THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE TALK DURING WRITING EVENTS IN A

FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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THE IMPACT OF COLLABORATIVE TALK DURING WRITING EVENTS IN A

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Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study research was to investigate the oral language of early language learners as they participate in "collaborative talk" experiences (Wells & Wells, 1996) during journal writing experiences in a first grade classroom. Specifically, this study analyzed the conversations of young learners, with particular attention given to the questions they pose and answer as they use oral language during the composition process. Participants included three students whose literacy development was at, above, or below district achievement levels for first grade.

Three research questions guided data collection and analysis: 1) What patterns, if any, emerge in the collaborative conversations (Wells & Wells, 1996) of first grade students during their construction of an journal writing entry; 2) What patterns, if any, emerge in the questions these students generate and/or respond to during their construction of an journal writing entry and; 3) What patterns, if any, emerge in the student's journal writing which gives evidence of their questions and/or participation in these conversations? Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009) with the goal of developing emergent core categories ground in the data.

Data analysis revealed that most of the oral language students used was in the form of utterances that were either generic comments or self-talk through which they constructed meaning. Students also asked questions of others, although most of their

questions focused on the mechanics of writing. When responding to others, participants primarily offered either direct support or prompts to further peers' thinking.

Ultimately, the study found that although all of the participants engaged in collaborative conversations with their peers and the teacher, meaningful self-talk had the greatest impact on their writing. Furthermore, the complexity and quality of the meaningful self-talk which was produced varied according to the participants' developmental levels. An ancillary finding of this study concerns the critical role of the teacher in collaborative conversations. Her view of how to support writing development and her participation in collaborative conversations with her students were heavily influenced by her perception of their developmental levels.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family, especially my husband and

children. I love you very much.

I would like to also dedicate this dissertation to all emergent literacy learners.

Although you are little, it is important that we, as educators and parents,

listen to you and recognize that you have very important things to say.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

All humans are born with the ability to learn language and communicate
(Goodman, 1986). Language is integral to most human activity, enabling us to
participate as an individual in social and cultural events. Furthermore, language is not
simply a means for communication; it is a way for us to interpret and encode thought
(Wells, 1984). Shuy (1984) observed that, "learning relies heavily on language" (p. 167).
As children participate in experiences requiring the use of language, a transfer of
knowledge occurs (Bruner, 1985; Gardner, 1996; Goodman, 1996; Heath, 1985; Meade
& Cubey, 2008; Wells, 1984, 1999). Most researchers agree that language development
is dependent upon personal, cultural and social influences that result in both idiosyncratic
and conventional usage (Bruner, 1985; Goodman, 1996, 2003; Meade & Cubey, 2008;
Whitehead, 2004). According to Bruner (1985), Vygotsky believed that language use
during social transactions allowed for the simultaneous passage of beliefs, assumptions
and values from seasoned members of a cultural group to novices. All language learning,
therefore, is a complex activity.

Our view of language and literacy development has been an evolutionary process
(Goodman, 1996; Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1982; May & Campbell, 1981; Shuy,
1984; Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 2000). It is generally believed that from birth, the
human brain is ready to function and learn language (Bruner, 1985; Chomsky, 1996;

1

Meade & Cubey, 2008; Piaget, 1959; Rice, 1996; Whitehead, 2004). Moreover, as young

children come to understand the power of language, they recognize its importance as a

tool for "getting things done" (Shuy, 1984. p. 169). Infants and young children learn this

concept quickly, through meaningful and purposeful linguistic experiences intended to

meet their individual needs. In addition, as children hear language, they find intrinsic

motivation to learn and participate in oral communication with others (Bruner, 1985;

Halliday, 1975, 2004; Meade & Cubey, 2008). Language, therefore, becomes an intimate

part of our selves, something we use in every aspect of our daily lives.

Background

Perhaps because of its pervasive influence, considerable research has examined

language development, particularly the literacy processes of listening, speaking, reading

and writing. Most of this research has concluded that children are not passive recipients

but rather, active agents in their own language development (Barrone & Morrow, 2003;

Bruner, 1985; Clay, 2001, 2005; Erickson, 2000; Genishi, 1981; Goodman, 1986, 2003;

Graham, 2007; Holdaway, 1979; May & Campbell, 1981; Morrow, McGee & Richgels,

2001; Power & Hubbard, 1996; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Richgels, 2002; Strickland,

1990; Takanishi, 1981; Vacca & Vacca, 2000; Weaver, 2002). A child's literacy

development unfolds during daily life experiences in which the child constructs personal

linguistic hypotheses. These hypotheses are then actively tested out in the world through

the child's participation in meaningful language negotiations with others (Halliday, 1975,

1993; Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1982; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).

Such negotiations can take many forms. A young child may, for example,

playfully experiment with writing by putting down idiosyncratic markings on a page.

The child's main unconscious goal in such events is to actively construct meaning through language. The cumulative impact of these meaningful experiences is that the child begins to develop metalinguistic awareness and then consciously begins attending to and imitating conventional usage (Pinnell, 1994; Wells, 1994). Language then is a functional, self-generated activity through which children construct expectations of and about language as they begin to grasp its purpose and possibilities. Moreover, this process begins well before a child enters school (Harste et al., 1982).

The term "emergent literacy" is used to describe this view of language development, one based on psycholinguistic theory (Ehri, 1998; Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982). Specifically, it holds that when children attempt to make sense of the world in a quest for meaning, they develop as language users without explicit instruction (Clay, 2005; Goodman, 1986, 2003; Halliday, 1975, 2004; Harste et al., 1982; Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 2000). Furthermore, young children who live in literate societies and communities are exposed to the power of written language from young ages. Consequently, they quickly learn its functions and power: "Language becomes the medium through which thoughts are shared, but it is also the medium of thinking and learning" (Goodman, 1996, p. 81).

Because language development is continual and occurs simultaneously at many levels, the emergent literacy perspective recognizes that when children enter school, they have already achieved significant understanding of the complex interrelationship of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Tolchinsky, 2006). Consequently, children bring this prior metalinguistic knowledge about how language works with them from their very first school experiences. Such knowledge, in fact, provides them with a

foundation for learning as they enter traditional schooling (Meade & Cubey, 2008; Whitehead, 2004).

According to the emergent literacy view, written language development occurs when oral language no longer sufficiently meets a child's individual or social communicative needs (Tolchinsky, 2006). Some argue that this is because oral language is 'concrete' while written language is more abstract and difficult to develop (Gardner, 1994; Chomsky, 1996; Goodman, 1996; Wells, 1994). Regardless, Goodman (1996) observed that "the how and why of language development are inseparable in attempting to understand both oral and written language development" (p. 82). Langer & Smith-Burke (1982) noted that, "written language literacy is a natural extension of all learning generally, and language learning specifically. Theoretically, this view suggests that children encounter their environment as active cognitive organisms who identify features of meaning they find salient" (p. 122). Therefore, writing production in emergent language learners is semantically driven as they naturally discover how language works and then is applied for communicative purposes.

Statement of the Problem

Research has established that all language processes (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) are synergistic (Genishi, 1981; Newell, 2002; Whitehead, 2004). Furthermore, Harste et al. (1984) determined that both initial learning and fine tuning of language is reliant on its use during social negotiations and hypothesis testing, as these elements steer the learner to gradual attainment of semantic competence. Most children learn to listen and speak as a natural result of home language development; however, the same cannot be said regarding the language skills of reading and writing. These literacy

4

skills are traditionally taught in the schools, not learned independently or taught in the homes (Prior, 2004).

Bates (1984) asserted that "the success and failure of the school systems lies primarily in their ability to develop strong language capabilities in the children they serve" (p.255). As already noted, decades of research have determined that as young children are exposed to language in their early years, they come to recognize its function and make meaningful connections that enable them to gain significant metalinguistic knowledge (Goodman, 1996). Much of this metalinguistic knowledge has been achieved by the time they begin elementary school (Halliday, 1975; Harste et al., 1982). A study by Wells and Wells (1984) revealed, however, that during oral language experiences at school, children played a less active role in classroom conversations than they did in conversations at home. They further noted that homes intrinsically appear to provide richer opportunities for "learning to talk" with an adult than do the schools (Wells & Wells, 1984, p. 194).

In addition, reading, writing, listening and speaking are not discrete language functions. They work in harmony with one another, each relying on the other for interpretation and clarification (Genishi, 1981). Langer and Smith-Burke (1982) pointed out that, "oral and written language grow and develop in parallel rather than serial fashion" (p. 123). Traditionally, however, language instruction in schools has isolated these processes for instructional purposes (Goodman, 1986; Takanishi, 1981). Moreover, such isolated skill instruction is often delivered through pre-packaged programs which do not build on what children already know about how language works (Genishi, 1981; Wohlwend, 2009). For example, many such programs feature language instruction that

emphasizes decontextualized and discrete skills which are meaningless to young children, because their understanding of language has been based on authentic and holistic encounters with it in meaningful contexts (Wells & Wells, 1984). Abstract skill instruction does not draw on children's natural curiosity or the enthusiasm and expertise they acquire when they are encouraged to play and experiment with language (Pinnell, 1996).

According to Shuy (1984) and Wells and Wells (1984), such highly-structured curricula result in teachers who often talk *at* students instead of *with* them. Because they do not value the importance of student talk in the classroom these approaches do not encourage children to develop, pursue, and negotiate meaning with questions that are of importance to them. Furthermore, teachers are deprived of knowing what students find interesting, as well as at what level students are functioning in terms of their development and their needs. Therefore, language learning and development in the school is often not a collaborative act of negotiating meaning as it is in the home. Langer and Smith-Burke (1982) emphasized the importance of negotiability in language for young children, because it helps them determine what it is that they wish to say. They further ascertained the importance of negotiability in written language development as negotiability "represents the child's discovery that what is known about one communication system can support understanding of other communication systems" (p. 114). As Wells and Wells (1984) asserted:

> We must aim to be collaborators with our pupils in the process of learning, rather than merely organizers of learning tasks and evaluators of the finished products. Above all, we must listen to and take seriously what children have to say as we talk with them about the tasks in which they are engaged. (p. 194)

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the role of talk, particularly the "collaborative talk" (Wells & Wells, 1984) that occurs during active learning (Gallagher, 1992). Furthermore, research has called for new instructional perspectives that integrate literacy processes and draw on young children's incipient understanding of how language 'means' (Halliday, 1975, 2004). Similarly, there have been calls for analysis of the role of writing as a catalyst for language learning in early school instruction (Mayher, 1990; Nagin, 2003; The National Commission on Writing, 2006). Newell (2006) further urged that attention to writing instruction recognize writing as a complex and integrative process:

> Although writing may at least potentially serve as a means for the development of thought, it can only do so within the complex and rich social contexts that have been restructured according to teachers' conceptions of learning and the school's values. (pp. 242-243)

Unfortunately, while effective pedagogical methods for writing instruction have been well established, the teaching of writing is often neglected or narrowly conceptualized in schools (Nagin, 2003; The National Commission on Writing, 2006). Students typically learn to write in the classroom as an isolated activity, using teacher-directed prompts and reading-related assignments under close supervision during specific allotted times during the day (Strickland, Bodino, Buchanan, Jones, Nelson, & Rosen, 2011). In fact, many primary-level teachers themselves are not comfortable as writers and have not been well-prepared to implement research-based process writing instruction (Noll, 2010).

Because both the reading and writing instruction of young learners is often bifurcated, many students come to view oral and written language as wholly discrete activities (Shuy, 1984). Yet, reading, writing, listening and speaking are not discrete

language functions. They work in harmony with one another, relying on each other for interpretation and clarification (Genishi, 1981). Furthermore, through the act of composing text, the learner simultaneously develops both skill as a writer and critical metalinguistic awareness about how language functions (Wells, 1994).

The functional view of language is concerned with how people use language to function in their natural world by participating in conversations, interactions, explanations, presentation and negotiation (Pinnell, 1996). Berthoff (1984) observed: "If you start with a working concept of language as a means of making meaning, you are recognizing that language can only be studied by meaning of making language" (p. 330). Given the critical importance of early school literacy experiences, educators need a deeper understanding of how young children use all forms of language. To that end, children must be observed as they use language, particularly in its oral and written forms, in the context of real classroom literacy events (Clay, 2005; Goodman, 1986, 1996; Graves, 1983, 2005). Therefore, analysis of young writer's participation in integrated literacy experiences that occur during the social learning community of a school classroom would deepen our understanding of young children's nascent literacy development.

Purpose of the Study

As members of learning communities in school, children need to participate in multiple literacy events each day that provide opportunities to read, write, and talk with others. Given that young children begin school with considerable linguistic and metalinguistic skills, educators need a better understanding of how they apply these skills to negotiate the demands of school tasks. Since oral language is the principal linguistic

8

mode through which early literacy develops, insights about how children use "talk" (e.g., conversation) would be particularly helpful. Moreover, oral language that occurs during a child's engagement in the act of composing text would be particularly instructive, since such events naturally require integration of all language processes.

This study then focused on the oral language of early language learners as they participate in "collaborative talk" experiences (Wells & Wells, 1996) while journal writing in a classroom setting. Fang (1999) stated, "conscious knowledge of these language and language-related issues is imperative for those working with young children" (p. 182). Analyzing these spontaneous conversations might provide deeper insight into the contextual relationship between young children's oral and written language.

Specifically, this study analyzed the conversation of young learners, with particular attention given to the questions that they pose and answer, as they engage in free composition writing activities. Prior research has demonstrated that during free composition times, language can become a navigational tool for self-expression and learning (Berlin, 1982; Britton, 1970; Dyson, 2002; Moffett, 1994). Consequently, analysis of the oral language used during these events may yield valuable insights about how children employ linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge while simultaneously constructing understanding. Ultimately, observing and analyzing conversations that arise in the natural educational setting may help classroom teachers integrate and maneuver language during writing activities for their young learners.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study fuses social constructivist (Bruner, 1985; Cazden, 2001; Palincsar, 1998) and psycholinguistic theory (Goodman, 1996, 2003; Harste et al., 1982), using their precepts to explore young children's collaborative conversations through a sociopsycholinguistic lens (Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982; Whitehead, 2004).

Constructivism is based on a set of beliefs about how learners "construct" individual knowledge and understanding as they continually analyze and evaluate their experiences in the world around them (Palincsar, 1998; Whitehead, 2004). Social constructivists believe that knowledge is not solely reliant on individual interactions with the environment. Rather it is built through continual negotiation of their experiences with other individuals (Bruner, 1985; Halliday, 1975, 2004; Piaget, 1959; Wells, 1984, 1996, 1999; Whitehead, 2004).

Psycholinguistics is an area of study in which the focus is on how humans acquire and use language. It posits that the primary goal of language acquisition is how humans employ language as a tool for learning, thinking and self-directing (Whitehead, 2004). To that end, as young children begin to develop linguistic forms of communication, they use their existing knowledge of language as a conscious tool for learning new words. Consequently, psycholinguists believe that young children learn words and develop metalinguistic awareness simultaneously (Goodman, 2003; Halliday, 1975; Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982; Whitehead, 2004).

Assumptions

This study is based on three assumptions. First, students are navigators and co-creators of knowledge (Shut, 1984; Wells, 1994). Second, collaborative talk will occur when students engage in the act of composing text (Halliday, 1975; Wells, 1994). Specifically, conversations will occur between a student and their peers and between the students' and their teacher. The student will also generate spontaneous comments that are not addressed to others. It is believed that all three types of oral expression and communication will generate insights regarding how language is used by young learners as a tool for language development.

It is further believed that some aspect of these collaborative conversations will doubtless involve raising and responding to questions (Gallagher, 1992). As this study attempts to analyze first grade students' active participation in language conversations and the application to their writing, the researcher assumes that participant- peer- and teacher-generated questions will arise as they work through the process of moving from oral to written language. Third, those occasions can be recorded and analyzed systematically using a qualitative research paradigm (Fang, 1999).

Research Questions

1. What patterns, if any, emerge in the collaborative conversations (Wells & Wells, 1996) of first grade students' during their construction of a journal writing entry?

2. What patterns, if any, emerge in the questions these students' generate and/or respond to during their construction of a journal writing entry?

3. What patterns, if any, emerge in the students' journal writing which gives

    evidence of their questions and/or participation in these conversations?

Definition of Terms

Active Learning- Active learning occurs as humans engage in using language to

think during problem solving activities (Halliday, 1975; Wells, 1994). According to

Wells and Wells (1988), there are two requirements for active learning: "1. The learner

must play an active role in selecting and defining the activities, which must be both

challenging and motivating; 2. There must be appropriate support" (p. 157). In this

study, active learning occurs when students are engaged in collaborative linguistic

conversations while constructing meaning during journal writing (Wells & Wells, 1996).

Case Study- A case study involves an in-depth examination of a bounded system

with the goal of generating a rich, thick description to illuminate and furnish a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009). This study uses a case

study paradigm to analyze how a bounded group of first graders employ language as a

tool for learning during writing events.

Collaborative Talk- According to Wells and Wells (1996), collaborative talk is

any discussion that occurs between one or more persons during which the language

produced revolves around achieving a goal. In this study, collaborative talk will refer to

those conversations students have with each other, with the teacher or with themselves as

they engage in generating a text during journal writing.

Emergent Literacy- The interrelated processes of speaking, listening, reading and

writing develop continually and simultaneously as children actively participate in

authentic, meaningful experiences during which they engage in these processes without

explicit instruction. According to emergent literacy theory, the primary goal of such

interactions is for children to get things done and make sense of their world (Halliday,

1975; Harste et al., 1984; Shuy, 1984). The emergent literacy perspective supports the

immersion of children in a wide range of authentic literate activities which encourage

exploration, discovery and understanding. In this study, this term is defined from the

sociopsycholinguistic perspective (Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982), referring specifically

to how children develop as language users without explicit instruction, as well as how

young learners use language as a tool for learning.

Journal Writing- In this study, this term will refer to the act of composing a

personal narrative with the goal of communicating a message (Harste, Woodward, &

Burke, 1982).

Metalinguistic Awareness- According to Harris and Hodges (1995),

metalinguistic awareness is a "conscious awareness on the part of a language user of

language as an object in itself" (p.153). In this study, metalinguistic awareness will be

gained as the students negotiate and refine hypothesis about language based on their

constructed understandings. Such understanding is a byproduct, not a prerequisite, of

language development (Goodman, 1996).

Questioning- Questioning refers to the intellectual synergy generated through

verbal discussion that results from examining a problem, raising doubt and experiencing

uncertainty in an effort to negotiate an issue (Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary, 2012).

In this study, the questions raised and answered by students, their peers and their teacher

during conversations will be analyzed as a means of understanding young children's

literate behaviors as they use oral language to support and develop understanding of written discourse.

Schemata- In this study, schemata will be defined as the organizational system in the brain for storing and organizing prior knowledge. According to schema theory, this system is activated and refined as a person engages in behaviors, experiences, thinking and learning (Whitehead, 2004).

Sequential Structure- In this study, the conversations which took place during each observation were analyzed chronologically from the onset to the closure of each session, as well as from the first to the fifth week of the data

Sociopsycholinguistics- This term refers to the shared area of psychology and linguistics that deals specifically with how humans naturally acquire language and then enlist in it as a tool for thinking and learning: "Language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge" (Wells, 1994, p. 65). The theoretical framework of this study is based on a sociopsycholinguistic perspective which posits that cognitive and linguistic processes are best understood within the context of the social, cultural and situational forces governing their use (Bates, 1984; Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982).

Summary

Research in emergent literacy and language development has demonstrated that by the time young children begin school, they have already developed significant metalinguistic awareness as they seek to make sense of the world around them (Goodman, 1996; Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 2000). Moreover, this linguistic

development evolves as children learn language in social communities where they actively and continually negotiate meaning with others (Harste et al., 1982).

Some research has found that most schools do not sufficiently recognize and build on the linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge of young learners (Bates, 1984; Fang, 1999; Shuy, 1982; Wohlwend, 2009). One reason for this limitation may be that teachers are uninformed about how to use children's incipient understanding of language as a catalyst, as well as a support system, for further learning (Graves, 1983, 2005; Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Holdaway, 1979). Fang (1992) stated,

> Only when we become more cognizant of the ways in which language shapes experience/reality and of its role in human learning and development will we become more prepared to help children grow as proficient language users and effective communicators. (p. 182)

This study seeks to identify how first graders, as active learners, employ oral language as a tool and a medium for constructing meaning with text during journal writing events. Analyzing students' collaborative talk (including questions) they actively pose to themselves, their peers and their teacher during these conversations may provide insight regarding how students employ language to work through the process of composing a personal narrative.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Every day, first grade students participate in multiple literacy events in which they speak, listen, read and write. These events support their developmental growth, especially their metalinguistic knowledge. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to add to this body of knowledge by exploring the collaborative language experiences students engage in to provide insight into a learner's thinking as he or she employs language during situational and social writing experiences.

Gould (1996) stated, "Throughout the instructional process, the heart of writing development is the dialogue in which teachers and students collaborate, inform, question, think aloud, self-correct, challenge, and construct meaning together" (Englert, Mariage & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 211). Observing and analyzing these particular conversations may aid classroom teachers by providing a better understanding of how young language and literacy learners integrate and maneuver language during writing activities. In addition, this study will deepen our understanding by building on a large body of prior research that has examined how children naturally use written and oral language as a navigational tool to clarify, interpret, and negotiate meaning in ways that also result in greater metalinguistic awareness.

