in this study made gains in inclusion of story grammar elements that were developed through the process of
creating stories with adult mediation in the form of asking questions that related to their developing, writing, or narrating these stories. Through this process the activities occurred in an authentic context of the classroom in an activity that was meaningful to the children -- creating their own books. Lever and Senechal (2011) found a similar increase in inclusion of story grammar elements without explicit instruction when looking at the effects of a dialogic book reading intervention on fictional narrative development of 5- and 6-year old children and concluded that “oral fictional storytelling skills could be improved by shared reading experiences” (p.20). These studies are similar in that they both used scaffolding questions in naturalistic contexts (story book reading and story book creating) that did not necessitate the use of explicit instruction in story grammar elements, but used open-ended guiding questions to provide assistance in story structure.

Figure 4 illustrates the categorical distribution of the mean scores from the pre- and post-intervention measures for the INC. Each of these categories could be scored either 0 to 2 or 0 to 3 and were rated on either number of occurrences or complexity of the event measured in that category. Although these data were not tested statistically, it appears that the children in this study had improved scores in the story grammar and structure elements of character, setting, initiating events, actions, complication, consequence, formulaic markers and temporal markers.

Although microstructure analyses of early writing samples is not possible due to the limited text produced, microstructure analyses are often explored when investigating writing productions of older children. For example, studies have used microstructure analysis to investigate the written texts produced by school-age children with language impairment versus children who are typically developing (Gillam and Johnson, 1992; Mackie & Dockrell, 2004; Puranik, Lambardina & Altmann, 2008). Puranik et al. (2008) documented the progression of the microstructure of written language samples with children in grades 3 through 6 including TNW, total number of T-units, mean length of T-unit, number of clauses, and clause density. These studies demonstrate that children with language-based disabilities often produce written
texts that exhibit reduced productivity, reduced complexity, and reduced lexical. Although we are not yet able to measure the microstructure of the early learner’s written narrative, a microstructural analysis of the child’s spoken narrative may provide insight into a child’s potential with later written narratives. Spoken and written narratives may exhibit differences such as organization, structure and mechanics; however, they are generally similar in their semantic, syntactic and phonological processes (Wellman et al, 2011). Although younger children produce spoken narratives that are generally longer in length and more semantically and syntactically complex, by the fourth grade these differences between spoken and written narratives become substantially smaller (Fey et al, 2004). Therefore, if children are generating spoken narratives through a process similar to later school activities of more conventional writing, it could be expected that their early spoken narrative skills would influence their later written narrative skills.

Our results with the measures of narrative macrostructure and microstructure elements emphasize the relationship between using a process writing approach through creating books and developing language skills that are specific to fictional narrative development. In early literacy research, investigations often focus on the contributions that spoken language can make to later literacy development (Griffin et al., 2004; Hooper et al., 2010; Nation & Snowling, 2004). Because spoken language skills are more developed than written language skills in young children (Shanahan, 2006), it makes sense that spoken language skills would influence the written language skills in early and later writing. What has been far less explored is how a comprehensive approach to early writing can influence language skills, such as narratives. Although process writing incorporates a comprehensive approach to literacy with tasks involving both code-related skills and spoken language skills (Nelson, Bahr, Van Meter, & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2004; Ray & Glover, 2008), there is no prior research specifically demonstrating that this writing approach used with preschool children can influence language outcomes. Quantitative evidence to support that preschool process writing influences narrative development is therefore also non-existent. Hence, the finding that process writing through creating books, significantly influenced macrostructure narrative growth and
displayed clinical significance in microstructure growth is unique.

**Collaboration and Classroom Context**

The results of this study offer evidence for a classroom-based collaborative approach to early writing to influence skills related to literacy and language development. SLPs are often encouraged to provide classroom-based interventions; however, research is limited in how to effectively implement these recommendations. According to Nelson et al, (2004), process writing with school-age children can offer SLPs opportunities for working with children individually and in small groups with an authentic activity in a classroom while providing direct intervention or general enrichment support with writing processes and language targets (at levels of discourse, sentences, and words with written and spoken communication). This study provides initial evidence that extends the idea that process writing is an effective context for collaboration and classroom-based language and literacy instruction in a preschool setting.

**Limitations and Future Research**

There are several limitations that may influence the applicability of this study. First, the lack of a control group makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the efficacy of the intervention. A control group that did not receive the writing intervention would have allowed us to account for potential maturation effects. Second, a larger more heterogeneous sample would provide better capacity for generalization of outcome measures for efficacy of this early writing approach. Third, the ability to replicate this study may be compromised by the fact that the procedures for the intervention were classroom-based and collaboratively implemented. Providing instruction in a naturalistic setting with more than one person implementing the approach, as well as adaptations made collaboratively to meet classroom and individual needs, left room for potential variability in instruction throughout the intervention process. Finally, inability to randomize participants and inconsistent attendance may have compromised the outcomes.

Beyond these limitations, this study leads to interesting directions for future research in the area of early writing. This preliminary study leads to further exploration of early writing approaches that offer a
comprehensive approach to early literacy, which includes targeting both code- and spoken language skills. It is also necessary to investigate the efficacy of this approach with children with language disorders, as the results from the current study may not generalize to preschool children with identified language impairments. Studies should also compare the outcomes of children with language disorders to their peers with typical language development to further investigate problems that young learners might experience within a process writing approach.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that early writing activities have a capacity to influence early literacy outcomes that extend beyond traditional quantitative measurements of code-related abilities to include gains in the area of fictional narrative development. By providing young children with early writing activities that include both transcription through written forms and composition through narrative development, the bi-directional relationship between spoken language and written language skills can be further supported in a classroom context. This study suggests that early writing activities, specific to process writing, influence spoken narrative productions. Influencing narratives important for early language and literacy intervention, as narratives have proven to be predictive of later literacy skills, and poor productions are indicative of language disorders. By enhancing spoken narratives through this approach to early writing, the potential to further support written narrative production in the school years would be an even greater contribution. Including this compositional focus in early writing activities through process writing has potential to ready young children for the school-based task of narrative writing. This study illustrates that young children can engage in a comprehensive approach to writing at a young age and that through this process approach of creating books, the self-generated fictional narrative skills of young learners can be enhanced. This study provides speech-language pathologists with a feasible context for providing a collaborative, classroom-based approach to support young children’s language and literacy development specific to early writing and narrative development.
References


Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and effect sizes for the pre- and post-intervention measures.

<table>
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<th>Measure</th>
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<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
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Note. INC-Index of Narrative Complexity, CU-communication units, MLCUw-mean length of utterance in words, TNW-total number of words, NDW-number of different words

*Cohen's d effect size index was computed for the effect size: .20 represents a small effect, .50 a medium effect, and .80 a large effect.
Table 2. Raw scores for each participant for pre- and post-intervention measures.

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*Note.* INC-Index of Narrative Complexity, CU-communication units, MLCUw-mean length of utterance in words, TNW-total number of words, NDW-number of different words
Figure 1. Pre- and post-intervention average writing scores on the Sulzby et al. (1989) scale based on the average of all scored pages of writing in the child’s created book.
Figure 2. Pre- and post-intervention highest writing scores using Sulzby et al (1989) scale based on the highest single page score evidenced in the child’s created book.
FIGURE 3. Pre- and post-intervention raw scores on the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) for each participant’s narration of a self-generated fictional story produced during an early writing activity.
Figure 4. Pre- and post-intervention distribution of the mean scores by scoring category of the Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) for the participants’ narration of a self-generated fictional story produced during an early writing activity.
Appendix A

Sulzby, Barnhart, & Hieshima (1989) 12-Point Emergent Writing Scale

1. Drawing: Child draws one picture for the entire composition or embeds pictures within other forms of writing.

2. Scribble—Wavy: Scribble is a continuous (or continuous with breaks) form without the definition of letters. The scribble may be curvy or pointed in form but there will be no differentiation of shapes.

3. Scribble—Letter-like: This scribble is different from the wavy scribble because the child is using different forms within the scribble, and these forms have some of the features of letters.

4. Letter-like units: These probably are closely related to letter-like scribbles, but they resemble manuscript letters (or, occasionally, separated cursive letters). The forms may resemble letters but they appear to be forms the child has created.

5. Letters—random: The child writes with letters that appear to have been generated at random.

6. Letters—patterns: The child writes with letters that show repeated patterns that may include repeated letters or patterns that approximate English spelling.

7. Letters—name elements: The child writes with letters that show repeated patterns that may include repeated letters or patterns from the child’s name.

8. Copying: the child will copy from environmental print in the room, on articles of clothing or school supplies or seen out of the window, etc.

9. Invented spelling-syllabic: The child uses only one letter per syllable to represent a phonetic relationship between the sounds in the spoken words and the letters used to stand for those words.

10. Invented spelling-intermediate: The child uses invented spelling in between the syllabic and full invented spelling level.

11. Invented spelling-full: There is a letter for all or almost all of the sounds in the spoken word.

Appendix B

Guidelines for Implementing the Process Based Writing Approach

Goals of the Process Based Writing Project:

1. To encourage children to express their thoughts and ideas through drawing and writing.
2. To encourage social interactions between children during creation of their books.
3. To encourage children to select a topic of their choice to write/draw about in their books.
4. To encourage the children to draw pictures and write messages in their books.
5. To encourage the children to help each other while they are engaged in their writing.
6. To encourage children to enjoy the process of writing and expressing ideas.
7. To encourage the development of emergent literacy skills such as:
   a. Language skills
   b. Print awareness
   c. Alphabet knowledge
   d. Phonological awareness

The teacher and SLP will scaffold/assist child with each of the following areas:

1. Topic generation
2. Drawing pictures
3. Writing messages
4. Developing and sharing stories

Topic Generation

- Children should have freedom to write about the things that are meaningful to them
- Encourage children that their lives contain important stories and events to tell about
- Model the thought process that you might use in trying to come up with a topic
- Use children’s books, family events, classroom events, etc. to give the children ideas to write about

Drawing Pictures

- Drawing is an important tool for children to express ideas that they are unable to express in writing
- Using drawings helps them to tell a story on paper before they are able to write the words
- Inform children that their drawings do not have to match adult or picture book versions
- Assist child in building on these skills at his/her level
- Encourage children to add more to their drawings to elaborate on their stories

Writing a Message

- Assist children in learning the difference between writing and drawing
- Encourage the children to try to write a message with the pictures they have drawn
- Accept any form of writing that the child produces (scribbles, random letters, backward letters, etc.)
- Focus on the idea/expression from the child as he/she interprets his/her writing
- Encourage the child to access print from the classroom setting (word wall, storybooks, name cards, alphabet chart, etc.)
- Assist the child with letter-to-sound relationships, phonological awareness concepts (rhyming, initial sound isolation, etc.), and beginning invented spelling (for example, using one letter to represent each word)

**Developing Stories**

- Using drawing and early writing through storytelling may encourage early narrative skills to help with later literacy success
- Assist children with sequencing their stories (Example: What happened next?)
- Ask children open-ended questions about what they are drawing and writing (What does it say? What is your story about?)
- Encourage children to go back and add to their stories
- Encourage children to talk about their stories with adults and children while they are creating them
- Encourage children to share their stories when they have completed them
CHAPTER III

Early Literacy Development Re-Examined:
From a Quantitative Intervention Design to a Qualitative Cultural-Historical Analysis

