Understanding the Connections Among Oral Language, Drawing and Writing in Emergent Writers (Project)

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Understanding the Connections Among Oral Language, Drawing and Writing in Emergent Writers
by
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Ruth Ann Marie Hester
Abstract

Due to increased pressures to raise scores on high stakes tests, teachers of emergent writers often focus on literacy sub-skills that do not provide authentic experiences with language and writing. Early literacy instruction must be designed around the interconnected modes of symbolic representation of oral language, drawing and writing to develop critical thinking skills and deep literacy learning. Additionally, learning environments must support the development of emergent writers as they negotiate their understandings and identities within unique socio-cultural worlds. Through a digital presentation and collaborative experience, this project aims to inform administrators and teachers on the natural literacy development of emergent writers and influence their instructional practices toward a more effective and respectful way of teaching writing to children. The project presents current research and literature on oral language development, the use of storytelling in the composing process, the role of drawing for emergent writers, and the role of the environment in literacy learning. Instructional methods are explored that honor the needs and development of emergent writers.
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Understanding the Connections Among Oral Language, Drawing and Writing in Emergent Writers

**Problem Statement**

Instructional methods for emergent writers often focus on procedural skills devoid of meaning and context (Neuman & Roscos, 2005). Teachers of emergent writers are pressured to focus on literacy sub-skills to align with standardized tests, and authentic experiences with language and writing suffer (Kalmar, 2008). To meet these demands, districts are purchasing packaged curricula and following lock-step programs that are not intuitive to the needs of emergent writers (McCarthey, 2008). This type of early literacy instruction ignores the critical thinking skills that are developed through the interconnected modes of symbolic representation of oral language, drawing, and writing (Vygotsky, 1978).

When young children are given opportunities with meaningful storytelling and drawing, they share ideas and theories of their worlds and weave elaborate stories in the development of their identities as writers (Dyson, 1986; Horn, 2005). Emergent writers have many personal stories to share, as well as hypotheses about writing. They begin to test these hypotheses by gestural mark-making, playing with spacing, letter formation and directionality (Zecker, 1999). In her book *In Pictures and In Words: Teaching the Qualities of Writing Through Illustration Study*, Katie Wood Ray (2010) explains that the process a child goes through in composing a drawing parallels the elements of a writing process. She stresses the value of drawing as a text itself, and a developmentally appropriate mode of communicating meaning as a
complex process in equal value to the process of communicating through the written word.

For decades research and theory have confirmed the strong connections between the symbolic modes of drawing and writing. Piaget (1963) argued that children’s concepts and ideas of the world are reflected in their drawings. According to Flower and Hayes as cited by Caldwell and Moore (1991), writing is a visionary process, where the writer generates imagery about a concept or idea. Caldwell and Moore (1991) argue, “for novice writers, then, the best planning strategy for writing may be to find a correspondence between internal and external representations of ideas through the use of drawing” (p. 208).

According to Horn and Giacobbe (2007), providing time for oral storytelling among emergent writers honors children and their experiences, develops the identities of individuals in the learning community, “acknowledges talk as having an essential place at the core of writing”, and “allows children to learn about the elements of craft before they ever put them on paper” (p. 16). The authors go on to explain that, by sharing and listening to each other’s stories, then moving directly to composing on paper, children develop the understanding that writing is about constructing meaning and communicating that to others. By honoring the development of emergent writers through storytelling and drawing, critical thinking skills are developed that allow for the progression to the composition of written text (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007).
Rationale and Importance

The connections between oral language, drawing and writing are essential to the development of emergent writers (Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). These connections are often not part of early writing instruction, in effect, depriving children of essential mechanisms in their process of problem solving, expression and organization of thought (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). “In our human evolution, it was speaking that came first, then drawing, and then writing. In young children’s development (for the most part), it happens the same way” (Horn, 2005, p. 35).

Literature on the development of emergent writers illustrates the dynamics and tensions that take place when children transition from drawing to writing text. When drawing, emergent writers re-create “imaginary worlds” through mark-making, talking, and dramatic play, employing the conventions of time and space, character, and plot development (the basic components of literature) (Dyson, 1986). Writing grows out of “the entire history of sign development in the child” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 106), including oral language, symbolic play, and drawing.

This depth of storytelling and writing starkly contrasts the writing experiences many children have when they begin pre-school and kindergarten, where they have limited opportunities for storytelling and writing in the symbolic modes that are most familiar to them, drawing and talking (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). They instead do vast amounts of seatwork and are denied authentic and meaningful experiences with oral language, reading, and writing. Oral language is developed in the process of drawing when emergent writers are working through their concepts of the world.
(Vygotsky, 1986). “It is with a strong oral language base that the young child finds success in reading and writing” (Cooper, P. M., Capo, K., Mathes, B., & Gray, L. 2007, p. 252). With an understanding of the connections between oral language, drawing and writing in emergent writers, a teacher can nurture rich contexts in which to teach composition and support the child’s natural progression through his/her use of symbolic representation (Ray, 2010).

**Background of Study**

With the research and theoretical foundations of Vygotsky and Piaget, further studies have been conducted that attempt to describe and identify the development of oral language and other symbol systems in children as they relate to literacy. Johnson (2007) argues that a child’s early communicative behaviors (gesture and movement) serve as non-verbal modes of expression that extend into oral language. As children develop further, these non-verbal modes contribute to a more sophisticated cache of experiences for telling stories. Drawing provides opportunities to create stories and is the next mode to develop. Children continue to make sense of their worlds through drawing and develop their concepts of language (Vygotsky, 1978). Storytelling prior to and through drawing provides opportunities in a social context for children to organize their ideas and theories on a topic, revisit those ideas, add or change details, and sometimes completely transform their original theories (Kissel, 2008; Zecker, 1999; Dyson, 1986).

Heath (1982), a linguist, provides another theory of oral language development and literacy. She contends that socio-cultural factors shape our oral
language development and our understandings of literacy through “literacy events”, “literacy practices” and “literacy performances.” Heath argues that, often times, children who do not grow up in cultures that match the events, practices and performances of the school culture struggle in their understandings of reading and writing as they are taught in the classroom. Instructional methods that focus on sequential learning and leave little room for storytelling and exploration do not meet the needs of these children (Norton-Meier, 2005). Norton-Meier described how emergent writers whose cultures differ from the dominant culture in the classroom can build upon their developing knowledge of print through drawing and writing and having conversations about those “literacy performances.”

Research in aesthetic education links visual representation through drawing, painting and other visual media with enhanced cognition of concepts and development of oral language in young children (Wright, 2007). According to Vygotsky (1978), “the relationship between speech and action is a dynamic one in the course of children’s development” (p.28). Vygotsky explains that in the early stages of a child’s development, speech accompanies action as a way of problem solving, but later precedes action as a way of planning. Thus, young children draw and speak simultaneously, forming their ideas that they can later name. Older children use speech to plan what they will draw, and “thus we see that drawing is graphic speech that arises on the basis of verbal speech. This gives us grounds for regarding children’s drawing as a preliminary stage in the development of written language” (Vygotsky, 1978, Pp. 112-113).
Despite vast research on the connections among oral language, drawing and writing, much of early literacy instruction focuses on literacy sub-skills that align with standardized tests and assessments, rather than frequent authentic experiences with language and storytelling (Kalmar, 2008; Neuman & Roskos, 2005). The content of this instruction includes phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The driving force behind these standards is the increased pressure from mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act and the report from the National Reading Panel (NRP), which requires standardized testing for teacher and school accountability (Cooper, P. M., Capo, K., Mathes, B., & Gray, L. 2007, p. 252). This push for standardized outcomes pressures teachers to teach content earlier, resulting in fewer opportunities for children to develop oral language (Kalmar, 2008).

