Drama, a Springboard for Writing at the Kindergarten Level

by

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DRAMA, A SPRINGBOARD FOR WRITING

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Abstract

This action research venture investigated the influence of drama-based lessons (Story Drama, Mantle of the Expert, and the Zone of Proximal Development) on kindergarten-aged students’ motivation to write. This research used qualitative methods to examine, inform and carry out each lesson. I conducted a research study for 12 weeks aiming to answer these research questions: (a) How does participating in dramatic lessons support student engagement in writing? (b) How do students view themselves as writers and how do they feel about writing after participating in dramatic lessons? (c) How does scaffolding lesson content encourage student connections in dramatic retellings of stories and in subsequent writing activities? Moreover, I gathered qualitative data through observations, videos, interviews, and student writing samples. Results show that drama can offer students many of the skills necessary for learning both inside and outside of the curriculum. Furthermore, these approaches to learning have helped the kindergarten-aged children interpret, comprehend, and convey meaning through drama and writing activities. For many of the participating students, drama supported the development of abstract thought and personal connections, as well as deduction and inferential skills. During the drama activities, students were highly engaged, often demonstrating a deep understanding of stories through their actions and improvisations. The enthusiasm that followed as a result of the drama activities often transferred to students’ drawings and written work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST of TABLES .................................................................................................................. viii
LIST of FIGURES ................................................................................................................ viii
LIST of APPENDICES .......................................................................................................... ix

1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 The Researcher/Teacher ............................................................................................ 1
   1.2 Motives for This Research ......................................................................................... 2
   1.3 The Research and the Research Questions ............................................................... 4
       1.3.1 Need for Playful Learning and the Arts ............................................................... 5
       1.3.2 Creative Writing in Kindergarten ......................................................................... 8

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................. 9
   2.1 Emerging Writers ...................................................................................................... 9
       2.1.1 Emergent Writing ............................................................................................... 11
       2.1.2 Research on Emergent Writing ........................................................................... 17
   2.2 Writing and Drama .................................................................................................. 20
       2.2.1 Story Drama ...................................................................................................... 21
       2.2.2 Dramatic Play in the Kindergarten Classroom .................................................... 26
   2.3 Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivist Theory ............................................... 27
       2.3.1 The Role of Play .................................................................................................. 30
       2.3.2 Symbolism in Writing ........................................................................................ 32
       2.3.3 The Interaction Between Learning and Development ......................................... 33
       2.3.4 Mantle of the Expert (MoE) ............................................................................... 36
       2.3.5 Zone of Proximal Development and MoE ............................................................ 36
       2.3.6 Structure of Scaffolding ..................................................................................... 38
       2.3.7 Scaffolding Writing ........................................................................................... 41

3. METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................................... 43
   3.1 Qualitative Research ............................................................................................... 43
       3.1.1 Triangulation ....................................................................................................... 44
       3.1.2 Thick Descriptions ............................................................................................. 45
       3.1.3 Case Study ......................................................................................................... 46
       3.1.4 Drawbacks to Qualitative Research ................................................................... 47
   3.2 Action Research ....................................................................................................... 48
   3.3 Research Methods Context ..................................................................................... 51
   3.4 Weekly Data Collection ........................................................................................... 53
       3.4.1 The Scaffolding of Each Lesson ........................................................................... 53
       3.4.2 Routines and Nightly Schedule .......................................................................... 54
       3.4.3 Books and Mentor Texts ..................................................................................... 56
   3.5 Analysis of Collected Data ....................................................................................... 58
       3.5.1 Teacher Day Book and Weekly PowerPoint Slide Lesson Plans ......................... 59
       3.5.2 Teacher Reflective Voice Recordings .................................................................. 60
       3.5.3 Classroom Observations (Video Recorded) ......................................................... 60
       3.5.4 Analyze Writing .................................................................................................. 60
       3.5.5 Conversations with Early Childhood Educator ..................................................... 61
       3.5.6 Conversations with Parents ................................................................................ 62
DRAMA, A SPRINGBOARD FOR WRITING

3.5.7 Questionnaires and Conversations with the Parents—Four Weeks Later .......... 63
4. FINDINGS .................................................................................................................. 63
  4.1 Weekly Detailed Descriptions .............................................................................. 64
    4.1.1 Week One ......................................................................................................... 65
    4.1.2 Week Two ......................................................................................................... 68
    4.1.3 Week Three ....................................................................................................... 70
    4.1.4 Week Four ....................................................................................................... 74
    4.1.5 Week Five ......................................................................................................... 77
    4.1.6 Week Six .......................................................................................................... 81
    4.1.7 Week Seven ..................................................................................................... 86
    4.1.8 Week Eight ...................................................................................................... 90
    4.1.9 Week Nine ...................................................................................................... 92
    4.1.10 Week Ten ...................................................................................................... 97
  4.2 Focus Children: Case Studies .............................................................................. 99
    4.2.1 Ryan’s Profile and His Learning ...................................................................... 99
      4.2.1.1 Ryan and His Family .................................................................................. 99
      4.2.1.2 Ryan’s Personality and Engagement in the Drama Activities ................. 100
      4.2.1.3 Ryan’s Writing .......................................................................................... 102
      4.2.1.4 Ryan’s Engagement in the Writing ......................................................... 102
      4.2.1.5 Ryan’s Results ......................................................................................... 105
    4.2.2 Jeff’s Profile and His Learning ........................................................................ 107
      4.2.2.1 Jeff and His Family .................................................................................. 107
      4.2.2.2 Jeff’s Personality and Engagement in the Drama Activities ..................... 108
      4.2.2.3 Jeff’s Writing ............................................................................................ 109
      4.2.2.4 Jeff’s Engagement in the Writing .............................................................. 110
      4.2.2.5 Jeff’s Results ............................................................................................ 115
    4.2.3 Claire’s Profile and Her Learning ................................................................... 117
      4.2.3.1 Claire and Her Family .............................................................................. 117
      4.2.3.2 Claire’s Writing and Engagement in the Drama Activities ....................... 118
      4.2.3.3 Claire’s Weekly Involvement .................................................................... 118
      4.2.3.4 Claire’s Engagement in the Writing .......................................................... 119
      4.2.3.5 Claire’s Results ......................................................................................... 123
    4.2.4 Anna’s Profile and Her Learning .................................................................... 124
      4.2.4.1 Anna and Her Family .............................................................................. 124
      4.2.4.2 Anna’s Personality and Engagement in the Drama Activities .................... 125
      4.2.4.3 Anna’s Writing .......................................................................................... 125
      4.2.4.4 Anna’s Engagement in the Writing ............................................................ 125
      4.2.4.5 Anna’s Results ......................................................................................... 130
    4.2.5 Jill’s Profile and Her Learning ........................................................................ 131
      4.2.5.1 Jill and Her Family ................................................................................... 131
      4.2.5.2 Jill’s Personality and Engagement in the Drama Activities ....................... 132
      4.2.5.3 Jill’s Writing .............................................................................................. 133
      4.2.5.4 Jill’s Engagement in the Writing ............................................................... 134
      4.2.5.5 Jill’s Results .............................................................................................. 137
    4.2.6 Bill’s Profile and His Learning ........................................................................ 138
      4.2.6.1 Bill and His Family ................................................................................... 138
4.2.6.2 Bill’s Personality and Engagement in the Drama Activities .......... 139
4.2.6.3 Bill’s Writing ............................................................................. 140
4.2.6.4 Bill’s Engagement in the Writing ............................................. 141
4.2.6.5 Bill’s Results ........................................................................... 142
4.3 Cross Case Analysis ...................................................................... 147
  4.3.1 The boys .................................................................................... 147
  4.3.2 The girls ................................................................................... 148
  4.3.2 The boys and girls .................................................................... 150

5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS ......................... 152
  5.1 Discussion Revisiting the Research Questions.................................. 153
  5.2 Implications .................................................................................. 163
    5.2.1 Increasing Sample Size ............................................................ 163
    5.2.2 Extending the Study Longitudinally ......................................... 163
    5.2.3 Observing Teachers Overtime .................................................. 163
  5.3 Implications for Practice ................................................................. 164
  5.5 Final Thoughts from a Teacher-Researcher’s Perspective .................. 166

REFERENCES ...................................................................................... 169
APPENDICES ....................................................................................... 200
DRAMA, A SPRINGBOARD FOR WRITING

LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Summary of Qualitative Data Collection Methods</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Selection of Topics and Expectations</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Routines and Nightly Schedule</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Anna’s Writing</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  Scaffolding- A Model ........................................................................ 40

LIST OF IMAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Image 1</td>
<td>Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Author’s Oath</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Kevin’s Story</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 4</td>
<td>Photo of Student, Map Making</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 5</td>
<td>Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Marvin’s Story</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 6</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Emotions with Puppets</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 7</td>
<td>Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Music/Color Slide</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 8</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Ribbons</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 9</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Super Heroes</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 10</td>
<td>Student Work, Super Heroes</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 11</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Super Heroes</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 12</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Arrival Time</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 13</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Puppy Animal Cap</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 14</td>
<td>Classroom Photo, The Pod</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 15</td>
<td>Photo of Student, The Very Hungry Caterpillar</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 16</td>
<td>Student Work, Karen’s Writing from Week 6</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 17</td>
<td>Photo of Student, Wild Things</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 18&amp;19</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Wild Things</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 20</td>
<td>Photo of Students, Cool Down Movement Video (5 A DAY)</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 21</td>
<td>Photo of Students, The Gruffalo</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 22</td>
<td>Classroom PowerPoint Slide, My Life-Sized Gruffalo</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 24</td>
<td>Photo of Student, My Life-Sized Gruffalo</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 25&amp;26</td>
<td>Student Work, My Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 27</td>
<td>Student Work, Map</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 27</td>
<td>Student Work, Ryan’s “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie” Writing Piece</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 28</td>
<td>Student Work, Super Hero Drawing</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 29</td>
<td>Student Work, The Gruffalo</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 30</td>
<td>Student Work, Very Good, Really Good, Very Good Day</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 31</td>
<td>Student Work, Claire’s Hungry Caterpillar Writing</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 32</td>
<td>Student Work, Anna’s Hungry Caterpillar Writing</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 33&amp;34</td>
<td>Student Work, “If You Give A” Writing</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 35</td>
<td>Student Work, Super Hero</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 36</td>
<td>Student Work, Jill’s “Very Bad Day” Writing</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image 37</td>
<td>Student Work, Bill’s “Superhero” Writing</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Puppet Information</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Kindergarten Dolch Site Words</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Monday Night Talk Show Excerpt</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Recruitment Flyer- Posted in Library</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>Letter of Information-Consent to Participate</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>Consent for Participation in Educational Research</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Researcher/Teacher

In 2001, I entered the Drama in Education program at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Drama in Education is a four-year, undergraduate program that motivates pre-service teachers to shift their mindset from information delivery to a drama, movement and inquiry-based mode of facilitation. There is no doubt that Drama in Education shaped me into the teacher I am today. Through a combination of coursework and placements within the community, I learned to embrace children as they are and communicate with them in ways that engage and motivate. The mediums for this communication were as varied as they were effective and often included, puppetry, costumes, make-believe, in-role activities, undercover missions, investigative reporting, to name a few, into the lessons. In the process, I came to believe that the principles of drama education are transferable and helpful to any area of content and any level of student.

I have been a teacher for ten years. My career began at the Windsor Essex Catholic District School Board, and over the years I taught French as a Second Language, Learning Support Services and Kindergarten. However, it was my graduation from the Master of Education program at the University of Windsor, in 2009, that served as a turning point. I sought to engage in action research, focusing on teachers, students, the curriculum, and the delicate balance that takes place in the classroom. I also reached out to a community of likeminded educators with whom I shared my newfound perspective and lesson ideas. After completing my graduate studies course work in Ontario, I moved
to Nashville, Tennessee and began teaching at a private school by day and a liberal arts college at night. This experience has given me the opportunity to expand my understanding of education in another country; it has also provided me with a new venue in which to apply the educational philosophies that have become my lifeblood.

**Motives for this Research**

As a classroom teacher, I saw opportunities to inspire children through drama and writing. Early on in my career, while teaching at a school in the heart of a working class town, I can recall teaching a student name Daniel who was intimidated by school and experienced pervasive difficulty in the classroom. Throughout the year, I used drama to help bring texts and print to life for Daniel. Initially, he was uncomfortable leaving his seat and rarely participated in our dramatic activities. Sometimes, he even mocked his classmates and I when we used drama to explore the meaning in a story. Over time, however, Daniel began to become more involved in the lessons and often asked, “Can we use drama to act it out?” when I shared a story. By the time we had reached the end of the year, Daniel enjoyed school and he was proud of his reading and writing. The change in Daniel was evidenced by his improved grades, not only in writing but in other subject areas as well. Inspired by Daniel’s writing success, in the fall of 2013, I enrolled in *Teaching Writing in the Classroom*. This course, which was taught by Dr. Shelley Stagg Peterson at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, led me to dig deeper into research surrounding emergent writing. It also caused me to ask more questions about how students best learn to write, and, most importantly how drama can help a student begin developing his/her identity as a writer from a very young age.
Even before beginning this research I considered inquiry and drama to be fitting tools for research in the classroom. This belief has only been further cemented through my experience teaching kindergarteners. Young children have a natural curiosity about the world, and without effort transform the most ordinary happenings into extraordinary stories, questions and ideas. This observation is buttressed by an expansive body of research, spanning many decades, that concludes that children’s learning is best reinforced through play (Christie & Billie, 1992; Fisher et al., 2011; Roskos & Neuman, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). As noted by Vygotsky (1978), play is learning, for it “contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development” (p. 102). In many parts of the world - China, Finland, Australia, and Canada, to name a few - learning through play has already been or is in the process of being integrated in early childhood curricula (Cheng, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006; Samuelsson, 2008).

That said, there is a lingering belief that learning through play in the early years will halt children’s reading abilities and their academic successes later in life (Almon, 2013). Despite evidence to the contrary, “…many teachers are fearful of play in the classroom. In their minds, play is synonymous with chaos. But when children are deeply engaged in play, they tend to be focused and fairly quiet. There is a “hum” of play that fills the room, with occasional loud voices that then quiet down again. This is true of young children, but also of school-age children” (Almon, 2013, p. 15). Almon’s intention was to debunk the myth that play is purely frivolous and mutually exclusive from learning.
The chosen methodology for this study was action research, which is typically carried out in the classroom and focuses on an everyday problem affecting the teacher (Ferrance, 2000). Using a reflective process, the teacher sets out to inform and change an aspect of his/her practice. “Rather than dealing with the theoretical, action research allows practitioners to address those concerns that are closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make change” (Ferrance, 2000, p.1). Kurt Lewin “is credited with coining the term ‘action research’ to describe work that did not separate the investigation from the action needed to solve the problem” (McFarland & Stansell, 1993, p. 14). In fact, action research is often seen as a form of professional development for it focuses teachers’ attention on educational change and development of best practice (Merriam, 1998). A critical element of best practices is searching for ways to expand and build upon knowledge, and action research is a valuable endeavor for educators, helping to inform and contribute to a better understanding of a particular area of interest.

**The Research and Questions**

Using my previous learning experiences and action research as my platform, I set out to explore ways in which kindergarten children’s writing can be supported through dramatic play. During the investigation, I engaged students in drama lessons, hoping to generate writing excitement, ideas and narrative understandings. Narrative understandings, at the kindergarten level, will be defined as demonstrations of story comprehension, storytelling and responses to mentor texts (Stagg-Peterson et al., 2012; Albright, Delecki, & Hinkle, 2009; Hew & Wong, 2010). I describe narrative writing as the use of personal ideas, impressions, critical thinking and feelings to entertain or inform
the reader (Derewianka, 1990). Building on this enthusiasm, students then participated in creative writing activities. Lastly, kindergarten learners were interviewed concerning their opinions about writing.

The following questions guided my research and reflection process:

1) How does participating in dramatic lessons support student engagement in writing?

2) How do students view themselves as writers and how do they feel about writing after participating in dramatic lessons?

3) How does scaffolding lesson content encourage student connections in the dramatic retellings of stories and in the subsequent writing activities?

I believe that the creative arts - music, dance, and, in particular, drama - offer students many of the skills necessary to participate and play an active role in a literate society (O’Mara, 2008; Wright, 2011). My teaching and my doctoral research are based on a view that education is an intricate tapestry, “an endless rew weaving of the social fabric on which all can depend” (Palmer, 1998, p. 50). This metaphor of tapestry explains a connection that, in and through drama, produces opportunities for learning outside of the curriculum and develops learners’ abstract thought, personal meaning and inferential skills (Freebody, 2003; Wright, 2011).

**Need for playful learning and the arts.** As noted in the research on early childhood education, the past two decades have brought a drastic shift in Kindergarten classes in America. Kindergarten students are now under enormous amounts of pressure and expectation to produce high-level academic standards.
[The kindergarten] most adults remember from childhood—with plenty of space and time for unstructured play and discovery, art and music, practicing social skills, and learning to enjoy learning—has largely disappeared. The results of three new studies, supported by the Alliance for Childhood […] suggest that time for play in most public kindergartens has dwindled to the vanishing point, replaced by lengthy lessons and standardized testing. (Miller & Almon, 2009, p. 2).

Add to this burden the fact that students are being denied play—a major outlet for energy, emotion and stress (Miller & Almon, 2009). Some studies are showing that this focus on the skill-based outcomes disallows students the necessary space, time and wonder to reach full creative potential (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Miller & Almon, 2009).

From a pedagogical perspective, drama is founded on the principle that a connected child is an attentive child, and an attentive child is more likely to understand the material being presented to them. Drama directly connects children with the lesson and therefore facilitates understanding (McMaster, 1998). Educational drama is a unique method of lesson delivery in that it is one of only a few techniques that can simultaneously support a wide range of learning styles to promote literacy improvement (McMaster, 1998; Anderson, 2004). Although some students at the kindergarten level may find it difficult to write complete narratives, children at this level can communicate meaning through movement, gestures, voice and sign (Wright, 2011). As Wright (2011) explains, “The arts give shape to formless ideas—they are a vehicle by which we can express our growing awareness of ourselves and the worlds in which we live…they open a window into children’s realities” (p. 2). Many kindergarten-aged children thrive when presented with opportunities to respond to texts and their outside world. Drama is often
said to be a medium that naturally drives its young participants to practice decoding, discourse, vocabulary building, and executive functioning (McMaster, 1998).

My research took a balanced approach, as identified by Bodrova and Leong (2005) who describe the complications that often arise when teachers, administration and governments take one-sided approaches to kindergarten. They explain, “In our experiences, we have found that both extremely chaotic classrooms and extremely teacher-directed classrooms are counterproductive to developing self-regulation and other underlying skills in children…We call for educators, their professional organizations, and policymakers to develop as fully as possible […] the creation of a healthy balance” (as cited in Miller & Almon, 2009, p. 5). What kindergarten-aged children need is “a balance of child-initiated play in the presence of engaged teachers and more focused experiential learning guided by teachers” (Miller & Almon, 2009, p. 4). In a balanced kindergarten classroom, drama-based play does not translate into chaos nor does structure translate into straightjackets.

Learning through play offers a stimulating environment for the learner and is an integral part of such balance. Wright (2011) asserts that the arts are one of the more “powerful means with which to promote future oriented learning, particularly for young children, because they involve nonverbal, symbolic ways of knowing, thinking and communicating” (p. 365). McCaslin (2005) adds that drama in the classroom is not a new endeavor. Historically, theater has been recognized as a powerful means of educating and coaching.

The arts help to release feeling, encourage discovery and bring about thoughtful responses. In our rapidly changing and technological world, students need to be able to
contribute ideas, form relationships and solve multifaceted problems that go beyond
textbook teaching (DeMoss and Morris, 2006). When drama is used in a classroom
setting children eagerly participate in fictional scenarios filled with infinite possibilities

**Creative writing in kindergarten.** Some people might question whether
kindergarten-aged children can truly write, let alone write creatively. However, as Clay
(1994) points out, children at this age are taking critical steps towards understanding
functions and concepts about literacy. Beaty and Pratt (2003) add that the more focus is
placed on supporting and nurturing the young writer the more successful that writer will
become. I concur with Ray and Cleveland (2004), who state “that it is the energy of
making stuff in a daily writing workshop that drives all our teaching with our youngest
writers” (p. 6). A rich variety of language activities and engagements, including drama,
are necessary to help nourish the young writer (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Education
Queensland, 2000; Fields, Groth, & Spangler, 2004; Hess & Wheldall, 1999; Sulzby &
Teal, 1991; Torgesen, et al., 2007). I view writing in the kindergarten classroom as “a
creative exploration, an adventure, an outlet for imagination, and the growth of a child’s
spirit” (Snyders, 2014, p. 414) and define *creative writing* as the use of personal ideas,
impressions, feelings and inventiveness when writing (Clay, 1994; Morley, 2007).
Furthermore, I have found, as have researchers, that creative writing entertains,
stimulates the imagination and fosters artistic expression. Writing creatively increases
self-confidence and motivation in writers (Dornyei, 2001).
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the current literature on the use of writing and drama in early childhood education, I will focus on four significant areas: 1) Emerging Writing, 2) Emergent Writing Research 3) Writing and Drama and 4) Educational Drama and Dramatic Play. Thereafter, I will describe how social constructivist theory - including Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which the teacher poses different sets of questions and delivers activities to assess and to guide appraisal of student mastery - supports this research. Furthermore, the ways in which the Mantle of the Expert (MoE), dramatic teaching tool, and the ZPD worked together to provide a foundation will be explained. More specifically, I will highlight the relationship between this research and the larger field of curriculum studies, rooted in the theories of Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky (Kozulin, 2004; Swain & Lapkin, 2013; Vygotsky, 1986; Hendy & Toon, 2001). Finally, I will explain the framework and methodologies of this study, presenting both the strengths and the limitations to my planned approach.

Emerging Writers

Emergent literacy is an expression used to explain the way young children learn to read and write, even though they are often unable to read or write in the conventional sense. Children learn a great deal about reading and writing before they ever attend traditional school (Clay, 1976; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Truly, children can often learn about symbol, letters and print on their own, however, this discovery is better grasped when adults support the learning that is taking place. The very first interaction that children have on their journeys to becoming literate is often speech. Print is used to
represent the spoken word and when children understand that print is a feature of language they begin learning how reading, writing and speaking all work together (Temple, Ogle, Crawford & Freppon, 2005). The learning expectations set for young people today, however, have not always been the standard. Over the years, the level of literacy needed to function in society has increasingly necessitated greater understanding and more knowledge of reading, writing and analysis of print. As recently as a few hundred years ago, the skills of reading and writing were not only looked at as two separate entities but a large portion of the population did not understand how to read or write. Advancements in technology has given literacy a new shape and form; indeed, the generation known as “Millennials” have progressed through the stages of development with the aid of technology at their fingertips. That said, the importance of early education has remained a constant, as evidenced by Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s *Practical Education* (1798), a book authored by daughter and father. The Edgeworth’s contended, “…that children should read books or have books read to them that would cultivate the ‘habit of reasoning’” (as cited in Van Kleeck & Schuele, 2010, p. 343).

Thus, while society has seen many changes that have undoubtedly influenced the landscape of education, the goals of literacy instruction have kept to a similar course. The Edgeworth’s writing summarizes what is commonly referred to as ‘critical thinking’ in today’s society, illustrating just one of the ways that the foundation of early literacy has endured over hundreds of years.

Another important facet of emergent literacy is discovering and communicating with print. Clay (1994) has designed concepts about print along with graphic principles that can help educators better understand the reading and writing of young children. She
suggests that in order for children to truly understand print they must discover the recurring principle, the generative principle, the flexibility principle, and the directional principle (Clay, 1994; Temple et. Al, 2005). Each principle builds on the last, from drawing a same-sized shape again and again to learning that writing follows a set of (left to right and top to bottom) directional rules. These are essential modalities for children because each improves their writing and represents an important part of their writing development (Brooks, 2005; Mackenzie, 2011).

When learning to read, children must first begin to understand the smallest sounds in words, phonemes, and then they can begin building on letter sounds and phonics development. Once a child has made these connections, he/she is better able to recognize patterns and build on their understanding of language. Paramount in Clay’s design is the thought that students must be granted time to express their ideas through drawings, scribbles and invented spelling (Rowe, 2003; Kress, 1996). Fostering student drawing is one of the many ways to support and encourage later writing acquisition (Mackenzie & Versesov, 2013). In this way, the markings that children make, even in the simplest form, promote student social and cognitive growth. Cultivating children’s desire to write and draw is a complex process, however the principles suggested by Clay (1994) and Mackenzie & Versesov (2013) play a significant role in promoting writing.

**Emergent writing.** Emergent writing “is not an ‘all or nothing’ skill set, rather, children will progress along a continuum from very basic writing in the form of scribbling to conventional writing and spelling” (Dennis & Votteler, 2012, p. 444). Researchers in emergent literacy “have advanced the claim that children in literate
societies begin to learn about reading and writing from birth” (Rowe, 2008, p.66).

Emergent literacy skills and understandings include phonological awareness, letter naming, vocabulary building, word manipulation and eventual writing (Hilbert & Eis, 2013). They also include, concepts about print, including directionality and orientation. Still more, emergent skills incorporate concepts of word, which often entails the labeling of objects combined with storytelling and the ability to retrieve those labels and stories when appropriate. All of these skills and understandings are built as a result of interaction with a wide variety of texts.

Through interaction with text, students become inspired to emulate and create. At times, the standards-based curriculum can serve to confuse and even halt a student’s writing creativity. Velasquez (2011) indicates that the process of writing is made more difficult for students when they are expected to prove proficiency in written content, purpose, audience, spelling and punctuation, all with the goal of a flawless end product. As a result, “when students write, they often think of themselves as writers for the teacher, with their own desires and interests ignored” (Garner et al., 2008, p. 339). D’Arcy (2012) adds,

In a skills-based writing paradigm, the writer is a scribe concerned mainly with what Smith (1982) identified as ‘surface’ or secretarial features of writing. In a creative and process-based paradigm the writer’s attention is given to compositional aspects of writing (Smith, 1982) and the construction of meanings. The emphasis on compositional or processes of writing rather than writing as a product is strongly advocated by educationalists who have acquired empirical evidence of effective classroom-based pedagogy. (p. 139)

This atmosphere of high-stakes testing often places emphasis on the correctness of text form instead of writing encouragement and support (D’Arcy, 2012). Furthermore, this environment can occasionally lead teachers to cast doubt on the invented messages of
students, prompting students to wonder if they have answered the question or completed an assignment correctly. When this shift in learning takes place, students are moving from intention to convention (Meyer & Weih, 2013). Conventional writing does not allow for the same freedoms that intentional writing provides (Meyer & Weih, 2013; Wohlwend, 2007). Learning to write can be a frustrating process for children, especially when they feel pressure or inadequacy due to the restrictions of conventional assignments and learning. Therefore, it is the teacher’s obligation to create a sense of “excitement, interest, and confidence […] while at the same time introducing young children to the way written language works” (McCarrier, Pinnell, & Fountas, 2000, p. 15). One way that teachers can help to create excitement and interest is to allow free choice and lengthy blocks of time for writing, without pressure to complete assignments each day or each period. Because writing is a meaning-making and critical thinking endeavor “involving the linking of invisible patterns of oral language with visible symbols” (Clay, 2005, p.1) children require intentional, open teaching. When children “see an advantage in being able to write they will apply the same focused attention to learning how to write that they applied to learning to be oral language users” (Mackenzie, 2010, p.30). Like adults, children benefit from the opportunity to think about an idea and converse with others about their invented stories.