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Abstract

This article re-examines a quasi-experimental study of a Head Start classroom that was originally designed to explore quantitative outcomes of a process writing approach that examined literacy through early writing forms and macrostructure and microstructure narrative development. In the original six month study, I recruited a teacher to assist me in initiating an early literacy intervention that consisted of creating storybooks through drawing, writing, and narration, as a means of promoting early literacy development. This article reexamines that classroom intervention using cultural-historical theories of learning and development (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) to reconceptualize and redefine early literacy development. Specifically, I explore the literacy practices that constituted this community of practice, investigate what counted as literacy development within this context, and redefine development as transformation through participation within this intervention and classroom setting. The qualitative, case study analysis (Genishi and Dyson, 2005) was based on videotapes, audio recordings and writing artifacts which were (re)examined from the original six month study. The analysis illustrates how specific ideology and research frameworks that propose a one size fits all approach to literacy and development at times conflicted with and constrained the varied paths of diverse learners. The study explores the ideologies of individuality, notions of universality, and a “fix-it” mentality of the Head Start intervention that unknowingly perpetuated deficit views of young children and contributed to “the uniformity, homogenization, and regimentation of classroom practices” (Genishi and Dyson, 2009, p. 4).
Research in the area of early childhood literacy is abundant. The rationale for this research is largely founded on the principles of emergent literacy, a proposed critical period of development in the early years, and attempts at meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse group of children in our society (Gillen & Hall, 2010). While the research within the field of early literacy as a whole is varied, quantitative intervention designs tend to be the methodology of research that holds privilege when influencing public policy, national reports on factors that contribute to early literacy development, and recommendations or mandates for “best practice” in early childhood instruction (NELP, 2008; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2010). An increased call for “evidenced-based practice”, more “scientific” research and the development of content standards, even in the early childhood classroom (http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Early-Learning/Early-Learning-Content-Standards), add to this privileging of quantitative intervention research in the field of early literacy (Allen et al, 2007; Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003). Unfortunately frequently nested within this type of research are certain assumptions that uphold deficit views of diverse children, view literacy as individual and “in-the-head”, and perpetuate limited definitions of development (Orellana & D’warte, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to re-examine a quasi-experimental intervention study of early writing in a Head Start classroom. I will be examining literacy events and practices through a cultural-historical theory of learning and development (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), investigating this new writing practice as it was incorporated into an already established classroom community of practice. The goal of this examination is to understand the ideological underpinnings of the intervention design and further explore the definition of early literacy development to include a more culturally sensitive view of learning. Through this case study examination I intend to provide researchers and educators further insight and understanding of how experimental intervention research designs in early literacy can constrain the learning of young children and perpetuate deficit views of diverse learners. I aim to illustrate that when we as researchers frame our research methodology differently, using more expansive definitions of learning
and development, we can transform our former deficit ideas of diversity to realizations of linguistic, social and cultural resources.

**Assumptions of Intervention Research**

Since the beginning of compensatory education, policies, programs and curricular initiatives have relied on the model of intervention designed to serve “culturally disadvantaged” children often with an end goal of determining “what works” (Beatty, 2012). Reports such as the National Academy of Education report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns & Griffith, 1998), National Reading Panel (NRP) (NICHD, 2000), National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) and other research syntheses focus on experimental or quasi-experimental interventions that are “scientific” and “evidence based” in order to eradicate the disadvantages that young diverse children would otherwise come to school possessing. The deficit discourse of “at-risk” to define these diverse children invokes ideas of pathological problems that lie within individuals, families, and communities; however, it does nothing to address larger institutional constraints to equality in education (Valencia, 1997, 2012).

Although the theoretical framework is infrequently stated within these quantitative intervention studies, the underlying theories of these approaches to early literacy research tend to be reflective of cognitive, behavioral, and positivist theories of learning and development (Hillocks, 2005; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). With these theories in mind, four major assumptions seem to stand out: 1.) development is individual maturation in which a chronological sequence of internal events is achieved; 2.) acquisition of specific early literacy skills will promote later literacy development; 3.) these literacy skills are specific cognitive or linguistic skills that are acquired through particular pedagogical techniques; and 4.) the performance of these skills are measured through standardized assessments or against predetermined developmental trajectories often reflecting mainstream normative ideas of literacy and development (Dyson, 2003; Orellana & Peer, 2010; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2011).
Even if the instructional strategy itself is not focused on teaching decontextualized skills, evaluative measures force researchers to break down reading and writing into isolated skills that will allow for comparisons between experimental groups. These measurements are then evaluated against normative data of predefined concepts of literacy development (that generally reflect the culture of white, middle-class children), to determine the influences of the intervention on outcomes related to these same definitions of literacy growth and development. Again, this limits the definition of development to individual, linear, and hierarchical constructs, and assumes that the normative data used to measure development in this way is somehow representative of the development displayed by all children (Heath, 1983; Rogoff, 2003; Smagorinsky, 2011).

**Cultural-Historical View of Development**

Over the last three decades, the field of literacy research has moved away from experimentally designed intervention studies toward qualitative research and sociocultural frameworks that provide different definitions of development and learning beyond developmental trajectories, prescribed paths to literacy attainment, and specific measures of early literacy performance (Dressman, 2007; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013). This methodological shift was symptomatic of the field’s larger shift towards social theories that share a conception of literacy as a “social practice” (Beach, 2005; Dressman, 2007). Juzwik et al. (2006) explored the research on writing from 1502 articles of refereed journals over a six year period (1999 to 2004). These authors concluded that, “research focused on context and social practices of writing dominates writing research at the beginning of the 21st century” (p. 467). This shift from studying literacy from a quantitative, cognitive framework to viewing literacy through a sociocultural lens has been termed “the social turn” (Gee, 2002), as it puts its emphasis on investigating the ways in which literacy is defined and used as social practices by various communities.

When researchers move away from more linear and hierarchical views of development that are supported by quantitative experimental studies and normative views of literacy learning, development can
be observed through a broader lens. Within a cultural-historical framework, development is redefined as the changes that people go through as their participation in various sociocultural activities within their communities change (Rogoff, 2003). According to Cole (1996), “the structure and development of human psychological processes emerge through culturally mediated, historically developing, practical activity” (p. 108). In other words, there is no one universal definition of human development or single “desirable outcome” of development across cultural communities. Development and learning within and throughout multiple domains of human activity vary greatly depending on the specific cultural community’s local goals and practices in which individuals routinely participate. Therefore, learning and development can be understood only in the context of a specific community’s social and cultural-historical practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003).

In contrast to theories of development that put emphasis on the individual, developmental maturation, and an “in the head” approach to defining development and learning, cultural-historical theorists place the emphasis on how children develop and learn with others as part of a community. Although biological maturation plays a part in human development, it cannot be seen as the only contributor (Cole, 1996). Human development is, at the very least, equally influenced by cultural constructs that are acquired only through an individual’s capacity to participate in a community’s cultural practices (Wells, 2000). Rogoff (2003) disputes the idea that the concept of nature versus nurture is an “either-or” decision and instead proposes that it is most accurate to look at human beings as “biologically cultural” (p.63).

When applying cultural-historical theories of learning and development to early literacy, it becomes evident that literacy learning develops not by a set of explicitly taught skills that are sequentially learned, but by a process of recurrent social engagement and participation in literacy activities in which children are constantly attempting to make sense of their experiences (Dyson, 2003). Therefore, to understand early literacy, learning, and development in more complex ways, researchers must move away from an
intervention design of achieving literacy “success” and turn toward a research methodology that investigates reading and writing in the context of social and cultural interactions.

In a cultural-historical view of learning and development, the performance of children is largely dependent on the routine and circumstances that occur in their community, as well as the cultural practices that they are used to. According to Rogoff (2003), many of the repertoires learned by children are not necessarily explicitly taught or scaffolded in a specific way, but are learned as the children “participate and are guided by the values and practices of their cultural communities” (p.284). Examples of these types of practices that are learned through this concept of “guided participation” (p. 283) include children’s repertoires of narrative development, daily living routines, and play experiences as they do not depend on teacher-mediated experiences. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) further this discussion by introducing the concept of “linguistic and cultural-historical repertoires” (p. 22) which indicates that the ways in which individuals participate in certain activities are determined by their cultural background and experiential familiarity with the specific practices in which they are being acculturated (i.e. language and literacy activities, testing formats, having discussions with authority figures, etc.). Cultural-historical frameworks in literacy value what the child, the family and the community contribute to the literacy learning process through funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994) and repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Communities of Practice and Legitimate Peripheral Participation. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning cannot be seen as an independent or isolated activity, but must be viewed within the context of participation in any ‘community of practice’ (p.98). In a monumental piece of work, Lave and Wenger introduced the concepts of “communities of practice” and “legitimate peripheral participation”. Lave and Wenger (1991) define communities of practice as “participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (p. 98). Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the members of these communities of
practices as not necessarily having the same cultural identity, the same levels of participation or even the same interests in the activity, as there are often varied viewpoints, varied contributions, and a specific social structure or power relationship among the members of any given community of practice. These communities of practice are learning communities in which there are both “newcomers” who are in the process of becoming “full participants” in the particular community of practice and “old-timers” who have already established themselves as full participants within the same community of practice.

This process of learning in practice has been coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) as “legitimate peripheral participation”. Lave and Wenger (1991) introduce us to this alternate concept as they begin to conceptualize learning in a way that differs from more “traditional” views of learning theories in which learning is strictly seen as a specific cognitive process that moves through linear stages or builds on simple to complex skills. Through the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, they move us into a view of learning that is developed within the context of social activity. Learners are defined as peripheral participants because they are not yet full participants within a community of practice of which they are being apprenticed to the social norms and expectations within that community’s cultural and social practices.

Lave and Wenger (1991) make it clear that legitimate peripheral participation is a way of understanding learning—and not a pedagogical strategy. They draw a clear distinction between learning and intentional instruction. They purposefully leave out links to schooling when introducing the concept of legitimate peripheral participation to avoid linking learning to pedagogical instruction. They emphasize that learning is taking place even if there is no intentional instruction as learning through peripheral participation is viewed as an aspect of all activity. Within this framework, it is relevant to understand how children become full participants within a specific community of practice of learners, to understand how they learn within these instructional contexts, and to understand that learning “involves the construction of identities” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Given these principles, it is important to unpack how these
communities of practice are constructed in the classroom setting and how identities are formed around what counts as literacy within a given community of practice.

**Zone of Proximal Development.** When we look at knowledge as being constructed, as opposed to being fixed (Smagorinsky, 2011), we can bring additional terminology to the discussion of learning and developing. When we discuss learning within the context of the classroom setting, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a concept that often comes to the forefront. When taken out of the context of Vygotsky's larger body of work regarding the social and cultural nature of learning, cognitive learning and maturational development frameworks often use ZPD to support the pedagogical process of guiding the individual learner through a step-by-step process of acquiring skills that can later be performed independently (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This process is often referred to as “scaffolding” in which a more experienced adult may lead the child to this new level of competency within this cognitive zone of proximal development (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989; Smagorinsky, 2011).