This chapter reviewed scholarly research in literacy areas that are pertinent to this study: 1) writing as a process; 2) theories of language development; 3) emergent

literacy and 4) literacy in the classroom. The review presented important themes which have emerged over time in each research area.

The History of the Writing Process and Writing Research

Since the 1960s the complex phenomenon of writing and its classroom instruction has been explored by scholars operating from different ideologies, methodologies, pedagogies and epistemologies (Beach & Friedrich, 2006; Berlin, 1982; Ede, 1994; Faigley, 1986; Marshall, 1994; Nagin, 2003; Perl, 1994; Tobin, 1994). Early advocates of what came to be known as the "expressivist" movement, such as Murray (1994, 2009), Macrorie, (1994), Elbow (1994) and Berthoff (2003), began to shift the traditional focus of composition pedagogy from editing the final product to concentrating on prewriting and invention during the process of writing (Hairston, 1982; Nystrand, 2006).

Expressivists recognized the need for authors to develop what they called an "authentic" or personal voice through activities such as journaling and free-writing in which students were encouraged to use language as a tool for self discovery and uncovering their own truth. This new model viewed language, both written and oral, as cognitive and expressive processes which shape and extend everyday experiences (Nystrand, 2006). Their general consensus was that if we wanted students to be able to write well, they needed to be engaged in the writing process in non-prescriptive ways (Elbow, 1994; Macrorie, 1994; Murray 1994, 2009). This model, which viewed writing as an idiosyncratic meaning making process, brought forth questions about the cognitive skills of writing, including whether writing could even explicitly be taught.

During the 1970s scholars began to design research studies that not only placed the emphasis on the writer as he or she engaged in the process but also looked more

closely into the cognitive skills which are invoked during composition (Emig, 1977; Faigley, 1986; Flower & Hayes, 1977, 1984;. Perl, 1994; Reither, 2000). In 1971, Emig conducted what became a seminal study that explored how twelfth grade students naturally composed text. Emig conducted a case study of eight students, recording their oral comments about their own writing processes as they were engaged in the act of composition. Her data revealed the recursive nature of their writing, demonstrating that the students did not compose in the linear fashion suggested by the traditional instructional model. Emig asserted that writing is a heuristic tool (Emig, 1977). Although she did not provide a solid cognitive theory of the composing process, her study opened the door and provided a methodological foundation for future research regarding the cognitive model of the writing process (Faigley, 1986).

In 1975, Graves produced another major study focused on the cognitive processing of second grade students. Using Emig's (1977) "think aloud" process, Graves recorded the oral discussion of these children as they talked about the texts they were composing. Based on his data analysis, he similarly concluded that the participants did not move through the writing process in a lock-step linear fashion as it was presented in most textbooks (Perl, 1994). Graves determined that even young students have cognitive processes much like adults, employing a variety of strategies to meet their individual needs during composition. He argued that young students' exhibit growth cycles and developmental patterns which teachers need to understand. In fact, Graves thought teachers should consider both students' development and their knowledge of the writing process as they planned writing instruction (Graves, 1983, 2005).

In 1977, Flower and Hayes developed the processing model of writing which has provided a common language for describing skills a writer engages in during the composition process (Faigley, 1986; Hayes, 2006; Nystrand, 2006). Flower and Hayes' goal was to unearth how writers resolve the rhetorical problems they encounter during composition; their theoretical framework came from the information-processing branch of cognitive psychology which examined how human beings solve problems (Flower & Hayes, 1984; Graham, 2006; Rijlaarsdam & Bergh, 2006). Flower and Hayes expanded on Emig's (1971) and Grave's (1975) think-aloud data collection procedure redefining it as 'protocol analysis' (Flower & Hayes, 1977, 1984; Hairston, 1982). The researchers transcribed their participant's oral comments during the composing act in order to uncover the cognitive processes (i.e., network of goals and hierarchical relationships) which keep a writer moving forward.

The model Flower and Hayes (1984) developed is made up of three elements: 1) the task environment, comprised of everything outside of the writer including the goal(s) and/or problem(s); 2) the writer's long term memory, defined as the background knowledge of the writer and; 3) the writing processes encompassing prewriting, writing and revision. Similarly, cognitive research revealed that the task environment is a hierarchical relationship of goal setting, idea generation and organization (Graham, 2006). However, the critical factor is that in order to keep the momentum going, writers engage in whatever stage is necessary at the moment (Rijlaarsdam & Bergh, 2006). Flower and Hayes (1977, 1984) explicitly identified long term memory as the driving force of composition and found that writing is a recursive, complex problem solving process.

During the 1980s the cognitive model was criticized for portraying the writer as an isolated individual working through the process (Faigley, 1986; Nystrand, 2006). Researchers such as Bizell (1982) and Reither (1985) suggested that to best acknowledge the dialectic relationship between language and thought, writing needed to be looked at through a wider lens of social knowing. Language, these theorists argued, is a tool for interpreting experiences and creating knowledge: "Rather than viewing knowledge as existing inside the heads of individual participants or in the external world, sociocultural theory views meaning as being negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture and activity" (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 208). Faigley (1986) stated that through engagement in communication with others, we acquire a specialized discourse which allows for our participation. Nagin (2003) expanded upon the theory of social knowing by stating that writers do not participate in writing experiences solely based on individual behavior; in fact, all writing is a social act as it is created through an expanded dialogue with others. Consequently, the social model of the writing process is based on questions of how writers engage in writing and how it is shaped regarding participation in different environmental, specifically social contexts.

The adoption of the social view of writing draws on the psycholinguistic theories of language learning, as well as the relationship of language and thought defined by central figures in the area of language growth and development such as Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1959), Chomsky (1996), and Luria (Engler, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006; Nystrand, 2006; Prior, 2006; Whitehead, 2004). Hairston (1982) described this overall paradigm shift in theoretical frameworks: "Changes in theory probably started , in the middle of the 1950s, from intellectual inquiry and speculation about language and

language learning that was going on in several fields, notably linguistics, anthropology, and clinical and cognitive psychology" (p. 80). In the 1960s, the field of psycholinguistics also began to generate a paradigm shift regarding theories of child development and literacy learning: "Psychologists were intrigued with questions about how adults comprehend and produce speech, how children acquire language, and how language influences thinking" (Ehri, 1998. p. 98).

Theories of Language Development

Prior to the 1960s the behaviorist perspective was the dominant view of language learning and child development in the 20th century. This view was based on Thorndike's (1898) original theory of "operant conditioning" which was later expanded by B. F. Skinner (1948). From this perspective, language development is based on a set of hierarchical skills which are honed through activities that provide repeated practice with mastery of specific outcomes. According to behaviorists, children need explicit, tightly controlled instruction where their correct responses are positively reinforced through praise and encouragement as they engage in language learning (Skinner, 1948). Furthermore, their negative responses are either ignored or corrected (Meade & Cubey, 2008; Martin, 1996; Skinner, 1948; Whitehead, 2004).

In the late 1950s a nativist view of language development emerged based on the work of Chomsky (1996). From this perspective, all intellect is already present at birth. As a result, humans are preconditioned to be sensitive to the linguistic features of their environment (Chomsky, 1996; Martin, 1996). According to Chomsky (1996), the nativist view of language learning "is thus a kind of latent structure in the human mind, developed and fixed by exposure to specific linguistic experience" (p. 23). Therefore,

maturation is based on human language use of this innate mental structure, since there is a specific part of the brain called the "language acquisition device" which is prewired to break down language syntactically. As children encounter language experiences, they develop theories about how language works. These theories are constantly modified based on new experiences (Chomsky, 1996).

In addition to the behavioral and nativist theories, the cognitive view of language development based on the work of Piaget (1959) also emerged during the period. This view holds that the preverbal stage (birth to 18 months) is the crucial age for language development. According to cognitivists, all successive language and literacy experiences rely on the development that has already occurred during this time. Piaget called this stage the 'sensorimotor' phase. It occurs as children learn and develop through lengthy encounters with their environment, drawing on all five of their senses to construct knowledge.

In contrast with the nativist view, Piaget (1959) did not agree that language development occurs in response to the environment. Instead, Piaget argued maturation in language occurs through a constructive process. As such, language development occurs as children engage in deliberate problem-solving through thinking. During these encounters and experiences, children develop and construct 'schemata' through which they store, organize and categorize experiences in their brain (Piaget, 1985). As children's facility with language increases, they engage in 'fast-mapping,' a process in which they rapidly connect new experiences to their existing schemata. Often these new encounters require children to reorganize and re-categorize their prior knowledge (Piaget, 1959, 1985).

The cognitive view does not deny that humans are born prewired to learn language (Gardner, 1996; Whitehead, 2004). However, cognitivists understand development as internal to the learner, who must pass through a series of 'stages' as he or she gains awareness of and insight about the activity which is being learned. Piaget's theory of language development views the language a child uses until around the age of 7 as egocentric, meant for self discovery. He wrote: "His language only begins to resemble that of adults when he is directly interested in making himself understood; when he gives orders or asks questions" (Piaget, 1996, p. 21). Therefore, mastery of predetermined developmental milestones at a child's current developmental stage is a prerequisite for engagement and participation in more difficult language tasks, such as literate activities. Moreover, this can only occur through lengthy interactions with the environment (Piaget, 1959, 1996).

The Sociolinguistic Perspective

During the 1980s the sociolinguistic perspective emerged. Sociolinguists view all learning as based on social experiences with language (Bruner, 1971, 1985; Cazden, 2001; Meade & Cubey, 2008; Nystrand, 2006; Wells, 1994; Whitehead, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978, 1996). The sociolinguists were joined by theoretical linguists who began to think about language units larger than a sentence. According to Shuy (1984), both groups "began to ask questions about meaning, a long neglected concept, and began to distinguish semantic word meaning from contextual discourse meaning" (p. 168).

Bruner (1971, 1978, 1985), for example, saw language as a tool for social and cultural participation. He observed that children learn through engagement with more knowledgeable others who provide scaffolding to support their learning and development

23

(Bruner, 1971, 1978). The concept of scaffolding refers to how an expert can guide a novice through a difficult task by providing a "scaffold" of developmentally-appropriate experiences that allow the novice to master the learning task. With the expert's guidance and praise, the learner will eventually take control of what is being learned and apply that new knowledge independently (Bruner, 1978). Ultimately, Bruner saw young children as small apprentices to adults. Through linguistic rehearsals with others, he believed that children develop as language learners while simultaneously learning about the world around them. According to the sociolinguistic view, then, children are active participants who grow as they interact and negotiate meaning with adults. Because of this, adults must allow for in-depth participation and development as they transmit cultural knowledge to educate the child (Wells, 1994).

Vygotsky (1978) also believed that social and cultural influences were the key to language development. He argued that inner thought is shaped and influenced by social experiences. Moreover, Vygotsky theorized that language and thought begin separately in children but, with experience and participation in language, the two are gradually fused together (Vygotsky, 1978, 1996). First, we use thought to learn language and later we use language to learn (Bruner, 1985; Vygotsky, 1996; Wells, 1994). Vygotsky (1978, 1996) did not believe that rather than simply disappearing, egocentric talk becomes our inner critical thinking. Therefore, all language learning is a social event (Bruner, 1971, 1985; Halliday, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978; Whitehead, 2004).

Sociolinguists view language as a way to interpret and encode thought, not just as a means of communication (Halliday, 1975, 1993). Moreover, children are not passive recipients but active participants in their creation of knowledge and in their own

development as language users (Halliday, 1975; Wells, 1994, 1999; Wells & Wells, 1984). As they experience the purposes of language and how language functions in their cultural communities, children are inducted through participation as members of these communities: Heath (1985) stated, "Children and adults co-construct and negotiate knowledge; children facilitate their language learning by initiating and sustaining conversation. The greater the shared background between adult and child, the greater the possibility for extended discourse" (p. 18). It is through opportunities provided by more knowledgeable others in which children negotiate meaning and come to a shared understanding, thereby allowing them to partake in difficult language tasks they would not be able experience independently (Bruner, 1971, 1985; Cazden, 2001; Goodman, 1996; Halliday, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1994, 1999; Wells & Wells, 1984; Whitehead, 2004).

Shuy (1984) stated as children realize the power of language, they come to understand it is a tool which enables them "to get things done" (p. 169) and participate in their environment and the world which surrounds them. In addition Holdaway (1979) explains language has been recognized as a critical factor in the development of literacy: "Literacy is a matter of language. A traditional error of thinking about reading and writing was to see them as discrete subjects isolated from the world of language and spoken culture and then to teach them as if they had no relationship to listening and speaking" (p. 12).

Emergent Literacy

During the 1970s and 1980s, researchers deepened their understanding of young children's language development. Much of their research was centered around the

possibility that young children have preconceived metalinguistic knowledge regarding writing and reading that is well established before they ever enter school (Clay, 2005; Ehri, 1978; Goodman., 1996; Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Langer &, Smith-Burke, 1982; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). During this same period, literacy theorists more and more turned away from viewing the acquisition of speaking, listening, reading and writing as occurring in a linear, sequential path to a view that sees these complementary language processes as complex and synergetic. As Shuy (1984) noted, language itself is a tool for learning because, "learning relies heavily on language" (p. 167).

This study of language from the child's point of view gave birth to what is often called the "emergent literacy" perspective. Today there is general consensus that children learn about the power of language and the meaning it holds through a self-directed trial and error process that comes from their natural immersion in the environment (Shuy, 1984; Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2000; Whitehead, 2004). Deeply influenced by psycholinguistics, the emergent literacy perspective specifically addresses how children develop as language users without explicit instruction. It also explores how young children use language as a tool for learning (Harste et al., 1982).

Emergent literacy is founded on cognitive, social and constructivist theories of development (Goodman, 1996; Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 2000). One of the basic tenets of this theoretical framework is that all forms of language (listening, speaking, reading and writing) result from the human need to be social (Goodman, 1996). As a social community, people communicate through different forms of language (i.e. oral, written, art, artifact, etc.). As adults communicate and socially interact through these mediums, they tacitly and concurrently provide language demonstrations, even to the

youngest children (Harste et al., 1984). Since children are seen as participants in literacy

activities from birth, well before explicit instruction in school has begun, the stages or

benchmarks of emergent literacy progress parallel the development of oral language

(Morrow, McGee & Richgels, 2001). Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) wrote that

emergent literacy, "is used to denote the idea that the acquisition of literacy is best

conceptualized as a developmental continuum with its origins early in the life of a child,

rather than an all-or-none phenomenon that begins when children start school" (p. 848).

Furthermore, when very young children live in literacy-rich environments, they

are continuously aware that print is functional and carries meaning (Goodman, 1986,

1996; Harste et al., 1982; Wells & Wells, 1984). As such, children hypothesize and

develop semantic theories regarding how print works in the world around them. These

theories are then tested out with more knowledgeable others (Goodman, 1996). Because

of this, social context plays a large role in motivating young literacy learners as readers

and writers (Bobbitt, 2007). What language participants, including very young language

learners, take away from adult-led reading and writing opportunities is up to them. Harste

et al. (1984) pointed out, however, that with "more and more [literacy] encounters come

more and more opportunities to become aware of, familiar with and knowledgeable about

the use of available and potential demonstrations" (p. 185). Therefore, whenever a

language learner is participating in a literacy event, he or she is the recipient of multiple

linguistic demonstrations. As Harste et al. (1982) noted: "We suspect that when children

are allowed to discover the regularities of print, they reach generalizations and begin to

orchestrate information about a variety of language systems" (p. 111).

27

The popular "readiness perspective," based on Piaget's (1959, 1985) sequential

language progression, directly contradicts the emergent literacy perspective. "Readiness"

advocates have established educational milestones, based on developmental maturity,

which they hold are prerequisites to advancement in literacy learning. Emergent literacy

theorists do not believe that children need to have mastered certain skills before they can

take part in particular reading and/or writing activities (Morrison & Slominski, 2006;

Vacca & Vacca, 2000). Rather, they believe that real literacy occurs by expanding a

child's world through holistic immersion in language experience, by providing continual

opportunities for the child to experiment with language. The process involves

encouraging the child to engage in risk-taking (e.g., oral approximations), a process seen

as a continuous and on-going process for people throughout their lives (Harste et al.,

1984). Holdaway (1979) noted that children need not wait until formal instruction to

experiment with reading and writing; as it is through experimentation that children

imitate and begin to approximate. Moreover, natural learning occurs through

experimentation and approximation as children engage in all of the language processes.

Children bring all of their prior knowledge with them during these experiences.

Therefore, reading and writing should be taught simultaneously and not in a linear

fashion of learning to read first (Clay, 2001; Holdaway, 1979).

To that end emergent literacy advocates believe in providing children with a wide

range of experiences which encourage exploration, play, discovery and understanding as

they are simultaneously being immersed in authentic reading and writing activities

(Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Morrow, McGee & Richgels, 2001; Teale &

Sulzby, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Through this process, young children are

continually creating their own unique "person history" which then contributes to their knowledge and translation of what words and language mean to them (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004). Ultimately, as children engage in literate events in their homes and in the world at large, they begin to develop metalinguistic awareness of how print works (Goodman, 1996; Tolchinsky, 2006). Harste et al. (1982) explained: "As teachers, we need to be concerned not only with what children do once they encounter print, but with what anticipations they hold for language generally, as well as what decisions they make about reading and writing on the way to the process" (p. 130).

Literacy in the Classroom

Children's language and literacy development therefore, is dependent upon the synergy of personal, cultural and social influences, which result in idiosyncratic and conventional uses (Whitehead, 2004). Because of this, effective language growth in a classroom setting requires that learners continue to employ all of the social resources and symbolic tools that they already bring with them to school to aid in their literacy development (Ehri, 1978; Harste et al., 1982; Johnston, 2004). According to this view then, it is the classroom teacher's responsibility to immerse students in literate experience, model literate behavior, provide examples of effective language use and create a social environment that will encourage effective reading and writing behaviors (Britton, 1970; Cazden, 2001; Ehri, 1978; Graham, 2007; Graves, 1983; Holdaway, 1979; Johnston, 2004; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Richgels, 2002).

Scholars agree that when children encounter language in holistic, purposeful ways and are encouraged to apply their individual knowledge and learned information to literacy learning, they are enabled to unlock the mysteries of the English language

29

(Cazden, 2001; Halliday, 1975; Meade & Cubey, 2008). Moreover, as noted earlier, reading, writing, listening and speaking are not discrete language functions. They work in harmony with one another; each relying on the other for interpretation and clarification (Genishi, 1981). In addition, a child's reading and writing usually develops within the same timeframe and often follows the same developmental progression (Ritchey, K. D., 2008). As Harste et al. (1982) observed: "Reading and writing are sociopsycholinguistic processes and, as such, children develop models of written language from natural, ongoing encounters with print" (p. 127). Therefore, literacy learning is a complex semantic process of building on prior knowledge, while simultaneously acquiring new information (Ehri, 1978; Halliday, 1993; Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Meade & Cubey, 2008).

One requisite aspect of this interrelated developmental process, however, is the child's ability to approximate, 'self correct' and monitor his or her own meaning-making attempts by checking for accuracies (Cazden; 2001). When young language learners take on the great responsibility of personal reading and writing, they rely heavily on the use of approximations. The main focus of these efforts is on the semantic – or meaning-making – purpose of language (Goodman, 1996; Morrow, McGee, & Richgels, 2001; Richgels, 2002). Harste et al. (1982) observed that from the moment that children realize that print carries meaning, semantics becomes an important strategy: "It is from discovering what language does (both semantically and pragmatically) that children discover its form (both syntactically and graphophonemically)" (p. 106). According to Wells and Wells (1984): "Our efforts to facilitate the developments of children's

understanding of the world in which they live and their power to control it are largely

accomplished through linguistic interaction" (p. 190).

A large body of research has confirmed that in order to take control as language

users, children must first be willing to take chances and make mistakes (Clay, 2001; Ehri,

1978, 1998; Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Morrison & Slominski, 2006;

Morrow, McGee, & Richgels, 2001); Wells, 1994). Through this process of

approximation and monitoring the child is both a teacher and learner i.e., successful

efforts result in learned information that becomes an automatic part of the child's lexicon

(Gentry, 2000; Goodman, 1986, 1998; Halliday, 1975). Moreover, the semantic

strategies children develop under these conditions allow them to function as literate

individuals in the world and not just in the classroom. The classroom then must provide

children with both opportunities and support for linguistic risk-taking that builds

semantic strategies.

Pinnell (1996) explained the functional aspect of language as focused on how

people use language to operate in the world through conversations, interactions and

negotiations with others: "What is important about language is what we can do with it-

how it functions in a world of people" (p. 146). Because literacy is naturally a social

function and social events are what propel children into literacy development, classroom

interactions and learning events provide a natural environment for language development.

In fact, there is a great deal of agreement among scholars that teaching literacy in the

schools must be functional as well as meaningful i.e., it must serve a real purpose for

students (Britton, 1970; Cazden, 2001; Ehri, 1978; Goodman, 1986, 1998; Graham, 2007;

Graves, 1983; Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Halliday, 1975; Holdaway, 1979;

31

Johnston, 2004; Meade & Cubey, 2008; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Richgels, 2002). To support literacy development in an environment that accommodates the sociolinguistic experience of all students, teachers need large amounts of time devoted to the exploration and the learning of language (Dyson, 2002; Rice, 1996; Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2001).