Young authors should be encouraged to use writing as an avenue for self-expression. Neu and Berglund (1991) explain that children often use drawing and writing to express and better process their own feelings. Exploring emotions through drawing and writing is, in fact, quite natural for children. Many researchers see children’s drawings and emergent writing as a porthole into their thoughts and feelings (Levin & Bus, 2003;
Neu & Berglund, 1991). If teachers do engage in the act of scribing a child’s thoughts, the child’s voice must be exact in the writing in order for the child to see their words on the paper. When teachers edit student voice, they halt student expression and this slows the progress that children can make during their early writing experiences (Archer & Breuer; 2015; Calkins, 2013; Lensmire, 1994). Advocates of writer’s workshop, a largely student-directed writing period, believe that voice is “the imprint of ourselves on our writing” (Graves, 1981, p. 227). They work with students to dig deeply into each student’s authentic, unique looking glass. The teacher assumes the role of facilitator and guided questioner; however, his/her role does not involve control over the writing process or topics. Instead, the teacher prompts students to determine purpose, audience, topic and organization; these selections make up the student voice in any given piece of writing (Calkins, 2013).

As the literature illustrates, writing plays an integral role in a child’s intellectual and emotional growth; yet, according to Kress (1996), it remains something of a mystery as well. He explains that although we, as a society, know quite a lot about alphabetic writing it still remains a complex process especially for kindergarten-aged children. The early writing process is a “deeply transformative and creative” effort (Kress, 1996, p. 68). The main effort in learning to write takes place when students move from writing pictures to writing sounds. Preschooler writing begins with scribbles and lines that are essentially indistinguishable; then, as time passes, the forms begin to resemble letters and eventually writing-like patterns emerge (Rowe, 2008). During this time, early learners begin to understand that their markings on the page can symbolize linguistic communications that can be read and interpreted by others. This awareness of “writing as a goal-directed,
functional activity is basic to developing as a writer” (Teale & Martinez, 1987, p. 4).

Emergent literacy findings indicate that although student writing may appear as merely
doodles on the page, the work young learners are engaged in is meaningful and necessary
to their success as writers (Adoniou, 2013; Hawkins, 2002; Levin & Bus, 2003). This
complex task of writing involves many steps and actions before completion.

Children have to think of a message and hold it in the mind. Then they have to
think of how to start it, remember each letter form and its features, and
manually reproduce the word letter by letter. Having written that first word (or
an approximation), the child must go back to the whole message, retrieve it,
and think of the next word. Through writing, children are manipulating and
using symbols, and in the process learning how written language works (As
cited in, Askew & Frasier, 1999, p. 43)

As children consume and explore print linked with language, they begin to acquire and
form understandings of different kinds of communication (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982).

Normally, this stage of learning welcomes students who are fairly good storytellers
(Ackermann, 2001). Emergent writers are often eager to record the events of real and
imagined life as one. While these young writers become oriented with making marks,
recording ideas, responding to environmental print and reading their markings, they also
begin to consciously understand the difference between print and drawing (Tunks &
Giles, 2007). During this time, children’s understanding of written language emerges and
they begin to look at words with a more critical eye. Students at this stage often associate
their name with one letter; it is common to see emergent writers identifying ‘their’ letter
in other words (Ray, 2004; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004). Furthermore, this ability to
differentiate print from drawings, and words from numbers is a platform for emergent
writers to build their identities as authors (Puranik & Lonigan, 2012; Ray 2004). When
children come to see themselves as writers, they begin to look at the world differently (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004).

Before children even consider the task of formal writing, they are learning what it means to be writers from their teachers and other adults in their lives (Puranik & Lonigan, 2012). “They are learning that people who make books get ideas all the time, especially when they aren’t actually writing” (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004, p. 17). Teachers and parents can help a child notice things that authors do by asking children questions about books that have been read to them (Fields, Groth & Spangler, 2004). Caregivers, grandparents and siblings can also model the functions of print for children (Dechant, 1993). An adult might decide to write a grocery list, a letter or an email. While the adult is carrying out this writing task, he/she should be explaining the task and engaging with the child (Butler, Liss, & Sterner, 1999). Children do not need much convincing to join in on these useful writing activities and their involvement does not need to be perfect. In fact, the importance of their participation is to help them understand that what they have to say is important and worth recording (Horn & Giacobbe, 2007). Emergent writers see a need to write and have a desire to learn to write when they observe the people who are important to them writing for real purposes (Calkins, 1994).

Therefore, during the emergent writing phase, the teacher’s role, as stated by Wales (1989), is to focus on what the students are trying to say in their writing, not merely how they are communicating it. The process of writing, consequently, is just as important as the product. Barrs, Barton and Booth (2012) propose classroom use of the thought-writing continuum in order to provide students with a foundation for their writing. The continuum has three necessary components: (1) inner speech (also known as verbal
thought), where students consider possibilities and hypothesize the details of their writing; (2) oral speech, which ensures that students have the opportunity to hear their thoughts out loud in a supportive and caring environment; and (3) written speech, during which students record the ideas that they have given thought to and have an opportunity to share with classmates and teachers. Transferring ideas from thought into written language is a form of translation; the more experience students have with the idea, the easier the translation becomes (Barrs et al., 2012). When narrow boundaries are set for writing, limitations to the breadth and creativity of responses as well as student comprehension are also established (Baghban, 2007). As Teale and Martinez (1987) have stated, “without an emphasis on making literacy socially significant in the lives of children, we may unwittingly be undercutting the teaching of the skills of writing” (p. 4). Accordingly, the thought-writing continuum was emphasized in this research as a way of emphasizing student voice, creativity, audience and purpose.

**Research on emergent writing.** Previous research on children’s creative engagement and writing in kindergarten classrooms has examined formal writing programs. This body of research (Ganske, 2014; Horn & Giacobbe, 2007; Lysaker & Wheat, 2010; Mermelstein, 2013) suggests that the decisions the emergent writers make about each piece of written work are deliberate, as children focus on communicating meaning. Indeed, a main component of the writers’ workshops, currently so popular in the United States, is the sharing of participants’ work with each other (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994; Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005). In such workshops, students select topics and write at their own pace (Calkins, 1994). Given the huge effort children exert to
produce printed and drawn texts, their collaboration, self-talk while writing, and participation in the writing process is of great importance to this research.

According to another study, many young authors do not revise their written work once it has been completed. For five months, Hertz and Heydenberk (1997) offered a creative writing program to kindergarten students at a Pennsylvania elementary school. They found that students tended to edit while they were writing; as they spoke about their writing or read their in-progress writing out loud, they often changed the main idea at the midway point and began a new story.

Literature suggests that this private speech and self-consultation is at its peak at the kindergarten age (Manfra & Winsler, 2006; Winsler & Naglieri, 2003). It has also been found that the private speech of four- and five-year-old children is goal directed and aids in self-expression (Manfra & Winsler, 2006). Furthermore, the quality of self-talk is increased when social-emotional learning and expressive language skills are supported. In fact, this support actually helps children to use internal verbal signals to carry writing out tasks more fluidly. Essentially, private speech during writing tasks helps children to maintain focus, persevere through challenges and plan their behavior (Winsler et al, 2007; Machado de Almeida Mattos, 2000).

Another branch of research on early writing instruction has focused on teachers’ and students’ talk during writing classes. In her research involving three kindergarten classrooms in New South Wales, Australia, Mackenzie (2009) investigated the influence of language use and scaffolding in the classroom. Her findings indicate that the language of writing used by teachers is often too abstract for children in the emergent writing stage. “Children must be helped to understand the ‘school language’ that the teacher is using.
Teachers must also find ways of refining their teacher talk so that it is more accessible to [students]” (p. 15). Mackenzie suggests that if teachers approach the task of dissecting and planning their language in the classroom with more intent and focus, their students may make more positive connections as listeners and writers. Similarly, Girolametto et al (2000) determined that teachers who used more direct language when communicating with their students saw fewer opportunities for verbal performance and class participation. The language teachers use to teach literacy, Mackenzie (2009) adds, can impact student understanding and progress. In other words, the verbiage chosen for explanations are as important as the content itself (2009).

Similarly, conversations around writing in the classroom are as important as the writing itself. In fact, many researchers believe that thinking and talking about writing prior to engaging in any pencil to paper tasks is an absolute necessity (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, Schwartz, Marron, & Dunford, 2013; Graves, 1983; Smagorinsky, 2013). Tolentina (2013) partnered with a small private school and, focusing her attention on 14 four- and five-year-old children, spent an entire school year studying their writing habits and conversations about writing. She found that “children benefit from engaging in dialogue and interaction during book writing. Many of the revelations that children uncovered about writing and themselves as writers transpired when they were interacting with each other and while they were transacting with texts” (p. 16). Writing with students at the same level is a transformative practice. The interactions that take place while writing alongside peers help to actively shape children’s writing, thereby empowering students to take chances they may not otherwise take (Rowe, 2010; Tolentina, 2013). Kissel’s research (2009) reinforces that children are constantly informing and being
influenced by their peers while writing. Their words, drawings and even their motivators for the writing often stem from these interactions. In an ethnographic, qualitative study of a kindergarten classroom, Kissel, Hansen, Tower and Lawrence (2011) demonstrate how conversations between children push and pull them as writers. Kissel et al. (2011) discovered that simple conversations between two children could solidify writing and generate ideas. That said, these conversations could also derail writing and refine ideas or change topics entirely. The topic changes and/or generation of ideas is strongly related to students’ awareness – even at the kindergarten level - of having an audience. Oftentimes, students desire to write something that is meaningful, and one way they do this by constructing their writing with and for others, therefore giving their writing personal significance. Students at a writing center, Kissel (2009) suggests, might share ideas while sitting in close proximity to one another. When an idea is confirmed as valuable, students then begin to include it in their talk, writing and drawing (2009). Once students become invested in an idea, they sometimes include a modification to make the idea theirs. Kissel (2009) also found that as students began to develop their writing skills they gravitated toward students who also had a growing understanding of writing and creation. This proximity to students who have shared interests and knowledge shows a tendency to converge to form and show meaning on the page (2009).

**Writing and Drama**

Creative drama is a student-centered, creative and captivating pedagogical method that can be employed to help students develop as writers and foster positive attitudes towards writing (Erdogan 2013; Hess & Wheldall 1999). Researchers have long acknowledged the connection between drama, literacy and language learning (Cremin et
Dramatic teaching methods provide the necessary springboard for narrative understandings and inspired writing. A case study conducted by Cremin et al. (2006) showed that elementary school students are more motivated and engaged in writing when drama is a precursor to the writing process, for example. Additionally, as Graves (2004) explains, writers can only compose pieces about that which they have some knowledge. Situating writing opportunities after or during the dramatic process can allow for a broader understanding of the given material. Furthermore, the hope is that a deeper pool of topics and dramatic experiences might also create richer “storying,” for it is in the “immediate world surrounding the children where, in fact, dramatic things are always happening” (Graves, 2004, p. 89). Many researchers have also found that students’ syntactic structures were strengthened their writings followed from drama-based lesson plans and dramatic play-time (Booth, 1998; McMaster, 1998; Pellegrini, 1980; Rowe, 2010).

**Story drama.** Story drama is a method used in the classroom to involve students in literature and deepen understanding of text (Booth, 2005). It involves the dramatization of a tale (Wanerman, 2010), whether it originates from a children’s book or some other source, be it a memory or even a prediction for the future. When the teaching method does utilize a book, it is usually one that children are familiar with and enjoy hearing or reading (2010). The story is then used as foundational scaffolding for the subsequent drama lesson, in which the teacher often plays a fictional role alongside the children to help move the story along. While the drama is built around the involvement of the whole class, still images, narration, improvisation and other tools can be used to investigate the
narrative (Booth, 2005). Some teachers only tell the beginning of a story and ask the students to create alternate endings. Other teachers use music to create mood and atmosphere in the drama work, with the music-playing students exploring story themes through tableaux and/or mime (Booth, 2005). Still other teachers frequently interview certain characters from a story, achieving a close-up view of the traits and motives of that character. Paramount in such a lesson is the notion that actors have no particular end in mind when beginning the performance (Wanerman, 2010). Instead, the teacher serves as a guide, bringing themes and key understandings to the surface while facilitating interpretation and exploration of the story in authentic ways. Few costumes and very little practice are needed, the story drama is supposed to evolve organically, without the need to be polished or intended for an audience. The only goal is to help students make real connections and form memories that bond them to the story, and to each other as well.

“In drama and in narrative, the context may be fictional, but the emotional responses are real. Although the student is in a make-believe situation in a story and in drama, the real world still exists, and the learning for the student lies in the negotiation of meanings - symbolic and literal - taking place in both spheres” (Booth, 2005, p. 14).

Story drama, at its very core, demands that students inject themselves into the story, allowing their subjective worlds to inform the drama and their understanding of the text; this subjectivity also provides additional opportunities for thought and feeling to enter the literature classroom. There are varying opinions around what drama can accomplish in the classroom, and even the definition of drama itself. As Bolton (1979) indicates, the central component to any drama in education lesson is the process. At the heart of this process is a teaching and learning pedagogy, which aims itself towards critical literacy,
shared power and the learning potential of students (Bolton 1979, O’Neill 1995, Warren 1999). For the purposes of this thesis, educational drama and roleplay are defined as a “kind of play where children behave ‘as if’ they were someone else,’ or as if’ they were themselves in a fictional situation” (Prendiville & Toye, 2013, p. 9). This form of educational drama is closely linked to the natural development of kindergarten students; it’s not bound by economic status, language aptitude, or culture. Instead, educational drama combines imagination and pretend while aiding child development and learning (Prendiville & Toye, 2013). It is this imaginative and dramatic play that provokes narrative understandings and “… serves the function of suspending reality by redefining, or transforming, the meaning of objects, roles, and situations. For example, blocks become firetrucks, peers become monsters, and birthday parties are announced. Children, of course, can do this… with others, in social play” (Pellegrini & Galda, 1990, p.78). Accordingly, an effective curriculum is one that encourages engagement, imagination, and community-based activities while offering opportunities for children to experience and construct knowledge.

The belief that play holds an essential and deserved place in childhood is also celebrated in the observational research of Bruner (1983). Bruner suggests that children use play to make sense of the world. It is through play that children begin to assimilate and understand the intricacies of objects, roles and situations. Play is the instrument used by children to cope, develop and imagine (Daiute, 1989). One form of play called Socio Dramatic Play (SDP) ¹ encourages the formation of shared meaning while acting out

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¹ SDP is also commonly named ‘social fantasy play’, ‘social imaginative play’, ‘social make-believe play’ and ‘social pretend play’ (Levy, Phelps & Schaefer, 1986).
impressions of the real world (Whittington & Floyd, 2009). When carried out in a meaningful fashion, SDP can promote children's emergent literacy skills (Paley, 2004), motivating them to socialize in dramatic scenes far beyond their years (Elkonin, 1978). Dramatic play needs no written lines or scripts, instead a stimulating and supportive environment is all that is needed (Way, 1967). Dramatic play opportunities are often spontaneous, open-ended and meaningful to those involved. The expressive nature of drama lends itself as a socially significant learning tool for children of all cognitive levels. Therefore, a study of the ways in which SDP might be a catalyst to greater understanding and eventually improved narrative understandings may prove informative for educators of kindergarten-aged students (Whittington & Floyd, 2009).

As Freire (2009) states, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry, human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other” (p. 164). Dramatic play creates space for this reinvention because it is malleable (Hendy, 2001). As Lundy & Booth (1983) explain, each story drama lesson will be its own unique drama; no two will look exactly alike. This is because students and teachers interpret a story together, drawing on their background knowledge and experiences. They may focus on only one or two characters, or they may focus on a central issue of the story. Furthermore, the teacher and students might choose to have a narrator, or maybe a group of children creating the sounds for the story and another group narrating each part. There is no fixed set of instructions, as there are many decisions that can be made about the way the story is retold in each classroom. For these reasons, story drama is versatile and so easy to use in a variety of different settings. This technique is not only useful for the teacher, it also
promotes children’s social emotional, language and intellectual development. As Barton & Booth (2004) have explained:

Children play out their lives through story. It tells them that life will go on, and gives form to what has happened, what is happening, and what may happen, ordering their experiences through gossip and anecdote and tale. They need stories from us to give reassurance to their inner stories, the ones that demonstrate their curiosities, fears, and concerns. (p. 18)

The stories that are played out in story drama are the students’ stories because the teacher’s aim is to “preserve the students’ personality, not erode it to fit a pattern conceived by me” (Heathcote, 1991, p. 27). By allowing a student's personality to enter the drama-based learning, the teacher opens doors to feeling and understanding. This simple act promotes opportunities for new language development, new ideas and better writing. Heathcote (1991) adds that through this dramatic vehicle, children respect their teacher, not necessarily as the person who knows everything in the room but as a person who is learning alongside them. “Instead of being an onlooker and supporter, the teacher works within the group, and has a positive and leading share in the direction of the group’s activities and a peculiar responsibility for the interactions which are the life of the group” (1991, p. 43). Heathcote (1991) further explains that the dramatic action in the room can be tragic, comedic, absurd or playful—as long as it is an environment in which the community is listening with both “care and imagination” (p. 40). It is through these drama-based lessons that the students develop attitudes and personas to inspire points of view for their writing, vantage points that may have otherwise been absent. No longer is the teacher simply present to deliver the assigned writing piece of the day; instead, he/she is a presence in the room supporting students as they enter the creative drama world (Heathcote, 1984).
The most motivating and enriching forms of literacy learning take place when all of the developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, emotional, social and physical) are applied (Shamir & Korat 2007; Hilbert & Eis, 2013). Drama taps into each of these domains, providing the active ingredients necessary for future reading and writing success. Educational drama and role-play offer a solid foundation for writing as these modes of lesson delivery promise “…a context and purpose for writing, whether that be to write a shopping list or to take an order in a café. Teachers who position learning in “a context in which it will be applied later” avoid isolated learning scenarios where school-acquired knowledge and real world knowledge are separate (Andersen, 2004, p. 283). This learning becomes available to aid students in the solving of real world problems (Andersen, 2004).

According to Hendy, even “children of five and six years of age are quite capable of using drama experiences to inspire their writing” (2001, p. 84). During the early stages of composing, dramatic play helps with brainstorming and offers students an alternative to staring blankly at a page (Diaute, 1990). Children involved in dramatic learning are regularly trialing new ways of talking and acting, which leads to greater understanding of the many options available to communicate thoughts and feelings.

**Dramatic play in the kindergarten classroom.** As mentioned earlier, research shows that play is one of the most significant contributors to child development as it supports—problem solving, imagination, language development, creativity and ultimately success in school (Maynes, 2013). This sentiment has been echoed in the work of curriculum developers, and noted by Ministry of Education in Ontario, Canada:
...play-based learning leads to greater emotional and academic success... Play lies at the core of innovation and creativity. It provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive. Play and academic work are not distinct categories for young children, and learning and doing are also inextricably linked for them. (p. 13, 2013)

Booth and Barton (2004), Jahreie, Arnseth and Krange (2011) agree that dramatic play-based learning is an essential component to storytelling, whether it be oral or written. Positive engagement with peers, through play, helps students develop socially and improve their understanding of peer perspectives (Wood, 2004, Bulotsky-Shear, Bell, Carter & Dietrich, 2014). In this research, play and drama were largely intertwined. For example, on some evenings a mentor text was shared “… to alert the audience and actors as to the plot. [The story is read] aloud again as the children step into their roles. Though the teacher serves as director and producer, offering suggestions to foster dramatic interpretation, such as ‘How can you show the class that the monster surprised you?’; expectations of dramatic performance are relatively low. Except on special occasions, dramatization is a one-time through, no-rehearsal event” (Cooper, 2005, p. 233). The action in our drama lessons was an extension from the story that had been shared. The students were playing while simultaneously in role. Their interactions, following the story drama lessons, were free flowing and student led, however, they were also drawing from the story to lead their language and movements. “In this way a story often contributes lessons worthy of the best kindergarten curriculum” (Paley, 1981, p.167). The drama, therefore, was not merely play or role play, instead it was playing with role play.

Play provides children occasions to pursue different approaches to communicating (such as talking with an accent or heightened emotion) without the worry of making errors (Bluiett, 2009). Consequently, socio-dramatic play is especially
conducive to language learning at the kindergarten level. Socio-dramatic play further contributes to the development of self-regulation skills, such as task initiation and flexibility, and can be instrumental in establishing greater dialogue with peers and teachers (Garvey, 1990). Children in the primary grades learn about themselves and the world through dramatic play (Prendiville & Toye, 2013).

The above research and reflections give me reason to believe that important connections exist between student play, drama and early learning. In the next section, I continue to outline the work that informs my research by synthesizing the work of social constructivist theorists.

**Theoretical Foundation: Social Constructivist Theory**

“Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.”

(Chinese proverb)

Social constructivism highlights the importance of meaning making and constructing knowledge (Richardson, 2003). Teachers who espouse this theoretical approach involve their students in activities where they are able to create, assemble, form, make, build and compose their knowledge (Thompson, 2000; Richardson, 2003). Social constructivists reject the “banking” philosophy that knowledge is a gift imparted on learners when teachers orally deposit information, just as they do any education system in which students are forced to passively collect, memorize, recite and write (Freire, 2009). Educators who embrace social constructivism know that “… through communication … human life hold[s] meaning. The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking” (Freire, 2009, p. 167). As much as they may try,
teachers cannot deliberate for their students or give them authentic, original thoughts. The social constructivist teacher, aware of his/her limitations, recognizes that the classroom is a place where discovery takes place through social processes (Schwandt, 1994). As noted by Gagné (2014) “…social constructivist pedagogy is placed in the middle pedagogical space, as it seeks to include the development of higher order thinking among learners, based on the co-construction of knowledge by teachers” (p. 96). Constructivism challenges the teacher to move from dictating information to facilitating opportunities for the formation of knowledge (Freire, 2009).

Bruner (1986) conceives that the manner in which children ponder, create and respond to the world is “the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us” (1986, p. 69). He defined two distinct forms of thinking: one, the ‘paradigmatic mode’ and, two, the ‘narrative mode’. Paradigmatic thinking is a process that involves analytics and sequencing, whereas narrative thinking is more of an imaginative and creative process requiring the construction of real or fictional events. Narrative thinking also encourages children to enthusiastically use, experience and reflect on stories told. To that end, narrative thinking is best suited for educational drama lessons where students create make-believe scenarios constructed on knowledge they have gained. With respect to teaching writing, Bruner suggests that when students are situated within the drama, they are better able to imagine differing perspectives—therefore, assisting with the writing process as a whole. The shift in learning takes place when a student stops learning about narrative and begins to learn through narrative. This process then becomes a stimulus for greater connections in the classroom, school community, and world. During my research I aimed to provide kindergarten students with
the time to ponder, create and explore through drama. As Bruner (1986) has explained, narrative thinking generally helps the learner to stand back from reality and proceed without a set of instructions. The advantage to this approach is that students take ownership of the learning.

Social constructivists view writing as a social practice (Daiute, 1990; Stagg Peterson & Portier, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). In observing this perspective, I have come to understand that literacy is not merely an individual intellectual pursuit; instead it is a communicative tool for different social groups within it. Literacy learning is a practice embedded within cultural codes and rituals. Writing, therefore, is approached and discussed by using particular cultural tools (Gutiérrez, 2002). Understanding which tools to use largely depends on a child’s ability to navigate discourses (Gee, 1999). Children who readily adopt a classroom discourse typically fair well and even thrive in their learning.

Language learning, specifically writing, utilizes the notion that literacy is influenced by the social contexts in which children are immersed as they age. Children draw meaning from their surroundings and social groups, using the customs and practices that surround them to help construct that meaning (Cole, 1996). A struggle with discourse, codes and language learning may be an indicator that more emphasis is needed on social practice. Dyson (2003), Green and Boolme (1984), Kenner (2004), and Kucan and Beck (1997) have examined how student writing is aided by relationships with peers. From this body of research, it can be deduced that when students are presented with opportunities to combine personal reflection, knowledge of language construction and an understanding of those around them, they are better prepared to construct meaning through discourse in
social settings (Kucan and Beck, 1997). If this thought is accepted, then as children interact in social settings, they are developing both their knowledge of literacy and the understanding of how knowledge is constructed (Putney et al., 2000).

This research is grounded in the thought that learning is both a social and communicative effort in which imaginative play is one of the decisive elements to a child’s development as a writer (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, there are three central themes that emerge when thinking, investigating and writing about this research through a Vygotskian lens. The role of play, symbolism in writing, and the interaction between learning and development will be highlighted in the next section.

**The Role of Play.** Vygotsky describes the role of play in a child’s development as enormous (1978). Through play, a child’s innermost desires are brought to life and the child suspends reality in order to embrace the imaginary (1978). As children develop the ability to embrace and enact play, play’s purpose is revealed (1978). “Simply running around without purpose or rules is boring and does not appeal to children” (1978, p. 103). There are guidelines to a child’s play that make it purposeful and when rules are more complex they require more of the child (1978).