Many schools do recognize the importance of developmentally appropriate practice and its impact on learning. Instead of lengthy direct instruction on how to write stories, children are presented with opportunities to share their worlds through drawing, symbolic play, and storytelling (Kalmar, 2008; Kissel, 2008; Horn, 2005; Ray, 2010). In their study on a storytelling curriculum and standardized tests, Cooper, Capos, Mathes and Gray (2007) show a significant difference in standardized test scores in children who followed the storytelling curriculum versus the children in classrooms where skills-centered instruction was practiced. Improvements in oral language and early literacy knowledge were greater in the emergent writers who had authentic experiences with reading and writing. Batel (2005) argues that success in early literacy development is possible when children are provided with real
experiences to build oral language, and are encouraged to organize their thoughts with drawings and conversations before writing.

Writers write to communicate ideas, experiences and theories. By honoring the emergent writer’s process of making meaning of his/her world through drawing, the teacher is honoring the child and his/her identity as a writer (Ray, 2010). Through dictation of stories, and ample opportunities to hone early modes of symbolic representation, the emergent writer can receive the support and challenge needed amidst the tension that arises in the transition from drawing to writing text (Dyson, 1986).

The learning environment must support emergent writers in their processes of making meaning through drawing and talking (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray 2010; Routman, 2005). The experiences of children cannot be separated from time and space (Greenman, 1988). For children attachments to places and spaces are formed through their experiences within them. Places and spaces have the potential to offer a sense of belonging and an overall sense of meaning to life, security and opportunities for growth and creative self-development (Ellis, 2004).

An environment is a living, changing system. More than the physical space, it includes the way time is structured and the roles we are expected to play. It conditions how we feel, think, and behave; and it dramatically affects the quality of our lives. The environment either works for us or against us as we conduct our lives (Greenman, 1988, p. 5).
Research in children’s geographies can provide insight into the design and development of school learning spaces. Research in the field of children’s geographies examines the sociospatial marginalization of children with the belief “first, that childhood is a social construction with different meanings across different places and times; and second, that children are active agents who construct their own cultures and spaces independently from adults” (Cole, 2009, p. 23). The careful planning and construction of the learning spaces within a school can support the overall culture of the school, the needs of children, and the curricular goals of the educators (Gislason, 2010).

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to inform school administrators and teachers of emergent writers about the research on the connections among oral language development, drawing, and writing in emergent writers, as well as to provide instructional methods to support these connections. This project will take the form of a comprehensive digital presentation that will be presented at a staff meeting, board meeting or staff development training. Through examination of the foundational theory and current literature, a greater understanding can be attained about the connections between theory and practice.

The presentation will include foundational theories and current literature on oral language development, the drawing-writing connection and the instructional methods that integrate storytelling, drawing and writing in emergent writers. This presentation will not include a specific curriculum to follow, but will suggest
instructional methods, books and professional journals for support in structuring a classroom environment and instruction using oral language and drawing in the teaching of writing. According to Graves (1994),

“Much of the early writer’s work often goes into the drawing, which can serve as a rehearsal for the text that follows. That is, while she draws, a text begins to grow in her mind, although she isn’t conscious of a text to come. If she shares her writing, the other children are usually more interested in the drawing. For quite some time, there is more information in the drawing than in the text” (p. 66).

Informing teachers and administrators on the role of the environment and developmental process of emergent writers may impact writing instruction to include scaffolding the development of their early modes of symbolic representation.

**Objectives of the Project**

The primary objective for this project is to inform teachers and administrators on the connections among oral language, drawing and writing in emergent writers and to provide ideas for instructional methods to support these connections.

To meet this objective, teachers and administrators will be presented with foundational theories, current research and literature on the following:

1. Oral language development and emergent literacy:

   Oral language is the symbolic representation of meaning and a mode of communication that is connected to a child’s socio-cultural context and exposure to language. Providing foundational knowledge in oral language
development will allow teachers and administrators to better understand the connections between oral language and writing.

2. The use of drawing by emergent writers:

Drawing is the transition between oral language to conventional written language and should be examined closely when considering instructional methods for emergent writers. The presentation will include images of drawings as they connect to the emergent writer’s representations of ideas, events, concepts, aesthetic goals, plans or perceptions.

3. Instructional methods that integrate storytelling, drawing and writing with emergent writers:

Instructional methods that successfully merge oral language experiences, drawing and writing will be examined. Storytelling as a classroom practice will be explored as a method of developing the emergent writer’s understandings of writing as spoken language in conventional written form.

4. The role of the environment in supporting the oral language, drawing, and writing of emergent writers:

The learning environment frames the experience for the young writer and should be carefully considered in planning for experiences in storytelling, drawing, and writing (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).
Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this project, the following terms will be defined as:

**Instructional Methods** Any teacher planning, collaboration, lessons, and/or units that the teacher connects to student experiences with writing in the classroom.

**Emergent Writers** Young children who are actively constructing their knowledge and use of language and the connections between language and the written word (Brenneman, 1996).

**Scaffold** When an adult or more knowledgeable peer provides support for a child to promote development (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Oral Language Development** A process of progression in the use of speech as a way of communicating and making meaning (Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2005).

**Drawing** The use of pencils, markers, crayons, pens, etc. to create marks on a surface to represent ideas, events, concepts, aesthetic goals, plans or perceptions (Rosenblatt & Winner, 1988).

**Writing** “...a system of signs that designate sounds and words of spoken language” (Vygotsky, p. 106).

**Teachers of Emergent Writers** Teachers who work with students who are actively constructing their knowledge of language and the connections between language and the written word (Brenneman, 1996). Usually, these students are in kindergarten, first or second grades, but may include English language learners of any grade level.
**Standardized Tests** Tests required in all public schools to measure student performance where the tests are administered and scored in a standard manner.

**Authentic Experiences** Experiences that are within a natural, meaningful context.

**Symbolic Representation** The use of symbols (gesture, speech, drawings, writing) in meaningful ways to communicate ideas, concepts, perceptions, plans and events (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Symbolic Play** The utilization of objects and gesture in a “symbolic function” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 108).

**No Child Left Behind Act** The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, is the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. ESEA is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research” (Ed.gov, 2009).

**Scope of the Project**

The goal for this project is to educate teachers and administrators on the connections between oral language, drawing and writing in emergent writers and to provide ideas for instructional methods that support these connections. Specifically, this project will provide information and resources for teachers in setting up a supportive learning environment and to implement writing experiences for emergent writers that will support them in their uses of storytelling and drawing. The project
will provide images of child drawings, writing samples, images of learning spaces, and transcriptions from storytelling to illustrate these concepts.