Early Writing Experiences in the Classroom

Producing conventionally accepted language is the most difficult of all of the language tasks (Halliday, 1975). Writing is a complex generative process of using symbolic tools, which provides communication between human beings and allows for social interaction (Dyson, 2002). Halliday (1993) stated that during the act of writing a person must not only reflect upon the prior knowledge that has been acquired through listening, speaking, and reading but, also then move from "the general to the abstract" (p. 109), reconstructing this information to attain semantic competence in their written product. Moreover, children display different levels of knowledge and perform at different developmental stages such as, but not limited to, novice/beginner, emerging, conventional, etc. as they engage in writing activities (Clay, 2001; Gentry, 2000; Morrow, McGee, & Richgels, 2001). Although differing categories have been constructed to represent these developmental stages, there is a general consensus that as children transition through, their progress is qualitatively represented by changes in their cognitive development that are reflected by their competence and sophistication in their text generation and transcription (Gentry, 2000; Graves, 1983; McCutchen, 2006; Morrow et al., 2001). Graves (1983) suggested the best way to monitor a child's growth in their writing is by recognizing the changes they show over time. Therefore, these

stages are not meant to simply label the student but, to be used as a guide for the teacher regarding how each child is functioning and progressing in their language learning (Clay, 2001). Holdaway (1979) stated, "When writing instruction is most productive, it addresses a range of skills and practices relevant for good writing." (p. 112). Therefore, Graves (1983, 2005) suggested that teachers familiarize themselves with the growth cycles and developmental patterns student's experience to best facilitate their writing development.

Today, the writing process originally articulated by Flower and Hayes (1977) continues to be extremely influential in the teaching of composition from kindergarten through high school (Nagin, 2003). This model is consistent with current understandings of early literacy development as it is child-centered and generated largely from the social and functional aspects of language. As students actively engage in the writing process for the functional purposes of generating and/or communicate meaning, they focus their efforts on the semantic nature of language. Yet, Graves (1983, 2005) and others (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Nagin, 2003; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Wohlwend, 2009) have found that providing authentic writing experiences, as well as time to write, is a crucial but often neglected component of writing development in many classrooms.

One significant aspect of authentic writing experiences is the opportunity for students to talk about them with others. Graves (1983) stated, "the challenge to teachers is to know the process of writing, to understand the self-centered forces behind the writer, and to see the place of this self-centeredness in a writer's overall development" (p. 245). Since a novice writer's main means of discourse is through oral language, his or her text generation relies heavily on conversational experiences (McCutchen, 2006). As Newell

(2006) observed: "Although writing may at least potentially serve as a means for the development of thought, it can only do so within the complex and rich social contexts that have been restructured according to teachers' conceptions of learning and the school values" (Newell, 2006, p. 241). Therefore, writing in collaborative social environments allows young learners to revisit, think about and experiment with what they find interesting and exciting about their latest literacy discovery (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006).

Ultimately, the act of composing text gives students a way to enter into the academic tradition: "If writing is to have a role in the intellectual development and academic life of all students, and in the practices of all teachers, how it functions within curricular conversations, as well as the social life of classrooms, both seem particularly important" (Newell, 2002, p. 245). As such, the movement from orality to written production is an important issue, one which needs further investigation in terms of the literacy development of young children.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the patterns and themes which emerge during the collaborative conversational experiences of first grade students as they engage in journal writing experiences. Its goal was to deepen our understanding of how social conversational participation influences first grade students during writing events. This chapter has reviewed scholarly research in the following areas: 1) writing as a process; 2) theories of language development; 3) emergent literacy and 4) literacy in the classroom. This research foundation was used to interpret the results of data analysis and generate findings about the research questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study sought to explore how students in a first grade

classroom construct meaning as they engage in collaborative conversations during

writing activities. Specifically, this study analyzed the linguistic patterns which emerged

during observable conversations during journal writing in order to develop a deeper

understanding of how young learners used language to negotiate the demands of school

tasks. This chapter presents the proposed design, research questions, and the

methodology which was employed. Data collection and analysis procedures, including

issues of reliability, validity, and limitations will also be discussed.

Design of the Study

Using a qualitative case research paradigm, this study sought to describe how

young learners engaged in and used language in collaborative conversational experiences

that occurred during school writing activities (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is

built on several assumptions which are compatible with the goals of this study

(Merriam, 2002).

First, qualitative research is interested in how people construct meaning and

understanding through experiences that occur in natural settings. According to Merriam

(2009), "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make

sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 13).

Second, Flick (2009) asserted that meaning and understanding evolve and are constructed

during social interactions. According to Merriam (2002), a "central characteristic of

qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social

worlds" (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, qualitative research is an interpretive approach

which seeks to investigate participants' multiple perspectives and interpretations of

meanings as they occur within a specific context directly tied to the phenomenon of

interest. These precepts are compatible with this study, since the researcher is "interested

in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this

meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy inductive, and the

outcome is descriptive" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Third, qualitative research aims to

understand the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of the participants. As such,

qualitative research is concerned with the emic, or inside, perspectives of participants

regarding their realities and how they construct meaning and understanding in their world

(Merriam, 2009).

Because of this, qualitative researchers must immerse themselves in the natural

environment of the participants in order to study and understand the phenomenon from

their perspective. Flick (2009) observed that qualitative research "becomes a continuous

process of constructing versions of reality" (p. 19). Furthermore, in a qualitative research

study the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, as well as data analysis

(Flick, 2009; Merriam, 2002, 2009). Therefore, in order to successfully construct the

emic perspective of the participants, the researcher must build rich, thick description from

the collected data to accurately convey findings about the phenomenon of interest.

A case study is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). The case study design enables a researcher to investigate a specific phenomenon from the participant's point of view as it occurs in a natural setting. This process enables the researcher to generate rich, thick descriptions which illuminate understanding (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) explained that because they focus on one program, phenomenon, event or situation, case studies are *particularistic*. They are *descriptive* because they are rich in detail, and *heuristic* because they are intended to illuminate understanding for the reader. Merriam (2009) further observed that by "concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p .43). As such, case study research views knowledge to be constructed within the constructivist paradigm.

In this study, a case is defined as a first grade student who engages in observable collaborative conversations during school writing events. While listening and speaking are literacy events which young learners participate in at home, reading and writing are formal literacy events that occur most naturally in a classroom. Therefore, a qualitative case study conducted within a constructivist and sociopsycholingusitic theoretical framework is compatible with this study. To further insure the natural setting of the typical literacy learning environment, the researcher took on the strict role of *observer as participant* (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (2009) distinctly defined the role of observer as participant and differentiates this role of the researcher from other observation methods such as complete participant, participant as observer and complete observer. As such, by engaging in the

role of *observer as participant*, the researcher is not an active participant but does gain enough trust from the participants to earn their acceptance and membership into the group. Unlike the role of *participant of observer* in which the researcher actively participates in the setting, the *observer as participant's* main focus is on gathering data. As such, Merriam (2009) stated, "the researcher may have access to many people and a wide range of information, but the level of information revealed is controlled by the group members being investigate" (p. 124).

Ultimately, a qualitative case study was well-suited as the analytic paradigm for this study because the research goal was to represent how participants constructed meaning through collaborative talk experiences and possible questioning when in their natural setting. Consequently, qualitative case study methodology was the best framework to illuminate the data and allow for a reflective view of the realities of the participants during this study.

Research Questions

1. What patterns, if any, emerge in the collaborative conversations (Wells & Wells, 1996) of first grade students' during their construction of a journal writing entry?

2. What patterns, if any, emerge in the questions these students' generate and/or respond to during their construction of a journal writing entry?

3. What patterns, if any, emerge in the students' journal writing which gives evidence of their questions and/or participation in these conversations?

Research Setting

This study was conducted in a suburban first grade classroom situated in a K-4 elementary school located in a large Midwestern state. At the time of this study, according to the state's Department of Education website, this elementary school was rated "excellent with distinction" during the 2011-12 school year as it met all of the requisite five state indicators. Student enrollment numbers ranged from 500-749, of which 94.9% were identified as White/non-Hispanic, 9.2% were identified as economically disadvantaged and 10.3% were identified as a student with a disability; 17% of the total population of the school was enrolled in the first grade.

The classroom in which this study was conducted had been chosen purposefully, because the teacher had created a classroom environment that invited social interaction amongst the students. The teacher was in her fourth year of teaching and had spent two prior years teaching kindergarten students. Because she believed that all modes of literacy are interconnected (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and children are active meaning-makers with individual paths of development, her instructional beliefs were compatible with the theoretical framework of this study. Furthermore, she believed that social interaction allows for children of different ability levels to aid each other in their construction of knowledge. Moreover, the social environment, as well as the journal writing experiences the teacher provided the children, was reflective of best practices determined through prior research (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graves, 1983, 2005; Nagin, 2003; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Wohlwend, 2009). As such, the children were free to choose their own topics and to use oral language (i.e., collaborative conversations) to support the composing process. Consequently, the researcher knew there would be ample

opportunities for students to engage in collaborative conversations during the course of a

school day.

The classroom itself was bright, with windows lining an entire wall. The walls

were covered with resources to support learning e.g., posters hung from above the

windows provided reminders for students of how to engage in the writing process. An

entire side of the room was lined with computers. In one corner of the room students

could choose to sit on a bright, multicolored ABC carpet placed in front of an area

dedicated to calendar, the weather and other activities. A 'word wall' displayed

frequently used words in alphabetical order. When they were writing, students sat at

round tables which were the central focus of the room. The middle of each table was

filled with writing materials and supplies which were easily accessible to students. The

teacher's desk was located in a small corner of the room by the classroom door.

Participant Selection

In order to best address the research questions, three first grade students were

purposefully chosen and each served as one case. Flick (2009) stated: "The

appropriateness of the structure and contents of the sample, and thus the appropriateness

of the strategy chosen for obtaining both, can only be assessed with respect to the

research question of the study" (p. 125). Moreover, Merriam (2009) defined purposeful

sampling as "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand,

and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned"

(p. 77). Therefore, Merriam (2009) suggested the researcher develop criteria based on

the research questions that will guide the researcher when choosing participants who will

provide the best cases for the purpose of the study. For this reason, the researcher established the following criteria for selecting the cases:

- One chosen participant was considered to be working *above the first grade level* in meeting expectations and benchmarks in the area of writing.

- One chosen participant was considered to be working *at the first grade level* in meeting expectations and benchmarks in the area of writing.

- One chosen participant was considered to be working *below the first grade level* in meeting expectations and benchmarks in the area of writing.

The researcher hoped that the established criteria for participant selection would provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Piaget (1956) explained that children are continuously communicating their thoughts as they engage in 'egocentric talk' which is produced mainly for the 'self' as they strive for understanding. Therefore, by observing and analyzing developing writers at varying ability levels in the first grade as they engage in conversation with others either at the same or differing ability levels during writing experiences may provide insight into the value of these social experiences.

The selected participants were identified by their level of performance and academic achievement in writing based on a teacher-developed rubric which aligned with the writing standards of the district's report card. It scored students for each respective grading period in one of three categories: secure, developing and beginning. A child's gender, race, ethnicity or economic status did not play a part in participant selection. Therefore, to determine which students met the established criteria, the researcher

conferred with the first grade teacher about the student's performance and scores on the developed rubric.

As this study sought to describe students' engagement in conversation, which is considered a human behavior, the researcher gained approval of the University's Instructional Review Board for the protection of the selected human subjects prior to the onset of data collection. As such, the researcher provided the parents and/or guardians a parental consent form about the nature of the study, as well as indicated that their child's identity would be protected through the use of pseudonyms. The consent form explained that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw their child from the study at any time. The parents and/or guardians were asked to sign and return the consent form to indicate their willingness for their child to participate in this study (Appendix A).

Researcher Profile

The researcher has 10 years of experience teaching first grade in a public school located in a small, diverse town in the Midwest. It is her belief that all students can learn and that each child experiences his or her own continuum of development. Moreover, her belief about how to teach the language arts is deeply rooted in constructivist and sociopsycholinguistic theories of literacy development (Bruner, 1985; Cazden, 2001; Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982; Palincsar, 1998; Whitehead, 2004).

The researcher believes that prior to the onset of schooling, students have had many literate experiences. Moreover, students come into the classroom with unique knowledge and understandings, particularly with regard to the functional purposes of language. Because of this, they are not simply passive recipients of literate knowledge but, are active participants in the construction of their individual interpretation and

42

understanding. Consequently, the researcher believes students should be encouraged to collaborate with others to negotiate meaning and purpose in order to develop a functional understanding of language and literacy. As students are encouraged to work with others and question new information, they develop as critical thinkers and invested learners.

Although the researcher had no articulated hypothesis, she was aware of potential interpretive bias. Gallagher (1992) stated that, as humans, our practical interests and conditions bias our interpretations. Therefore, we anticipate outcomes based on our interests and prior experiences as invested participants. In this study, the researcher took on the strict role of *observer as participant* as to not interfere in the natural setting of the typical literacy learning environment (Merriam, 2009). To further ensure accuracy, the researcher continuously analyzed the field notes so that they were a true construction of the reality of the participants.

Upon completion of each observation and interview, the researcher expanded and transcribed the collected data. The field notes were simultaneously used as a tool for self-analysis during which personal and analytic notes were identified, including researcher subjectivity statements. Furthermore, to eliminate bias and ensure the emic perspective of the participants, the researcher triangulated findings by using multiple data sources to describe the same phenomenon. In addition, the researcher asked peers with expertise in literacy and qualitative research methodology to review the data and concur that her findings are indeed reflective of the participant's perspective and that the data directly correlated with the proposed research questions.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a five week period. In the first two weeks the researcher visited the classroom twice a week (Mondays and Wednesdays), and then for the last three weeks expanded the number of her visits from two to three times a week (Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays). The students' usually engaged in journal writing each morning for approximately a 35 to 40 minute time period from 10:15 to 10:50 a.m.

Four sources of data were gathered: 1) audiotape recordings of conversations; 2) observational field notes; 3) writing samples and; 4) informal/formal interviews. Following is a detailed explanation regarding the purpose of each data source and a timeline for how it was collected.

Audiotape Recordings

As the phenomenon of interest was situated in the social construction of knowledge that occurred during collaborative conversational experiences, the researcher audio recorded and observed the natural conversations which occurred during journal writing events. To identify patterns in the participants' collaborative conversations, there were four to six audio recorded conversations for each participant which were transcribed. These recordings ensured accuracy by preserving the child's natural conversational production. Flick (2009) stated that conversational analysis is interested in the sequential and formal analysis of conversation which occurs in everyday situations. Moreover, "meaning accumulates in the performance of activity (objective hermeneutics)" (Flick, 2009, p. 334). Therefore, "researchers should approach the field under study as naively as possible and collect unstructured data" (Flick, 2009, p. 355).

The researcher relied on the audiotape recordings to capture the participation of each

child precisely as he or she interacted in typical situations and authentic social events

during writing experiences (Flick, 2009). As Flick (2009) stated: "A principle objective

of CA (conversational analysis) research is to identify those sequential organizations or

patterns… which structure verbal conduct in interaction" (p. 335).

Data analysis of the transcribed audiotapes permitted the researcher to deconstruct

and analyze how the "conversational machine" (Flick, 2009, p. 338) of the participants

functionally operated during journal writing activities in the classroom environment. By

conducting a conversational analysis of how the participant sequentially engaged in 'turn

taking,' as well as analyzed how meaning was accumulated, the researcher created a

formal contextual analysis in order to best answer the first and second research questions.

Observational Field Notes

Observation allowed the researcher access to behaviors of the participants in a

natural setting which allowed interpretation (Merriam, 2002, 2009). Merriam (2009)

stated observation is a natural human behavior, but only becomes a research tool "when it

is systematic, when it addresses a specific research question, and when it is subject to the

checks and balances in producing trustworthy results" (p. 118). As such, the researcher

specifically recorded how the participants sequentially worked through turn taking

throughout each observation. The researcher also recorded any non-verbal behaviors

pertinent to the research questions. Upon completion of each observation, the researcher

transcribed the field notes.

Flick (2009) stated that conversational analysis is presented, "in a reliable way

only if they are presented in the gestalt of a narrative" (p. 334). As the strength of the

case study lies primarily in the rich, thick description of the natural learning environment context, the researcher drew on this data to reconstruct the natural setting of the conversational experiences accurately (Merriam, 2004, 2009). Therefore, the field notes aided in the reconstruction of the audio transcription by confirming who said what, as well as by identifying emerging patterns throughout the data analysis and the construction of the narrative. The audiotape recordings, as well as the observations/field notes, represented the main, initial sources of the conversational analysis which answered the first and second questions of this study.

Writing Samples

While the audio recordings and observations provided an accurate evidence of how students engaged in conversations during writing events, the writing samples provided viable evidence of how these conversational experiences during writing actually influenced the ultimate text. Merriam (2009) stated that written documents are personal and can provide "a reliable source of data concerning a person's attitudes, beliefs, and views of the world" (p. 143). Therefore, the student's writing samples were collected and analyzed to gain a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

Specifically, these documents were scrutinized for themes and patterns that addressed the third research question, "What patterns, if any, emerge in the student's journal writing which gives evidence of their questions and/or participation in these conversations?" Thompson & Walker (2010, p. 109) wrote:

> Writing is thinking made tangible, thinking that can be examined because it is on the page and not in the head, invisible, floating around. Writing is thinking that can be stopped and tinkered with. It is a way of holding thought still long enough to examine its structures, its possibilities, its flaws. The road to a clearer understanding is travelled on paper. It is

46

through an attempt to find words for ourselves in which to express related ideas that we often discover what we think. (Gage, 1986, p. 24)

Informal Interviews

Merriam (2009) explained that interviews are a useful tool when a researcher wants to know more about unobservable behaviors, such as what is on a participants mind and/or what a participant in thinking about. Flick (2009) stated, "researchers should approach the field under study as naively as possible and collect unstructured data" (p. 355). The researcher conducted informal interviews with the participants only when clarification was needed regarding what had been written or said during the observation. These informal conversations were captured either through audiotapes or observational field notes, but were not analyzed systematically as formal data. Rather, they were used either to gain acceptance and membership into the group or to augment the researcher's incipient understanding of a statement or event as she sought to identify patterns or themes in the data.

Formal Interview

Merriam (2009) stated that, "Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). Merriam added that interviewing is also necessary when a researcher is interested in past events. The researcher, therefore, conducted a semi-structured interview with the teacher (Appendix B). The teacher was asked about the participants' social and academic growth. She was asked to comment about how the classroom environment and its function during student social interaction had evolved since the beginning of the school year. The interview also addressed questions regarding the teacher's overall philosophy

of education, views of child language development, and writing instruction all of which

contributed to how the classroom, including the people in it, function. Since the

classroom teacher was the conductor and facilitator of the social interaction and all which

is academic, this data source was used to help interpret the natural context of the learning

environment during the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2002) asserted that in order to create a rich, thick, detailed description

of the case and its context, data analysis must be sequential and continuous.

Furthermore, because theory-building in qualitative research is inductive, data analysis is

a recursive and dynamic process in which each data source builds successively on each

other data source, thus providing a direction as the study proceeds. Flick (2009) wrote

that the strength of conversational analysis is to show "natural situations and how a

strictly sequential analysis can provide findings which accord with and take into account

the compositional logic of social interaction" (p. 338). In this study, data analysis was a

sequential process which began at the start of each individual conversational experience

and continued through to the end in order to allow patterns and themes to emerge. These

themes were revisited frequently and continually. They were refined throughout the

study to illuminate the research questions so that a theory about them could be generated

(Merriam, 2002, 2009).

Flick (2009) defined conversational analysis as an investigational process situated

in linguistic and non-linguistic communications that occurs during social interactions. Its

goal is to determine how the meanings of the participants sequentially emerge during

contextual situations:

CA begins with the richest possible documentation- with audio-visual recording and subsequent transcription- of real and authentic social events, and breaks these down, by a comparative-systematic process of analysis, into individual structural principles of social interaction as well as the practices used to manage them by participants in an interaction. (Flick, 2009, p. 335)

Therefore, the interpretations drawn from data analysis were procedural. In this study, the researcher followed a conversational analysis procedure (Flick, 2009) during the data analysis. The first step began with transcription of the audio tapes and field notes after they were been collected. As soon as each data source had been transcribed, the researcher began the open coding process, since "data analysis is done in conjunction with data collection" (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). Merriam further explains that because "you are being open to anything possible at this point, this form of coding is often called *open* coding" (Merriam, 2009, p. 178).

During the analysis of each individual data source, the researcher looked for meaningful units of data that represented patterns related to the phenomenon of interest for each of the three research questions. Merriam (2009) suggested that these units meet two criteria:

(1) they should be heuristic so that it allows for the reader to think abstractly, beyond the unit's purported and intended meaning; and (2) each unit should be the smallest explanation possible (i.e., constitute an independent thought) that can "stand by itself. (p. 177)

During this open coding process, the focus was on the sequential structure of the transcribed audiotapes and field notes. The researcher sought to locate any questions that were sequentially situated in the transcriptions and, therefore analyzed how the children participated, again locating patterns and themes which emerged. Upon completion of these steps, the researcher compared the transcriptions to the writing samples to identify

in what ways the conversation, as well as the questions, did or did not contribute to the writing experience.