Educational drama can offer some of these guidelines that Vygotsky spoke of to help make play purposeful and powerful. It contributes communicative and social elements to learning, while allowing children to embrace the imaginable. Children who participate in drama-based and play-based activities cultivate listening skills on two levels: (1) listening for engagement purposes and, (2) listening for evaluative purposes (McMaster, 1998). When children combine engagement and evaluation with play, they
are marrying internal and external action. Play and drama-based lessons provide a backdrop to learning where “…imagination, interpretation and will are the internal actions carried out by the external action” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.100). Thereby, moving meaning into the most prominent position, \( \frac{\text{Meaning}}{\text{Action}} \), in a child’s action/meaning ratio. In other words, “we find that the development of will…occurs when the child operates with the meaning of actions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 101). Early in a child’s life, action will often dominate their action/meaning ration. This is often the case because children can carry out more actions than they can comprehend. As children grow and learn about the world, they are more inclined to play with rules, to listen for engagement and evaluative purposes, and to embrace the imaginable. This multifaceted process shaping how children play and make sense of the world demonstrates that in every imaginative scene or invented story, enacted by children, there are rules containing meaning that are concealed yet abided by (1978). Furthermore, observations of children during imaginative play have revealed that children process information from the world as they speak in role, as characters, to themselves and others (McMaster, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). “…a stick becomes a riding horse for a child because it can be placed between the legs and a gesture can be employed that communicates that the stick designates a horse” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 108). Imaginative, role-based playtime is an ideal opportunity to learn the powerful tool of communication. Objects hold meaning and children learn to deliver that meaning through gesture (Vygotsky, 1978). It is the engagement in imaginary situations that enables children to act independently. It permits them to sever thought from object while making meaning, imagining and reflecting (Vygotsky, 1978).
Symbolism in writing. The mechanics of reading and writing have been featured prominently in classrooms since the earlier days of education (Sheehan, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). “Unlike the teaching of spoken language, into which children grow of their own accord, teaching of written language is based on … training” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 105). The training and preparation needed to sufficiently teach writing necessitates an enormous dedication of time and energy and because of this, it is often reduced to mechanics instead of the essence of writing, which is creating.

That said, children are authoring stories in one form or another well before they ever understand the mechanics of writing. Gestures are the first sign a child makes on his/her journey to becoming a writer (1978); such movements are encoded with emotion and what the child is observing. They use two fingers to demonstrate legs running, and their shoulders demonstrate a jump. Children often use body language to explain their scribbles and other written marks, thereby showing that “the pencil marks are only a supplement to this gestural representation” (p.107). Eventually the scribbles do turn into words and at this stage the gesture is sometimes lost in favor of mechanics teaching. “The entire secret to teaching written language is to prepare and organize this natural transition appropriately” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 116). Uniting symbolic gestures with the written word enables a more fluid transition from the abstract to the concrete. Creating opportunities for direct symbolism supports better expression through writing and when executed properly can be as meaningful as a conversation (1978).

Writing exercises, according to Vygotsky, must be meaningful and hold importance to the early writers. When students are excited about the topic, they may find that writing with expression comes more naturally. Purely technical writing, on the other hand, can
bore the child (1978). Writing is a cultural and educational activity that is frequently taught as a fine motor skill. Reading and writing must be presented to a child in such a way that he/she feels the need and the desire to learn. Without that desire, the writing may be neatly formed and grammatically correct but it will lack that symbolic representation and creativity that engages the reader. Following this progression, “writing should be cultivated rather than imposed” (p.118). Through cultivation, children begin to see that drama, gesture and drawing are all forms of writing. The process of transitioning children from scribble to speech must be accompanied by this narrative, when students understand the variety of ways that they can write, the opportunities associated with writing widen.

The interaction between learning and development. In some circles, it is believed that age and development precede learning (Vygotsky, 1978). That is, a child cannot learn certain material until he/she has mentally and perhaps socially matured to a certain point. It has also been assumed, at certain points in history, that “…processes such as deduction and understanding, evolution of notions about the world…and mastery of logical forms of thought and abstract logic all occur by themselves, without any influence from school learning” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 80). Important in this regard is the theory Vygotsky described as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which he poses a different set of questions to guide his appraisal of student mastery. Rather than observing what the child can do independently, or asking what the child can repeat, Vygotsky encourages educators to observe what the child can do with the assistance of a teacher. It also takes into account that two children of the same age and with similar backgrounds
may have different mental ages and capacities. In the ZPD, children are given instruction just beyond their individual capabilities. Rather than considering a classroom of eight-year-old children as one, the ZDP would look at each child individually. Vygotsky reasoned that independent learning could best flourish if teachers progressively guided students through lessons ensuring student comprehension. “It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under the guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The Zone of Proximal Development defines the material that children have not yet mastered and cannot solve independently as the “buds” of independent development, rather than the “flower” or the “fruits” of development. The ZPD looks at this material with anticipation, thus allowing teachers to map out an individual student’s immediate learning. It is the function of the ZPD to see the potential a child has to grow, expecting that understandings and knowledge of each topic will progress. Working within this ideal teaching zone facilitates best practice and optimal use of time. In a typically developing child, “learning which is oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of a child’s overall development. It does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process but rather lags behind this process” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). Therefore, the learning that takes place in the classroom is continually advancing the development of the child.

What matters, then, “is using the developmental potential of speech to generate and explore ideas, rather than to always speak and write in ways that meet an assessor’s approval” (Smagoringksy, 2013, p. 194). The notion of exploring ideas for
the purposes of speaking and writing demands that teachers grant students the opportunity to think through their writing. With this belief in mind, teachers give up the thought that all writing is designed to be read by an audience. Some writing, in fact, is scribed to help students begin to process, express, and explore (Smagorinsky, 2013). The ZDP points to teachers helping students connect what is already known and what is about to be learnt. In other words, the teacher helps the student build "scaffolding." Scaffolding techniques are utilized in education to help move students increasingly toward stronger understanding, positive attitudes and eventually greater independence in the learning process. Furthermore, this learning awakens the curiosity children possess and facilitates understanding through peer relationships. Learning and development, then, are connected at the very core. They work in harmony, one informing the other and each improving as the teacher makes “every effort to push [students] in that direction and to develop in them what is intrinsically lacking in their own development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89).

**Mantle of the Expert (MoE).** The MoE approach, first established by Dorothy Heathcote (1985), can be carried out in a variety of fashions: the teacher can assign roles to the students; the students may chose roles for themselves; or the students might happen upon roles during the course of the MoE drama activity. In my experience, teachers usually decide on the subject and characters that can be assumed in their classroom. The characters typically represent multiple view-points, thereby offering the drama a potential climax. Prior to beginning the lesson, the teacher exits the classroom and adds a scarf, hat or tie to his/her wardrobe. This is done so that the students understand the difference
between their teacher and the character he/she is playing. When the teacher returns to the classroom it is as this new character, with a new attitude, in the transformed ‘imagined’ space (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985). Next, the educator informs the students of the problem; for example, “There are some people who are for the building of the bridge and some people who are against it.” This allows the students an opportunity to consider which role they would like to assume. From here students announce their characters’ names and roles in the drama. Teacher and students then work together to uncover the storyline, with the teacher serving as guide and prompting children who need assistance, all while utilizing his/her role to its maximum potential.

**Zone of Proximal Development and MoE.** Some teachers may have a tendency to think about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP) in a vacuum; observing that the ZPD would serve its purpose and sufficiently aid students all on its own. This research poses the question whether drama, when paired with the ZPD framework, creates an atmosphere that is ripe for learning. It has been perceived that through the use of drama in education, and specifically MoE, classrooms can explore scenarios and solve problems in a realistic, interactive, and kinesthetic fashion (Anderson et al., 2009; Grady, 2000). Now, the MoE method will be combined with the ZPD to uncover if learning is, in fact, aided.

Employing the MoE commands the teacher is an active participant and guide in the drama, differentiating to meet the needs of each child’s development and skill level. Subjects are explored through roleplay, urging students to consider the thoughts, motives and emotions of characters. The lessons often center on one particular moment, analyzing
the people within that period of time intimately and authentically. All of this is carried out without ever leaving the classroom.

MoE enables teachers to invest and communicate with a group instead of assuming the more traditional role of provider of knowledge (Cawthon, Dawson, Ihorn, 2011; Edwards & Furlong, 1980; Miller & Saxton, 2004; Thompson, 2003). The MoE demonstrates many of the principles held by social constructivists, including the ZPD. Research suggests that when students are pondering questions, problem-solving and uncovering answers, with the aid of a teacher, retention rates and understanding are increased (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). The increase in recall can be attributed to teacher use and awareness of the ZPD. MoE and ZPD provide a foundation for the curriculum. This foundation allows teachers to create imaginary and relevant scenarios and challenge students to their fullest capabilities. Teachers who use the MoE approach work alongside students to build on their existing knowledge through drama and movement. Additionally, with knowledge of each student’s ZPD, teachers create a springboard for meaningful ideas, hypotheses, and solutions to be tested through drama activities.

When utilizing MoE, assessing student understanding is often made easier through inquiry and in-role activities. The classroom becomes a place where there is no single right answer. Instead, there are numerous roles and opportunities for students of all learning levels to share their knowledge and add weight to the drama (Christie & Billie 1992; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Grady, 2000; Miller & Saxton, 2004; O’Neil, 1995; Wilhelm & Edminster, 1998). Through open-ended dialogue and dramatic action, the classroom community can construct new understanding and acquire new skills. This peer-
to-peer dramatic endeavor not only ignites the desire to learn but also feeds
communication and literacy development. Students work together for a common dramatic
purpose, each bearing weight and contributing to the final outcome.

The teacher’s responsibility, namely, to assess student understanding and guide the
drama, allows frequent opportunities for stepping in and out of role as required. This fluid
movement from character in-role to the role of teacher is signaled by the removal of the
scarf, hat or tie. When the costume piece is removed, the teacher is present; when the
costume piece is worn, the character is present. In both roles the teacher can offer one-to-
one conferences, reinforcements, and incentives to the student experts (Heathcote, 1984).

**Structure of scaffolding.** Just as proper scaffolding provides essential support for a
carpenter to complete his work, so too does scaffolding provide the necessary support for
learning in the classroom. Scaffolding, as a teaching and learning metaphor, was first
coined and researched by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). Wood et al. (1976) observed
three- to five-year-old children using building blocks to form a tower. The interlocking
blocks proved to be somewhat difficult for these young learners, thus providing the
teacher with a perfect opportunity to scaffold their learning. The teacher in this study
considered the children’s starting point, supported their inquiry process and eventually
gradually released support so that the child could complete the task independently (Wood
et al., 1976). The exchanges between teacher and student, then, are "much more than
face-to-face interaction(s) or the simple transmission(s) of prescribed knowledge and
skills;" these interactions are rooted in rich communication and a strong understanding of
student comprehension and needs (Daniels 2001, p. 2). When used properly, scaffolding
means more to the classroom than a well-designed graphic organizer (Benko, 2012). For example, in a qualitative study involving 20 second-grade children, Chen, Revegno, S. Cone and T. Cone (2012) found that effective scaffolding involved activating prior knowledge, providing support as students experimented and refined their creative work, and then supporting students as they reflected on their learning and creative processes. Furthermore, effective classroom scaffolding requires that the teacher attempt to “… connect the task to students’ prior learning and future tasks, rather than focusing on isolated skills out of context” (Benko, 2012, p. 292).

As seen in Figure 1.0, Benko (2012) explains scaffolding as a process, beginning with a task that is suitably thought-provoking and challenging for the student. Without a stimulating and demanding task, students can become uninterested and the need to collaborate is lessened.

**Figure 1: Scaffolding- A Model**

![Diagram of scaffolding process]

Footnotes:
“1” indicates feature of scaffolding from Langer & Applebee (1986)
“2” indicates feature of scaffolding from Wood et al. (1976)

The teacher who scaffolds gently increases the level of difficulty and simultaneously
assesses student understanding in order to begin removing that scaffolding (Applebee and Langer, 1987). The teacher and each individual student engage in a learning relationship that is collaborative and minimizes frustration in order to help facilitate understanding.

The horizontal arrow represents the move toward a gradual release of responsibility from the teacher to the student, but this design does not mean to suggest that scaffolding always happens in a linear fashion. The beginning (selecting a task) and end (transferring responsibility) are more fixed, but scaffolding during instruction and a teacher’s stance during that instruction will vary, as demonstrated by the arrows looping between “teacher’s instruction” and “teacher’s stance.”

Teachers, utilizing a model like the one seen above (Figure 1), are sure to assess students’ ability while posing questions that both challenge and solidify their thinking. As the task unfolds, students gradually assume more and more responsibility and ownership of their work. The end goal of this scaffolding model is that students complete the task or assignment on their own.

**Scaffolding writing.** The teacher’s role “is to teach developmentally appropriate skills and strategies and to encourage writers to try new techniques within their own writing. They listen to children, confer with them and introduce them to new possibilities in their writing” (Kissel et al., 2011, p. 437). As children compose written work, it is also crucial for teachers to model how a writer might plan a story and thinks out loud about the writing process (Dennis & Votteler, 2012). The teacher might ask students to explain their thinking or ask open-ended questions about the characters. These sorts of queries serve to improve student ideas about their written work. Furthermore, many researchers (Graves, 2004; Kittle, 2008) encourage teachers to write with and for their students. This act of showing the students how they manage writer frustration creates an atmosphere that embraces the growth mindset (Dweck, 2006).
Children benefit from continuous scaffolding especially when the tasks assigned require more critical thinking (Chen, Rovegno, Cone & Cone, 2012). Scaffolding is “like an ocean wave instead of a linear process. Scaffolding ebbed and flowed as a function of the interactions among the content, context, and specific learners and groups” (Chen, Rovegno, Cone & Cone, 2012, p. 233).

In order to better assist students in transferring responsibility, teachers should conference with students and give specific feedback about their writing (Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, Valdes, & Garnier, 2000). Teachers’ feedback provides guidance and empowers students to revise thoughts rather than individual grammar miscues or word corrections. Comments on the theme and the ideas in the writing will better serve and motivate the student as a writer (Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, Valdes, & Garnier, 2000).

Another scaffolding teaching perspective comes from Read (2010), who urges that scaffolding is essential to teaching writing and “allows us to support students as they gain familiarity with the expectations and conventions of a genre” (p.47). Read (2010) supports this assertion with a model for scaffolding classroom-writing instruction. This model, which utilizes prior knowledge and key supports, helps students to compose meaningful pieces of socially constructed work (2010). Teachers who follow the model will gather both student and genre writing examples and engage the students in an inquiry about the writing. Teachers then model how to carry out the writing, using think-alouds and writing in draft mode to encourage the idea of recording ideas quickly. From this point, teachers may move into a shared writing time where students work together to compose a piece of work that the group authors. Finally, the teacher allows the students to write, offering encouragement and support as needed (2010).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

In order for one to fully appreciate the twenty-first century learner, research is needed to identify the “daily realities of classroom life through social interaction” (Rowe, 1994, p.12). One valid approach to social human science exploration is that of qualitative inquiry. The heart of good qualitative research is unquestionably extensive data collection, with the best models of qualitative inquiry establishing just how laborious and time consuming this approach to research can be (Creswell, 1998). Scholars agree that a naturalistic approach to research shapes a strong qualitative narrative. When subjects are observed in their natural setting the interpretation of those phenomena are less obstructed than might be expected had the research taken place in an unfamiliar backdrop (Creswell, 1998; Freebody, 2003, Hatch 2012).

Qualitative analysis provides “a distinctive way of knowing and theorizing about educational and social practices and structures, and thus can make distinctive contributions to education knowledge and debate” (Freebody, 2003, p. ix). The qualitative researcher is an instrument used for data collection. He/she collects video, voice recordings, word or pictures artifacts. Next, the data are examined for meaning and/or patterns and the findings are explained in a written document (Tacchi, Slater & Lewis, 2003).

The goal of my research has been to describe and attempt to understand a particular aspect of the learning that is taking place for the kindergarten students in my summer class. I began this qualitative work with the supposition that the classroom
setting is unique, multifaceted and worthy of research (Hatch, 2012; Creswell, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). My research purpose involves comprehending a facet of the world, in this case a group of kindergarten aged children, from the research participants’ viewpoints (Hatch, 2002). I gathered data using interviews, observations, anecdotal notes and video to capture the rich complexity of the classroom (Creswell, 2012), which was an authentic and natural environment (Hatch, 2012). In this qualitative report, I welcome the reader into a classroom that was set in a library, during one night per week for 11 weeks. I hope to provide a detailed narrative of what occurred throughout that time.

In qualitative research, validity is attained when the researcher continuously and meticulously fulfills verification strategies, allowing the reader to track and authenticate the methods used in the research (Rolfe, 2004). Two of the main validity concerns applicable to this research are researcher bias and generalizability of the findings. I have attempted to address these validity concerns by using triangulation and thick descriptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124).

**Triangulation.** The purpose of triangulation is to gather validation of findings through merging differing perspectives and data. When the perspectives and the data converge, this is commonly viewed as the greatest point of validity (Jakob, 2001). As a result, triangulation has widely become an accepted practice in social research. The use of triangulation in social science can be linked to Campbell and Fiskel (1959), Webb (1967) and Denzin (1970). Each research elaborated and built on the public understanding and associations of triangulation with research methods and designs. Therefore, there is a clear tradition in social science research methods that supports and
promotes for the use of multiple methods. It has been argued that if insufficiencies exist in one’s data collection, these can be resolved through the combining of methods and consequently, thereby allowing each method to gain individual strength (Olsen, 2004). Accordingly, social scientists submit that validation of qualitative data can occur through the collection of supporting findings, using distinctive methods. For completeness, triangulation is a process of substantiation that increases validity by merging numerous evidence-based perspectives (Olsen, 2004). In this research study, triangulation was achieved by combining video and written data sources, in-person interviews and conversations with the ECE. The in-class experiences of the children, in combination with current research and perspectives on writing, have helped to increase the validity of this investigation.

Thick descriptions. Qualitative research often involves a thorough portrayal of participants as well as their past and present experiences. It differentiates itself from other types of research with the inclusion of thick descriptions (Holloway & Wheeler, 2009). These descriptions reach beyond simple portrayals of participants and instead delve deeper into feelings and the interpretation of actions. Qualitative researchers use thick descriptions that best position them to describe, analyze and understand findings. Thick descriptions mature when data is comprehensively collected. The task of collecting data in this manner involves a full “description of the location and the people within it, giving visual pictures of setting, events and situations as well as verbatim narratives of individuals' accounts of their perceptions and ideas in context” (Holloway & Wheeler, 2009, p. 13).
Qualitative researchers are often telling the story of their research to the reader. The thick descriptions allow readers to better picture the setting, the participants and the action of the research. Furthermore, when thick descriptions are used, the researcher develops a more active role in the research because his/her knowledge of the data is what informs the study. Through a concise description of process of the research, the researcher can form and share conclusions.

**Case study research.** This case study has been theoretically informed by the theory of “multiple ways of knowing” devised by Cramer et al. (2007) whose notions of “knowledge and literacy” conceptualize learning as both an aesthetic and cognitive framework of knowledge. In case study research, investigators “emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke images, and create, for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there” (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 338). As a research strategy, case study has a long history of contributing to the field of education (Gibson, 1988; Lightfoot, 1983; Wolcott, 1973). The use of case study enables bounded system research through a comprehensive, in-depth data collection process in which interviews, observations, video footage, and documentation are used to explore the topic at hand (Creswell, 2007; Smith, 1978).

Case study research gathers and displays data in a variety of forms. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that using text alone to display information gathered during the data collection process is not enough. Charts, forms and video displays allow the reader to easily understand intricacies found in the case study (Merriam, 1998). Visual aids facilitate more thorough explanations, assessments and mental pictures for the reader.
These mental images create “a rich, ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 428).

Critics of the participant observer case study methodology assert that data collection is highly subjective and unreliable due to the insider/outsider paradox (Merriam, 1998). One method of managing this lack of reliability is to create time for “distancing” (Missouri Education, 2011). Distancing creates a separation for the researcher, therefore aiding a more objective standpoint, sufficient reflection and analysis of the data observed. “By incorporating distancing and immersion, and acknowledging the emotional and psychological discomfort brought about by managing this paradoxical stance, participant observation becomes reflexive” (Missouri Education, 2011, p. 8).

Participating researchers aim to involve outside points of view and consultations. These external views can provide critical observations and feedback, possibly inserting an original perspective that further propels the research, or changes its direction completely.

Qualitative case studies embrace an approach to research that assists in the exploration of a wonder, a curiosity or a question about how something can be improved. Case studies allow for issues to be explored through a variety of lenses, further facilitating and revealing multiple aspects of the research (Stake, 1995).

**Drawbacks of qualitative research.** One of the drawbacks of qualitative research is the problem of replication due in part to the unique and naturalistic settings of this form of investigation (Wiersma, 1995, Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Enhancing the reliability of case study research can be done in several ways. Firstly, confirming the clearness and precision of written depictions is fundamental to reliable qualitative research. Next, one should explore group knowledge in a non-linear fashion, allowing for “moments where
ethnographers are confronted with a surprise or something that does not go as expected” (Arthur, Waring, Coe & Hedges, 2012, p. 310). Finally, qualitative researchers must attempt to see what is being studied without expectation (Arthur, Waring, Coe & Hedges, 2012). In terms of my views on teaching writing and drama, I am an outsider to the American schooling system. Therefore, my expectations are quite open ended in this regard. However, my former employment as a Canadian kindergarten teacher has positioned me as an insider in terms of classroom experience with this particular age group. In this research, my expectations are rooted in past research and experience, however with the American kindergarten students as my subjects, I have much to learn from the data collected.

Throughout my research, it has been my intention to inform best practices for teachers by gathering socially constructed information and continually improving upon and building new knowledge (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). I have chosen action research as the methodology to help achieve these research aims.

**Action Research**

Action research focuses on improving the quality of an organization, a school, or a group (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Gagné (2014) summarizes action research as “research conducted for teachers by teachers” (p. 93). The assessment that action research is “…a single loop of planning, acting, observing and reflecting is only a beginning; if the process stops there it should not be regarded as action research at all. Perhaps it could be termed ‘arrested action research’” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 185). It is essential that the action cycle repeat itself continuously to inform the researcher with new queries,
problems and sometimes solutions (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action cycles may evolve over the course of several hours, days or even months depending on the process of re-thinking and planning.

Action researchers work in close proximity with their subjects in a natural setting. As far back as the 1940s and even today, researchers have argued that this proximity can distort and contaminate the events transpiring in the “natural” setting (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Conversely, those in favor of action research assert that familiarity between subject and researcher is often one of the most carefully planned and controlled elements of the research. This connection, they contend, enables teacher/researchers to pull away from the status quo and form a collaborative insider view of particular happenings in their classrooms (Schon, 1983). Within the bounds of action research, the classroom becomes a place where action and experience are distinctly linked in a transformational fashion and carried out “…as an opportunity to learn from unfolding experience” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 581). Practitioner researchers today see action research as a way to expand their own understandings of teaching practice (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Theoretically speaking the foundations “of action research in education are grounded in the importance that John Dewey gave to human experience and active learning in the generation of knowledge” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 673). Dewey refocused teachers from holding the role of instructor to embracing the role of professional reflective learner. Corey (1949) suggested that this contemplative role was more likely to create a collaborative community of researchers committed to best practices, human relations and partnerships in education. The scholastic research that had taken place up until that point had “very little effect upon the behavior of the very people
responsible for the publication” (p.148). For many teachers, the information being published about pedagogy (which was generated almost exclusively by academics) was not useful in a practical sense (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

To the extent possible, action research takes real concerns from real teachers and systematically seeks to interpret evidence in order to more accurately “reflect on whether the action has made a difference – and perhaps, as a result of what you have found, you may decide to start the whole cycle again” (Hall & Keynes, 2005, p. 10). The action researcher is an activist, vigorously working to bring about change. He/she is a critical educational researcher who imposes a dialectical view of social situations. The view seeks to uncover how subjective or objective conditions could constrain and limit action, aiming to explore how each condition can be improved. Action researchers are positioned “to improve particular practices, understandings and situations by acting in a deliberate and considered way in which understandings and values are consciously expressed in praxis” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.192). Teachers who conduct action research focus on student learning:

… within particular classrooms. Teacher-researchers have in-depth knowledge of their students and their specific classroom context. They are able to gather data daily and observe students systematically and regularly over long periods of time. Pedagogical knowledge gained through randomized controlled trials is often not as richly contextualized as that gained through collaborative action research (Stagg-Peterson, 2012, p. 2).

I began this research with the intent to improve a particular area of study (Hatch, 2012). With this in mind, I constructed questions based on daily happenings in my
previous classrooms; these queries became the starting point for this action research cycle (Stagg-Peterson, 2012). Teachers who participate in action research often grow more skilled in measuring student understanding and making use of this data to modify and enhance their teaching strategies and lesson delivery (Stagg-Peterson, 2012).

It should be noted that this study was designed to reflect practices and models of a single drama kindergarten classroom. The goal was and remains to observe and describe how this particular bounded system responded to drama as an intervention to nurture the young writer. The significance of this research lies in the fact that many educators have not yet been witness to, or even read accounts of, the ways in which drama may be helpful to emerging writers.

**Research Methods Context**

This action research took place over the course of 12 weeks in the summer and fall of 2015 at a public library in a small county in the southern United States. The children and the families who participated in this study heard about the literacy program while visiting the library where the research was to be held. The library staff helped promote the program, flyers were posted, and word spread quickly. There was no cost to enroll in the program. There were 16 child participants between four and six years of age, with 15 of them participating in the full study. One child was unable to continue in the program once the school year had begun, her days, the family explained, were too long for a four-year-old. The library was not on a direct bus route, so students who attended the program were driven by their own parents or car-pooled with others. For the first five weeks, the drama and literacy program took place every Monday night from 5:30 to 7:30.
Once the school year began we noticed that some of the younger children were tired by 7:30, so we chose to end fifteen minutes earlier.

Katherine Miller, the Early Childhood Educator who assisted me in this research, is a current Master of Education, Learning and Design graduate at Vanderbilt University. During the time of this research, Katherine was pursuing her postgraduate work in children’s emergent literacy skills. Her undergraduate degree is also from Vanderbilt, where she majored in Science and Early Childhood Education and Development. She has two years of classroom teaching experience in the public education system. In the spring of 2015, Katherine and I met while working together at Vanderbilt University. Wanting to gain more experience with research, Katherine agreed to work alongside me during this research and was compensated for her assistance with this study. Katherine was paid a wage of $15/hour for three hours every Monday night for 12 weeks. Throughout her participation in this research, she was also a full-time student and a tutor for struggling readers. Each night, as we cleaned up the classroom, Katherine and I spoke about the struggles and the accomplishments of the students who participated in this research. Many of the reflections that you find in this paper had their origins in those initial conversations with Katherine.

The classes for the study took place in the library’s “children’s room.” The room had walls adorned with paintings of children frolicking in the woods and a 20 x 15-foot pane of windows. One entire wall of the room was covered in cabinets. The room also housed a sink and a retractable wall that opened to create a very large space. Most importantly for our purposes were the puppet theater, an easel and white board and large circular tables. Each week, I brought my personal projector and computer, which enabled
me to project stories, images and video for the children to see. The library staff
continued to be supportive of the program, and didn’t seem to mind the noise level
coming from our classroom.