This project will not address the use of symbolic play as it relates to oral language development or storytelling, except when explaining its connection to writing in literacy development (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, it will not compare the use of drawing and storytelling in writing instruction with other methods of instruction.

Limitations to this project could be many. Teachers, administrators and/or board members may not be willing or able to attend the presentation. I may receive resistance by administrators and/or board members to any suggestions to alter language arts instruction for the school/district. Teachers may see this as something they must do in addition to their already busy schedules and resist. To address these issues, the information will be presented so that teachers can use the information presented to build upon what they are already doing.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To best meet the developmental needs of emergent writers, early literacy instruction must include experiences that tap into the interconnected modes of symbolic representation of oral language, drawing, and writing (Dyson 1986; Horn, 2005; Kissel, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). A child’s literacy with written text develops through exploring, creating, and imagining her social existence in the varied symbol systems of symbolic play, talk, and drawing (Vygotsky, 1978; Dyson, 1986).

Children are active agents in the formation of unique cultures and spaces and build their identities within them (Cole, 2009). A learning environment created in partnership with the children has the potential to nurture the development of the varied symbol systems of emergent writers (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Ray, 2004; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). The physical space defines the expectations for social interaction, type and quality of work, and level of respect for the varied writing processes of the children (Bruner, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Ray, 2004; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007).

Theory/Rationale

Emergent Literacy and Social Constructivism

Emergent writers are characterized by their struggles to negotiate the symbolic nature of written language, the connections between print and speech, and the visual aspects of writing (Vygotsky, 1978; Zecker, 1999). From the perspective of developmental cognitive psychology, children actively construct knowledge of their
worlds (Piaget, 1963). Literacy learning, then, emerges from the sociocultural contexts in which children interact through language, drawing, and writing as they learn to interpret symbols and their identities in the social world (Bruner, 1996; Dyson, 1995; 1988). Bruner (1996) explains, “it is culture that provides the tools for organizing and understanding our worlds in communicable ways” (p. 3).

Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978) are responsible for much of the foundational knowledge and theory that has contributed to the literature and study of emergent literacy. Both theorists contend that development is possible because of conflicts arising in a child’s understanding of the world that are resolved through socially constructing new understandings from existing ones. Furthermore, literacy learning is a phenomenon of cognitive development propelled by the negotiation of conflicts through social interaction in oral language, drawing, and symbolic play (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). They diverge, however, in their theories of the specific purposes of play in young children and the types of social interactions that spur development.

Piaget (1962) theorized that symbolic play is a pleasure-seeking activity for children, and does not contribute to the development of new knowledge. However, competence in this type of symbolization is an early predictor of competence in reading and writing text (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993). Piaget viewed reading and writing as similar cognitive processes that develop simultaneously at each developmental stage (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Piaget, 1963).
On the other hand Vygotsky (1978) argued that symbolic play is a manifestation of the conflict that exists where a child’s desires are in opposition to societal constraints. Symbolic play is among the first order symbol systems, the others being drawing and oral language. According to Vygotsky (1978), reading and writing are separate processes, where reading and literate writing use second order symbolization with early writing and drawing utilizing first order symbolization. Emergent writers negotiate their texts through time and space, between real and imaginary, all within unique social contexts (Dyson, 1988). Dyson argues that when children are allowed to confer with each other about their texts (drawn or written), and “play” with constructing texts through drawing, they use feedback from their peers and more knowledgeable others to negotiate between real and imaginary worlds. Through this process, emergent writers begin to understand social rules about real versus imaginary storytelling and begin the transition from using drawings to plan their written texts, to drawing as a way to enhance what is already written (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

Children’s Geographies

The field of children’s geographies can provide insight into creating learning spaces that support emergent literacy and the social construction of knowledge. As a challenge to all stakeholders of public education, “questions need to be asked about how well served children are by their places. When planning human environments, adults have traditionally made assumptions about what children need” (Ellis, 2004, p. 87). Research in the field of children’s geographies examines the
sociospatial marginalization of children with the belief that childhood is socially constructed by its existence in time and place, with children acting as independent, active agents in its construction (Cole, 2009).

In western cultures childhood is a socially constructed concept in which children are viewed as either victims or perpetrators of social disorder, marginalized by adult-created environments with adult values (Matthews & Limb, 1999). Adult-created spaces and landscapes intended for children are often neglectful of the needs and desires of the diverse cultures of children. In these environments, “children’s place needs and values are seldom incorporated into the physical planning process and as such children are cast as ‘outsiders’” (Matthews & Limb, 1999, p. 78). Conflicts between adults and children often arise when children’s use of space is in opposition to adult intentions. This conflict is exhibited in classroom learning spaces where children tumble and run in open spaces intended for whole group lessons, or where children escape to hall bathrooms for conversations with friends (Matthews & Limb, 1999). The careful planning and design of learning spaces in collaboration with children can support their unique cultures, the formation of their identities, and ways of making meaning of their worlds (Cole, 2009; Ray, 2004).

Research/Evaluation

The Role of Oral Language for Emergent Writers

For emergent writers “oral language is a cognitive tool used to construct meaning, internalize language used in print, and regulate thought and activity” (Kalmar, 2008, p. 88). Children talk to negotiate ideas and conflicts and develop their
identities within their social worlds (Dyson, 1988; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978).

Piaget (1962) argued that speech of young children ages 3-8 is egocentric speech that serves the child himself as the only audience, and later develops into socialized speech. Egocentric speech is often seen during an emergent writer’s composing process as she searches for meaning of her world and ways in which to visually represent that meaning (Dyson, 1983).

In a study titled *The Role of Oral Language in Early Writing Processes*, Dyson (1983) explains that writing requires the young child to manipulate spoken language to graphically represent conceptualized words. This complex task begins with the first order symbol systems in which words, gestures, or drawings represent real objects or events (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, the progression to conventional writing happens when children understand that written symbols can also represent speech itself. Eventually, the need for drawing and “directive” language to plan the writing becomes unnecessary, as the writer understands that written symbols directly represent objects and events (Dyson, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978).

Psycholinguistic theory explains language acquisition as a natural process occurring within varying social contexts where an individual strives to make sense of his/her environment (Smith, 2004). It is a complex system involving one’s theory of the world developed by making meaning of contextual experiences. Syntax (the organization of words in speech), semantics (the meanings of words/sentences) and context (the settings in which language occurs) are organized within our theories of the world in general patterns called schemes (Smith, 2004). It is through these
schemes that children are able to learn, communicate, relate to others, problem-solve and explore. “We can use the theory of the world to predict the future. This ability to predict is both pervasive and profound, because it is the basis of our comprehension of the world, including our understanding of spoken and written language” (Smith, 2004, p. 23).

When making meaning of spoken language, we require schema about the syntactic structure of language within its cultural context, the situation in which the language is spoken, and the semantics of the language itself (Smith, 2004). Smith explains that schemas are only useful when we activate them in the activity of prediction, which involves our expectations about meaning based on prior knowledge. “Prediction is the basis of comprehension, and all children who can understand the spoken language of their own environment must be experts at prediction” (Smith, 2004, p. 168).