Although the researcher analyzed each participant's set separately during the open coding process, upon completion of coding the separate data sets, the researcher used the open codes to construct categories that cut across the data in order to generate a theory about the research questions. Merriam defines this as *axial or analytical* coding. It occurs when a researcher returns to the codes to construct categories to "group those comments and notes that seem to go together" (Merriam, 2009, p. 179). Consequently, the researcher located "highly aggregated meaning units and concepts that bind together the parts of the units" (Flick, 2009, p. 355) for each separate site visit. She then began to make sense of the data in its entirety by looking for descriptive accounts regarding participation in collaborative conversations and the use of questioning during writing. Flick (2009) states that during this step, "new data are sought with which the interpretation is falsified, modified, and extended by means of the later data collection" (p. 355).

At this point, the researcher merged the themes and patterns of the analysis in its entirety across the three cases in order to develop a "classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns in the study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 180). This cross-case classification system was constructed by locating codes which fell into emergent categories that cut across the data. As Merriam (2009) explained: "Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves" (p. 183). Ultimately, any patterns which emerged across all

three cases deepened understanding of research questions by demonstrating whether or not the conversations and/or questions participants raised had a visible impact on the written product. This was a critical step in the data analysis, since the purpose of those conversations and questions was to see whether the students' use of language around an journal writing event would impact their composing process.

Ultimately, the researcher collected data through theoretical sampling as she simultaneously collected and analyzed the data. Furthermore, she analyzed the data through the constant comparative method as she developed substantive theory which revolved around emerging core categories which cut across the data. These steps in developing relationships which were derived from this study are reflective of grounded theory (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) stated that, "Categories, and the properties that define or illuminate the categories, are conceptual elements of the theory, all of which are inductively derived from or are "grounded" in the data" (p. 31).

Fang (1999) stated: "Textual analysis should be theory-driven. As Halliday (1985) pointed out, an analysis without any theory of language is not an analysis at all, but simply a running commentary on a text" (p. 181). Consequently, as the researcher constructed these categories, she mindfully applied constructivist and sociopsycholinguistic theories of language learning as the means to best understand how the learners used language as a tool for learning. Using this interpretive lens during data analysis resulted in findings that provided an in-depth perspective of how first grade students employed collaborative talk and questioning as they engaged in active learning through language (Halliday, 1975; Wells, 1994; Wells & Wells, 1996).

51

Data Management

Data management and organization is of the utmost importance from the start of a

qualitative case study: "The case study researcher can be seriously challenged in trying

to make sense out of the data. Attention to data management is particularly important

under these circumstances" (Merriam, 2009, p. 203). It is recognized that the goal of a

qualitative study is not generalizability of findings, but rather to "capture the process

under study in a very detailed and exact way" (Flick, 2009, p. 134), allowing the study to

be replicated in other contexts to compare results.

The preferred way to conduct data analysis in a qualitative study is to treat it as an

on-going process that is initiated from the start of the study and continues well past the

stopping of data collection (Flick, 2009; Merriam, 2004, 2009). Because of the volume

of data that was collected, compounded with the goal to give a heuristic view of the

phenomenon of interest, data management played a critical and challenging role

throughout this case study (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, data management was given

intensive consideration from the onset of this study. Two binders were kept for

managing the data throughout this study.

One binder was used to manage the collected data. This binder was designed to

give an accurate and detailed audit trail or log of this study's journey: "An audit trail in a

qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were

derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 2009, p. 223).

Within this binder the researcher designated a section for each site visit. The section

included a list of the participants, the transcription of each audiotape recording, all

expanded field notes and all informal interviews and the writing samples which were

collected. These data were appropriately dated and catalogued. Other sections of this

binder held teacher interviews and consent forms, which were also labeled and marked

accordingly.

The second binder was reserved for data analysis and consisted of two sections.

One section was designated for the master sheet of the codes, patterns and themes that

emerged for each participant during each solitary site visit. These pages were dated and

paginated and placed sequentially in the binder. The other section was designated for the

construction of a master category sheet for the cross case comparison. This master

category sheet was placed at the beginning of the binder and was modified and referred to

as the researcher developed "conceptual congruence" (Merriam, 2009, p. 187) which was

achieved as the researcher abstracted themes and patterns that cut across the data. This

chunked data was appropriately marked by date and page when chunked into a category.

Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness

Even though quantitative research and qualitative research are based on different

assumptions of reality, the same high standards apply to both methodologies. Merriam

(2009) explained: "Rather than abstract universals arrived at through statistical analysis,

what we have in qualitative research are concrete universals. The general lies in the

particular; what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer to similar situations

subsequently encountered" (p. 28).

At the core of any research study validity, reliability and ethics are central

concerns. Maxwell (1992) stated that the data itself do not determine the validity of the

study. Rather, it is the inferences the researcher draws from the data which determine the

validity of the study:

Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose. To speak of the validity of a method is simply a shorthand way of referring to the validity of the data or accounts derived from that method. (Maxwell, 1992, p. 284)

Establishing credibility and consistency in a qualitative study is, therefore, a crucial factor not only in determining the study's reliability and validity but, also in protecting the overall quality of the study (Flick, 2009; Golafshini, 2003; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2002) suggested that researchers address the "internal validity, reliability, external validity and ethics in interpretive qualitative research" to allow the reader to judge the trustworthiness of the study (p. 23).

One of the central assumptions of qualitative research is that there is no true reality, as reality is not fixed and interpretation varies and changes from person to person and over time (Merriam, 2009). All humans construct their own individual understanding and interpretation. Internal validity then refers to the researcher's interpretations of the participants' realities (Merriam, 2002). Because the researcher is the primary data collection instrument and tool for analysis, qualitative research requires the researcher to monitor analysis closely in order to ensure he or she is presenting an accurate portrayal. The researcher therefore employed the strategy of triangulation to support the internal validity of the study. Triangulation involves "the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple resources, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). As the emphasis of this study was on reconstructing the natural interaction of the participants, the researcher employed multiple sources during the data collection process.

First, because the main source of data for this study was the audiotape transcriptions, the researcher used two to three separate devices for audio recording while at the site to ensure accuracy during the transcription. The researcher used two devices for three to four children and three devices if there were more than four children writing together in a group during the site visit. When she took field notes, the researcher also used an "echo pen," a writing instrument which had a built in recording device. As the researcher transcribed she mindfully visited each device, especially if clarification was needed, to ensure the accuracy of the contextual conversations. The writing samples of the students collected at each site visit also constituted a data source. Each of these data sources were used not only to identify patterns but also to confirm incipient patterns by checking them against the other data sources to ensure that the codes, categories and inferences which emerged from the participants cut across all areas (Merriam, 2002, 2009).

Second, the researcher used multiple methods to confirm emergent findings. As the dissertation process is often solitary, the researcher regularly consulted with members of the dissertation committee, as well as fellow doctoral students with expertise in early literacy, during the data analysis process. This helped monitor her reflexivity and subjectivity throughout the study (Flick, 2009; Merriam, 2002, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

As this study was intended to define patterns and themes which emerged from the conversational experiences of first grade students during writing, one main limitation of this study may be scrutinizing and dismantling these experiences for subjective analysis. Flick (2009) observed: "This lack of interest in the contents of the conversations in favor

of analyzing how the 'conversational machine' functions, which is at the forefront of many conversation analytic studies, has been repeatedly criticized" (p. 338).

Another foreseeable limitation may be that the researcher has limited the focus to three cases instead of analyzing the entirety of conversational experience encompassing all of those who participate. This may be due to many factors, ranging from the selected participants not always choosing to work with the same students when the researcher visits to the fact that some of the students in the group may not have signed consent forms and cannot therefore participate in the study.

As this is a qualitative case study of the conversational experiences of three participants in a first grade classroom, the leap to generalize the findings of this study to other populations may not be applicable in other locations. Therefore, it is up to the reader to visualize whether the findings of this study apply to other situations.

Similarly, since this was a case study of unique individuals in a unique setting as they are understood by one researcher, the findings which are concluded may be different through another researcher's interpretive lens and/or with other populations. Therefore, generalization to other demographic, socioeconomic and/or cultural settings may not be applicable. In addition, if this study were to be replicated elsewhere it may yield different results.

Summary

This chapter has presented the proposed design, research questions, and the methodology for a study which sought to determine how young literacy learners use language to interpret and develop meaning as they constructed an written text. The chapter included a detailed description of participant selection, data collection procedures

56

and conversational analysis. The goal of the data analysis was to gain a deeper

perspective about the patterns, themes and categories that emerge when young writers

engage in collaborative conversations and questioning and whether they were applied

during writing experiences. This chapter closed by addressing the reliability, the validity

and the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how first grade students'

engagement in collaborative conversational experiences (Wells & Wells, 1996) might

impact their literacy development. Since oral language is the primary mode through

which the literacy processes develop in young children, conversational analysis (Flick,

2009) was used to identify any salient patterns that emerged in the students' spoken

discourse during acts of composing text. The ultimate goal was to deepen understanding

of the contextual relationship between children's oral and written language.

The goal of this study was not, therefore, to provide measurable evidence of

individual student growth but rather to gain a deeper insight into how social experiences

at school might shape the writing and/or language development of young children. To

that end, the researcher sought to identify emergent themes and categories that revealed

whether or not the conversations students engaged in during journal writing had a visible

impact on their written products.

Data analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. What patterns, if any, emerge in the collaborative conversations (Wells &

Wells, 1996) of first grade students' during their construction of a journal writing entry?

2. What patterns, if any, emerge in the questions these students' generate and/or respond to during their construction of a journal writing entry?

3. What patterns, if any, emerge in the students' journal writing entry which gives evidence of their questions and/or participation in these conversations?

The study was conducted in a first grade classroom located in a small suburban, Midwestern public school. Recorded conversations were the primary data source. A total of 13 conversations occurred (Mondays and Wednesdays for the first two weeks; Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays for the last three weeks). Data collection sought to capture the "conversational machine" (Flick, 2009) of the whole and small group settings during journal writing. Data analysis and interpretation of emergent themes deliberately followed the sequential structure of the transcribed conversations and classroom observations (Flick, 2009). This meant that the conversations were analyzed chronologically from the beginning to the end of each session as well as sequentially from the first to the fifth week. Secondary data sources were transcribed field notes, student writing samples, a teacher interview, and informal conversations with the teacher and the students as needed for clarification during observations. They provided additional insights and were used to triangulate findings.

Interpretation of the data was influenced by analytic methods used in prior research conducted in the disciplines of discourse analysis and sociopsycholinguistics (Bruner, 1971, 1978, 1995; Clay, 2001, 2005; Halliday, 1975, 1993, 1996; Harste et al., 1982; Harste et al., 1984; Johnston, 2004; Vygostky, 1978, 1996; Wells, 1994, 1999; Wells & Wells, 1998, 1996). This body of research is compatible with the theoretical framework which guides the study.

This chapter presents the results of data analysis, first through a rich, thick narrative description of how a typical conversation unfolds within the classroom setting. This is followed by focused attention to three students whose literacy development was either at, above, or below grade level. At the onset of the study, the three participants were purposefully chosen with input from the classroom teacher. These individual case studies were helpful in providing a deeper understanding regarding the value of emergent writers' participation in and application of meaningful social conversational encounters with students of various developmental levels during journal writing experiences.

Results of data analysis for all three research questions are embedded in an in-depth analysis of the three selected informants of this investigation. As noted earlier, the researcher used rich, narrative description to paint a picture of the natural writing environment. This included verbatim excerpts from the conversations observed. Data analysis was restricted to nine observational sessions which best captured the natural writing environment. The other four were hampered by unnatural circumstances (e.g., a substitute teacher).

The Classroom Environment

As the researcher embarked on the initial observation in mid-April, students were busily retrieving their journals for daily journal writing. There was a low hum of conversation as the 24 students gathered their belongings and returned to the four brightly colored round tables located in the center of the large first grade classroom to begin their writing task for the day. During an interview Mrs. Kay, the classroom teacher, commented: "We were provided with the tables so that is what I had to use" (TI: P1). The classroom was designed with the tables as the focal point. Placed in the middle of

each table were baskets of writing materials (e.g., pencils, crayons, scissors, name tags) the students shared. One wall was designated as the "word wall." It contained sight words the students were required to effortlessly identify and use as a resource during writing time. This wall was simultaneously shared with a Promethean Board (Promethean World plc).

The adjoining wall contained a row of computers. Nearby was a wall designated for the calendar. It also contained high-frequency vocabulary words that students could use as a resource during their journal writing (e.g., days of the week, holidays, months). In the same area was a "reading nook" containing numerous books and children's literature for the students to enjoy. Another wall was lined with windows, but posters were hung above them. The posters listed the rules and expectations for writing. Some of them had been created by the children to announce important classroom and school-wide events. They also served as a useful resource for the children during writing time.

Preliminary data analysis of four observations revealed a predictable sequence of events pertaining to the evolution of the conversations during writing time. Although the conversational transcriptions were presented in a linear fashion, the children's verbal interactions often overlapped. The three discernible phases of a lesson were the class opening directed by the teacher, conversational shifts that occurred as students composed, and the closure of the writing activity which was also teacher-directed.

Opening

The opening of journal writing was meant to set the stage for the independent writing activity. For the majority of the observations, Mrs. Kay began by focusing class attention on the writing task which she continually monitored until the closure. After she

had gained the children's attention, Mrs. Kay engaged the class in conversation, reinforcing explicit expectations she had of them while also noting any idiosyncratic engagement by individual students. The choice of topics had been carefully designed to tap into the students' experiences. These were often the nucleus of the conversational opening, always conducted through whole group brainstorming.

During the following excerpt, Mrs. Kay encouraged students to provide a glimpse of their main topic idea and then gently guided them through teacher modeling to expand their ideas by providing details. As this particular opening unfolded, many of the children during the brainstorming activity revealed that they would be writing about their recent choir concert. The following is an example of an explicit expectation to be incorporated in their final written product:

> Mrs. Kay: OK. For those of you who are writing about the concert today give me a detail. I'll give you one detail if I was writing about the concert, I might mention the bright lights. That's a detail. Does anyone else have a different detail to add about our concert? Natalie?
>
> Natalie: Um that I was on, in the second row.
>
> Mrs. Kay: The second row. Natalie told me exactly which riser she was on. Melissa?
>
> Melissa: Ummm . . . . That my mom and dad were there?
>
> Mrs. Kay: Ahhhh, Melissa said that her mom and dad were there. That is a great detail. . . . And Reese? A detail about the concert? You can talk about the lights; where you stood; who was there…
>
> Reese: I saw my mom and dad.
>
> Mrs. Kay: He saw his mom and dad. All right; can I have the red table choose a smart spot . . . green table . . . blue table a smart spot. (TO4: P2)

Mrs. Kay frequently validated and complimented student responses. Furthermore, she would acknowledge that not every student in the classroom may have had the

62

opportunity to share their ideas but encouraged the students to share during their small

social groups to develop their topics for writing:

> Mrs. Kay: Ok, I know lots of you had not had a chance to share your idea with
> me yet but, that's ok; that's what you can share with your neighbor. (TO: 9:P2)

As the students scattered about the room in all directions, they located their

writing buddies while simultaneously finding a smart writing spot. This seating was

flexible. Mrs. Kay stated that in the beginning of the year, she chose seating for the

children, but as the year progressed she encouraged student independence allowing for

students to make good choices.

Conversational Shifts

The significant themes and patterns which emerged for all the research questions

occurred during the Conversational Shift phase of the lesson. This was probably because

it was during this time that the collaborative conversations (Wells & Wells, 1996)

between students transpired. During this phase, students used oral language to initiate or

react to the comments of peers. Therefore, all examples drawn from the data occurred

during this phase of the sequential conversation.

Closure

The closure of journal writing time was presented as a wrap-up of the daily

journal activity. Most students were observed to initiate simple utterances such as, "I'm

done." This type of initiation was followed by a conference with Mrs. Kay. Mrs. Kay

would begin the closure routine several minutes before the end of writing time by

providing a gentle reminder to students of the number of minutes remaining. As her

countdown ensued, she would provide friendly reminders of the expectations for

completion; in the final moments, she would ask the students to add their "final touches."

During an observation on May 20th, the importance and appreciation for routine was

apparent:

> Mrs. Kay: OK final touches please.
>
> Alley: Final touches?
>
> Masey: She always says that (laughing).
>
> Masey: So it would be last.
>
> Masey & Alley: Final touches.
>
> Masey: Yeah, because she always says that.
>
> Alley: Yeah, she always.
>
> Masey: She always says that . . . she says last final touches and then she says now this is our very last final touches of the day (the girls giggle).
>
> Alley: Of the day. I'll miss that next year. (TO9:P14)

Although not all students were able to complete the illustration to their journal entry,

Mrs. Kay would often allow extra time later in the day for students to finish.

Overview of Results

The themes or patterns which addressed the first and second research question

emerged through collaborative conversations that occurred during the Conversational

Shift phase of journal writing. According to Wells and Wells (1996), a collaborative

conversation is any discussion that occurs between one or more persons during which the

language produced revolves around achieving a goal. In this study, collaborative talk

referred to those conversations students had with each other, with the teacher, or with

themselves to meet the goal of generating a text during journal writing. Data analysis

found that the conversations typically evolved around three topics related to 1) the classroom context, 2) personal information and, and 3) the writing process.

Shifts from one speaker to the next were engendered by one of two conversational actions on the part of the participants: 1) an initiation or 2) a reaction. Data analysis revealed two broad categories of initiation: 1) utterances and 2) questions. Collaborative conversations involving initiation and response which emerged as most significant were those which occurred around the writing process. Specifically, such conversations were usually initiated by participants with some kind of utterance or question pertaining to the writer's craft or writing mechanics. Students either uttered what they were thinking aloud during the construction of their journal entry or deliberately asked questions of their peers. The topic of these events was usually related to the writer's craft (e.g., content or topic)) or the mechanics of writing (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization, spaces, etc.).

An utterance is defined as a statement initiated by a participant that is not addressed to any particular audience. Utterances fell into one of two subcategories: 1) generic comments or 2) meaningful self-talk. Generic comments were casual or random statements made by participants pertaining to the writing process but not addressed to any particular audience. By contrast, meaningful self-talk were intentional oral deliberations, initiated by participants with themselves, for the purpose of resolving or advancing some aspect of the writing process. Most meaningful self-talk had a discernible impact on the construction of the written product. Most, but not all, topic initiations received some kind of reaction from peers or the teacher.

Peer and/or teacher reactions to initiations fell into four categories: 1) direct support, 2) furtherance, 3) acknowledgement, or 4) non-response. Direct support occurred when a participant was given explicit information that enabled him or her to move forward during the construction of their journal entry. Furtherance reactions extended a conversation through statements or questions which resulted in a collaborative problem solving. Acknowledgments were brief responses that merely recognized a participant's utterance or question. A non-response occurred when a participant made an initiation to which there was no reaction from others.

To highlight patterns which resulted in categories that addressed the research questions, this chapter presents in-depth analysis of collaborative conversations with three purposefully chosen participants. An individual case study of each participant shares examples of illustrative initiations and reactions with an analysis of how the collaborative conversations impacted one of their written products. The three profiles are followed by a cross-case analysis and summary of findings that address the research questions.

Reese

Reese was a young boy who lived with his mother. At the time of data collection Reese was 8 years old, which was an entire year older than the other students in the class. Reese was a kind, gentle young man who loved people and animals. He enjoyed engaging in conversation about his friends, family, and his pets. Reese always chose to work within a social group during journal writing time.

Although he was a struggling writer, Reese was observed to happily engage in journal writing. However, Reese appeared to lack self-confidence as a student. During

one observation, the researcher sensed she was in Reese's way and asked him if he needed her to move. He replied: "I don't know because I want to copy you but it would be too hard" (TO11:P8). Reese often looked for encouragement in the form of praise and validation from his peers, but particularly from Mrs. Kay. Although Mrs. Kay held informal conferences with students during each observation, formal conferencing with the rubric only occurred twice during data collection. Each student in the class was given a copy of the rubric to place in his or her writing folder to use as a resource and refer to while writing. Reese was never observed checking his work with the rubric, even on formal assessment days. During an informal interview with Mrs. Kay, she commented that Reese put forth his best effort on days when he knew the rubric would be used.

Reese was observed to solicit help on numerous occasions from both Mrs. Kay and other students. His conversations typically concerned personal information and events occurring in the classroom context. Reese was easily distracted by conversations that interfered with the writing task, conversations for which he often was the initiator. Mrs. Kay spent a great deal of time helping Reese focus and work through his journal writing. Mrs. Kay's expectation was that each child compose at least four detailed sentences for a journal writing event. Reese was observed six times during the data collection; he completed his journal entry with illustrations only one out of the six times.

Utterance and peer reaction. Data analysis revealed that Reese initiated 35 generic comments of which 34 received a non-response and one was acknowledged by one of his peers. Reese initiated 16 questions and received direct support four times; acknowledgement three times; a non-reaction twice; and furtherance seven times. However, Mrs. Kay initiated furtherance with Reese 24 times during the six observations.