Weekly Data Collection

**The scaffolding of each lesson.** The research conducted at the library integrated
literacy skills and drama; most often we used story drama as the main form of lesson
delivery. Students became characters from books, used puppets to create completely new
stories or new endings and engaged their bodies to interpret the emotion of characters.
Hard, soft and reciprocating scaffolding were used in the delivery of these lessons
(Holton and Clarke, 2006; Saye & Brush, 2002).

Hard scaffolding occurred in the planning of the lessons. Each week, I created and
used PowerPoint presentations that were tailored to our lesson content and goals. Each
presentation was complete with visual aids, videos and language prompts. The
presentations were made to tap into prior knowledge, pre-teach vocabulary through
games and coach the students using question and answer formats. The images, too, were
used to visually aid and anchor student understanding. This hard scaffolding is a
predetermined support that hints and questions students, aiming to direct them through
their learning (Holton and Clarke, 2006). I planned, for example, to write an exemplar
story and to highlight the parts of a story, beginning, middle and end (Armbruster, Lehr,
& Osborn, 2001; Calkins et al., 2013). This hard scaffolding aimed to teach the students
slowly and by example. The first few occasions on which I scaffolded the parts of a story,
the students watched. Later, I asked for student volunteers to help me write exemplars and they were probed to think about what happened first, next and finally.

The soft scaffolding was exercised when circulating through the classroom as students worked. It took place after teacher modeling and while students engaged in group or solo work. The use of soft scaffolding, less predictable than hard scaffolding, positioned Katherine and I to listen and respond to students on the spot, directing them as the lesson progressed. Reciprocating scaffolding, on the other hand, offered even less certainty (Holton and Clarke, 2006). In a scenario where reciprocating scaffolding was employed, students were encouraged to share thoughts, knowledge and collaboratively work. Katherine and I gradually released control of the classroom, allowing students to author the learning. This collaborative work allowed students, on the same level, to communicate ideas and share (Stone, 1998).

**Routines and Nightly Schedule.** First, students arrived and signed themselves into our class. They selected their nametag and went to their table spot to work on their arrival book. Each week a written prompt or question was displayed in relation to our theme for the day. The question written usually gave a hint about the lesson for the day. Either Katherine or I orally dictated the message to the students as they arrived. While awaiting the arrival of the other students, the children responded to the question by drawing, writing and talking about the prompt. When students read the question they sometimes shared excitement and even a little nervousness about what activities would ensue that evening.
Table 1: *Routines and Nightly Schedule*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Routines and Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:15</td>
<td>Students begin arriving. Students work on answering a written prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30</td>
<td><em>Monday Night Talk Show</em> and warm up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:40</td>
<td>Drama Activity/game related to theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:50</td>
<td>Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>Main drama activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Writing activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Sharing Time and cool down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:15</td>
<td>Home time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At approximately 5:30 we began our session with the *Monday Night Talk Show*. Each week during the talk show puppets were special guests, their job was to give hints and pose important questions. I always began the talk show with a microphone in hand and these words, “Hello and welcome to the Monday Night Talk Show…” The information discussed during the talk show directly correlated with the planned activities for the evening. Students conversed with the puppets using words, actions and sometimes songs. This improvised gathering was followed up by a relating game or drama activity, then students had a break for snacks.

When snack was complete we launched into the theme driven whole group drama activity. During this main portion of our lesson, when students typically engaged in drama activities, students were asked to think, pair and share about ideas prior to performing or acting in role (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2006). In this case, the process
aided the product. Additional time for thinking benefited the students and their writing. We questioned the book characters and acted out the stories. If the characters in the book screamed, so did we. The students and I often became the characters from the stories we read. As the teacher and facilitator in the room, I was often moving in and out of role to guide and participate in the drama.

Lastly, nearing the end of our time together, students recited or repeated an author’s oath. The oath is a positive affirmation of the writing talent; it is recited with the children speaking as if they are soldiers.

**Image 1: Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Author’s Oath**

![Author’s Oath](classroom_powerpoint_slide)

Following the oath, the students began their writing. They had some instruction on what they could write. However, they were not penalized if they chose to write or draw something else. The important thing was that the students were excited to engage in
writing. Before students departed we shared our writing and participated in a whole group cool down activity.

Books and mentor texts. Central to story drama is the use of narrative, usually in the form of a book. There are certain things a teacher can do to make a book more favorable for a dramatic retell. These factors include reading the story more than one time and providing the students with enough time to ponder and consider the illustrations (Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Senechal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995), involving the students in concentrated discussions about stories that are shared in the classroom setting (Whitehurst et al., 1999), and providing opportunities for students to interpret stories through reader’s theater and dramatic retells (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). McCleaf, Nespeca and Reeves (2003) encourage educators to use storybooks with conflict and action. Books that have exciting content are often stimulating to read. McCleaf, Nespeca and Reeves (2003) further assert that the characters in the story should have distinct personalities. Characters with differing personalities and specific interests provide students with a platform for an engaging dramatic retell. Additionally, a strong dialogue between characters, even one that is repetitive is also helpful. Finally, the tale should immediately charm its listeners and it can have a happy tone or a moral lesson to it. The books that were chosen for this research were often adventures, with magical characters such as talking animals, kings and superheroes. Many of the books also had some level of suspense, an overarching question or an unsolved mystery. Most of the books had telling pictures that helped to facilitate understanding.
Table 2: Selection of Topics and Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week #</th>
<th>Anchor Texts</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRIOR</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meet Children: Learn about the children/families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1      | Johnny Apple Seed  
         Jodie Shepherd (2010) | - Biographical writing  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 2      | The Expedition  
         Willi Bauza (1975) | - Narrative writing  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 3      | This is Not a Box  
         Antoinette Portis (2011)  
         I Feel Orange Today  
         Patricia Godwin (2000) | - Recount writing (tell what happened to you)  
         - Adding emotion  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 4      | My Dad is a Superhero  
         Lily Lexington (2012) | - Procedure writing (how to make a sandwich)  
         - Explore & experience books  
         - Working on writing |
| 5      | If You Give a Mouse A Cookie  
         Laura Joffe Numeroff (2015) | - Narrative writing  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 6      | The Very Hungry Caterpillar  
         Eric Carle (1994) | - Narrative writing/Explanatory  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 7      | Where the Wild Things Are  
         Maurice Sendak (1963) | - Narrative writing  
         - Visualization  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 8      | Have I Got A Book for You!  
         Mélanie Watt (2009) | - Persuasive writing  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Responding and reacting in written form. |
| 9      | The Gruffalo  
         Julia Donaldson (2004) | - Narrative writing  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 10     | Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.  
         Judith Viorst (1987) | - Narrative writing  
         - Explore & experience the text  
         - Working on writing |
| 11     | Presentation of work | 5:30-6:30pm |

Analysis of Data

My analysis of student response to the drama lessons and subsequent writing lessons began with the video transcription process and the organization of all the data into spreadsheets. The spreadsheets helped me classify and arrange the data according to themes. Following this coding and theme-oriented organizing, I began noting connections between student responses, involvement and student written work. As patterns surfaced, I continued to contemplate the data and write about the connections I was pondering.
Table 3: *Summary of Qualitative Data Collection Methods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Teacher daybook and weekly PowerPoint lesson plan slides</td>
<td>Weekly notes and preparation for each class.</td>
<td>Classroom teacher/researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Teacher reflective voice recordings</td>
<td>Weekly observations recorded after our class.</td>
<td>Classroom teacher/researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Classroom Observations (Video Recorded)</td>
<td>Weekly recordings were analyzed during 3 separate reviews.</td>
<td>Classroom teacher/researcher, participants, ECE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Analyzing writing</td>
<td>Weekly writing pieces, too, were analyzed on 3 separate occasions.</td>
<td>Classroom teacher/researcher, participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Conversations with Early Childhood Educator (ECE)</td>
<td>Weekly observations with the ECE were recorded after each class.</td>
<td>Classroom teacher/researcher, ECE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Conversations with parents</td>
<td>Spoke with parents prior to research, on final night of research and following research.</td>
<td>Classroom teacher/researcher, parents of participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Questionnaires and conversations with parents</td>
<td>Questionnaires were complete on the first night of our research.</td>
<td>Parents of participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher daybook and weekly PowerPoint lesson plan slides.** In order to plan and explain the teaching strategies and learning activities that I used each week, a detailed daybook was put to use. All themes and activities were outlined in this book. Observations of student attendance and reluctance or motivation to enter the classroom, on any given night, were also included. Furthermore, a detailed PowerPoint presentation was created for each week of this research. Each presentation consisted of roughly 30 presentation slides that carried the students through the lesson. The presentations made use of visual aids, songs and videos. Each day plan and PowerPoint lesson plan was reviewed and highlighted. From this review, important observations, successful ideas,
and potentially relevant reflections were recorded. These ideas and reflections were then assembled according to underlying themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Teacher reflective voice recordings.** Following each lesson, I used a voice/audio recorder to record my thoughts and reflections about the lesson. This recording was taken upon leaving the library so that important observations from the lesson would not be forgotten. Many of the recordings hold observations of participation and student enthusiasm. These ideas and reflections were listened to and relevant sections of the audio were transcribed.

**Classroom Observations (Video Recorded).** Student and parent consent were given to take pictures and video for the purposes of this research. Video recordings were taken on each of the 11 nights that this research was conducted, the initial meet and greet night was not recorded. There were three video cameras in the classroom each night. Additional video footage was taken to interview children during and after the writing process. Each video was viewed four to five times and students’ words, actions and conversations were observed. When the audio was clear enough, all dialogue was coded using the central themes of this research. Emerging themes were then grouped together according to their commonalities. Furthermore, each student was observed individually and his/her progression through the 11 weeks of our program was noted based on the common themes.

**Analyze writing.** Each week nearly all of the 15 participants completed one or more pieces of writing, all varying in length. At times the writing consisted of drawings and scribbles; however, towards the end of the research students were elaborating on ideas, including more words, and creating more sentences. The student writing was coded
and analyzed based on the themes emerging from the research and the research questions. Student writing was a good indicator of the connections that were being made during our drama lessons and while students were conversing at their table groups. In the margins of the transcripts, some of the notes I made were about student engagement and understanding of the drama. I also wrote about individual student stamina while writing and how the drama lessons affected the length and breadth that some students were willing to write. Any significant questions that I had about student inflection and student body language were also noted so that I could view the video data once again and look for these subtleties. Additionally, I recorded the occasions on which students, in their writing, stuck to the exact story we had acted out in the drama and times where students created a new drama with some similar themes. These differences in story often equated to more time spent thinking, so time spent talking and thinking about writing was also observed.

**Conversations with Early Childhood Educator (ECE).** As previously mentioned, our lessons typically ended between 7:15 and 7:30p.m. After all participants had left the building, Katherine, ECE and I would spend roughly 15 minutes discussing the evening’s events. Since Katherine was a Master of Education student at Vanderbilt University at the time of this research, she was a perfect comrade to help in the development and reflection process. The topics discussed were not pre-set; instead, conversation was free flowing and based on our observations of all aspects of the lesson, including student participation and level of enthusiasm. We did, however, record them to later reference and transcribe. Katherine and I also corresponded via email to share lessons and lesson ideas prior to delivering them. We also wrote about the students’ responses and interactions and
discussed how we could better engage certain students and what the best practice was for particular scenarios. I kept records of our email correspondences regarding students and lessons.

**Conversations with parents.** Parents often communicated feelings about the program during drop-off and pick-up times. Katherine often discussed their comments, particularly when there was an idea for improvement. For example, when the school year began several parents brought it to my attention that their children were very tired after our sessions, as their days were approaching 14 hours outside the home. After this Katherine and I decided to offer the parents several different times during which they could participate; when they put it to the group for a vote. Parents also spoke with us about how our lessons were extending into the home. On the final night of our class, I spoke with each of the parents individually and noted their comments about the program as a whole. Their reflections helped me to get a general sense of satisfaction with the program as well as the extent to which the parents would want to participate again if a similar program was offered.

**Questionnaires and conversations with parents - four weeks later.** A month after the final night of our program, I phoned and spoke to the parents once again. I asked them such questions as: “Since the final drama and literacy class, have you noticed your child engaging in a less-than-average amount, an average amount, or a more-than-average amount of dramatic play time?” Parents’ anecdotal comments and stories about their children aided my assessment of the program’s success and lasting effects on the child’s desire to engage in drama and/or write. An inductive approach was used to analyze this data; inductive methods allow the researcher to condense raw textual data
into a clear and concise summary. Inducting the data from the questionnaires enabled an evaluation process where summarizing the research findings was not the only goal. As the questionnaires were reviewed, the research objectives were considered and any data directly relating to the research themes questions was transcribed accordingly.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I have chosen to present my findings from this 11-week drama and literacy program qualitatively. The findings of this research have helped to address the research questions below.

1) How does participating in dramatic lessons support student engagement in writing?

2) How do students view themselves as writers and how do they feel about writing after participating in dramatic lessons?

3) How does scaffolding lesson content encourage student connections in the dramatic retellings of stories and in the subsequent writing activities?

A rich description of the events that transpired during our library drama and literacy class will follow. It is my intention to present dramatic kindergarten teaching possibilities that include writing in a cross-curricular fashion. The story that follows will be supported with qualitative evidence by way of student written work, student responses to drama, teacher and ECE observations and parent communication. Throughout the course of compiling these findings I will be referring back to my research questions and asking if and how drama lessons supported writing, how students feel about writing following our drama lesson, and whether students are making connections from the drama to their writing.

To estimate the level of written expression in this research, every piece of writing (children typically engaged in writing between seven and ten pieces) received a rating for each aspect of a writing task (Clay, 1994). The ratings fell under three categories:
language level, message quality and directional principals (Clay, 1994). This evaluation process places a piece of writing in a not yet satisfactory/developing (score of one to four) or probably satisfactory (score of five to six) category by using the Rating Technique for Early Progress (Clay, 1994). What follows is a detailed review of this written analysis for six of the sixteen children who participated in this research.

Rating the dramatic involvement that each child had in this research, involved viewing video of each child and their participation in the drama activities. During these observations of video, student participation was rated as independent or reliant. If a child was said to be independent, he/she did not necessitate any extra prompts or encouragement from the teacher to participate. If the teacher was required to additionally motivate a child, the child was rated as reliant on the teacher for the motivation necessary to participate in the drama activities. The same qualifiers were used to estimate the level of involvement in each written lesson.

**Weekly Detailed Descriptions**

All things considered, scholars concur that the makings of a story involve: (1) a beginning- including the naming of characters and place; (2) a middle- a series of events that rise to an eventual climax; and (3) an end – the culmination of the story, where questions are answered and parties find resolve (Spinillo & Pinto, 1994). With this in mind, the aim of my creative drama teaching was to situate writing during or after dramatic experiences expecting to create deeper opportunities for story writing and reflections.

What follows are detailed descriptions of each night of this research, written in a week-by-week format.
**Week One.** As students arrived to our classroom they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. In the corner, toys such as Legos and dolls were displayed to help transition students into the room on the first night. Many of the students went to the toys when transitioning from their parents to the room. When all of the students had arrived we began our class by moving our bodies. We projected an online dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015). Though all of the children were staring at the screen, only a few children actually moved their bodies. I could see that the students were a little apprehensive, so I made my movements bigger and more energetic. A couple of the students began to participate. Their participation was encouraging for me, so I praised them and circulated throughout the room, attempting to win over more of the nervous faces. Sadly, I was unsuccessful. Students did, in fact, move their bodies while I was in close proximity to them, when I moved to another area, however, they resorted to staring at the projection screen. The students did not know one another, apart from a couple of students who attended the same school, and I hoped that as the weeks went on the Monday night group would become more of a community and less of a group of strangers all listening to the same story.

Next, the students met Kevin (the monster puppet, see Appendix A for all puppet descriptions) and received their alliteration nametags, which read, for example, Adorable Annie. Students then heard the story of Johnny Appleseed; in the story Johnny’s love of the land is described (Shepherd, 2010). When the story was complete, Kevin asked the students to talk with their partner about their likes and their favorite things to do (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2006). Then, students shared their ideas with Kevin. With the story complete, I announced the very first *Monday Night Talk Show* (See Appendix C for a
more detailed description of the Monday Night Talk Show). I explained to the students that Johnny Appleseed would be visiting the class and as I looked for him in the audience a student volunteered to be Johnny. As a class, we asked Johnny questions about his life; some of these questions were answered in the book and some were not. Several students found it humorous to see a new friend acting as a character. All of the students played along with the drama, though class involvement was at varying levels. Next, Kevin shared a story that he had written about his life. In the story, Kevin is pictured on a bike, watching television, and even baking cookies.

Image 2 & 3: Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Kevin’s Story

I really like to ride my bike. I ride it so fast. I always beat my mom and dad.
The children guessed at Kevin’s favorite pastimes and shared similarities as well as differences in their tastes. They acted out their favorite things to do simultaneously and moved around the room to music. Lastly, the students began the writing process. They were given some writing ideas, for example, I asked the students, “Would you like to write a book like Kevin? I know he would like to read a book about you!” In general, though, they were asked to write about anything they wanted to. The students were told that they could draw or write and if they could not write, Katherine or I could write what they said.

At the end of the evening, we engaged in a cool-down, breathing exercise video called, *Time to Chill* (5 A Day Fitness- You Tube, 2011). As was the case with the introduction video, most students simply stared at the screen without moving. To be honest, I worried no one would return for week two.
Week Two. As students arrived to our classroom on week two, they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. In the corner, toys (such as blocks and dolls) were displayed, once again, to help transition students into the room (there were several students who had difficulty leaving their mother or father’s side). It was my goal to develop a routine and familiarity as quickly as possible, so when all of the students had arrived we began our class, just as we had in the previous week, by moving our bodies. We projected an on-line dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015). On this night, a few more students participated in the dancing.

Next, I formally began our evening by hosting the *Monday Night Talk Show*. I asked the students, my audience, if they had ever been on an adventure and if so, had they ever gone in search of buried treasure. The talk show generated conversation, excitement and ideas. With their interest spiked, I shared the book, *The Expedition* with the students (Baum, 1975). This book has no words. As a class, we quietly looked through the pages, pausing to discuss our observations and make predictions. Once the book was complete, I acted in role as a General. To show the children that I was no longer acting as myself, I turned my back on them and changed my posture. I re-entered the scene as the General. My shoulders were back and my head was high. I had a stern look on my face as I paced around them. I asserted, “Soldiers?! Get into line formation!” And, “Soldiers! That’s not how we get this ship ready for an expedition!” “I didn’t hear a yes sir!” The students giggled and chorally answered, “Yes, Sir!” They too, held their heads high and pulled their shoulders back in order to show that they were no longer students, they were now soldiers. As we began our re-enactment of the story, one student took on the role of lead
soldier while others shouted warnings and cut back brush with their imaginary swords. We made our way around the island (the classroom) and stole the native temple, bringing it back to our boat. Before we could get there, though, the lead soldier came up with a new idea. He thought it best to return the temple to the native people. After a short pause and a simple head nod, our acting soldiers agreed and began the process of returning the temple to its rightful owners.

Image 4: Photo of Student, Map Making.

Following the re-enactment, the students were asked if they wanted to make a treasure map. Marvin (the puppet) made a video about how he would make a treasure map. His thoughts were the narration of the video and the hope was that students would use a similar thought pattern to make their treasure map.
Several treasure maps were shown and Marvin showed the students a treasure map that he had made. Students used large brown paper to create their maps.

At the end of the evening, we engaged in the same cool-down, breathing exercise video from week one called, *Time to Chill (5 A Day- You Tube, 2011)*.

**Week Three.** As students arrived to our classroom on week three, they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. Additionally, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. On this particular night, the board said: I feel… and pictures of sad, happy and angry faces were drawn. Katherine and I read the question to each student and showed them a possible answer. Moreover, the alphabet was written on the board. Some students chose to copy
the alphabet while others chose to answer the writing prompt. No toys were available for free play this week.

In keeping with the routine from the previous two weeks, when all of the students had arrived we began our class by moving our bodies. We projected an online dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015). On this night, quite a few more students participated in the dancing.

Next, I began our *Monday Night Talk Show*. I asked one of the puppets, Annabelle (an obnoxious and forgetful cow) if she had ever been really, really happy. She shared a story of a time where she was really happy. Next, I asked the students similar questions about feelings. The students chose a hand puppet to help express each different emotion. They acted out I feel statements associated with hand puppets. When then acted out scene cards with different emotions on them. One of the cards read, “Your ice cream just fell on the floor. How do you feel?”
After this introduction we played the game “This is not a…” The students practiced acting out and ‘imagining’ that a given item was something it was not. For example, one student acted out a scene where a pencil was a telephone. When reflecting on past lessons with the Monday night group, it seemed as though I had been observing mostly right there actions. Some of the students were not able to see beyond what the text offered or convey new thoughts. I was hoping that this imaginative activity would help to expand their thinking.

Later on in the evening, I distributed ribbon wands. The students then moved around the room with the ribbon wand in hand to the music from Dr. Seuss’ *Many Colored Days* (Seuss, 1996). This portion of the lesson heard sad, happy, playful, confused, menacing and angry music. Each emotion was connected to a color, however the emotion was unclear until the song began. For example: *Yellow* (Yellow, The Idea), is
a piece of music that gives one the feeling of being in an actual tornado. The song emotions were a surprise to the students each time a color was selected.

**Image 7: Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Music/Color Slide**

The children chose a color and then moved their bodies according to the music played for that color. They leapt and smiled for the playful song; hid and scurried for the menacing song.
Finally, students wrote emotion messages. They were given sentences frames to help with the writing process and to begin to encourage independence. For example, I feel _____ when I see yellow. Or, I feel ________ when I see green. To end our evening, we engaged in the same cool-down, breathing exercise video from week one and two called “Time to Chill” (5 A Day- You Tube, 2011).

**Week Four.** As students arrived to our classroom on week four, they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. Additionally, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. On this particular night, the board said: If you were a superhero what would you be able to do? A drawing of a superhero flying, combined with the word fly, was written as an example. Moreover, there were blank masks placed at each child’s spot at the table. The students were then
invited to color or decorate their masks. Some students chose to answer the writing prompt and others chose to decorate their masks.

**Image 9: Photo of Students, Super Heroes.**

In keeping with the routine from the previous weeks, when all of the students had arrived we began our class by moving our bodies. We projected an online dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015). That night, we noticed quite a few more students participated in the dancing.

Next, I began our *Monday Night Talk Show* in role as a super hero. As Superhero Justine, I flew around the room (clothed in my cape and mask) prior to greeting the students. Next, I shared my stories of heroism with the students. Then, I asked one of the puppets, Marvin, questions about his super powers. The students already knew that Marvin was a hearing impaired and non-verbal puppy, but they did not know about his superpowers until today. In order to find out more about Marvin’s powers, I modeled
yes/no questions, so that the students could engage with and learn more about Marvin. Next, the students in the class turned to a partner and shared their superhero powers. The think-pair-share time was helpful to many of the students; their answers after discussing with a friend were constructed in a more logical sequence than they were when students were cold called (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2006). Liam, in particular, found the think-pair-share time was useful in order to really consider his superhero. He thought for some time, then turned and spoke enthusiastically about his superpowers and finally he confidently shared those ideas with me. Following our share, we read the book, My Dad is a Superhero (Lexington, 2012). Then, the students were caped (knighted) as superheroes. With very little prompting, the students quickly embarked on imagining life as a superhero in our library space. When it was time for Liam to receive his cape, he had already developed the super powers he would possess in his mind and he had voiced them to a friend. So, acting it out was made that much simpler. He swirled, twirled, dipped and accelerated around the room. Next, the class acted out potential scenes where superheroes would be needed and discussed how best to save the day. The children puffed out their chest and exclaimed, “I’ll save you!” as they soared to rescue a cat in a tree (a scene they had created).

Later on in the evening, the students were challenged to put their superhero actions and ideas onto paper. Without any additional coaxing, Liam quickly took to writing and drawing about his superhero powers. He had a list in his head and he asked that it be written in a specific order. “My pretty much powers are” he said, “speed, strong, tornado/fly, blasting.” Liam was excited to put his crayon to the paper because the scaffolding had slowly led him to a complete view of his superhero.
Image 10: Student Work, Super Heroes.

Image 11: Photo of Students, Super Heroes.
Finally, the superheroes drew themselves, writing information about their powers and super abilities. As our night came to a close, we engaged in the same cool-down, breathing exercise video from all of our previous weeks called *Time to Chill* (5 A Day-You Tube, 2011).

**Week Five.** As per usual, while students were arriving to our classroom they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. Additionally, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. On this particular night, the board question read: What is your favorite thing to eat? What happens when you eat it? Moreover, the alphabet and kindergarten/first grade high-frequency Dolch words were written on the board (Dolch, 1948). Some students chose to copy the alphabet/Dolch words, while others chose to answer the writing prompt (Dolch, 1948). As the weeks progressed, children were more eager to enter the room and begin writing, regardless of the prompt.

**Image 12: Photo of Students, Arrival Time.**
In keeping with the routine from the previous weeks, when all of the students had arrived we began our class by moving our bodies. Once again, we projected an online dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015).

Next I began our *Monday Night Talk Show*. I asked one of the puppets, Seth (a sinister snake) what he liked to eat and what happened when he ate that food. Seth said, ”I like to eat sssssssssmores and then I like to have a glass of milk” (the message was told in a similar fashion to the story book, *If you Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 1985). After listening to Seth, students responded with their own “I like… and then” statements. Next, students engaged in make believe play by using real bowls, whisks and measuring cups to imagine making the food they would most like to eat. As an example, a few students made cookies with me. Then each student made his or her own favorite food. One child imagined making s’mores, while another imagined popping popcorn and
another imagined making a whole plate of spaghetti. Then they were asked to think-pair-share (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2006) about this question: “What would happen if we gave a cookie to a mouse?” The students acted out the answer to this question by imaginatively eating the food they had just prepared. Students ran in circles, had imaginary food fights and portrayed children whose eyes were bigger than their stomachs.

For the main portion of the lesson, students listened to the story, *If you Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 1985). When the story had been read, they chose an animal mask/hat to wear. Then they created and acted out their own stories with at least three parts. This was modeled by Annabelle (the cow puppet) who had crafted her own “If you…then you” story. At this point in the evening the students, sporting their animal caps, were challenged to think of a story for their character. They began creating their own if, then stories using the animal caps, and the improvisational drama we had just engaged in, as a starting point. The students acted out the stories first with partners and then they began the writing process.