In her essay on Transactional Theory, Rosenblatt (2005) explains that, although language is socially generated, it always occurs within a transaction of a person with his/her environment. Language only makes sense in specific contexts. As the contexts change, so do the meanings of words. Words have a shared public meaning, but also have a private meaning, as we all have different experiences in obtaining the meanings of words. “The human being is seen as part of nature, continuously in transaction with an environment - each one conditions the other” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 3). Within any transaction in the environment emergent writers make sense of the
experience by drawing on schema for that situation and synthesizing it with the new information to create new understandings (Rosenblatt, 2005; Smith, 2004).

**The Role of Drawing for Emergent Writers**

According to Vygotsky (1978), drawing is graphic speech, a first order symbolism that spans the development from dramatic play and oral language to writing. A child’s first marks through drawing are an extension of gestures, what Vygotsky appoints “the first representation of meaning” (p. 110). During the development of oral language, children must translate sensory images into speech (Caldwell & Moore, 1991). Once oral language has progressed and become habitual, children begin to use drawing as graphic speech as they struggle to represent what they know about their worlds (Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing allows emergent writers to use a familiar symbol system to reduce the processing demands of representing sensory images from thought to language to writing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Zecker, 1999). It is this level of drawing as representation that leads emergent writers into the second order symbolism of conventional writing (Pellegrini & Galda, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978).

When emergent writers draw, they are composing ideas about what they remember and understand about their worlds (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Drawing is writing. Critical thinking and decision making for drawing and writing follow similar processes as emergent writers compose and revise for meaning and clarification (Kissel, 2008; Ray, 2010). Graphic representation through drawing allows children to understand their power to communicate, and the
need for their representation to be readable by others (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998). In their desire to communicate graphically, children use drawing as a much clearer and simpler mode than the written word (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998).

As explained by Bruner (1996), symbolism is the representation of the reality that is shared among members of a cultural community. This symbolism is “conserved, elaborated, and passed on to succeeding generations, who, by virtue of this transmission, continue to maintain the culture’s identity and way of life” (p. 3).

Supporting the use of multiple symbol systems in emergent writers will develop literacy in multiple text forms (images, traditional writing and language) in the varied contexts they may encounter (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2005). As emergent writers talk and draw to express meaning within their unique cultures, they have great power to define, maintain, and transform the identity of that culture and their own identities within it (Bruner, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).

For emergent writers talking while drawing helps them to remain focused and elaborate on the ideas about which they are drawing (Oken-Wright, 1998). Children may talk before they draw or write as a way of planning, or they may begin drawing and announce later what they have drawn (Oken-Wright, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Talking while composing is evidence of the child’s thinking (Dyson, 1986)). It might take the form of egocentric speech, in which the child is practicing or rehearsing her concept of the world (Piaget, 1962). Or, it may materialize as socialized speech that
engages a peer or more knowledgeable other in the learning community (Oken-Wright, 1998; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978).

When the learning environment invites children to draw and write together, the act of composing engages meaningful social experiences around which children can experiment with ideas and language, struggle together with concepts and identity, and negotiate the disequilibrium between their real and imaginary worlds (Dyson, 1988; Piaget, 1962; Oken-Wright, 1998; Whitmore, et al, 2005). Interactions with teachers and peers during the composing process leads emergent writers to reenvision/revise their texts as they synthesize new information in the construction of meaning and the communication of that meaning to others (Kissel, 2008). It is this way of working that scaffolds the emergent writer in her development from identifying and labeling objects/events through drawing to the desire to communicate that meaning to others (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

As emergent writers begin to include letters to represent initial sounds and words to support their drawings, they begin the transition to the second order symbolism of written language (Kissel, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). They are still dependent on talking and drawing to plan and revise their thinking until they are able to simply write conventional text to represent their thoughts/language and forego the intermediary step of drawing (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). At this stage of development, drawing becomes a way to enhance what has already been written, much like picture books and illustrated informational texts (Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Through opportunities with drawing, emergent writers are able to gain control
over the planning, organizing, and composing process that lead to conventional writing (Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Horn, 2005; Kissel, 2008).

When faced with writing tasks that fall outside of their existing schema for text structure, context, or content, emergent writers will often resort to drawing to bridge the gaps (Zecker, 1999). Engaging emergent writers in a variety of writing tasks allows the teacher to get a more complete picture of each writer’s understandings about written language, genre, and the use of other symbols across contexts (Kissel, 2008; Whitmore et al, 2005; Zecker, 1999).

The Role of the Environment

A sociocultural context. Rosenblatt (2005) stresses that each individual’s organizing frameworks or schema are developed within a social context in which socioeconomic and cultural factors play a role in influencing behaviors, concepts, and identities about reading and writing. She goes on to suggest that the growth of children as readers and writers should be nurtured at all developmental levels in environments that allow children to build upon their rich experiences in their unique sociocultural contexts. Nurturing this growth means, again, providing authentic purposes for reading and writing, opportunities for on-going dialogue with peers about texts, and diverse texts in which the child can identify with the author and/or characters/content (Kalmar, 2008; Norton-Meier, 2005; Rosenblatt, 2005).

Norton-Meier (2005) described her challenges as a teacher in developing inquiry-based curriculum that supports and builds upon the children’s questions of the world and the problems they are negotiating within and between their worlds, inside
and outside of school. She tells of an experience that challenges her to consider the lives of her students outside the classroom and real world literacy. In their homes and communities children are literate in the complex spoken languages specific to their cultures, environmental print, and many varied messages and demonstrations about literacy. Norton-Meier goes on to say that the classroom environment must be a place where children’s lives, the school, and the community overlap in deliberate ways.

Vygotsky (1978) and Smith (2004) contend that learning to master reading and writing happens in much the same way as mastering spoken language: through meaningful experiences within the child’s environment. These meaningful experiences can take the form of dramatic play or drawing in which children explore literacy stances, demonstrate and develop their literacy knowledge, and lead to more advanced thinking (Whitmore, Martens, Goodman & Owocki, 2005). The conditions under which children learn anything, including conventional writing, are meaningful contexts in which to generate and test hypotheses (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, meaningful contexts are defined by the children who engage within them (Ellis, 2004).

The experiences of children cannot be separated from time and space (Greenman, 1988). According to Greenman (1988), children form attachments to places and spaces as they have experiences within them. The learning environment includes the physical space, the tools afforded for learning within that space, the ways in which time is structured, and the roles children assume while interacting there (Bruner, 1996; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Greenman, 1988; Ray, 2004).
Places and spaces have the potential to offer a sense of belonging and an overall sense of meaning to life, security and opportunities for growth and creative self-development (Ellis, 2004).

**Socialization messages.** Despite postmodern influences on curricula and instructional practices, school learning spaces for children often project adult values and socialization messages for the preparation of the movement of children into adulthood (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001). In a study conducted in 64 classrooms in southern California, Brint, Contreras and Matthews (2001) examined the socialization messages communicated to students through direct teacher-student interactions, class rules, school-wide curricular programs, and the use of public space in visual displays and oral rituals. This research indicated that teacher-student interactions, class rules, and school-wide curricular programs placed great emphasis on the values of orderliness and hard work. Postmodern values such as multiculturalism, individual uniqueness, and choice accounted for less than one percent of the coded messages in the study. Organizational priorities within the schools (i.e. competition over test scores and funding) determine the messages being sent and redefine values to fit their objectives (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001).