When viewed alongside the other tenets of Vygotsky's theoretical emphasis on the social and cultural underpinning of learning, however, it becomes apparent as to why some researchers view this ZPD through a very different lens. From a cultural-historical viewpoint, the ZPD is no longer viewed as a cognitive stepladder in which the adult gives the child access to the subsequent rung; instead, it is seen as a co-constructed zone in which the adults and children “collectively” construct meaning through joint activity. Within this interpretation of the ZPD, the notion of scaffolding is often rejected as being too rigid and as being too focused on the adult as the expert. Instead, sociocultural researchers believe this zone should be viewed as one that is adaptable to concepts of teacher and learner mutually influencing one another toward a common end goal (Moll, 2000; Smagorinsky, 2011). Dyson (1990) uses the term “weaving” (p.204) instead of “scaffolding”, in which the metaphor for learning shifts from a vertical step-by-step process to one that adds “horizontal dimension” to the learning context. She adds that within this concept of weaving, children's varied experiences through other activities may be influential in making
progress in any one area. The focus in this model then shifts from individual characteristics of the child or the exclusivity of the teaching, to what an individual can accomplish through participation in joint activity, through the interdependence of adults and children. Through this model of ZPD, social and cultural goals are utilized for the purpose of collective learning, which is directed toward specific cultural goals (Dyson, 1990; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Smagorinsky, 2011).

Through the concepts of ZPD, other researchers have developed further terms such as hybridity and “third space” (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). These notions acknowledge the child’s capacity to use cultural resources of their unofficial worlds and intersect them with the official practices of the classroom to create this third space (Wohlwend, 2008). According to Gutiérrez (2008), it is within this alternative and transformative space, where conflicts of official and unofficial practices experience a variety of interconnections, that learners experience a new form of participation which has the potential for more dynamically influencing learning and development of all children. Through these cultural-historical definitions and concepts of learning and development, it becomes increasingly clear that experimental and quasi-experimental studies that reduce literacy development to isolated skills development and specific pedagogical steps to learning do a disservice to furthering our understanding of the literacy development of young diverse learners.

Current Study

When viewing learning and development from a cultural-historical theoretical perspective, literacy learning must be examined as situated within the setting in which it is produced, as well as in relation to the values and goals that exist within a particular community of practice (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Gee, 2003). Within this classroom setting, certain types of repertoires for acting, talking, and learning are established where children, as peripheral participants in this official classroom culture, begin to develop understandings of specific literacy practices, what their roles are as literacy learners and what counts as literacy within that community of practice (Rowe, Fitch, and Bass, 2001).
In this paper, I am re-examining an early childhood Head Start classroom that is engaged in a newly constructed intervention activity to promote early literacy that consists of children constructing storybooks through early writing and narrating activities. I am investigating the following research questions:

1. What are the literacy practices in which this community of practice engages within the context of the newly constructed intervention design?
2. What counts as literacy development within this community of practice?
3. How was development demonstrated through participation within this community of practice?

Methods

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in an inner-city Head Start full-day preschool classroom in a mid-sized Midwestern city. This Head Start center provided programs in 48 neighborhoods, 23 school districts and in 222 classrooms within this urban city. The particular site in which this study was conducted had a total of 22 classrooms that include Early Head Start, Home Start, half-day and full-day Head Start preschool programs.

Participants included the students in the Head Start classroom, the classroom teacher and me as a participant-observer. The preschoolers were 9 girls and 6 boys ranging in age from 3 years 2 months to 5 years 3 months at the beginning of the study. Fourteen of the children were African-American and one child was Vietnamese-American. The classroom teacher was an African-American female who had an Associate's degree in Early Childhood. She had been teaching preschool children for 11 years at the time of this study and had been a classroom teacher for this particular agency for five years. I participated in this study as a participant researcher. At the time of this study, I was a PhD student in a Communication Sciences and Disorders program with a focus on early language and literacy development. I am a white female who had been a speech-language pathologist (SLP) for 9 years working primarily with preschool
age children in a Head Start or childcare setting. I had an established rapport with this Head Start agency and teacher as I had worked there as a contracted SLP for six years prior to this study. My role prior to the study was to provide both direct clinical services for children identified with speech and language needs, as well as teacher training and development to enrich the language and literacy skills of the children in their classrooms.

**Prior Writing Experiences**

Prior to the beginning of the study, journal writing in the classroom was a curricular activity that was designated according to the center-wide lesson planning guide as a weekly activity. During journal writing time, the classroom teacher directed the children to the classroom tables and instructed them to trace or copy letters, the child’s own name, and words in traditional “composition” notebooks with rule-lined pages. These letters, names, and words were modeled for the children in a variety of ways such as: 1.) printed in the child’s book by the teacher, 2.) printed on an index card placed on the table near the child (i.e., a name card) 3.) printed on a dry erase board centered in the classroom for all the children to see, or 4.) printed on a word wall or chart fixed onto a classroom wall.

**The Process Writing Intervention**

The original intervention study design was developed as an alternative approach to early writing that sought to provide the children with a more “meaningful and authentic” context for early writing than was previously occurring in the classroom. I proposed a process writing approach adapted for younger children as they created their own storybooks. A process approach to writing traditionally includes teacher led tasks such as mini lessons (to teach specific writing conventions) and conferring with students, as well as student directed tasks such as open-ended writing and sharing their work from an author’s chair (Calkins, 1994). I used an adaptation of this approach for preschoolers proposed by Ray and Glover (2008) in which process writing for young children involves the creation of their own picture books. These authors and educators propose that picture books provide a familiar context for young children to begin experimenting with early
composition skills. They argue that unlike early writing tasks that focus on functional writing, such as making grocery lists and sign in sheets, compositional writing goes beyond basic transcription skills and assists young writers with bringing meaning to the page and thinking deeper about the process of writing as a whole.

Two times a month, for five months, the children created short books during 30-60 minute structured writing times in the classroom. Both the teacher and I provided support and instruction for the children as needed for topic generation, drawing pictures, writing a message to go along with the pictures, and developing the narrative of their stories. The books were comprised of five white blank 8x11 inch pages stapled between colored construction paper covers. The teacher led each session and assisted half of the children at one table and I assisted the other half at another table. The children who were at the table with the teacher or with me varied from session to session, as the teacher split up the children so that she spent equal time with all children across the sessions. The process of instruction that was instituted during these sessions will be explored in further detail throughout the analysis, findings and discussion of the literacy practices that occurred within this classroom context.

The classroom teacher and I worked together to bring both areas of expertise to the delivery of the process-based writing approach, which included communicating with one another throughout the process and consulting with one another on making decisions regarding the development and instruction of this process approach. Although I provided the background information for an alternative approach to early writing than what was previously occurring in the classroom, as well as language and literacy goals for early writing that extended beyond transcription and mechanics, the classroom teacher brought much knowledge about the center-wide curriculum, working within the scope of the educational expectations of the center’s administration and the children’s parents, and meeting the individual needs of the children in her classroom. The teacher and I met briefly after most sessions to discuss progress, concerns or
adaptations to meet the needs of the children throughout the process based writing approach in the classroom context and made adjustments accordingly.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The current study uses data from a previous study that was designed as an intervention for early writing with quantitative measures obtained to investigate early literacy performance outcomes of preschool children in a Head Start. Although the primary objectives of this original design were to examine the children’s literacy development through quantitative pre- and post-intervention measures, the data collected also consisted of video recordings of the intervention activity, audio recordings of the teacher and researcher, interviews with the teacher, written storybook artifacts and audio recorded oral narratives from the children, which provided the data to conduct this subsequent qualitative, case study analysis.

This case study approach investigated the participating community of practice, specific elements of the classroom literacy practices, and the mediating artifacts contributing to these practices. The classroom itself was analyzed as the social unit (the case under study) for this analysis. Within this case study framework, my analysis focused on the meaning that individuals are making of events in their lives in specific contexts of everyday interaction (Dyson and Genishi, 2005).

For this analysis, I use a cultural-historical theoretical framework of development through a qualitative, case study from a participant-observer perspective. I collected data as a participant-observer two days per month for six months (January-June) as the children, teacher and I participated in the process writing in the classroom setting for 30-60 minutes per session. During these sessions, I recorded the events using video-recording, as well as audio-recording with lapel microphones attached to both the teacher and myself. I also collected audio recordings of the children telling their stories from their completed books. Conversations between the teacher and me after the sessions were also audio-recorded. Finally, I took photographs of the completed storybooks that the children created during each classroom session. For this analysis, the video and audio recordings were transcribed.
This study identified “literacy events” (Heath, 1982) and “literacy practices” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) as the units of analysis. Heath (1982) defined literacy events as “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (p. 50). To identify literacy events across the corpus of qualitative data, I viewed the videotapes and documented all of the child interactions that occurred within the context of the classroom intervention that centered on textual production or textual interpretation. I also used the photographs of the writing artifacts and matched them with their corresponding textual interactions. Finally, I reviewed the transcribed audio recordings of children’s individual spoken narrative productions with only the researcher that were obtained as data collection for the initial intervention study. As I identified each child interaction with text, I then tabulated them by the nature of the interactions which largely focused on storybook writing and storybook reading.

Given my focus on analyzing the dominant literacy practices within the community of practice, I narrowed my next step of analysis to the most frequent literacy events that I documented across the intervention: collective storybook writing at the table, storybook reading at the table, storybook reading with the researcher and storybook reading in author’s chair. Once I identified these observable episodes of talk and activities centered around texts across my qualitative data, I drew upon Barton & Hamilton’s six propositions of a social theory of literacy to interpret these literacy events from the standpoint of literacy practices. Barton and Hamilton (1998) introduce six “propositions of a social theory of literacy” which serve to expand on the concept of “literacy practices”. These six propositions are outlined as follows: 1.) literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; 2.) there are different literacies associated with different domains of life; 3.) literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others; 4.) literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices; 5.) we need a historical approach for an understanding of the ideology, culture and traditions on which current practices are based; and 6.) literacy
practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

Literacy events are the observable interactions with a text and are often a starting point for literacy research; however, they are frequently shaped by the formal procedures and expectations of social institutions which form literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). These literacy practices are not observable units, but instead culturally constructed as they are informed by social rules, values, attitudes, and social relationships. By analyzing the literacy events through the larger lens of literacy practices, we are able to better understand the social constructions, normative expectations and ideological underpinnings that inform the interactions of these literacy events. To do this, I read through my tabulated data of literacy events and categorized these events through larger social goals and ideology that were further informed by social rules, social roles, normative expectations, and values.

Next, given my goals of identifying what counts as literacy development in this setting, I analyzed these literacy practices to interpret the most prevalent institutional norms or ideologies that shaped the social practices of the intervention study. These predominant ideologies that the children began to internalize through the task of storybook writing and reading were concepts of individuality, intentionality, and use of monomodal print constructs.

Finally, I identified how development was demonstrated through the children internalizing the normative expectations and ideologies within the established literacy practices. Through my documentation of literacy events which were originally tabulated chronologically, I identified concepts of “learning” and “development” by further identifying when the participation changed over time as well as how the practices themselves changed over time. Specifically, through re-reading the previously tabulated literacy events and further video observations, I created a log to record these changes of participation. I identified specific instances when individuals or groups participated in a different manner than in previous observations, when children began taking up the language of the teacher or researcher, how the children would begin to re-
appropriate an “official” practice toward their own “unofficial” purposes (Dyson, 2003). I further categorized these changes by the ways in which the participation transformed such as more independent engagement of valued practices, children enforcing normative expectations onto one another, taking on expected roles, and re-appropriation of official practices.

