The Use of Print Referencing Techniques Through Preschoolers’ Play-based Creative Writing Experiences: The Impact on Oral Language Development, Print Awareness, and Literacy Abilities with Children Diagnosed with Language Disorder

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The Use of Print Referencing Techniques Through Preschoolers’ Play-based Creative Writing Experiences: The Impact on Oral Language Development, Print Awareness, and Literacy Abilities with Children Diagnosed with Language Disorder

by

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DEDICATION

To my loving husband, David, who was there to offer support, listen attentively, and propose a counterpoint when needed: I thank you from the deepest regions of my heart. Lest I forget, I also thank you for your willingness to open the “bank of Dad” as needed. To my parents, Van and Jean, although you were not here with me in the physical sense, I have felt your spiritual presence throughout this segment of my life. To David and Derek, my sons, I appreciate your words of encouragement and your actions that supported me through this endeavor. To Katon and Murray, your sweet little faces and funny toddler-antics kept me going when Grandma wanted to give up. To Ansley, I hope you will forgive me for not giving you the time a mother-in-law should give to her wonderful daughter-in-law. To my sister, Mary, and my brother, David, thank you for your prayers. I needed them many times. To my mother- and father-in-law, Emlie and William, you held a place in which my parents could not be. Your continuous encouragement helped me through this journey. To Carolyn, my teaching assistant, you are like a sister to me. Thank you for supporting me with your time, willingness to help, and overall positive attitude through this endeavor. Lastly, to the children and their parents who participated in this study, I will never be able to thank you fully to the degree you deserve, nor will I be able to look at a superhero action figure in the same way without thinking of a possible preschooler’s piece of creative writing. Thank you for your willingness to assist me throughout this research process.
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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I explored the lives of 10 children who were diagnosed with a language disorder. The children were enrolled in a therapeutic half-day speech-language preschool classroom for 3- and 4-year-old children within a public-school system in the rural Southeast. The research included a 15-week mini-ethnographic case study utilizing participant observation. Through a sociocultural Vygotskian approach used to meet their language and literacy needs holistically, I encouraged the children to use meaningful artifacts from which their play, talk, and stories developed. I collected both qualitative and quantitative data to assess how creative writing experiences including print referencing approaches impacted the children’s abilities in oral language, awareness of print, and development of literacy abilities.

The results revealed the children’s engagement in creative writing were influenced by toys, specifically superheroes—-independent of ownership of the toy—as well as media representations of superheroes and cartoon characters. The toys offered the children the opportunity for movement and engagement, resulting in creative writing pieces, which children revisited during print referencing engagements. The results also showed that children’s natural use of interactive movements and self-generated songs throughout the creative writing sessions functioned as necessary sociocultural interactions the children utilized to aid them in the development of their ideas. These findings are contrary to the belief that a quiet environment offers the best atmosphere for creative writing opportunities and that toys should remain at home, as toys and other
media representations were the most commonly represented themes in the children’s creative writing pieces. This study further revealed that when children realize they have autonomy when producing their own stories in a play-based context, they are more apt to attend to oral language that has been scribed for them, thus creating an interconnected awareness among their oral language abilities, awareness of print, and literacy abilities when their scribed words are emphasized.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

During this research, I was a speech-language pathologist working as a preschool teacher in a therapeutic classroom that focused on helping children develop their language abilities. The children who participated in my classroom, like all children, were unique individuals. Yet, these children all had one common characteristic: they were classified as children with a language disorder. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD; 2011) defines a language disorder as a condition that “delays the mastery of language skills in children who have no hearing loss or other developmental delays” (p. 1). Language can be defined in a variety of ways, however in this dissertation, I use the definition “a code for conveying thoughts or ideas” (Camarata & Nelson, 2002, p. 108). One common characteristic of preschool children with language disorders is their difficulty with using the “code” to combine words effectively to interact with others to make their needs known (Camarata, 2014).

In addition to traditional 4-year-old kindergarten activities like reading, show and tell, and outdoor play, the children and I participated in creative writing activities (Clay, 1977; Copp, Cabell, & Tortorelli, 2015; Dorr, 2006; Weaver, 2002). Creative writing opportunities are not new in early childhood classrooms. Clay (1977) expressed that through her experiences, she saw the “creative urge of the child to write down his own ideas” (p. 335). To honor the children’s creativity, I encouraged the children to draw their experiences without placing excessive requirements on fine-motor abilities. Simply, the
children drew pictures. In turn, they told me their experiences while I transcribed their words verbatim, honoring the language of their culture, and avoiding the conventions of ‘correct grammar” (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996, p. 11). The children and I then reread their work together (Nessel & Nixon, 2008). From that point, the children chose to look upon, trace over, or copy my examples of print (Clay, 1977, p. 336).

I argue that when children with a language disorder participate in socially- and culturally-based creative writing experiences that encourage them to use their imaginations, they are prompted to see, hear, and act upon their own words as well as the words of others. Their socially- and culturally-mediated interaction acts as a learning experience that teaches them language is important. Law, Dennis, and Carlton (2017) noted that “key to all intervention is building the child’s motivation to speak” (p. 4). Thus, the more children use language, the more it arouses attention in others, creating a reciprocal process. I have observed the beneficial outcomes of the sociocultural intervention of creative writing since 2010, when I first adopted it in my therapeutic classroom.

Early intervention services that meet the language requirements of children with language disorders have been well documented (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASLHA], 2014; Gallagher & Chiat, 2009; Gillam & Kamhi, 2010; Leonard, 2014). Many therapeutic interventions involve teaching isolated, targeted behaviors that are reinforced by tokens or praise (Law et al., 2017). Law et al. (2017) reported that in the past 20 years, therapeutic interventions have begun to shift toward socially-based interventions. Regardless of the intervention method, many researchers have suggested that a language disorder, when not aggressively ameliorated, impacts literacy attainment
(Cable & Domsch, 2011; Camarata, 2014; Leonard, 2014; Schuele & Hadley, 1999). When considering specialized services, better outcomes result when earlier and more intensive interventions are adopted for children with language disorders (Leonard, 2014; Skibbe, Grimme et al., 2008). My therapeutic classroom was the only early intervention program within my school district and the surrounding counties that utilized a speech-language pathologist as the preschool teacher of record to address the needs of children with identified language disorders. As such, I designed this research to investigate how socially- and culturally-mediated creative writing opportunities impacted the language, print knowledge, and literacy outcomes of the children in the classroom.

A major impetus for this research was the recent bill passed in the state in which I reside that requires school district administrators to retain children in third grade if adequate literacy skills are not attained as anticipated by students’ third-grade year, unless they are categorized as special education students. Unfortunately, with this mandate, many children with language disorders, like those in my classroom, are at risk of being relegated away from their general education peers through either a special education placement or retention unless early intensive services are effectively provided.

I conducted the research using participant observation through a Vygotskian sociocultural lens to describe the interactions, relationships, and outcomes of the children’s oral language, awareness of print, and development of literacy abilities through their participation in a play-based, early intervention, creative writing approach using adult-directed print mediations using the children’s scribed stories. Through this interactive process, I aimed to identify the outcomes that resulted when children shared
their thoughts through a playful format while an adult scribed and acknowledged their oral and written formats.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within the context of my classroom, I believe the interdependence of culture, beliefs, community, and language is honed through interactive social practice. As such, I strove to identify, encourage, and preserve the children’s sociocultural behaviors to help them determine their identities as unique individuals. Sociocultural approaches to learning, attributed to Vygotsky, are based on the constructivist belief that knowledge development takes place amid, and in connection with, others in cultural contexts. Researchers (Lantolf, 2000; Wertsch, 1985) have defined the sociocultural approach as human thought mediated through the use of language, symbols, signs, and other symbolic tools, which facilitates interactions with others, and with ourselves, in order for learning and meaning-making to occur.

In the classroom, I observed the actualization of a variety of sociocultural characteristics. These included the zone of proximal development, social and cultural mediation, and play; and these aspects of sociocultural behaviors functioned as the theoretical frame for my research. Vygotsky’s (1998) theoretical stance supported my work because it centers on the young child, is constructivist in nature, ties the emotional with the cognitive, and views the social milieu as the “basic source of development” (p. 198). While Vygotsky’s theory appears fragmented at times due to his untimely death, his attention to language, make-believe play, and the interaction of emotions and cognition allowed me to piece together a representation of best-practice guiding principles.
Zone of Proximal Development

Children navigate the learning environment with “various degrees of knowledge” (Kissel, Hanson, Tower, & Lawrence, 2011, p. 427). When engaged in tasks that may be unfamiliar, the novice learner relies on the supportive engagement of others with more experience such as a caregiver, parent, or another child. The expert will gradually transfer responsibility to the novice through joint learning activities when guided and supported with scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Through social engagement, cognitive and linguistic concepts are transmitted, developed, and transformed into a complex relationship of meaningful thought. As Vygotsky (1987) suggested,

...
The transfer of knowledge “to go beyond” is dependent upon the novice’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The ZPD is defined as “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 adult, or more knowledgeable, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Smagorinsky (2017) suggested the use of the term zone of next development since learning is a long-term developmental process of acquiring the skills needed for socially- and culturally-recognized outcomes (p. 5). Rogoff (1990) likened Vygotsky’s ZPD to an apprenticeship “in which a novice works closely with an expert in joint problem solving” (p. 141). The expert does not have to be an adult, or even an older child, but must be more experienced in solving the problem presented. As an example, since artifacts were welcomed and encouraged in our classroom, children often brought action figures to school for sharing. Due to my age and voluntary lack of exposure to television, I required scaffolding before I could competently discuss concepts about superhero cartoon characters such as The Flash, Reverse-Flash, Spiderman, and the contrasting differences between the Red Power Ranger and the Blue Power Ranger. The children relished the opportunity to be the more knowledgeable others. Some researchers disagree with the ZPD as a construct, arguing that potential development is not measurable (Smagorinsky, 1995). However, I found that such knowledge was measurable through quantitative outcomes.

**Thought and Language**

Language for the preschoolers served a tool that helped them mediate their thinking. The children were able to use language to influence others and guide
themselves. The children also utilized their language to give novel purpose to substitute items, renaming them as the objects within their thinking. As an example, I observed this convergence when children reinvented their markers into make-believe objects such as swords, wands, and cannons as their discourse followed their interaction with objects. During creative writing experiences, when the children drew their thoughts on paper while being actively engaged with each other’s artifacts, the act functioned as an “emergent form of written speech” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 156). The children were able to use their written speech to support their language to engage with their words in print further.

Communication, according to Vygotsky (1978), “is as important as the role of action in attaining the goal. Children not only speak about what they are doing . . . the speech and action are part of one and the same complex psychological function” (p. 25). Speech and action, which researchers once considered separate components in a child, converge as the child develops cognitive skills. For the children, the act of speaking while engaged in a play-based creative writing experience was both “natural and necessary” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 25). Cognition and language allowed the children to take command of the environment through speaking.

Mediation

Razfar and Rumenapp (2014) defined mediation as “materials, ideas, and assistance from more expert others” (p. 203). It is a balance between human input and symbolic-tool involvement. A child’s performance depends on the extent of mediation required to complete a task. Children talking together, using language as their tool, is a type of cultural and social mediation.
**Human mediation.** Children learn early on that they can “get things done through words” (Bruner & Watson, 1983, p. 18). By using their functional language, the pragmatics of communication, children can persuade, disagree, create, demand, and comment about situations and actions within their environment. Language, and thus literacy, develop through socially-mediated practices viewed in their “context of development, the forms of mediation available, and the nature of participation across practices” (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 55). Dewey (1916), like Vygotsky, believed children interact and develop through social and cultural participation: “Every individual . . . must grow up, in a social medium. His responses grow intelligent . . . because he lives and acts in a medium of accepted meanings and values” (p. 344). In the classroom, the combination of children talking and writing through socially-mediated acts connected them, as authors and the readers, with language, commonality of interests, and printed texts revealing their thoughts.

**Human mediation involves culture.** Rogoff (1995) acknowledged that it is inadequate to think about “individual development and social interaction without concern for the cultural activity in which the personal and interpersonal actions take place” (p. 141). The acquisition of “symbolic and representational systems” (Olson, 1995, p. 95), such as speaking and writing, is a cultural act that aids in intellectual growth. Bruner and Watson (1983) suggested “language is what culture is about” (p. 103) as it is the “means for interpreting and regulating culture” (p. 24). Olson (1995) proposed the acquisition of a language functions as the primary means of learning the “folkways” of a culture (p. 95). Children gain an understanding of their communities of living as well as their communities of learning through the language of those communities. Within cultural
activities such as socially-mediated journal writing within my classroom, the writers told stories using their social identity, which was “constructed in the social language” from the community (Gee, 2012, p. 146). Through cultural acts, children shared their personal narratives, whether by speaking, gesturing, drawing, or writing. Children need to tell their personal narratives as they, “constitute the psychological and cultural reality in which the participants in history actually live” (Bruner, 1986, p. 43).

In human mediation, interactions take the form of physical gestures and verbal comments between an expert and a novice, where the more knowledgeable person guides the novice. Kozulin (2003) noted sociocultural interactions of human mediation consider the level and degree of involvement by the more proficient other. Through continued interaction, the experiences are transformed, developed, and transferred into the learner’s knowledge base. Vygotsky (1978) posited:

> Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (p. 5)

I observed different approaches children used during their creative writing experiences.