Data analysis of the observational transcripts found that Reese engaged in 35 utterances about the writing process. Moreover, Reese sporadically verbalized isolated words in a non-meaningful way 26 times. Neither his teacher nor his peers reacted to any of these utterances. For example, as Reese was writing he might randomly say one word he was writing aloud (e.g., "dog," "mittens"). Such verbalizations were uttered in an unconnected, non-meaningful way. Furthermore, Reese's engagement in self-talk had no discernible impact on his written work.

The remaining 11 utterances were generic comments which received a range of reactions from others. Six of these comments were observations about the nature of Reese's involvement in the construction of his journal entry, such as "I'm already done" (TO8:P22). Each of these utterances received a non-response reaction from Reese's peers. During one observation Reese received an acknowledgement from one of his writing buddies as he counted the number of periods he had used out loud: "Reese bragged that 'I have 10 (periods)' which the peer acknowledged with 'Wow'" (May 25, 2013). Three of the utterances pertained to the writer's craft and received a furtherance reaction from his peers.

Reese began each writing session by initiating a collaborative conversation, often about the choice of topic for that day. For instance, during one observation Reese said, "I forget what to write" (TO12:P3). This utterance sparked a rich discussion among Reese and his four writing buddies about the recent Memorial Day parade events. As each friend shared his parade experience, he furthered the conversation (see Figure 4.1). Ultimately, because of the conversation that evolved from his statement, Reese was able

to verbalize his parade experience to his friends. The interactive conversation had a

significant impact on Reese's journal entry that day.

Questions and peer reactions. Data analysis revealed that Reese initiated 16

questions during the six observations. Three of these questions were about writing

mechanics and specifically directed at Mrs. Kay. On those occasions, Reese sought

praise for his handwriting twice and assistance with spelling once. As she responded to

one of the handwriting questions, Mrs. Kay acknowledged Reese by telling him "Good

job." She responded to the other two questions with furtherance. On two occasions,

Reese asked a student teacher how to spell words and received a direct response from her.

The remaining questions were directed at peers and all but one pertained to spelling.

Reese often began with a generic comment that stated his problem; but if there

was no response, he quickly initiated a direct question to elicit the help of his peers.

During an observation on May 15, 2013, this conversation transpired between Reese and

Zed:

> Reese: Ok, you have to spell yesterday for me. (pause) How do you spell
> yesterday?
>
> Zed: Are you sure? Yesterday, Y-E-S-S-S (begins to spell but then starts to
> repeat the S and begins laughing).
>
> Reese: How do you spell yesterday? It's not funny. Y-E-S-R . . . yesterday . . .
> you're being mean to me.
>
> Zed: No I'm not.
>
> Reese: You have to help me. (TO8:P3)

Reese received direct support from his peers four times. Data analysis revealed

that Reese pursued his questions to others until there was a resolution. If Reese did not

receive an explicit reaction to his questions, he received a furtherance response from his

peers. As noted earlier, these furtherance responses sometimes evolved into

conversations that resulted in some impact on his writing. The following excerpt is an

example of furtherance between Reese and his writing buddies Alley and Masey:

Reese: Alley, how do you spell 'this'? (the word this)

Alley: It's on the word wall word.

(Reese looks over at the word wall from his seat trying to locate the word)

Alley: Oh, I don't like my handwriting. What are you going to write about?

Masey: My play date from yesterday

Reese: Alley, it's not on there

Masey: (Begins to spell it for Reese) T-H

Alley: Masey! He has to tap it out! He's supposed to tap it out. He has to tap it out. Masey! You're not supposed to get up to answer.

Masey: I'm not telling him. Reese, up on the word wall it's under T.

Alley: Yeah. It's on the word wall, but you can't see it that well so you have to walk over.

Reese: I saw it, but it doesn't say.

Masey: Yeah, it's on there (pause) (TO 4: PG 3 &4).

Ultimately, Masey directed Reese to search the dictionary located in the back of

the journal in order to locate and apply the word in his journal writing correctly. The

majority of the furtherance responses from Reese's peers guided Reese in finding

allocated resources in the room.

Data analysis determined that Reese usually initiated questions to his peers about

the mechanics of writing. Mrs. Kay, however, often deliberately initiated furtherance

questions when she was working with Reese. These were not in response to any

utterances or questions from him. In fact, Mrs. Kay engaged in furtherance with Reese 24 times during the 6 observations, all of which occurred during the construction of Reese's journal entry. During each observation, Mrs. Kay was engaged in furtherance conversations with Reese from the onset of the journal writing event through its completion. Mrs. Kay would expand dialogue and ask Reese questions to keep him on task and help move him forward with his writing. These questions focused on the writer's craft, as well as mechanical aspects of the writing process.

Impact on Reese's written product. Figure 4.1 presents a typical writing sample from Reese's journal entry on May 28, 2013.
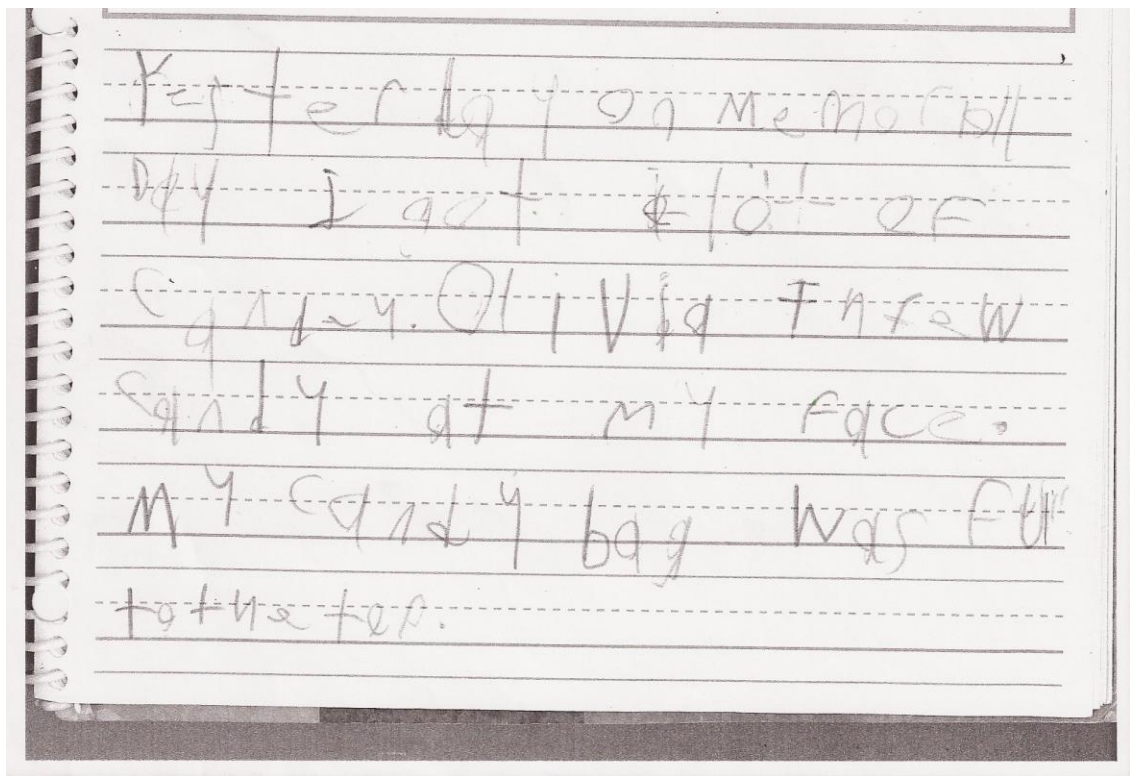

Figure 4.1. Reese's typical writing sample. (This reads: Yesterday on Memorial Day. I got a lot of candy. Olive threw candy at my face. My candy bag was full to the top.)

On this day Reese sat down with his writing buddies and immediately stated he did not know what to write about. One of the students at the table suggested that Reese

write about the recent Memorial Day parade and a rich discussion emerged among the group. Reese began describing how his friend in the parade threw candy at his face. This became the topic of Reese's journal entry. Data analysis revealed that Reese began each writing session by initiating a collaborative conversation, either with his peers for ideas or with Mrs. Kay for validation of his writing topic. Occasionally, Reese did begin his journal entry independently but then erased it and completely started over after engaging in conversation with his writing buddies or Mrs. Kay.

Shortly after the onset of writing, Mrs. Kay began circulating around the room to check-in with the various writing groups. As she approached Reese's table, she noted that everyone in the writing circle was beginning his or her journal writing with "Yesterday." She then turned her attention to Reese:

Mrs. Kay: Reese how do you start?

Reese: Capital (pause)

Reese: Yesterday.

Mrs. Kay: Do you remember our capital Y? That's actually a giant lower case. Your Y is actually a V in the sky with a stick. (TO12:P9)

After Mrs. Kay helped Reese get started, she continued to circulate around the room checking in with other students and helping as needed. As the other students within Reese's writing circle engaged in their text construction, Reese slowly progressed with his writing. He borrowed the "Memorial Day" card which had been taken down from the calendar and used it to copy the spelling on his paper. During his application, he briefly engaged in a word utterance as he copied the word "duh-day." After he finished copying,

Reese quickly became off task until Mrs. Kay returned a few moments later to assess his progress.

Mrs. Kay: What do you have so far?

Reese: Yesterday on Memorial Day I . . . went.

Mrs. Kay: Go slow, go slow.

Reese: Got (he changed from went to got).

Mrs. Kay: Good. What letter comes next?

Reese: O.

Mrs. Kay: Make a perfect circle and up to the sky with that T.

Reese: Which, where? Which letter?

Mrs. Kay: What is your word?

Reese: Got.

Mrs. Kay: Up to the sky (helping him form the letter t). Good.

Reese: A lot of candy.

Mrs. Kay: Umhum. Can I see a finger space though? Good.

Reese: I, it filled up the whole bag.

Mrs. Kay: The candy bag? You got that much? Tell me about it. (TO12: P 14 &15)

By the time Mrs. Kay had arrived at the table Reese had written "Yesterday on Memorial Day I" on his paper. Before she left, Mrs. Kay engaged in furtherance to help Reese construct his first two sentences. Through this collaborative conversation, Reese and Mrs. Kay began the sentences; but as soon as Mrs. Kay left, Reese quickly wandered into other topics with unproductive generic comments. After several minutes, Mrs. Kay returned:

Mrs. Kay: Oh dear . . . all right we need a lot more done "Yesterday on Memorial Day I got a lot of candy"

Reese: Period.

Mrs. Kay: Umhum. Now what are you going to tell?

Reese: I don't know.

Mrs. Kay: (gasp) We just talked about it. . . . Didn't you tell me about Olive?

Reese: Yeah.

Mrs. Kay: OK. Start with a big capital O for Olive. Do you know how to spell Olive? If not, she's right here. (Reese was sitting with her). Perfect, "yesterday it was Memorial day. . . . I". We just talked about an important name so you need a big capital. . . . Ok, make it perfect, round, nice. Olllliiiiiivvvvve (she enunciates the word for Reese to hear the sounds). (TO12:P 21&22)

Mrs. Kay engaged Reese in furtherance five times during the approximately 45 minute writing event. Data analysis indicated that this type of reaction from Mrs. Kay was typical. As collaborative conversations transpired between Reese and Mrs. Kay, she generally began by using furtherance with questions such as, "How are we doing Reese?"(TO4:P11). Typically, during these initial conversations construction of the first sentence was achieved. Then as Mrs. Kay would follow up on Reese's progress during her next round of checking in, she would begin with, "What do we have so far Reese?" (TO4:P14). The majority of the time Reese was no further along than he had been during Mrs. Kay's last visit.

As these conversations transpired over time, Mrs. Kay began to provide more direct support pertaining to both the writer's craft and mechanical aspects of the writing process. Evidence emerged showing that the majority of Reese's engagement in the act of writing occurred while Mrs. Kay was physically present. Data analysis revealed that this type of behavior was typical for Reese.

74

Reese's reactions to peer initiations. Data analysis found that Reese's reactions to his peer's initiated questions and utterances were minimal. On two separate occasions, two of Reese's writing buddies initiated a question about how to spell a word. On each occasion, Reese attempted to provide direct support by spelling the word for his friend. However, both times Reese's attempt to provide help was neither acknowledged nor accepted by his peers, probably because the spellings he provided were incorrect.

Summary. Results of data analysis found that Reese's engagement in initiations usually took the form of generic comments and specific questions about the writing process. Moreover, he did not engage in meaningful self-talk. While Reese received all four types of reactions from his peers, he mainly received furtherance and direct support from his teacher. Furthermore, when Reese asked a question, he was not satisfied with a non-reaction or simple acknowledgement from his peers, particularly when he faced problems with writing mechanics (e.g., spelling). When Reese encountered these reactions, he typically reiterated the question until he had received assistance, usually through furtherance or direct support.

One significant finding of the sequential conversational analysis was that it was only through Mrs. Kay's deliberate and continual furtherance initiations and reactions that Reese was ultimately able to construct his journal writing. Often reactions that began with furtherance turned into direct support. Reese himself offered few reactions to peer-initiated questions. When he did, these were always in the form of direct support, though the information he offered was sometimes inaccurate. Reese only completed one writing assignment and as noted earlier, his engagement in meaningful self-talk had no discernible impact on his produced writings.

Tina

Tina had just turned seven a few days before the beginning of data collection. She was, therefore, one of the younger children in the class, as well as the youngest participant in the study. Tina lived at home with her biological parents and younger sister. Her mother was a homemaker who regularly volunteered in the classroom. During the observations, Tina spoke of her reading and writing experiences at home. After she successfully helped one of her writing buddies spell the word "jazz," Tina explained that she knew how to spell the word because at home she and her mother had constructed a calendar on which they had recorded Tina's after school activities. Tina was chosen because her literacy development met grade-level expectations and so was representative of students who satisfy the district's language arts standards for first grade.

Tina was a vivacious young girl who was usually the director of her social writing cluster. She was inquisitive and happily engaged in conversation with her peers in all of the topics related to conversational shifts. During writing events, she spent an equal amount of time on- and off-task. Although Mrs. Kay occasionally intervened, Tina could easily self-direct and refocus without an initiation or reminder from Mrs. Kay. Although Tina always worked with her two closest friends, during two observations she did welcome others to join the writing cluster.

Tina independently located and used classroom resources (e.g., the dictionary) during the construction of her journal entry. She was a determined writer and often extended herself to help others in her writing cluster fulfill their writing goals. On several occasions, Tina's curiosity sparked rich conversations about the topics students at

her table were writing on. She continually inquired about the researcher's occupation and the "book" she was convinced the researcher was writing.

Tina was observed six times during the data collection, although only four of the observations were used for data analysis. During each of those observations, Tina set goals for herself as a writer. She also self-monitored her progress and for each journal writing exceeded the four sentence minimum required by Mrs. Kay. Moreover, Tina finished her journal writing, including illustrations and corrections, during three out of the four observations. On one occasion, she was unable to complete her illustration because of the length of her entry.

Data analysis revealed that Tina initiated 87 utterances. Tina initiated six generic comments which received acknowledgements or non-response reactions. Of the 87 utterances, Tina engaged in meaningful self-talk 76 times. Furthermore, Tina initiated 12 questions. Five of these questions were comparisons of her progress with others. These received acknowledgement and non-reaction responses. Six of the questions were about spelling. All six questions were addressed to an adult in the room; she received furtherance reactions to five of them. Tina initiated one question about the writer's craft. It received furtherance which evolved into a collaborative conversation with peers.

Utterance and peer reaction. Results of data analysis found that Tina initiated 87 utterances pertaining to the writing process. Six of these were generic comments in the form of statements; they received a non-reaction from peers. For example, as Tina worked she would state, "I'm on the back" as she moved on to another page. Tina often monitored her progress by orally counting the number of periods and pages through until the entry was completed.

In addition, Tina used oral language to compose at every stage of sentence construction, saying each individual word or phrase orally as she placed her markings on the paper. Although Tina might say a word in isolation, that word was soon followed by another part of the sentence shortly after. In fact, Tina only uttered generic words in complete isolation a total of five times during the observations.

Data analysis revealed that out of the 87 utterances Tina initiated, she engaged in meaningful self-talk 76 times. As she prepared herself to write, Tina typically verbalized her plans for text construction. At the onset of writing during each observation, Tina engaged in meaningful self-talk about her choice of topic. One day she stated, "I'm going to write about my dance team" (TO7:P1). She used this kind of self-talk to hone in on her topic.

Tina's primary use of utterance was as a strategy to work through and advance writing though self-talk. The following is an example of Tina engaging in self-talk as she writes, "Then I will be in front of three judges I don't know and they will see if I made it. I have to try my best to go to the dance team" (May 13, 2003):

> Tina: Will be in front of three (pause)
> Then I will be in front of three…judges (pause)
> Now (pause) and they (pause) sssssseeee (pause)
> Have to . . . I have T-T-T (pause) go to (pause) dance. (TO7:P20)

Tina also engaged in self-talk as she generated more complex words and/or unknown words. She typically elongated and sounded out words such as "windy," often by breaking them apart:

> Tina: Really windy (pause)
> W-I-N (starts spelling the word letter by letter) (pause)
> Windy (repeats the word) (pause)
> Win-d-y (breaks the word apart). (TO10:P12)

Most of Tina's utterances received a non-response from peers. Moreover, there were no examples of direct support or acknowledgements. Only once did a generic comment receive a furtherance reaction from Tina's peers. On that occasion, Tina experienced writer's block during the composition of her text, stating "I don't know my next sentence" (TO13:P8). After this initiation, Tina immediately began describing the big, giant chocolate chip cookies her mother was bringing in on the last day of school. The rich discussion which followed greatly impacted the remainder of her journal entry on this day (see Figure 4.2).

Questions and peer reactions. Data analysis revealed that Tina initiated 12 questions pertaining to the writing process. Four of these questions were so she could compare her own progress with peers. Perhaps because Tina needed to establish specific goals, her questions for her writing buddies generally inquired about the length of an entry. Tina initiated conversations by asking, "How much did you write today?" (TO7:P15) or "How many [pages] do you have?" (TO10:P10). These questions usually received acknowledgment reactions as peers examined and compared their own productivity.

Twice, Tina initiated questions about writer's craft. One question received a non-response (TO13:P12). Observational notes indicated that Tina then resolved this problem herself. However, on a separate occasion Tina engaged her writing partners by asking them if they knew that her mother was going to bring in cookies for a treat on the last day of school. The collaborative conversation which ensued helped Tina move forward with her journal entry (see Figure 4.2).

Tina initiated six questions about writing mechanics (i.e., spelling), always by soliciting the help of an adult in the classroom. She received an explicit answer from the student teacher on one occasion and furtherance responses from the researcher twice and Mrs. Kay three times. The following example is from May 1, 2013:

Tina: How do you spell there?

Mrs. Kay: Use it in a sentence.

Tina: There are all kinds of hats. T-H? Then a vowel . . . E-R?

Mrs. Kay: One more.

Tina: E.

Mrs. Kay: Yes! (pause)

Tina: So wait, T-H-E-R-E?

Mrs. Kay: Umhum (TO4:P3)

Tina was a determined writer and rarely received direct support as a reaction from others. As noted in this example, the few questions she initiated were often answered through furtherance as Tina worked out the solutions to her question with guidance. The only time Tina received direct support was when she approached a student teacher asking for help in spelling "excited" and the student teacher then spelled the word for her (TO4:P4).

Although Mrs. Kay frequently initiated collaborative conversations with students through furtherance to move them forward during the construction of their journal writing entry, she only did this twice with Tina during the four observations. Moreover, these instances of furtherance presented themselves as an attempt by Mrs. Kay to refocus Tina's attention because she was engaging in non-writing related conversations.

Most of Tina's conferences with Mrs. Kay occurred after she had completed her journal entry. Typically, Tina initiated the conference by telling Mrs. Kay, "I'm done." During the conference which followed the completion of one journal entry (see Figure 4.2), Tina repeatedly asked Mrs. Kay, "What about my handwriting? Is my handwriting good?" Mrs. Kay gave her a mini-lesson on lower-case "g" formation and pointed out other instructional areas such as periods and capitals. At the conclusion of the conference, she asked Tina, "What can you work on?" Tina responded, "My G's in my handwriting" (TO13:P21).

Typically during these conferences, Tina seemed determined to catch her own mistakes as she read through her completed work with Mrs. Kay. As Tina was reading through her work during one conference, for example, she kept finding mistakes (e.g., subject-verb agreement) and corrected them with the approval of the teacher and her peers. Tina's writing buddy Melissa complimented her several times by saying, "Good thing she catched [sic] it" (TO10:P16) and "She's catching a lot of her writings. Wow" (TO10:P17).