RESULTS

According to Barton and Hamilton (2000), “Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others” (p.8). Therefore, the literacy practices that individuals engage have underpinnings that go beyond the immediate literacy event, as they are influenced by the larger macrostructure of a particular community’s social and historical contexts. The normative values of the literacy practices that are occurring in the classroom in this study through (and often despite) the intervention design along with prior classroom norms are illustrative of this proposition. The literacy practices that are uncovered through this analysis are influenced predominately by institutional expectations enacted by the adults in the classroom. As children in a Head Start classroom representing minority children of low socioeconomic status, they are being enculturated to these literacy practices primarily because it is assumed they “need” certain aspects of literacy that they lack due to the inadequacies of their home environment. Rochelle and I acted on specific institutional expectations (knowingly or unknowingly) regarding what it means to teach early literacy to children from these alleged disadvantaged backgrounds. Rochelle had specific expectations in relationship to what it means to be a Head Start teacher, what it means to teach writing, and how to meet the demands of others’ expectations of her (parents, Head Start administration, etc.). I also came into this classroom with specific ideologies in relationship to being a researcher of early literacy, wanting to find “the best way” to teach children early writing skills, a desire to influence early childhood policy in literacy interventions and approaches, and how to conduct research within the demands of my program, my educational institution and the community of intervention researchers in early literacy as a whole. Through these institutions, the
definitions of early literacy are underlined by ideological discourses on what it means to attend Head Start, to be a student in a school, and to be a citizen in our society.

Throughout the presentation of these findings, I will use Barton and Hamilton's (2000) framework of literacy practices to describe the learning and development that occurred within the intervention context in this Head Start classroom. I will explore what it means to be a participant within this community of practice as it relates to forming the identities of becoming a writer, a storyteller and a student. In the first section, I will explore the overall literacy practices of this setting as I investigate “What counts as a writer and a storyteller?”. Some of the normative expectations of these practices were already established between Rochelle and the children. The introduction of the process writing program incorporated expectations that were different from what was previously occurring in the classroom, although some of the expectations determined by the intervention were synonymous with the already occurring literacy practices. In the second section, I will explore the ideological themes that stood out most to me during the analysis of these literacy practices by discussing “ideological concepts underlying what counts”. The concepts of individuality, intentionality and monomodal expectations of writing were overarching themes that emerged frequently through this analysis. These concepts arise from larger institutional and ideological normative expectations of what it means to be a writer, what it means to do school, and sometimes broader social goals of what it means to be a member of our society.

What Counts as a Writer and a Storyteller?

The intervention design and the Head Start center largely functioned under an “autonomous” model of literacy (Street, 1995), which views literacy as a set of technical skills that are acquired and evaluated independent of a social context. This autonomous view is contrasted with an “ideological” model which views literacy practices as related to the cultural and social structures of a society. Prakash and Waks (1985) discuss four possible conceptions of education and their end goals, which can be directly applied to conceptions of literacy. These conceptions are technical (cognitive competencies), rational
(cognitive socialization to creative and imaginative abilities), individual (students pursuing unique pathways of development), and social (responsible social action). In this section I will first discuss how these conceptions help demonstrate what counted as literacy, through both writing and storytelling, within this community of practice. Through the discussion of these literacy practices and their normative expectations, I will then use Prakash and Waks (1985) concepts to explore what “did not count” within this process writing context. Finally, I will discuss how the children demonstrated development through participation as they learned both the explicit and implicit expectations of the described literacy practices.

**Literacy Practices of Writing and Storytelling.** Within the literacy practice of creating storybooks, Rochelle and I began apprenticing the children into the procedures and routines of this writing activity during a predefined day and time, two times a month for 30-60 minutes each session. Children sat in assigned seats at classroom tables with teacher and researcher handing out booklets and markers for the task. The classroom teacher began the activity each session by explaining what was expected of the children during the writing activity. The children were reminded to write words like an author does and to draw pictures like an illustrator does. It was emphasized that they were to write their names on their books first and then proceed to their “story writing”. As the children began creating their books, Rochelle and I moved around from child to child and asked a variety of questions to help the children develop their written stories. We reminded children to “write a message” to go along with their drawings in order to encourage the inclusion of early writing forms in their books. When a child indicated she was finished with her book, she was often asked to “tell me your story” by Rochelle. The children were then asked to come into a separate room individually to tell their stories to me while they were audio recorded. When time permitted, the children were asked to share their stories with the class in an “author’s chair” format.

When introducing the children into the process writing, the adults emphasized a focus on the production of specific written forms in their books, such as their names, alphabet letters, and words.
The children were encouraged to write messages and draw pictures in their books; however, it was established early on that writing constituted more than scribbling and drawing. Being a writer in this context meant writing their name, alphabetic letters or words through copying, dictation or “sounding it out”. These expectations had been previously established in their prior classroom writing experiences, as well as through this early writing intervention. The adults overtly differentiated between drawing and writing when talking to the children about their books. When children’s books displayed only drawing, adults would pose questions to the children regarding their lack of print. For example here is an exchange between me and Autumn:

Me: What is happening on this page?
Autumn: That’s the tooth fairy coming to the house.
Me: Oh, do you think you could write some words on this page to tell more about what that’s all about.
(Autumn continues to tell her story to me.)
Me: Wow, I really like that story Autumn. I really like that you drew great pictures to tell a story, can you write some messages on your pages to tell your story a little bit more? I’d be glad to help you.
Autumn: I don’t know what to write.
Me: Well, let’s look at your first page.
Me: So, here’s your first page. So tell me what happened, you said this was a shooting star? So what more could we try to write on your page?
Autumn: I want this page.
Me: Oh, well, what could we write on this page?
Autumn: Tooth Fairy.

Rochelle and I reinforced this idea of writing as producing specific forms when we spent time with a child who was attempting to put print in his or her book. Scribbling or drawing was acknowledged, to provide opportunities to explore writing as personal expression through process writing, but it was demonstrated by the adults that these forms were less privileged. For example, children who exclusively
used scribbling or drawing forms usually garnered responses that were shorter, such as “nice job” or “I like your dinosaur”, as we moved on to assist other children with their more official objectives of putting print on the paper. This explicit focus and privileging of certain semiotic forms over others in this setting demonstrates the underlying ideology that some modalities (such as linguistic or drawing forms) are more immature than others or simply stepping stones in which the end goal is monomodal print-centered constructs of literacy (Flewitt, 2013; Kress, 2013).

With the adult emphasis on producing letter and word forms, writing is defined as a technical skill to be learned (Prakash & Waks, 1985), and this focus often disregards other ideas about writing, such as writing as personal expression (Calkins, 1994) or writing as a social tool (Dyson, 2003; 2008; 2010). These other concepts may appear in this intervention context, such as writing for individual expression through the process writing structure or writing as social experience through the exchanges between the children; however, they are merely a means to an end goal of leading children towards producing print on the page.

As the children created their books they were asked many questions to help them generate their stories. These questions were developed to assist children to tell stories in a certain way. The questions often began with who, what and why, and supported the acquisition of specific narrative story grammar elements such as character, setting and action/Attempts. These questions inferred that a story should be told in a linear sequence, which has a beginning and an end. Questions such as “What happened next?”, “Who is your story about?”, “What are you going to have him do?”, “Who lives in that house?”, were posed as children were developing their books. Stories that did not start “at the beginning” and did not follow this story structure and linear format prompted further questioning or were sometimes disregarded by a “nice job” with no further engagement, and the adult moved on to another child. These types of questions and storytelling routines are yet another avenue in which educators may unintentionally lead children into exclusively participating in literacy within specific institutional expectations and serve to further define which developmental pathways are rewarded.
There were also ways of being a storyteller that were valued and storytelling expectations that were being established by both figures of authority. Rochelle and I used picture books from the classroom shelves as a tool to show the children what a story looks like. The normative expectations of this intervention implied that storytelling was textual and that it was read from a text similar to the ones in the classroom (Bloome, Katz, & Champion, 2003). This view of narrative development as related to textual productions is limited in its conceptualization. It draws the focus of storytelling to a goal of technical means (versus rational, individual or social) (Prakash & Waks, 1985) in which the end goal is textual conventions and measurements of pre-defined acceptable components of storytelling. However, children may draw from a broad range of storytelling practices and contexts that have goals beyond the technical. Some of these other storytelling contexts include narrative as performance (Bloome, Katz, & Champion, 2003; Heath, 1982), narrative as a dialogic discourse (Dyson, 2009), and narrative as entertainment (song, television, gaming) (Dyson, 2003; Marsh 2010; Wohlwend, 2009). Although the more open-ended context of process writing might have been conducive to the engagement of these alternatives, the end goals of acquiring and measuring certain technical skills was not.

As this textual storytelling was emphasized, children were expected to put pictures and words in their books and then read and interpret those pictures and words to a listener. Conventions about how to hold the book, writing from left to right, and other procedural constructs were explicitly promoted. Upon completion of their books, it was expected that the children would tell about each picture or mark that they had made on the pages. It was often implicitly communicated to the children that the storytelling should not extend beyond what the children had produced in their books. For example, a child might have been interrupted if they were elaborating on the content on one page by comments such as “Tell me about your next page,” or “OK, turn the page and tell me what happened next”. This is illustrated through an exchange between Rochelle and Kael during the first month of the classroom intervention:
Kael: He went all the way down the street. He got cut on the head. And then he dropped the gl^, and then he dropped the picture glass. And then he was running from that monster and the monster was getting away cause he said, “Where is my glass”? And then he sees him and then they was running at each other and he got kicked and he was running. And then, and then he leaked his stomach and he leaked his stomach and kicked and then he was kicking him and^

Rochelle (interrupts him mid-sentence): Wow that was a lot. That was mean. That was mean.

Kael: And then he was crawling back home and he put the glass on his head again. He broke it. The monster got in trouble. And then he broke this and then he went to water park. He did^

Teacher (interrupting again): Ok, what happened next? Of that story. (She pointed toward his book.)

Through this exchange, Kael demonstrated that he has prior cultural experiences with storytelling; however, he is still learning that in this context storytelling must be reflected through his text.

This emphasis on storytelling as exclusively textual (and technical) further reduces literacy to definitions of school-based literacy and limits children’s opportunities to borrow from their already existing cultural and linguistic repertoires of the practice of storytelling (Bloome, Katz, & Champion, 2003; Dyson, 2003; Spencer, Knobel & Lankshear, 2013). For example, when the children “officially” shared their work with the class in this setting, the following expectations were set with both explicit and implicit instruction focused on storytelling in a specific way. For example, to be a child reader in author’s chair You read every page as you had originally intended it (unless a researcher or a teacher asks you to interpret or expand on a page). You display your book for everyone to see. You read every page (no skipping), and when you are finished you say, “The End,” and everyone claps for you. As a child listener You sit quietly and pay attention to the other readers without comments or questions about their books. When author’s chair was enacted in this setting, the children often attempted to engage in more interactive and dialogic modes of storytelling, but they were discouraged from this interaction as it did not follow the narrow definitions of
storytelling as displaying individual textual intentions. For example, Kael is sitting in the author’s chair telling his story:

Kael: There's a bad shark and then the shark (interrupted by teacher)

Teacher (to another child): Come over here.

Kael continues with his story: put him in the net.

(Teacher continues to address another child somewhat softly while Kael continues on telling his story.)

Kael: Cause, cause he wanna eat the fish. He wanna eat the fish but he got tape on his mouth.

Candice: Oh, he got tape on his mouth. He can’t bite no more.

Kael: (smiles in response to the comment): and then he got arms (interrupted by Zaire’s comment).

Zaire: Yeah, now he can’t eat the fish.