**Human mediation aids in self-regulation.** My observations of the children, following Vygotsky’s (1978) thinking, revealed three types of speech children use to self-regulate their behavior: social speech, private speech, and inner speech. Through this
triadic progression, children learn to make requests, solve problems, and internalize the solutions to problems as a means of developing higher mental processes.

**Social speech.** Children use talk, initially, for mediating social interactions, but later utilize it as a tool for determining “the solution of difficult tasks, to overcome impulsive action, to plan a solution . . . and to master their own behavior” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 28). I saw this interaction as children exchanged ideas about their journals with each other. Early stage speech accompanies a child’s actions allowing one to talk through and solve problems. At later stages of development, speech, which precedes the task, is utilized as a blue print for action.

**Private/egocentric speech.** When young children are engaged in complex tasks that are egocentric or private, self-talk is used not to engage in conversational turn-taking with others in their midst, but to guide self-directed problem solving. Children tend to use greater amounts of self-talk with more complicated tasks, especially tasks with confusing or ambiguous solutions (Berk & Meyers, 2013). Private speech also shapes self-regulation. This is supported by a recent study involving executive functioning, planning, and behavior control (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Children use this kind of speech to modulate their behavior depending on who is in the environment. I witnessed children telling themselves to “stop” if they believed their actions could be misconstrued as unwanted behaviors. Using private talk helped them to work through their actions to perform an action that offers greater social acceptance. Recent empirical research offers a wider scope of its purpose such as preparing for social interactions, pretending and make-believe, and practicing pragmatic communication (Berk, 2014).
**Inner speech.** Inner speech is communication that becomes intrapersonalized through mental self-talk (Vygotsky, 1962). Children talk their way through problems, often offering solutions to themselves. Vygotsky (1962) explained, “Inner speech is almost entirely predictive because the situation, the subject of thought, is always known to the thinker” (p. 193). Inner speech extends beyond Vygotsky’s theory. Alderson-Day and Fernyhough (2015) argued that inner speech functions more symbolically than semantically. For example, a phrase, like “doctor’s appointment,” when produced in social speech may have a clear, surface-level referent, such as a meeting with a physician. Yet, when said in inner speech, the symbolic meaning of “doctor’s appointment” may invoke deeper related thoughts such as disease, diagnosis, cancer, cost, insurance, missed work, wait time, and so on (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

**Human Mediated Learning**

Rogoff (1995) defined, analyzed, and categorized three facets of human mediated learning which were active in the context of my classroom: apprenticeship, guided participation, and appropriation.

**Apprenticeship.** The children in my classroom used a leader-apprentice approach when teaching others about the artifacts they bring to school. Rogoff (1995) asserted the novice and the more knowledgeable other work jointly in apprenticeship at the level of the child’s ZPD. This collaboration helps the child to internalize the learning and achieve independence from the expert. When the children shared their artifacts, I often had to change roles from the knowledgeable other to the novice since many of the toys were not in my knowledge base.
**Guided participation.** Many times, while I scribed a child’s creative writing piece, I emphasized different parts of the text written by that child. Yet, another child sometimes intervened to become a participant, whether my approach was explicit or tacit with the first child. Guided participation builds upon Vygotskian theory through “routine, tacit communication and arrangements” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 149). Through a socially-mediated interactive process, a child progresses from a current level of awareness to developing new knowledge. Rogoff (1995) further noted “guided participation is not an operational definition . . . but it is meant to focus attention on the system of interpersonal engagements and arrangements . . . for each other” (pp. 146–147). I understood that through guided participation as mediation, a child “actively observing and following the decisions made by another” was a participant regardless of if that child had contributed to the engagement (Rogoff, 1995, p. 147).

**Appropriation.** As I engaged with one child scribing the chosen words in preparation of mediated print engagements, often I observed other children repeating similar responses of the first child as a way of reusing that child’s representation to create their own ideas in their own creative writing journals. To an uninformed observer, it may have appeared children were attempting simply to copy one another. However, the presumed imitations may have stemmed from their instinct to follow along with a task. First conceived by Bakhtin and Holquist (1981), *appropriation* refers to a transformative action in which a listener/observer “take[s] the word to make it one’s own” (p. 294). The art of transforming one’s language for another’s purpose is often observed in children’s discourse when they participate in socially-mediated activities. Maxwell, Weill, and Damico (2017) described appropriation as language experiences which can be extracted
from and adapted for another’s use (p. 10). Maxwell et al. (2017) likened appropriation to repurposing one’s words for another’s purpose to describe the “active, transformative process” (p. 10) of reworking utterances that one has taken to make them their own.

When a child engages in a sociocultural activity like creative writing that includes mediated print referencing, whether “tacit or explicit, face-to-face or distal” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 147), the participation leads to change and preparedness for others in the similar activity. Neuroscientists have validated this conception through research on mirror neurons (Fadiga, Fogassi, Pavesi, & Rizzolatti, 1995). Fadiga et al. (1995) determined, after rehearsing an action repeatedly, specialized neurons (mirror neurons) in the mammalian brain’s premotor cortex discharge nanoseconds prior to engagement in the activity practiced. Considered a social phenomenon, if another individual is nearby, the same neurons will fire within that individual simply though tacit observation (Fadiga et al., 1995). In both participants, whether tacitly or explicitly engaged, the same affective response is realized. This evolutionary attribute allows us to learn about, and from, another’s behavior.

**Sign and Symbolic Mediation**

Approaches that adopt symbolic tool mediation use symbolic tools as interventions for change (Kozulin, 2003). The intersection of speech, signs, and the practical use of tools constitutes the “most significant moment in the course of intellectual development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 24). Through the intersection of speech, signs, and tools, “signs and words serve children first, and foremost, as a means of social contact with other people” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 28).
Sign mediation is the relationship between what is indicated and what is tangible, functioning at the external level. Since the sign and the object have a correlational link, the object dictates the sign (Veraksa, 2011). As an example, a traffic sign is easily identifiable because it has a place in our reality, requiring no interpretation. In this research, the signs the children interacted with were the artifacts they brought with them from home. Signs for them included superhero action figures, a Super Mario ball, a stuffed blue bunny, toy cars, jewelry, and other items that reflected the culture of childhood.

A symbol, conversely, “can assume almost every meaning” (Veraksa, 2011, p. 92). A symbol, such as a painting, does not immediately take hold in our thoughts as identifiable because to do so, it first requires interpretation. However, greater exposure and interaction with an object results in higher frequency of the interpretation of its characteristics and, thus, a greater depth of interpretation. The children’s drawings became symbols that only the children could interpret. For the parents and I to engage with the children through their drawings, we needed the children to interpret the symbolic nature of their creative writing products. To call their lines and squiggles scribbling would represent an adult’s weakness in the interpretation of the symbol. For the children’s thoughts and words to be understood, it required the children to move the families and me to a deeper level of thought. Often, both the tools and the drawings were symbolic. While I consider a marker as a device simply for writing, children used their markers as symbolic references to anything that could be represented as long and thin such as cannons, magic wands, swords, and walking sticks.
Play. Graham and Burghardt (2010) stated that “it is likely that play with objects is a developmental precursor to most, if not all, complex and cognitively flexible tool use” (p. 395). Graham and Burghardt (2010) defined play through five characteristics:

(a) incompletely functional in the context to which it appears (act of pretending);
(b) spontaneous, pleasurable, rewarding, or voluntary; (c) it differs from other more serious behaviors in form (exaggerated) or timing (occurring earlier in life before the more serious version is needed); (d) is repeated, but not in abnormal and unvarying stereotypic form; and (e) is initiated in the absence of severe stress.

(p. 394)

Their definition supports the Vygotskian (Vygotsky, 1978) belief that play goes beyond simple movement activities as seen in outside, rough-and-tumble play, and takes the form of object use and social interactions through sociodramatic engagements. When watching young children in play, they typically pretend an aspect of adult life. Sociodramatic play affords the children the opportunity to imitate and explore adulthood since a child’s purpose during sociodramatic play is “to act like an adult” (Elkonin & Stone, 2005, p. 86). Pellegrini (2009) noted that children who have developed assertive social play abilities may not appear aggressive to their peers and teachers, but can use their assertive social abilities for access to needed resources.

Play is observed during writing when children have access to their tools and artifacts since “make-believe play, drawing, and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 116). Vygotsky (1978) noted “play bears little resemblance to the complex, mediated form of thought and volition it leads to. Only a profound internal analysis makes it possible to determine its
course of change and its role in development” (p. 104). Play is a “complex system of speech through gestures that communicate and indicate the meaning of playthings” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 108). During make-believe play, children engage in symbolism with their toys as these objects depart from their intended use and take on roles based on the children’s imagination (Lillard et al., 2013). An orange is no longer an orange once a child realizes it can roll like a ball. Play becomes an opportunity for creating symbolic representation as the precursor to written symbolic language. Unlike the traditional view of play where children freely engage in activities without guidance, the Vygotskian belief is that adults, or the more knowledgeable others, are also active participants because children strive to learn about and become part of the world of adulthood.

As literacy abilities continue to develop, play becomes an essential generating activity within the ZPD, allowing children to extend their “mental abilities” to the next levels of development with the guidance of an adult or more knowledgeable other (Roskos & Christie, 2013, p. 83). This allows the child to be “always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 116). Graham and Burghardt (2010) recognized that social play requires children to be mindful of physical and social cues as they need to modify their own behavior in order to react with speed and accuracy to the interactions and responses from others. Graham and Burghardt (2010) observed, “Play likely contributes to the formation of socially appropriate behavioral responses upon which animals increasingly rely with age” (p. 410). Play affords children the opportunity to use make-believe signs and objects to engage in acts that “display a level of maturity more advanced than in non-play” (Berk & Meyers, 2013, p. 99). Children create play opportunities such as fighting
fires, saving people, and fighting evil forces within the context of their classroom that resemble the preparations they may need for real-life adult experiences.

**Play aids in the development of executive functioning skills.** Vygotsky (1978) theorized that play provides the environment for practicing executive functioning skills, the cognitive processes for attention, self-regulation, and self-gratification needed for future engagement such as academic tasks, parenthood, and employment. Children develop increased attention and focus through guided play in sensory and sociodramatic experiences (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2016). Through the act of play, children learn self-regulation as they wait for peers to share a marker or a toy; a self-regulatory response that may not be observed in other environments. Even though young children often want to be instantly gratified, self-gratification is also an outcome of play since “the preschool child enters an imaginary, illusionary world in which the unrealizable desires can be realized” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 93). I have observed children draw puppies, kittens, and new baby siblings as a means of gratifying a desire they possessed. The children also realized self-gratification through role-playing story narratives of superheroes, caring cartoon characters, and community helpers, helping them to realize they possessed the human desire to help others.

**Socially-Constructed Labels**

As a speech language pathologist concerned with issues impacting special needs children, I am in a dilemma. While the construct of a language disorder is labeled as a disability, an impairment, I often view it as manifested from politically- and socially-constructed practices that determine and defend a deficit theory. Gindis (2003), following Vygotsky, noted that a disabling condition is perceived as something abnormal only
when “introduced into social context” (p. 203). In many preschool classrooms, educators use standardized assessments to measure literacy attainment, thus becoming the norm instead of the exception. The standardized testing process now in prekindergarten (preK) classrooms encourages the use of socially-based categories.

While I am bound by the term *language disorder*, defined by my professional organization, as “impaired comprehension and/or use of spoken, written and/or other symbol systems that is evident in form, content and/or function of language” (ASHA, 2016, p. 1), I understand knowledge construction in children, through a sociocultural lens, to be an interaction between two or more people. This is at odds with many authors in the field of communication issues who have suggested the need for children to be corrected in order to compete with what they label as the traditionally-developing child (TD), as it is known in the literature. Whose discourse has the power to label a child as impaired versus TD? Whoever currently holds a place in the dominant discourse has the power to delineate a child as a disordered child from the TD. Johnson (2006) reminded us that “disability and nondisability are socially constructed” (p. 18) and through this dichotomy, our culture dictates how we view and treat other people. Kovarsky and Walsh (2011) suggested *disability* is not related to inability but the “interactional achievements of therapy participants where problems are brought into existence because of the contexts in which they emerge” (p. 195). Through a deficit lens, those who separate children into categories of abilities intimate “that these problems are housed within the individual” (Kovarsky & Walsh, 2011, p. 197) without acknowledging that communication is a sociocultural act that relies on multiple players and is impacted by multiple layers of historical and cultural issues.
Instead of measuring the observed communication difference as the disorder, Gindis (2003) noted “it is the child’s social milieu, however, that modifies his or her course of development and leads to distortions and delays (p. 203). Thus, the sociocultural reaction to the perceived problem often creates an acquired learning disorder (Clay, 1987). I believe it is important to understand how Vygotskian thought about children’s language and literacy development through the interactions of social, culture, symbolism, signs, and play enhances a children’s performance. As a researcher, I aim to add to the current literature to redefine communication issues through a lens that recognizes the constructivist, sociocultural nature of description, identification, and management in place of the current deficit model.
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emergent literacy is the belief that reading, writing, and oral language develop in an interconnected fashion within informal social contexts (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Cabell et al. (2009) noted emergent literacy “specifies no clear boundary between prereading and reading” (p. 3). Instead, it is an ever-developing process that begins with the child’s earliest oral and written language experiences. Through the lens of emergent literacy, children are exposed to literacy experiences before formal education begins. Some children, specifically children identified with a language disorder, have greater difficulty acquiring literacy abilities than their same-age peers. In this literature review, I address three important areas related to my study: (a) understanding language disorder, (b) children’s awareness of print, and (c) children’s engagement in writing. The intersection of these three elements addresses my overarching research question: How does the use of print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based), in the context of playful creative writing activities with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder impact their oral language development, ability to interact with print, and literacy skills attainment?