The global educational reform movement has led American education policy makers to focus on data and competition. Most schools have turned to business models driven by outcomes and quantifiable data (Sahlberg, 2011), leading to intensified standardized testing of children in areas of literacy and numeracy. This, in turn, has resulted in the standardization of teaching and learning, changing
administrative ideologies and a return to traditional teacher-centered instruction, and the continued decline of America’s ability to compete on international assessments (OECD, 2009).

Regardless of social reform and educational research, educational reform efforts and funding gaps continue to restrict the contributions of American children to their own learning (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The achievement gap that exists in the academic performance of America’s children (i.e. the disparity between the achievement of minority and poor students and their white counterparts) has drawn concern from many educational researchers and civil rights activists. Ladson-Billings (2006) presents an analogy that likens the achievement gap with the national debt. The achievement gap is an “education debt” comprised of the accumulation of all of the educational injustices that have been unresolved since the formation of the first American public schools. The author argues that “the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5). In the lives of both rich and poor children, decisions and policies over education have shaped the public image of children and rendered them powerless in their own educational experience (Ellis, 2004), thus contributing to the “moral debt” owed to children (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 8).

 Cultures that value collaboration, creativity, and innovation exhibit those ideals in their school environments. The early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy were built after careful collaboration around common goals and principles
defined by research, community culture, and beliefs about children (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). The environment is highly regarded as the “third teacher,” in which children interact with it, define it, and transform it. The environment also has the power of transformation, as children form their identities within it (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). When considering the instructional methods to support and develop the potentials of emergent writers, teachers must also consider the power and potential of the learning environment as it impacts the processes and identities of young writers (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Ray, 2004).

Finnish schools have been successful in rising to the top during the 21st century global educational reform movement (Sahlberg, 2011). According to Sahlberg (2011), Finland has embraced constructivist learning pedagogies that empower children and assign high levels of respect for teachers, administrators and children. Like the early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia, Finnish schools study child/environment interactions and seek input from children about their learning environments (Kangas, 2010). Examination of various learning environments both inside and outside of schools continues to inform the theories and practices of Finnish schools and learning spaces. With active roles in the design and creation of learning spaces, children display positive outcomes in their overall physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and mental well being (Cole, 2009). Finnish educators understand that “if the objective is to construct school environments based on theories of learning that embrace and enact democratic principles, then student involvement should be both genuine and sustained” (Kangas, 2010, p. 208).
The Role of the Teacher

**Setting the stage.** Children are experts at “reading” the world around them (Smith, 2004). In a learning environment, messages are sent about what happens there, who is welcome to use that space, the value and nature of relationships between those interacting there, how your body should move, the tone of voice and type of talk that occurs there, the roles that might be played, and myriad other messages (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001; Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998). Those messages are sent by many elements that may exist in the learning environment, including: the tools and materials, visual messages containing rules or procedures, the arrangement of furniture, lighting, open versus closed space, and so on (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998).

To communicate a high value of the work of emergent writers, a teacher would provide easy access to tools and writing materials that support their modes of symbolic representation (Baghban, 2007; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010). Their roles as knowers, doers, and writers are defined by objects and resources that exist in the learning space (Bruner, 1996). Just like a hammer invites one to be a builder, high quality drawing books, notebooks, markers, pencils, and books invite one to be a writer (Bruner, 1996; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Kalmar, 2008).

In the early childhood centers of Reggio Emilia, Italy, children are believed to have many “languages” through which they symbolically represent their understandings, ideas, plans, realities, and imaginary worlds (Edwards, Gandini &
Forman, 1998). These authors explain that the many modes of symbolic representation used by children are languages through which they can communicate, and fall within the first order symbolization described by Vygotsky (1978). This perspective guides the teachers in their choices of materials and tools for the learning spaces within the schools, which may include drawing and writing materials, clay, wire, blocks, props for dramatic play, shadow screens, and many others (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Opportunities with media in addition to drawing materials opens the doors for emergent writers to more deeply negotiate their ideas, theories and identities, as they transition to traditional writing (Horn, 2005; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

A partnership with the children in the design and use of the space honors place needs and values, their role in the learning community, and the sociocultural nature of symbolization (Cole, 2009; Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998; Matthews & Limb, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). When learning about written language, children watch the “demonstrations” of others about what written language is, for what and when it is used, and who uses it (Smith, 2004). Spaces that nurture these “demonstrations” would include quiet spaces for two or three children, round tables where small groups can meet and discuss their compositions, and large group meeting areas for teacher/child modeling or for the whole class to share and celebrate together (Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998; Smith, 2004; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). The provision of spaces that encourages talk during composition allows emergent writers
to engage in problem solving around social rules and real versus imaginary storytelling (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

A learning environment where written language is interesting and accessible to all children is necessary in forming children’s identities of themselves as readers and writers (Smith, 2004). Emergent writers will internalize what they see in the work of others (Ray, 2004). Though they may not be fully able to articulate what or why, emergent writers will begin to incorporate elements such as craft and conventions into their writing as they construct new understandings (Bruner, 1996; Ray, 2004).

Making visible the past and present lives of the children, both inside and outside of the classroom, honors their social existence unconstrained by time (Dyson, 1986; Norton-Meier, 2005). Children do not just exist in the present, rather they have pasts, presents, and dreams for the future (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). In Reggio Emilia the image of the child “is one that places the child within the context of history - both personal, lived history, and the heritage of one’s culture and society” (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998, p. 307). It is through this visible history that children can identify meaningful contexts for talking, drawing, and writing by reliving their pasts, imagining the pasts of others, reflecting on the present, and imagining what could be (Dyson, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

**Nurturing development through storytelling and drawing.** In a study titled *The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Teachers’ Writing Instruction*, McCarthey (2008) found that teachers in high-income, high-performing schools did not feel any
direct effects from the law, and continued to teach how they chose, mostly through a writing workshop approach. As described in the study, the children who attended those schools were well prepared, and overall, always scored well on tests. In contrast teachers at low-income schools felt the impact on their everyday lives and instruction with pressure to raise test scores. Teachers at the low-income schools reported cuts in recess and programming, such as art and social studies. Writing instruction focused on preparing students for the standardized test through packaged curricula abandoning daily writing instruction altogether (McCarthey, 2008).