Teacher: Shh, listen to the story.

Me: Ok, listen to Kael.

Teacher: Sit down Zaire (who is on his knees next to Kael looking at the book).

Kael: He got arms. And then he broke his leg, he broke his leg.

(Zaire and Autumn are on their knees close to Kael looking at the pages on his book curiously. Kael is still holding the book on his lap and reading it so the other children cannot see it too well).

Kael: He broke his leg cause his leg is ‘bout to come off.

(Teacher instructs Zaire and Autumn to sit down.)

Although we don’t know what storytelling practices the children came into the classroom already knowing, it appears through these exchanges that the children have attempted to engage in storytelling through a more interactive modality. When only certain types of storytelling styles are allowed or engaged, other types of storytelling or purposes for storytelling are denied. In this setting, children that come into school with a repertoire of textual storytelling (dyadic parent-child book reading common in white middle class homes) are at an advantage over children who might come to school with different storytelling routines within their family and community practices, such as interactive participatory storytelling styles.
To summarize, literacy here is conceptualized as a universal phenomenon, as a “single Literacy that is the same everywhere” (Street & Street, 1991) without taking into consideration that literacy exists outside of school and is specific to social and cultural contexts within communities. Particular societal and educational discourses often have underlying institutional power structures that facilitate this discourse and their accompanying assumptions regarding literacy learning. The privileging of “scientific research” for exclusively influencing public policy on “what works” in early educational contexts (NELP, 2008) illustrates how institutional power can perpetuate these hegemonic definitions of literacy that often inform the classroom and research practices (Janks, 2010). Although “there are different literacies associated with different domains of life” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; p. 11), specific research methodologies, pedagogical practices and institutional constructs of literacy perpetuate the notion of one universal literacy which also treats children as a homogenous group of learners, or at least implies that they should be.

**Demonstrating development through participation.** Through a cultural-historical lens, development is displayed in this setting as the children learn the norms and expectations of this community’s writing and storytelling practices. The children demonstrated that they were becoming more full participants (as opposed to peripheral participants) (Lave and Wenger, 1991) by adhering to and displaying the valued literacy practices of this community.

In the intervention study, writing development was exclusively measured through a writing forms scale (Sulzby et al, 1989). Through a cultural-historical analysis we can see that writing development was more complexly displayed through children’s change in participation over time (Rogoff, 2003). As the children began to internalize the expectations of what counts as writing in this setting, they more independently demonstrated development by engaging in valued behaviors such as writing their name on the front of their book before starting, ascribing to book conventions when writing (writing on all the pages, front to back), and asking for help to put print on their pages. For example, children sought out praise or acknowledgement that they were successful in valued forms of writing, by calling out comments such as:
“Look, I wrote a ‘A’!” or “Miss Rochelle! I write my name!” They further demonstrated that they understood the valued practices of this community when some children took on the roles of the adults by enforcing the normative expectations onto each other. For example, children often corrected each other when they weren’t writing their name in the right place or implementing the correct “forms” in their books, as illustrated in the following exchange between the children in the classroom:

Candice:  Open your book.

Others: No, you supposed to write your name.

Zaire:  On the back.

Ta’Niyah: Nu-uh, you ‘posed to write it on the front.

Amani:  I’m done with my name (slowly turns to the first page).

Ta’Niyah: Let me see.

Amani: Why you writin’ your name little?

Within the study design, development in storytelling was measured through story grammar elements and an increase in spoken language measures such as c-units, mean length of utterance, total number of words and total number of different words. Development, however, was further being demonstrated as the children’s participation in storytelling changed when they began to internalize the norms and expectations of this practice. For example, some children demonstrated more “full” participation as they were able to tell their stories from their books with minimal adult questioning or when they incorporated expected characters, settings, or events in their tellings. The results of the intervention study showed statistically significant gains in the narrative macrostructure characteristics from pre- to post-intervention. However, these results may not necessarily tell us that the children produced “better” narratives, but that they were able to learn what was defined as storytelling in this setting. As the children learned and displayed these valued storytelling practices they shifted their identities from “peripheral” to “full” participants within this community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003).
Within this framework of development as a process of transformation through participation over time, the emphasis is not only on how the individual changes through involvement in an activity or practice, but also on how the process, through the participation of the members of the community of practice, changes or develops the specific practices of that community. As this writing process progressed, some children began resisting putting writing forms in their books aside from the name on their covers. As Rochelle and I saw the children demonstrating more storytelling from the drawings as text in their books, along with their sometimes overt resistance to putting accompanying writing forms in their books, we began to consider that drawing and storytelling should hold more equal privilege with writing forms. Alas, (as documented through interviews between us) we still felt pressure through institutional definitions of writing as printed forms to continue to focus on children putting print in their books, but potentially in a more balanced manner. How the children participated in the writing of storybooks over the course of the intervention period began to influence how the writing process and some of its underlying normative expectations changed.

Understanding learning and development from a cultural-historical theoretical perspective involves more than measuring children’s performance of discrete skills at specific points of time. Learning is more complex than pre- and post-test measures constructed through quantitative research methodology. In this study it is illustrated that the adults apprenticed children into the normative expectations of the practice at hand, while the children internalized, interpreted, and engaged in the norms of these practices. But it is also important to observe how these children exerted their individual or collective agencies through resistance to specific aspects of the practices. Finally, critical to understanding learning and development through this framework, it is imperative to uncover how collectively these two processes of internalizing norms and resisting certain aspects might have contributed to the development of these classroom practices.

**Ideological Concepts Underlying What Counts**
According to Barton & Hamilton (1998), “literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (p.12). Three overarching themes that reflected broader social goals of schooling and other overarching societal constructs were under construction throughout the literacy practices established within this context. The goals of individuality, intentionality, and monomodal print constructs were pervasive throughout the design of the study, the process writing approach, and the classroom culture. My goal throughout this section is to explore these ideas further and investigate how these concepts are culturally constructed within the local goals of the classroom, as well as the process writing intervention design and do not always reflect the cultural backgrounds and resources of the children. The section serves to underline that these goals were not created in a vacuum within the classroom or research study; however, they are consistent with the larger Western values and cultural practices that support social constructs of individuality, intentionality, and print-centric literacies in today’s society (Dyson, 2010; Manyak, 2004; Street & Street, 1991).

**Individuality.** As the process writing procedures were being initiated, expectations of individuality and ownership were immediately set up by Rochelle at the beginning of each session in some variation as follows:

Rochelle: Can you tell me what you guys are doing?

Some child responses: Writing our own books.

Rochelle: You’re writing your own books. Who is the author?

Children: We are. Us.

Rochelle: I am (points to self).

(A few “I am”s by the children follow).

Rochelle: Yes, so who’s the illustrator?

Children: I am.
While the children were creating their books they were told that they could write about whatever topic they chose and could tell the story “in their own way”. The children were frequently coined “authors” and creators of their own stories. To be a book writer in this setting you came up with your own ideas and topics, you did your own work, you were the author and illustrator, and it was your book.

This notion of individuality and ownership is foundational to this “process writing” activity and was encouraged and enforced throughout the intervention contexts. In this setting writing was being established as children sat together in a group although they were expected work independently. The children were being socialized into the notion that composing in school is an individual act (Comber, 2003), even though these texts were rarely constructed independently; instead they were created as interactional events among the participants within the classroom community. There was an ongoing conflict and sometimes confusion between the social nature of the process writing and the ideals of individuality within this classroom.

Throughout the intervention, the children were allowed to talk to each other and talk about the work that they were creating (as long as they were “working”). The adults, however, strongly encouraged the children to take ownership of their text, come up with their own ideas for topics, and discouraged them from co-constructing topics and texts, which is further highlighted in this exchange as Rochelle dissuaded the sharing of ideas for topics at the beginning of this session:

Amani has just told Rochelle that he is making a story about a bee’s nest.

Ionna: I’m making a bee’s nest.

Rochelle: No, you’re doing your own story.

Rochelle (Now addressing the group):

You’re writing your own stories. Come up with your own ideas. Ta’Niyah, what is your story about?

Ta’Niyah: Uh, bees.

Rochelle: That’s not what your story is about. Tell me what your story is about. That’s what Amani’s story
is about. You have to use your own creative ideas.

The process writing design of the intervention, although a more authentic way to teach writing than other skills-directed approaches, still enacts the ideological assumptions of what it means to “do school”. It is still predominately teacher-directed, enforces specific routines and genres of writing, and constructs notions of authority, individuality, ownership and competition. For example, in this context, adults could contribute to texts with children in specific ways, such as asking leading questions about their stories that at times even changed the story ideas and directions of the children’s topics, but children were not allowed to contribute to each other’s work in the same fashion. Children could help each other with spelling of words or giving instructions as long as they were working in their own books, but if the children attempted to engage in any collaborative writing, they were told to stop and do their own work. For example, in the first month of the intervention, Autumn and Ionna are both “finished” writing their books and are at the same table waiting to tell Rochelle their story. Rochelle is currently listening to Kael tell his story. The girls are looking at Ionna’s book together, and then Ionna gets a marker and writes something in her book. They are sitting on their knees in their chairs laughing and talking about the text that continues to be under construction, and Ionna adds to her book with the spoken help of Autumn. Rochelle responds:

Um, girls, excuse me, I need you to sit down (they are in their chairs, just on their knees), I need you to put the markers back. You are finished. You are going to mess up the pages in your book. If you could just wait patiently and I’ll listen to your story. Can you listen with me? Sit down (Ionna is getting out of her chair). Kael is telling his story. Would you like to hear his story?

In this example, the girls are seen by Rochelle as playing or messing around. Adding to the book collectively was going to “mess it up” because it was already deemed “finished” by Rochelle. However, children were allowed to engage with each other as long as they were contributing only to their own books and were demonstrating “real work” with specific types of valued literacy. For example, in the last month of the intervention, Maya and Amani are sitting at the end of the table waiting for me so they can “tell me their
story”. They are initially having a conversation about their books, and then they get markers out and begin working in their books again:

Amani gets a marker from out of the bin: How do you spell, how do you spell…

(and he looks over to the wall).

Maya: Apple! A! A apple. (She begins to write something on the cover of her book.)

Amani: How do you spell “lion”? (He looks over at the alphabet chart on the wall.)

Maya: I wanna spell a apple.

Amani: I’m spelling “lion”. (Takes off the top of a marker and begins writing on his front cover.)

Maya: I’m spellin’ apple.

Amani: L.

Maya: (While looking in the same direction): A. (Writes something on her cover).

Amani: (Looks back at the chart and squints): I.

Maya: I’m done. A.

Amani: (Writes the letter “I” on his cover, returns to look at the chart, squints): O.

(He writes the letter).

Maya says something then flips her book over to the back and begins writing again.

Maya: I’m writing “ball”.

Amani (looks again at the chart, writes on book): N.

Amani: Miss Rochelle, I spelled “lion” (and he holds up his book for Rochelle to see).

Rochelle: Yes you did. All on your own. Good job.

Throughout this intervention, the children learned through their participation how they were and were not allowed to contribute to each other’s writing and stories. **You had to do your own work, and you had to be engaging in specific literacy work (which was often self-regulated writing for teacher approval). Everyone had to be doing the same work and there were specific behavioral expectations to adhere to while doing your work.** Although the exchange between Amani and Maya is evidence of the children
learning concepts of print, it also demonstrates more complex displays of learning and development. Amani, Maya and other children exhibited learning and development as they internalized the messages of what it means to do writing in this community. Amani and Maya demonstrated to us that they are developing a sense of individuality (by writing in their own books), developing and incorporating specific routines (writing is putting print in your book), and developing expected roles, both as a student and as a peer.