*Image 13: Photo of Students, Puppy Animal Cap.*
At their writing tables, the students drew and wrote their *if then* stories, some of which were humorous in nature. As our night came to a close, we engaged in the same cool-down, breathing exercise video from all of our previous weeks called *Time to Chill* (5 A Day, You Tube).

**Week Six.** As students arrived and signed into our classroom they immediately noticed and commented that the typical room layout had been altered. Our classroom was, in fact, set up differently on this day, which generated a lot of conversations surrounding what we would be doing that evening. There were no tables available for students to sit at as I had moved them in order to make room for the POD. The POD is a portable plastic, inflatable room. The POD inflates using a box fan and has a plastic doorway. It comfortably fits 16-20 students and a teacher. The POD measures about 12 feet x 9 feet and when it is not in use, it is kept in a large red fabric bag, reminiscent of the sack Santa
Claus carries. Some of the students initially supposed that we would be “going to the North pole” that night. A photo of the POD can be seen below.

**Image 14: Classroom Photo, The Pod.**

As per usual, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. On one particular night, the board question read: What do you already know about butterflies? Additionally, the alphabet and kindergarten/first grade high-frequency Dolch words were written on the board (Dolch, 1948). Some students chose to copy the alphabet/Dolch words, while others chose to answer the writing prompt (Dolch, 1948). In keeping with the routine from the previous weeks, when all of the students had arrived we began our class by moving our bodies. Once again, we projected an online dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015).

Next, I began our *Monday Night Talk Show* as a human sized caterpillar named Mrs. Caterpillar. I told the students that I was very hungry and I asked them what I should eat. One student said macaroni, another green apples and Karen said that she
loved frozen grapes; she proposed that I should (as the caterpillar) give them a try. I asked one of the puppets, Claire (a purple butterfly) what she likes most about being a butterfly. She said, she liked to eat the nectar from inside the flowers. I asked the students if they had any questions or wanted to share what they already knew about butterflies or caterpillars. Many of the students already knew some details about the lifecycle of a butterfly. Still, Claire helped to point out the most important elements of the lifecycle: Egg, caterpillar, chrysalis and butterfly. Claire was a fairy godmother butterfly. She helped many of the caterpillars to build their chrysalises and eventually become butterflies. Next, the students listened as Mrs. Caterpillar (Justine) read the story, The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Carle, 1969). In role as Mrs. Caterpillar, I replaced all of the places in the story where the author said, “…the caterpillar” with “I” or “me”.

Image 15: Photo of Student, The Very Hungry Caterpillar.
Upon completion of the book we discussed the parts that stood out to us. The students lead this conversation. Next, I asked the children if they would like to become a teeny tiny egg. Most of the students in the class appeared excited and formed their bodies into tiny round eggs on the floor. At this time, Katherine and I scattered leaves around the children and when they woke up, they began eating. We played music that replicated the sounds of nature for this phase of the caterpillar’s life. Without a word, the children/caterpillars ate. While they ate, I began to inflate the POD (the chrysalis). Following this initial portion of the lesson, the students acted out the remaining days of the story. Next, each child entered the chrysalis by crawling as caterpillars through the
POD door and laying down. The students, though they did not speak, were visibly excited to undergo their transformation into a butterfly. As the lights turned off and on and off and on (to symbolize day and night) the children waited for their transformation to take place. On the 14th day, or the 14th time we turned the lights off and on, upbeat music began to play. The change in music symbolized the transformation had taken place. Each child emerged from the chrysalises pumping his/her wings back and forth and eventually flying from our POD.

At their writing tables, the students drew and wrote about their life as a caterpillar and eventually a butterfly. Some students emulated Eric Carle’s (1969) writing, while other students wrote stories that reflected the actual drama that had just taken place in our classroom. As Karen wrote her caterpillar tale, associations could be seen from our Monday Night Talk Show that took place earlier in the evening. She wrote, “On Friday, she [the caterpillar] ate frozen grapes.” More than an hour after we introduced the topic during our talk show, Karen was making connections and expanding her thinking.
As our night came to a close, we engaged in the same cool down, breathing exercise video from all of our previous weeks called, *Time to Chill* (5 A Day- You Tube, 2011).

**Week Seven.** Upon arrival, students were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. Additionally, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. On this particular night, the board said: What is a wild rumpus? What is a wild thing? Do they dance? Do they sing? Do they run? Do they swing? Furthermore, students were prompted to decorate, color or add words to a wild thing mask, which was placed at each child’s table spot. In keeping with the routine from the previous weeks, when all of the students had arrived, we began our class by moving our bodies. Once again, we projected an online dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015).

Next, I began our *Monday Night Talk Show*. I asked the students questions about Wild Things. First they thought about the questions, next they talked with a partner and
lastly, they share their thoughts with our groups. Following the group share, students became more prepared to take chances during our movement exercise. They used their bodies to show how they thought Wild Things (Sendak, 1963) would walk, run, talk, sing, and even dance. They then completed decorating the Wild Thing costumes, which were (Whole Foods grocery bags that had face openings and zigzag necklines).

**Image 17: Photo of Student, Wild Thing**

We then read the book, *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) in order to compare our thoughts about Wild Things and what the book actually said about them. Once we reached the middle of the book (the part where the wild rumpus begins) the students, adorned in their handmade costumes, brought the pages of this imaginative story to life and began acting out the rumpus. Quite naturally, the students fell into roles as Wild Things and I joined in on the dramatic action. We roared, we danced and we pretended to swing from trees. One student even took on the role of Max, the king of the Wild Things (seen below).

**Image 18 & 19: Photo of Students, Wild Things**
The story images were made into slides and projected in order to help lead the students through the rest of the story. We added to the story by asking “What does a Wild Thing do in the morning, at noon, at night?” We acted out our days as Wild Things and shared, through spoken word, how our character passed the time. While they were acting I put a spot light on several students, I held my hand over each child’s head and asked questions to confirm their understanding of the story, for example: “How do you feel now that a new King has arrived?” and “How do you feel now that Max is leaving?” the students then shared how their character felt at that paused moment in the story. When we had completed the book we discussed Max’s journey and talked about what the Wild Things would do now that Max was gone. With these ideas fresh in their minds, the
students returned to their writing tables and began to write and draw with their Wild

Thing in mind. At the end of the evening, we projected an online cool-down, breathing exercise

video used in all of our previous lessons called, *Time to Chill* (5 A DAY- You Tube, 2011). By this point in the research the students knew the relaxation video by memory. They could close their eyes and fluidly follow along with the motions of the video, they breathed deeply and truly seemed to use the time to relax.

**Week Eight.** Once again, as students arrived to our classroom, they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. In keeping with the previous weeks, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. On this particular night, the board said: If you had $1000 what would you buy? This question was decided upon for two reasons. Firstly, the book we studied that night was *Have I Got a Book for You!* (Watt, 2009). Secondly, the prompt would help students to think about money and purchasing items. While students arrived, the alphabet and kindergarten/first grade high-frequency Dolch words were also written on the board and several students took to copying them in their journals/books (Dolch, 1948). Some students chose to copy the alphabet or the Dolch words, while others chose to answer the writing prompt. When all of the students had arrived, we began our class by moving our bodies. Next, we projected the on-line dance music video called *Get Your Body Movin’* and then I began our *Monday Night Talk Show* (GoNoodle, 2015).

First, I tried to sell the students meaningless items (a piece of ripped paper and a broken pencil) for high prices. Unfortunately, they happily agreed to buy the high priced
and meaningless items. Next, I sought to help the children further understand the meaningless aspect of this activity, students were asked if they would need a fan in the winter or a heater in the summer. The analogy, even when acted out, was lost on the students. Katherine and I tried to act this scene out to better illustrate how silly it would be for a polar bear, living in the ice, to have a fan to keep him cool. The teacher-acting didn’t seem to connect, either. Then, I tried to sell the students a heater in the summer. I wondered if the opposite example would help with lightbulb moments. Even at this point, some of the students wanted to buy the heater from me. At this point, using Kevin (the monster puppet) as my helper, I explained that these would be silly things to spend money on. Some of the students appeared to understand after this explicit instruction.

Following our book introduction, and seeing that the introduction was a flop, we played another round of ‘This is not a…but it’s a….’ with a piece of paper. To help reinforce our creativity, we put on our imagination glasses (fictional glasses used to help us see things in a deeper way). The students had grown more familiar with the game and were grasping it more quickly. Next, in an effort to connect the game to our nights lesson, we asked students if they would buy the items we had created. This again, confused them. The idea was too abstract, and more concrete instruction was needed, especially since most students don’t interact with the act of purchasing items daily.

While reading the book, *Have I got a book for you!* (Watts, 2009), I used frequent check-ins to confirm understanding. Students seemed generally puzzled about the ideas in the book and believed the main character in the book was giving us a deal when he offered us 10 boring books for the price of one. Only a few students were able to grasp the idea that the Cat Salesman was *sweet talking* us. Most felt that more was always more,
no matter what the more was. I made several analogies and I strained to explain the concept in different ways, all to no avail. Katherine, too, joined in on the explanation train, though it did not seem to solidify this concept in the minds of all of our students.

At last, I divided the students into groups and asked them to use puppets to sell a boring book (exactly what was sold in the story). At the time, I wondered if the use of the puppet would help to solidify the ideas of the book in the students’ minds. Each of the groups experienced some trouble transferring the ideas from book to the scene. In the end, most students presented scenes that told story of someone selling something, and someone buying something. I ended this section of our evening rather quickly. The difficulty the students experienced in our drama and thinking time carried over into our writing block of time. Students did not know what to write and were confused about the goal, which is the exact opposite outcome a teacher would hope for after a drama lesson. Despite their best efforts, the main focus of the lesson had been lost. This loss had absolutely nothing to do with the students, their achievement, or their attention to the topic. Instead, it had everything to do with my errors as an educator. I had not selected an appropriate mentor text, I had decided to try and help the students understand even though the room was telling me to abandon ship, and after all of this I had expected the students to write with passion and creativity. Rookie move.
Image 20: Student Work, Week Eight

It can shoot out a slide and when you go on the slide it takes you all the way to dinosaur time! 100 + 101 it can turn into a submarine and it can turn into a canoe and it can turn into a blimp and it can turn into an airplane and it can also turn into a boat!

Image 21: Photo of Students, Cool Down Movement Video (5 A DAY)
At the end of the long and somewhat frustrating evening, we projected an on-line cool-down, breathing exercise video used in all of our previous lessons called, *Time to Chill* (5 A DAY- You Tube, 2011).

Week Eight was very discouraging, that said, Week Eight helped me to know this group in a more distinctive way. Prior to this failed lesson, on my part, I had not witnessed such confusion or seen so many students who lacked direction in their writing. The writing that I gathered from the students, during Week Eight, was a good indicator of what writing looks like when a lesson is not made completely clear to students. The writing from Week Eight, lacked the direction, enthusiasm, and creativity that the writing from other weeks had possessed. If Week Eight taught me anything, it is what I should not do. It forced me to dig deeply, to reflect on student scaffolding, and to center in on topics that the students enjoy participating in.

**Week Nine.** As students arrived to our classroom, they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. Additionally, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. One night the question read, “What kind of creature do you think would live in a deep, dark wood?” Underneath the question was the image of a creature with very small red eyes, a spikey back and claw like hands. As was the case in past weeks, the alphabet and kindergarten/first grade high-frequency Dolch words were also on display for student reference and use (Dolch, 1948). Some students chose to copy the alphabet/Dolch words, while others chose to answer the writing prompt (Dolch, 1948). One of the students, upon entering the room, was uninterested in our night and even expressed a desire to go home. In an effort to change
his mind, his father read him the prompt on the white board. Before anyone could blink, the student was at his seat imagining what this ‘deep dark wood’ creature would look like.

In keeping with the routine from the previous weeks, when all of the students had arrived, we began our class by moving our bodies. Once again, we projected an on-line dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015).

In order to tap into prior knowledge and help students to share ideas, we began the *Monday Night Talk Show*. I surveyed the students asking them what lives in a deep, dark wood and what is a Gruffalo (Donaldson, 2004). “What does he/she look like, sound like and walk like?” I asked. The students used their bodies to show and tell their thoughts about a Gruffalo. Next, the students heard the story of *The Gruffalo* (2004) by Julia Donaldson. In this scenario, the scaffolding used was a visual and vocabulary prompt. In our book, *The Gruffalo* (2004) the repetitive prose included the phrase ‘…in the deep dark wood’. When this language presented itself in our read aloud the children in our class said the words chorally with me. The familiarity with the story made it easier for the students to be involved and I believe that this prior exposure and understanding increased their participation. Following our story time, the students chose a facemask representing a character (mouse, fox, snake, owl, and the Gruffalo) from the story. Using the projected story slides for assistance, the students retold the story using their own words and phrases. The retell went like this:

**Teacher:** The fox saw the mouse and the mouse looked good. So he said…

**Fox:** Hey Mouse, want to come to my house?

**Mouse:** I’m meeting a Gruffalo, I can’t.

**Teacher:** The fox had never heard of a Gruffalo, so he said [pause]

“Gruffalo...?”

**Fox:** What’s a Gruffalo?
Mouse: He has big purple bumps[pause] and spike on his back and his body is hairy and he’s big.
Teacher: The fox felt scared, so he said….. The fox said…
Fox: Ahhh!

Image 22: Photo of Students, The Gruffalo

Throughout the course of the retell, students were spotlighted. Spotlighting is a technique in which the teacher pauses the action of a drama to hear more from individual characters. The teacher moves around the room and holds his/her hand over a child’s head, and the child answers a question posed from their character’s point of view. When I stopped the drama to ask, “How does the little mouse really feel when he says…”
students chimed in with their responses. Next, the students, eager to begin their writing, laid their bodies on large pieces of brown paper (three feet by two feet). Katherine and I traced their figures and they began to draw and write about their own Gruffalo.

**Image 23: Classroom PowerPoint Slide, My Life Sized Gruffalo**

Katherine and I shared our ideas in a think-aloud format. We projected examples of drawn Gruffalos and talked about their personalities, likes and dislikes and their physical features. I modelled the phrases that came to mind when I was writing about my Gruffalo. When I was stuck on what to write next, the students contributed ideas and connections from our read-aloud.
Image 24: *Classroom PowerPoint Slide, Gruffalo*

![Gruffalo PowerPoint Slide](Image24)

- What do you see?
- What will you draw when you make your Gruffalo?
- What will the Gruffalo’s name be?
- What does your Gruffalo like to do for fun?
- Where does your Gruffalo live? The rainforest?? The Smokey Mountains? The North Pole?

Image 25: *Photo of Student, My Life Sized Gruffalo*

![Student drawing a life-sized Gruffalo](Image25)
At the end of the evening, students presented their Gruffalo drawings, explaining how their Gruffalo was different or that same as the character from our book. Then we projected an online cool-down, breathing exercise video used in all of our previous lessons called, *Time to Chill* (5 A DAY - You Tube, 2011).

**Week Ten.** As students arrived to our classroom, they were invited to draw, write or stamp on pre-made booklets and colorful paper. Additionally, a question was written on the classroom write board with an example answer. On this particular night, the whiteboard read: I wonder what would happen on a really bad day? A picture was drawn with a child bearing a sad face, the word sad was also written. A word bank was also communicated on our white board in order to help the children select words for their arrival activity. In keeping with the routine from the previous weeks, when all of the students had arrived, we began our class by moving our bodies. Once again, we projected an online dance music video called, *Get Your Body Movin’* (GoNoodle, 2015).

Next, I began our Monday Night Talk Show by asking the students about their horrible, really bad days. Kevin (the friendly monster puppet) shared some stories of really bad days with the students and they echoed back similar themes. Afterward, the entire class acted out some of the scenarios that students had shared, with three or four children acting in each scene. One scene, suggested by a student, was a car full of children who were on their way to drama class. The car was stopped on the highway because of traffic and the kids were having a very bad day. The scene was a real life observation and connection to our learning, one that many of the students in our class could relate to. Then, students heard the story of Alexander (from the book *Alexander*...
and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (Viorst, 1987)) and his unfortunate day. The students then used their bodies and facial expressions to show how Alexander felt during each portion of the story. One student acted as Alexander so that we could ask him questions to understand more about his bad day. We unpacked the story by using a “first, next, then and finally” model to guide our understanding (Stead & Hoyt, 2011). After diving deeper into what makes a bad day the students were ready to author their own pieces and most had no shortage of ideas, so for the tenth and final time they penned stories based on our drama experiences.

**Image 26 & 27: Student Work, My Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.**
At the end of the evening, students presented their bad day illustrations and stories. Then we projected our online cool-down, breathing exercise video used in all of our previous lessons called, *Time to Chill* (5 A DAY- You Tube, 2011).

**Focus Children- Case studies**

Fifteen children participated in the drama and literacy program. Six children were selected as focus children for this research. Purposeful sampling was utilized to select the six kindergarten aged students. Three boys and three girls were selected. Students from a variety of different developmental levels and ages were also definitively selected. Children who had experienced formal schooling and those who had not, were also chosen. At this time, who the children are outside of the classroom, as writers and participators in this research, will be described. All names are pseudonyms.
Ryan’s Profile and his Learning

Ryan and his family. Ryan, a happy, playful and creative five-year-old, is the middle child in his family, with one older and one younger sister. Both of Ryan’s parents are employed and actively involved in his life. Ryan’s father, Jack, works in the music industry and his mother, Liv, is the owner of a popular children’s boutique. Jack and Liv went to college and have made the education of their children a top priority. Ryan attends a local public pre-school. “Ryan is easy,” observed Jack; “The hardest thing is limiting him to one or two shows on TV each night.” When he is not watching TV he’s building his own obstacle courses and following maps to fictional buried treasures.

Prior to this research, Ryan’s parents commented that he was very energetic and easily excited about learning. He frequently used his imagination and liked playing alone and with other children. When I asked Liv what her goals for Ryan were, she answered that she, “…hope(s) he is able to be happy in his chosen career path. Jack and I both love what we do and we’ve tried to show our kids that you can be happy at work, you can make a living in the arts and you can do it all without sacrificing your passions.”

Ryan’s personality and engagement in drama activities. Ryan is a child who listens with intent. Ryan would often double- and triple-check the assignment for our class and then double- and triple-check to see if his spin on the assignment was approved of. He is a studious child who breathes the expression, “live life to the fullest!” On our program nights Ryan would arrive at class still wearing his soccer cleats and game uniform. When his mom asked him if attending our class was too much (because there
was no time between soccer and our program for a sit down meal) he responded, “We get goldfish crackers during snack, Mom. I want to go!”

Ryan’s two sisters have greatly influenced his demeanor; he is a sensitive and caring boy. According to Liv, “he has a big heart and always tries to take care of the people around him before himself. He especially likes to take care of his sisters. If either of them are sad, he makes it his priority to make them happy, which he is quite good at--he’s a little comedian!” During our drama and writing program, it was not uncommon to hear Ryan asking his group what they were writing. He attentively listened to their responses and encouraged each of his friends throughout the writing process. During our writing block of time, Ryan often shared his ideas with students who were contemplating ideas. His willingness to share ideas helped some of the other students to contribute their ideas as well.

Ryan was quick to play along during in-role lessons and he was not afraid to take chances. For one of such a young age he was also able to improvise quite well. All of these qualities and characteristics helped to make him a leader in our drama and writing program.

On the first night of the drama and writing program Ryan told his mother that he was going to be able to “write full storybooks by the end of the night.” He did, in fact, write a four-year-old’s version of a storybook that night. On every sheet he began a new topic and he illustrated a picture for each page, just as one would see in a ‘real’ storybook. With this strong start, Ryan and I began working on a thread and/or a connection that could tie his story together from the first page to the last.
Ryan attended eight of the 10 drama and writing sessions. When in attendance, Ryan participated in every facet of the program with fervor. He completed eight pieces of writing and his writing gradually included more words, descriptions and more of his own ideas. Ryan was never shy when we were acting, dancing or moving our bodies.

During the second week of our program Ryan met Marvin (the puppet) and introduced himself by engulfing Marvin in a hug. When I brought puppets as guests to visit with our group, Ryan was always the first child to buy in to the puppets. He kept track of all of their names and committed details, like their birthday and favorite color, to mind. On the second week of our program, Ryan helped to welcome Marvin to our group and, on his own accord, created and explained to Marvin reasons why he would need a treasure map (the theme of the day’s lesson). Ryan explained that the map would lead to a treasure but, “it was a very dangerous path and we need the map so that we don’t die.” After this thorough explanation Ryan asked only for a hug in return, which Marvin granted!

**Ryan’s writing.** Ryan knew, from having participated in our drama activity, that there were snakes, lava pits and even quicksand along the course of the treasure map. During the drama lesson, Ryan was the student who led the way as our group traversed the thick wood. He used a sword to cut through vines and he alerted us when he saw danger. Ryan also helped to plot an alternate ending for our story when he argued, “The treasure isn’t ours and we should return it.” Ryan led the group from a moral standpoint and he had the courage, during this second week activity, to propose a change in our story.
His actions were quite a surprise. Through his conversation with Marvin and his classmates, I was able to see what portions of the lesson Ryan viewed as important.

**Ryan’s engagement in the writing.** As seen in his treasure map drawing (below), Ryan incorporated ideas we did not explore in our drama, such as biting sharks and shaky bridges. In fact, I believe that our lesson was merely a springboard for Ryan’s writing ideas. The drama lesson was simply the tip of the iceberg; it helped to reveal novel notions and connections upon completion. Ryan was always proud to display and share his work. Each week he looked for my approval, asking things like, “Do you like what I did? It looks like the map has a shaky bridge!”

![Image 28: Student Work, Map.](image)

As the weeks progressed, Ryan’s writing (which was already exceeding my expectations) continued to improve. He began to include more descriptive words and attempted to write an increasing number of his stories solo. In week four of our program we tackled the story, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 1985). Independently, the
students chose an animal cap that I had provided as a prop for our lesson. They then created scenes to show what would happen if you gave a _______ (dog) a ________ (cupcake). The students mused with different headlines and consequences to their “If you…then you’ll” stories. Ryan’s excitement surrounding the use of his costume (animal cap) was colossal. When he was able to seize the frog puppet he cried out, “YES!” with all of this excitement. From this reaction, I believed he would have no trouble at all creating a frog character and eventually writing about it. However, during the brainstorming time he had some difficulty developing his ideas. For starters, Ryan reasoned that his frog would want to eat a fly. Eventually, with some careful questioning and assistance, Ryan explained that the frog would catch the fly with his tongue and then he would want bugs. This was as much as Ryan was able to accomplish for his presentation. When our writing period began, Ryan elaborated his story with more detail and a stronger beginning, middle and end. He ended his story by writing: “[After that] his tummy will hurt and then he’ll want some juice and he’ll never eat a fly ever again.” Ryan’s story illustrates how he used the drama activities to help shape a more complete tale. During the drama, Ryan used his body to depict a frog leaping and sticking his tongue in the air to catch flies.

Justine: “What is your character eating?
Ryan: Flies and bugs.
Justine: How many is he eating?
Ryan: So many he is going to be sick!

The conversation that occurred during the drama and writing lessons was necessary to help Ryan create, express and complete his thoughts. When I approached him to complete the scribing of his frog narrative, he had completed his third image and was ready to dictate the final portion of his story. And, to my surprise, Ryan was dictating his
story for the students who were seated at his table. Ryan struck me as a natural communicator, one who encourages and motivates those around him through his willingness to be vulnerable and to share.

Image 29: Student Work, Ryan’s If You Give a Mouse a Cookie Writing Piece (Numeroff, 1985).

On the final night of our program I had the chance to converse with Ryan’s mom. We spoke about Ryan’s learning over the course of the previous 10 weeks and we marveled at his remarkable wit, his intense acting abilities and his eagerness to write. Ryan’s mother assured me that Ryan had become more eager to narrate his day (on paper) when they were at home. Ryan’s love for drama, literacy and this program was clear as he completed the 10-week program with an enthusiasm that was unmatched by any other child. He was joyous about his writing and always eager to participate in more writing activities.
**Ryan’s results.** Ryan completed nine of 10 possible pieces of writing; nine were at least partially dictated by Ryan to the teacher. In seven of the pieces Ryan penned messages without assistance and in all nine writing samples Ryan drew a picture to accompany the writing.

Using the Rating Technique for Observing Early Progress (Clay, 1994), each piece of writing was assessed for language content. Seven of ten pieces of writing were placed in the developing phase. Ryan showed his highest proficiency scores in the message quality indicator category. He frequently attempted to independently record his own ideas. In three of nine lessons, Ryan’s writing was evaluated at a level four. The remaining pieces of writing were steadily in the not yet satisfactory category with 18 scores between two and three.

During the drama portions of our weekly lessons, Ryan generally showed signs of interest and excitement. His involvement in the dramatic action of the lessons was rated as independent. Eye contact, participation and direct involvement in the lessons were observed in all video of the video documentation of the lessons.

When approaching the writing lessons, Ryan generally liked to confer with a teacher before commencing. When he wrote, he did so with the intent to be creative and different from his classmates. This was observed in the number of new ideas that Ryan used in his writing, he did not require any additional motivators from teachers to complete his writing. His involvement in the written portion of the lessons was rated as independent. In eight of nine pieces of writing, direct connections to the drama lesson were made. Nine of the pieces of writing followed along with the same theme of the drama lessons. In four of these pieces of writing, Ryan used the same character he portrayed from the drama
portion of the lesson as his central character in his writing. That being said, he also
extended the thoughts and ideas from our drama lessons onto new fronts, in eight of the
pieces. In these new idea pieces of writing, Ryan added details to his story that were not
part of our group discussion or the whole group drama lessons.

Jeff’s Profile and his Learning

**Jeff and his family.** Both of Jeff’s parents work outside the home. His mother is
employed at a not-for-profit agency committed to helping adults with disabilities, and his
father is the regional manager of a trucking company. Both parents hope to instill in Jeff
the desire to work hard and make a difference in the world. According to Jeff’s mom, he
is “a very happy, loving, caring, and stubborn four-year old.” On occasion, Jeff
accompanies his mother to work. These opportunities afford Jeff a chance to interact with
adults who have special needs. “Jeff’s outward affection for people with different
abilities is just one of the reasons why he is so special. He is not afraid to interact, hug or
talk to the people who have mental and physical handicaps, which is not typical for a
four-year old,” explains his mother.

