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Educating Teachers about the Complex Writing Processes of Preschool Students (Project)

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by
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Abstract

Preschool teachers traditionally view young children's written literacy development as a linear continuum that progresses from making scribbles, to lines, to letter strings, to invented, and finally, conventional spellings on paper. This project seeks to change preschool teachers' perceptions of children's writing development to encompass a more broadened definition of literacy. On the path from emergent to conventional writing, young children naturally negotiate and mediate a number of symbol systems in order to make sense of their worlds and create meaning as they come to understand the complexities and intricacies of the writing process. Exploration of these symbol systems is a crucial step for children to come to understand written language. Unfortunately, with a push for teaching basic skills in the preschool classroom in preparation for the demands of kindergarten, the focus in most classrooms does not lie in an appreciation for these multiple symbol systems. This project, professional development for preschool teachers, will equip educators with knowledge of young children's complex meaning-making processes and with practical resources, methods, and ideas for the classroom that are sensitive to children's diverse paths to literacy.

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Chapter One: Project Proposal

Problem Statement

Writing development has traditionally been defined as a linear continuum that young children follow as they progress from making scribbles, to lines, to letter strings to invented, and finally, conventional spellings on paper (Fang, 1999). However, students' stories are not constrained by this continuum, including scribbles and marks. Preschool students share stories through the drawings they create, the tales they tell, the songs they sing, and the situations they enact. Each day, young children weave between a number of symbol systems or modes of expression, such as drawing, talking, gesturing, dramatizing, singing, and playing in order to express themselves, make meaning, communicate, and come to understand the world around them (Dyson, 1986; Kendrick, 2004; Sulzby & Teale, 2003; Whitmore, Martens, Goodman, & Owocki, 2004). Research demonstrates that children are able to communicate and generate powerful and imaginative ideas through a variety of symbol systems, but that in most instances, these alternative modes of representation are not highly valued in schools (Dyson, 1990; Harste, 2000; Kendrick, 2004; Olshansky, 2008; Resnick, 2007; Siegel, 1995). Anning (1997) demonstrates the long-standing prevalence of these literacy limitations in schools by bringing up the work of Freire. In 1971, Freire addressed the limitations of literacy which dominated the school curriculum, arguing that we too often privileged the teaching of "letteracy" (reading the word) over the teaching of "literacies" (reading the world) (p. 236). These limitations still hold true today, nearly thirty-five years later. Whitmore,

Martens, Goodman, and Owocki (2005) make clear the sad realization that children's varied uses of symbol systems and expression are still "less accessible in the typically minimalist, segmented, and verbocentric lessons of school" (p. 302). Instead of viewing written literacy as a simple lock-step progression of marks on paper, it is crucial that we change our perspective to view young children's conventional written development alongside their complex abilities to make meaning (Dyson, 1991; Fang, 1999; Siegel, 1995, Sulzby & Teale, 2003).

A young child's journey through literacy is a "messy, noisy, and colorful process" (Dyson, 1986, p. 407-408) that takes the teacher on an exceptional ride. If he/she is observant enough, he/she is able to see the beginnings of literacy in all the kinds of creating that students do, from storytelling to symbolic play to graphic representations and finally, to an understanding of conventional written language (Dyson, 1986; Galda, Pellegrini, & Cox, 1989; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Kendrick, 2004; Pelligrini & Galda, 1993; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Sulzby & Teale, 2003). Writing is not a skill acquired only after a child has mastered conventional letters, words, and sentences; it is a skill that is present in all forms of young children's meaning making: talking, drawing, playing, building, singing, acting, and more (Dyson, 1986; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Newkirk, 1989; Ray, 2008; Smith, 2004). Teachers must adopt this broadened definition of literacy, one that encompasses more than conventional language (Cowan & Albers, 2006; Dipardo, 2003; Dyson, 1995; Fang, 1999; Harste, 2000; Leland & Harste, 1994; Pelligrini & Galda, 1993; Short,

Kaufmann, & Kahn, 2000; Siegel, 1995; Sulzby & Teale, 2003), so that each student has an equally unique opportunity to express the stories which ache in their hearts.

Importance and Rationale of the Study

From a very early age, young children make meaning by moving fluidly among various symbol systems (Dyson, 1995; Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 1999). Within these meaning-making processes, children actively construct what it means to be literate (Kantor, Miller, & Fernie 1992; Whitmore et al, 2005; Yaden et al, 1999). Ideally, within the preschool classroom, these unconventional literacy behaviors (Yaden et al, 1999) occur alongside more conventional and traditional literacy behaviors as students simultaneously learn to form letters, words, sentences, and complete messages (Whitmore et al, 2005). Goodman, Smith, Meredith, and Goodman (1987) say that as children are developing language, " there is an almost explosive force from within the children that propels them to express themselves" (p. 34). Children answer this urge for expression by constantly communicating with others across a variety of symbol systems as they build their uniquely diverse paths to literacy.

Research on how children come to write has often blurred into discussions about how children *should* come to write, and often, into how parents and teachers should help children come to write (Dyson, 1995). However, these decisions in the preschool classroom should be made by individual teachers on an individual basis. There is no one best way; no two paths to literacy look the same (Dyson, 1990; Whitmore et al, 2004). As supportive adults and stakeholders in children's lives, we

need to be sensitive to the complexities underlying children's writing development and extend our definition of literacy beyond a linear view to allow new insight into understanding and supporting young children's diverse intentions and purposes for making meaning (Dyson, 1990; Kantor et al, 1992; Whitmore et al, 2005; Yaden et al, 1999).

In order to guide or scaffold young children's efforts as symbol weavers on the path toward conventional written language, teachers must help children "weave literacy from the rich diversity of resources they bring to school with them" (Dyson, 1990, p. 211). Though children are equipped with significant individual differences in language, cognitive, and social skills before starting school (Morrison, Connor, & Bachman, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), we must realize that each of our students comes to school with the same "intellectual *potential* for literacy" (Whitmore et al, 2005, p.305). Literacy abounds in all of the meaning-making processes students undergo. Pianta (2006) describes these processes, this path to literacy, as an "exceptionally complex, dynamic, and multi-system process" (p. 150). Appreciating these complex and unique social and intellectual resources allows teachers to gain insight into the curiosities, friendships, and significant themes so prevalent within the accomplishments their students make on paper, or otherwise.

In addition, young children's reliance on their growing use of symbol systems helps them develop the concept of symbolization (Bodrova & Leong, 2006; Whitmore et al, 2004; Yaden et al, 1999). As children play, they use objects (concrete, and later, abstract) to represent other objects (Bodrova & Leong, 2006;

Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Pelligrini & Galda, 1993). As children talk to and with others, they hear and use meta-linguistic verbs such as "say" and "write" to symbolize both speech and writing processes (Fang, 1999; Robins & Treiman, 2009), and, as children draw, they use symbols which become increasingly more representative of the objects they are meant to portray (Anning, 1997; Dyson, 1995; Newkirk, 1989). The child's flexible use of these early controlled symbol systems will lead to, and predict, the child's ability to use written conventional symbols (Kantor et al, 1992; Pelligrini & Galda, 1993). In short, early writing originates in symbolic play and oral language and travels a developmental route through drawing to writing (Dyson, 1995; Tierney & Sheehy, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

From a sociocultural perspective, children's diverse paths to literacy are situated within their particular cultural communities, and, from an educational standpoint, this includes the active meaning-making which occurs on both individual and social levels within the common culture of the classroom (Kantor et al, 1992). That is, children use a variety of symbol systems to construct language, and these processes are always situated within a particular social and cultural context. Literacy processes for young children always have individual, social, and cultural implications; the rapid language development that occurs before children enter school is largely dependent on both social and cultural contexts (Whitmore et al, 2005; Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006; Bodrova & Leong, 2006). This idea is further informed by Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory. He states that learning

begins long before (pre)school and that these learning processes are further awakened when children interact with others in their environment.

It is the child's relationship with supportive adults, preschool teachers in particular, that constitutes the primary medium through which literacy is acquired (Pianta, 2006; Bodrova, 2006). Preschool teachers must act as a mediator within a child's active, diverse construction of literacy, exposing children to rich literacy experiences that value students for who they are and where they come from (Whitmore et al, 2005). If we look at young children's literacy development from a semiotic, sociocultural perspective, we can enjoy the diversity and social implications present in children's meaning making, and understand that meaning is constructed through signs of all kinds (Siegel, 2006; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Dyson, 1995; Kantor et al, 1992).

Writing is in fact a language process, one in which children construct meaning (Fang, 1999). However, on the path from emergent to conventional writing, young children naturally negotiate and mediate a number of symbol systems in order to make sense of their worlds and create meaning as they come to understand the complexities and intricacies of the writing process (Dyson, 1995). In a society that has "immersed [itself] in a world of words of our own making" (Siegel, 1995, p. 456), school curriculum, materials, and assessments have become linearly restricting and verbocentric. "We have come to regard our reliance on language as natural and, in doing so, fail to recognize that there are multiple ways of knowing- […] each of which offers a distinctive way of making meaning" (p. 456). Our cultural bias toward

language over other symbol systems may position students as passive learners and has the tendency to marginalize and restrict other ways of knowing. Preschool classrooms that place too much emphasis on conventional writing are surely setting unnecessary limits and restrictions on all students, whose natural developmental strengths lie in other areas, such as dramatic play, talk, and drawing.

Background of the Study

The study of emergent literacy began in the 1960's, increased throughout the 1970's, blossomed through the 80's and began to decrease again in the late 90's (Kantor et al, 1992; Sulzby, 2003; Yaden et al, 1999). Up until then, literacy researchers had been interested in the idea that learning to read and write required formal instruction (Siegel, 2006). Research spurred by an interest in how children use speaking, listening, reading and writing processes simultaneously led to this term we now know as emergent literacy (Whitmore et al, 2005). This new definition meant viewing the literacy events in which young children participate (including storybook reading and dramatic play) as "reflections of children's growing facility with the full array of knowledge required to mean through written language" (Siegel, 2006, p. 66). Marie Clay (2003) also reminds us that Donald Graves was a key player in dismantling myths of reading and writing readiness surrounding the traditional view of conventional writing development in the 1970's and 80's. His research and others', she tells us, showed that young children's fine motor skills are in fact coordinated enough to make meaning on paper, that they do not need to be able to read before they can write, and that their writing does not need to be conventional.