Impact on Tina's written product. Tina solicited minimal help from others, either in the form of explicit questions and/or generic comments. Tina's writing entries were typically the result of meaningful self-talk that she engaged in throughout the process of text composition. The following is a partial writing sample from Tina's journal entry on May 29, 2013.
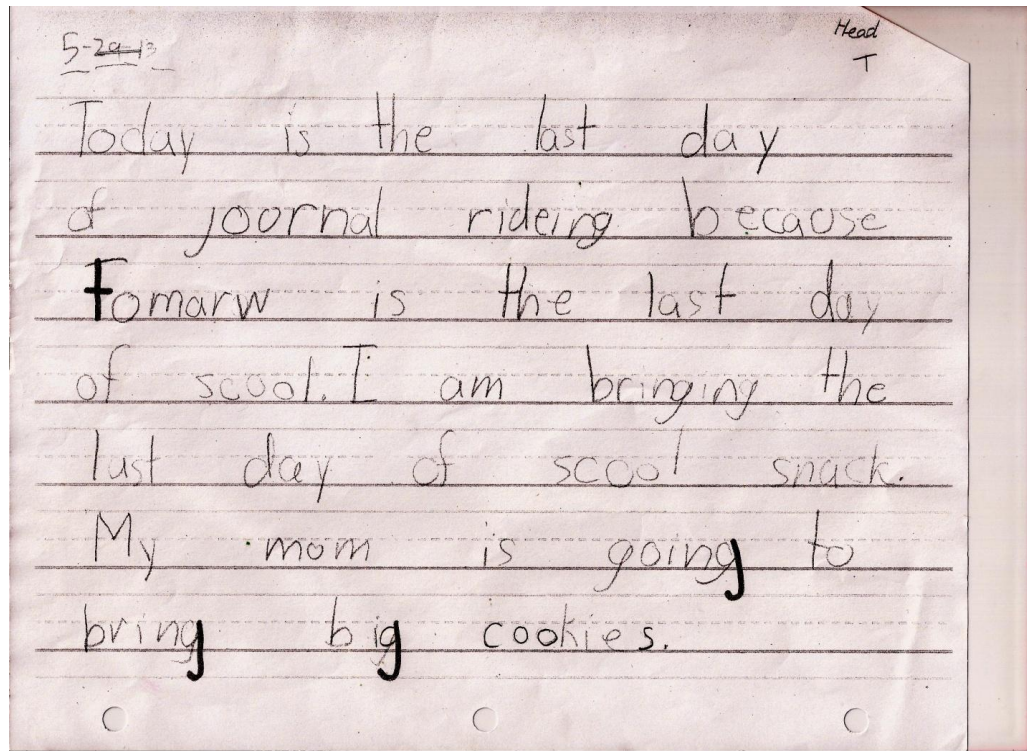
Figure 4.2. Tina's writing sample. (This reads: Today is the last day of journal writing because tomorrow is the last day of school. I am bringing the last day of school snack. My mom is going to bring big cookies.)

Initially, the construction of this journal entry evolved as Tina sequentially worked her way through the writing task without requesting assistance from either the teacher or her peers. She talked her way through "Today is the last day" and kept silently writing until she became stuck on the word *journal*. Initially, Tina asked the researcher how to spell "journal." The researcher responded with furtherance by asking Tina where she could find that word. Tina then resourcefully located this word off of the cover of the journal notebook, copied it down, and continued to support the construction of her entry with meaningful self-talk by verbalizing "journal writing because tomorrow" (pause) "the last day."

At this point Tina said that she was stuck and engaged in a collaborative

conversation by initiating a question to which she received a furtherance reaction:

Tina: Ummm. . . . What should my next sentence be? (pause) I don't know my next sentence. "My . . . mom . . . is . . .

Kat: Oh yeah, my dad said we might have an ice cream party since he's the room mom.

Tina: Going . . . to . . . bring . . .

Melissa: We are going to have an ice cream party?

Tina: Did you know that my mom is bringing huge cookies?

Melissa: An ice cream party?

Reese: He's the room mom so you know it.

Tina: You guys, you guys, did you know that my mom is bringing in the last day of school snack? And she's bringing in these big cookies?

Reese: Oh

Kat: Big?

Melissa: How big?

Tina: Big chocolate chip cookies about like . . . this big.

Reese: OHHHH Tina's mom is bringing in big giant cookies!

After engagement in this collaborative conversation with her peers, Tina silently

advanced through the next sentence ("I am bringing the last day of school snack"). She

then resumed self-talk through the construction of the last sentence on this page but only

by saying, "My mom is" aloud. This example of self-talk and its direct impact on Tina's

journal writing was typical.

Tina's reaction to peer initiations. Data analysis found that Tina was an active participant in searching out solutions to problems concerning her own writing, as well as in providing support to the others in her writing group. Tina's writing partners initiated questions or utterances pertaining to their writing craft struggles on three occasions. Each time Tina used furtherance to respond to her friends:

Melissa: What shall I write about? (pause)

Melissa: What should I write about? (Melissa goes over to Mrs. Kay for help and comes back to the table)

Melissa: Mrs. Kay told me I should chit-chat with you to see what I should write about.

Tina: Oop. Chat with? Ohhh. . . . How about you write about what you shared this morning? I'm writing about what I shared this morning.

Melissa: I forget what I shared

Tina: So you clean right? For um, eight?

Melissa: Oh, I forgot!

Tina: Oh, so, oh, you shared that you cleaned for eight showers.

Melissa: Hours! (TO7:P2)

However, on five occasions Tina was asked questions about spelling. Each time she provided direct support to her peers:

Melissa: Do you know how to spell Sunday?

Kat: Go get it (from the calendar).

Tina: S U, S . . . I do, I do, I do. You don't have to get it cause it's stuck on there. S U N D A Y . . . it's easy. S U

Melissa: U

Tina: U N

Melissa: N

Tina: D A Y

Melissa: D A

Tina: That was easy

Melissa: I only know how to spell…

Tina: Just break it up. 'Sun' and then 'day'

Melissa: And day. Oh that was easy and

Tina: And then smash it together and its says 'Sunday' and then you write it all together

Researcher: Smash it together?

Tina: Yah. That's how Mrs. Kay taught us. (TO10:P 3&4)

Data analysis revealed that Tina also listened and reacted to her writing partners' collaborative discussions with Mrs. Kay. Twice Tina interrupted conferences to help her friends solve issues with the writing process. For example, during one observation Mrs. Kay was trying to draw attention to a sentence fragment Melissa had written by accentuating the period with an extra long pause. Melissa was unable to understand Mrs. Kay's point until Tina interrupted:

Tina: Wait, wait, wait, Melissa. . . . Mrs. Kay

Mrs. Kay: What do you think Tina?

Tina: Is it this capital? You have to make it lower case. Away with this period.

Mrs. Kay: OK, good thinking Tina. And then could you read that last sentence again Melissa.

Summary. Results of data analysis found that Tina's engagement in initiations usually took the form of meaningful self-talk and questions that compared her writing

85

progress to others. The majority of the reactions she received from others were non-reactions although on occasion she received an acknowledgement or furtherance. Rarely, however, did Tina receive direct support. When Tina encountered a problem with writing mechanics, she always sought the help of an adult. Tina reacted to peers chiefly through the use of direct support or furtherance. Although she did ask her peers a few questions about the writer's craft, Tina's engagement in meaningful self-talk had the greatest impact on her produced writings.

Alley

Alley was selected to represent a child whose writing proficiency was above grade level. Alley had a December birthday and was approximately 6½ years old at the time of data collection. She lived at home with her mother, father and brother. During the teacher interview, Mrs. Kay commented that Alley was an "independent thinker." Mrs. Kay noted that Alley used all available resources during writing events, including the teacher-created rubric. She thought Alley wanted to "make sure that she includes everything," so she could remember her end-goals and meet expectations (TI:P6).

Alley was a quiet, focused student who took her school work seriously. She rarely initiated conversational shifts on the topics of personal identity or the classroom context. When Alley engaged in off-topic conversational shifts during writing events, she always successfully redirected herself to the writing task. On several occasions Alley interrupted and redirected her peers when they were engaged in off-task conversation. Alley was cognizant of her writing partners' progress and would monitor, challenge, and analyze their work. In fact, Alley often kept others on track with their writing. For example, one day she turned to Reese and said, "Reese, you're supposed to be writing.

You only have two sentences" (TO4:P19). Alley always chose to work with her best

friend Masey, although the two girls frequently included other writing buddies, especially

Reese. Alley was observed six times during the data collection; she completed her

journal entry with illustrations all six times.

Data analysis revealed that Alley initiated 125 utterances. Out of these utterances,

17 were generic comments, all of which received a non-reaction. Furthermore, Alley

engaged in meaningful self-talk 97 times. She initiated seven questions during the six

observations. Five of these questions were initiated in the company of her peers but

received non-reaction responses. Two of the questions were addressed to the teacher.

One question pertaining to spelling received a furtherance response from Mrs. Kay, while

the other inquired about assessment and received a non-response from her.

Utterance and peer reaction. Data analysis revealed that Alley initiated 125

utterances pertaining to the writing process. Four were isolated words spoken orally

during the construction of her journal entries. Thirteen were similarly generic comments;

all received a non-reaction from peers. Some of the generic comments occurred while

Alley was self-monitoring her work. For example, at one point she stated, "I don't like

my handwriting" (TO4:P3), a comment to which there was no response from her peers.

Most of the generic comments to which there was no reaction occurred as she was

finishing her writing (e.g., "I'm done") (TO4:P23). She often made generic comments

while working on illustrations for her composition. For example, before she drew an

American flag Alley said, "I am not drawing 50 stars" (TO12:P25).

During the six observations, Alley only received one furtherance reaction from

her peers. It occurred while she was considering a choice of topic. It is unclear whether

the initiation was deliberately intended to engage others:

Alley: I just don't know what else to write about.

Mandy: What did you do over the weekend?

Masey: Did you open your pool? Wow, cause Matt did open their pool.

Mandy: You . . . could . . . Write about what you are going to do this summer or
you could say when the (local) pool opens I am going to go there

Alley: I might (TO12:P5)

Although Alley's peers used furtherance to assist her in selecting a topic, this

conversation had no direct impact on her writing since she eventually chose to write

about Memorial Day. Data analysis further indicated that Alley engaged in meaningful

self-talk approximately 97 times as she worked through the construction of her journal

entry. Sometimes she analyzed her own handwriting (e.g., TO11:P5) or self-corrected

her own errors: "Oh I wrote a little 'I'" (TO4:P10). From the moment Alley sat down to

write, she used oral language throughout each phase of writing. The following is an

example of meaningful self-talk used to support text construction:

Alley: On Saturday (pause)
On Saturday . . . I went to
On Saturday IIIIIIIII:, oh yeah (pause)
Okay (pause). I went . . . I went to . . . Michigan . . . MMMMMM . . .
MMMMMM. I don't know how to spell that.
I went, I went to (pause) Miii . . . Maaa . . . Mih . . .ch (sound) . . . Mi-chigan
(breaks apart into two sounds). Michigan

Masey: Michigan? (interrupts)

Alley: Mich-i-gan (breaks up syllabically) That's not.

Masey: Oh the map…

Alley: That's behind us (she retrieves the map and comes back to write)

Alley: Let's see . . . okay. (Pause- locates Michigan and writes it). There. On Saturday I went to Michigan . . . For, f-oooo-rrr (sounds out by breaking apart) For my . . . for my cousins . . . my cousins first . . . cooo . . . uuuu . . . in (trying to write communion). First. After . . . weeee. for my cousins firrrst. Communion. Cuh . . . mmmmunion. Mmm . . . N . . . cuuumuuuuunnnion . . . communion. (TO5:P1&2)

On this day, the first sentence of Alley's journal read "On saterday [Saturday] I went to Michign [Michigan] for my cosins [cousins] first counyin [communion]" (May 6, 2013). Observational notes found that Alley's engagement in self-talk followed this pattern throughout this entire writing event. During one observation, this conversation transpired between Masey and Alley:

Alley: Draw this before . . . No wait . . . A capital

Masey: What?

Alley: I didn't say anything. (TO11:P5)

This evidence suggests that as Alley engaged in meaningful self-talk, she was not looking for feedback from Masey.

Moreover, Alley's self-talk was quite complex. Her utterances were generally recursive in nature as she often repeated earlier remarks while working through each complete sentence construction. When Alley encountered spelling obstacles, she experimented with different problem-solving strategies (e.g., elongating the word; breaking it apart either sound-by-sound or syllabically) until she had achieved an acceptable spelling. Results of data analysis found that Alley sought minimal assistance from either her peers or adults in the classroom during the construction of her journal entries.

Questions and peer reactions. Alley initiated seven questions during the six observations. Only one question pertained to the writer's craft. On that occasion, Alley asked her friend Masey at the beginning of journal writing, "What are you going to write about?"(TO4:P3). This question received a brief acknowledgement from Masey who said, "My play date from yesterday." Alley initiated four questions about spelling. However, each of these questions received a non-reaction from peers and was ultimately answered by Alley herself. For example, during one observation Alley said, "Is this how you spell concert? Oh wait, concert is on here." (TO4:P3). In this example Alley responded to and solved her own spelling problem shortly after initiating the question. In the other three examples Alley addressed her question to the group but received a non-reaction from her peers (e.g., TO4:P7).

Alley initiated questions to Mrs. Kay on two separate occasions. Once Alley inquired whether or not the students would be formally assessed with their writing asking, "Do we have ice cream scoops?" (TO11:P12). Alley received a non-reaction, perhaps because Mrs. Kay was distracted by a question from another student. During one of the six observations, Alley asked Mrs. Kay for help with writing mechanics:

Alley: I'm confused with "race." I think it's R-A-S but that's not right.

Mrs. Kay: You're right because it looks funny but it's a C

Alley: R-A-C?

Mrs. Kay: AAAAAA (elongating the long A sound in the word) (pause)
Who pinches?

Alley: E?

Mrs. Kay: Yep. Perfect (TO11:18)

Data analysis found that Alley spent little time engaging in conferencing or furtherance procedures with Mrs. Kay. Mrs. Kay approached Alley to ask her about her topic on four separate occasions. Once she looked over Alley's shoulder and complimented her by saying, "Nice, Alley" (TO6:P10). In fact, results of data analysis found that all her conversations with Mrs. Kay had a minimal impact on Alley's journal writing.

Although Alley completed her journal entries for each observation, she only wrote more than the minimal four-to-five sentence requirement once. Moreover, Alley received little feedback from Mrs. Kay, requiring few corrections to her finished compositions.

Impact on the written product. Alley's engagement in meaningful self-talk had more impact on the construction of her journal entries than the collaborative conversations she had with the teacher and her peers. Consequently, their reactions did not have a discernible impact on any of her writing samples. The following is a typical writing sample from Alley's journal entry on May 28, 2013.
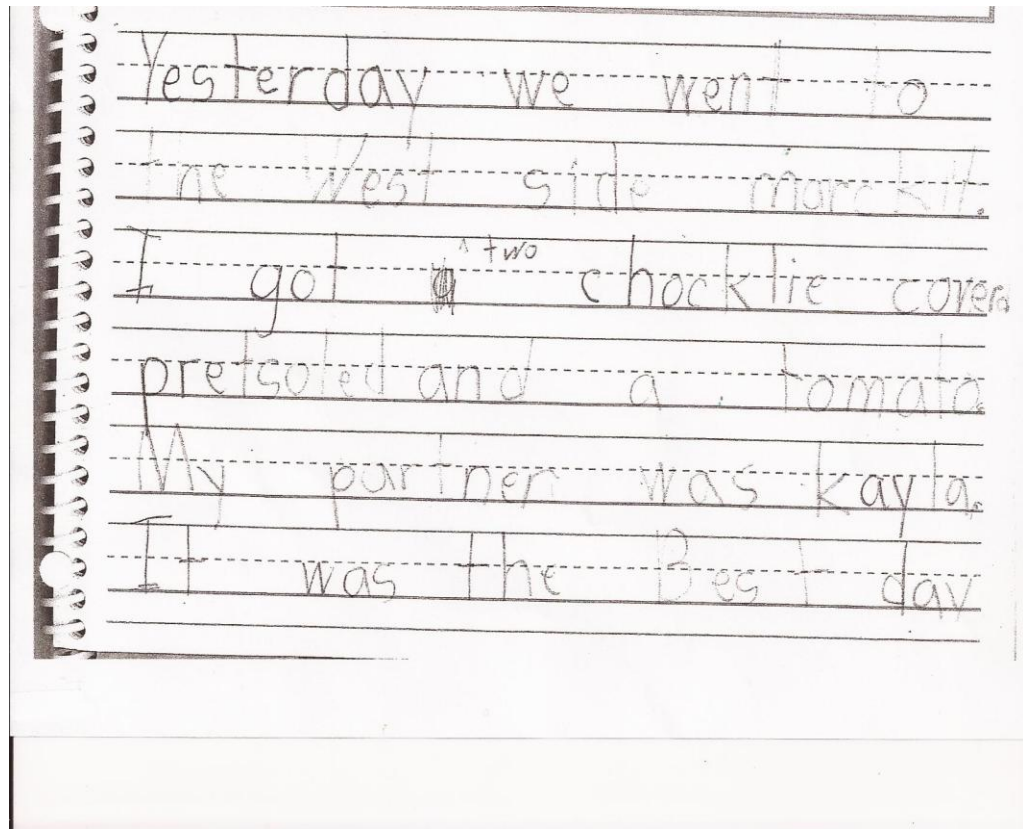
Figure 4.3. Alley's writing sample.

As Alley sat down to work with her writing buddies, a conversation transpired

around Reese's favorite color. However, Alley eventually refocused her attention on the

writing task and began to engage in meaningful self-talk:

> Alley: Oh yeah, yesterday . . . we . . . went . . . toooooo . . . the . . . wessst. Oh
> yeah (pause)
> Yeah, too . . . the . . . to the west . . . siiiiiiide" (pause Yesterday we went to the
> Westside market (pause). Market rrrrrrrrk . . . C . . . K . . . R-kit. Market . . . Oh
> yeah . . . Yesterday we went to the mes, (hahaha-laughs) Westside Market.
> (TO6:P11)

Alley was then interrupted by Reese as he engaged the students in an off-task

conversation. The conversation momentarily captured Alley's attention, but she quickly

regrouped and kept moving forward with her meaningful self-talk. She began her next

sentence with "I got" but became stuck on "chocolate covered pretzel." She talked

herself through this over and over until she was able resolve the concern and move on:

> Alley: And a chocolate covered pretzel (pause) and a chocolate covered pretzel
> and a tomato . . . aaaaaaaaaaa . . . to-ma-to. Toooooo-maaaaaa-to . . . and a
> tomato. Whew, I have 2 sentences. My partner was Kayla. (Pause) My . . .
> parrrr-tner . . . (pause) Hmmmm . . . my part. (TO6:P17)

As Alley worked through her second sentence, she again became sidetracked

when her peers began discussing their ages. Her participation in this conversation was

brief. She quickly refocused:

> Alley: My partner waaaaaas. I need Kayla's name tag. (Reese gets up and gets it
> for Alley)

> Alley: Kay-laaaah. Ok, my parter was Kaaaa . . . K-A-YYYYYY-L-A. Kayla . .
> Kayla (pause)
> My partner was Kayla. How many sentences do I have? 2, 3, one more. It was
> very fun. That's my last one. . . . Ugh. (TO6:P20)

She then concludes her writing as she works through an additional sentence:

> Alley: It was . . .the . . . best (pause) day . . . it was the besssssssst" (pause)

Alley's reactions to peer initiations. Although Alley rarely received reactions

from others as she initiated utterances and questions to peers and her teacher, data

analysis found that Alley engaged in furtherance reactions with her peers four times

during the six observations. The richest example of Alley's furtherance occurred with

Reese:

> Reese: Alley, how do you spell 'this'? (the word this)

> Alley: It's on the word wall word. (Ryan looks over at the word wall from his
> seat trying to locate the word)

> Alley: Oh, I don't like my handwriting. What are you going to write about?

> Masey: My play date from yesterday

93

Reese: Alley it's not on there.

Masey: (Begins to spell it for Reese) T-H.

Alley: Masey! He has to tap it out! He's supposed to tap it out. He has to tap it out. Masey! You're not supposed to get up to answer

Masey: I'm not telling him. Reese, up on the word wall it's under T.

Alley: Yeah. It's on the word wall, but you can't see it that well so you have to walk over

Reese: I saw it, but it doesn't say

Masey: Yeah, it's on there (pause). (TO 4: PG 3 &4)

During her other three furtherance responses, Alley tried to help writing partners resourcefully locate words with which they were struggling.

Although Alley was fully absorbed by her own writing, she was aware of Mrs. Kay's presence and of the conferencing that was occurring around her. On four occasions, Alley interrupted a conversation with Mrs. Kay and used furtherance to help her writing partners work through issues related to writing mechanics. For example, as Reese and Mrs. Kay attempted to work through the word "cousin," Alley helped Reese recognize that he needed to place the vowel "o" in the word cousin (TO6:P10). Furthermore, after peers had held a conference with Mrs. Kay, Alley continued to remind them about the corrections they needed to make. For example, Mrs. Kay had a conference with Masey about her use of periods. Later, as Masey was finishing her work, Alley reminded her that, "Mrs. Kay said don't forget to write your periods" to which Masey responded, "Oh yeah" (TO9:P12).

Summary. Results of data analysis found that Alley's engagement in initiations almost always took the form of meaningful self-talk or questions about spelling. In fact,

Alley's use of oral language through meaningful self-talk was her primary means of generating text or solving any composition problems independently. Consequently, peer reactions were typically non-responses, with few examples of acknowledgement and furtherance and no examples of direct support. From the onset of a journal writing event through its completion, Alley typically verbalized each step in her text construction aloud but without regard for or interest in peer reaction. In addition, her self-talk was often recursive in nature, as she would cycle back to earlier remarks as a way of thinking through an issue. Alley did, however, react to the utterances and questions of peers, sometimes even when they were addressed to someone else. Most often these reactions took the form of furtherance. Ultimately, Alley's engagement in meaningful self-talk had the greatest impact on her completed journal writings.