In a writing workshop approach, writers choose their topics, write during regularly structured writing time, engage in extensive talk about their work with both peers and knowledgeable others, and experience mini-lessons focused on various writing topics (Horn, 2005; Ray, 2004). This format of writing instruction provides the elements of writing development necessary for emergent writers by incorporating meaningful contexts (choice and conversation), social construction of knowledge through oral and written language, and scaffolding by more knowledgeable peers and adults (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). Packaged curricula, as described in McCarthey’s study (2008), do little to nurture the need for meaningful contexts, do not honor the lives and identities of the writers, and do not scaffold the needs of the emergent writer through the transition from drawing to writing text (Cooper, Capo, Mathes & Gray, 2007; Kalmar, 2008; McCarthey, 2008; Dyson, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978).
Oral storytelling by the children provides built-in meaningful contexts about what to draw and write (Horn, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). Horn (2005) argues that making opportunities for telling stories during writing time is necessary for emergent writers to begin the composing process. Martha Horn believes that oral storytelling places the focus on the child (the author), validating her life and experiences. Additionally, storytelling acknowledges “the important place of oral language in learning to write” (p. 35) and provides “the opportunity to teach the craft of writing before our students can write” (p. 36). The co-construction of oral stories with emergent writers honors their desire to share and makes known the role of the audience, as the teacher (and other children) listen, give feedback, clarify for meaning and understanding, and ask questions (Horn, 2005; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). Furthermore, English Language Learners benefit from storytelling, as they experience increased access to narrative language and share their rich cultural identities (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Whitmore et al, 2005).

As emergent writers understand the use of visual symbols as graphic speech, they begin to compose their stories through drawing (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). A writing workshop approach supports the use of storytelling and drawing as part of the composing process (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010). Mini-lessons can take the form of illustration study, where the children reflect on and revise their drawn compositions (Ray, 2010). Ray defines drawing and writing as parallel processes, where each strives for the sophisticated communication of meaning through prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. Children will often write
about the same topics again and again, each time making small changes to style, adding details, letters, and other marks (Kissel, 2008). Labeled and captioned pictures can later become elaborate stories when children are allowed to return to familiar topics and ideas (Baghban, 2007). Ray (2010) advocates for the acknowledgement of drawing as composition, in which deep work is scaffolded through sophisticated tools, adequate time, rich dialogue, and teaching “into” illustration. Ray (2010) boldly states, “for children to grow up as writers under the care of teachers, those teachers must teach them how to show up and move forward, how to be both the boat and the wind for their forward motion as writers” (p. 21).

**Summary**

The role of teachers of emergent writers is to provide opportunities for the their natural literacy development as they struggle to transition from first order symbolization to second order symbolization (Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Instructional methods that focus on procedural skills, leaving little time for meaningful composition, do not develop critical thinking skills and ignore the unique needs and cultures of children (Kalmar, 2008; Neuman & Roscos, 2005; McCarthey, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Early literacy instruction that honors the lives and cultures of children includes opportunities for creative expression of thought through drawing, as they learn the role of symbolic representation in literacy (Horn, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

Deep, meaningful literacy learning is scaffolded in meaningful contexts (Vygotsky, 1978), which are necessary for emergent writers as they learn the role of
oral and written language as tools for communicating in their socio-cultural worlds (Dyson, 1988; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Teachers that provide time for collaborative oral storytelling, drawing and writing understand and utilize the varied ways of knowing that children bring to their own literacy learning as their lives weave in and out of the classroom (Dyson, 1986; Horn, 2005; Norton-Meier, 2005; Whitmore et al, 2005). Making visible their past and present work, and private and home lives within the learning environment places children in the midst of their holistic realities as members of the larger society (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).

Ignoring the distinctive space needs of children leads to conflict and denies emergent writers a voice in their own learning community (Cole, 2009; Matthews & Limb, 1999). In contrast, partnership with children in the design, structure and use of their learning spaces supports collaboration with peers and honors their roles and changing identities (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).

Oral storytelling and drawing within the context of a writing workshop approach scaffolds the emergent writer in her transition from talking to drawing to conventional writing (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray, 2010). The negotiation of symbolic representation within these three modes is scaffolded through extensive interactions with peers and knowledgeable others, resulting in deepened understandings of symbolization (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Oken-Wright, 1998; Ray, 2004, 2010; Whitmore et al, 2005). Drawing and writing are parallel processes in the sophisticated task of communicating meaning (Ray, 2010).
Conclusions

Emergent writers become deeply literate when their natural literacy development is scaffolded through oral storytelling and drawing. The careful collaboration and design of learning spaces can provide meaningful contexts for children to share what they know and develop their unique identities as writers in their complex socio-cultural worlds. Rather than relying on pre-packaged curricula and center-stage teaching, teachers and administrators must understand how to become partners and facilitators with emergent writers through watching, listening, and learning alongside them.
Chapter 3: Project Description

Introduction

According to Kalmar (2008) and Nueman and Roskos (2005), instructional practices in literacy that focus on sub-skills do not provide opportunities for deep literacy learning and ignore the needs of emergent writers. Emergent writers naturally transition to traditional written text through first order symbol systems in their efforts to connect to others and understand their socio-cultural worlds (Caldwell & Moor, 1991; Dyson, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). Oral language and drawing are among the first order symbol systems that must be honored and nurtured by teachers of emergent writers (Horn, 2005; Ray, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) presented the need for rich, meaningful contexts in literacy development. Storytelling in a writing workshop approach builds in meaningful contexts by allowing children to choose their own topics, share their identities and personal lives, and draw on the stories of others for inspiration (Dyson, 1986; Horn, 2005; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). When storytelling is accompanied by supportive opportunities to compose those stories through drawing, children learn to think critically about the composing process, recognize the connection between verbal and written speech, consider the role of audience, and transform their own identities as writers and members of the learning community (Batel, 2005; Cooper, Capo, Mathes & Gray, 2007; Ray, 2010).

Emergent writers need learning environments that support oral storytelling, collaboration with peers, and composing through drawing (Edwards, Gandini &
Forman, 1998; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Ray 2010). Learning environments define the use of the space, the roles to be played there, and have the power to support or hinder development (Ellis, 2004; Greenman, 1988). Children have different space needs from adults and should be included in the design, planning, and care of the learning environment (Cole, 2009; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007).

The objective of this project is to inform administrators and teachers of the connections among oral language, drawing and writing in emergent writers, and to suggest instructional methods and practices that support critical thinking skills and deep literacy learning. This chapter explains each section of the presentation and how it will be presented.

**Project Components**

Pressures to raise scores on standardized tests has led many schools to focus on procedural skills in writing that do not address the unique development of emergent writers (McCarthy, 2008; Neuman & Roskos, 2005). With an understanding of the connections between oral language, drawing and writing in emergent writers a teacher can nurture rich contexts in which to teach composition and support the child’s natural progression through his/her use of symbolic representation (Ray, 2010). The objectives of this project are to present administrators and teachers with foundational theories, current research and literature on the following: oral language development and emergent literacy, the use of drawing by emergent writers, instructional methods that integrate storytelling, drawing and writing with emergent
writers, and the role of the environment as it supports writing development (See Appendix A for presentation slides).

**Oral Language Development and Emergent Literacy**

According to Heath (1982), oral language development and our understandings of literacy are shaped by socio-cultural factors. At the start of the presentation, I will ask the participants to examine their own purposes for writing and socio-cultural influences on their own literacy development. I will contribute information regarding the power of writing to shape identities, construct meaning, gain acceptance in the learning community, develop oral language, and create imaginary worlds (Dyson, 1986; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Norton-Meier, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

Additional slides will be shown that describe and illustrate the socio-cultural development of language and literacy through egocentric and socialized speech (Piaget, 1962), and the stages of symbolic representation (Heath, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). Emphasis will be placed on the role of social factors and contexts in language development and the shaping of identity (Dyson, 1988; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers must understand the importance of context and social factors on language development as they design developmentally appropriate experiences and learning environments (Norton-Meier, 2005).