Understanding Language Disorders

A language disorder is a condition “that delays the mastery of language skills in children who have no hearing loss or other developmental delays” (NIDCD, 2011). Unlike late talkers with language delay, children characterized as having a language
disorder are at risk of literacy weaknesses if they do not receive adequate interventions to reach emergent literacy abilities (Leonard, 2014). At times, describing children identified with a language disorder may be difficult due to the multiple characteristics that can be considered a language disorder such as language delay, language difference, or a severe motor planning condition (Cabell et al., 2010; Conti-Ramsden, Botting, Faragher, 2001). According to Leonard (2014), once identified, children with a language disorder require intensive assistance. They may not achieve on par with their general education peers with additional time alone. The specific needs of children with a language disorder can be understood by examining prevalence rates, various labels, diagnosis, and impact.

**Prevalence rates.** An identified language disorder is a highly prevalent communication condition impacting approximately 7–8% of children during their early childhood years (Leonard, 2014; Rice, 2013). Due to these prevalence rates, Leonard (2014) cautioned researchers from making inaccurate and presumptuous statements such as “virtually all normal children acquire language rapidly and without effort” (p. 3).

**Labels.** Multiple definitions are often associated with language-related conditions, which makes it difficult for a practitioner to arrive at a conclusion beneficial to the child’s needs. In the literature, terms such as *language delay*, *language impairment*, *specific language impairment*, and *spoken language disorder* are all used to name conditions of communication that affect the understanding and use of language across modalities (i.e., spoken language, sign language, or both) in some or all of the five domains identified: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Gleason, 2005). Many researchers have refuted the use of the term *language delay* since delay suggests that time is the only required intervention (Leonard, 2014; Rice, 2013). While
labels can be confusing or insensitive, Schuele and Hadley (1999) noted appropriate services are often contingent on a classification that clearly defines the child’s needs. Cabell et al. (2010) additionally noted a language disorder can stem from other developmental disabilities making the language disorder secondary in nature to the primary disability. While a language disorder can result from other developmental disabilities such as Down Syndrome, traumatic brain injury, or autism, language disorders in this research were identified as the children’s primary developmental disability.

**Diagnosis of a language disorder.** A language disorder is characterized by significant delays in receptive and/or expressive morphology, syntax, and vocabulary in the presence of otherwise typical cognitive, sensory, and motor abilities (Leonard, 2014). As a diagnostic criterion, Rudolph and Leonard (2016) determined that late talking alone was not indicative of a language disorder but children’s inability to combine two or more words by 24 months was statistically sensitive. In addition to minimal word combining, Camarata (2014) noted other predictors of a language disorder exist such as reduced listening comprehension, lack of pretend play, restricted phoneme repertoire, and minimal gesturing or vocalization. A language disorder impedes a child’s ability to acquire oral language abilities, thereby impacting the development of other language-related skills such as reading, writing, and spelling. Forty percent of children with a language disorder will have difficulty attaining literacy abilities in structured educational settings without assistance (Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002).

**Impact of a language disorder.** Children, teens, and adults are all impacted by language disorders (Leonard, 2014). Skibbe, Grimme et al. (2008) explained “children
with language delay (LD) in preschool often exhibit long-term disadvantages in reading achievement, due to, in part, that oral language ability facilitates both word recognition and reading comprehension” (p. 475). When not ameliorated, the impact affects every stage of life from early childhood through adulthood.

**Early childhood.** In an early childhood study, Gallagher and Chiat (2009) compared the outcomes of children with a language disorder based on the results from three service delivery settings: intensive therapeutic programming, a consultative setting, and students without assistance. Children classified with a language disorder who received intensive, direct, weekly therapeutic interventions showed greater improvement in receptive and expressive language abilities as well as positive development of behavioral abilities than the comparative group of children whose needs were addressed through consultative services provided indirectly by a speech-language pathologist to a staff of daycare providers. Unsurprisingly, the children who were denied services faired the poorest of the three groups. This finding contradicts the “wait and see” approach for children with a language disorder.

**Secondary school.** In a secondary school in Manchester, England, Conti-Ramsden, Durkin, Simkin, and Knox (2009) measured the outcomes of 241 students divided into three groups taking end-of-school examinations. Over half of the students had no history of special needs services, 7% had a resolved language disorder, and 39% had an unresolved language disorder. To be considered in the study, children with a history of an identified language disorder needed to possess a performance IQ score of at least 80, have no sensory loss, speak English as the primary language, and have a recent standardized language assessment with a standard score below 85. Whereas the
traditional students and those who had resolved their language disorder performed similarly, many of the students with an unresolved language disorder attained lower scores. Conti-Ramsden et al. (2009) concluded that children with a history of an unresolved language disorder have fewer opportunities for educational attainment.

In support of findings by Snowling, Adams, Bishop, and Stothard (2001), Conti-Ramsden et al. (2009) found that children who could resolve their language disorder functioned as well as their TD peers at the end of secondary school examination assessments. Conti-Ramsden et al. (2009) reiterated “that early resolution of an identified language disorder is a positive indicator, and that such children do not differ significantly from their traditionally developing (TD) peers” (p. 33). The research by Conti-Ramsden et al. (2009) revealed, through regression analysis, three areas that have significant hierarchical effect on school outcomes. Nonverbal intelligence was the most predictive; literacy abilities were the next most predictive; and early and progressive language development was the least predictive of school outcomes. Conti-Ramsden et al. (2009) cautioned that viewing the results hierarchically may falsely reduce the impact language poses on literacy abilities:

It could well be the case that oral language difficulties may have had (and we would argue they are likely to have had) (emphasis in original) a prior impact on literacy skills (Conti-Ramsden, et al., 2009, p. 32).

Conti-Ramsden, et al. (2009) noted for those children unable to resolve their language issues in a timely manner before end-of-school evaluations, both teachers and students were affected by the deficit thinking often associated with special needs labeling and
teacher expectations. Conti-Ramsden et al. (2009) suggested further research be conducted in both instructional and policy decision-making to counteract deficit thinking.

**Adulthood.** In adulthood, an unresolved language disorder often impacts issues related to family, employment, and education, however it is not a well-researched area. Whitehouse, Line, Watt, and Bishop (2009) acknowledged the dearth of research related to the long-term effects of a language disorder in adulthood. Whitehouse et al. (2009) found from their investigation of 18 adults with a childhood diagnosis of a language disorder that the effects of unresolved language disorder persisted into adulthood. Whitehouse et al. (2009) noted that among those with a history of an unresolved language disorder, many experienced “lasting difficulties with speech production, receptive grammar, verbal short-term memory, and phonological awareness as well as considerable literacy impairment” (p. 502). Whitehouse et al. (2009) further noted the need for early childhood assessment and identification programs to identify and serve children effectively through appropriate interventions.

In another longitudinal prospective study beginning in 1982, (the “Ottawa” study), researchers assessed the language abilities of children included in the control group, children with articulation difficulties, and children with language impairments. Johnson, Beitchman, and Brownlie (2010) then measured the outcomes of the same participants as adults in 2002–2003, comparing language assessments, intelligence quotients, cognitive assessments, family life surveys, educational attainment surveys, earnings outcomes, and quality of life ratings. Johnson et al. (2010) noted members from the articulation and control groups faired similarly in many respects, while the language group participants attained lower scores in many categories. For example, both the
control group and the articulation-only group scored equally and above the mean on language assessments, intelligence testing, and cognitive assessments. The adults in the language disorder group scored within the first standard deviation below the mean on language assessments, intelligence testing, and cognitive assessments. In educational attainment, the control group and the articulation group again achieved considerably higher levels of education with 92% of these groups successfully completing high school. In contrast, only 76% of the language disorder group graduated from high school. In earnings outcomes, the speech-only groups had significantly higher earnings than the language disorder group. Also noted was the correlation between the control and speech-only groups who, possessing higher language abilities, also experienced higher occupational status. Overall, the three groups rated their quality of life comparably.

Similarly, in a 30-year follow-up study, Elbro, Dalby, and Maarbjerg (2011) investigated literacy outcomes, socioeconomic attainment, and employment status of 198 adult speech and language therapy participants who had been diagnosed with a language disorder during childhood from 1969–1979 to determine the latent impact of language disorders on literacy gains, economic achievement, and employment status. Elbro et al. (2011) found from the adult responses that “the language-impaired children did not appear to have grown out of their difficulties—not even later in adulthood” (p. 445). The authors noted that while the diagnosis and treatment of speech and language disorders, specifically an identified language disorder, had improved in the 30 years since the children were served in a clinical format, it was unethical to suggest individuals identified with a language disorder would outgrow their difficulties. Elbro et al. concluded that “very poor adult outcome is an important challenge. Given the enormous expenses at
personal and all other levels, research into prevention and intervention should be intensified” (p. 447).

**Determining the Best Therapeutic Plan**

It is apparent from the research on the lifelong impact of language disorders that without appropriate intervention services, children who possess a language disorder are at risk for concomitant problems throughout their lifetimes (Conti-Ramsden, et al., 2009; Whitehouse, et al., 2009). The key to helping children is in finding the early intervention services that make positive differences in a short amount of time during the preschool years. Possible avenues for intervention include shared book reading, print awareness interventions, writing activities, and play mediations.

**Awareness of print.** McGinty and Justice (2009) stated *print knowledge* is “the ability to understand forms, features, and functions of print” (p. 81). To clarify, forms of print are the visual combinations of letters and words that represent oral language, such as books, newspapers, and diaries. All reading materials have distinct semantic meanings within their category. The features include the syntax or rules that govern how print is written and read. For example, directionality, order, and organization are features of print. Lastly, the functions of print represent the communication style needed for a situation, event, place, or group of people (McGinty & Justice, 2009).

**Print referencing.** *Print referencing*, the conscious, deliberate, preplanned act of identifying the form, feature, or function of words within texts, is an intervention that has been well established in the literature as an effective strategy to engage young children in emerging literacy development (Dynia, Justice, Pentimonti, Piasta, & Kaderavek, 2011; Ezell & Justice, 2000; Ezell, Justice, & Parsons, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2004; Justice
Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Piasta, Justice, McGinty, & Kaderavek, 2012; Zucker, Ward, & Justice, 2009). Print referencing, as defined by Zucker, Cabell, Justice, Pentimonti, and Kaderavek (2013), refers to adult interactions . . . characterized by meaning-related talk, focused on comprehending narrative events, illustrations, or language within books, and code-related talk addressing print, letters, or sounds of words within books. (p. 1425)

To elucidate the differences between code-related talk and meaning-related talk further, Snow and Matthews, (2016, p. 59) provided a clear definition of the terms. Code-related talk is made up of constrained skills that teachers gravitate toward since they are easily teachable because of their fixed nature. An example of code-related talk is letters of the English alphabet (which cannot exceed 26), or how to hold a text, or identifying where a student should begin to read the title or the first word on the page. All of these examples result in a finite, nearly predictable answer. In meaning-related talk, the talk of unconstrained skills, the teacher identifies vocabulary words, investigates background knowledge, provides descriptions, engages in role-playing, and identifies grammar concepts; all of which are relatively infinite in nature.

**Print is routinely ignored.** Evans and Saint-Aubin (2005) identified specific references to print as important since children routinely ignore the printed words in texts but focus on the illustrations as the primary form of transacting meaning. To understand print referencing techniques, a teacher or parent should have knowledge of the techniques, frequency of use, training requirements, characteristics of print, and purpose for the intervention.
Print referencing techniques. Justice and Ezell (2000) described two common techniques teachers use during print referencing: evocative and nonevocative techniques. Evocative approaches are comments, queries, and directives that obligate the child to respond independent of the size of the group. Nonevocative approaches, both verbal comments and nonverbal cues, require no verbal responses from the child (Ezell & Justice, 2000). Lovelace and Stewart (2007) compared the outcomes of evocative and nonevocative approaches using a single subject, multiprobe design with five Caucasian students, four females and one male, who had an identified language disorder and were enrolled in a preschool setting. The five participants, whose ages ranged from 48–60 months, had been previously assessed and placed on special needs plans, and were receiving speech-language therapy for semantic weaknesses while enrolled in the study. Lovelace and Stewart (2007) through biweekly intervention sessions of storybook reading, determined nonevocative interventions provided similar benefits previously reported by verbal, evocative approaches. Lovelace and Stewart (2007) recommended nonevocative print referencing with children who have a specific language impairment as a way to support children with minimal linguistic output.

Frequency. Piasta et al. (2012) examined the effects of print referencing with three groups of preschoolers to determine the recommended frequency of its use during storybook reading. Working within a head start facility through Project Sit Together and Read (STAR), the researchers studied the results of children participating in a 30-week shared reading program with various levels of print referencing. The children were classified into three groups: (a) those in a traditional reading condition, (b) those receiving a moderate level of STAR interventions which were twice-weekly print
referencing techniques embedded into the strategic storybook lesson, and (c) those in a full STAR program which consisted of 4 days of intentional print referencing interventions with strategic storybook reading patterns weekly. Teachers in the traditional reading classroom were trained in shared book reading strategies without receiving information related to print referencing. The children in both STAR groups improved their reading and spelling skills. The children enrolled in the full STAR group continued to progress, even into the second year, in three areas (letter-word identification, spelling, and passage comprehension), suggesting that print referencing has long-term benefits.