Cross-Case Analysis

Comparison of results across cases revealed the quality and nature of the collaborative conversations and its impact on the students' written products. The themes and categories ground in the data collected from the three participant cases are representative of the themes and categories that emerged during analysis of the entire data set that included the conversations of all the students who participated in the study.

Initiation

Results of the data analysis found that all three participants' engagement in initiations took the form of utterances that were either generic comments or meaningful self-talk. Initiations also occurred around specific questions. Moreover, the nature of the talk that each participant engaged in was related to his or her overall developmental level

of the participant. Reese typically uttered generic comments; Tina and Alley typically

uttered meaningful self-talk. Table 4.1 presents the number of participant initiations.

Table 4.1

Content Analysis of the Participants' Initiations

	Reese	Tina	Alley
Generic Comments	35	11	17
Meaningful Self-Talk	0	76	97
Questions	16	12	7

Ultimately, all three participants engaged in initiations that were utterances of

some kind during the construction of their journal writing. Moreover, they all uttered

generic comments and most of them were specifically addressed to others. Consequently,

the initiations of generic comments and meaningful self-talk did not centrally involve the

engagement of others.

When compared to Tina and Alley, Reese uttered more generic comments, but

they engaged in more meaningful self-talk. In fact, Reese never initiated meaningful

self-talk. In addition, the language he used in his utterances appeared random or

disconnected and his syntax was usually fragmented and not organized in a way that

communicated a cohesive meaning. By contrast, Tina and Alley frequently engaged in

meaningful-self talk that continued from the onset of their journal writing through its

completion. They often used these conversations with the "self" as a way to rehearse

potential word choice or brainstorm content. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the quality

of Tina and Alley's meaningful self-talk ultimately had a significant impact on the

quality of their written products. In general, Alley's meaningful self-talk was often syntactically more complex than Tina's. Alley's conversation with herself was often recursive in nature and occurred throughout each writing event. Although Tina did engage in meaningful-self talk, it was often disjointed and not typically recursive in nature.

Questions

All the participants initiated questions to their peers or the adults in the room, either directly or indirectly. The number of questions that each participant initiated varied somewhat although Alley clearly initiated the fewest questions (see Table 4.1). The overwhelming majority of questions initiated by all three participants pertained to the mechanics of writing. The majority of questions Tina and Alley initiated were to their peers. On some occasions their questions were related to other students' progress.

Participant Reactions to Peers

As the participants engaged in collaborative conversations with others, they also took on the role of reactor to their peers' questions. Although all four types of reactions occurred, only direct support and furtherance provided significant insights about the nature of collaborative conversations. Table 4.2 presents the number of participant reactions.

Table 4.2

Content Analysis of the Participants' Reactions

	Reese	Tina	Alley
Direct Support	2	5	0
Furtherance	0	3	4
Acknowledgements	0	2	6
Non-Response	4	2	3

Overall, these results indicate that each participant's reactive pattern was unique. For example, Reese gave no furtherance responses and Alley gave no direct support. Tina chose direct support as her primary response mode. There was also a qualitative difference in the kind of reaction. While most responses concerned writing mechanics, Reese's attempt to provide direct support for spelling was ineffectual probably because the spelling was incorrect. Tina's frequent use of direct support, however, was more effective. On four separate occasions, Alley used furtherance when responding to a spelling question by engaging her peer in a process of collaborative problem solving. When responding to a writer's craft question, Alley provided a similar furtherance response of collaborative problem solving.

Support from Mrs. Kay

Furtherance was the typical response from Mrs. Kay as she engaged in collaborative conversations with the students to assist them with their journal writing. Yet, Mrs. Kay's involvement with each student was markedly different. Alley's engagement in furtherance with Mrs. Kay was minimal. In addition, no conversation with Mrs. Kay had any discernible impact on Alley's written product.

Mrs. Kay's use of furtherance with Tina always occurred after the completion of her journal entry. In addition, it was always Tina who approached Mrs. Kay for a conference after she had finished writing. At that point Mrs. Kay used furtherance to help Tina recognize any corrections she needed to make in journal entries.

Neither Tina nor Alley interacted often with Mrs. Kay. Mrs. Kay initiated furtherance with Reese a total of 24 times. Each of these furtherance procedures occurred from the onset of his journal writing through its completion. Typically, each furtherance she initiated began in an effort to help Reese determine his content. As the conversations ensued, however, Mrs. Kay routinely switched to direct support that always focused on Reese's writing mechanics. Moreover, Mrs. Kay always provided explicit directions concerning letter formation, spaces between words, placement of periods, capitals, etc.

Ultimately, the nature and quality of most of the participants' collaborative conversations had some impact on their journal writing. Although each participant engaged in collaborative conversations with others, most of their oral conversations were with themselves. Those conversations were either generic comments or deliberate efforts to work through issues related to text composition. There were stark differences in the type and quality of talk among the three participants. The students who were performing at or above grade level engaged principally in meaningful self-talk; the student performing below grade level engaged principally in generic comments.

Most reactions to and from peers were either brief acknowledgements or non-responses. Given that the talk initiated by participants was primarily aimed at the self, this is not surprising. The teacher's participation in the collaborative conversations was

99

notable for two factors. First, although she used the opening of writing time to focus on the writer's craft, particularly the selection of topic and potential details, the majority of questions directed to her and the majority of comments she initiated were about writing mechanics.

Second, most of the teacher's reactions were furtherance and intended to call students' attention to incorrect usage, spelling, or punctuation based on mechanics. For Alley and Tina such conversations were often responses to initiations by them, often after a writing had been completed. For Reese, the conversations were also attempts to move his writing process forward because he was usually a reluctant writer. Yet, despite the differences in language development and writing fluency of the students, Mrs. Kay's instructional focus and reactive mode varied little.

Findings

Overall findings of this study then demonstrate that first grade students use oral language, specifically meaningful self-talk, as a way to advance their meaning-making with written language. Moreover, they do so through conversations that occur while they are composing, even in the social setting of a classroom context. One significant finding of this study is the nature of those conversations. While students initiate engagement with peers through comments, questions, and reactions, most of their conversations are not directed specifically to others. In fact, most of the students' talk is not directed to a specific audience but occurs with the self, and therefore, is used as a way to problem-solve various aspects of the writing process. Furthermore, much of the talk directed at others was in the form of questions about spelling and other writing mechanics. This

suggests that when composing in school, students seek assistance with features of "correctness" rather than content.

Another significant finding of this study is that the quality of students' talk during a writing event, regardless of independent age and/or their developmental level, may be connected to their overall language and academic development. While all three students initiated self-directed conversations, the students with more developed language skills engaged in more meaningful self-talk and it had a positive impact on their text construction. In addition, the more advanced students demonstrated greater ownership of the process, both in soliciting specific information as needed and offering assistance and/or information to peers.

One ancillary finding of this study concerns the critical role of the teacher in collaborative conversations. In this classroom, the teacher continually observed and discussed students' progress during journal writing events. As she interacted with students her instructional attention was on surface-level features (e.g., spelling, letter formation) rather than on the craft or content of the students' writing. Consequently, her students saw her as a source of correct information and it is likely that she saw herself in this role as well. Although the teacher clearly understood that her students had different levels of expertise, she still focused on the same issues in the same reactive mode. While it is beyond the scope of these findings to determine *how* the teacher's presence affected all three students, it is clear that her focus on writing mechanics was a significant factor in their literacy development.

Summary

This study used a qualitative case study design to investigate how social experiences at school might shape the writing and/or language development of young children. Using purposeful sampling, the researcher chose participants whose literacy development was either at, above or below grade level with the help of the teacher. Conversational analysis (Flick, 2009) was used to identify any salient patterns that emerged in the students' spoken discourse during acts of composing journal entries. A cross-case analysis was conducted to deeper understanding regarding the value of emergent writers' participation in and application of meaningful social conversational encounters with students of various developmental levels during journal writing experiences. The results and conclusions were presented through a rich, thick narrative which was grounded in the data.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is composed of four major sections. First, a summary of this study is

presented which includes the purpose, the research questions, and the research methods.

Second, the findings of this study are presented followed by the major conclusions related

to the study's research questions. Third, the implications of the study are discussed.

Fourth, recommendations for further research are presented.

Conclusions

The processes of listening, speaking, reading and writing are dependent upon one

another during language and literacy development. Children must enlist these

interconnected processes during the complex activity of discovering how language

works. One way they do this in school is through negotiating meaning with others during

the social learning community of a school classroom. Because of this, effective language

growth requires that learners continue to employ all of the social resources and symbolic

tools that they already bring with them to school to aid in their literacy development

(Ehri, 1978; Harste et al., 1982; Johnston, 2004).

Halliday (1975, 1993) stated that producing conventionally accepted language is

the most difficult of all language tasks because it requires continuous access to and

reflection on prior knowledge of the language processes to semantically construct a

written product. As such, written production in emergent language learners is

semantically driven as they naturally discover how language works and then apply that knowledge for communicative purposes. Moreover, prior research has demonstrated that during free composition times, language can become a navigational tool for self-expression and learning (Berlin, 1982; Britton, 1970; Dyson, 2002; Moffett, 1994). Given the critical importance of early school literacy experiences, educators need a deeper understanding of how young children use all forms of language as they participate in writing experiences.

To deepen our nascent understanding of how integrated language experiences impact student writing, this study sought to investigate the spontaneous collaborative conversations of first grade students during journal writing. Its goal was to provide insight into the contextual relationship between young children's oral and written language. The study also probed these conversations to provide a better understanding of how learner's engage in thinking as they integrate and maneuver language to negotiate the demands of school tasks. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What patterns, if any, emerge in the collaborative conversations (Wells & Wells, 1996) of first grade students' during their construction of a journal writing entry?

2. What patterns, if any, emerge in the questions these students' generate and/or respond to during their construction of a journal writing entry?

3. What patterns, if any, emerge in the students' journal writing entry which gives evidence of their questions and/or participation in these conversations?

This research was conducted in a first grade classroom located in a small suburban, Midwestern public school. Using purposeful sampling procedures, three students (one above grade level; one at grade level; and one below grade level) were

chosen to participate with input from the classroom teacher (Merriam, 2009). Data

collected in order to best address the research questions included 1) transcribed

audiotapes, 2) observational fieldnotes, 3) informal and formal interviews, and 4) writing

samples from the participants. Triangulation of the data occurred through checking each

of these data sources against one another to ensure the codes, categories and inferences

which emerged cut across all data sources (Merriam, 2002, 2009). Member checks and

peer examination were also conducted.

Conversational analysis (Flick, 2009) was used to analyze how the participants'

sequentially engaged in "turn taking," as well as how meaning was accumulated. The

analytic goal was to establish procedural patterns within the data to address the first two

research questions. The patterns and themes which emerged were then compared to the

writing samples of the participants to address the third research question. An across

cases analysis was conducted to reveal the quality and nature of the collaborative

conversations and its impact on the students' written products. As such, grounded theory

(Merriam, 2009) was used as the researcher constantly compared the collected data. The

following is a discussion of the data analysis.

The Nature of Collaborative Conversations

Wells (1994) asserted that knowing is a process which is attained through

language experiences. Moreover, cognitive and linguistic processes are best understood

within the context of the social, cultural and situational forces governing their use (Bates,

1984; Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982). Furthermore, linguistic development evolves as

children learn language in social communities where they actively and continually

negotiate meaning with others (Harste et al., 1982).

105

The results of this study support these psycholinguistic and constructivist theories of language development (Bates, 1984; Ehri, 1998; Langer & Smith-Burke, 1982; Harste et al., 1982; Palincsar, 1998; Whitehead, 2004). Results of this study found that all of the children participated in collaborative talk experiences between one or more persons during which the language produced revolved around achieving a goal, i.e., composing a text (Wells & Wells, 1996). As they engaged in these collaborative experiences, the results of the conversational analysis revealed two types of initiations, utterances and questions. These initiations provided insight into how the children semantically constructed knowledge as they analyzed and evaluated their writing experiences (Palincsar, 1998; Whitehead, 2004). As children engaged in initiations with others and themselves, for example, they showed evidence of employing language as a tool for learning, thinking and self-directing (Whitehead, 2004).

In addition, cross-case analysis found that more utterances were initiated than questions. The utterances which emerged as significant were mainly built on a continual negotiation of their writing experiences during which students used their existing knowledge of language as a conscious tool during their writing construction. Utterances were generally of two types: generic comments or meaningful self talk. Although the social environment served as a forum for conversation, it was the meaningful self-talk which occurred spontaneously and was not directed at any particular audience that emerged as the most powerful factor in advancing students' text production.

Furthermore, the nature or way in which the children, used self-talk as a language tool during the construction of their journal writing entry was clearly related to their overall developmental level. Data analysis revealed that all the students engaged in

106

conversational experiences. However, the developmental levels revealed that the lower the level the more the student participated in conversations with peers that did not reflect engagement in the writing process. Moreover, the students with more advanced language skills engaged in more meaningful self-talk and thereby, demonstrated greater ownership of the process. As such, while findings of this study broadly support constructivist and psycholinguistic theories of language development; they also demonstrated that these social theories of language development took strikingly different forms based on the students' developmental levels.

Differences in the Quality of Conversations

The results of this study support Harste et al.'s (1982) seminal theory of how children's development and written language growth parallel their oral language development and growth. They asserted: "We believe the strategies of semantic intent, negotiability, hypothesis testing, and fine tuning of language are not separately employed but rather are complementary and synergistic" (p. 123). In this study, the students were deliberate in intent and used their conversations to negotiate meaning or test hypotheses of what to write or how to spell a word. Furthermore, results indicate that these four strategies are employed regardless of the kind of talk (e.g., with self, peer) or nature of the social setting (e.g., home, classroom) in which children's written language occurs. In fact, findings of this study revealed that self-talk had the greatest impact on the student's written product. It further demonstrated that the way in which the children engaged in these strategies, particularly during meaningful self-talk, was reflective of their overall literacy developmental levels.

Quality of interactions with the self. Piaget's (1959) cognitive theory of

language development is based on a child's mastery of predetermined developmental

milestones. He believed that a child's current developmental stage was a prerequisite for

engagement and participation in more difficult language tasks, such as literate activities.

As such, he believed that children need time and maturity in order for their knowledge

and understanding to unfold. Furthermore, he believed the language a child uses is

egocentric self-talk meant for self discovery and usually disappears around the age of

seven as a child reaches the age of reason. By contrast, Vygotsky (1978) theorized that

language and thought begin separately in children but with experience and participation

in social language experiences, the two are gradually fused together. He did not believe

that egocentric talk disappeared. Instead, he thought it gradually became part of an

individual's inner critical thinking. Vygotsky also believed that a function needed to be

practiced spontaneously and unconsciously before a child gains conscious control of it.

Before gaining control a person was simply responding impulsively to environmental

events.

Results of this study support Vygotsky's view of conscious control and suggest it

is a significant marker in a child's developmental level. Even though they were younger

than Reese, Alley and Tina's self-talk was deliberate and directed; they engaged in

purposeful talk as they decided on the content and vocabulary of their journal entry. In

fact, both of these students relied heavily on semantic intent as they naturally engaged in

negotiation, experimentation and hypothesis testing with the self. Each of them provided

evidence of not only constructing but also refining their written products through the use

of these strategies. Ultimately, their acts of conscious control had a discernible impact on their writing.

Alley's engagement and use of these strategies from the onset of a writing event to its completion was considerably more sophisticated than Tina's and appeared to have a greater impact on her written products. By contrast, Reese's self-talk had the least impact on his writing. In fact, he never completed one assignment. In terms of language development, Alley was the most advanced, and Reese the least advanced of the three participants. One significant conclusion of this study then is that while the use of self-talk is regularly enlisted by all young children, its quality and ultimate impact is influenced by a child's overall linguistic development.

Not surprisingly, such development is not rigidly determined by age. Reese was an entire year older than Tina and Alley. At the time of this study, Reese was 8 years old and chronologically beyond the egocentric language development theory of Piaget. Yet, Reese did not engage in meaningful self-talk. Moreover, he demonstrated less conscious control during the writing process, i.e., his utterances tended to be generic comments and were clearly less sophisticated than Tina and Alley's. Most of his self-talk focused on semantic intent, i.e., identification of topics for a journal entry. He rarely engaged in negotiations, as well as experimentations and/or hypothesis testing with the self. Most of his oral language initiations took the form of generic comments to which the teacher or his peers responded. Although he failed to complete even one journal entry, the greatest impact on Reese's written products were through social collaborative conversations with others.

Quality of conversational experiences with others. Sociolinguistics views all learning as engendered from social experiences with language (Bruner, 1971, 1985; Cazden, 2001; Meade & Cubey, 2008; Nystrand, 2006; Wells, 1994; Whitehead, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978, 1996). Bruner (1975), for example, believed that children develop as language learners while simultaneously learning about the world around them as they engage in linguistic rehearsals with others.

Most of the initiations directed at others in this study were in the form of questions, particularly about the mechanics of writing. Data analysis identified four modes of peer reaction in response to initiations: 1) direct support, 2) furtherance, 3) acknowledgement, and 4) no response. Only direct support and furtherance resulted in collaborative conversations that influenced the participants' writing process. Furtherance is a kind of scaffolding (Bruner, 1978) which occurs as a more knowledgeable other guides a novice through a difficult task. It is often cited as an instructional implication of Vygotsky's (1978) "zone of proximal development" in which learning occurs at the intersection of child development and, as such, the task demands adult guidance.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the quality of these initiations and peer reactions appeared to be reflective of the participants' developmental levels. Although Tina and Alley engaged in collaborative conversations with their peers, they rarely sought assistance from them during their journal writing experiences. However, they did often respond to their peers.

When responding to an initiation from her peers in the form of questions and comments, Tina varied her reactions according to the kind of initiation. Questions about writing mechanics initiations elicited direct support in which she provided explicit

responses. However, Tina would provide furtherance responses concerning writer's craft initiations from her peers. By contrast, Alley never engaged in direct support. Her primary response to all peer initiations was furtherance. Furtherance was Mrs. Kay's typical response, one she often modeled.

Moreover, when Tina and Alley engaged in furtherance with their peers, they employed the four sociolinguistic strategies Harste et al. (1982) identified as central to young children's language growth. When asked about writing mechanics, for example, Alley used the opportunity to raise questions about word choice that resulted in discussions of other potential words that prompted the student to reconsider the intended meaning. The discussion involved negotiation, hypothesis-testing and a fine tuning of language with language. It is significant that both Tina and Alley used furtherance in peer interactions, but that Reese did not.

Reese uttered the most generic comments and asked the most questions. When Reese was faced with a problem or needed help, he kept his initiations confined to the peer social group in which he worked. When he sought assistance from his peers, Reese asked for direct support; he rarely sought adult assistance. Perhaps, this was because he intuitively recognized that his peers were more knowledgeable than he was and assumed they could provide direct support in terms of explicit responses. Moreover, Reese was not sought out to as a participant for reactions to other's problems. One conclusion of this study is that the quality of conversational experiences with others, whether from an initiation or as feedback provided during spontaneous conversation, is related to the level of a child's overall literacy development.

Quality of conversational experiences with the teacher. Research has clearly established that a young child's literacy development is largely the result of a growing awareness of the power of language and the meaning it holds, an awareness which evolves from a self-directed trial and error process regarding how print works in the world around them (Harste et al., 1982; Shuy, 1984; Yaden, Rowe, &MacGillivray, 2000, Whitehead, 2004). The young child tests these incipient theories with more knowledgeable others (Goodman, 1996). Because so much of this process is one of self-discovery, scholars agree that all young children need time and opportunities to write for authentic purposes. In fact, social writing experiences for the functional purpose of generating and/or communicating meaning which allow children to focus their efforts on the semantic nature of language are critical (Cutler &Graham, 2008; Graves, 1983, 2005; Nagin, 2003; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Wohlwend, 2009).

In the design and management of her classroom, Mrs. Kay demonstrated an awareness of this principle. The social environment, as well as the journal writing experiences Mrs. Kay provided the children was reflective of best practices determined through prior research (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graves, 1983, 2005; Nagin, 2003; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Wohlwend, 2009). Children were free to choose their own topics and to use oral language (i.e., collaborative conversations) to support the composing process.

Moreover, during the formal interview Mrs. Kay explained that each child was on his or her own continuum of development. She observed: "I might need to treat each child differently . . . some I can push a little bit more and some need more gentler guidance" (TI:P1). This statement is reflective of how Mrs. Kay viewed her collaborative conversational experiences with each of the participants. During each

observation, Mrs. Kay would walk around the room in order to monitor the different social pockets of writers. Yet, *how* Mrs. Kay interacted with them and facilitated was very different based on what she perceived as the student's developmental and performance levels.

Alley and Mrs. Kay's interactions were minimal. Alley rarely checked-in with Mrs. Kay and Mrs. Kay rarely approached Alley to facilitate her learning during writing events. Mrs. Kay provided occasional furtherance experiences with Alley which always concerned writing mechanics. Mrs. Kay never used furtherance or other reactions to suggest areas of improvement. Consequently, Alley was free to experiment with language as she deemed necessary.