Even though by the 1980's researchers had discovered that literacy development begins long before a child enters school (Whitmore et al, 2005), language arts programs remained reliant upon language more than upon arts (Leland & Harste, 1994) and emergent writing research remained focused on spelling and conventional written development (Fang, 1999). Fortunately, most early literacy research, founded by the work of John Dewey and Louise Rosenblatt and further informed by Kenneth Goodman's theory of language development and L.S. Vygotsky's learning theory, remained grounded in literacy as a meaning construction process (Whitmore et al, 2005). From here, some researchers worked to advance the field by focusing on the cognitive processes of early literacy, while others, such as Harste et al (1984) and Ann Haas Dyson (1986; 1990; 1991; 1995) introduced intriguing new questions about social interaction and the integration of multiple symbol systems (Yaden et al, 1999). Coupled with Vygotsky's (1978) observation that writing development is related to other symbolic events such as drawing and playing, the work of these researchers provided a prominent shift in perceptions of a child's meaning-making abilities (Siegel, 2006). These researchers proposed literacy development as a diverse path, one that does not privilege written language above other meaning-making systems. This meant beginning to view young children's literacy processes against their own conventions, not holding them up against developmentally inappropriate adult conventions of literacy (Harste et al, 1984; Dyson, 1986). Researchers concluded that literacy learning is a truly multimodal

event (Siegel, 2006). That is, each act of making meaning involves more than one mode of communication: multiple symbol systems.

These researchers brought a semiotic perspective to the study of young children's literacy development (Siegel, 2006). Semiotics, developing since the work of Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure in the 1800's and early 1900's, is a field of thought that studies meanings in all their forms and contexts and "is uniquely suited to understanding multimodality because it offers a way of thinking about meaning and text that does not privilege language over all other sign systems" (Siegel, 2006). In addition to a semiotic lens, these researchers approached their data from a socio-psycholinguistic lens, looking for organized, intentional, generative, and social instances of sign-making, rather than successful or unsuccessful approximations of adult literate behavior (Siegel, 2006). Although this research did little to alter curriculum or educational policy, it did spur new research questions and theoretical perspectives.

Recently, our understanding of semiotics within the classrooms has been questioned by some researchers (Halliday, 1978; Kress, 1997, 2003) in order to make room for sign-making in the sociocultural context (Siegel, 2006). Inspired by social semiotics and the knowledge that children come to school as meaning-makers, educators began to explore ways to acknowledge and support children's multimodal literacy practices within a social context (Fang, 1999; Kantor et al, 1992; Siegel, 2006). This began with Suhor's (1982) concept of transmediation, was further explored by researchers such as Harste et al (1984) and Dyson (1986), and continues

to be explored today. Other theories, including Halliday's (1978) theories of language, Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theories of reading, Graves's (1983) writing process pedagogies and Vygotsky's (1978) social theories of thinking and learning also helped turn the spotlight toward learners as social meaning-makers (Speigel, 2006).

Despite the fact that "children have always engaged in what are now called multimodal literacy practices," this idea of multimodality is only recently becoming a popular topic on the literacy scene (Siegel, 2006). The early research on children's multifaceted meaning-making processes surely sets the stage for the explosion of interest in multi-literacies and multimodality we are seeing today (Spiegel, 2006).

Statement of Purpose

This project will educate teachers about the complex literacy needs of young students. I will prepare a presentation for early childhood educators that provides them with theory, resources, discussion, and reflection surrounding young children's complex literacy development.

Objectives of the Project

The objectives of this project are outlined below. To achieve these objectives, research on early literacy and young children as meaning-makers will be reviewed and summarized. Specifically, this project will address the following components:

1) Describe and outline the complex literacy processes of young children

2) Describe and address the need for a broadened definition of literacy
3) Provide preschool educators with a wealth of information about young children's diverse paths to literacy
4) Provide preschool educators with resources and methods that bring developmental theory into the classroom for practical use
5) Provide preschool teachers with resources for reflection, discussion, and implementation of developmentally-appropriate literate practices within the classroom

Definition of Terms

Emergent literacy: The skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing and the environments that support these developments (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 849).

Young child: A term used to loosely denote the child from birth through the end of kindergarten (Sulzby, 2003, p. 300).

Literacy: The processes by which we, as humans, mediate the world for the purpose of learning. Within a sign system perspective, literacy is defined broadly as all the ways in which we make and share meaning. (Harste, 2000, p. 6; Short, Kaufmann, & Kahn, 2000, p. 169).

Transmediation The use and movement among sign systems (Harste, 2000, p. 7; Siegel, 1995, p. 456).

Semiotics: A broad field of studies that looks at "meanings and messages in all their forms and all their contexts" (Innis, 1985, cited in Siegel, 2006).

Sign or Symbol systems: The vehicles by which we code and encode our world. The ways in which humans have learned to mediate the world in an attempt to make and share meaning. Examples of sign systems include language, art, music, drama, mathematics, and movement. Multiple ways of knowing. (Harste, 2000, p. 10; Short, Kaufmann, & Kahn, 2000, p. 160).

Scaffolding: The interactional support that adults and more skillful peers offer learners (Dyson, 1990, p. 203).

Scope of Project

This project will aim to make known the benefits of broadening our definitions of literacy in order to allow all preschool students a chance to express themselves in ways that coordinate with their paths of natural development. The main focus will be to equip educators with knowledge of young children's complex meaning-making processes and with some practical resources, methods, and ideas for the classroom that are sensitive to children's diverse paths to literacy. This is not a preschool literacy curriculum; it is professional development for educators of young children. This project will not include progress monitoring for teachers. Educators will be expected to rely on their own prior knowledge of children's development as well as their regular teaching practices in order to implement ideas and research in appropriate ways within the context of their own classrooms.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Preschool children naturally and intricately use a variety of symbol systems to communicate and make sense of the world (Dyson, 1986; 2001; Whitmore, Martens, Goodman, & Owocki, 2005; Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 1999). Exploration of these symbol systems is a crucial area for children to come to understand written language (Dyson, 1983; Morrison, Connor, & Bachman, 2006; Whitmore et al, 2005). Unfortunately, with a push for teaching basic skills in the preschool classroom (Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992; Siegel, 2006), the focus in most classrooms does not lie in an appreciation for these multiple systems (Dyson, 2003; Kendrick, 2004; Kress, 1997; Siegel, 2006; Whitmore et al, 2005). This literature review will outline the theoretical perspectives and the research which informs an understanding of children's complex written language development and go on to present ways in which teachers can support this development.

Theory/Rationale

Emergent Literacy

An emergent literacy theoretical perspective seeks to track children's literacy knowledge and processes as they move from unconventional to conventional literacy (Yaden et al, 1999). Emergent literacy researchers realize that children are active constructors of their own literacy knowledge (Kantor et al, 1992; Yaden et al, 1999), and that they construct this knowledge as they engage in authentic reading and

writing practices (Kantor et al, 1992; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Roskos & Vukelich, 2006; Yaden et al, 1999).

As of late, emergent literacy has become more focused on the social practices of children (Lynch, 2009). Dipardo (2003) and Duncum (2004) share that literacy is increasingly being viewed as a flexible tool embedded in a social context rather than a body of knowledge to be acquired. A socially-situated emergent literacy perspective adopts the belief that children construct meaning within authentic, socially-situated contexts and reproduce this knowledge in literate ways by negotiating meanings in these contexts (Bodrova, 2006; Kantor et al 1992; Rowe, 1989; Tomasello, 2000; Whitmore et al, 2005). That is, children's activities such as pretend reading and writing are legitimate literacy acts, and social contexts are crucial situations where literacy is acquired and developed. (Roskos & Christie, 2001).

Semiotics

A semiotic perspective joins both cognitive and social views of literacy (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Peirce, 1966; Rosenblatt, 1978; Rowe 1994). Therefore, semiotics understands that meaning is constructed by the literacy learner's cognitive processes within the social setting (Gee, 1996; Kantor et al, 1992; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984). Students make meaning through the use of various sign systems and achieving true literacy means being able to flexibly use and interpret these sign systems (Cowan & Albers, 2006). Though the social aspect of a semiotic perspective is important, this theory ultimately focuses on the cognitive work of the individual over the influence of the social group (Kantor et al, 1992).

From a semiotic perspective, students are able to see literacy as a multi-modal and collaborative process as they think and operate across multiple symbol systems (Cowan & Albers, 2006). Semiotic researchers realize that the literate behaviors in which children engage span a wide range of sign systems and experiences, therefore they advocate for a widened definition of literacy for young children (Kantor et al, 1992).

A Process-Oriented Approach

Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) are responsible for conjoining an emergent literacy view with a semiotics theoretical perspective (Siegel, 2006). The theoretical perspective of this project joins an emergent literacy perspective with semiotics to create a process-oriented approach. This process-oriented approach adopts the understandings of emergent literacy while looking at children's development across various sign systems (Dyson, 1995; Gallas, 1994; Leland & Harste, 1994; Rowe, 1994; 1998). Emergent literacy from a semiotics theoretical perspective adopts the view that children come to understand that they too can make sense using written language by interacting with others across symbol systems in a print-rich environment (Goodman & Goodman, 1979; Kantor et al, 1992). Children invent and construct emerging definitions of written language and refine these constructs through their experience with literacy across symbol systems and social contexts (Whitmore et al, 2005). According to Piaget (1962), inventing concepts of literacy is crucial to a child's development. Each time someone teaches a child something he or she could have come to discover on his or her own, he says, it

prevents that child from inventing it on his or her own, and therefore from fully understanding it.

Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Theory

Vygotsy's cultural-historical theory deems that literacy is "a system of signs that is collectively developed and culturally transmitted" (Bodrova, 2006, p. 243). It is under Vygotsky's learning theory that we understand literacy as a process in which the learner actively constructs meaning. Vygotsky (1978) stresses that literacy learning begins long before a child enters school. That is, what children learn in school is simply a continuation of what has already been learned.

Vygotsky (1978) researched both the cognitive and social aspects and connections between play and literacy (Christie & Roskos, 2009). His research emphasized the role of adults and peers in everyday experiences as a contribution to a child's understanding of literacy (Vygotsky, 1978). He stressed that children demonstrate literacy in meaningful contexts by imitating and internalizing the literate behaviors they see while observing those around them (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993). Interaction with others, he has concluded, also awakens mental processes crucial for literacy learning (Whitmore, Martens, Goodman, & Owocki, 2005).

Research/Evaluation

The Importance of Play in Literacy Development

Through play, children come to understand the world around them (Christakis & Christakis, 2010) as they undergo critical cognitive processes for understanding literacy (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Pellegrini, 1985;

Smith, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). The connection between literacy and play is theoretically framed by both Piaget (1962) and Vygtosky (1978). According to Vygotsky, play is an early point on the child's developmental continuum which leads from drawing to writing. Since Vygotsky's work, many emergent literacy researchers have determined that early writing does in fact originate in symbolic play, and travels a developmental route through drawing to writing (Galda, Pellegrini, & Cox, 1989; Pellegrini, 1991; Rowe, 1994).

Play exists in a social context in which children use language and imitate literacy-like behaviors in significant ways (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Schrader, 1989; Vygotksy; 1978; Whitmore et al, 2005). In social situations, children share knowledge about written language as they problem-solve through play (Vukelich, 1993; Whitmore et al, 2005), which leads to advanced levels of thinking (Piaget, 1962; Pontecorvo & Zucchermaglio, 1990). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is also a relevant concept when considering dramatic play (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Whitmore et al, 2005). In play, Vygotsky (1978) points out that children go above and beyond their role as children as they act out various roles, and in doing so, create their own zones of proximal development.

Developing a concept of symbolization. Dramatic play is an arena for children to develop the concept of symbolization (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Piaget, 1962; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, play is an area for children to first learn this concept and for Piaget, a place to practice the skill.

According to Vygotsky (1978), representational competence is gained when a child discovers that one object can represent another, which is a critical prerequisite for learning to write. Others (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Pellegrini & Galda, 1991; Piaget, 1962) agree that this competence transfers into aptitude in other symbol systems, such as written language. In play, children transform objects and their identities, acting out self-generated scripts (Pellegrini & Galda, 1991). As they gain competence with symbols, children are able to separate these objects from their physical form, and eventually, are able to use only words to represent meaning (Bodrova, 2006).

Based on a study with 3 ½ year olds, Pellegrini and Galda (1991) found that a child's use of representational media during play does, in fact, predict his or her ability to exhibit emergent writing skills. Therefore, confidence and competence in writing can be traced back to the confidence and competence that comes from symbolic play (Galda et al, 1989). Children develop representational skills in this arena that do transfer to other domains (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Several aspects of symbolic play, including the use of linguistic verbs, talk around language (metalinguistic language) and using props to represent objects in play, also provide the basics for using written symbols (Galda et al, 1989; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993).

Additional benefits of play. Play provides a space for children to develop narrative competence and knowledge of story structures (Bennett- Armistead et al, 2005; Klenk, 2001; Pelligrini & Galda, 1993), develop knowledge of written language (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Klenk, 2001; Whitmore, Martens, Goodman, & Owocki, 2005), hear enriched vocabulary (Klenk, 2001; Morrow & Schickedanz,

2006), come to understand print conventions (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Klenk, 2001), come to understand character perspective as they act out various roles (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005; Klenk, 2001), and have an opportunity to create, question, and problem solve (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005; Kantor et al, 1992; Yaden et al, 1999). In addition to its benefits for literacy development, children also learn to control impulses through play and to observe and learn from the emotions and experiences of those around them (Christakis & Christakis, 2010).

Enhancing Dramatic Play Centers with Literacy

If the goal is to get children to engage in literate activities during play, then the literate materials need to be supplied (Bennett-Armistead, 2005; Roskos & Christie, 2001). Enhancing dramatic play centers with literate materials creates a space for children to learn about literacy in an authentic, rather than skills-based, setting (Klenk, 2001; Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006). Christakis & Christakis (2010) advocate for a play-based curriculum, arguing that a skills-based program socially isolates children, divorcing their learning from an otherwise meaningful context. Unfortunately, with a push for basic skills (Kantor et al, 1992; Siegel, 2006), there is a danger of play disappearing from the preschool curriculum (Bodrova, 2006).

Adults mediate in play in an attempt to match children's intentions for play with the literacy strategies they know will be useful and beneficial (Schrader, 1991; Yaden et al, 1999). These materials might include books, signs, paper, pencils, notepads, markers, menus, telephone books, and stamps (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Roskos & Christie, 2001) so that children can engage in authentic literate

activities such as writing shopping lists, recipes, letters, stories, notes, phone messages (Morrow & Rand, 2006), or creating traffic signs, receipts, order forms, and labels for storage (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005).

By enriching dramatic play areas with literacy materials, research concludes that the literacy behaviors of preschoolers increase dramatically (Christie & Enz, 1992; Christie & Roskos, 2009; Kantor et al, 1992; Morrow, 1990; Morrow & Rand, 1991; Neuman & Roskos, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993b; Vukelich, 1991b; Yaden et al, 1999). However, the combination of literacy-enriched dramatic play and adult mediation in that play leads to even more significant advances in children's knowledge of the functions of literacy (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Klenk, 2001; Morrow, 1990; Neuman & Roskos, 1993a; Vukelich, 1991a) and to even more literate behaviors (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Morrow, 1990; Morrow & Rand, 1991; 2006; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; 1992; Pellegrini 1982; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Vukelich, 1991b; Yaden et al, 1999). Adult presence may also, Christie and Enz (1992) suggest, indirectly motivate children to maintain interest in dramatic play.

Teacher and Peer Role in Play

Play centers are complex areas for social interaction with both peers and adults (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; Yaden et al, 1999). Dramatic play areas support literacy learning by providing a space for others to provide assistance, support and feedback, access to literacy materials, choices and options, as well as ideal situations for problem solving (Yaden et al, 1999). Research shows that peers provide a useful role in negotiating literate roles and activities within

the dramatic play centers they help create (Morrow & Rand, 2006; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; Stone & Christie, 1996; Yaden et al, 1999).

To ensure children receive the most literate benefits from play, it is recommended that adults play with children, following their actions rather than leading and directing (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005; Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006), model the use of literate materials (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005; Kantor et al, 1992; Klenk, 2001; Morrow & Rand, 2006) use enriched vocabulary often (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006), and help scaffold the play and the literate behaviors within the child's zone of proximal development (Bodrova, 2006; Christie & Roskos, 2009; Morrow, 1991; Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Vukelich, 1991a; Whitmore et al, 2005).

Though dramatic play is a crucial space for learning about written language, Pellegrini and Galda (1993) stress that children take various paths to gaining literate competence, and, various routes within their play as they imitate and internalize what they know about literacy. Therefore, print-rich play centers should be just one aspect of a preschool curriculum (Bennett-Armistead, 2005; Christie & Roskos, 2009; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993). Ultimately, for children to develop a full understanding of literacy, both situated and meaningful literacy learning should take place (such as that provided by literacy-enriched dramatic play) as well as formal literacy instruction so that children can practice and make connections in one setting to what they are learning in the other (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Kantor et al, 1992; Morrow & Rand, 2006; Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Neuman & Roskos, 1997).

Complexity of Drawing and Writing

Young children's drawings are much more than colors, shapes, and objects (Dyson, 1986). Drawing is another symbol system that helps children develop a sense of representation (Bodrova, 2006; Newkirk, 1989). As children experiment with paper and utensils, they make gestures that produce marks, and these marks come to later represent words and phrases (Bodrova, 2006). Conveying meaning through written language is an ability that grows out of drawing and other, previously practiced symbol systems such as gesture, speech, and dramatic play (Dyson, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). Within non-structured literate activities, children often use writing and drawing processes simultaneously and interchangeably, as well as the terms associated with these processes (Dyson, 1983; Sulzby & Teale, 2003). Dyson found that children can often fulfill their intentions for making meaning on paper by using either of these representations (Dyson, 1983).

Young children engage in very diverse behaviors when it comes to drawing and writing (Dyson, 1986; Whitmore et al, 2005). The diversity of these behaviors is often not recognized by teachers (Dyson, 1986). Dyson (1986) states that children may exhibit different drawing or writing styles depending on the situation. According to Kantor et al (1992), Rowe (1994), and Whitmore et al (2005), this is because each literacy act is situated in a particular social context and traditionally, the structure of school, whether intentionally or not, further establishes borders between symbol systems, even with the type of paper children are given (Dyson, 1986; Lensmire, 1994; Whitmore et al, 2005).

As teachers, we need to encourage the use of both drawing and writing processes (Sulzby & Teale, 2003) and view both as legitimate, extraordinary approximations to literacy (Dyson, 1986; Ray, 2004). Encouraging children to use both drawing and writing processes adheres to the semiotic perspective, understanding that each literacy act involves the integration of multiple sign systems (Duncum, 2004). Studying and creating picture books is a perfect example of the ways in which two symbol systems (writing and illustration) can work together in such a way that the sum is stronger and more meaningful than its parts (Duncum, 2004; Leland & Harste, 1994; Ray, 2010).