Gettinger and Stoiber (2014) discovered print referencing does not require long periods of training to encourage teachers to be mindful of their interactions with print concepts. In their 2014 study, Gettinger and Stoiber provided minimal training, 60 minutes of professional development, to preschool teachers who had not previously used print referencing. Following the initial training, the researchers provided in-class modeling of reading behaviors with exemplar students as a means of coaching the teachers in the expected referencing behaviors. Gettinger and Stoiber (2014) noted by training teachers to be mindful of increasing their “opportunity to respond” (p. 284) during storybook reading, teachers increased their evocative approaches to print through questions and directives, and their nonevocative approaches to print through pointing and gesturing. The researchers determined the quality of print approaches was as important as the quantity, noting children at risk for literacy difficulties experienced benefits with print referencing even when the opportunity was short in duration.

Dynia et al. (2011) examined how various texts influenced teachers’ discussion of print concepts. Dynia et al. (2011) implemented a 30-week book reading intervention
program for preschoolers utilizing 57 preschool teachers who had completed training in the use of print referencing techniques. The researchers video-recorded teachers engaged in storybook reading to determine what specific interactions teachers volitionally used when asked to reference print. The review of the data revealed the teachers responded to the salience of code-based comments of font, size, and location even though teachers could have noted opportunities for meaning-based comments (e.g., vocabulary, descriptions, and grammar). Thus, in Dynia et al.’s (2011), the volitional use of print referencing as a technique to highlight print characteristics within the text was used more often with code-based comments than meaning-based comments. Dynia et al. (2011)’s results align with Piasta et al. (2010), who found teachers’ engagement with print depends on the salient features of code-related print during storybook reading.

**Print differences.** In a study of 16 4-year-old children with identified communication impairments, Kaderavek, Pentimonti, and Justice (2014) compared teacher-led and parent-led text readings to answer two questions: (a) do teachers and care-givers provide the same amount of extra-textual talk, and (b) is the level of engagement dependent upon the reader, the teacher, or the caregiver? The authors defined *extra-textual talk* as “talk that occurs when the adult reader makes comments that go beyond the actual text reading” (Kaderavek et al., 2014, p. 291). According to Kaderavek et al. (2014), extra-textual talk influences a child’s development of language and literacy skills through highlighting meaning- and code-based talk. The authors explained that the development of meaning-based skills can be made by mutually describing actions or characteristics, using abstract thought to compare and contrast, role playing, and discussing character’s emotions, while the development of code-based skills relies on talk
related to concepts of print. The authors chose the texts for the study because they offered simple wording, basic language, and interactive, child-friendly page flaps the children could manipulate during story reading. Both sets of readers, the teachers and the caregivers, were instructed to read in their typical manner.

Kaderavek et al. (2014) found teachers provided more descriptive extra-textual talk than the caregivers, which was most likely due to their professional training on the benefits of engaging with print concepts. The authors suggested that caregivers may be reluctant to use extra-textural talk because the children may be unintelligible or their minimal language abilities make turn-taking discourse less appealing. When the researchers examined the second question concerning whether the level of engagement differed between teacher-led, large group storybook reading and caregiver, one-to-one reading, there was no discernible difference: both groups had high engagement. The researchers were initially surprised by this observation since children with an identified language disorder typically exhibit reduced levels of engagement during large group storybook reading (Skibbe et al., 2010). After a review of the texts chosen, Kaderavek et al. (2014) surmised that the use of simple texts with flaps and folds that could be manipulated encouraged the children’s high level of engagement.

Storybook reading is a method teachers often use to develop a child’s awareness of print. Shared book reading, where the adult uses preplanned interventions to bring a child’s attention to illustrations and meaning within the text, is a common intervention for children with language delays, and is used as a means of developing the language and literacy abilities of young children (Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010; Skibbe, Moody, Justice, & McGinty, 2008). Many investigators have addressed the
productive use of storybook reading in building language and literacy skills in both small and large group settings (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Ezell & Justice, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2000; Justice & Lankford, 2002; Justice et al., 2009; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). However, storybook reading for engaging with print and language concepts may not be adequate for all children. McGinty and Justice (2009) noted that children characterized as having a language disorder are often predisposed to attention difficulties, and thus experience greater challenges attending to texts than their non-language disorder peers. The same authors noted that children’s concomitant attention weaknesses may diminish the benefits of small and large group literacy experiences.

What Works Clearinghouse (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) investigated the use of shared book reading for children with language disorders and found it offered medium-to-large effect sizes for developing language skills but virtually no observed benefits for comprehension or alphabatics. In fact, simply reading a book to a child without stopping to intervene may be as productive as stopping to engage a child with a print concept. Skibbe et al. (2008) stressed that

book reading is a language-based task which requires children to sit still, to pay attention for relatively long periods of time, and often relies heavily on language comprehension. Thus, book reading capitalizes on the very skills that are often underdeveloped in children with language impairment. (p. 65)

Children who have difficulty sitting and paying attention to a text naturally have greater difficulty paying attention if the text is splintered with evocative or nonevocative prompts about print concepts. Through such an approach, the children may miss important nuances of print’s form, function, and features. The researchers highlighted the need for
more direct engagement, leading me to investigate creative writing as an intervention for children who have a language disorder. I have used creative writing as an intervention technique for the last 8 years, though I have not formally studied it. As such, I investigated the literature focused on children developing their language and literacy abilities using student-authored creative writing.

Writing for preschoolers. In a National Early Literacy Panel (2008) report, writing for preschool children was recognized as one of the six variables representing foundational literacy skills that had “medium to large predictive relationships with later measures of literacy development” (p. vii). Writing for preschool children functions as a way of “expressing ideas, opinions and views in print: writing for communication or composing” (Gerde, Bingham, & Wasik, 2012, p. 251). For the last 8 years, I have heard teachers and parents remark that preschoolers who are not talking are not capable of writing. Even when children are given the opportunity to write, adults often intervene with their own ideas of ways to interpret the drawing. “Both writing and drawing suffer from being dominated by pedagogical concerns” (Lancaster, 2013, p. 320) since adults anticipate a child’s final creation to have some semblance of the expected actual object or symbol, though with preschool children, that is a rarity. The conflict of expectations not corresponding to the outcome may lead adults into thinking preschool children are not ready for writing activities. Calkins (1994) noted children naturally engage in writing long before entering through the school doors. By the time they are ready to come to school, children have already left “their mark on the backs of old envelopes, on living room walls, on shopping lists, and on their big sister’s homework” (Calkins, 1994, p. 59). Calkins (1994) argued:
Children need time to be children, to grow through natural childhood activities. It is not children but adults who have separated writing from art, song, and play; it is adults who have turned writing into an exercise on lined paper, into a matter of rules, lessons, and cautious behavior. (p. 59)

When working with young children, it is the process, not the product, which prompts children to engage and respond to their work through words or gestures. As writing becomes an integral part of the curriculum, children view it as a valued experience (Bouas, Thompson, & Farlow, 1997). Their pictures function as a personal basis for the children’s language and literacy abilities as children move from pictures to conventional written forms (Kissel, Hansen, Tower, & Lawrence, 2011). Within their quest for making meaning with symbols, children develop the basic guidelines for “linguistic and gestural forms of reference” (Wolf & Perry, 1988, p. 19). The process of writing may initially seem to be haphazard with scribbles and small marks before moving to scribbles with continuous zig-zags or loops followed by letter-like shapes through the child’s strategic planning (Gerde, Bingham, & Wasik, 2012; Lancaster, 2013). Children typically follow this sequence then add letter writing prior to writing meaningful language with invented spelling. Goodman (1986) explained each child’s marks become personal and potent productions of thoughts and feelings. Recent studies have acknowledged children’s language and literacy gains in early childhood settings when participating in creative writing. The following studies reveal the benefits of using creative writing opportunities in the classroom while socially engaging with other writers.

**Benefits of writing.** Aram and Biron (2004) compared two groups of preschoolers, one group exposed to oral language and joint storybook reading (using
meaning-based interventions) and the other group exposed to joint writing and alphabetic skills (using code-based interventions), to compare outcomes from both mediations. The control group was excluded from the study apart from participating in pre and post testing. Student interns from a local university were assigned to engage with small groups of no more than 6 children weekly for 1 year to address either oral language and joint storybook reading or joint writing and alphabetic skills. The parents participated in training twice a year relevant to the type of group in which their child was enrolled. One parent group received instructions to incorporate strategies in joint book reading, while the other group received instructions on utilizing writing through everyday activities in the home. When the researchers compared the outcomes, they found joint writing, using a code-based intervention, was a more productive approach in meeting the language needs of the children who were at risk for literacy delays in comparison to the oral language and joint storybook group. Unlike the oral language and joint storybook group, who experienced growth in two areas (vocabulary and general knowledge), the joint writing group experienced positive outcomes in all areas: word writing, grapheme (letter) awareness, phoneme (sound) awareness, vocabulary, and general knowledge.

**Writing spaces.** MacKenzie and Veresov (2013) explored the relationship of drawing during writing development. The child participants, students in a multisite early childhood program, were free to speak, draw, or write their thoughts during an independent, free-writing time using their personal drawing book. Through a Vygotskian sociocultural lens, the authors selected three concepts of study: (a) the development of mature speech forms, (b) the process of drawing to text construction, and (c) the impact on written language outcomes when children eliminated drawing from the writing
process. The authors found the children’s drawings functioned as a necessary form of self-expression through which the written text construction developed. From the writing samples in the research, when young children wrote using conventional forms of writing without the support of drawings, the writing was often short and simplistic. They suggested children’s writing difficulties may have been the product of an abrupt transition from drawing to sole conventional writing without graphic supports, resulting in children relying on a writing system they were not comfortable with or adept at using. They recommended children be encouraged to use drawing for as long as possible.

MacKenzie and Veresov (2013) contended that when children were encouraged to incorporate drawing into their writing curriculum, the integration of both modes of communication provided a smoother transition, resulting in greater complexity of written language abilities than when teaching conventional print as an isolated skill.

Writing through social engagement. Kissel et al. (2011), in a 6-year ethnographic study using a Vygotskian sociocultural lens, studied the interaction of 4- and 5-year-old children during creative writing. The class consisted of general education students from high poverty areas in a large southeastern city. The authors described the classroom during writing as nontraditional, as the teacher was not in charge of dictating the events. Instead, the classroom climate focused on interactive engagement with peer-to-peer discussions. The researchers’ first finding was preschool writers’ identities were tested as they interacted with their peers. Writing in this preschool classroom offered free opportunities for gesture, talk, movement, and writing. Through their relaxed interactions, the children revised their writing often, realizing untapped knowledge and abilities. The children’s strategic interactions tested and molded their writing identities.
Second, Kissel et al. (2011) surmised that interactions among children introduced new possibilities to their writing. Following a model lesson in which the teacher drew and discussed math concepts related to a presented text, the children followed her lead to create novel math-related concepts in their writing. Kissel et al. (2011) concluded that during writing, children produce novel concepts that function as teaching tools for the writer and peers. Last, the researchers identified that writers relied on interactions with a more knowledgeable other (MKO). The interaction motivated them to improve naturally in their production of ideas and concepts on paper through drawing and letter writing. Kissel et al. (2011) found that through this interactive approach, three thematic areas of importance emerged: writing changes identity, writing offers new possibilities, and writing affords peer-to-peer assistance.

Through a microethnographic study lasting 1 year, a preschool teacher implemented a creative writing format to encourage students to engage in journal writing (King, 2012). The class contained 12 students, one with special needs and others who were dual language learners. The teacher, with the assistance of a paraprofessional, taught the class during a half-day in a 2-hour and 45-minute session each day, extended through 4 days weekly. Twenty minutes each day were devoted to journal writing with specific goals to: (a) encourage writing as a structured learning experience; and (b) keep the creative writing episodes child-centered, avoiding discussions of skills and conventions of writing. At the end of each lesson, the students shared their work with their peers. King (2012) analyzed the children’s interactions by noting the discourse children used when discussing their creative writing pieces. The children typically retold their stories without scribed words since, as King (2012) explained, time constraints
prevented the researcher from scribing the children’s words on most days, except in the conference period on Fridays. King (2012) found it difficult for children to reflect upon their creative writing pieces to engage meaningfully after a period of time had elapsed. King (2012) discovered that children benefitted from creative writing opportunities, especially when scribing was included. At the culmination of the study, King (2012) noted an improvement in students’ understanding of letters and concepts of print and an increase in social interactions related to writing.