**The Use of Drawing by Emergent Writers**

Drawing as a first order symbol system will be discussed as a mediator between thought, language and writing (Dyson, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978) with
emphasis on drawing as a parallel process to writing (Ray, 2010). Participants will view a video of two boys co-constructing a story through drawing. They will be asked to describe what is happening in the video with members of a small group. I will direct their attention to the social learning taking place, the intermingling of imaginary stories with real life, the cross-over of Spanish and English in their dialogue, and the rich oral language being developed within a self-created, meaningful context (Dyson, 1986; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Norton-Meier, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

In small groups the participants will find one example of drawing as composition from Katie Wood Ray’s book *In Pictures and In Words: Teaching the Qualities of Good Writing Through Illustration Study* (2010). The participants will be asked to consider the following questions: What meaning is being constructed? What components of the writing process can you identify from the illustrations and the author’s explanation? What strengths does the writer have? How might you scaffold this writer?

**Instructional Methods/The Role of the Teacher**

**Oral Storytelling.** Several slides will focus on the instructional methods and practices that can support the natural development of emergent writers. “It is with a strong oral language base that the young child finds success in reading and writing” (Cooper, P. M., Capo, K., Mathes, B., & Gray, L. 2007, p. 252). Oral storytelling will be presented as described by Horn (2005) and Horn and Giacobbe (2007) as a scaffold to the transition from thought to speech to composition on paper (Vygotsky,

**Drawing as Composing.** Participants will be asked to examine their practices as they apply to the opportunities provided for children to draw during writing time. They will view images of workspaces that show how children negotiate the composing process through studying the work of other authors, drawing, and composing with peers.

The participants will then be asked to work in small groups to reflect on student work samples they collected prior to the presentation (Appendix B). The following questions will be displayed as the participants reflect and discuss their samples: What memories/ideas was the child representing? Was there another child involved? What efforts can you celebrate? What do you wonder about as the reader? Did the child use only drawing, or was there an attempt at writing text? What opportunities do you see for scaffolding in a conference or mini-lesson?

**The Role of the Environment**

Learning environments hold great power to support or hinder development. In a learning environment messages are sent about what happens there, who is welcome to use that space, the value and nature of relationships between those interacting there, how your body should move, the tone of voice and type of talk that occurs there, the roles that might be played, and myriad other messages (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2001; Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998). I will discuss the power of learning environments and ask participants to discuss the photos they collected of
their classroom writing spaces prior to the presentation (Appendix B). Participants will be challenged to examine the rules and procedures assigned to the spaces, the tools available to writers, the types of interactions that are supported there, and the physical elements of the environment. Special attention will be given to child participation in the design, use, and care of the learning environment (Ellis, 2004).

Tools for writing that are of high quality and sophistication create high quality, sophisticated writers (Bruner, 1996). I will present information on the importance of tools and resources for emergent writers and discuss the potential for other materials in the learning environment that support other modes of symbolic representation (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Symbolization in other modes, such as paint, clay, and dramatic play encourage critical thinking and lead to deeper literacy learning (Horn, 2005; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

Each participant will be asked to create an individual or collaborative drawing of an ideal learning space. The ideal learning space would support oral language development, the transition between drawing and writing, and the past and present social lives of the children who use the space. Participants will be challenged to consider making changes to their learning environments in partnership with the children. A partnership with the children in the design and use of the space honors place needs and values, their role in the learning community, and the sociocultural nature of symbolization (Cole, 2009; Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998; Matthews & Limb, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).
Finally, I will ask participants to brainstorm a list of instructional practices that might merge with or even transform their current practice with teaching writing to emergent writers. I will contribute ideas for a writing workshop approach and ways in which to partner with children in their writing experiences. A list of resources and references will also be provided for further inquiry.

**Project Evaluation**

Following the presentation, participants will be asked to complete a survey requesting feedback about the presentation itself, information they found helpful, and ways in which they plan to implement changes in their writing instruction and learning environments (see Appendix C). Another survey will be distributed and collected one month after the presentation to inquire about any changes made to instruction and/or learning environments, and if any further support is desired in planning or implementing writing instruction with emergent writers (see Appendix D). Success of the project will be determined by an increase in developmentally appropriate practice in the teaching of writing through storytelling and drawing.

**Project Conclusions**

This project was designed to increase awareness of the natural literacy development of emergent writers and honor their socio-cultural contributions to their own learning. Children have experiences to share that provide rich, meaningful contexts about which to construct meaning. Their desires to communicate that meaning to others through various modes of symbolic representation should be supported and nurtured in their journeys to join the literacy club (Smith, 2004).
Hopefully, this project raises awareness of the unique needs of emergent writers and honors them as fully capable, rich, strong, and powerful authors.

**Plans for Implementation**

The project will be implemented upon my employment with a school and approval by school leadership. It will take the form of a two-hour professional development training titled “The Connections Among Oral Language, Drawing, and Writing: Designing a Quality Writing Experience Based on Research and Developmentally Appropriate Practice.” All members of leadership, support staff, and teachers of emergent writers will be invited to attend.
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Appendix A

Presentation Slides

What is “writing”?

Purposes
- Communicating/Connecting with others
- Remembering/Recording
- Processing ideas
- For the joy of it
- Self-expression
- Other purposes?
- Why do children write?

How did we learn this?
- Exposure to stories and various forms of print
- What socio-cultural factors affected your interest/success in writing?
- How did our ancient ancestors write?
- Was their writing system effective?
- So, what is writing?

What power does writing hold?

Through Writing a Writer Can:
- Share perspectives (Stenberg, 1989)
- Develop a personal identity (Weintraub & Waxman, 1988)
- Construct meaning about the world (Vygotsky, 1978)
- Engage with others (Sacks, 1992)
- Gain validation as a member of a social group (Bennett & Goodwin, 1986)
- Develop oral language
- Create imaginary worlds (Dyson, 1990)
- Overcome and test hypotheses (Vygotsky, 1978)

Quantity vs. Quality
- What kinds of writers do we want?
- What must we do to develop deep literacy learning where children think critically and communicate effectively?

Emergent Literacy

- Early in their development, children use oral language to communicate and connect to others and their environments (oral language, gestures, dramatic play, visual images, symbol usage)
- Socio-cultural factors (ideas, experiences)
- First order symbol systems
- Conversational writing, second order when the writer can stop writing as a group conversation between writer and reader
- First order writing, creative writing (Vygotsky, 1978)
- Deep literacy development occurs when the natural symbolization process is nationalized
- Support of drawing may ease the transition to writing text

Oral Language Development

Purpose of Speech
- "Oral language is a cognitive tool used by construct meanings, communicate and represent the world of experience through print and regulate thought and activity" (Cic核查, 1990, p. 486)
- Children talk to negotiate ideas and conflicts and develop their identities within their social worlds (Dyson, 1990; Flower, 1990; Dyson, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978)
- Expressive vs. Socialized Speech (Flower, 1990)
- Language is context specific

Talking and Writing
- Writing requires the young child to manifest spoken language to make sense of emerging conceptualized words (Dyson, 1990)
- Symbolization begins when children realize that words, gestures, or visual images represent objects or events (Vygotsky, 1978)
- Progression to written language involves representing objects or events (Dyson, 1990)
- Varying social contexts (actions)
- We use our theories of the world to predict the future comprehension

Factors of Development

Context
- Schemes
- Ideas and Conflicts
- Culture
- Oral Language Development
- Language Used in Print
Drawing IS Writing!
- Drawing and writing are parallel processes where planning, composing, reading, and sharing take place in both (Ray, 2000).
- For emergent writers, drawing is the main way of organizing ideas and materials.
- Drawings should be seen as writing as they express meaning and communicative ideas with the ability to be read by others.
- Oral language is developed in the writing process, and emergent writers are working through their concepts of the world (Oring, 1978).
- What do you notice about the writing experience in this video? Discuss in small groups.