The impact of social context. Literacy learning occurs within natural social contexts (Kantor et al, 1992; Whitmore et al, 2005). Teachers are partners in this literacy learning that occurs within the social context of the classroom (Dyson, 1984; Lynch, 2009; Pianta, 2006; Rowe, 1994). Both Vygotsky (1978) and Pianta (2006) stress that literacy is acquired as a result of the relationships between teacher and child. That is, the teacher plays an important role in a child's written language development. Vygotsky (1978) believes that children develop higher mental functions critical to their understanding of literacy, such as focused attention and deliberate memory, through social interaction and the use of various culture-specific tools. He defines these cultural tools (i.e. adult scaffolding, self-directed speech, alphabet charts) as human-created devices that support children in gaining control over their deliberate higher-order thinking abilities. In other words, he states that these cultural tools help children reach their own zones of proximal development as they eventually

internalize both the tools and the sophisticated mental processes crucial to understanding written language. Bodrova (2006) builds off of this work and emphasizes the importance of expanding our reliance on these cultural tools to include social contexts themselves, such as make-believe play and children's natural behaviors that fall across symbol systems- writing, drawing, speech, and gesture. In this way, she continues, teachers can more appropriately and efficiently help each child reach his/her individual and variable zones of proximal development and further assist the child's development of higher mental functions necessary to an understanding of literacy.

Peer interactions also support students as they draw and write. However, these interactions vary depending on the child's age, personality, preferences and familiarity with the task (Zucchermaglio & Scheuer, 1996), social and cultural factors (MacGillivray, 1994) and the roles of children and adults in particular literacy events or tasks (Burns & Casbergue, 1992; DeBaryshe, Buell, & Binder, 1996; Power, 1991; Rowe, 1994; Zucchermaglio & Scheuer, 1996).

Composing. In order to develop an understanding of the depth and breadth of literacy and its importance, young children must practice its use in meaningful, socially situated, contexts within the classroom (Dyson, 1983). Children will learn to write, Vygotsky (1978) and Bodrova (2006) articulate, when they see it as a process as meaningful to them as play. Dyson (1983) suggests making books for the class library, creating presents and cards, writing and responding to letters through a class

mailbox, and dictating comments about drawings. In addition to these authentic tasks, Kantor et al (1992) add journaling, recipes, lists, notes, and signs.

Children's personal and social histories are woven into the texts they create (Dyson 1984; 1989; Kendrick, 2004; Rowe, 1994; 1989). Children come to understand the functions of genre and content through the books they read, the interactions in which they engage, and the observations of others engaged in the writing process (Rowe, 1994; Yaden et al, 1999). Throughout the composing process, children experiment with various forms and content and invent definitions of what written language means and how it is used (Avery, 1987; Clay, 1975; Dyson, 2001; Whitmore et al, 2005). Under a process-oriented approach, we know that natural interactions occur between children as they gather to create texts of their choice (Labbo 1996; Rowe, 1994; Troyer, 1991). It is through this process which involves the creation of texts as well as conversing with and observing others that children come to develop understandings of author and audience, texts and genres, social relationships, and the ways in which written language can be used to make sense of the world (Dyson, 1988; 2001; Rowe, 1989; 1994).

Symbol Systems

To understand children's written language development, we must look at the complex interrelationships between traditional writing development and children's use of other symbolic systems (Dyson, 1983; Morrison et al, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) articulates that the goal of literacy learning is to teach the child written language against his or her own needs, and not to simply teach the alphabet. Christakis &

Christakis (2010) advocate for this dual-understanding of written language development when they say: "Kindergartners need to know not just sight words and lower case letters, but how to search for meaning" (Christakis & Christakis, 2010, para. 16). That is, we must help children understand how to make meaning across any number of symbol systems they so naturally use. Learning how to make meaning is one of the first steps in literacy development (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Whitmore et al, 2005).

Children's first encounters with symbolizing processes occur through talk, dramatic play, art, and constructive activities (Dyson, 1983). Children need to be given opportunities to use symbol systems simultaneously as they engage in meaning making processes (Whitmore et al, 2005). Yet, children have differing styles and preferences in their use of symbolic materials (Dyson, 1986) and these significant differences are influenced by a number of factors (Morrison et al, 2006). To add to the complexity, the symbol systems, which are critical to the process of acquiring literacy (Harste et al, 1984; Siegel, 2006), function differently, as distinctive systems (Dyson, 1986). Each symbol system is a unique tool that can contribute something in understanding the world (Harste, 2000).

An essential part of discovering written language requires that the child sort out the various ways in which meaning can be expressed (Sulzby & Teale, 2003). Learning to write, in part, means children must learn to differentiate and resolve the tensions between the many and various symbolic worlds they utilize (Dyson, 1983, 1988). The more experience a learner has with a particular sign system, the better he

or she is able to integrate that sign system with others as he or she creates texts (Cowan & Albers, 2006).

Until children have mastered a flexible understanding of symbol systems, a wavering between two systems, such as drawing and writing, is common, and can help children solve problems as they construct and make sense of written language (Dyson, 1986). As children develop more sophisticated understandings of written language, the symbol systems drawing, writing, talk, and gesture become more distinguished from one another (Dyson, 1983; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). Drawing and writing may not fully differentiate, Sulzby and Teale (2003) say, until well into a child's kindergarten or first grade year.

Due to personal and social differences, children travel diverse learning paths on the way to achieving conventional literacy, developing different components of the intricate symbol-making process at different times (Dyson, 1986; Galda et al, 1989; Nelson, 1981; Wolf & Gardner, 1979). Children consistently analyze, hypothesize, and revisit their assumptions about what it means to mean as they come to understand written language and communication (Whitmore et al, 2005). They naturally see and explore the connections between the many facets of the symbolic world (Kress, 1997). Children from across diverse populations quickly understand that written language is organized in a particular way and attempt to discover those rules and conventions (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Whitmore et al, 2005). As children come to understand written language, they learn not only the functions of print, but what it is that can be written, and the many ways ideas can be expressed.

Talk and gesture support drawing and writing. Writing emerges, in part, from a child's practice with oral language (Dyson, 1993; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Pontecorvo & Morani, 1996; Sulzby, 1996). Children use talk as a way to demonstrate their thinking while engaged in drawing and writing processes (Dyson 1983; 1986; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). Young students' creations hold meaning and this meaning can often be expressed as the child reads his or her message (Sulzby & Teale, 2003). In this sense, the symbol system of drawing is linked to the symbol system of oral language as children use their drawings as a means to record their stories and messages (Bodrova, 2006). Through their talk, adults receive a glimpse into a child's thinking processes as he or she makes meaning (Dyson, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978).

In addition, children use gesture as a meaning-making system while in the act of composing (Dyson 1988; Newkirk, 1989; Whitmore et al, 2005). For instance, a child might move a crayon around a piece of paper to act as a car accompanied by a zooming sound (Neves & Reifel, 2002) and this gesturing potentially strengthens the child's message (Whitmore et al, 2005). Children face potential problems when transferring their talk and drawing to text because meanings made within one system may not be easily translated into another (Dyson, 1986). Often this gesture and talk can't be captured completely with the written word. Young children need to be allowed to explore these symbols freely as they come to understand the writing process (Dyson, 1983).

Teacher Role in Children's Meaning-Making

Teachers must be observant, knowledgeable, and sensitive to the diverse and complex ways in which young children use various symbol systems to make meaning (Dyson, 1986). They must try to see the writing process from the child's point of view, given the child's intentions (Dyson, 1983), rather than view the young child's literacy development against the lens of adult conventional literacy (Harste et al, 1984; Siegel, 2006). Following an emergent literacy perspective, many researchers (Bodrova, 2006; Dyson, 1984; 1986; Ray, 2004) advocate for honoring young children's early drawing and writing as legitimate literate behavior.

Dyson (1984) states that when we largely restrict how a child participates in a literate activity (i.e. dictating which materials to use, providing copying or fill-in-the-blank tasks), we place limitations on a child's expression and on what he or she will come to discover about written language. She continues by saying this reliance on teacher-created structure breaks up the writing process, allowing children to explore only part of the process, separating the meaning-making from the encoding. When we provide overly-structured writing activities, we are not allowing students to show us all of which they are capable (Ray, 2004). These assignments operate under teacher limits and concepts of what is or is not achievable (Harste et al, 1984; Ray, 2004). With this in mind, writing on our students' initiated creations limits their meaning-making, placing yet another boundary on the complex processes in which they undergo (Dyson, 1986; Ray, 2008).

The composing process. Instead, teachers should provide plenty of opportunity for open-ended composing periods in which children can perform and rehearse according to their own symbolic preferences (Dyson, 2001; Ray, 2004; 2008). Teachers must let students define their own levels of achievement (Ray, 2004). An opportunity to write without assignments and restrictions gives children the freedom to express themselves, experiment with genre and content, and self-monitor their processes (Graves, 1983; Whitmore et al, 2005).

In learning how to make meaning, the child's composing process becomes more important than the product (Calkins, 1983; Ray, 2008; 2010; Whitmore et al, 2005). Because of the complexity of students' drawing and writing processes, teachers must observe and listen to students carefully in the process of creating (Dyson, 1986; Ray, 2004, 2008). These processes should be valued with meaningful activities that allow children to control the writing process whenever possible (Dyson, 1984; Kantor et al, 1992), and, give children the chance to share their authentic texts with one another (Dyson, 2001; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2004; 2008). Additional key factors for effective writing in early childhood settings include time, freedom of resources, and opportunities to interact throughout the process of composing (Goodman & Wilde, 1992; Ray, 2004; Whitmore et al, 2005).

An on-going invitation for children to compose in any way they choose supports children's diverse drawing and writing processes (Ray, 2004). Teachers can support children's composing processes by providing a listening ear, talking about author and illustrator intentions within mentor texts, providing encouragement and

access to various audiences, and talking with children about their own intentions and composing decisions (Ray, 2004; 2008). As children compose, teachers must not be quick to use the written word to stand for or replace children's other meaning making systems. We need to provide a variety of open-ended text-producing activities to account for the differences in children's use of symbol systems (Dyson, 1986; Ray, 2004) and their diverse paths to conventional literacy (Whitmore et al, 2005).