As the intervention progressed through the months, it would seem that the children would have fully embraced this notion of individuality and ownership when it came to creating their stories. However, as the months passed, the children began constructing more stories that shared similar topics and ideas. They learned that if their topics were different at the beginning of their stories, they could subsequently begin to borrow the content of other’s stories and weave them into their own. Once the story topic was initially established and received implicit or explicit approval by me or Rochelle, the borrowing of ideas was rarely questioned. For example, in the beginning of an intervention session four children are sharing their topic ideas as they start working in their books. Kael is working on a story about the police; Ta’Niyah is beginning a story about pizza; Ionna has written the title “Pretty Princess” on the cover of her book with my help; and Zaire has not yet established his topic. Within five minutes of the session beginning, these children quickly begin incorporating components of each other’s stories into their own.

Kael: And then he got locked up in a police cage. In a dog cage.

Me: In a dog cage? Oh my goodness.

Kael: And then he got bit up.

Me: Alright, let me talk to um, let me see what Ta’Niyah’s working on and I’ll come back to you. Can you finish your story Kael?

Me (to Ta’Niyah): Oh is that a dog too? Is your dog in a cage too just like Kael?

Ionna: Miss Amy I made my dog, my dog was in her cage locked out with my grand-daddy. My doggie was
named Amy. Was eatin’ my grand-daddy.

Me: Was eating your grand-daddy so he had to lock him in a cage?

Zaire: And my dog was nice.

Although this talk is acceptable within this intervention context, it is viewed as a stepping stone or extraneous activity instead of an important part of the writing process. The story construction displayed by these children is not on the page or in the head but developed through the interaction between them.

Dyson (2003, 2008, & 2010) reminds us of the importance of this “improvisational collaboration” (Dyson, 2010, p. 22) as it provides a dialogic space for children to develop collegiality, engage in social affiliation and enact this complex mode of participation. Within the above vignette, children have demonstrated development as they have transformed the idea of writing as an individual on the page to a task involving complex social participation within the writing activity. Unfortunately, as writing becomes further shaped in schooling, as a textual and independent activity, this type of collaborative authorship has potential to disappear. Furthermore, when writing and storytelling are evaluated by specific individual measures outside of the context in which they were created, such as in the intervention study, we miss out on how this type of collaborative activity contributes to becoming a writer in this dialogic space that holds social value to these children.

**Intentionality.** Being a writer in this context meant that the marks that a child puts on a page have linguistic meaning as children were frequently asked to assign meaning to almost all marks that they put on a page. Questions such as “What does that say?” and “What did you write?” were frequently posed with the assumption that the children had predetermined intentions before putting anything on the page.

Intentionality is often assumed as a “natural” activity, something that is inherent in all humans, but the reality is that children learn how to have specific textual intentions through the local goals and values of the literacy practices in which they participate. This is illustrated during the beginning stages of the intervention period as some of the children seemed uncertain of the interpretation of their marks and at times appeared
to be guessing or making it up as the questions were asked. For example, here is an exchange between Candice and I as we are discussing her page (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. The last page of Candice’s book on 1/26.](image)

Me: Look you wrote some stuff on this page. On the last page. Can you tell me what you wrote here?
What did you write about?
Candice: Um.
Me: Right here. Candice, tell me what you wrote about.
Candice: I wrote this, this, all this (showing me exactly what is on her page, what she wrote).
Me: You wrote all this? What's all this say? Look at what you wrote and what you drew and tell Amy what it says.
Candice: Oh I wrote house and stuff on it. Um it called say um it called this, this, all this.

It becomes apparent during this exchange that Candice is not sure what she wrote, at least as it applies to what is valued as intentional text production in this literacy practice. She wrote “letters or words” on her page as requested during her book writing, but she has not yet learned that she is expected to display her knowledge that she had intended those marks to have meaning beyond the letters and shapes that she created or, further, that explaining marks to a teacher is the goal of literacy. This concept of
intentionality was also assumed during storytelling. As children began creating their books, Rochelle and I immediately began asking questions about their storytelling topics and intentions. The questioning often began with “What is your story going to be about?” or “What’s happening in your story?”. These types of questions were posed to the children as if they knew before they started creating their books what the topic and story ideas were going to be. It was implied that the children’s stories were already pre-formulated “in the head” and that they just needed to be “put in print”. These expectations of intentionality were also carried over into the drawings of the children (similar to their writing as explored above) with questions directed toward the children such as “tell me what this is” and “What’s happening here?”

Children were expected to assign certain intentions to their writing and drawings for them to count within this context, which was specific to interpreting them into a linguistic message. For example, in the same session Ionna and Ta’Niyah both write large lines across their pages (see Figure 2 and 3) as they sit at the same table (Zaire was also writing the same lines); however, Ionna knows to quickly ascribe meaning to her “drawing” that will denote her “lines” as being intentional symbolic marks (and after this exchange incorporates her dog into her drawing).

*Figure 2.* Ionna draws lines on 4/26.
Unfortunately, Ta’Niyah is not as quick to figure out how to interpret her drawing so that it meets the expectations of writing in a storybook format in this setting:

Ta’Niyah: Miss Rochelle! (She holds up her book to display her drawing/writing).

Rochelle: What is that?

Ta’Niyah: Lines.

Rochelle: Why would you do that when you supposed to be writing a story, drawing pictures, so I don’t even understand why that’s on there.

(Rochelle talks to some other children and then comes back to Ta’Niyah.)

Rochelle: What are the lines for? Are the lines saying anything? Tell me about your lines. (Ta’Niyah is pointing to a line and going back and forth with her finger, not looking up and begins flipping a page back and forth.)

Rochelle: Tell me about your lines.

Ta’Niyah: I made it some more lines purple.

Rochelle: What does the lines mean?

Ta’Niyah (doesn’t look up and quietly says): A fish.

Figure 3. Ta’Niyah draws lines on 4/26.
Rochelle: Ok, that’s good. Where is the fish going?

To be able to finish the task, to meet the minimal requirements of Rochelle, Ta’Niyah’s writing had to have textual intentions. She had to take on specific roles of what it meant to be a writer in this context to get teacher approval so that she could finish the task and move on to playing. Power in this community is given to those with possible prior experience, those who may already have specific cultural repertoires of participating in valued ways of writing, in this case having pre-conceived textual intentions regarding the marks on your page. But this position of storyteller with individual intentions is not typical for all writing and storytelling across cultural contexts.

“Adults have a strong hand in controlling access to resources, task structures, and rights to participate. ‘What does this say?’ is not a neutral request for information. Instead, it locates children within the power structure of their classroom and envisions them as participants in a curricular (and societal) economy where certain kinds of writing and reading are valued.” (Rowe, 2010)

As we can see in the exchanges above, intentionality is a learned concept and all intentions are not similarly valued. The children in this intervention setting were expected to create textual intentions of their markings, in this case “lines”, with some linguistic reference to their underlying intentional symbolic meaning beyond the assumed less mature act of simply “making lines”. But what is not considered within this exchange is what Ta’Niyah’s intentions might have truly been when she produced the lines on her page. Consider the exchange between Ta’Niyah and Zaire (figure 4) as she was creating the lines in her book:

Ta’Niyah: Now I make this Zaire.

Zaire: How you do that?

(Ta’Niyah is making lines on her page from the top to the bottom while holding onto the marker with two hands.)
Zaire: How you do that Ta’Niyah? (She doesn’t respond and continues to focus on making her lines.)
Zaire: Ta’Niyah, how you do that? (He turns his book to a new page.)
Ta’Niyah continues to draw her lines and says something but is difficult to understand.
Ta’Niyah: No Zaire, just don’t do it! (She has noticed that Rochelle is no longer engaged in a conversation with another child and looks around to see if Rochelle is watching them. She may be worried that Rochelle will see her and Zaire “copying” each other.)
Zaire: Do what?
(When Rochelle begins talking to another child, Ta’Niyah stands up and finger draws lines on his page. Zaire then draws lines on his page as was demonstrated by Ta’Niyah.) (See Figure 3).

Although we may not know exactly what Ta’Niyah’s intentions were when she drew lines in her books, we can conclude that her lines had intentions that should not be interpreted only as an immature form of drawing or writing. If we extend Prakash & Waks’ (1985) conceptions of education to her line writing, we could view her semiotic intentions as a personal attempt to explore writing through her own creative means. Or if we look to Dyson (2010) and watch how Ta”Niyah is engaging Zaire in the
collaboration of line drawing we can see that her intentions may be socially created for affiliation or even friendship in the co-creation of their texts. When these personal or social intentions are not rewarded, the children are being enculturated into exclusively producing specific individual textual intentions with linguistic interpretations that are in line with who this intervention, this researcher, this teacher, this Head Start program, and the society at large envision these children to be.

**From multimodal to monomodal.** In the role of educators in the classroom setting, we make assumptions that we know what is best for children. Often framed by the cultural discourses of mainstream society, our classroom work seems straightforward. We are to give children the tools that allow them success in life. Arguably the most valuable of these tools is literacy. The discourse continues to seem equally straightforward that our ultimate goal for children is the attainment of specific literacy “skills” that are exclusively textual in nature (such as alphabet knowledge, name writing, letter forming, book conventions, etc.). Many young children, however, use varying semiotic systems that extend beyond the boundaries of print-centered text, including talk, gestures, drawing, singing, and dramatic play in their early reading and writing experiences (for example, Arthur 2001; Dyson, 2003; Lysaker et al., 2010; Wohlwend, 2011). The children in this setting were no exception. For example, in the second day of the intervention, Anthony demonstrates that he has had prior experiences with storytelling as he engaged in dynamic narratives while he was creating his book. His book was about the “Cat in the Hat” as he related much of his story to the TV show that he indicated is “on his TV but it is taped”. Anthony engaged in multimodal ways of being a storytelling which went beyond putting his story on paper. He used hand gestures and different voice volumes. He frequently requested listeners to hear his story, incorporated songs into his story (Wheels on the Bus, Happy Birthday to You) and borrowed from media sources (Cat in the Hat show). His story was engaging, and many children commented and expanded on it while he was creating and telling it.
Unfortunately this initial display of producing an engaging story was not always valued as it did not always fit into the pre-established and defined ways of being a writer and a storyteller in this intervention context. Anthony was only three and was not yet able to establish himself as a successful writer and a storyteller in this setting. He was not producing decipherable letter forms beyond the first letter “A” in his name. His drawings were typically varying forms of circles. His storytelling was typically not reflected in textual productions. His behavior during the tasks was frequently redirected (i.e., he was often instructed to sit down, wait his turn, etc.). Despite these seeming deterrents, Anthony was eager to seek out approval from the adults in the class and he made frequent attempts to transform his writing and storytelling to fit the normative expectations of this intervention, while at the same time using his text for varying purposes. For example, he uses his book as a text to gain and maintain attention with adults (“Miss Amy! Miss Amy! The Cat in the Hat slams the door!”). He chooses topics that his peer group might value or comment on more than the adults (motorcycles, police, blood) and includes other classroom children in his stories (“That’s you Dashawn!”) for camaraderie with his peers. He observes what is valued by adults in terms of other children’s behavior and attempts to include specific writing forms in his books to further gain attention from the adults (“Miss Amy come here! I write some numbers.”). His end goal was not to create a finished textual product; instead, he used this text “as a mediator of his social agenda” (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; p.987). Therefore, when it came time to “evaluate” Anthony’s individual performances on pre- and post-intervention measures, he was not evaluated as a child that had made gains in any particular quantifiable skills within the limiting definitions of literacy during this six month period. However, the data acquired during this qualitative analysis provided a different story. Anthony demonstrated that he knows multiple symbols to convey meanings, he is aware of the social uses of literacy, and he exhibits a certain “literate flexibility” as he is able to adapt to the varying uses of literacy across contexts. Although the more open-ended process writing activity being proposed through the intervention in and of itself was not overly constricting, the institutional ideology of classroom practice that limits what counts as literacy through
reductive assessments and measurements of literacy learning becomes problematic in the evaluation of the development of literacy learning.