Mrs. Kay and Tina did interact as Tina constructed her journal entry, but often it was an effort by Mrs. Kay to direct Tina's focus back to the writing activity. As such, Tina, much like Alley, was allowed to experiment with language, take chances, and make mistakes. After Tina had completed a writing assignment, Mrs. Kay sometimes used furtherance to scaffold Tina's learning by calling attention to some aspect of writing mechanics. This enabled Tina to take control of her editing with assistance.

Mrs. Kay and Reese interacted most frequently during this study. However, Reese rarely sought out Mrs. Kay for assistance. Rather, 24 times she approached him by initiating lengthy furtherance conversations. While these exchanges typically began as gentle furtherance intended to help Reese hone in on a topic, they eventually evolved into direct support with regard to Mrs. Kay's explicit expectations for his writing mechanics. As such, Reese was often faced with many explicit directions at one time. Moreover, he

accomplished little work independently and was consistently reliant on direct support from Mrs. Kay.

An ancillary finding of this study then is that the teacher's participation in collaborative conversations with her students was heavily influenced by her perception of their developmental levels. While she used both direct support and furtherance in her interactions with all the students, the teacher gave the more advanced students ample freedom to explore language and generate text. Moreover, her frequent conferences with the least advanced student largely confined his attention to issues related to writing mechanics. While most of the feedback participants sought from others was related to writing mechanics, the teacher used those occasions as editing opportunities for the more advanced writers but spelling lessons for the least advanced writers. Data analysis suggested that Mrs. Kay's view of how to support writing development required that the mechanics of writing (e.g., spelling, punctuation) be mastered as a major benchmark in composing text. This linear or skill-based view of writing as a developmental process is not, however, consistent with findings of sociolinguistic research in early language development.

Ultimately, the focus of this study was on the quality and types of conversations children engage in as they use language as a tool for learning (Halliday, 1975) during writing experiences in school. A major finding is that all these young learners engaged in collaborative conversations as both initiators and reactors. Moreover, the nature of those initiations and reactions were similar. As initiators, they used oral language primarily to make generic comments or talk through writing issues without addressing their remarks to an intended audience. Furthermore, they deliberately asked questions of their peers.

When responding to questions or interacting with others, the significant responses they gave provided direct support or raised questions to further their peers' thinking on an issue.

Yet, despite the similarity in types of initiations and responses, the study found that there were marked differences in the quality of the students' talk in both roles, differences that could be attributed to their overall literacy development. The participants whose language development was more advanced usually engaged in meaningful self-talk as a way to work through issues or ideas related to a writing event. The participant with less developed linguistic skills used generic comments often with no apparent connection to the writing task. In addition, the more advanced language users provided focused and pertinent feedback to peers; the least advanced provided little feedback. Finally, the teacher's interactions with students also reflected her awareness of development levels. She gave the more advanced language users freedom to explore while focusing the less advanced language user's attention on writing mechanics.

All participants in this study received the same number of writing assignments. Similarly, each had freedom to choose a topic, craft a piece, and use talk to express their own thoughts or engage with others. Yet despite the similarity of setting and task, the participants had vastly different opportunities to grow as language learners in the classroom setting. The advanced learners had self-confidence as language users and the teacher allowed them freedom to explore and create in their writing. The less advanced learner lacked confidence and was allowed less freedom to explore. One significant finding of this study, then, is that as children participate in collaborative conversations in

115

school the nature and quality of those interactions will be influenced not only by their own literacy development but also by how their peers and the teacher respond to them.

Implications

This study generated new insights about how children of differing developmental levels use oral language as a tool for learning during journal writing experiences in the environment of a first grade classroom. Consequently, findings of this study hold implications regarding the early language experiences of young children for all educators, particularly early childhood classroom teachers. Following are implications for educators as well as for future research in this area.

Nature of Talk

Research has shown that children are not passive recipients but active participants in their own language development (Barrone & Morrow, 2003; Bruner, 1985; Clay, 2001, 2005; Erickson, 2000; Genishi, 1981; Goodman, 1986, 2003; Graham, 2007; Holdaway, 1979; May & Campbell, 1981; Morrow, McGee & Richgels, 2001; Power & Hubbard, 1996; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Richgels, 2002; Strickland, 1990; Takanishi, 1981; Vacca & Vacca, 2000; Weaver, 2002). Moreover, language is not simply a means for communication; it is a way for us to interpret and encode thought (Wells, 1984). Piaget stated that as children develop as language users, they engage in egocentric self-talk as they encounter and try to make sense of new environmental experiences. Vygotsky's acquisition of language theory added that understanding is achieved through social negotiation and is, therefore, co-constructed during interactions with more

116

knowledgeable others. Therefore, as a language learner develops understanding, egocentric talk becomes consciously internalized through inner speech.

Sociopsycholinguistic theorists, such as Harste et al. (1984) have demonstrated that children develop understanding and knowledge during natural encounters which allow them to engage in the strategies of "semantic intent, negotiability, hypothesis-testing and fine-tuning language through language" (p. 130). Furthermore, their seminal research indicates that written language develops in the same way as the other language processes of reading, speaking and listening and, as such, these processes are dependent upon each other during the complex activity of language learning.

One conclusion of this study, then, is the importance of meaningful self-talk during writing experiences for young children. It appears that the significance of providing a social environment for the participants in this study was not necessarily to engage in conversations with others but to allow them the freedom to engage in meaningful conversational experiences with the self. This finding contradicts the language acquisition theory of Piaget which states that egocentric talk disappears based on maturity and development. As such, evidence emerged indicating that the more advanced the developmental level of the participant, the greater the engagement and the greater the quality and sophistication of their egocentric self-talk. Ultimately, the meaningful self-talk which emerged during conversations with the self proved to have the greatest impact on the students' writing performance.

These findings further suggest that Alley and Tina were active participants in their construction of knowledge. As such, they freely engaged in language as they saw fit. Their meaningful self-talk demonstrated their movement across all of the language

systems as they engaged in risk-taking through experimentation, hypothesis testing and negotiation mainly with the self. Moreover, the overall value of this meaningful self-talk was that it allowed these participants to engage independently in the strategies presented by Harste et al. (1984), an engagement which enhanced their current performance levels. Moreover, the findings of this study further revealed that Reese did not engage in meaningful self-talk. Although he was an entire year older that the other two participants, he took on the role of a passive recipient and did not yet recognize the power of language as a tool for his learning (Shuy, 1984). While it is beyond the scope of this study to determine why Reese's literacy development lagged, it may be that his social experiences served as a crutch rather than an opportunity to engage in risk-taking through the meaningful self-talk which was demonstrated by Alley and Tina.

These findings indicate the stark differences in the ways children of different developmental levels engage in language with themselves and others, as well as how this engagement reflects their active participation in taking ownership of their learning. One implication of this study for teachers is that children should be encouraged to engage in meaningful self-talk during writing experiences regardless of developmental levels because such opportunities are central to all language growth. Moreover, analyzing how young writers engage in language, specifically meaningful self-talk, can provide teachers a window into a child's development and current understanding of language as they semantically construct their writing and fine tune their language through hypothesis testing and negotiation (Harste et al., 1982).

Nurturing Development: An Instructional Perspective

Literacy development is contingent upon a child's active participation in all of the language processes. A large body of research has confirmed that in order to take control as language users, children must first be willing to take chances and make mistakes (Clay, 2001; Ehri, 1978, 1998; Harste et al., 1982; Holdaway, 1979; Morrison & Slominiski, 2006; Morrow, McGee & Richgels, 2001; Wells, 1994). Fang (1999) stated that, "conscious knowledge of these language and language-related issues is imperative for those working with young children" (p. 182). Scholars agree that when children encounter language in holistic, purposeful ways and are encouraged to apply their individual knowledge and learned information to literacy learning, they are enabled to unlock the mysteries of the English language (Cazden, 2001: Halliday, 1975; Meade & Cubey, 2008).

An ancillary finding of this study was the critical role of the teacher's oral interactions, particularly with the student whose literacy development had not achieved benchmarks for first grade. It was apparent that the nature of the teacher-student conversations had a significant impact on whether a child was an active participant or passive recipient during the construction of their written products. Moreover, the teacher's implicit understanding of language development, coupled with her awareness of each student's literacy skills, influenced the instructional choices she made in conversations with them.

The current educational climate of trying to "normalize" children's learning was reflective in Mrs. Kay's engagement with the participants' based on their developmental levels. On the surface level, Mrs. Kay appeared mindful of the need to provide a social

and free environment with appropriate writing activities for young writer's as suggested by best practice in prior research (Clay, 2001, 2005; Cutler & Graham, 2008; Flower & Hayes, 1977; Goodman, 1986, 2003; Graham, 2007; Graves, 1983, 2005; Harste et al., 1982; Holdaway, 1979; Morrow et al., 2001; Nagin, 2003; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Takanishi, 1981; Vacca & Vacca, 2000; Weaver, 2002; Yaden et al., 2000). As such, she created opportunities for natural engagement in journal writing in a social environment which she appeared to facilitate. Moreover, during the teacher interview her philosophy revealed her beliefs that each child needs different support structures to aid them during their literacy development.

Yet, *how* she engaged with the participants as an instructor during these writing experiences varied greatly based on the children's developmental levels. As such, Mrs. Kay provided little to no guidance for Alley; just enough support and guidance for Tina; and too much direct support for Reese. The stance she took had a discernible influence on whether the participants were allowed the freedom to engage in all of the language process as they used the strategies suggested by Harste et al. (1982) to experiment with during writing as they worked through their current hypothesis.

The findings of this study provided evidence which revealed that Tina and Alley had more freedom to take chances and make mistakes and, as such, took greater risks with their writing. They engaged in approximations and experimentation and were observed to self-correct and monitor their own meaning-making attempts (Cazden, 2001). By contrast, Mrs. Kay's continual presence coupled with the multiple directions she provided Reese may have dampened Reese's motivation and/or reduced his confidence in taking ownership of his learning.

Therefore, one implication of this study is that teachers need to be cognizant of the ways in which they allow children to self-direct their learning through engagement in language, specifically through self-talk during journal writing experiences. In fact, teachers should be aware that their presence and the direction they provide must be developmentally appropriate and reflect best practice instruction based on established theories of all literacy processes. If it is not, children may stagnate or even take steps backward in their language development, inadvertently contributing to the "Matthew effect" (Stanovich, 1986) so frequently alluded to in reading development.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study support prior research which has established that the language processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing grow and develop synergistically (Genishi, 1981; Newell, 2002; Whitehead, 2004). Therefore, an important implication of this study concerns how instruction, particularly in early classroom environments, aims to address instructional goals which connect these processes.

One conclusion of this study indicates that as young children participate in authentic literacy experiences, such as journal writing, talk should be nurtured and encouraged as a vehicle for generating and communicating meaning. The findings of this study suggest that the types of talk young language learners participate in are indicative of how they are interpreting and creating meaning during writing construction. Therefore, teachers should listen to their students and become aware of the ways in which children of all developmental levels engage and participate in language as this information can be used as an important tool for educators to help broaden and develop

appropriate instructional goals to meet the needs of the student as an individual to further enhance and encourage literacy development.

The findings of this study also suggest that the conversations that students have with themselves and others may be of value to the teacher as an instructional self-evaluation tool. Prior research has noted that the language processes are often taught and assessed in isolation (Goodman, 1986; Takanishi, 1981). However, by analyzing and understanding how students hear and then speak to each other during writing experiences in the classroom may provide valuable insight into what students consider to be the focus and purpose of writing activities. As such, this important information may be of valuable use to educators as they plan their lessons and reflect on aligning their expectations and instructional goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

Results of this study revealed ways in which young writers engage in language, as well as the teacher support during journal writing is indicative of their developmental levels. Newell (2002) observed: "If writing is to have a role in the intellectual development and academic life of all students, and in the practices of all teachers, how it functions within curricular conversations, as well as the social life of classrooms, both seem particularly important" (p. 34). Moreover, Bates (1984) asserted that "the success and failure of the school systems lies primarily in their ability to develop strong language capabilities in the children they serve" (p. 255). Results of this study, therefore, provide direction for much-needed future research on the potential value of young writers' engagement in meaningful self-talk as a tool for learning.

Due to the nature and design of this study, it was conducted in one first grade classroom in one public school in the Midwest over a short period of time. This study employed purposeful sampling that included one teacher and three participants who were representative of differing ability levels. Future research could extend to include a larger pool of participants encompassing different economic and cultural diverse backgrounds, as well as different types of school settings so that more data can be collected and analyzed to determine whether the findings presented in this study are typical. This study indicates the potential value of assessing the meaningful self-talk that students engage in, as it provides a window into the student's current understanding and active participation during language learning. Therefore, future research which focuses on this phenomenon over a longer period of time is need. As many children make significant gains in their language development during first grade, a longitudinal study of how students engage in meaningful self-talk throughout the year may provide valuable insight into their transitional journey, as well as how the teacher can be of assistance in helping children actively participate in their literacy development.

Additionally, future research is needed in the classroom of other teachers to determine if this phenomenon occurs in different learning environments. Moreover, with the current educational reform to ensure all students are successful which is measured through standardized tests, analyses of teacher conversations may reveal valuable information regarding how we are instructionally approaching learning in children of differing developmental levels. As such, future research replicating this study with larger populations by focusing on how teachers interact and encourage engagement in language

in young writers may continue to add to the scholarly conversation regarding how young children actively take ownership of their learning through language.

Summary

This study found that although all of the participants' engaged in collaborative conversations, meaningful self-talk emerged as having the greatest impact during the construction of journal writings. Moreover, the sophisticated quality of the meaningful self-talk which was produced was indicative of the participants' developmental levels. As such, the quality of the nature of the meaningful self-talk which was produced was reflective of the student's active participation in their language development and growth as they engaged in language through the strategies of hypothesis testing, fine-tuning language, semantic intent and negotiability (Harste et al., 1982). The greater the quality and quantity of meaningful self-talk, the greater the active participation in the creation of knowledge of the participant. Furthermore, this study found that the importance of the social environment during journal writing was to allow for engagement in conversations with the self.

Furthermore, this study also found that how the teacher facilitated their writing and interacted with the participant's was starkly different based on their developmental levels. Furthermore, these findings suggest that the developmental levels were indicative and, therefore reflected, how much control Mrs. Kay allowed the participant's to have over their writing and ultimately their learning.

The findings presented in this study show the benefits of analyzing the types of conversations children of varying developmental levels engage in during language learning experiences, specifically with the self. Educators and policy makers need to take

124

into consideration the findings of studies like this which highlight the ways children at differing developmental levels function as learners within the confines of the classroom. Further research of this phenomenon may provide additional insights regarding children's active participation in their construction of knowledge through meaningful self-talk.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF CONSENT

Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
College of Education
Akron, OH 44325-4208
(330) 972.7773 Office
(330) 972.2452 Fax

Dear Parents and/or Guardians:

I am a former first grade teacher who is now a doctoral student at The University of Akron. My dissertation study, The Impact of Collaborative Talk During Writing Events in a First Grade Classroom: A Qualitative Embedded Case Study, will focus on language development by studying how the conversations first grade students have about their writing influence their compositions. This study is one requirement necessary to complete my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Akron. I am sending this letter requesting your child's participation in my dissertation study.

As part of my study, I plan on conducting classroom observations during instructional time when your child engages in writing activities that are part of Ms. Kozar's regular classroom instructional routine. During these observations, I will record the student conversations and then later compare these conversations to their writing samples. As your child may not always have correct spelling in their writing, I may need to clarify what they wrote through an informal, informative interview. This study will not affect your child's natural classroom routine or their grades in any way. I will be in your child's classroom during the months of April and May.

Please understand that allowing your child to participate in this research project is completely voluntary. You or your child may quit this study at any time by simply letting Ms. Kozar know your wish. Furthermore, to protect your child's confidentiality, his or her name will not appear in this study. All notes and other resources used during the study will be kept in a secure location which will only be accessible to me This study will also not interfere with current school policy of notifying Ms. Kozar if your child reports any potentially harmful situations.

This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666 or 1-888-232-8790. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me (440-539-9286) or my advisor, Dr. Evangeline Newton (330-972-6916). If you would like to receive a final copy of the study's results, please contact me at (440) 539-9286.

My dissertation committee and I believe that the conclusions of this study will result in deepening our understanding of how young writer's oral language experiences in the school classroom contribute to their literacy development. I hope you will allow your child to participate. Thank you .

       Brigette A. Kaiser
       Graduate Student
       University of Akron

I do not wish for my child to participate in this research study   ☐

I give my child permission to participate in this research study   ☐

My child's name_____

Parent's name _____
Parent's signature_____

APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Beliefs

1. Describe your teaching philosophy.

2. Describe how you have set up your classroom environment.

3. Describe your views of child development.

Student Language and Literacy Development

4. What are your views/beliefs about children's language development?

5. How is language development addressed in your classroom? In your district? And,

how do these compare/contrast one another?

6. What types of language experiences do you value in your classroom environment?

7. How have you seen the children in the classroom grow in terms of their language

development since the beginning of the school year?

8. Describe your belief of children's literacy development.

9. Do you see the processes of listening, speaking, reading and writing as connected? If

so, how?

Writing Instruction and Application

10. What are your thoughts on writing in the first grade classroom?

11. How much time do you devote to the subject of writing?

12. How do you approach writing instruction in your classroom?

13. What language experiences do you provide your students during writing time? (i.e. How do you feel the students learn best during writing?)

14. How do you view social interaction during writing times?

15. What are your expectations for the students during the process of writing?

16. How was the rubric the students use during writing developed?

17. How do you see them using this rubric during their writing?

18. How have the students adapted to using this rubric? How has its use evolved since the beginning of the year?

19. When you review/assess a student's piece of writing what is the focus and/or what do you look for in terms of the most important aspects of the student's writing?

16. How have your students evolved as writers since the start of the school year?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER TO PARENTS

Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
College of Education
Akron, OH 44325-420
(330) 972.7773 Office
(330) 972.2452 Fax

Dear Parents and/or Guardians:

I am a former first grade teacher who is now a doctoral student at The University of Akron. My dissertation study, The Impact of Collaborative Talk During Writing Events in a First Grade Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study, will focus on language development by studying how the conversations first grade students have about their writing influence their compositions. This study is one requirement necessary to complete my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Akron. I am sending this letter requesting your child's participation in my dissertation study.

As part of my study, I plan on conducting classroom observations during instructional time when your child engages in writing activities that are part of Ms. Kay's regular classroom instructional routine.   During these observations, I will record the student conversations and then later compare these conversations to their writing samples. As your child may not always have correct spelling in their writing, I may need to clarify what they wrote through an informal, informative interview. This study will not affect your child's natural classroom routine or their grades in any way. Therefore, there are no anticipated benefits for your child if they participate in this study. I will be in your child's classroom during the months of April and May.

Please understand that allowing your child to participate in this research project is completely voluntary. You or your child may quit this study at any time by simply letting Ms. Kay know your wish. Furthermore, to protect your child's confidentiality, his or her name will not appear in this study. All notes and other resources used during the study will be kept in a secure location which will only be accessible to me This study will also not interfere with current school policy of notifying Ms. Kay if your child reports any potentially harmful situations.

This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666.   If you have any questions about this study, please contact me (440-

539-9286) or my advisor, Dr. Evangeline Newton (330-972-6916). If you would like to receive a final copy of the study's results, please contact me at (440) 539-9286.

My dissertation committee and I believe that the conclusions of this study will result in deepening our understanding of how young writer's oral language experiences in the school classroom contribute to their literacy development.. You may keep this letter for your records but, please sign and return the attached permission form. I hope you will allow your child to participate. Thank you.

     Brigette A. Kaiser
     Graduate Student
     University of Akron

I do not wish for my child to participate in this research study ☐

I give my child permission to participate in this research study ☐

My child's name_____

Parent's name _____

Parent's signature_____

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Administration
Akron, OH 44325-2102

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

April 19, 2013

Brigette A. Kaiser
30510 Ashton Lane
Bay Village, Ohio 44140

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20130327 "The impact of Collaborative Talk during Writing events in a First Grade Classroom: A Qualitative Embedded Case Study"

Thank you for submitting an IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and has been approved under Expedited Category #7.

Approval Date:	April 19, 2013
Expiration Date:	April 19, 2014
Continuation Application Due:	April 4, 2014

In addition, the following is/are approved:

- ☐ Waiver of documentation of consent
- ☐ Waiver or alteration of consent
- ☒ Research involving children
- ☐ Research involving prisoners

Please adhere to the following IRB policies:

- IRB approval is given for not more than 12 months. If your project will be active for longer than one year, it is your responsibility to submit a continuation application prior to the expiration date. We request submission two weeks prior to expiration to insure sufficient time for review.
- A copy of the approved consent form must be submitted with any continuation application.
- If you plan to make any changes to the approved protocol you must submit a continuation application for change and it must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
- Any adverse reactions/incidents must be reported immediately to the IRB.
- If this research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, you must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.
- When your project terminates you must submit a Final Report Form in order to close your IRB file.

Additional information and all IRB forms can be accessed on the IRB web site at:
http://www.uakron.edu/research/orssp/compliance/IRBHome.php

Cc: Evangeline Newton– Advisor
Cc: Valerie Callanan – IRB Chair

☒ Approved consent form/s enclosed