Literacy in the classroom. Teachers need to come to see literacy as a way of life in the classroom (Kantor et al, 1992). Written language can be used as a teachable moment in the classroom as it fits the spontaneous needs of children in their play and exploration (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005; Kantor et al, 1992). Literacy holds a place in many classroom activities as a way to solve problems and foster social relationships (Dyson, 1986; Kantor et al, 1992; Yaden et al, 1999). To encourage the use of, and the benefits which come from literacy, writing materials should be available in all areas of the classroom (Bennett-Armistead, 2005; Kantor et al, 1992; Klenk, 2001), and writing and drawing should be encouraged during free-play (Kantor et al, 1992; Ray, 2004; Whitmore et al, 2005). Across the classroom, teachers should offer students the opportunity to use print whenever possible (Kantor et al, 1992), as they simultaneously support each child's meaning-making processes (Bodrova, 2006; Whitmore et al, 2005). According to Frank Smith (1998), teachers are the proficient members of the literacy club, and their students, the beginning members. Teachers are the mentors that provide authentic models and opportunities

for the use of written language in the classroom (Bennet-Armistead, 2005; Kantor et al, 1992).

Professional development. Certain factors affect a child's meaning-making processes, including the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and priorities of the teacher (Lynch, 2009). Roskos and Christie (2001) agree that teachers have varying priorities, but that each also has a finite number of resources. Studies show that the majority of preschool teachers believe they have limited knowledge about early literacy development (Lynch, 2009). This is unfortunate because it is the preschool teachers' beliefs and knowledge bases that affect the resources available to children and the amount to which children are encouraged to explore print-rich materials and meaning making across symbol systems (Lynch, 2009). Most preschool teachers still view literacy as a cognitive process rather than a social one and believe there is one best way to teach reading and writing, yet do not know what that is (Lynch, 2009). The general consensus is that preschool teachers want to know more about children's writing development through workshops that allot time for discussion (Bodrova, 2006; Lynch, 2009). Bodrova (2006) suggests professional development that also allows time for reflecting on children's learning, engaging in professional reading, and completing assignments that hold teachers accountable for implementing effective strategies. It is the teacher's challenge to help children represent what they know across a diverse range of systems, allowing them to tap into their individual strengths and preferred styles of representation (Dyson, 2001; Kendrick, 2004).

Broadening Literacy

We must broaden our definition of literacy to encompass meaning making across sign systems (Gardner, 1983; Kendrick, 2004; Leland & Harste, 1994; Malaguzzi, 1998; Whitmore et al, 2005). Duncum (2004) stresses that every act of literacy is multi-modal. That is, everything we encounter in today's culture integrates more than one symbol system—often, the visual and the verbal (television, magazines, websites, theme parks, etc). Leland and Harste (1994) articulate that when we say a child is writing, we often mean that this is the sign system highlighted. In reality, they say, there are a number of sign systems operating as a child sits down to write (such as talking with others, drawing, gesturing, and reading). Ideally, all modes of meaning making should be treated as equally significant (Kendrick, 2004). This is because literacy, according to semiotic theory, almost always involves written language in association with other sign systems, and is almost never devoid of its social context (Duncum, 2004; Leland & Harste, 1994). Over-relying on language impedes student development and restricts multiple ways of knowing (Leland & Harste, 1994).

Children engage in a diverse range of literate behaviors (Bodrova, 2006; Dyson, 1986; Whitmore et al, 2005; Yaden et al, 1999) and currently, these non-traditional modes of representation are often not valued in schools (Dyson, 2003; Kendrick, 2004; Kress, 1997; Siegel, 2006; Whitmore et al, 2005). Siegel (2006) stresses that with sensitive, knowledgeable teachers, there is room for multiple literacies to co-exist in the classroom with traditional school literacy. The symbol

systems with which young children are so adept at using should not be treated as add-ons to written language, but should be viewed as equally important modes for making meaning (Kendrick, 2004). We must, Bodrova (2006) continues, strive to teach written language as a meaning-making system, rather than simply as a set of conventions.

Summary

A process-oriented approach brings together the emergent literacy understanding that children are active constructors of their own literate knowledge, and the semiotics understanding that children construct this knowledge across symbol systems (Dyson, 1995; Gallas, 1994; Leland & Harste, 1994; Rowe, 1994; 1998). This approach has its roots in Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory (1978), which adopts the belief that children are active constructors of knowledge, and that they demonstrate this knowledge in meaningful contexts, such as play, as they observe and imitate the literate behaviors of those around them.

Long before children learn the conventions of written language, they are discovering the meaning-making aspects of written language (Christakis & Christakis, 2010; Dyson, 1986; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Whitmore et al, 2005). Children are constantly hypothesizing and constructing ways to communicate and make sense of the world (Dyson, 2001; Rowe, 1994; Whitmore et al, 2005; Yaden et al, 1999). As children construct definitions of the meaning-making aspects of written language, they are traveling across a wide variety of symbol systems, each of them following a unique path (Dyson, 1986; Galda et al, 1989; Nelson, 1981; Wolf &

Gardner, 1979). These paths are influenced by social factors, including support from peers and adults, and resources provided (Dyson, 1986; Lensmire, 1994; Whitmore et al, 2005). It is the teacher's role, then, to understand the complexity and diversity of young children's written language development and be sensitive to the literate needs of each child. The teacher must find a balance between providing traditional literacy instruction and authentic areas for children to practice these literate behaviors (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Kantor et al, 1992; Morrow & Rand, 2006; Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Neuman & Roskos, 1997), such as adult-supported dramatic play (Christie & Enz, 1992; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Morrow, 1990), open-ended composing periods (Dyson, 2001; Ray, 2004; 2008), and sharing time (Dyson, 2001; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2004; 2008).

In play, children develop a concept of symbolization, which will later contribute to an understanding of written language as a symbol system (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Pellegrini & Galda, 1991; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Other symbol systems, such as drawing and talk, help children develop a concept of symbolization, which will transfer to an understanding of the representative abilities of written language (Cowan & Albers, 2006; Dyson, 1983; Newkirk, 1989). Both socio-dramatic play and open-ended socially-interactive composing periods are meaningful spaces for children to participate in literate behavior as they learn to make meaning using written language, and other, equally important, symbol systems.

To cater to the complexity of students' literacy development, we must broaden our definition of literacy to include multiple symbol systems (Gardner, 1983;

Kendrick, 2004; Leland & Harste, 1994; Malaguzzi, 1998; Whitmore et al, 2005). After all, with a narrow view of literacy that focuses only on traditional written language, education cannot be equal for all, particularly for the student whose strength is not a linguistic one (Harste, 2000; Leland & Harste, 1994).

Conclusions

Preschool children make meaning through a variety of symbol systems often not valued in school. It is the teacher's job to act as mediator, providing formal literacy instruction in balance with authentic, meaningful tasks that allow children to make meaning and demonstrate what they know about literacy across symbol systems. As children travel the path to understanding written language and conventional literacy, they observe others around them, internalize what they see, and attempt to recreate these literate behaviors as they play, draw, write, talk, and gesture. Preschool teachers must appreciate each of these meaning-making attempts as legitimate, literate behaviors. Teachers should be offered professional development opportunities to help them restructure and redefine their visions of preschoolers as complex literate beings.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

It is all too common for teachers of young children to look at a drawing and exclaim, "How cute!," but Dyson (1986), Newkirk (1989) and Ray (2008) remind us that young students create drawings far too complex to receive only this passing sentiment. Dyson (1986) has found, as have I, that given paper and markers, young children create not only lines and colors, but entire imagined worlds of action, actors, and objects. Though drawing is a symbol system with which many young children are familiar, it is just one of many upon which young children rely (Kendrick, 2004; Dyson, 1983; Robins & Treiman, 2009). Children weave between many symbol systems, or modes of making meaning, to express the sentiments that weigh on their hearts (Dyson, 1986).

These symbol systems: drawing, talking, gesturing, dramatizing, and playing, are a child's literacies (Dyson, 1986; Kendrick, 2004; Sulzby & Teale, 2003; Whitmore et al, 2004). In other words, literacy for a young child is so much more than text. As stakeholders in the lives of young children, Dyson (1986) encourages us to look for the beginnings of literacy in all the kinds of "making" that young children do. "In this way, we will begin to understand, appreciate, and allow time for the often messy, noisy, and colorful process of becoming literate" (p. 407- 408).

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) research reminds us of the connections between young children's regular symbolic representations (such as play and drawing), and their writing development. He concluded that conventional written language does not come

in one straightforward way from early written language, rather, written language is "the culmination of a long process of development of complex behavioral functions in the child." (p. 106).

Based upon the research of previous chapters, we know that this process of writing development is often not understood or fully appreciated in schools (Harste, 2000; Kendrick, 2004; Resnick, 2007; Siegel, 1995). This project aims to educate preschool teachers about the complex literacy development of their students and give them time to discuss, implement, and reflect upon various practical solutions that cater to their students' vast symbolic repertoires.

Project Components

A presentation will be given to teachers which will include several components: a restructuring of beliefs, a presentation of theory and background, analysis of student work, allotted time for discussion, suggested practical solutions, and brain-storming and implementation (See Appendix A for presentation slides).

Restructuring of Beliefs

According to Lynch (2009), most preschool teachers believe their knowledge of early literacy processes is limited. At the start of the presentation, I will engage audience members with a simple question: "Why do we write?" As a group, we will brainstorm a list of reasons we, as literate adults, use writing, reflecting upon the ways this tool serves us in our worlds. My contributions to the list will include: "to communicate," "to make sense of our worlds," and "to foster and maintain relationships with one another."

Next, I will share a drawing created by one of my students. The page is filled with lines, colors, and objects. I will ask audience members to reflect upon the following question with someone next to them: "What do you notice?" Participants will hypothesize about what they see on the page. After one minute, we will reconvene and I will share an audio clip of that student reading his story. Text to accompany the story will also be provided. I will then share with audience members that the student whose story they heard has in fact, in his story, done everything that proficient writers do. He has used symbols on paper for the same purposes we brainstormed at the start of the presentation, and in addition, has included characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, left-to-right progression, and revision. The only difference, I will share, is this student's lack of experience, and his use of picture symbols rather than written symbols. Young students, not yet comfortable with written symbols, rely on their own personal conventions when putting marks on paper (Bodrova, 2006; Dyson, 1986; Newkirk, 1989). Drawing *is* their literacy. For young students, drawing is writing too.