Children are motivated more by the availability and appropriateness of semiotic materials for delivering their message rather than adhering to print-centric conventions (Kress, 2003). In contrast to looking at children’s accompanying semiotics as less mature and more child-like or simply a step toward more dominant forms of writing, it would be useful to view this multimodality in young children’s writing through more expansive definitions of composing. When the literacy practices of children are reduced to school tasks and conceptions of literacy, we might miss out on the richness of literacy practices engaged in beyond schooling (Orellana & D’warte, 2010) that use multiple sign systems. There has been an increase in research investigating how incorporating a repertoire of semiotic practices, instead of being dependent on print-only textual representations, might be advantageous for the increasing demands of multimodal textual experiences in 21-st century literacies and technologies (Orellana & D’warte, 2010; Rowe, 2013).

The research in this area focuses on the strengths and benefits of the use of these multimodal ways of early writing when they are valued as additive to the literacy repertoire, as opposed to more monomodal views of print-centered conventional literacy that exclusively focus on “the basics” (Flewitt, 2013; Kress, 2013; Rowe, 2013).

Multimodality is furthered explored through ideas of hybridity and “third space” (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995) which incorporate the child’s capacity to use cultural resources of their unofficial worlds to intersect with the official practices of the classroom to create this third space (Wohlwend, 2008). According to Gutiérrez (2008), it is this alternative and transformative space, where conflicts of official and unofficial practices provide a variety of interconnections which allows learners a new form of participation that is inclusive of all children. This new form of participation has the potential for more dynamically influencing learning and development.
DISCUSSION

During this analysis, I am in no way trying to find fault with Rochelle or myself or the use of an open-ended process writing approach as a way to engage young writers. My focus was dedicated to uncovering the ideological underpinnings that implicitly define many of the educational approaches with young diverse learners and to specifically unpack the assumptions that underlie my intervention design aimed at providing supposed “disadvantaged” children with assumed necessary literacy precursory tools for later academic success. Throughout the study, Rochelle communicated her overwhelming sense of responsibility to provide the children in her classroom the necessary foundations for later reading and writing and her worries that she will “fail” them and their families if she does not. Her intentions are honorable; she takes her work seriously and provides a nurturing and loving classroom for the children in it. Although I sometimes had potentially more constructivist and slightly less skills-based ideas of what was acceptable for young children to do in the name of literacy than Rochelle, I came into this intervention context with narrow views of literacy, certain deficit ways of thinking about children from poverty backgrounds, and assumptions about how early language and literacy development could and should be measured. We both embarked on this early literacy intervention with slightly differing frameworks, but as noted earlier, we both ascribed to the ideologies that are influenced by larger institutional structures that view specific students and value specific literacies in specific ways.

I am also not implying that children do not need to have access to school language and literacy practices that might be different from their home and community literacy practices. I aimed, however, to illustrate that the tools currently incorporated in quantitative intervention designs and other pedagogical strategies targeting children of poverty may not be the best tools available to give children the abilities to effectively navigate the complex literacy landscape of and between in- and out-of-school literacies. Furthermore, I aimed to illustrate that when we as researchers frame our research methodology differently,
using more expansive definitions of learning and development, we can transform our former deficit ideas of diversity to realizations of linguistic, social and cultural resources.

An overarching dilemma is couched within the framework of Head Start and the premises from which compensatory programming was founded. These premises conceive children from diverse backgrounds (primarily concerned with poverty, race and language use) as being disadvantaged due to their homes that lack specific language and literacy practices. This deficit thinking is supported by overarching discourses of “risk” that are pervasive throughout our educational system and manifested through policies of standardization, “scientific based research”, and an ideology of “universal” literacy learning and development. This deficit framework entices some researchers to adopt a “fix-it” mentality through intervention designs in which the end goal is to find the “one best way” for diverse children to acquire the literacy practices that white, middle-class students already possess.

There are further overarching dilemmas with using this methodology of research. First, intervention designs often target specific groups of children that are labeled “at risk” for later reading and writing success. By focusing on what the children are allegedly lacking, this body of research rarely considers what children bring to literacy from their home and community practices. If home literacy practices are considered, it is usually to compare how well they do or do not measure up to the home literacy practices of white, middle class families. Another overarching dilemma is within the data collection and measurement methods that are employed. Many of these studies collect pre- and post-intervention scores of individual school-based literacy measures to evaluate whether the child made gains through the intervention design. This methodology is dependent on the notion that literacy is a neutral task comprised of a discrete set of linear and hierarchical skills to be learned and displayed through specific pedagogical techniques. These quantitative measures limit what can be assessed about the children’s early literacy development processes or the social relevance of literacy. For example, a writing forms score, measurements of number of C-units, or calculations of total number words does not consider the varying
ways that Anthony used his text as a tool to navigate his social agenda in the classroom or his ability to incorporate multiple modalities that extend beyond the text to communicate his dynamic story to his audience.

Orellana & D’warte (2010) question the exclusive use of school-based definitions of literacy to define literacy success and call for a more in-depth framework that considers and values the cultural and linguistic resources that diverse children bring to early literacy environments:

What other kinds of “head starts” might be made visible if we expanded beyond such a narrow notion of “conventional” literacy skills? Whose talents go unseen when we measure children from nondominant groups on dominant-cultural yardsticks, and what are the implications for those children’s developmental pathways? What skills are being lost because we are not nurturing them? (p.297).

Other researchers have constructed different views and approaches to literacy learning and development that resist definitions of literacy as a universal phenomenon and consider varying pathways to development. Dyson (2003) encourages us to develop a “permeable curriculum” in which children can bring in their out-of-school cultural resources, including home and community literacies as well as media and pop culture influences (video games, television shows, music, dramatic play, etc.). Gutiérrez et al. (2009) suggest the concept of “re-mediation” which changes the deficit dialogue from a framework of “fixing” nondominant students’ alleged pathologies to one that focuses on expanding children’s literacy repertoires. Souto-Manning (2010) uses this concept of “re-mediation” to develop a Head Start classroom curriculum informed by both home and school literacy practices that challenges “ethnocentric definitions of literacy” to make early learning experiences meaningful to all children. Paris (2012) proposes the adoption of a “culturally sustaining pedagogy” in which the emphasis is on both sustaining the cultural and linguistic repertoires of the children’s families and communities as well as giving them access to the language and literacy practices of the dominant culture.
CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of viewing literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) in which literacy learning and development is influenced by the local goals and values of a community of practice that are influenced by larger institutional structures. In this study I have detailed the literacy practices that were present within this community, what counts (or does not count) as literacy development in this context, and how development is demonstrated through participation within this intervention setting. Overall, this study offers ways that a cultural-historical analysis can assist researchers in expanding definitions of early literacy learning and development. It further emphasizes the importance of educators and researchers to recognize the cultural resources that children come to school possessing. Finally, this study challenges the assumptions behind many intervention studies that frame diverse children as deficient, propose a universal concept of literacy, and rely on limited definitions of early literacy development.

By expanding both our definitions of early literacy development and our research methodologies for understanding the nature of this development, we can see “how our vision of children changes with our theoretical tools, methodological decisions and responses to the ideologies of politics of education” (Dyson, 2010; p. 9). Social, political and education discourses are largely responsible for both instituting and upholding these ideologies about who is “at-risk”, what counts as literacy learning and development, and what should be deemed scientific research. It is our responsibility as researchers and educators to challenge these discourses and provide ample evidence to refute them. When our pedagogical practices and research methodologies are allowed to expand and develop along with our children, we further allow these children to demonstrate to us the cultural resources that they come to school knowing, which afford further opportunities to contribute to and extend their school-based learning.
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CHAPTER IV

DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

The two studies investigated in this dissertation explore two distinct frameworks that exist in the field of early literacy research today. The first study, a quantitative intervention design, explores a classroom-based approach to early writing. Intervention research is frequently engaged in to determine pedagogical techniques that are conducive to early literacy learning that will facilitate the acquisition of specific skills for later literacy learning. Experimental and quasi-experimental intervention designs hold privilege in reports such as the National Academy of Education report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns & Griffith, 1998), National Reading Panel (NRP) (NICHD, 2000), National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) and other research syntheses as this research is deemed “scientific” and “evidence-based”. Since the induction of compensatory education (such as Head Start), policies, programs and curriculum initiatives have relied on this model of intervention design to serve young children from diverse backgrounds, often with an end goal of determining “what works”. This research that employs experimental intervention designs in early literacy research is often conducted in efforts to eradicate the disadvantages that young diverse children would otherwise come to school possessing.

The purpose of the design of the first study reflected these goals. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of a process approach to early writing in a Head Start classroom for promoting language and literacy skills specific to early writing development, as well as spoken macrostructure and microstructure narrative performance. The following research questions were explored:

1.) Is there a difference between the pre and post intervention writing represented in the books the children created through a process approach to writing as measured by the Writing Forms scale (Sulzby, Barnhart, & Hieshima, 1989)?

2.) Is there a difference between the pre- and post-intervention macrostructure elements represented in the stories the children created and narrated through a process approach to writing
as measured by using The Index of Narrative Complexity (INC) (Petersen, Gillam & Gillam, 2008)?

3.) Is there a difference between the pre- and post-intervention microstructure elements represented in the stories children created and narrated through a process approach to writing as measured by language analysis using Systematic Analysis of Language Transcription computer software (Miller & Iglesias, 2008)?

Alternatively, the second study developed in this dissertation uses a subsequent qualitative, cultural-historical analysis (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), which falls under the overarching sociocultural framework, of examining alternative ideas of literacy learning and development and understanding the ideological underpinnings of the intervention design. Through this theory, literacy learning is examined as situated within the setting in which it is produced and in relationship to the values and goals that exist within the particular community of practice (Street, 1995; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Gee, 2002). Through a sociocultural framework, researchers posit that classrooms are comprised of multiple communities with varying resources that come together to create their own community of practice. Within this classroom, certain types of repertoires for acting, talking, and learning are established where children, as peripheral participants in this official classroom culture, begin to develop understandings of specific literacy practices, what their roles are as literacy learners and what counts as literacy within a certain community of practice (Rowe, Fitch, and Bass, 2001).

The purpose of my second study reflected these goals. The purpose was to re-examine the initial quasi-experimental intervention study of early writing with a Head Start classroom through a subsequent qualitative case study design analyzing literacy events and practices. Through this case study examination I intended to provide researchers and educators further understanding of how experimental, intervention research designs in early literacy can often unknowingly serve to constrain the learning of young children and continue to perpetuate deficit views of diverse learners. Furthermore I aimed to illustrate that when we as researchers frame our research methodology differently, using more expansive definitions of learning
and development, we can transform our former deficit ideas of diversity to realizations of linguistic, social
and cultural resources. The following research questions were explored:

1. What are the literacy practices in which this community of practice engages in within the context of
the newly constructed intervention design?
2. What counts as literacy development within this community of practice?
3. How was development demonstrated through participation within this community of practice?