In a two-site study of kindergarten children with diverse heritages, Jones, Reutzel, and Fargo (2010) investigated the differences between an interactive, skills-based, evocative writing program and a writing workshop format that used an independent, self-selected approach. The authors administered pre and post assessments in phonological awareness, knowledge of letter names, and word reading abilities at baseline and follow-up. The authors compared the outcomes of both groups using chi-squared and independent t-tests and found that both approaches were effective in increasing children’s early reading abilities, with no discernible differences in either approach. Jones et al. (2010) affirmed that the marks of writing through either approach become “an integral component of language. When a child writes, thoughts and knowledge are synthesized to create a unique message. A moment of time is captured in written text” (p. 338). The authors determined that the act of writing was the key component in the children’s gains, while the strategies used to encourage the children to write were immaterial. The authors suggested the results should encourage teachers to be flexible in their writing approaches since it is the process of writing that results in positive outcomes, not the approach.
Writing Through a Play-Based Format

Before I expound upon play, I must note that What Works Clearinghouse (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) researchers were unable to conclude any benefits when preschool students with disabilities played during literacy opportunities, since none of the available studies met evidence standards. Roskos, Christie, Widman, and Holding (2010) noted it is difficult to prove that play positively impacts literacy and language development through quantitative approaches because measuring the “effects of play are not equipped to capture the depth of learning in nuanced relationships among students’ play, reading, and writing across rapidly changing cultures” (pp. 57–58). Wohlwend and Peppler (2015) further noted that “contrary to the play/rigor binary, play-based curriculum is not simplified, frivolous, or detached from disciplinary content” (p. 26).

Play as an academic pathway. When play is valued as a pathway by which the curricular standards for language and literacy are met, then guided play, adult-initiated play, offers a structured environment where outcomes can be more controlled (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Kittredge, & Klahr, 2015). Weisberg et al. (2015) noted guided play begins with a play idea by the adult who then encourages the students to direct the actions and outcomes with the original ideas. I suggest that the word “adult” can be used synonymously with “more knowledgeable other” when discussing guided play, since the students, who bring toys (i.e., their artifacts; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) into the classroom also bring cultural knowledge and power with that artifact as they mediate through cognitive, social, linguistic, and cultural ways.
The Impact of Play on Language

Han, Moore, Vukelich, and Buell (2010) researched the outcome of play when it was added to thematic vocabulary lessons designed for preschool children. Forty-nine children were selected for the study who were at the highest risk for literacy delays and from the lowest performing group from a Head Start facility in a midwestern state. The children were from different cultural backgrounds: 12 had African-American heritage, 32 had Latino heritage, one had European heritage, two had mixed heritages, and one had a heritage not specified. Twenty-nine of the children spoke Spanish as their home language. The researchers assessed the children’s receptive vocabulary language abilities for all participants using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Third Edition (PPVT-III; Dunn & Dunn, 1997) prior to the intervention. All scores were at least one standard deviation below the mean (age-level average). Each scheduled intervention consisted of one adult tutor and two students engaged in reading and vocabulary activities for 30 minutes, twice weekly, for 16 weeks. Han et al. (2010) chose vocabulary words related to the literacy curriculum through a thematic approach with four thematically-related words being taught weekly for a total of 64 words. Each group received 30 minutes of time for a read-aloud with preselected texts containing the preselected vocabulary words. Explicit examples of pictures and objects of the preselected vocabulary concepts were displayed while the tutor provided child-appropriate definitions.

The play-added experimental group received similar experiences except with a shorter teaching period, which enabled the tutor to provide 10 minutes of guided play within the half-hour time frame. The play segment, in this study, was provided with manipulative, concrete representations of the vocabulary items and physical actions.
displayed by the tutor and voluntarily imitated by the students. Han et al. (2010) acknowledged improvement for both groups based on the results from the PPVT-III (Dunn & Dunn, 1997). Improvement from the at-risk group to within one standard deviation (age level average) was observed with 44% of the vocabulary-only group but 62.5% of the students in the play-added experimental group, moving within one standard deviation (age level average) for vocabulary. Han et al. (2010) surmised that play, when used with explicit instruction of vocabulary concepts, resulted in measurable, positive differences in comparison outcomes. While both groups increased their vocabulary, the play-added experimental group showed higher gains.

Mielonen and Paterson (2009) also investigated how play impacts language development. The participants, two American females of European heritage who had recently completed their kindergarten year, were monitored in one of the participant’s homes. Using a case study approach, the researchers implemented and monitored play engagements to determine the impact on oral language and writing output. The authors used conditions of learning (Cambourne, 1995) as their theoretical framework. Mielonen and Paterson (2009) identified opportunities for “immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibility, approximations, employment, and response” (p. 18). From their work, the researchers identified the benefits of play, finding it positively impacted cognitive abilities such as oral language development, problem solving, and literacy skills.

**Playful, Interactive, Creative Writing**

Print referencing can be described as the deliberate and thoughtful engagement of child and the more knowledgeable other using concepts of print. When an adult or more
knowledgeable other emphasizes print concepts with children, their engagement with the printed word becomes as meaningful as the illustrations and the verbal language of the story. An instructor who uses print referencing techniques, or structured, preplanned references to text, provides focus to “meaning-related talk . . . and code-related talk” (Zucker et al., 2013, p. 1425). The research on teaching students with a language disorder currently includes multiple studies of instructors using print referencing during joint read-aloud events in classroom settings, which have found improved literacy outcomes for the students involved. What Works Clearinghouse (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) noted shared book reading offers benefits for meaning-related talk but little, if any, benefits for code-related talk. Indeed, there has been exhaustive research on the use and benefits of print referencing, through students’ meaning- and code-based attention to read-alouds (Dynia et al., 2011; Ezell & Justice, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2004; Justice et al., 2009; Piasta et al., 2012; Zucker et al., 2009) as well as language-experience approaches (Combs, 1984; Dorr, 2006).

Simply using a commercial text as a format for print engagements would not have met the language and literacy needs of the students I served. To balance the children’s experiences, I opted to devote a segment of the day for creative writing opportunities using an “environment-oriented approach” through a play format that has open “access to material (e.g., books) and social resources (e.g., peers) that hold potential for impacting literacy development at print awareness, comprehension, and print knowledge levels” (Roskos et al., 2010, p. 67). I hypothesized that using students’ creative writing as a document with which to reference print would make a bigger impact on the students I worked with daily. My personal wonder stemmed from having used print referencing
techniques during storybook readings and finding the students were often distracted.

Through a sociocultural lens, I saw the approach of using the children’s journal writing as a way for the students to document their lived experience while also engaging in interactions with print. While there has been much scholarly work published related to creative writing, print referencing, guided play, and shared storybook reading, research does not exist that combines print referencing techniques with a play-centered creative journal writing. I attempted to fill this gap in the literature with a microethnographic case study utilizing participant observation.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, I sought to answer how code- and meaning-based print referencing techniques, when used with the children’s creative writing productions through culturally- and socially-mediated experiences, impacted the children’s oral language development, awareness of print, and literacy skills attainment. The 10 children in this study had identified specific needs in both communication and literacy development related to their diagnosis of a language disorder. The majority of the data collection occurred within the context of their classroom. Eighteen parents/guardians were encouraged to participate in pre and post interviews. Additionally, I asked parents to interact with their children in response to the children’s drawings created in the classroom that I sent home. Here, I included detailed instructions for the parents on ways to reinforce print referencing techniques further using both meaning-based and print-based interactions. The parents reported, through written responses, the results of their child–parent interactions.

Institutional Review Board Process

This research took place in a public preschool setting in the rural Southeast. The school is regulated by the school district’s Board of Education and follows the health, safety, and educational requirements of the state Board of Education. The state’s Department of Social Services also makes routine visits to assess the health and safety of the preschoolers.
**District permission.** I complied with the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, and received IRB approval for the study. As part of the IRB process, I met with two school district representatives to request approval to conduct the research at my school. Both gave permission noting they were interested in the final results. I also obtained permission to make video- and audio-recordings in the classroom since the devices were school district owned. The school district provided me with recording equipment, including an iPad and a terabyte external hard drive, to complete the research.

**Parental permission.** I spoke with all parents at the beginning of the year to inform them of the research process. I developed the letters to obtain the parents and children’s permission in English and Spanish. Since I am not a proficient communicator in Spanish, I sought the assistance of a translator certified in translating written Spanish. Upon IRB approval, I met with parents who signed the agreement forms for both them and their children to participate in the research. Being preschool, the children were too young to sign a child assent form.

**Participant Selection**

I employed purposeful sampling (Christ, 2010; Lingard, Albert, & Levinson, 2008; Patton, 1990) to choose 10 participants out of the 30 possible students in the class. As Patton (1990) avows,

> the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. *Information-rich* cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. (p. 169, original emphasis)
The 10 children I selected were unique members of my therapeutic classroom, who began in the class when they were 3 years old. At the time of initial enrollment, the children possessed minimal verbal language and were thus identified as having a language disorder without any other diagnosis. The children had reached their fourth birthdays by the beginning of the 2016–2017 school year. In the fall of 2016, the children were mainstreamed from the full-day special needs programming of my therapeutic classroom and a developmentally delayed classroom to a combination of a general education, 4-year-old kindergarten classroom in the morning and my classroom in the afternoon. As students in my therapeutic classroom during the 2015–2016 school year, they had previously participated in print referencing techniques while I read storybook texts as well as creative writing opportunities. During the 2015–2016 school year, I did not formally investigate their responses to print referencing during storybook reading, and I did not observe any noticeable differences nor responses in their attention to print concepts. During the 2015–2016 school year, I did not include planned experiences using print referencing techniques during students’ creative writing opportunities.

Of the 20 possible children who did not meet the criterion for acceptance into the study, two of the 4-year-old children were full-time, special-needs children who split their day between a developmentally-delayed classroom and my classroom. Another 4-year-old child who was mainstreamed into a 4-year-old general education classroom in the morning, possessed a severe speech motor planning delay which, when accounted for, revealed adequate underlying language abilities. The other children were not selected because they were 3 years old and thus too young to meet the age and placement criteria.
The 10 selected children who continued enrollment in the therapeutic classroom began 4-year-old kindergarten with ongoing difficulty in communication abilities, which impacted classroom performance related to preliteracy development. This is consistent with the findings of Snowling, Duff, Nash, and Hulme (2016) that severe language disorders in the early grades impact performance in literacy-related tasks. As such, there was a “common sense obviousness” (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1983, p. 3) in choosing these participants. Their histories, past experiences, and present struggles made them the best group for me to study how print referencing during creative writing opportunities impacts language and literacy abilities.

I also asked the 10 students’ parents to participate in the study. Parental participation was important because researchers have found that parents’ willingness to interact using print referencing strategies during storybook engagements increases when the researchers provide parents with guidance prior to the experience. Without guidance, parents use minimal print referencing strategies (Ezell & Justice, 2000; Justice & Ezell 2000). I aimed to enable children to have similar reading and writing experiences at both school and home for increased consistency and continuity. Every Friday, the children chose a creative writing sample to share with their parents, who acted as guided responders prompting the children to share their drawings and engaging with the detailed direction as instructed. Paper copies of the instructions were sent via the children’s book bags. The children and their parents independently chose pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, which I used when sending documents home. Children were given cartoon character icons from which to choose their names. Parents were asked to select their own names (given names and surnames) at their convenience.
The Children

The children began their day in one of the six general education classrooms housed within the two main buildings that comprise the four-building campus. They joined their peers in the therapeutic classroom in the afternoon.

Captain America. Captain America is a quiet, caring child. He is quick to give another child his chair, share a desirable writing marker, or share toys he brings to school from home. Captain America, a child of both European and African heritage, lives with his mother, father, three sisters, and two brothers. He has had a history of communication concerns since infancy. His mother described his development as “it started out kind of slow at first.” Because of these concerns, he was identified and served through an early intervention program for children with special needs.

Dora the Explorer. Dora lives with her mother and older sister, as well as a younger brother and sister who also attend school with Dora. Dora, a child of African and Pacific Islander descent, displays herself as a fiercely independent young child who is often seen guiding her brother and sister, like a little mother, through the school building after exiting the bus in the mornings. She carries her mothering skills into the afternoon classroom by directing other students how she thinks they should go. Dora’s language delay was identified early on in an early intervention program for infants and toddlers with special needs. Dora’s mother expressed her opinion about Dora’s language abilities during our first interview, stating:

I think she is coming along a lot better with it than she started off before getting into the program. She is able to say a lot more letters and starting to learn the sounds of each letter, and what letters certain words begin with.
Dora experienced the sudden and unexpected death of her father in April 2016. In addition to losing her husband, Dora’s mother also experienced a significant illness at the onset of the research period. Dora rarely spoke about her father’s passing or her mother’s sickness.

**Hello, Kitty.** Kitty, a child of African heritage, lives with her grandmother who is her legal guardian, Jane Burch, in addition to her brother and two uncles. When I asked about Kitty’s language abilities, Kitty’s grandmother commented, “It’s better now.” Kitty’s grandmother became the legal guardian for Kitty after her parents were incarcerated in an adjacent state. Early assessment summaries revealed Kitty’s language contained patterns of echolalia (echoing another’s words) and jargon (creating nonsense words). Kitty can be described as a little girl who has a difficult time defending her worth. I frequently observed her giving her belongings away to develop friendships and to appease aggressors. When events did not proceed as she anticipated, she often cried.