Theory and Background

I will continue by presenting the theory and background presented in the previous chapters to participants in the form of presentation slides (Appendix A). In short, I will stress that preschool students are writers. They are symbol weavers (Dyson, 1986). Since each of our students takes a different path to literacy, it is our job to be sensitive to this diversity and understand our students as complex meaning-

makers first, before we consider them to be conventional writers (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Whitmore et al, 2005).

I will share that early writing originates in drawing, dramatic play, and other symbolic processes (Dyson, 1983; 1986; Galda et al, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978) and share the ways in which both drawing (Bodrova, 2006; Newkirk, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978) and play (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Piaget, 1962; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978) help children develop a concept of symbolization which later translates into an understanding of written language (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, I will stress play's social benefits (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Roskos & Christie, 2001; Schrader, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978; Whitmore et al, 2005), cognitive benefits (Piaget, 1962; Pontecorvo & Zucchermaglio, 1990; Vukelich, 1993; Whitmore et al, 2005), and literate benefits (Bennett-Armistead et al, 2005; Klenk, 2001; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993).

Practical Solutions

Next, I will provide teachers with three broad research-based practical solutions they can easily incorporate or enhance in their classrooms. These are: 1) Literacy models, 2) Open-ended composing periods, and 3) Adult-supported dramatic play.

Literacy models. I will provide teachers with practical solutions for incorporating more environmental print, writing materials, models of writing, and the use of print as a teachable moment within their classrooms. These suggestions are supported by Bennett-Armistead (2005), Klenk (2001), Smith (1988), and Kantor et

al (1992), respectively. I will compile ideas into a handout to be used for future reference (Appendix B). At this point in the presentation, I will welcome alternative suggestions for incorporating the use of print as a model for writing, and will share results from the pre-survey which might be of interest to participants. Teachers will have space within the handout to write additional suggestions should they desire.

Open-ended composing periods. As I suggest incorporating open-ended composing periods into the curriculum, I will present the research of both Dyson (1984) and Ray (2004) which reminds us that overly-structured writing activities place limitations on children's expression. I will urge teachers to steer clear of dictation whenever possible, a habit that places boundaries upon children's meaning-making processes and limits exploration across symbol systems (Dyson, 1986; Ray, 2008). I will stress the importance of process over product (Calkins, 1983; Ray, 2008; 2010; Whitmore et al, 2005) and provide teachers with a handout for future reference which outlines various elements of composing with young children (Appendix C).

Adult-supported dramatic play. The last suggestion I will provide is that of supporting dramatic play and the many ways in which this can be done. Participants will receive a handout for future reference, with room to write, and will also be given time to share additional ideas with one another (Appendix D). Based upon the research of Morrow and Schickedanz (2006) and Roskos and Christie (2001), we know the importance of providing appropriate and authentic materials for dramatic play centers. I will provide suggestions for writing materials and props I have found to be useful in my classroom. I will encourage teachers to participate in their

students' dramatic play, sharing research which stresses this importance and its benefits for children's literate development (Christie & Enz, 1992; Klenk, 2001; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; 1992; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Yaden et al, 1999). In addition to pointing out the ways in which adults can mediate in children's play and sharing examples from my own classroom, I will stress that meaningful, informal literacy learning must take place alongside formal literacy instruction in order for students to develop a full understanding of literacy (Christie & Roskos, 2009; Kantor et al, 1992; Morrow & Rand, 2006; Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006; Neuman & Roskos, 1997).

Student Work

After presenting the theories, research, and research-based solutions which support young children as complex meaning-makers, I will share samples of student work with participants. This section can be cut in the event of a time restraint. The samples, accompanied by students' dictated text, illustrate the fact that drawing is a legitimate literate act. The samples range from one-page journal entries to child-created picture books. Some of the samples will be shared with the audience via presentation slides, and others will be passed around to various tables so that each table sees something different.

Discussion

After viewing a number of samples together via presentation slides, discussion will begin as I allow participants time to reflect aloud upon what they notice within the student work that rests on their tables. This is the time for audience members to

analyze the work, looking for the many ways in which young children's writing skills are extraordinary. Each table will be given time to discuss and collaborate, and then, to share with the group. As each group shares, I will compile a list that points out all of the ways in which our students are literate and extraordinarily capable. Again, this section will take place if time allows. The goal is to continue to restructure participants' beliefs so that each comes to believe that their preschool students are, indeed, writers.

Brainstorming and Implementation

At this point in the presentation, I will allot time for discussion and questions. Next, participants will have the opportunity to group themselves according to classroom and brainstorm ways in which they can take what they have learned from the presentation today and apply it to their respective classrooms. After a short brainstorming session, lead teachers will be responsible for implementing three (3) literate activities of their choice, either from the suggestions given during the presentation, ideas developed during the brainstorm session, or activities they have chosen to create or enhance on their own, which take into account students' diverse paths to literacy.

Plans for Implementation

This project will be implemented for the first time in April 2011. The presentation will be titled "Literacy Workshop," and all lead preschool teachers and support staff members from my school will be in attendance. I have received permission from the director of my school, and the workshop will be considered a

literacy training for all staff members. This presentation can be adapted as needed and taken to other settings to be shared with stakeholders in the lives of young children.

Project Evaluation

To determine success of this project, I will first distribute a pre-survey (Appendix E) to all staff members, one month prior to the workshop. This will give me a general sense of attendees' ranges of background knowledge. I will use the answers to gauge my audience members' understandings of early literacy and to adapt my presentation as needed. At the conclusion of the presentation, I will distribute a post-survey (Appendix F) which will help me determine whether the workshop attendees have gained new knowledge about early literacy and how this will be implemented in the classroom. Support and lead staff will be given time to brainstorm practical solutions with one another based upon those presented in the workshop. Lead staff will be responsible for implementing or enhancing at least three (3) developmentally-appropriate literate practices in their classrooms (Appendix G). I will schedule follow-up meetings with lead staff within two weeks of the workshop to gauge their success, provide feedback and suggestions, and assist with implementation as needed.

Project Conclusions

This project was designed with the knowledge that no two children's paths to literacy look alike (Dyson, 1990; Kantor et al, 1992; Whitmore et al, 2005; Yaden et al, 1999). The pre-surveys I have received and read do highlight the fact that preschool teachers feel some unease when addressing early literacy. Hopefully, this

project, designed to educate preschool teachers about the complex development of young children's literate knowledge, will serve to restructure teachers' beliefs about literacy in order to incorporate a more broadened view, encourage them to feel sensitive toward children's complex paths to literacy, and give them the confidence to implement developmentally-appropriate literate practices within their respective classrooms.

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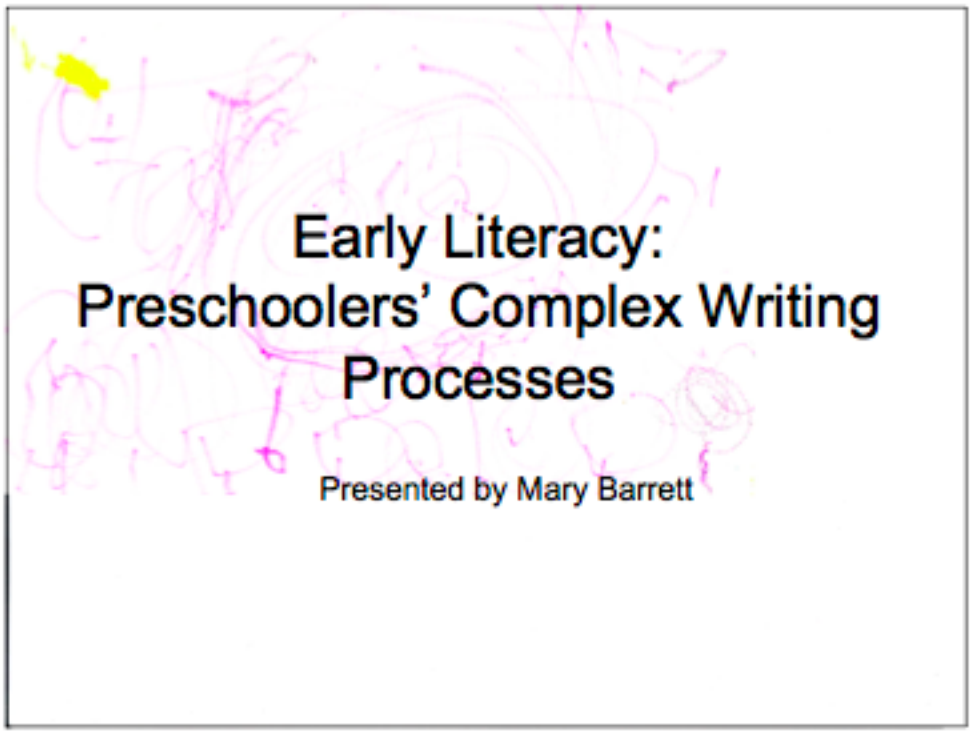

He robbed a bank and then he zoomed on his bicycle, and then the police came chasing after him and then he went in his airplane and then the police put a net on it, and then he planted some beans. It grew into a beanstalk and then he lifted the helicopter up and then he captured the police in the door and then he dropped it, and then he opened the door and he flew out of the helicopter and then he fell and then another helicopter came and he grabbed onto the pole, and it zoomed in and he flew away. And the helicopter came chasing after him. The End!

Drawing as Writing

"Adults must hold 2 understandings simultaneously: The child is a writer, and the child is 4-years old." - Ray & Glover

- Drawing *is* a form of writing. It is one primal way beginning writers represent and understand meaning.
- Young children are symbol weavers (Dyson).
- Young children draw naturally and playfully.
- Beginning writers' drawings are often not yet representational in a conventional sense.
- Drawing relies on personal conventions.
- Re-readings are often consistent because the drawing is representational to the child. It follows his or her conventions.