Jeff is an only child and although he does not attend regular public school he is
enrolled at a pre-school two days a week for four hours a day. Most days, Jeff anxiously
awaits the answer to the question, “Is today a school day?” At school he invents,
constructs and imagines. Jeff is an extremely verbal child. It is not unusual to hear Jeff
telling elaborate stories to his parents, teachers and friends. Jeff is a leader and prefers
inventive play to paper and pencil tasks. According to his pre-school teacher, Jeff
regularly gathers his friends and explains the rules to board games. Next, he orchestrates
the play and the rules of the game with an energy and enthusiasm that is unmatched by even the best of game show hosts!

On the days when Jeff does not go to his preschool, he spends time with his great grandparents. While under their care, he exercises his best manners and attempts to help around the house. Jeff thrives in environments where the rules are clear and known. He never turns down an opportunity to “do chores” and he often takes on the role of a well-intentioned “rule enforcer” when he witnesses people stepping out of line! Jeff wants to make sure everyone is “doing the right thing.”

When Jeff is not at his grandparents’ house or learning at his pre-school, he can be found writing songs. His interest in music was sparked by the gift of a harmonica. Since receiving the gift, Jeff has been writing and playing for hours. Jeff is also fond of problem-solving and working on puzzles. He regularly works on the same puzzle for short blocks of time over several days, a testimony to his stamina and persistence.

**Jeff's personality and engagement in drama activities.** On the first night of this research, after sharing the story of *Johnny Appleseed* (Shepherd, 2010), I announced to the students that Johnny Appleseed would be visiting our classroom. I clarified, “Actually, he’s sitting right here at our table…where did he go?” I asked. The students looked at me and each other with curious faces. I looked around the room with a quizzical look and said, “Hmmm, I thought he was right here at this table…” Suddenly, Jeff raised his hand and asserted, “I’m right here!” With that, I called Johnny Appleseed (Jeff) to the front and he approached with his chest stretched out and his head held high. It was at this moment that I knew Jeff was ready for all that this drama and writing program had to offer. “So, Johnny,” I asked, “what brings you to Tennessee? What has made you so
famous? What’s your favorite fruit?” I paused after each question; gauging whether I should pose another question that Jeff knew the answer to. Jeff hesitated and for a moment he looked frightened, then he whispered, “I’m not really him…” So I whispered back, “That’s okay, we’re pretending and they (pointing ever so slightly at the other children) believe you are Johnny Appleseed!” It didn’t take any further prodding, Jeff carried forward as Johnny. The children asked him a variety of questions, including some that can be seen below in this excerpt:

Justine: I see a friend who has a question over here.
Student 1: How did you even make the apple tree?
Jeff: Well, we plant the tree and they are really small.
Justine: What color are the seeds?
Jeff: They are orange and small.
Justine: Orange and small. Hmmm. What do you think of that (student 2)?
Student 2: You may need to water it. That's a lot of responsibility.
Justine: Is it a lot of responsibility, Johnny?
Jeff: Not for me, because I love it.

Justine: (Student 3), do you have a question for Johnny?
Student 3: Yeah, I have a watered a lot of trees.
Student 4: How many apple pies have you made?
Jeff: I've made 2!
Katherine: Johnny why did you plant apple trees?
Jeff: Because that's just what Johnny does!

Although I could tell that Jeff was slightly unsure, I could see, by the expression on his face, that he was enjoying the role and that he liked this fictional play.

**Jeff’s writing.** Jeff was in attendance at all 10 of our drama and writing program nights, and for eight of those weeks he needed encouragement to complete his writing tasks. When Jeff attempted to write on the first night of our program, he sat and stared at the page for a lengthy period of time. Katherine and I approached him separately and coached him through his writing options.
Justine: I am so excited to hear about your story! What is something that you love to do at home, Jeff?
Jeff: I don’t know.
Justine: Do you like to ride your bike, like Kevin?
Jeff: Sometimes.
Justine: Do you ever have races on your bike, they way that Kevin does? Do you remember when he wrote that in his story?
Jeff: (No response)
Justine: Would you like to start with a drawing? Sometimes I start with a drawing when I am writing a story about myself. (Justine picks up paper and begins to draw.) I am going to draw myself on a bike here, and I am going to draw a ramp for my bike over here. I like to ride my bike over a ramp. It’s fun. When I am done this drawing, I will be ready to write because the picture will tell me the words I want to say. Do you want to draw first, as well?
Jeff: Okay (Picks up crayon but does not draw. He responded by shrugging his shoulders and looking down).

The upbeat, excited and motivated child we had met during the opening night drama activities had nearly disappeared. Later, Jeff still had not drawn or recorded anything on paper. Again, Jeff and I talked about all of the things he loved and I asked him to think about and make connections to the story of Johnny Appleseed (Shepherd, 2010). I suggested that we begin by putting our crayon on the paper. “It’s the first part that is the toughest,” I offered. Finally, after a great deal of time, Jeff agreed and he drew a green dotted line that was about 15 centimeters in length. I asked him to tell me about the drawing and he eventually said, “It says, I love horses.” That was the writing that Jeff completed, in totality, on the first evening.

Jeff’s engagement in writing. As I reflected on that first night, I knew that I would have to link the drama and the writing lessons more closely in order to keep students, like Jeff, engaged and participating in our learning. Jeff’s strengths, at that point, were his commitment and contributions to our drama lessons. He could easily follow the story lines and creatively solved problems as we encountered them. For example, during a week three warm-up activity we read the book, This is Not a Box (Portis, 2011). Kevin,
my hand in a monster puppet, led activities to showcase how everyday objects could be reinvented when using our imagination. For example, Kevin said “This is not a pencil it’s a…” then he held the pencil to his ear and began talking on the pencil phone. Each time a new invention was shown, Jeff was hardly able to contain himself and yelled out his guess as to what the *it* was. Before long many of the students, including Jeff, wanted a turn at being the leader. When it was Jeff’s turn he whispered to me, “But I have lots of ideas and I can’t choose just one.” Jeff shared four or five great ideas and then he settled on a bow and arrow. He acted out his object using the pencil as the shaft of his bow and mimed the action of an arrow being shot. Within seconds the students in our group had guessed his object. Jeff’s take on the game helped me to realize what a creative child he is. Jeff’s ideas were not previously shared as an example, nor were they related to an example that was shown in our group activity. His ingenuity with this drama game and the other drama activities that made up our days, however, did not flow into his writing. Again in week three, Jeff sat for a lengthy period of time staring at his page. He watched the children around him engage in their writing. He even happily listened to their ideas. However, Jeff did not approach writing with this same excitement.

As we pressed on to week four, I hoped that the theme of superheroes would ignite a desire to write. When Jeff approached writing activities he did not seem to be motivated to write or draw. One week we even gave Jeff the option to tell us what to draw in order to get him started; that did not work either. I had heard Jeff and some other children in our class fantasizing about being superheroes and wondered if this topic would motivate a deeper desire to write. The drama activity portion of the lesson gave way to superhero heaven in our classroom. Students, including Jeff, were flying up, down
and all around. Within the drama activity, the students explored possible superhero saving missions and special elements needed on their superhero uniforms (to ensure optimal performance). When the developmental portion of the drama lesson was complete, the students made their way to their writing spots. Jeff, to my surprise, was no more eager to write this week than he had been in the preceding three weeks. And, even after multiple conferences, he was unmotivated to draw or write. About half way through our writing block I asked Jeff, point blank, what I could do to help. He responded: “You could draw the guy’s body…?” Feeling semi-desperate, I obliged and we made a deal that involved me completing the outline of the body and Jeff adding all of his ideas to the superhero. Below is an image of Jeff’s piece.

**Image 30: Student Work, Super Hero Drawing**
What struck me about Jeff’s writing was not how little he wrote or drew, but that he did not appear to be affected by not writing. Rather, he appeared content with drawing as little as possible, even if there were no other activities to do or games to be played.

By week seven, I yearned to see some real writing from Jeff and I was feeling positive about my chances of seeing a breakthrough when he arrived that evening. Jeff began the night with tons of energy; he practically skipped into our classroom. During our quick warm-up dance called, Get Your Body Movin’ (GoNoodle, 2015), Jeff was dancing with an abundance of energy and everyone was noticing. As we moved into the main portion of our lesson, Jeff was very involved in the storybook, Where the Wild Things Are (Sendak, 1963). The students, particularly Jeff, listened intently to the story and then began acting as characters from the story using story drama as our spring board. First, we became Wild Things; we roared our terrible roars, gnashed our terrible teeth, rolled our terrible eyes and even showed our terrible claws. Jeff was animated, loud and a little scary! Next, we had a wild rumpus and the children talked about what they would do differently at their rumpus. Some children said they would shoot cannon balls, others said they would destroy things and still more said that they would sing and dance. When the rumpus ended, on account of the main character deciding to go back home for a warm dinner, the students sailed back home as regular boys and girls. Next, they saw a Wild Thing that I had drawn and I modeled how I would write about my Wild Thing (Sendak, 1963). By sharing what I would write about my Wild Thing creation, I was modeling the behavior that I wished to see in the students. Once I had modeled this process, students shared their writing ideas with our group. Excited to write, they took the author’s oath and began the writing process (The author’s oath is an oath the students take each week:}
“I am an amazing, creative and talented writer. I can write stories with details and great pictures. Today I will write like the great author that I am!”). Jeff went to his usual writing place and despite our best efforts he did not engage in the writing process. Instead, with a teary look, Jeff whispered, “I want my mom, I’m tired.”

Moving forward I knew that something would need to change. Jeff had approached the writing tasks, up until this point, with very little enthusiasm, despite his ever-increasing involvement in the drama portion of the lessons. I was confused.

For the next two weeks, I tried something new, I told the story portion of the drama through a short video. For both weeks nine and 10 I showed the video version of The Gruffalo and Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (Donladson, 2004; Viorst, 1987). Once again the students acted as characters from the stories and during week nine, in particular, Jeff truly became an image of the Gruffalo. His body, voice and even his walk emulated that of a Gruffalo. We asked the Gruffalo questions that weren’t in the book, such as, “Are you afraid of that little mouse?” Jeff answered, “I am not afraid of that mouse, that mouse is afraid of me!” When Jeff approached our writing task, he possessed a different sort of demeanor. He quickly situated himself beside his 4 ft x 2.5 ft piece of paper and began drawing his life-sized Gruffalo. Perhaps it was the fact that he had encountered the writing for 7 weeks and was now more comfortable, or it could be that the paper was unusually large and therefore interesting, or maybe it was the fact that the lesson was delivered in a new way. Regardless, Jeff began to write and draw. His written ideas about the Gruffalo were finally beginning to emulate his dramatic involvement in our lessons. Jeff’s writing finally showed some creative thought. Below you can see a portion of Jeff’s writing on the eighth night. “My name is Ridge. He lives in the North Pole. He likes to swing from vines inside. He will scare the penguins away!” Jeff created a totally fictional character who
lived in a unique location and had specific likes. After nine weeks of spectating, Jeff was beginning to add innovative details to his writing.


By the time we reached the final week of the program, Jeff’s willingness to engage in writing had improved. Although he was not likely to read his writing out loud to the class, he did share his writing with me.

**Jeff’s results.** Jeff completed all 10 possible pieces of writing. Eight of the written pieces were at least partially dictated by Jeff to the teacher, and for one he did not write or draw, despite teacher involvement. Furthermore, Jeff posed the need for a great deal of
encouragement to approach the writing block. As the weeks went on Jeff’s attitude improved and his familiarity with our weekly process grew. In four of his pieces of writing, Jeff penned messages without assistance and in six writing samples he drew a related picture to accompany the writing.

Using the Rating Technique for Observing Early Progress (Clay, 1994), each piece of writing was assessed for language content. All of the writing produced by Jeff was placed in the not yet satisfactory/developing stage of writing. At the beginning of this research, Jeff was in constant communication with the teachers in the classroom due to the fact that he was lackluster in his approach to writing. In fact, for the first five weeks he made his dislike for writing quite clear. He conversed with other students at his table and intently listened to their ideas about writing, however, it did not appear to motivate him to write his own story. Nearing the end of this research, Jeff began writing more and more. In weeks eight, nine and ten, he was able to connect the drama activity to his writing without as much prompting or support from teachers.

During the drama portions of our weekly lessons, Jeff was a leader in every sense. His involvement in the dramatic action of the lessons was rated as independent. He was often the first student to volunteer and the most energetic student involved in the drama lessons. In nine of ten lessons, Jeff was abounding with energy, creative ideas and enthusiastic about his participation in our drama.

When approaching the writing lessons, Jeff did not transfer over the same enthusiasm. His involvement in the written portion of the lessons was rated as reliant, as he seemed to require additional motivators, questions and prompting to complete most of his writing pieces throughout the course of this research. In three of ten lessons the
completed writing had no connection to the dramatic action that had taken place. Furthermore, it was on these three nights, in particular, that Jeff received additional support with a teacher 3 or more times during the writing block of time. Towards the end of this research, Jeff began to write with more connections to our topics and themes. Additionally, he became more interested in illustrating his thoughts, which seemed to contribute to his understand of his subsequent writing. In six of the finished pieces of writing, Jeff’s drawings illustrate one or more details that were mentioned in his writing.

Claire’s Profile and her Learning

Claire and her family. Claire is a dramatic five-year-old who typically wears pink tutus, tights and all things that glitter. Claire is a big sister to three-year-old Sean, and the two often walk side by side and hold hands. They share their snacks and embrace each other whenever they have been apart for longer than five minutes. Both of Claire’s parents are central figures in their church community. The family spends lots of time outdoors and away from technology. Not only do they make family time a priority, but learning as well. Claire participates in afterschool programing such as the drama club, piano lessons and even plays on the soccer team. In the springtime, she hopes to be on her first ever basketball team — a sport she thinks “looks fun!” Claire is not afraid to try new things and she is quick to announce her accomplishments. One such achievement was when her mother allowed her to “ride the school bus alone!”

Claire works hard to please her teachers and parents. She is, by the definition of almost every adult who knows her, the “perfect student.” Claire not only monitors her own behavior but the conduct of others as well. Several times during our lessons Claire’s
voice took on a motherly tone as she redirected her peers. “If you want to get chosen, you have to listen” or “If you don’t raise your hand, Mrs. Justine will not choose you.” Her parents were music and business majors at a nearby university. As a child, Claire’s mother always felt supported by her own parents to pursue what made her most happy. “That support is what led me to where I am today. I want to provide the same opportunities for Claire so that she, too, can find her passion in life. She is so creative and I just want to make sure that I allow that to flourish.”

Claire’s writing and engagement in drama activities. When this research began, Claire was already writing both lower case and upper case letters. She was using her fingers to space between words and she frequently asked for help when attempting to spell those she found difficult. Claire also made sure to check in with me at the onset of each lesson. She relayed to me all of the writing she had completed in the previous six days and shared the moments of inspiration that provoked her written work. When it came to dancing and moving during the drama lessons, Claire was less enthusiastic. For the first four or five weeks she either observed or somewhat reluctantly joined in to contribute ideas. She rarely offered to act out her ideas in a performance/audience format.

Claire’s weekly involvement. Claire was in attendance for eight of 10 drama and writing lessons, and completed all eight of those writing assignments. Claire came into the drama and writing program having already met me from the church we both attended and where I had volunteered. On the first night, however, an outsider would not have known that we were acquaintances. Claire was somewhat talkative while we were writing at the tables in our chairs, but as soon as the confines of the chair and table were removed she tucked herself into a corner and barely participated. She was an observer. When I
viewed Claire, knees tucked in and sitting on the floor, I could see in her face that she wanted to be part of our activities but was more comfortable sitting than she was participating. So, at the risk of reinforcing her non-participatory behavior, I allowed her to sit out on the first night. Over the next several weeks it became my goal to move Claire ever so slightly from her comfort zone to a place of growth and amplified learning. I was confident that she was capable of greater participation in our drama activities; I just had to figure out how to help her out of her shell.

Claire’s engagement in writing. The third week of class brought us to the Many Colored Days-themed lesson (Seuss, 1996). This lesson involved using musical excerpts, with a variety of producers, from the soundtrack *The Idea* (Seuss, 1996). Kevin, our guest puppet, visited the group to talk about his feelings. When talking with the students he shared stories of sadness, happiness and jealousy. The students listened, some laughed and in certain cases, such as times when he became angry, they seemed to agree with Kevin. During these conversations with Kevin, Claire shared that she is happiest at gymnastics and when she is with her family. Next, Claire danced around the room with the 15 other children from our class to different paced music (some of the music was fast and some slow- some happy and some lonesome). When an upbeat song named *Pink* played, Claire galloped around the room with her ribbon stick dancing behind her through the air (Chinese Dance, Tchaikovsky, The Idea). However, when *Purple*, a slower, more melancholy song, was played, she sat in an all-too-familiar pose (with her knees up to her chest) and did not move (Purple, The Idea). Later, when using puppets to show emotion in short scenes, Claire pulled the “sadness” card from the deck and promptly asked for another because she was “never sad, so I don’t know what I would do.” Afterwards, we
talked about what happened when sad songs were played for the group. Claire noted that she is unhappy sometimes, but it’s only because of little things. She said, “…you know, Mrs. Justine. You don’t cry over spilled milk.” In Claire’s writing, she only wrote of happy times and when we conferenced I asked her about this positivity. “Why write about sad things?” was her response and she carried on drawing a giant smile on a singing green shape.

Weeks later we watched a retell of the book, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1987). Many of the students seemed excited about the idea of creating bad stories. When I visited Claire during our writing block she was busy illustrating her story, as were most of the students. Students typically began with drawings and then added words. The order of writing and drawing was completely their decision; we forced no order or operations on the students. When I asked Claire to tell me about her picture, she replied, “It’s a picture of the best day I have ever had, but I haven’t had it yet…but it’s almost happening.” Again I queried, “What day is that?” She smiled and paused. “My seventh birthday!” Claire did not want to write about a bad day. She simply had no time or energy to devote to negativity. By choice, she selected a topic that excited her and she went with it. She did not ask or even try to explain why. Claire had participated in all of our lead-up activities, all of which were about a terrible day. She had made her decision, though, and she was going to write about a “So good, really good, very good day!” On her picture she wrote, “It is my BrthDay today. Im trning 7. I went to the American girl dol stor.” The important part about Claire’s drawing was that it had her unique thumbprint on it. During this research, my desire was not to be Claire’s director; rather, I was hoping to facilitate lessons and observe how children like Claire responded
dramatically and in writing. Claire wrote something completely contrary to all of her classmates. This intrigued and excited me because Claire was showing, more and more, that she had her own voice and that she found her stories worthy of telling.

**Image 32: Student Work, Very Good, Really Good, Very Good Day.**

As the weeks passed, Claire’s comfort in sharing her ideas and moving her body grew. One particular week, our drama activities focused on a series of transformations, including the eventual transformation from caterpillars to butterflies, Claire displayed a dramatic maturity that had not previously been seen. As the caterpillar, she gingerly moved around to slowly consuming each leaf. Soon after, her body morphed into a chrysalis with a spinning movement. Claire maintained concentration and never sought approval by making eye contact or confirming the task. Later on in the drama, when many days and nights had passed, Claire emerged from her chrysalis as a fragile butterfly.
As she gently fluttered around our room it was clear that nothing could interfere with her commitment to this role. It met all of Claire’s criteria: the drama context was happy, about a beautiful creature and it allowed her to play a make-believe role. Claire’s writing flowed from this starting point. It followed the format that was displayed in our mentor text, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1994) and it was full of humorous imagery.

**Image 33: Student Work, Claire’s Hungry Caterpillar Writing**

As we neared the end of the program, Claire’s feelings about her writing changed. She was more confident about sharing the work that she had done and more apt to explain pictures or describe the writing in greater detail. At the end of our program, Claire exclaimed, “I love to write. I especially love to write in my journal! I’m a good writer.”

**Claire’s results.** Claire completed eight of 10 possible pieces of writing; two of the written pieces were at least partially dictated by Claire to the teacher. In six of the pieces, Claire penned messages without assistance and in all eight writing samples Claire drew a picture to accompany the writing.

Using the Rating Technique for Observing Early Progress (Clay, 1994), each piece of writing was assessed for language content. Two of the eight pieces of writing were
placed in the probably satisfactory category. Nearing the end of this research, Claire began to write more frequently without the aid of a teacher while incorporating more of her own ideas. Her highest proficiency scores in the message quality indicator category where she scored above four for five of our 10-week program. Early on in this research, Claire struggled to record her own ideas in full sentence format. However, once we reached week five her written expression began to match her expression in our drama lessons.

During the drama portions of our weekly lessons, Claire was, at times, a contributing voice to our group’s creative process. Her involvement in the dramatic action of the lessons was rated as both independent and reliant. When watching the video documentation of each lesson, it is clear to see that when students were placed into small groups Claire was particularly interested in sharing her ideas. In a larger group, however, Claire was less likely to share. Furthermore, Claire especially enjoyed sharing ideas and conversing with the puppets. When costumes and/or puppetry were used, Claire was more apt to involve herself during the drama portions of these lessons.

When approaching the writing lessons, Claire talked about her writing with her table partners in four of ten lessons. She approached the writing tasks with enthusiasm and generally enjoyed the writing process, smiling and laughing as she completed her work, and did not require any additional motivators from the teachers. Claire’s involvement in the written portion of the lessons was rated as independent. It was observed that she made direct connections to our drama lessons in eight of the ten lessons. In six others, Claire used the drama lesson to inform her writing by portraying the same character. Additionally, in four of the written pieces, she added to the main themes and created
stories that were completely unique to her. Claire’s voice as a writer became evident as the weeks of this research continued. She consistently showed, through her writing, that she had a combination of unique ideas and the desire to story tell. Claire frequently read her finished pieces aloud to her table group and/or to the teachers in the room. Her sense of accomplishment and personal pride in her writing was a good indicator of her attitude towards the writing process.

Anna’s Profile and her Learning

**Anna and her family.** Anna is an outgoing six-year-old child who continually challenges herself. She prefers dancing to sitting in a desk and chooses fruit over candy bars. Anna is home-schooled by her mother. Her father is a professional musician who travels around the world each year. His touring schedule prevents the family from having a traditional home life, hence the decision. Therefore, about 10 years ago, Anna’s family made the choice to home-school. This less fixed form of schooling allows everyone to travel together and it affords everyone time off when Anna’s dad is home.

Anna’s parents describe her as a child who has a strong sense of identity. Her mother comments that Anna, “always has to contribute her thoughts about assignments.” Anna’s mother, Sarah, holds a Master of Science in Physical Therapy degree and as Anna’s primary instructor she also spends the most amount of time with her each day. Sarah hopes “that Anna finds her passion in school so that she can pursue a path that will provide her joy and a good income one day.”

As for pastimes, it’s not uncommon to find Anna alone in a corner writing, drawing and/or teaching her dolls. Anna’s idea of an exciting afternoon is one where she
is able to open a fresh new notebook with a brand new set of crayons and begin filling the pages with whatever her heart desires. According to her parents, she has never been the type of child who followed a set of rules or instructions. Rather, she looks at a game or a toy and considers what “she wants to do with it.” She has one older brother and the two, though separated by over four years, “really look out for each other.” In fact, Anna often copies her brother’s every move. This admiration has been a motivator for her learning. Her brother reads aloud to her and imaginatively plays with her. He even helps her with her homework. Their relationship appears to contribute to Anna’s positive outlook on learning and school.

**Anna’s personality and engagement in drama activities.** At the onset of this research Anna stood out to me as child who was both creative and advanced. She was one of the few children who, when she first sat down at our group table, wrote something other than her name. Instead, she wrote “fun” and drew a picture of her view out the window from our classroom. Each week, Anna presented herself in the same exuberant manner. Her hand was always raised and her ideas always flowing. During week two of this research, students were asked to think of some of the dangerous things that they might encounter while following a treasure map. Without pause, Anna answered that there “may be hot coals and people might have to walk on fire.” This custom of instantaneous creativity grew to be the norm, both during the drama activity time and in Anna’s writing.

**Anna’s writing.** Anna was in attendance for eight of 10 drama and writing lessons. She completed eight writing assignments and many additional writing pieces at
home. On the third night of the program Anna came in and began writing every word she knew in her arrival book (a blank booklet set out for students to draw and write in when they first arrive at the library) as if by heart. She also narrated her writing out loud for her peers to hear and she did so with great enthusiasm. Anna’s writing used invented spelling and lots of numbers.

**Anna’s engagement in writing.** On one particular evening, I began our lesson by sharing the book, *A Very Hungry Caterpillar*, in role as Mrs. Caterpillar (Carle, 1994). Anna chuckled when she approached me at the front of our makeshift classroom. “Nice to meet you,” she said as she stretched out her hand to greet me. As our lesson continued Anna fully engaged as a hatching egg, by placing her arms over head and making an oval shape on the floor. She embodied a hungry caterpillar, gorging on leaves and moving her body without the use of her arms. Eventually, she became a chrysalis waiting for her butterfly wings. While in the POD (an inflatable clear plastic room), Anna clenched her eyes closed and lay on the floor grinning while the lights turned on and off, symbolizing the day changing to night and night changing to day. When it was time to exit the POD and become a real butterfly, Anna stretched her arms as wide as she could and joyfully danced around the room. Her writing conveyed this delight as well. She detailed her week as a caterpillar by drawing and writing about the items that she ate, and she did so in a humorous way.

**Image 34: Student Work, Anna’s Hungry Caterpillar Writing**
### Table 4: Anna’s Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anna’s writing</th>
<th>What it says</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Won moneg a catopetr wos hongre!</td>
<td>One morning a caterpillar was hungry!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So et at 20 (picture of a sandwich)</td>
<td>So it ate 20 sandwiches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And ten et ate 100 pess ov (picture of pizza)</td>
<td>And then it ate 100 pieces of pizza.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten et at 2000 (picture of hamburger) and 3000 pess ov cande and 4000 bols ov (picture of ice cream cone) and 400,000 (picture of bowls of cereal) and ten et had a tome ac.</td>
<td>Then it ate 2000 hamburgers, 3000 pieces of candy, 300 bowls of ice cream and 400,000 bowls of cereal and then it had a tummy ache.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most intriguing aspect of Anna’s writing is that she often (politely) refused the help of the adults in the room. She didn’t want to have anyone else’s writing on her page. At times, she would ask for the spelling of a word or bring her paper to an adult solely for observation. Anna seemed to seem approval more than assistance. She did not appear to be interested in revising or accepting any feedback. The work that she did each week was the first and final draft. It represented her best effort at the time and she moved forward after its completion. For example, Anna wrote her own story modeled after the popular children’s narrative, *If You Give A Mouse a Cookie* (Numeroff, 2015). In Anna’s version she mused, “If you give a dog a cupcake…” About half way through the writing of her tale I asked, “What would happen if the dog was gluten free?” Anna laughed and said, “If I hadn’t already started I would have said that the cupcake was gluten free…and milk free, because that might upset the dog’s stomach!” Her new idea was arguably very funny, but she had committed to the original one and decided to continue with it. Her finished piece can be seen below.
One thing that remained consistent over the course of this research was that Anna loved sharing both her ideas for writing and her writing. When she spoke about writing, she did so with excitement and when she wrote, she did so with intensity. On the last evening of
our program, Anna shared: “I wish this class was every night. I don’t want it to end. I love (with emphasis) doing drama and I love (with emphasis) writing even more than I love drama!”