**Iron Man.** Iron Man, a child with African heritage, was born 7 weeks premature and remained in the neonatal unit for 3 weeks due to breathing complications. Before he entered preschool, he was identified and served through an early intervention program for children with special needs due to his minimal language output. Iron Man lives with both parents and two older siblings. At the onset of the research, Iron Man frequently cried when his needs were not understood and left unmet by children and adults around him. He frequently resorts to physical aggression when he thinks other children are invading his space. He finds solace in habitually retreating to hiding in his personal coat cubby to avoid social engagements and difficult conversations.
Mickey Mouse. Mickey, a child of both European and African heritage, lives with both parents and two older sisters. Before he entered preschool, he was identified and served by an early intervention program for children with special needs due to his minimal language output and overall unintelligibility. At Age 3, his parents reported he communicated through gestures, eye gaze, crying, and single words. Mickey Mouse presented as a very unhappy child. At the start of the research, Mickey often cried when arriving at school, wept on the way to the bathroom, and mournfully walked to the playground with his classmates. Mickey is often heard tearfully requesting, “I want my mommy. I want my daddy.” His mother’s explanation for his frustration made sense to me:

   In the beginning, he had a slow learning. Like, he would not talk at all. Whenever he did talk . . . you were unable to understand what he was saying. He was just pointing at things. If he wanted his sippy cup or whatever, he would just point and not actually ask for it, but just grunt for it.

Mickey frequently cried when he was unable to express emotions related to fear and anxiety. He was often inconsolable at school for long periods of time.

Raphael. Raphael, a child of Latino heritage, lives with his parents and two older brothers. His home language is Spanish but, according to his mother through an interpreter, his older brothers predominately speak English at home. Before he entered preschool, Raphael relied on both nonverbal gestures and crying to make his needs known. His mother described his language abilities when he entered the therapeutic classroom as being very delayed: “He didn’t say anything, . . . he only say Mama.” At
the onset of the research, Raphael minimally interacted with his classroom peers. He is very compliant with classroom directives but often cries saying he misses his mother.

**R2D2.** R2D2, a child of African and European heritage, lives with his parents and a younger sister. Before he entered preschool, he was identified and served by an early intervention program for children with special needs due to his minimal language output.

His mother shared the following during the first interview:

I noticed when he was maybe 15 months old, he really wasn’t saying any words consistently. I brought the point up to his pediatrician and he said, “Wait until he is 18 months old and if he doesn’t start saying words by then, we will start doing something about it.” Eighteen months came and went and there really was no change. He was using kind of his own little language he made up himself. None of us understood what he was talking about but he understood what he was talking about. It caused a lot of frustration with him, because he would try to communicate with us and we really didn’t know what he was saying, what he wanted, what he needed, so there was a lot of pointing and carrying us around to where he wanted to be or what he wanted us to get for him.

At the time of placement into the therapeutic classroom, his language was characterized as echolalic with nonproductive jargon. From my classroom observations, R2D2 began the 15-week long research with refusal behaviors when events did not proceed as he had planned. He often would pout and refuse to participate if I did not submit to his requests. His frustration often leads him to refuse to interact with peers and teachers. His refusal behaviors typically begin with pouting and protesting, then escalate into his refusal to move.
Spider-Man. Spider-Man, a child of African heritage, lives with his parents and an older sister. Before he entered preschool, he was identified as a special needs child and served by an early intervention program due to his minimal language output. Joan Lewis, his mother, shared, “I think he’s progressing from [when] he first began to make sounds and speak, which was probably about 3 years ago when he started making sounds.” Spider-Man began the research with minimal communication during opportunities for classroom discourse. He often relies on others to speak for him.

Superman. Superman, a child of European heritage, lives with his parents and an older brother. Before he entered preschool, he was identified as a special needs child and served by an early intervention program due to his minimal language output. Becca, his mother, expressed:

He has definitely had some delays compared to the average 4-year-old. He lost part of his hearing at an early age and because of it, he has always been a little bit more delayed. He always has struggled with what he’s trying to say. He’s always tried really hard, but it’s been hard for him to get out the correct sounds he’s needed. He’s come a long way with the way he’s doing things, but at an age where most children were talking in sentences, he wasn’t even saying “Momma” correctly. So, it’s been a struggle all of his life.

At the onset of the research, Superman often cried when he was asked to work through problems with peers. He is very difficult to understand which leads to additional anxiety and frustration for him.

Thor. Thor, a child of European and Pacific Islander heritage, lives with his parents, Jake and Grace McDonald, and an older brother. Early on, the parents’ concern
for Thor’s language acquisition difficulties prompted them to seek assistance for an evaluation and services. Prior to the research, Thor frequently cried out of frustration when his needs were not immediately met. At the beginning of the research, Thor had difficulty controlling his emotions. He often cries when he is unwilling to wait his turn for a toy or other physical tools for learning. I found him to be extremely difficult to understand which impacted how quickly I could meet his needs.

**Instruments**

I chose portions from two standardized instruments to use in this study that would offer an uncomplicated, efficient, yet sensitive assessment of the language and literacy components of the children’s abilities. More specifically, I administered the sentence repetition test from the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals– Preschool, Second Edition (CELF Preschool-2; Wiig, Secord, & Semel, 2004) to assess meaning-based skills such as word knowledge and background knowledge. I also selected portions from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening– Prekindergarten (PALS-PreK; Invernizzi, Sullivan, Meier, & Swank, Curry School of Education, 2013) to assess code-based literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge, name writing, and print awareness.

**Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Preschool, Second Edition.** I based my decision to administer the CELF Preschool-2 recalling sentences subtest as one of the pre- and post-assessments since it is regarded as a measurement that discriminates between typical language and language disorders even when adjustments are made for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Conti-Ramsden et al., 2001). Current research suggests sentence repetition tasks measure word knowledge, grammatical understanding, the phonological system, and the meaning- and code-based
skills needed for speech production (Klem et al., 2015). Klem et al. (2015) asserted that the ability to repeat sentences of varying grammatical structures is a predictor of long-term growth in a child’s language process.

Evidence of the assessment’s trustworthiness and cogency. The CELF Preschool-2 assessment has an internal consistency of .77–.92 for subtests and .91–.94 for composite scores. It offers moderate to high validity for both subtests and composite scores. Used as a judgment of reliability, the test-retest stability is estimated at .90. The internal consistency, also a measure of reliability, is identified through Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach, 1951) with reliability as a composite of .91 for children 48–53 months, .90 for 54–59 months, and .84 for 60–65 months of age. The split-half reliability of the sentence repetition subtest is ≥ .90. The intercorrelation of the sentence repetition subtest with expressive language index is .70 (Wiig et al., 2004).

The test developers (Wiig, et al. 2004) of the CELF Preschool-2 strongly suggested test administrators be aware of the differences encountered when assessing children from culturally- and linguistically-diverse backgrounds, such as dialectical differences found within the child’s home environment and community. To avoid potential bias when assessing children of diverse backgrounds, the authors suggested the use of nonstandard administration through a descriptive approach. The authors recommended providing extra time for responses, increasing the number of trial opportunities, obtaining a language sample, extending the assessment beyond the ceiling item, modifying the responses to reflect the dialect, and interviewing caregivers. They also noted nonstandard assessments must be reported as a nonstandard protocol.
**Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening– Prekindergarten.** According to the developers of the PALS-PreK (Invernizzi et al., 2013), this assessment was designed to identify students who do not exhibit the literacy skills defined by the assessment developers after the children are exposed to literacy experiences in the classroom setting. The authors of the PALS-PreK expressly stated that the assessment should not be used as a tool to screen children for reading delays because it is too premature to identify children for reading difficulties at this age. The screening tool does not provide benchmarks but rather offers expected developmental ranges for a child’s spring semester of the 4K year. The authors of the PALS-PreK assessed internal consistency using Guttman split-half reliability and Cronbach’s alpha. Interrater reliability was .99 on all subtests apart from the print and word awareness subtest. Construct validity was assessed through factor analysis with an eigenvalue of 2.9. The PALS-PreK concurrent validity results were moderately high and significant. Predictive validity was also high and significant.

I chose to administer five subtests of the PALS-PreK based on the activities that I planned as interactive engagements with students during the creative writing portion of the day: name writing, alphabet knowledge—uppercase, alphabet knowledge—lowercase, letter sounds, and print and word awareness. As a constrained skills assessment, these are skills “parents and preschool teachers value and actively support” (Snow & Matthews, 2016, p. 58) because they are teachable and finite.

**Research Design**

I chose to use a single mini-ethnographic case study approach with participant observation as the research methodology to “develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 109). I observed a bounded single
case study of 10 children who were similar in diagnosis, prior experience, age, and grade level. I believed a case study approach was best for this research since case studies “are the human interpretations on the basis of which people act” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 11). Stake (2010) defined a case, such as the sample I describe in this document, as a “specific, a complex functioning thing” (p. 2). Similarly, Merriam (2001) noted a case can be described as “a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). A single mini-ethnographic case study through participant observation allowed for a deeper understanding of complex issues within the context of my classroom. Merriam (2001) noted the selection of a case study approach is best “for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (p. 33). The classroom in which I teach is unlike any other in the school district or neighboring districts. The curriculum allows children to talk freely while a more knowledgeable other offers required guidance as stipulated in the special needs individualized education plan. I encourage communication, social interaction, movement, song, and play. As the classroom of study is unique, the children within it also have unique experiences.

I collected data through a participant observation approach. Spradley (1980) emphasized that through an ethnographical lens, participant observation means “learning from people” (p. 3) instead of investigating them. As a participant observer, I was a member of the situation as I gained knowledge from the interactions of the children. An ordinary observer passing by the classroom might describe the environment as a classroom of typical 4-year-old kindergarten children. As the participant observer, I observed the mundane as well as the highly interactive and, at times, chaotic verbal
engagements. These verbal interactions occurred through student-developed texts, artifact exchanges, bargaining for each other’s toys, and amidst a plethora of child-generated music and movement. I also noted what happened during socially- and culturally-mediated opportunities in creative journal time when I added print referencing techniques to the curricular activities. Spradley (1980) pointed out as the participant observer, I was tasked with purposely and explicitly understanding my role through six distinct requirements:

1. Engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation,
2. Become explicitly aware of the things usually blocked out to avoid overload,
3. Approach social life with a wide-angle lens,
4. Alternate between insider and outsider experience,
5. Increase [my] introspectiveness, and
6. Keep detailed records of both objective observations and subjective feelings.

(Spradley, 1980, pp. 54–58)

As a participant observer, I aimed to comprehend the social and cultural conditions through the perspectives of all participants (Zainal, 2007).

**Epistemology.** I subscribed to a constructivist epistemology, which confirmed my belief that knowledge is a construction of multiple realities shaped by the participation in social interactions with and among others (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

**Purpose.** Creative writing is recommended as a best practice for preschoolers (Calkins, 1994; Invernizzi et al., 2013). Currently, there is much research supporting the use of writing in the preschool setting and a plethora of literature on print referencing
with storybook formats. There is also substantial information available that encourages
the use of play in the classroom to improve language and literacy abilities. However, no
research to date has there specifically addressing my three research questions: How do
print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based) in the context of playful creative
writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder (a) impact their oral
language development, (b) impact their ability to interact with print, and (c) impact their
literacy skills attainment? These questions influenced the type of ethnographic case study
approach I selected, and I chose a method that was best for the purpose and outcome
(Yin, 2013). The single case study utilizing participant observation guided my
understanding of how to approach the three research questions. From these interactions, I
developed context-dependent knowledge; knowledge attained not from theories but from
the interactive experiences with the case which produced “concrete, practical knowledge”
(Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 4).

**Methodological Stance: Mini-Ethnographic Case Study Utilizing Participant
Observation**

I chose to conduct a mini-ethnographic case study utilizing participant
observation to acquire a deeper understanding of the context in which the children
learned. In traditional ethnography, “there needs to be long-term engagement” (Walford,
2009, p. 273). However, the prefix “mini-” denotes the study is completed in a shorter
amount of time than the average ethnographic study (Weinstein & Ventres, 2000). Fusch,
Fusch, and Ness (2017) suggested blending designs “to use the best of each design that
can mitigate limitations of each” (p. 923). Through a mini-ethnographic case study
approach, I made inferences through the “use of multiple research methods and the
generation of rich data” (Walford, 2009, p. 273). I determined that a mini-ethnographic case study with participant observation best suited the research process and the types of questions I developed due to the nature of the school year beginning and concluding at set times. Within the 15-week time span, I could learn about the social and cultural aspects of the children’s interactions by making inferences about socially- and culturally-mediated aspects of talk, movement, song, and toys (Spradley, 1980). I believe “reality is socially constructed as people’s experiences occur within social, cultural, historical, or personal contexts” (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011, p. 15). It is through the socially and culturally constructive engagement within the context of this research that the children, their parents, and I created new knowledge (Tracey & Morrow, 2012).

As an emic research study, I focused on qualitative methods but also integrated some quantitative methods. It is my belief that “realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experimentally-based” (Guba, 1990, p. 27). The interweaving of the two gave triangulated data results that afforded a greater understanding of the problem (Lingard et al., 2008). The justification for combining both kinds of data within one study is realized when considering “neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient, by themselves, to capture the trends and details of a situation” (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006, p. 3). As such, utilizing multiple streams of evidence “enhances the researcher’s ability to discover, understand, and communicate findings to a wide range of audiences” (Leiber & Weisner, 2010, p. 560).