Contrasting and Conflicting Theories

These two frameworks for studying literacy learning and development arise from contrasting and
often conflicting theories. First, the intervention study is based on principles of cognitive theories of
development that are interested in exploring the mental processes that are used to generate meaning
through and from print (Kucer, 2009). Cognitive research goals are to gain a fuller understanding of the
active role of the individual in meaning making and of the critical differences in the strategies used by
proficient and less proficient readers and writers. The methodologies involved in these studies generally
focus on the performance of literacy skills under controlled experimental conditions. Alternatively, the
qualitative case study analysis of the second study is based on principles of sociocultural theories of
learning and development. According to Kucer (2009), sociocultural researchers view acts of literacy as
expressions of group identity that signal power relationships. These researchers are interested in
determining the ways in which literacy is defined and used as social practices by various communities. The
methodologies of these studies usually involve literacy events (which are drawn from the literacy practices
of a community) as the unit of analysis, using qualitative research design, most often reflected in the form
of ethnographic studies.

There are a multitude of controversies that arise in the contrastive nature of these two frameworks
of studying early literacy, many of which can be gleaned by the differing approaches in methodology,
purpose and research questions outlined above. First, there is the definition of literacy. According to Street
(1995), the cognitive view of literacy relies on an “autonomous” model of literacy that sees literacy as cognitive skills that are unidirectional in nature while a sociocultural view of literacy relies on an “ideological” model that conceptualizes literacy practices as “inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society” (Street, p. 161). The definition of learning and development is often contested between these two frameworks. From an intervention design and cognitive theory perspective, development is defined as individual maturation in which a chronological sequence of internal events is achieved through particular pedagogical techniques. From a sociocultural perspective, development is defined as the changes that children go through as they participate in various sociocultural activities within their communities (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, learning and development can only be understood in the context of a specific community’s social and cultural-historical practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003). In sum, cognitive theorists place emphasis on the individual, developmental maturation, and an “in the head” approach to defining development and learning; cultural-historical theorists place the emphasis on how children develop and learn with others as part of a community.

There are also different ideas between the two fields of study in what constitutes “empirical” or “scientific” research and what methodology should hold privilege in literacy research. Cognitive theorists often hold to the belief that “experimental methods, while not being the only ones that we can learn from, are the only research methods that allow for this unambiguous attribution of causation because of their manipulation of an independent variable under well-described conditions” (Shanahan, 2005; p. 14; author’s original emphasis). Sociocultural theorists on the other hand, view quantitative research as methodology that takes learning and practice out of context (Hillocks, 2005). They generally employ qualitative, ethnographic techniques of inquiry with literacy events as the unit of analysis to investigate the literacy practices of a particular cultural community. The sociocultural researcher is documenting and analyzing how children participate in particular literacy practices “to the extent that they identify themselves with the values, beliefs, goals and activities of those who engage in those practices” (Ivanic, 2004; p. 235).
According to Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener (2004), “The social perspective has no use for skills at all and disdains empirical research on learning. The cognitive proponents are determined to rely solely on their experimental studies, conducted necessarily within narrow and controlled conditions, and to insist on the teaching of those skills they ‘know’ will ‘work’ for all learners” (p.72).

A final conflict to note is how these two different methodologies view diverse learners and their families. In the search for effective instructional practices that will solve the problems of school-based literacy learning, intervention studies investigating approaches with young diverse children are frequently framed within a deficit paradigm. This deficit approach is incorporated as researchers propose a “fix-it” model for children by developing instructional interventions that will repair what has been broken by their disadvantaged backgrounds (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004).

Alternatively, a sociocultural model investigates the language and literacy practices that are valued in families and community contexts that may or may not be valued in the school setting (Cushman, E., Barbier, S., Mazak, C., & Petrone, 2006). From this perspective, children develop and learn literacy in respect to the ways in which their parents need and use literacy (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983). Furthermore, sociocultural researchers claim that all children are ready to learn upon school entry; however, some children bring to school experiences with literacy and practices for learning that are different from the ones that hold value in school (Orellana & D’warte, 2010).

There are strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, many which have already been touched upon. Overarching critiques of the cognitive approach to early literacy learning is that this methodology is dependent on the notion that literacy is comprised of learning and displaying a discrete set of linear and hierarchical skills. Even if the instructional strategy proposed by the intervention itself is not focused on teaching decontextualized skills, evaluative measures force researchers to break down reading and writing into isolated skills that will allow for comparisons within the groups. These measurements are then evaluated against normative data of predefined concepts of literacy development (that generally reflect the
culture of white, middle-class children) to determine the influences of this intervention on these same
definitions of literacy growth and development. Again, this limits the definition of development to individual,
linear, and hierarchical constructs, and assumes that the normative data used to measure development in
this way is representative of the development displayed by all children (Heath, 1983; Rogoff, 2003;
Smagorinsky, 2011).

Overarching critiques of sociocultural research is that its methodology is limited in what it can do to
inform public policy and shape education practices since it is not designed to study what works in
incongruences is not enough to help teachers provide those students with the skills they need to reach
whatever literacy goals they have” (p. 80). The strengths and weaknesses of both frameworks are
evidenced through this dissertation that reflects the larger ideologies of the theoretical frameworks that
underpin each of the studies.

**Merging Methods and Theories**

But how could these studies inform each other if their methodology and findings were combined? How could we as literacy researchers benefit from research that explores contrasting theory and
methodology? What would be the advantages of considering both experimental designs by looking at
school-based measures of learning and at the same time providing a qualitative analysis of the potential
limitations and strengths of that particular pedagogical approach as it is pursued within a specific
community of practice?

Mixed method studies have begun to emerge with greater frequency in the last decade in the field
of literacy as a whole (Danzak, 2011; Dray & Selman, 2011; Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo,
2011) and more specifically to early literacy (Bradley & Reinking, 2011; Culatta, Kovarsky, Theoradore,
Franklin, & Timler, 2003; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Stahl, Keane, & Simic, 2012). In an Educational
Resources Information Center (ERIC, a digital library of education research) search, however, I was unable
to find any mixed method research on early writing and furthermore, any mixed method research that incorporated mixed theory as part of the mixed method design in early literacy research. Attempting to fill this gap in mixed method and mixed theory in early writing and early literacy research as a whole might enable us to better understand both theoretical frameworks and advance our knowledge in the interplays of cognitive and sociocultural development. Cognition cannot occur without social and cultural influences and social and cultural development could not occur without cognition. Recently, the editors of Reading Research Quarterly ("the most prestigious reading journal in the field" p.5), Neuman and Gambrell (2013), emphasized in an editorial that "no one methodology could possibly address all the critical issues in the field of reading and literacy" (p. 6).

Other researchers have also expressed these thoughts and explored this idea further in discussion formats and opinion pieces on future directions for literacy researchers. Stone (2004), a developmental psychologist, refutes the notion of an “either or” perspective on literacy learning and proposes an integration of the cognitive and sociocultural perspectives in a “cross-framework” model to gain more knowledge and perspective on educational methods. He does, however, approach this concept of merging these two frameworks with trepidation, as he indicates that they might be somewhat incompatible with their differing underlying principles. Later, Stone (2007) continues his push for this cross-framework methodology as he recommends “cross-fertilization” among the disciplines, proposing university initiatives. He gives three possible strategies in accomplishing this: 1.) research collaborations, 2.) doctoral training initiatives and 3.) public relations efforts. He even suggests challenging a research team to examine the same set of data using multiple lenses, which is what I have attempted through this dissertation. Moje (2009), a predominantly sociocultural researcher in the area of literacy also suggests that incorporating a combination of experimental and qualitative analyses might provide more insight into the changes that occur when people’s literacy practices are changing. She is also quick, however, to say that “experimental studies should never be conducted absent qualitative analyses of what happened in the experimental
treatments” (p.335). Purcell-Gates et al (2004) proposed such a merger to include an expanded view of the cultural and social practices of which a community engages by developing research that employs experimental designs to investigate the effectiveness of early literacy curricula centered on purposeful engagement with literacy. Hollich, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff (2000) sum up this view by stating: “just as a one-legged table is inherently unstable, scientific explanations of complex processes that force either/or decisions are not as powerful as those that embrace differing perspectives” (p.14).

The rationale for the proposed merging of methodologies and perspectives in the research that was conducted and analyzed for this dissertation is multifaceted and can be further extended to the merging of perspective in the field of early literacy as a whole. If public policy and federal funding are going to dictate and mandate experimental and quasi-experimental research in the area of early literacy (NCLB, 2001; NELP, 2008) as the only research capable of contributing to implications for early education classroom practices, it is important to include experimental design, but conduct this type of research with an added sociocultural lens. Providing concurrent qualitative methodology and sociocultural analysis in an experimental design may allow us to further examine how pedagogies and research practices either enhance or constrain learning and development with diverse learners. By adding a sociocultural perspective to intervention research studies, there is potential to develop intervention studies that become more culturally sensitive and promote a more expanded approach to diverse learning in classrooms. I believe this methodology of merging design and perspective has great potential to provide a unique, complimentary analysis that neither framework could provide if explored on its own.

Challenges and Choices

What would be the challenges? Researchers are generally only trained in one research methodology. It is asking a lot of a researcher to let go of ideological concepts and methodological tools of a framework that has served to form her or his professional identify. Even as a beginning researcher, for me personally, it has been a challenge to remain unbiased against or vehemently committed to one side or
the other. It has been a struggle to fluctuate between two distinctly different points of view and strike a balance. The balancing has been the hardest part, as the fields almost dictate that you choose. Straddling the fence may be seen as a weakness, as a failure to commit, or even as a form of treason. The writing itself also poses a challenge. There are certain words that are acceptable in a qualitatively designed study that are often deemed “unscientific” in a report of an experimentally designed study. In one methodology first person is the norm, in another it’s the exception. There are certain ways of “being and doing” that are crucial to being seen as a central participant in the sociocultural research community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). I’m not quite there yet, and I haven’t even attempted to merge these two perspectives. I have written using only one or the other methodological tools and its corresponding theories in two separate papers, and the challenges have been abundant.

The reality is that the convergence of these two perspectives would be difficult to do well. It would be challenging to go back and forth between theoretical frameworks within the same paper. Even with all the obstacles, it presents a worthy challenge. I believe the potential benefits outweigh the challenges. Do we as a field of early literacy researchers continue on our disconnected paths of pursuing alleged novel research questions that inevitably are posing and answering the same queries to the same audience? Or do we somehow try to break free from these monomodal ways of literacy research to incorporate a multimodal means leading to a more expanded and united research methodology? Doesn’t this approach seem like a more efficient and effective route to what our collective ultimate goals truly are: to give all children equal chances of having a successful educational experience to better prepare them for the demands of the future? It is proposed that there is not “one best way” to literacy learning. Don’t we also have to acknowledge that there cannot be “one best way” to literacy research? When we as researchers attempt to frame our research methodology differently, using more expansive definitions of literacy research, we can begin to transform our former deficit ideas of the “other literacy researcher” to realizations of their theoretical, methodological, and professional cultural resources.
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