Anna’s results. Anna completed eight of 10 possible pieces of writing; one of the written pieces was at least partially dictated by Anna to the teacher. In seven of the pieces, Anna penned messages without assistance and in all eight writing samples Anna drew a picture to accompany the writing.

Using the Rating Technique for Observing Early Progress (Clay, 1994), each piece of writing was assessed for language content. Two of the eight pieces of writing were placed in the developing phase. Anna showed her highest proficiency scores in the message quality indicator category, with five weeks of scores in the five to six range. She almost always preferred to independently record her own ideas. In six sequential lessons, Anna’s writing was evaluated at or above a level four. The remaining pieces of writing, from our first weeks together, were scored in the not yet satisfactory category with six scores between one and three.

During the drama portions of our weekly lessons, Anna was consistently engaged, contributing and involved in our creative process. Her involvement in the dramatic action of the lessons was rated as independent. Eye contact, participation and direct involvement in the lessons were observed in all eight of the video documentation of the lessons.

When approaching the writing lessons, Anna did not struggle to begin the writing process. In fact, she frequently began writing immediately, and with the same energy and excitement that she displayed during the drama portion of our lessons. She did not require any additional motivators from teachers to complete her writing. Anna’s involvement in
the written portion of the lessons was rated as independent. Additionally, Ann frequently shared new ideas both in her writing and through conversations with students seated at her group table. In seven of the eight pieces of writing, direct connections to the drama lessons were made. Six of the pieces of writing held the same theme as those explored in the drama portion of our class. In six of these pieces of writing, Anna used the same character she had portrayed in the drama portion of the lesson. The character she explored in role during the drama was her central character in her writing. In four of her written pieces, she took used the drama lesson content as a springboard for a new idea and/or theme. In these new idea pieces of writing, it was easiest to see Anna’s creativity and natural thirst to story tell. Each story possessed details that were not discussed, presented or acted out in our drama lessons. Anna seemed to thrive when given a blank page, a bucket full of markers and some time to create.

**Jill’s Profile and her Learning**

**Jill and her Family.** Jill is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, small-framed four-year-old. When I first met Jill, I wanted to pick her up and hold her for fear that she would be knocked over by one of the bigger students in our group. They say looks can be deceiving, and as I soon found out, Jill is anything but frail. Jill’s father is a professional musician who travels over 200 days each year. She has two older siblings and up until recently the entire family travelled across the United States on a tour bus with him and his band. The lack of consistency that life on the road entailed forced Jill’s family to settle down in the researched community just over a year ago. Jill does not yet attend school on a full-time basis; however, her days are anything but idle. Her mother helps to operate a not-for-
profit program that assists non-English speakers. This includes helping participants understand what school is. They meet at a community center twice a week. “The hope is to lessen the cultural shock of American school by slowly showing new immigrant children and parents what education in the United States looks like,” explained Jill’s mom. Every Tuesday and Thursday Jill is up before the sun, getting herself ready for “school.” Jill helps the children in the Pre-K program understand how to be an American student - she shows them how to sit with their legs crossed, how to raise hands, and how to play games. The day is long and Jill acts as a mini-teacher, always using a soft voice and setting a good example for the other children. By the time the day is over, though, she is beyond tired and typically falls asleep on the drive home.

While Jill enjoys this, she envies her older siblings who go to school each day. When they return home, she is eager to participate in “pretend school” with her older sister. The three siblings don’t always get along and Jill’s mom explained that this was one of the reasons she wanted more stability for the family: “It’s my goal for my children to love each other, to get along and to know that they can count on each other. I know that they need consistency, space and love to do that. So, that’s why we’re here. The road life was too unpredictable. I really just want Jill to grow up in a caring environment. She’s a spunky kid. She sometimes seems shy, but once she opens up it’s game over!”

Jill’s parents explained that they want the same thing for their other children as well. “We just want them to be secure in who they are. We want them to love each other and love other people. And, most of all, we want them to do something that they love and to be successful at whatever that is. We have a feeling it will be something artistic with Jill, but who knows - we don’t want to tell her what to be.”
Jill’s personality and engagement in drama activities. Jill attended eight out of 10 drama and writing lessons held at the local library. During this time, she completed five pieces of written work and one-partially completed piece of writing. On the first night of our program, Jill’s mom’s predictions about her behavior proved to be true. Jill was quiet as a mouse. Her voice was so soft that it sounded like a faint whisper. She moved tentatively and was reluctant to speak. Writing was out of the question for the better part of three weeks. However, by the fourth week she was beginning to open up to the group and, although she was not specifically volunteering to act out scenes, she was participating in whole group movement activities. At this point in the program we were finally beginning to see the spunky side of Jill that her mother had mentioned. On this night Jill did not tentatively enter the class. Instead, her entrance was more of a strut. The theme of our week four activities involved becoming superheroes. Our objective was to think, speak and protect like superheroes. The children listened to the reading of a superhero text and then we knighted them with superhero capes. When Jill’s name was announced so she could be knighted as a superhero, she approached with great excitement. The cape was barely on her shoulders and she had already begun to “fly” around the room.

Jill’s writing. The main goal of the lesson was to identify what sorts of powers would be necessary to actually become a superhero and then to write about those powers and how they would be used in real life. In her first piece of finished work, Jill showed what she believed was most necessary to her character’s superhero success: laser and whipping eyes, flying cape and boots that jump high. When I asked Jill about the whipping eyes she said that the eyes could turn around quickly - “They can whip!”
Jill’s engagement in writing. Following week four, Jill’s growing confidence was manifested in the sharing of ideas, acting out scenes and writing with more detail. As previously noted, during the final week of our Monday night classes, we used story drama and the text, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1987). Jill laughed at the stories events and shared numerous connections to the text. During our whole-group discussion, Jill contributed that she had bad days, too. On her own accord, she acted out dropping her ice cream, crying and then stomping away. She then returned to our group of clapping friends with a gigantic smile on her face. Jill shared, “I have bad days sometimes when my sister is being mean to me and my mom says for her to be nice, but she is not nice.” This kind of contribution to our group
discussion was not common in the first several weeks of our program. Jill’s growth was evidenced by her willingness to contribute personal connections, both vocally and with her body. When I asked the students to close their eyes and continue imagining a very bad day, Jill raised her hand and whispered, “I have to close my eyes when the sun is very bright because it’s not good if you look at the sun…It can make you not be able to see…when I have to close them it’s a very bad day.” Her connections to our learning were bountiful. Below you will see the drawing that Jill made during our final session.

Image 38: Student Work, Jill’s ‘Very Bad Day’ Writing

As Jill’s writing and drama involvement developed, she was also more willing to share her ideas and completed work with peers. It became more common to see Jill pulling her mom or dad into the room to show off her written work. This satisfaction and pride with
regards to her efforts helped me to see that she had enjoyed both the process and the end product. At the end of the program, I asked Jill:

**Justine:** What was your favorite part about coming to this program each week?
**Jill:** Becoming a butterfly.

**Justine:** Why did you like that night the best, Jill?
**Jill:** Because of the bubble (the POD room).

**Justine:** And did you like becoming a butterfly?
**Jill:** Yes.

**Justine:** What else have you enjoyed?
**Jill:** (Smiles but does not answer, appears to be thinking.)

**Justine:** Were there any other parts of our time together that you really liked?
**Jill:** When I got to wear costumes.

Although she was not the most expressive, most outgoing or the most advanced writer, the progress that Jill did make were impressive. By the end of the program, Jill was conversing and sharing her thoughts with the group. In an academic sense, she was connecting her own life to our stories and recording her ideas on paper. As one the youngest participants in this research, having just turned four when the research began, Jill wrote, made connections and experienced the drama activities in an age-appropriate way.

**Jill’s results.** Jill completed all 10 possible pieces of writing; seven of the written pieces were at least partially dictated by Jill to the teacher. In one of the pieces Jill penned messages without assistance and in eight writing samples she drew a picture to accompany the writing.

Using the Rating Technique for Observing Early Progress (Clay, 1994), each piece of writing was assessed for language content. All of the writing produced by Jill was placed in the not yet satisfactory/developing stage of writing. At the beginning of this research, Jill was more apt to duplicate the ideas she saw and participated in during the
drama activities directly to her writing. However, as the weeks of our program went on, she began to add more creative details when orally telling her stories to a teacher, who then wrote them. Jill’s orally told stories incorporated new ideas and themes that were not present in the drama portion of our lessons in five of ten instances. They possessed evidence of appropriate story structure and even, at times, incorporated humor.

During the drama portions of our weekly lessons, it took Jill several weeks to become comfortable with our group. Her involvement in the dramatic action of the lessons was rated as both independent and reliant. In the first three weeks of this research, Jill was not showing signs of engagement or of willingness and desire to participate in our activities. During those weeks, Jill produced written work that had little connection to the themes, characters or the places discussed and portrayed in our drama activities. By the time we had reached week four of this research, however, Jill was more relaxed around the members of our group and therefore, it seemed, more willing to take chances, volunteer to act out scenes, and share her thoughts about questions posed. When watching the video documentation of each lesson, it is clear to see that Jill’s comfort level with the group greatly affected her involvement in the drama lesson and her ability to connect the drama to her writing. Once she was more content in the drama, her writing also improved.

When approaching the writing lessons, Jill knew her limitations. As the youngest participant, she was unable to write complete sentences. However, from week four onward, Jill was not afraid to ask for help. Each week she clearly dictated the words she wanted written on her page. Jill pointed to the area on the page where she wanted the story written and she recited a story, a sentence or a caption without pause. Her
involvement in the written portion of the lessons was rated as both independent and reliant, although she sometimes required additional motivators to complete her writing, she was often, nearing the end of this research, able to carry on without prompting or guided questioning. It was observed that Jill made direct connections to our drama lessons in six of the ten lessons. In six pieces of writing, Jill used the drama lesson that preceded the writing to inform her writing by portraying the same character.

Additionally, in five of the written pieces, she added to the main themes, writing stories that were creative, funny and often realistic. Jill was the youngest voice in our group and she had also experienced the least amount of formal schooling. This may have been a contributing factor to her flexibility with regards to her writing process. She approached writing freely, her attitude was one that was uninhibited by structure or formalities. When some students were determined to draw first and write second, Jill could complete her writing process in any order without consequence.

**Bill’s Profile and his Learning**

**Bill and his family.** According to his mother, Mel, Bill’s favorite things to do on a Saturday morning include playing with Legos and computers and drawing and reading. Mel describes him as the typical oldest child: he follows the rules, does what he is supposed to and is a great big brother. He also happens to love school and learning: “If I am being honest, he is a great kid…I sometimes even feel a little bad because he is such a good kid. I look around and I know how blessed I am to have a child like Bill.” Bill has a younger brother and a younger sister, and three are close in age and play well together.
Bill’s father, Clark, is a computer programmer and his mom has been staying at home with the children for the last five years.

The Rawlins family begins their busy day each morning by 6:45 a.m. Now five years old, Bill often offers to help at home, and his parents are happy to have his assistance. Bill helps the younger children to get organized with clothing and chores while Mom and Dad handle breakfast and preparing for the day. “All of the children start pre-school or public elementary school by 8:00 a.m.,” Bill’s mother explained, “so the mornings can be hectic.” Despite the chaos, Bill calmly helps his siblings put on their coats, backpacks and shoes, seemingly without expecting a word of praise.

At nighttime the family often has a sport or activity that one of the children is involved in. Sometimes it is soccer, other times basketball. For a while it was our Drama and Writing program. The whole family goes to each event together and they support one another in a beautiful way. On their “free” nights, the kids play outside and Bill often orchestrates the game or make-believe setting in which they will play. “Currently his big thing is to make maps and make clues for adventures for him and his brother. He does like to make up the rules to all the games they play and can have a hard time if his rules aren't followed. He's not usually bossy but he likes to be the one in charge and tell the younger kids what to do.”

**Bill’s personality and engagement in the drama activities.** Bill attended all 10 of our drama and writing lessons held at the local library. Over the weeks he completed nine pieces of written work and had one partially completed piece of writing. When I first met Bill I expected him to be a very shy child. He walked into our room at the library
with half of his body tucked in behind his mom and the other half peering out as if to say, “I don’t know about you… keep a safe distance.” That first class, it seemed Bill would remain quiet the whole time. Then Jeff pretended to be Johnny Appleseed and I began to work the room as a television show host. Bill’s cheeks grew red and he sat quiet and then, almost without warning, he erupted into laughter and his hand shot up in the air. Bill asked Johnny Appleseed, “Why don’t you wear any shoes?!” From that point forward Bill participated in our drama activities with little hesitation.

As the weeks progressed Bill grew more familiar and comfortable with the predictable nature of our drama and writing class time. On our third night together, Bill questioned with a giddy voice, “What puppet did you bring tonight, Mrs. Justine?” When I had described the visiting puppet, Bill made it his priority to relay the message to the other children as they arrived. He knew that we had a format to our evenings and I was able to see how that certainty helped Bill to come alive.

**Bill’s writing.** By the third week of our program, Bill no longer hid behind his mother’s leg when he entered the classroom. His writing was thoughtful in nature and he showed his commitment to writing by being the last child to complete his written work. Bill spent a lot of time in the “thinking about writing” stage. As seen in the figure below, Bill thought about his superhero costume from head to toe. He also had multiple conferences with both Katherine and myself about his work.

**Bill:** I am just thinking about what I want to write.  
**Justine:** Do you have any ideas that you would like help writing?  
**Bill:** Yes, but not yet. I’m still thinking.  
**Justine:** What are you thinking of drawing?  
**Bill:** I am going to make a superhero with powers to do stuff with the eyes.  
**Justine:** Would you like me to help you write that down?  
**Bill:** No. I need to keep thinking, a little more. I’m not finished with the whole thing.
It was during these conferences that he narrated his drawings but did not yet want to write about them (or to have them scribed for him).

Image 39: Student Work, Bill’s ‘Superhero’ Writing

Upon completing the drawing, Bill dictated the elements of his drawing in a sure voice. From top to bottom, (Mask) “Destroy and see anything on it.” (Suit) “My suit makes me invisible.” (Cape) “My cape has boosters and it can help me speed across the world in 2 seconds.” (Boots) “The boots help me go to outer space with rocket boosters.” When I asked Bill what kind of superhero he was, he responded by saying that he was “a good, friendly superhero, the fastest one, too!”
Bill’s engagement in the writing. Throughout the ten-week process, I observed that Bill was nervous when it came to sharing his work with the group. His cheeks grew red, he hid his eyes and he hunched his back when it was his turn. He had no trouble acting out thoughts with the group, sharing his personal story ideas or improvising a scene. However, volunteering to share his work was another story. Nearing the end of our time together, I tried to motivate Bill to share his responses, rather than share what he had written, but he would stay put, saying only that his piece needed more “words and more colors.” Bill’s mom said that on car rides home he “couldn’t stop talking about what he had done at ‘Drama Class’ and all the writing that he had completed.” On the other hand, he remained bashful, his cheeks turning red in color, when I bragged about his writing to his mother or shared his creative ideas or complimented his way of approaching a task to the class. One of my hopes for Bill was that he would feel comfortable conversing about and sharing his written work. While I was not able to fully motivate him to share his great work with the rest of our class, or express why he was uncomfortable being the complete center of attention, I remain proud of the work Bill complete and I know he is too.

Bill’s results. Bill completed nine of 10 possible pieces of writing; eight were at least partially dictated by Bill to the teacher. In three of the pieces Bill penned messages without assistance and in all nine writing samples Bill drew a picture to accompany the writing.

Using the Rating Technique for Observing Early Progress (Clay, 1994), each piece of writing was assessed for language content. All of the scores for Bill placed him in the developing phase of his writing progress. On two of nine occasions, Bill’s writing was
evaluated at a score of level four. The remaining pieces of writing were steadily in the not yet satisfactory category, with 19 scores between one and three.

Throughout the course of the drama portions of these lessons, Bill generally showed signs of interest and excitement for the lessons. His involvement in the dramatic action of the lessons was rated as independent. Eye contact, participation and direct involvement in the lessons were observed in the video documentation of the lessons. In eight of nine lessons Bill did not wade in his interest in the drama portion of the lessons. However, in one lesson, during week eight, Bill was distracted and appeared uninterested in the lesson. He was not following along with the group and, through video observations appeared to be bored.

When approaching the writing lessons, Bill generally liked to organize his work area before beginning a piece of writing. He often organized markers, pencils and crayons in separate spaces surrounding his writing location, then began his drawings, and finally commenced upon the writing process (usually with the aid of a teacher). Bill’s involvement in the written portion of the lessons was rated as independent; he did not require any additional motivators from teachers to complete his writing. In eight of the nine pieces of writing, direct connections to the drama lesson were made in his writing. Nine of the pieces of writing followed along with the same theme of the drama lessons. In five of his written works, Bill, used the same character from the drama as his central character in his writing. He also showed independent, creative thought when he extended the lesson ideas from our drama activities in seven of the pieces. In these new idea pieces of writing, Bill added details to his story that were not part of our group discussion or the whole group drama lessons.
Cross Case Analysis

Although this cross case analysis allows for substantiation of observational findings, the relatively small sample size does make generalizability more limited. Still, in this research, I sought to better understand students as writers when drama was a precursor to that writing, what follows is an examination and comparison of the student work and behaviors.

The boys. When looking at the male participants, Ryan, Bill and Jeff all thoroughly enjoyed the drama aspects of this research. Each boy appeared to appreciate acting, imagining, and playing while learning. In fact, all three of the boys were noted for high levels of engagement in every drama lesson that they were present for. They appeared confident and absorbed in a variety of roles and scenarios. The boys, more so Jeff and Ryan, were able to quickly transport themselves, adopt a role, and commit to the character. Bill, too, was capable of taking on a specific role or character, however he was more inclined to let another friend do the leading in this realm. All of the boys were more likely to participate when Ryan was present. One particular week, when Ryan arrived late, neither Jeff nor Bill desired to take the lead. With some gentle coaxing, Jeff fell into the role of male leader, and Bill quickly followed.

The boys’ writing showed many unique characteristics. Bill was careful not to rush the writing assignments. He frequently spent lengthy amounts of time on the drawings. When he reached the writing phase of his work, his dictation was practically a manuscript…it seemed as if he had been rehearsing and re-working the words throughout the drawing phase. Bill entertained the ideas of his peers, by listening, though he was not
as forthcoming with the sharing of his ideas for writing. Ryan, too, was an eager participant in the writing aspect of this research. Ryan enjoyed the community aspect of both the writing and the drama. In fact, he habitually shared ideas with his table group, then used completely different ideas for his own stories. When friends shared their stories with Ryan, as was often the case, he encouraged them and suggested how the writing could be improved. His writing progressed rapidly throughout the weeks of this research.

A change occurred as Ryan advanced through this weekly program, Ryan began sounding out words and attempting to record his stories without the aid of a teacher. There were only a couple of other students, Claire and Anna, who also followed a similar course to writing independence. On the other hand, Jeff, who sometimes ignited lively conversations at his writing table, did not share the same enthusiasm for writing that Ryan and Bill seemed to possess. For the first half of the program, Jeff struggled to transfer his passion from the drama lessons to the writing assignments. When attempting to write, Jeff’s marker lingered on the page for great lengths of time, his eyes wondered off, and he shrugged when teachers encouraged him to share his thoughts. In the first half of this program, his ideas, both plentiful and novel, were more difficult to extract. The written work completed by the boys, made direct connections to and appeared to be inspired by the drama in which they had participated. Ryan, Bill, and Jeff were creative and expressive when it came to the drama and kinesthetic portions of our learning. Yet when we look to the writing, their interests, enthusiasm, and communication were more varied. With some support, these selected boys were able to accomplish the written tasks assigned to them.
The girls. Claire, Anna, and Jill each approached the drama activities in their own way. At the beginning of this research, Claire was more likely to be an observer than a participator. Midway through the program, though, Claire was more apt to participate, communicate, and demonstrate her knowledge through the drama activities. Anna, on the other hand, gladly involved herself in any and all drama activities. With each passing week, Anna’s involvement and contributions to our class grew. Jill, a mix of both Anna and Claire, held back as we began our lessons, but involved herself as the topics became more familiar. Her voice was often quiet and small when at the onset of the evening and by the time we had completed the drama lessons, I consistently observed much louder and more animated behaviors. Anna embraced the opportunity to be led by her older and more outgoing peers. All three of the girls seemed to enjoy the drama lessons, Anna and Claire were extremely creative with their thinking, problem solving, dramatic voices, and dramatic actions. As the weeks progressed, Jill, too, began expressing herself more readily through the drama, although never quite to the same level as her older peers.

When it came to the writing aspect of this research, Jill’s writing showed the most growth. At the time of this program, Jill had not yet attended formal schooling. Consequently, Jill was learning a lot about writing in our first few weeks of programming. Throughout the course of this research, Jill’s understanding of how to write, her observations of the writing completed by peers, and her sense of self as an author was growing. As evidenced by observations of her writing stamina, Jill began spending larger amounts of time working on writing at her writing table. I would argue, as the weeks went on, Jill began to feel that her writing was meaningful. Furthermore, it was this feeling of purpose, that encouraged and motivated her to continue writing. Conversely,
Claire and Anna began the program having had formal school experiences and with an understanding of what writing was. They also had a firm appreciation for the possibilities that writing held for them. Claire and Anna wrote stories, recipes, lists, and made comic strips on a regular basis. Both girls thoroughly enjoyed writing, they sat next to one another nightly. The girls each had a competitive, yet considerate spirit. Their closeness in age, ability, and their similarities with regards to ideas helped them to drive their learning forward. The girls encouraged one another, acted as a team, and possessed a similar flair in their writing pieces. Overall, the quality of writing pieces completed by the three girls almost always possessed strong connections to the drama lessons. The writing Claire, Anna, and Jill engaged in appeared to be inspired by the drama in which they had partaken. It frequently made direct connections to their characters within the drama scenes and even possessed similar language. The girls, in this study, were slightly more reserved when it came to the drama and kinesthetic portions of our learning. Yet when looking at the writing excitement, communication, creativity, and stamina the girls had, it was with minimal support that they accomplished the writing tasks assigned to them.

**The boys and girls.** Both the boys and the girls in this research worked diligently and creatively to bring stories and dramatic ideas to life. In general, the boys tended to excel in the dramatic and kinesthetic elements of the program, while the girls found their niche in the writing. Although several boys experienced confidence and engagement in both the drama and the writing, it was not the norm. The boys seemed to favor the imaginative and dramatic play, especially when costumes were involved. Interestingly, it
was more common for a girl (rather than a boy), in this research, to show signs of confidence and engagement in both the drama and the writing.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Discussion: Revisiting the Research Questions

I begin this chapter by using my research findings to reflect on the research questions that originally guided this research. Next, I propose implications of my research for research and practice. I conclude with reflections on what I have learned that will inform my teaching.

1) How does participating in dramatic lessons support student engagement in writing?

The drama activities carried out in this research supported many students in their writing endeavors. Since several of the kindergarten learners in this research, who had not yet attended formal schooling, were grappling with language expression, using creative drama in the classroom helped to create a sense of excitement and safety. On one occasion, the children were acting as the Gruffalo (Donaldson, 2004) when a female participant, Cindy, who was typically more reserved in our lessons, became the fearless mouse character. Her language mirrored that of the mouse from the story, her body exemplified bravery and her eyes were cast towards the somewhat frightening snake, depicted by another child from our group. This portrayal of the confident mouse was carefully executed and, although it took us nine weeks to reach this point, Cindy used the in-role drama to better understand the mouse’s character. When it was time for her to take this role from the stage to the page, she knew who the mouse was, she connected with the story, and her writing showed these advances.
Once the language of the lesson was embedded in their minds, thanks to the in-role activities, many students, like Cindy, were able to fluidly begin the process of recording their ideas. In cases where students were less absorbed in the drama activity, *Week Eight-Have I Got a Book for You!* (Watts, 2009) for example, the writing, too, lacked the imagination and enthusiasm seen in stronger, more engaging, lessons. When lessons were high in excitement, unscripted involvement, and creativity it was observed that there was an overflow from the drama ideas to the writing pieces. “Not surprisingly, research shows a significant correlation between high levels of engagement and improved … achievement as measured through direct observations and interviews” (Jablons & Wilkenson, 2006, p. 2). Similarly, according to Dornyei (2001), motivation and personal connections are said to be an essential element of language expression. Williams and Burden (2007) add that when a child views learning activities as personally relevant they feel a strong sense of agency and their attitude towards the activities are improved.

Accordingly, the drama in this research helped students to express and ripen their ideas. When it was time to write, students had, at the very least, a topic and a feeling they wished to convey in their mind. Perhaps more importantly, they were engaged in the drama, motivated to write, and excited about the learning.