Vygotsky discovered early writing originates in…

- Gesture
- Speech
- Dramatic Play
- Drawing
- Very young children begin to communicate and express themselves using gesture and speech. This expression next begins to show itself in dramatic play and drawing
- Both dramatic play and drawing help young children develop a concept of *symbolization* which can directly translate into their understanding of written language

For young children, literacy is...

- FIRST: The ways in which children express themselves, communicate, and make meaning across symbol systems
- SECOND: A mastery of letters, sounds, words, and phrases
- Each of our students takes a *different* path to achieving conventional literacy. On the path toward a mastery of language, students develop concepts about reading, writing, and language by communicating and expressing themselves using multiple symbol systems in various ways, primarily: speaking, writing, drawing, and playing (gesturing, dramatizing).

What else can we do to support our students' diverse paths to conventional literacy?

- Provide *models* of literacy
- Support their drawing, writing, and artistic expression with time for *open-ended composing periods*
- Support their *dramatic play*

Literacy Models

Research says…

- Environmental print (signs, names, labels)
- Books, books, books!
- Teacher models the writing of notes, letters, poems, lists, graphs, charts, etc.
- Teacher encourages the use of print during teachable moments (creating signs for block creations, writing a note so as not to forget)
- Provide writing materials in all areas of the classroom
- Encourage writing and drawing during free play

Open-ended composing

Research says…

- Opportunities to write/create without boundaries or limitations. *Process > Product!*
- Only providing structured writing opportunities limits students' expression
- Writing/artistic materials available in many areas of the room; Well-stocked writing and art tables
- Teacher encourages students to compose across symbol system or genre (write a song, make a picture book, act out a play…)
- Always writing on students' creations dismantles the belief that they are writers

Adult-supported dramatic play

Research says…

- Enhance play centers with literate materials…
- And model their uses!
- Play with children: Follow, do not lead…
- Use enriched vocabulary…
- These practices *will* lead to more literate behaviors, advances in knowledge of the functions of literacy, and motivation for children to maintain interest in the play!
- In make-believe play, children experiment with props and literacy materials, have the potential to create a variety of texts, develop a sense of symbol, and learn about story elements and structure

Our students can…

- Write from what they know and care about
- Include detailed information in their stories
- Reread their work and make changes
- Begin to craft a beginning, middle, and end
- Depict setting in their stories
- Extend their thoughts onto the page
- Remain focused on a topic throughout
- Know that letters have a place in the telling of a story or the creation of a book
- Decide when to abandon a story
- Choose to engage in writing over a variety of other exciting activities
- Work independently over time to create a text
- Represent meaning with illustrations and print
- Offer assistance to others and accept assistance
- Write with a sense of organization
- Respond to audience questions with confidence
- Read and reread with consistency over time
- Understand and preserve authority as authors of books
- Engage in revision to make meaning clearer
- Make clear, logical connections between the ideas in his/her text
- Select topics meaningful to them based on their experience
- Begin to write titles
- Experiment with writing
- Use color to make things look real
- Compose using pictures and text
- Add words to pictures
- Discover and solve problems of some complexity in their writing

"The young child is a written language user long before his writing looks representational…[and] the decisions which the young child makes are, both in form and in kind, like those which we make as literate adults." - Harste

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Literacy (written language) emerges out of gesture, speech, talk, drawing, and dramatic play.

For preschool students, drawing and dramatic play are particularly important avenues for coming to understand the functions of literacy.

As teachers of young children, we can…

1. Provide plenty of opportunity for open-ended drawing, writing, and creating processes

2. Be sensitive to the diverse paths to literacy our students travel, knowing that young children use a number of symbol systems to communicate and express themselves as they come to understand literacy

3. Immerse our students in print by providing models of writing, rich vocabulary, plenty of books, and literacy within teachable moments in the classroom

4. Provide, and be involved in, literacy-enriched opportunities for dramatic play

5. Provide informal literacy instruction (mentioned above) alongside formal literacy instruction

6.

7.

Never forget: each of your students IS a writer!

The Importance of Drawing to Young Writers

1. **Drawing is one primal way that beginning writers represent and understand meaning.** Most young children come to school knowing how to draw, and in most cases, they enjoy it. It is something they do naturally and playfully.

2. **Drawing is a way for children to be heard.** A student that has difficulty recognizing letters or representing words can often draw what he knows, thinks, and feels. When classmates show an understanding of a student's drawing, that student learns that people can listen to and "read" his drawings. He sees that what is important to him is being understood by others, and that what he knows, thinks, and feels matters. In addition, drawing and art are ways for the visually, rather than verbally, strong students to excel.

3. **Drawing allows children to go deeper into their stories.** Drawing allows children to represent a deeper meaning in their stories than they could by using text alone. Reliance on text to tell a story can limit the child that does not yet feel comfortable with the conventions of written language. Artistic expression allows a student to represent meaning using his/her own personal conventions.

4. **Through drawing, children learn about the craft of writing.** Because talking, drawing, and writing are three aspects of a complex "symbol weaving"* for young students, over time we have come to see that what children learn how to do in one mode sets the stage for and supports learning in the others. For example, when a child begins to take on specificity and increased detail in his/her drawing, eventually he/she will be able to be more specific in his/her talking and writing as well. This applies to dramatic play as well.

5. **Drawing helps children develop a sense of symbol.** Being able to write conventionally means being able to use symbols to abstractly represent something else. For instance, this word: "cat" is a symbol for the furry friend walking around your house. Through drawing, young children come to understand that the marks they make on paper can and do stand for or represent something else. When they see illustrations done by adults, peers, and illustrators, they see, with encouragement and experience, that they too can create representations on paper that stand for something else. Eventually, children develop the confidence to accompany these drawings with written text.

Be excited about what your students CAN do, never about what they can't do.

* Dyson, A.H. (1986). Transitions and tensions: Interrelationships between the drawing, talking, and dictating of young children. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *20*(4), 379-409.

Why Picture Books?

Open-ended composing periods are ideal, but as students' understandings of literacy become more sophisticated, we can suggest children make picture books, which asks children to **compose,** or make something with their writing.

Single page drawings	----------> Picture Books
Illustrations are often accompanied by fascinatingly endless text and extended conversation. As long as someone keeps listening, children will keep talking and adding to their oral texts.	Children have the potential to develop deep understandings of writing and composition. New pages with new illustrations extend the meaning of the text, nurturing a sophisticated understanding of text and an ordered sense of composition.

Why?

Picture books…

- are a familiar genre
- expand the avenues for meaning-making beyond single-page drawings and/or writings
- Focus on real writing for real audiences
- encourage the extraordinary task of *composition*
- help children read like writers
- build stamina for writing as students work independently over time on one text
- encourage students to make clear, logical connections between ideas
- allow students to see themselves as authors too
- encourage students to begin incorporating text when ready
- help students understand that writing ends with reading, and to anticipate a reader's response
- helps children see that they can create a record of something that holds fast throughout time
- are fun, and children like it!

When?

- A child excitedly tells a story, to keep it recorded forever
- After a dramatic play activity, to keep it fresh
- After something exciting or unusual happens in the classroom
- A child knows a lot about a topic; is an "expert"
- To teach others how to do/build/make something
- For a particular audience or occasion
- It's been awhile since a child has made a book, and you'd really like to watch him/her write
- ANTYIME!

Authors make intentional choices when they write books. Point this out to students. When reading books, talk about the author's name, read the author's note and dedication, and discuss the features (cover, title page, end pages, text vs. pictures). Talk about why the author might have chosen certain words or illustrations! Young children will begin to notice these features and include them in their own compositions when they're ready.

The Language of the Writing Process: Side-by-Side teaching

A child who initiates an act of writing has both the **desire** to write, and the **belief** that he or she is a writer. Sitting with students as they engage in the process of writing means observing, encouraging, supporting, and nudging students toward helping them understand the writing process and grow as writers. Below are some questions and statements you might make to children during this **side-by-side teaching.**

"What is your book/picture/story about?"

- Talk with the child about the topic and help her see she can bring her expertise
- Help the child imagine what ideas could stretch across the pages
- What types of features could she add to the book?
- How is this book similar or different to other books the student has written?
- Use the student's talk to suggest revisions he/she might make to make the meaning clearer
- Just talk! Talking helps a child imagine possibilities, and is often a rehearsal for the writing/drawing

Some young children may have a difficult time grasping the concept that books are about something:

- Ask "What have you drawn?" Help the child understand that his book/story is *about* that.
- Give examples of other books the child knows and what they are *about.*
- If a child has difficulty talking about the drawing at all, point out the colors and features you see because… A small bit of talk from you can get a child going.
- If a child is making a book that is not about just one thing, try helping the child find a common link .

Comments you might make to encourage an understanding of the writing process:

- "It's so smart how you're thinking ahead about your idea before putting anything down on the paper."
- " I notice how you're thinking about how your book might go by looking to see how many pages you have."
- "I think it's smart how you're going back and rereading what you've got so far."
- "Look how you've revised that! You've added ---– to your picture, and now I can understand it much more clearly."
- " I notice that you illustrate first, and then add the words. I bet the pictures help you think about what words you need" (or vice-versa).

Questions you might ask children about the process:

- "What are you going to do first, or next?"
- "Where did you get the idea for this book/story?"
- "That's interesting! Why did you decide to (make the cat so big in your picture)?"
- "How long have you been making this book?"
- "What are you thinking about?"
- "How do you feel about this?"

Asking children questions plants seeds of things for children to think about as they grow as writers over time. It also helps very young children begin to see themselves as people who ought to have answers to these questions because **they are writers too**, no matter what their creations might look like.

Drawing and Writing: Ways of Communicating

Below are common stages and characteristics of the drawing and writing development of young children. It is important to note that these stages are not purely chronological. Children's writing often progresses in this order, but oftentimes several characteristics can be seen in one piece of writing. Children may also skip certain characteristics altogether.