While I chose to use both streams of data, my knowledge predominantly developed through the lived experiences of the children and their parents, and through my interactions with them in our mutual participation in the research while making as “few
assumptions as possible” (Walford, 2009, p. 274). I believe the “inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two” (Guba, 1990, p. 27). Through triangulated interactions, the children openly shared their stories, artifacts, musings, and knowledge with their parents, the other children, and me. Likewise, the parents shared their stories, musings, and knowledge with the children and me. This process required both induction and hermeneutics. The interpretation of written, verbal, and nonverbal communication involved observing the children interacting within the specific location—their afternoon classroom. Examining parents’ written responses of their parent–child dyadic interactions using the children’s words as the creation of the text was also important in helping me construct my knowledge. It was through interactions with the children and parents that I realized and affirmed “learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

**Data Collection Procedures**

Deciding on this methodology required an array of diverse data sources from which I explored the phenomenon within a specific milieu as a participant observer (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2013). I collected data from classroom interactions using audio- and video-recordings, classroom-developed journal entries, parents’ written reactions to the copies of their children’s creative writing sent home and returned, parents’ pre- and postinterviews, individual student assessment data, and children’s selected artifacts brought from home to use during the daily creative writing time. The
use of several sources of data offered a “variety of lenses” permitting an array of features
to be perceived and acknowledged (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544).

Parents. In November 2016, I began the research process by obtaining the needed
consent from parents. As soon as the parents gave their permission, I sent a set of seven
open-ended interview questions for the parents to review prior to meeting with me for an
initial interview. The purpose of the questions was to create a way for parents to share
information about the language, literacy, and print experiences their children had
encountered in their home and early school life. Figure 4.1 presents a copy of the English
version of the questions (for both English and Spanish versions, see Appendix A).

Parent Questionnaire

1. How do you describe your child’s language development?

2. How do you describe your child’s current interaction with books?

3. How do you describe your child’s current interaction with drawing/writing?

4. How do you describe your child’s current interaction with writing alphabetic
letters?

5. How do you describe your child’s current interaction when you and your child
talk about print
   a. in books?
   b. in commercials?
   c. on commercial materials such as cereal boxes, clothing, cartoons, movies,
and signage?

6. How do you describe your child’s development in the use of writing tools, like
markers, pencils, crayons, and paints?

7. How do you describe your child’s current level of literacy
   a. when listening to books?
   b. when looking at books alone?
   c. when talking about illustrations in books with you?
   d. when talking about the words in books?
   e. when attempting to write?
Figure 4.1. Parent questionnaire.

The parents chose where they wanted to meet to respond to the interview, with the options being their home or their children’s school. With the questions as a guide, the parents spoke while I digitally recorded their responses using an Olympus VN-8100 PC digital voice recorder. I gathered information from the parents as one set of data points to assist me in answering my research questions.

To encourage parent participation throughout the research, each week I provided information at the bottom of each creative writing journal entry offering interventions parents could incorporate into the journal discussion exercises at home. My comments functioned as personalized opportunities to provide parents with information that targeted both code- and meaning-based literacy activities for their children and their particular journal entry. For example, with guidance related to code-based knowledge, I noted to parents that certain journal responses offered possibilities to find words that started like a friend’s name, counting words that were the same, or find the beginning of their story. I also noted meaning-based literacy opportunities such as constructing questions, generating synonyms of the children’s words, naming the color words chosen, or creating categories of their topics of interest. Parents used the strategies at their discretion, which made the process even more personalized. The parents regularly responded back to me referencing their children’s journal selection, the interventions I had suggested, and the overall outcomes.

Children. I began the research with a preassessment using both the PALS-PreK and the sentence recalling subtest from the CELF-2 Preschool, as previously discussed. Both assessments were administered during the week of November 21, 2016 through
December 2, 2016 prior to the start of the research. Following the completion of the parent interviews and pre-assessment procedures, from the week of December 5, 2016 through the week of April 3, 2017, I engaged in an explanatory case study to determine how print referencing impacted the children’s language-related abilities. For 3 days weekly during the 15-weeks of the research period, I captured nearly 800 minutes of children’s volitional discourse through audio- and video-recordings. I first carefully reviewed each recording then transcribed those that best exemplified my research goals. I concurrently noted and wrote memos of particular nuances. I documented the personal artifacts the children brought from home. I engaged the children in choosing the creative writing entry they wanted to take home to their parents. The children participated in member checking activities near the end of the research to verify or refute what I thought my observations meant.

**Analyzing Data**

I interviewed parents at the beginning and end of the research using open-ended questions. From these interviews, I coded the parents’ responses to determine the most salient points. I used *in vivo* coding as the first cycle coding since it functions to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). *In vivo* coding, as Saldaña (2013) noted, is applicable in an ethnographic study with participant observation methods as a means of looking at the lived experiences of the participants through coding a word or a phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative record. The most significant categories within the parents’ responses were revealed from the interviews.

To begin the analysis of the children’s discourse and the parents’ responses to the creative writing samples, I read through the transcripts as raw data, unencumbered and
without bias. I coded the parents’ comments related to the creative writing samples using
in vivo coding which offered the availability of focused coding, as a second cycle
method, to locate the most significant categories in talk at home to aid “in the
development of major categories or themes” (Saldana, 2013, p. 213). I followed that
process with an overall examination of the data so my presumed findings could be
“substantiated, revised and reconfigured” as needed (Merriam, 2001, p. 181).

**Conversational discourse.** For the children’s participation, I examined each line
of conversation through in vivo coding so I could grasp the nuances of the children’s
discourse. After that step, I moved to identifying the types of exchanges a holistic
approach (Boyle, 1994; Clandinin, 2013; Conteh, Gregory, Kearney, & Mor-
Sommerfeld, 2005; Goodall, 2000; Hymes, 1989; Spradley, 1980). I analyzed the data
based on a holistic ethnographic approach, moving from coding and reflection into
selected vignettes, and then into what I learned as a participant observer. I acknowledged
cultural and linguistic differences as I transcribed the children’s discourses. I wanted to
capture the “types of conversation and personal meanings” (Saldana, 2013, p. 136) of the
children’s significant social and cultural interactions in order to write a “story of culture”
(Goodall, 2000, p. 121). As a form of ethnographical discourse analysis, I began this
approach by observing, taking notes, and collecting audio- and video-recordings of verbal
interactions including the pauses, interjections, and body language intertwined with the
verbal interactions. Writing evening memos provided additional support to capture the
nuances of the exchanges. I coded the exchanges through an emic typology of
interactions so I could understand the world in which the children created their stories. I
needed to interact with the children through their stories so I could engage with them in
print mediations. As an ethnographic approach, this process allowed me to discover how the children’s shared cultural knowledge of being preschool children with a language disorder generated their cultural behavior, cultural artifacts, and speech messages (Spradley, 1980, p. 11).

**Journals.** For the journals, I transcribed and coded the children’s scribed comments using *in vivo* coding, which offered the availability of focused coding, as a second cycle method, to locate the most significant categories (Saldaña, 2013) to compare talk at school with talk at home. I believed it was important to determine if the content of children’s stories at school matched the content of the stories the children retold at home. I thought that if children’s illustrations held deeply rooted meanings for them, retellings from school to home should be harmonious.

**Artifacts.** I also examined how the children incorporated the artifacts brought from home, regardless of who brought them to the classroom, as well as the artifacts borrowed from within the classroom. I wanted to determine if the toys guided the children’s comments. To do this, I compared their journal entries with the artifacts present for the day to determine how the artifacts impacted the children’s thoughts. I categorized the overarching topics of the day and charted the artifacts present to determine how the children’s use of artifacts was embedded in their language.

** Appropriation.** I examined how appropriation impacted the children’s responses to determine if a sociocultural approach to learning was a better option for children with a language disorder. I noted that the most common therapeutic interventions identified by Law et al. (2017) involved teaching isolated, targeted behaviors reinforced by tokens or praise. I investigated the types of stories to see if the children repurposed each other’s
language. If children used appropriation most of the time, then a sociocultural approach (as opposed to a skills-based approach) would be better suited for children with a language disorder.

Movement. I examined the children’s need for movement during their creative writing experiences. I wanted to understand how movement, usually movement consisting of waving markers in haphazard directions, impacted their abilities when considering my research questions.

Self-talk. I also wanted to know how the children’s self-talk helped them during journal time to express themselves on paper. I wanted to know if music, specifically rhythmical repetitions of sounds that seemed nonlinguistic to me, were helpful for the children during creative writing opportunities, and to understand how they were used.

Standardized assessments. I administered the recalling sentences subtest from the CELF PreK-2 (Wiig et al., 2004) and the five predetermined subtests from the PALS-PreK (Invernizzi et al., 2013) during the week of November 21, 2016 through December 2, 2016 to gather preliminary data. In the spring, after concluding the 15-week creative writing with print referencing research, I readministered the same measures during the period from April 17–April 28, 2017. During the initial assessments, I engaged a retired preschool teacher to observe for test administration accuracy.

Trustworthiness

The prevention of bias required continuous reflection upon my process for gathering data, interpreting the observations, and positionality. Even with continuous reflection, bias is always possible and may be present in any research study during “planning, data collection, analysis, and publication” (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010, p. 619).
Triangulation. I collected data from multiple sources to provide a stream of knowledge from multiple directions. As an example, parents and I exchanged information through open-ended interview questions at the beginning and at the end of the 15-week ethnographic case study. Because the research was based on creative writing experiences, the children created drawings that were then sent to parents for discussion and engagement at home. Parents provided feedback to their children’s conversations and comments. Children were audio- and video-recorded to capture the nuances of their interactions. The video- and audio-recordings were transcribed, leading me each day to greater reflection and insight. I examined the children’s drawings and words to determine the multiple categories reflected within their discourse which helped me understand what thoughts were prevalent in the minds of the preschoolers. I captured my reflections in and out of class using a notebook and the notes application on my phone. The notes application allowed me to reflect at school, in the car, and even in the dark of night.

Member checking. As I reviewed my memos and transcribed the data from the video- and audio-recorded classroom interactions, I had questions about what I was interpreting through my reflections, observations, and perceptions. I wanted the case participants, the children, to be able to substantiate or amend my summaries. Near the end of the research period, I created an opportunity for the children to view a few previously recorded writing opportunities. I indicated to them my areas of confusion and surprise with hopes they would clarify or validate my interpretations. Through the words of the 10 4- and 5-year-old children, they offered their honest opinions about why they shook markers in the air, why they sang, why they brought toys to school, and the
importance of taking care of each other’s toys. The children thus “contribute[d] new or additional perspectives on the issue under study” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556).

**Length of observation.** This ethnographic case-study lasted for 15 weeks with the children interacting with each other three to four times weekly. The writing time was usually an hour in length but extended well beyond on many days.

**Peer examination.** While maintaining the anonymity of the students, I shared findings with a teacher acquaintance who has additional experience than I, thus qualifying as the more knowledgeable other. I took the opportunity to share epiphanies as well as confusion about the children’s interactions in my classroom.

**Audit trail.** To protect the individuals in this study, I will store the children’s journal documents, my researcher’s journal, a file containing the parents’ original responses to their children’s journals, the flash drive containing with video- and audio-recordings, and the terabyte external hard drive containing the backup of all documents pertaining to this research in a waterproof and theft-proof safe for a period of at least 6 years. If I or another researcher wish to replicate this study, information pertaining to the recording equipment, writing journal format, and information storage devices are defined by manufacture’s name and item number within this document.

**Positionality.** To discuss my positionality, I reflected on the words of Giardina and Newman (2011), who noted “soulfully naked positionality might bring about risk, discomfort, and uncertainty” (p. 53). I understand that even though my “race, nationality, and gender are fixed or culturally described,” I was positioned as “researchers are always positioned” through such issues as work life, family life, work load, academic
background, and age (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 117). Thus, my “reflexivity is needed in order to legitimize, to validate, and question the research process” (Pillow, 2003, p. 175).

**Insider/outsider.** Moore (2012) noted, “insiders are individuals who have a place in the social group being studied” (p. 11). I was an insider with a working knowledge about the classroom, the children, and their parents. I was responsible for the safety, welfare, and educational outcomes of the children with whom I worked. I was also there because I am a public employee, in some ways making me an outsider with allegiances to my school district. My outsider position precluded discussions of opposition to the district or state department concerning established school policy.

**Researcher.** I gained my knowledge through the perspectives, opinions, and beliefs of the parents who shared their stories about their children’s experiences in and away from their classroom, home, and other spaces. I believe the art of observing children offered information that was more useful than the information I derived from the standardized assessments.

**Power.** As the researcher in the classroom, and the teacher of record, I carefully monitored my power although my dual positions of teacher and researcher overlapped. Since I was a doctoral student, parents may have felt threatened about a misconceived notion about not knowing all the right answers. Parents may have believed their child’s standing in the classroom could be jeopardized if they said something that might have offended me. I had to be mindful to speak with, rather than speak about, the children and parents who helped to guide me to my answers related to my research (Sultana, 2007).

**Race.** I am of European heritage. Through my whiteness, I have received both seen and unseen privileges and opportunities. My whiteness has functioned as a
marketable commodity for many dynamics of life including, but not limited to, education, health care, the legal system, and housing opportunities.

**Age.** Throughout this research period, as a woman in my mid-50s with 33 years of experience in the public-school setting, I have worked in a variety of settings including acute care rehabilitation services, private practice, and higher education.

**Class.** As a privileged individual in a steady dual income family, I have had the financial ability to be involved with academia most of my adult life. I also financially supported my classroom through my personal funds. When I was involved in research, I provided participants with gift cards in gratitude for their participation.