Another aspect to student participation and engagement in this research was the familiarity with our lessons, schedule, and a process-centered approach to writing. The process approach is both predictable and flexible; it gives students a wide berth for creativity and self-expression, while providing the structure necessary to support their learning. “The type of classroom environment that a teacher creates and encourages can either increase or decrease a student's ability to learn and feel comfortable as a member of
the class” (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009, p.1). Research studies show that students crave structure and familiarity (Wong & Wong, 2014). When these essential needs are met, students are more likely to become engaged in, and committed to lessons and, therefore, inclined to achieve their personal best (Garner, 2008; Watson, 2003). On the first night of our program, I noticed that some students had quickly completed the writing assignment and then relocated from our writing table to the toy area. Their writing efforts, though complete to some degree, did not show their best effort. Unfortunately, the lead up to the writing “was not personally meaningful, [therefore] the children’s writing was short on content, creativity, and spark” (Brown, 2010). This event forced me to reflect on the goals of the literacy program by asking myself what my hope was for each of these children. My hope was not for completed pieces that were rushed, thrown to the side, and forgotten. Nor was my goal to have perfectly executed writing, with impeccable penmanship and punctuation. As Graves (2004) states, children want to write, we should let them do so without inserting the constraints of a polished product and preset themes. “Children need to choose most of their own topics. But we need to show them all the places writing comes from, that it is often triggered by simple everyday events” (Graves, 2004, p. 91). With this in mind, my goal was to help students to love to write. My research confirms what scholars (Culham, 2005; Meirer, 2000; Parsons, 2005) have found—that children should be given opportunities to voice their opinions and thoughts, and that they should be encouraged by their teachers, to cultivate their own personal writing flair. As children compose stories that hold personal meaning, they then begin to see themselves as authors (Barratt-Pugh, 2007; McGee & Richgels, 2008). Furthermore, I encouraged the children to revisit previous pieces of writing at the beginning or end of
each class, even weeks after lessons had been taught (Brown, 2010; Calkins et. al, 2013). When revisiting work, students often examined and reflected on what they wrote and drew, though few made corrections or added to their work. Instead, the students considered their writing, contemplating the accomplishment of each piece. As the weeks went on and the size and breadth of their writing folders grew, so did the author’s sense of achievement. In fact, many students began bringing their parents into the classroom to show the writing pieces from previous weeks contained in their writing folders. This process-centered approach was ideal for the kindergarten-aged children in this research, it facilitated initial excitement and motivation to write, careful contemplation of work, and thoughtful recognition of previous tasks. Process writing, by its very nature, considers each child’s starting point; from there, a journey of writing improvement and enjoyment commences. It has consistently been shown to improve writing quality for young children (Duke, & Martineau, 2007; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006; Purcell-Gates).

Another factor influencing children’s motivation and engagement in their writing is the relationships fostered by the drama activities. Drama has a positive effect on classroom dynamics and group cohesion, thus simplifying and accelerating the formation relationships, friendships, and a community, which learns together (Maley & Duff, 2001; 2005). Several weeks into the Monday Night program, students were making friends and showing visible signs of comfort (smiling, laughing, talking, sitting close to a new friend, etc.) in our group. Student participation was positively affected by this comfort, as students who were barely moving during our song and dance warm-up activity in the first weeks were confidently moving their bodies with giggles and grins by week four. Our group had evolved, over the weeks, from 15 people converging at the library one night a
week, to a community of young learners who had a healthy dose of excitement about our weekly meetings. The writing, too, became stronger as children developed relationships with peers and their teacher (Tolentino, 2013). The children understood the writing time to be an invitation, of sorts, where they were participants in a meaning-making activity (Dyson, 2001; Glover & Ray, 2008; Rowe, 2003). About mid-way through our 12-week program, students began regularly talking and sharing ideas at their writing tables, Elements of a beginning, middle, end, characters and plot were also becoming more prevalent across all of the writing. In one example, during our second week of program, a child named Blake drew trees, a dotted line and a ship to depict a treasure map. When I asked him if he wanted to add any words, he politely declined. In contrast, on the second to last night of our program, Blake drew a large, hairy creature and asked me to write: *This is the scariest, meanest monster of all! He has the scariest pokey things yet! Poison nose, orange eyes, black tongue.* With each passing week Blake’s writing displayed more descriptive elements and exciting moments, two topics that were discussed and mentored during our whole group lessons.

2) How do students view themselves as writers and how do they feel about writing after participating in dramatic lessons?

At the onset of this data collection process, I noticed that many students chose to scribble, quickly draw or speedily write a short entry on the paper. Several children approached me looking for affirmations or even hoping to move to what they perceived to be a more enjoyable activity. Their requests, “Can I play with the Lego blocks, now?” and “I’m all done,” informed me of their desire. The thoughts and excitement that took place in our drama lesson had not extended to their writing, in those first weeks. It
appeared that the students, by and large, did not view themselves as writers. As Alpert (2000) found in her observations of young children’s writing processes, “Composing is the getting ready to take the risk; it's the struggling to develop an idea; it's the self-doubt, the inner critic constantly challenging you; it's all the revision that happens before you ever get a word down on paper. Composing is the thinking, the problem solving, the choices” (p.13). I needed to create writing environments that mirrored the drama environments—children needed space and opportunity to take risks and be supported as they struggled with composing.

As the weeks went on, I realized my error in lesson planning. The focus of the writing could not be to finish; instead it had to be to enjoy writing. I needed to inspire the desire to write, instead of trying to turn out the final product with a set of predetermined criteria. The more interactive the writing and drama lessons were, the more the students, in this research, wanted to write and draw. Although the drama lesson from the first week involved role taking, movement, and imagination—it was not as interactive as the subsequent lessons were. Furthermore, in later lessons I began to use the think-aloud tactic (a process where teachers share their thinking as they complete a task) (Charters, 2003) while I modeled my writing processes, encouraging student input along the way (Ray, 2001). In the first lesson, I had made the mistake of thinking that too much drama might lead to a silent and motionless room. As it turns out, the exact opposite was true in this research. “It seems clear to me now that “writing” is only one piece of the puzzle that is “composing”…Composing is the getting ready to take the risk…Composing is the thinking, the problem solving, the choices (Alpert, 2009, p. 13). Over the remaining weeks of program, I implemented lessons using a collaborative, drama-based approach
under the working assumption that the students could use the story drama lessons as a base for their writing. I observed that the more opportunities there were for role-based learning, the greater enthusiasm for writing and generation of ideas for writing occurred. With greater involvement came greater reward, as the students began to view their scribbles, drawings, and writings as serious contributions to their bodies of written work. It seemed that structuring lessons with drama then writing, gave students a way to think about stories, and to discover more about themselves as writers. Thinking is a significant part of writing (Graves, 1983). The thinking and planning to write, is “…especially advantageous for both novice and struggling writers” (Harris et al., 2006, p. 298). Through this drama and thought focused process the children were able to create drawings and develop stories that replicated the knowledge and viewpoints gained from our lessons (Fields, Groth, & Spangler, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). When asked if they enjoyed writing letters, lists and stories, all of the children in the research study responded that they did enjoy writing. It is my belief that the enjoyment that the writing produced, in this study, was directly linked to the enjoyment that the children experienced in the preceding story drama lesson.

3) How does scaffolding lesson content encourage student connections in the dramatic retellings of stories and in the subsequent writing activities?

Students who are learning to read and write are best aided by instruction that scaffolds their learning in a safe social context (Graves, 2004; Read, 2010). Prior to beginning an assignment or an independent task, Read suggests that teachers provide “…students with the optimal amount of support necessary to complete the task” (Read, 2010, p.2). The first step to writing, as detailed by Read (2010), is the act of
brainstorming ideas. In this research, students thought about what happened before stories began, they considered how characters felt, and they made predictions for what could happen in the future. Furthermore, students acted in role as characters, answered questions and inferred messages that were not written in the text. For example, when students acted out a scene from *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), they were asked to describe how the Wild Things felt when Max arrived, during the rumpus, after the rumpus, when Max announced he was leaving, and when he had left. For this reason, I believe students in the Monday night class were more inclined to attach feelings and make connections to our shared stories in their writing. The kindergarteners, for the most part, made connections from the drama activities to their real life. On one occasion, after reading the book titled, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (Viorst, 1987), students were writing about a horrible day. One student shared that when he was stuck in traffic, his day was horrible. Many of the students could relate to the association that being stuck in traffic was, in fact, horrible. Next, the students engaged in improvised, dramatic scenes where they expressed how they felt by acting as if they were stuck in traffic. Although it was not his idea to begin with, the traffic theme carried over into Charlie’s writing. He drew a highway stacked back to back with cars and drew tears streaming down his face, “This is me, missing my brother’s soccer game,” he said. By scaffolding the lesson content into small relatable chunks, many of the student in this research were able to work through and connect to the weekly themes and stories. The drama connected to the lives of the students and it “…offer[ed] a chance to be heard, an opportunity to express ideas and feelings, an occasion for language. While drama is an active, "doing" medium, the reflective mode allow[ed] children to make meaning by
examining and understanding their thoughts and perceptions both as spectators and participants” (Booth, 1998, p. 30).

Another aspect of scaffolding utilized in this research was that of outlining. Although the students did not complete a formal outline of their story, outlining techniques, specifically the opportunities to talk about writing ideas before beginning writing assignments, were implemented on a weekly basis (Read, 2010). Each week, prior to engaging in the writing, students talked to each other and the teachers in the room about what they wanted to write. Sometimes as they spoke about their ideas for writing, their ideas changed. Students appeared to be comfortable abandoning one idea in favor of another; occasionally, they borrowed ideas from other students or they developed a new idea while they were circulating through our room. These incidences, where classroom dialogue specifically designed with the goal of talking about future writing, were observed as both helpful and motivating to the students involved. The scaffolding of the lessons, opportunities for conversations, as well as the thinking time may have helped students to share their personal connections through their written word.

Another important form of scaffolding is the peer-to-peer conversations; these are discussions that take place during the writing process. Peer-to-peer writing support has been shown to improve student written performance (Harris et al., 2006). This type of student assistance “may further reduce the need to plan while writing, freeing resources to engage in other writing processes such as translating ideas into words and transcribing words into printed text” (Harris et al., 2006, p. 299). Many students in this research conversed as they wrote. Ryan, Claire, Blake and Anna frequently began conversations at their writing tables. The kindergarteners did not have a script to lead their peer-to-peer
conferences. The talk that took place was authentic and free flowing. There were periods of silence and quiet chatter, when students were concentrating and/or reflecting. At other times, however, students told the story they were writing out loud, made connections to our previous drama lesson, and even suggested exciting changes to the stories their friends told with “What if?” additions. This concept of peer mentoring draws upon principles of social learning that emphasize intellectual sharing and collaborative thinking when carrying out work that is complex or demanding (Harris et al., 2006; Vechter & Bierley, 2009). The same principles are applied when teachers confer with students. Throughout this research, weekly writing sessions with a teacher were held. It is “the teacher’s role during every workshop period, in fact, to initiate conversations with students about pieces they are writing” (Anderson, 2000, p. 6). During the conferences teachers and students were able to talk about writing. The conferences were also “a powerful way of teaching [the students] to be better writers” (Anderson, 2000, p.6). These weekly meetings became essential to student confidence and growth in writing. Sometimes the conferences resembled that of a conversation between teacher and student, however and most often, these conferences were the sharing of ideas and the posing of questions in a safe and friendly manner (Anderson, 2006; Calkins, 1986). Students in this research benefited greatly from the queries posed by teachers, assistance scribing ideas, and of course the affirmation of completed writing.

Drama taps into a social form of learning that inspires children to connect to each other and the content of the lesson (Gallagher & Yaman Ntelioglou, 2011). The socializing effects of drama in education, too, can bridge the gap between learning and real life (Gallagher & Yaman Ntelioglou, 2011).
life was witnessed on many occasions during this research. When two or more kindergarten children became excited and engaged in a dramatic role, most often, the other children followed suit. Children also told each other stories of times where their dog ate a cookie off the counter, or their bad day started with waking up late. Children in this research knew their lives best. They used these real-life stories to connect to every lesson in this research. It is these connections that frequently inspired unique and thoughtful writing.

In conclusion, I believe that my research shows that drama-in-education has a meaningful and relevant role to play in literacy learning at the kindergarten level. Drama has the potential to improve young children’s oral communication abilities and their confidence, positive self-esteem and motivation to engage in writing activities. Each week, students were challenged, through scaffolded instruction, to enjoy writing, to creatively write, and to develop a personal voice in their writing. Mantle of the Expert dramatic teaching techniques, story drama and hot seating were used to help draw the children into narratives. These narratives helped to shape the lessons, through dialogue and questioning. During each class, students were given many different kinds of opportunities to contribute and participate (answering questions, elaborating on the ideas of their peers, performing, miming, singing, dancing, making noise sound tracks, etc.) this ensured that students, at all levels of understanding, could feel involved.

The role of teachers is to guide, assist, and wonder alongside students. Teachers probe with questions and act out possible solutions (Heikkinen, 2005). Children and teachers, together, take risks and try out new ideas, uncovering different solutions to problems and learning from each other.
Implications

A number of implications for research and practice arise from my research. I identify limitations in the following discussion of implications for research.

**Increasing sample size.** In future research, an increase could be made to the sample size, perhaps by involving a whole school or several schools, thereby increasing the number of students across a range of grades and/or within single grades. This would increase the generalizability of the findings, and could subsequently reveal what kinds of changes could be made to the delivery of writing lessons in order to support both students and teachers.

**Extending the study longitudinally.** Given the positive results of this short term, 12-week study, I believe that further research examining how a teacher, with a single group of kindergarten aged children, might maintain the positive benefits of the drama in education approach over an entire school year would be beneficial.

**Observing teachers over time.** A longitudinal study could observe multiple teachers as they adapt what they have learned about teaching with drama, as a tool for learning, into their subsequent teaching. It would be interesting to examine the challenges that teachers face when utilizing drama in their classrooms and the ways in which they either overcome or succumb to those challenges. Observing teachers over the course of several years would indicate if this type of lesson planning and delivery is sustainable for teachers.

Implications for Practice
My research shows that by using a drama in education approach, teachers support students to express themselves, make connections to texts and see themselves as writers. In the process, students deepen their understanding of the world, those around them and the topic that is being studied (Anderson, 2004; Booth, 1998; McMaster, 1998). When students are encouraged to look beyond the words on the page; thinking about how a character would feel, they have input for their writing. In this way, drama is a springboard for their writing. By looking beyond writing or reading lessons, and choosing to bring in the arts to support this learning, teachers help students to engage in writing, to develop important skills, and a love for literacy. When the different areas of study, reading, writing and the arts, are taught simultaneously in a cross curricular fashion, students can make multiple connections to deepen, expand, and extend their understanding of various topics.

Additionally, I have learned that attending to engagement, student interest in theme and determining if a certain topic for writing would be worthwhile are of the utmost importance while lesson planning. Teachers should also carefully select which mentor texts and storybooks are used in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers need to consider the benefits of their participation in drama activities. In order to gain the full benefits from drama in education practices, the teacher must embed him/herself into the drama alongside their students.

The research has further revealed that when two or more teachers are working with drama, an environment is created that is beneficial for the educators. During each of the 12 weeks of programming, we attempted to approach each lesson with a collaborative mindset. The relationship between Katherine and myself helped to provide support during
our lessons and discussions. Katherine delivered a fresh perspective on the lessons that had taken place and she was a critical part of future lesson planning. Katherine and I were able to communicate regularly, often reflecting and discussing next steps well after the children had returned home. Although Katherine did not have a drama background, she fully embraced the drama aspects of this learning. Katherine was not afraid to role play and engage in the suspended disbelief of this research. She frequently questioned the students in a way that helped them to more fully develop their roles and later writings. Katherine’s presence in the room was that of a teammate. Her educational experience combined with her eagerness to learn more about drama helped to unite us and create rich dialogue whenever we discussed our class. A similar scenario, in which a team of teachers carry out lessons ideas and communicate lesson effectiveness, would be a fruitful ambition. Connected by a common goal involving drama in education, the teachers could plan future objectives, reflect with, and assist each other. This type of relationship would be ideal for teachers, new to drama, who are aiming to implement drama into their literacy lessons. Because of her involvement in this research, Katherine has indicated that she would be interested in authoring journal articles about our collaborative approach to lesson delivery, planning, and how the arts help children to develop writing ideas. Furthermore, as a current 3rd grade teacher, Katherine penned, “I would definitely say that I use the arts more, I appreciate them more as a tool for learning, now. I see how drama and the arts can help move learning from surface to something that is more substantial for my students. I can see myself engaging in arts based research again in the future” (Miller, 2016). Katherine, an MEd student at the onset of this research and now a MEd graduate of Vanderbilt University, was a consistent
comrade, a dependable sounding board, and a creative partner in this research. I believe that this kind of partnership is essential to best practice, student success, and personal growth as a teacher.

**Final Thoughts from a Teacher-Researcher’s Perspective**

One of the hopes for this drama and literacy research was that it might help other teachers when approaching the task of teaching writing to kindergarten aged children. The arts are not new to the classroom. Many educators value the creative discourse and interactive teaching concepts that drama has to offer. The valuable relationship that can be formed between scaffolded instruction and drama in education strategies was highlighted during the twelve weeks of data collection.

More importantly, this research has given a group of students the opportunity to see themselves as writers. The combination of drama, community, and literature gave them a way to think about writing that was filled with adventure and wonder. The MoE and ZPD planning aspects of this research helped students to lean into their learning, at just the right level. This approach allowed for the creation of imaginary and relevant scenarios while challenging students to their fullest capabilities.

Furthermore, this research journey not only helped this small group of students, but it also transformed me as an educator. As the embedded teacher/research, each week I grappled with questions of lesson topic, delivery methods, book choice, scaffolding options, drama delivery choices, writing objective selections, writing assignments, questions of engagement and more. Decisions made were not always easy. As a participant/observer, I was able to see how one wrong move could make the difference between a fluid/strong lesson, and a choppy/weak one. Throughout the weeks of the
program, I was encouraged by the responses the children gave, by the way their faces lit up when I introduced a new puppet, and by their earnest and thoughtful writing. It amazed and challenged me to look deeply at each child as a writer, drama participant, learner, and member of the peer community. The journey of learning to love writing is truly a winding path. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to better know this group of fascinating, creative, and curious young minds. This research also helped me to reaffirm drama’s place in the curriculum. In a world where the arts can often be viewed as extra, this research helps to affirm the work of drama educators everywhere. It also has shown me that even after 12 years of drama in education experiences, I still fumble and falter. These stumbling experiences, at a craft I hold so close to my heart, help me to remember that I am constantly growing and learning. The grace that I give to my students, is the same grace I need to give to myself. The journey of being an educator, one who truly cares about students and their learning, is filled with uncertainty and risk.

Embarking on this research has helped me to remember to live in a state of permanent beta. It has reminded me that the goal, for teachers and students alike, is one of progress, not perfection.

When I began this research, I had not anticipated how it would shed light on the feasibility of daily drama interventions. First, I was surprised by the huge commitment of time and energy that was needed to plan the literacy and drama lessons. Student interests and learning levels were constantly being considered, therefore, lessons were always being reworked, rethought, and sometimes scrapped in an effort to provide the very best for this group. This generous allocation of time may appear unreasonable or even unmanageable for a teacher who teaches many subjects each day. As a current teacher of
second grade, this balance is always at the forefront of my mind. There are so many objectives, outcomes and mandates to fulfill and time always seems to run out. To achieve a balance and utilize drama in education, I have chosen to select two subject areas each day in which I will use drama in education principles and practices. Whether it be a puppet led activity, or a teacher in-role story drama, the goal is to deliver two lessons that engage the students using these techniques. This daily goal, I have found, excites my students and allows me to manage my time and work load to the fullest.

In the future, I hope to engage in research that observes entire faculties of teachers adopting drama as a teaching tool. I have often wondered what it would be like to teach on a team with teachers who embraced drama in education as a tool for the classroom. I imagine our daily teaching would be exponentially more imaginative and engaging. Furthermore, I have always found that sharing ideas with colleagues breeds new ideas, new options, and a sense of community. It is that environment, one that is rich with ideas, community, and creativity, that I desire to research and cultivate. If drama is a community wide initiative, the collaborative and supportive environment could be encouraging and make lesson planning and daily preparations more feasible.
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Appendix A
Puppet Information

**Name:** Kevin, Monster Puppet
**Age:** 12 Years Old
**Family:** Brother to Marvin
**Likes:** Computers, trees, sports, music, writing stories, and drawing.
**Special Characteristics:** Wants people to know that not all monsters are scary. He tells jokes and plays *Hide and Go Seek*. Kevin loves to make treasure maps and play ‘pretend’.

**Name:** Marvin, Puppy Puppet
**Age:** 6 Years Old
**Family:** Brother to Kevin
**Likes:** Superheroes, flying, reading, and hugs.
**Special Characteristics:** Is a hearing impaired and mute puppet. He answers with “*Yes*”, “*No*” or “*Maybe*” by shaking his head. Marvin loves when students read to him.

**Name:** Annabelle, Cow Puppet
**Age:** 4 Years Old
**Family:** Family members are Larrybelle, Sherrybelle, and Merrybelle. All cows, who also live on the farm.
**Likes:** Walking down to the stream, talking with the ducks, writing letters of concern to the farmer, and making cheese.
**Special Characteristics:** Annabelle is very forgetful. The students constantly remind her of her goals for the day.

**Name:** Claire, Butterfly Puppet
**Age:** 2 Years Old
**Family:** The Very Hungry Caterpillar.
**Likes:** Flapping wings, flapping, and spinning as she flies. She is an acrobat in the air.
**Special Characteristics:** Claire is the fairy godmother of caterpillars. She helps the caterpillars become butterflies by teaching each to make a magical Chrysalis.

**Name:** Seth, Snake Puppet
**Age:** 10 Years Old
**Family:** No family members.
**Likes:** Saying words that begin with S, laying in the sun, eating mice, and slithering in an open field.
**Special Characteristics:** Seth likes to exaggerate, many students even call him a liar. He tells fibs and the students teach him to tell the truth, even when it’s difficult.
### Appendix B
Kindergarten Dolch Site Words (Dolch, 1948)

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Appendix C
Monday Night Talk Show Excerpt- Week Ten

Justine: Hello and welcome to the Monday Night Talk Show. Tonight, we will be talking about bad days. Everyone has them, but what are they? What does it mean to have a bad day?

Student 1: When like everything bad happens. Like on the road and traffic.

Student 2: Like, if you were in traffic and you really wanted to go somewhere and the cars just weren’t moving.

Justine: That does sounds like a bad day, stuck in traffic! This just in, we are hearing reports that people are having other kinds of bad days. What other things might make a day bad?

Student 3: If you were late coming to this class.

Justine: That might make me have a bad day, too.

Let me tell you about a bad day that I once had. One day I was eating an ice cream cone and the ice cream fell on the ground.

Kevin (puppet): That sounds really bad! I love ice cream!!!

Justine: Yes, Kevin, it was. Have you ever had a bad day?

Kevin: Yes, one morning I woke up and the sun was shining in my eyes. Then, I looked at the clock, “AHHHHHHHHH!!!” I screamed. I was late for school!!!!!

Justine: That sounds bad, Kevin.

Kevin: Another time, my dog ate my favorite dessert off my plate! What kind of day do you think I was having?

Students: Bad! Not good! Horrible!

Justine: Oh, I see a member of our studio audience has her hand up. Tell me about your bad day, ma’am.

Student 4: If you were in traffic and you stayed there for 15 hours.

Justine: 15 hours!!

Students: (Laughter)

Justine: That would be a very long and bad day! Would you like to share, what’s your name sir?

Student 2: James.

Justine: Very pleased to meet you, tell us about what a bad day would look like for you.

James (Student 2): If you never got clipped up on your clip chart.

Justine: What would happen if you didn’t get clipped up?

James (Student 2): It means you haven’t been good (at school). (Students in the class are nodding in agreement.)

Justine: What sort of things do you do to get clipped up?

James (Student 2): Listen and do what the teachers says.

Student 5: Listening ears, too.

Justine: Very interesting. It looks like we have time for one more comment before we need to go to a commercial break. Yes, here we are. Ma’am, what happens to you on a horrible day?

Student 6: If my ice cream fell on the ground.

Student 7: Or (interrupting), if you went to the store to get ice cream and they didn’t even have any!

Justine: Thank you for your thoughtful answers, we will have more on this after our commercial break!
*FREE* DRAMA PROGRAM

to aid the development of
EMERGENT WRITING SKILLS

Would you like to help develop and improve your child’s beginning writing abilities this summer, while helping him/her gain confidence and public speaking skills?

ABOUT THE PROGRAM:
We are offering a FREE program for children ages 4-6 at the room. Each lesson will last approximately 2 hours and will help your child to learn to think critically, improve writing skills and develop personal connections to stories. This program is aimed at helping emergent writers. No prior skills are necessary.

TIME: MONDAYS from 5:30 pm-7:30 pm (July-September)
Beginning Monday July 6th 2016

At the end of the program your child will be presented with a certificate of completion and a firm handshake!

ABOUT THE LEADER:
This program is facilitated by Justine Bruyère, a PhD student in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning. Justine has over a decade of experience using drama to help children learn. This program intends to provide participating children with an opportunity to build writing skills. Justine’s research goal are focused on understanding how drama motivates children to partake in writing activities.

To find out more about Justine go to: www.justinebruere.weebly.com

WHERE: The Library:

If you are interested or have additional questions please email: justine.bruyere@mail.utoronto.ca to reserve your spot. Only *15* children will be accepted into this special program.
Appendix E
Letter of Information- Consent to Participate

May 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I have embarked upon a research study, which concentrates, on teachers helping their students with literacy skills using drama in education principles and practices. I will be observing the children in our group and collecting observational data during writing classes for 12 weeks (July-September). I will observe student creativity, structure and ideas after participating in drama and literacy lessons. Each week students will arrive to a drama lesson, which will be centered on a specific story. We will act out the story, explore the characters, create scenes and perform new ideas generated from our activities. Next, we will focus on writing strategies, expression, and ideas. Finally, I will ask the students to write (with assistance) and/or draw at the end of each lesson. An Early Childhood Educator will be present at all of the lessons.

Photographs and video will be taken during the course of this research. Images may be displayed, posted, or exhibited for educational purposes. The data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office for five years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. I will be happy to provide you with copies of the results of the survey.

I expect that this research will help teachers to learn more about helping students with literacy skills when using drama in education. I plan to present the findings in academic journals and at conferences for teachers and researchers. To ensure that no one knows that you have taken part in our research, when describing students, I will be using false names. False locations will also be used for the whereabouts of our research.

If you choose for your child to participate, please sign and return one copy of the consent form at the top of the survey, and keep the second copy of this letter for your records. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have, if you contact me at:
justine.bruyere@mail.utoronto.ca.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Justine Marie Bruyère, PhD Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I agree to my child's participation in Mrs. Justine Bruyère's research study. She has explained in writing the purpose of the study, what my child will be asked to do and how much time it will take. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study from her. My questions have been answered and I know I can ask more questions about the research later. I understand that I can say no and that my child can withdraw from the research study at any time without any negative consequences.

I understand that the researcher, Mrs. Bruyère, working on this study will keep the data confidential. She will keep my child's identity anonymous by not using any student names/identities in the research. Further, alternate names for the library and district will be used. I understand that images, including photographs and video, will be shown, viewed, copied, used exhibited, and distributed for educational purposes. I understand that the researcher intends to present findings in magazines and at conferences. I understand that Mrs. Bruyère will observe my child during drama and literacy activities.

I understand that if I have questions or concerns about participant rights and ethical conduct of research, I can contact the researchers.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

Date: ______________________

Name of child (please print): ________________________________

Name of Parent/Guardian: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

Please send the results of the survey ______ Yes ______ No

Email address: ________________________________