Pre-phonemic Stage

1. Scribbling
   - Develops over time from disordered or random (uncontrolled, marks begin anywhere on page) to longitudinal (controlled, repetitive, often progresses from left to right) to circular (more complex, controlled) markings.
   - As they near the end of this stage, children can often tell a story about their drawing.
   - Children usually do not use color with intention.
   - They enjoy making large movements when they draw (and marks on surfaces such as walls).

2. Drawing

   Children's drawings become more representational. For example, a human might have a circular shape for a head and vertical lines for legs. Children are starting to capture the elements themselves from the world around them. Drawing is one of the first ways young children tell stories on paper. This makes sense because many early emergent readers believe we read the pictures in books, rather than the words. Their pictures often tell a story or communicate a meaning.

3. Mock Letters and Letter-like symbols

   Between 2 ½ - 3 years, many children begin to recognize differences between drawing and writing. Still, at this age properties of drawing and writing are very much intermingled. Children's writing may look like linear, left-to-right scribbles or mock letter-like symbols. These can be personal or conventional symbols (letters in one's name, hearts and other favorite symbols, symbols that very closely resemble letters). Children may also experiment with symbols so that they represent some physical aspect of their topic (i.e. creating scribble-like writing that represents the size of the object being represented ("mouse" may be a shorter scribble than "dog" because it is a smaller animal)).

4. Letter strings

   At this stage, children may write strings of letters that do not actually compose words, but which the children may refer to as words. Numbers and shapes may also be included in the strings early on, though this will diminish as children increasingly come to see letters as a separate system. At this stage, children understand that writing is made up of something other than drawing and scribbles, but of letters and words.

5. Separated Words

   Groups of letters begin to have space between them to more closely resemble words.

Early Phonemic Stage

Children begin labeling pictures, often with only the beginning letter or sound they hear. They often attach labels to the pictures they draw because many children at this age have had thousands of literacy experiences centered around pictures and being asked to orally label them.
Children begin to write environmental print or sight words (names and text around the room and in their lives).

Children's letter formations become more conventional. They begin to match the sounds they hear to the letters that they write. Children often use one beginning sound to represent each word in the sentence or phrase they are writing.

Letter-Name Stage

Children represent words by writing the beginning and ending sounds, omitting the medial vowel sound.

Transitional Stage/Invented Spelling

A child at this stage is hearing and writing more than just 1 beginning and 1 ending sound. Children progress from not representing any vowels, to representing the incorrect vowel sound, to hearing and representing the beginning, middle, and ending sounds with 3 letters or more. Children's letter formations are becoming more conventional and are often recognizable. Children test out different ways words might be spelled, based on their knowledge of the sounds of letters and letter combinations.

Supporting Dramatic Play

The Importance of Make-Believe Play to Young Writers

1. **Make-believe play allows children to experiment.** When children pretend, they are always adopting a role that requires them to act older than themselves. In a sense, children are taking on their own "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) without the support of an adult or more-skilled peer. The child is experimenting with props and literacy materials, building higher cognitive processes and social relationships. Experimenting with familiar and unfamiliar roles helps children consolidate and reinforce their knowledge.

2. **Make-believe play allows children to experiment with literacy.** When we provide numerous examples of functional print within dramatic play settings, such as *newspapers, phonebooks, magazines, menus, signs and charts, maps, appointment books, coupons, and food containers*, we are creating an environment that allows children to interact with print the way they see others do. They too, consolidate and reinforce their knowledge about different literacy concepts here.

3. **Make-believe play allows children to produce a variety of texts.** By exposing children to a wide variety of functional texts, we are encouraging them to create their own. Given a well-stocked supply of writing materials, and functional text from a wide variety of genres within the dramatic play area, children will be encouraged to create many kinds of text that fit the needs of their play for the day.

4. **Make-believe play helps children develop a sense of "symbol."** Just like drawing, playing is an area where children come to understand the use of symbols. Young children use props as objects in their dramatic play situations. As they develop higher cognitive processes, they begin to see that those props (a play banana, for instance) can be used for other things (i.e. a microphone, a telephone). Eventually, they will come to see that no props are needed. This experimentation and negotiation with props helps young ones develop the abstract concept of symbols, which translates directly into their understanding of the symbols of written language.

5. **Make-believe play allows children to learn about story elements and structure.** Acting out and retelling stories helps young children gain a sophisticated understanding of narratives. Given props that relate to a common story, children can reenact the story, thus gaining an understanding of the characters, the setting, the sequence and plot, and even the act of storytelling, which can greatly enhance their comprehension. With a little nudge and some practice, children will be more willing to create and enact their own elaborate make-believe stories.

Just as it is important to provide a mix of teacher-initiated and child-initiated writing opportunities, be sure there is time for children to initiate their own dramatic play scenarios. It is not necessary to create a theme for each day of the week. For ease of use, consider creating "prop boxes." These are dramatic play "tool-kits" with all of the appropriate props and materials for particular settings and scenarios. They can be pulled from the shelf or closet as needed. **Some suggestions follow.**

Dramatic Play Theme	**Suggested Literacy Props to include**
Doctor/Vet Office	Animal books, pet care books, magazines, appointment book, phone book, keyboard, medical charts, file folders and clipboards with paper and pencil, Signs/Labels: Open/Closed, "medicine", All pets welcome
Grocery Store	Grocery-store ads, coupons, food posters, empty food containers, pencils and notepads for grocery lists, keyboard, receipt paper, nametags Signs/Labels: Food labels for shelves, Open/Closed, In/Out, "Sale"
Restaurant	Menus, cookbooks, order pads and pencils, chalk or dry erase board for specials, receipt paper, keyboard Signs/Labels: Open/Closed, Welcome, "Specials," "Desserts", "Wait to be seated"
Pizza Parlor	Cookbooks, recipe cards, menus, pizza boxes, order pads and pencils, phonebook, keyboard, receipt paper Signs/Labels: In/Out, "Today's Pizza," labeled ingredients
Camp Out	Wildlife posters, field guides, animal books, observation notebooks and pencils Signs/Labels: "Campsite," "No trespassing," "Beware of Animals"
Flower Shop	Seed packets, plant posters and books, phonebook, order forms and pencils, keyboard, receipt paper Signs/Labels: Open/Closed, Welcome, Labeled seeds and flowers
Bakery	Price lists, Order forms, pencils, recipe cards, cookbook, paper for labeling creations, phonebook, keyboard, receipt paper Signs/Labels: Open/Closed, labels on shelves
Firehouse	City maps, phonebook, Fire safety posters, paper and pencil, keyboard Signs/Labels: Direction posters for putting on gear or putting out a fire
Store (Shoes, Books, etc.)	Price lists, Store advertisements, Keyboard, paper and pencils, receipt paper Signs/Labels: Open/Closed, Items labeled on shelves
Airplane	Travel brochures, magazines, maps, flight manual, order pads and pencils for flight attendants, name tags, tickets, passports Signs/Labels: Seatbelts On, Take Off, Landing
Boat/Submarine	Maps of lakes, fish and sea books, fish field guides, animal magazines

Other suggested themes: Car mechanic, Housekeeping, Factory, Office, Bank, Zoo, Spaceship, Train, Baby Hospital, School, Movie theater, Post Office, Newspaper Office

Research shows adults play an important role in dramatic play:

* Play with them! * Use rich vocabulary in context, and repeat yourself
* Go with the flow; allow the child to lead the play
* Accept all levels of development; every reading and writing attempt you see is a legitimate, extraordinary literate behavior.
* Encourage the use of literacy props; let them see you using them
* Be open to new uses for props and props from other areas in the classroom. Sometimes children can invent better props than we can provide.
* Preschool children are more likely to engage in voluntary literacy behaviors during free-play periods when literacy materials are introduced and when teachers guide children to use them.

Early Literacy Workshop *Name (optional):*
Pre-Survey

Return completed questions to Mary by _____

1. What does "early literacy" mean to you? What does it look like?

2. What are you currently doing to incorporate literacy into the classroom (*lead staff)*? OR, What literacy practices do you see incorporated in the classroom (*support staff)?*

3. When it comes to early literacy, what would you like to know more about? Feel free to be specific!

Early Literacy Workshop Name:
Post-Survey

1. What does "early literacy" mean to you? What does it look like?

2. Name 3-5 ideas you have for incorporating, or helping to incorporate literacy into the classroom.

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

   5.

3. When it comes to early literacy, is there anything you would *still* like to know more about? Be honest, and specific!

Early Literacy Workshop:
Assignment for Lead Staff

In an effort to promote and increase children's early literate behaviors, I will make an effort to incorporate or enhance the following literacy practices within my classroom *(please be specific):*

1.

2.

3.

I will make every effort to incorporate these practices within the next three weeks. In addition, I will be available for follow-up conversation regarding the implementation of these practices.

Signed _____ Date _____

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
ED 693/695 Data Form

NAME: Mary Barrett

MAJOR: (Choose only 1)

_____ Adult/High Ed	_____ Elem Ed	_____ SpEd Admin
_____ CSAL	_____ Ed Diff	_____ SpEd ECDD
_____ Early Child	_____ Mid & H.S.	_____ SpEd EI
_____ Ed Tech	__X__ Read/Lang Arts	_____ SpEd LD
_____ Ed Leadership	_____ School Counseling	_____ TESOL

TITLE: Educating Teachers about the Complex Writing Processes of Preschool Students

PAPER TYPE: (Choose only 1)

__X__ Project
_____ Thesis

SEM/YR COMPLETED: Winter 2011

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL_____

Using key words or phrases, choose several ERIC descriptors (5 - 7 minimum) to describe the contents of your project. ERIC descriptors can be found online at http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=Thesaurus&_nfls=false

1. Preschool
2. Writing
3. Early literacy
4. Symbol systems
5. Professional development
6. Preschool teachers
7. Drawing
8. Play
9. Emergent literacy
10. Symbolization