Illustration Study
Let's examine how drawing can be supported as composition as demonstrated by Katie Wood Ray (2000).

Transition to Writing

The Role of the Teacher
"For children to grow up as writers under the care of teachers, those teachers must teach them how to show up and move forward, how to be both the boat and the wind for their forward motion as writers" (Ray, 2000, p. 35).

Oral Storytelling

Drawing as Composing
- When allowing emergent writers to draw as a way to plan their writing, how much time do you give them? "just a quick sketch."
- Do you notice them spending "too much" time drawing and not enough time writing?
- What does this work space tell you about the writer?
Reflect on Children's Drawings

Take some time to discuss the drawings you collected during your writing time this week. Read the drawings to your small group and identify the memories/ideas the children represented. Was there another child involved? What efforts can you celebrate? What do you wonder about as the reader? Did the child use only drawing, or was there an attempt at writing text? What opportunities do you see for scaffolding in a conference or mini-lesson?

Set the Stage

In a learning environment, messages are sent about what happens there, who is welcome to use that space, the value and nature of relationships between those interacting there, how your body should move, the tone of voice and type of talk that occurs there, the roles that might be played, and myriad other messages (Brint, Contreras & Matthews, 2003; Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998).

Time and Space

- "An environment is a living, changing system. More than the physical space, it includes the way time is distributed and the roles we are expected to play. It conditions how we feel, think, and behave; and it dramatically affects the quality of our lives. The environment either works for us or against us as we conduct our lives" (Greenman, 1998, p. 5).
- "Environments can provide meaningful contexts and authentic purposes for writing (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).
- Children exist in the present, but also have unique personal and cultural histories and dreams for the future. In what ways can this be made visible in the learning space (Dyson, 1998)?
- How is the learning environment in your classroom working FOR emergent writers? What can be improved?

Examine Your Learning Spaces

- In small groups look at the photo you brought of your classroom writing space. Answer these questions:
  - Describe the space.
  - Do the kids always use the space how you intend for them to use it?
  - What kinds of interactions do the spaces allow?
  - What tools are available for the children to use?
  - What is the lighting like?
  - Does the space support the development of an emergent writer? How?
  - Did the children play a role in designing and establishing the learning space?
  - What evidence is there in your photos that your children are using these spaces? In other words, is there evidence of their lives in the classroom?

Let's Talk About Tools

- Expert writers need expert tools (Bower, 1996).
- Emergent writers often write from memory, so they need resources that help them recall events and details in the process of composition and revision (Vygotsky, 1978).
- Drawing can often lead to other forms of symbolic representation to improve understanding and polish a composition (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998).
- Do the children have opportunities to build competence in the tools available to them?
Many Languages

The early childhood centers of Peggy Calkins, fully support early symbolization by providing children with a variety of materials to communicate and negotiate ideas through the use of many different materials. These materials are viewed as languages for symbolic representation (Eisner, Goodfriend & Forman, 1998).

Re-envision the Learning Spaces

Make a drawing of a learning space that would support the development of emergent writers. What tools would you provide? Where would they be located? What would the ideal space look like from the child’s perspective? Where would you make visible the past and present lives of the children? How is the furniture arranged to support conversations about writing between two children, small groups, and large groups? How does this drawing differ from your current environment for writing?

Instructional Practices

Writing Workshop
- Schedule time for writing.
- Begin by reading or telling stories for inspiration.
- Children choose their own writing topics.
- Hold time for storytelling. This can happen in large group, individual conferences, in pairs and small groups.
- Have paper and "pencils" for writing that encourage direct (no lines or construction of the pencil will block space for the text).
- Make illustration study the focus of real lessons (e.g., story).
- Recognize drawing as composition and support children in this way of making meaning.

Partnership
- Pair children with children in the class, set up, and use of learning spaces.
- Allow for a variety of easily accessible materials and objects (e.g., cups, bowls, magnets, wet felt, posters, etc.).
- Words and poems.
- Provide time for exploring other than drawing materials, e.g., clay, play dough, etc.
- Make children the work of the children (e.g., children make decisions, and then support the conversation and return them off).
- Allow children to choose their own work without having predetermined ideas for text and instructional needs.

References/Resources
Appendix B

Letter to Participants

Dear Participants,

You are receiving this letter because you have signed up to attend the professional development training titled *The Connections Among Oral Language, Drawing, and Writing: Designing a Quality Writing Experience Based on Research and Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. Prior to attending the presentation, I ask that you collect a couple of things to assist with your learning experience.

1. Please take a few photos of the learning spaces for writing in your classroom. Any space in your room where you and your students may write, instruct, or collaborate can be collected. Include pictures of the furniture, children, environmental print, etc. that will provide the best examples of the space and how it is used. Please print the photos and bring them to the presentation.

2. Before the presentation, designate one writing lesson with your emergent for drawing. Allow the children to choose their own topic and draw their story. Join one or two children and watch, listen, and take notes about what is happening. Please collect the drawing and bring it with you to the presentation. We will be examining the drawings in small groups.

I am looking forward to seeing all of you and sharing some inspiring information and ideas about how to best teach emergent writers!

Sincerely,

Ruth Ann Hester
Appendix C

Participant Survey

The Connections Among Oral Language, Drawing, and Writing: Designing a Quality Writing Experience Based on Research and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Please take a few moments to complete this survey to provide feedback about your experience.

1. What new understandings have you gained about the development of emergent writers? What information/experience was the most helpful?

2. What changes do you plan to make in your instructional practices?

3. What changes do you plan to make to the learning environment (including tools and materials) based on what was presented here today?

4. In what areas would you like further information/support?
Appendix D

Follow-up Survey

Several weeks ago you attended a presentation titled *The Connections Among Oral Language, Drawing, and Writing: Designing a Quality Writing Experience Based on Research and Developmentally Appropriate Practice.* Please complete this short survey and return it to Ruth Ann Hester.

1. What changes have you made to instruction and learning environments since you attended the presentation?

2. What changes (if any) have you noticed in the overall work of the children in regards to their writing development?

3. Would you like more support in determining ways in which you can implement storytelling and drawing into your existing structure/curriculum? Please indicate whether or not you would like to meet with me to discuss any areas of need or concern regarding presentation topics. I will contact you to set up an appointment.
Appendix E

Photo and Video Student Release Forms

David Arellano

Michael Montes

Emiliano Ortiz Fonseca