**Gender.** I am a heterosexual female who was raised in a two-parent household. While my father worked outside of the home, my mother’s role was to care for the house and children. My mother believed “girls” do not go to college but marry, stay home, and “have babies.” My passion for higher education may have had its origin in the non-negotiated, feminine deficit narrative I heard as a child.

**Childhood social trepidations.** As a young child in the public-school system, I chose not to interact within the classroom setting. Some might have called me shy. Today, I would have been labeled as a child with a social phobia or selective mutism. When I reflect upon my elementary years, I often think about my second-grade teacher, who offered an environment of choice, small groups, and independent work which I recall being the most comfortable environment for me considering my early childhood communication limitations.

**Dialect.** Although I was born in Western New York, my father’s career path relocated my family to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains when I was very
young. As my communication abilities grew, I developed a regional dialect as well. Without monitoring my words carefully, I have the potential to produce the regional vernacular often observed within the Ohio River Valley such as *acrossed, boughten*, and the deletion of the infinitive *to be*. As an adult, I realized in situations outside of my town that regional dialects are not respected as an accepted language form. I often feel compelled to monitor my words carefully.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

In this 15-week study, I sought to identify how print referencing techniques, when implemented with the children during playful creative writing opportunities, impacted their language development, awareness of print, and literacy development. To extrapolate the research findings, I examined the interactions of 10 children with whom I worked side-by-side in a therapeutic language therapy classroom. I also surveyed parents before and after the study to determine their attitudes about their children’s current levels of language development, awareness of print, and literacy development. I sent home creative writing accounts to the parents weekly that the children preselected, so their parents could continue to mediate print at home. I asked parents to respond to the directions I added to each journal entry related to how they could reference the printed words their children authored. Through these interactions, I identified specifics in the children’s discourse, identified outcomes in their pre and post language and literacy assessments, and gained knowledge of how their language, print awareness, and literacy abilities developed. Through this research, I hoped to “provide time and space for a lively culture to develop, sustained by friendship and the pleasures of play” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 138).

How the Children Directed My Thoughts

As an ethnographic study, I understood I would come to know about the ways children learn through their own words by understanding the “concept of culture” (Boyle,
Spradley (1980) defined *culture* as “the patterns of behavior, artifacts, and knowledge that people have learned or created” (p. 86). To learn from observing the children and their culture, I needed to make inferences from the children’s voices, their interactions with their friends, the artifacts they chose to bring to school, and their creative writing. From these observations, I reflected upon what I learned about these particular preschool children, preschoolers with language disorders, and how the process of their scribed creative writing pieces ultimately guided my thinking through their thoughts, actions, and artifacts. I wanted to see how the process enhanced their oral language, print awareness, and literacy abilities. I relied on multiple sources including dialogue, journal entries, and assessment results from standardized assessments from which I made inferences about the children’s cultural knowledge. Spradley (1980) noted “none of the sources for making inferences—behavior, speech, artifacts are fool-proof but together they can lead to an adequate cultural description” (p. 10). At times, I gained the knowledge explicitly, through engaging with the children, and at other times, tacitly by listening to the children’s interactions, noting their behavior and observing their artifacts.

**Creators of literacy.** As I prepared this section, I recalled the words of Heath (1983), who led me to confirm that using the children’s dictated stories provides the optimal setting for print mediating interactions between the children and me, as well as for the children and their parents:

Both children and adults are producers and consumers of literacy in a consistent, highly redundant, repetitive pattern of using oral language, especially dialogue, as a way of learning from both and about written materials (Heath, 1983, p. 256).
I quickly began to understand, while deeply-rooted as a participant observer in this research within the context of the therapeutic classroom, that the children’s ways of talking and creating language patterns revealed topics that were important to them. Although not limited to these two categories, most of their conversations were built around topics of significant interest: first, superheroes (both supervillains and positive superheroes), and second, their families. They shared these topics among each other initially, then shared with me, and finally shared with their families. Their talk also extended into places they had visited or would like to visit, space travel, friends, cartoon characters, and celebrations. Lesser topics, but still of importance to the children, were death, make-believe characters, spiders, robots, toys, shapes, letters, and reptiles.

Hymes (1989) noted that the manner of talking can be “the speech events, acts, and styles, on one hand and personal abilities and roles, contexts and institutions, and beliefs, values, and attitudes, on the other” (p. 45). The children valued talking about superheroes as their primary topic. The children often spoke about their families, as well, often interspersing superheroes into their language, discussing the ways superheroes helped their family members and how supervillains inhibited their family members. The children created roles in their stories in which they became the superhero saving others in the context of their stories. The children frequently struggled with how to say what they wanted their listeners to hear and understand. Their scribed talk offered an interaction point for print referencing since it reflected the balance between their speech acts and their values and beliefs. The children shared the cultural knowledge of their talk whether it was superheroes, supervillains, or family topics.
Children experience their lives through stories. Here, I reflect upon Goodall’s basic assumptions that “we symbolically act in, and on our world” (Goodall, 2000, p. 116) through communicative acts. We live our lives through stories. As Clandinin (2013) explained:

We intentionally come into relation with participants, and, we, as inquirers, think narratively about our experiences, about our participants’ experiences, and about those experiences that become visible as we live alongside, telling our own stories, hearing another’s stories, moving in and acting in the places—the contexts—in which our lives meet. (p. 23)

The Data Gathering and Coding Process

All of the conversations among the children took place in same classroom during the same time period starting at 12:00 pm and usually ending around 1:00 pm. If the children wished to extend their writing beyond the typically allotted time, I did not dissuade them. Children were never required to write if they opted not to do so.

Transcriptions. I transcribed each day by listening to the audio-recording first then watching the video-recording when I had questions about the discourse. Most days offered insight into my questions. The transcriptions allowed me to document examples of children’s talk, interaction with peers, and how they used their artifacts to engage in playful discussions.

Vignettes. I transcribed many of my observations into vignettes which originated from verbatim accounts from the classroom creative writing opportunities that occurred during the 15-week period of research. The vignettes functioning as an analytic memo,
illuminating the children’s conversations to summarize the children’s interactions evocatively using a shorter narrative approach (Holman, 1972; Seidman, 2013).

**Holistic coding.** I used a holistic coding technique that addressed different levels of conversational discourse to answer my three research questions: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based) in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder (a) impact their oral language development, (b) impact their ability to interact with print, and (c) impact their literacy skills attainment? Through my examination of the audio-recordings, video-recordings, parent input, and creative writing entries, I learned journal time for preschool children is more than simply drawing stick figures on a blank canvas. Four- and 5-year-old children traffic in multilayered negotiations for property, friendship, and power. Throughout the process of sharing stories, the children developed a sense of sharing material items through mutual respect for each other’s belongings. The children’s interactions resulted in discourse that revealed interactions with oral language, print, and literacy. The multiple-layered interactions between each other included: (a) persuading others, (b) using appropriation through talk and play, (c) using self-talk, (d) needing friends, (e) needing to be understood, (f) answering questions from creative writing, (g) engaging in rhythmic interactions, (h) attending to print, and (i) caring about others. Each segment revealed a level of importance since each contributed to the children’s ability to gain knowledge from their scribed talk. Without moving through the process outlined by these categories, the children would have been less able to interact with print mediation at the end of each creative writing period. In addition, two other areas of benefit that were
beyond oral language, interacting with print, and literacy attainment were the development of soft skills and the use of movement to gain knowledge.

**Language Development**

For my first research question, I asked: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based), in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder, impact their oral language development? I aimed to ascertain, from the culture of the children, how their process of playing, drawing, talking, writing, and mediating print impacted their language development.

**Persuading others.** The sociocultural aspect of the learning environment relied on the children to work together first before individually approaching their own work, offering an opportunity for the children to be influencing forces with their peers. The children, as well, relied on the guidance and prompting from their peers to think new thoughts and plan different writing strategies. Since this was a classroom in which children verbally and physically interacted together, at times there were situations in which one child guided another child through his or her story.

Such was the case of Dora and Kitty on January 18, 2017. It was evident Dora influenced Kitty to modify her drawing by simply stating a few words:

Kitty: I make a…, I make a…, I make a…

Dora: A castle?

Kitty: A castle!

Dora: A castle don’t look like that. That look like a circle. It goes ‘round and ‘round. Circles go around.

Kitty: That not a circle!
Dora: Yes, it is… ‘cause me got it at home.

Kitty: But it not round. It white.

Dora: I can see it round, but… look, see you, circle, circle, circle, circle, circle.

Although both children were enrolled in the therapeutic classroom as children with language disorders, I often saw Kitty struggling to meet the demands of Dora’s more advanced language skills. Dora’s more advanced language abilities placed her in the position of a guiding participant. When I asked both Dora and Kitty at the end of their writing segments to share their stories about their drawings, neither was upset but both responded with minimal output:

Dora: I made shapes.

Sanderson: Tell me about your shapes.

Looking at Dora’s illustration, I then prompted Dora to expand her thoughts.

Dora: The shapes are ugly.

As soon as Dora said “the shapes are ugly,” she put her hand over her mouth and put her head back and smiled. I shared with Dora that I was surprised she would call her shapes ugly. I quickly attempted to reframe her thoughts through a meaning-based print reference by suggesting she may might have been referring to *ugli* in *ugli* fruit, a fruit the class sampled the Friday before this date. Dora did not agree nor disagree but left the table and gathered her afternoon snack since her early bus had arrived.

When I asked Kitty about her story, I anticipated a story about a castle since that had been a topic of discussion between the two children. Jenkins, Mulvey, and Floress (2017) noted that children with language disorders are apt to encounter “social difficulties, due to their difficulties in meeting the linguistic demands of a social
exchange” (p. 409). Kitty had met a social difficulty when Dora proposed that she did not draw a castle but instead had drawn circles. I summarized Kitty removed all references to castles due to Dora’s guidance and repurposed the words I had previously shared with Dora into her story:

Kitty: I made fruit.

When Kitty told me she made fruit, I wrote five on her page and asked her to find a word that started like five. She looked at her page as she pointed to each word and quickly but purposely pointed to fruit.

Sanderson: Did you make ugli fruit like we had last week?

Kitty: No, pretty fruit.

What I learned about children influencing others through words. Children’s drawings often offer deeper descriptions in the drawings themselves than the children wish to share. Dora had spent considerable time helping Kitty see her drawing in a different perspective. If Kitty’s language development had been on par with Dora’s language, she might have been able to defend her circular drawing. Upon repeated inspection of the video-recording, Dora was not upset she called her shapes ugly as evidenced by her laughter. The culture of children’s “behavior, thought, and speech differ systematically from that of adults” (Hirschfeld, 2002, p. 613). Children are often brutally honest, which was Dora’s position that day about her shapes. Dora often spent extensive time on her drawings but, being focused on helping Kitty, she was distracted from her own work. On this date, the girls’ expressive language, although shorter than most of their stories, still offered available print that was appropriate during print referencing tasks. In the case of Dora and Kitty, it appeared their discussion over what type of
drawings could represent a castle and what type of drawing could represent a circle impacted their overall verbal output. Although Kitty’s final drawing offered lines that represented vertical directions, squiggles, and horizontal directions of all colors, her immediate response was, “I made fruit.”

Figure 5.1. Dora’s reflective story.
Using appropriation through play and talk. Frequently, the children appropriated both objects and words for different purposes so their actions held meaning for the children. I often saw children using markers as other objects to help them think through and plan their stories. The children also repurposed the words of each other to create more meaningful stories.

Repurposing materials for play. On March 21, 2017, during creative writing time, Spider-Man, R2D2, and Dora sat in a triadic arrangement at their writing table with their open journals before them. Spider-Man, who had not brought a commercial toy this date, created a cannon’s barrel and placed it parallel to the table:

R2D2: Cheese balls?


When the three children finished their creative writing, the four of us interacted through print mediating techniques, both code- and meaning-based, to which they competently responded. Dora responded to prompts that indicated how words were similar. R2D2 responded to a request to find a word that represented a transportation item. Spider-Man responded to questions related to cause and effect.

What I learned about play and repurposing common objects. Like most creative writing sessions in this research, the children engaged in a play period at the beginning of the writing session as a release of tension and a way to transition to the task. The play aspect allowed the children to release energy, find creative pathways, and engage with other learners. Play allowed the children to be interactive social learners first before individually focusing on their written work. The children usually became silent while engaged in the midst of creating their creative writing pieces after a few moments of play. Levin (2003) noted that children, like Spider-Man, have an awareness that their play, even when considered aggressive, is not the same as the actual violence being imitated. Spider-Man had an attraction toward weaponry, as noted in his oral discourse, yet he only wrote about weaponry (outer space/cannonballs) one time in the 15-week period. The group used themes involving power, weapons, and fighting behavior during their play, which I frequently observed in their creative writing. Levin (2003) explained that
“children who use war play to help them feel more powerful and safe are the children who feel the most powerless and vulnerable” (p. 60). Children who have experienced much of their early childhood relying on others to speak for them likely have power and vulnerability issues.

**Repurposing language.** The children often shared words and ideas with each, creating new ideas for new purposes. The children’s use of appropriation of oral language structures, ideas, concepts, and themes resulted in a transformative act (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Maxwell, Weill, & Damico, 2017). To an observer not familiar with appropriation, it might have seemed like unimaginative mimicking. However, appropriation offered the children the chance to learn from each other’s language.

**Green storm.** On February 10, 2017, as the children engaged in journal writing, three children, R2D2, Thor, and Captain America, appropriated language for a novel use to talk about a green storm. The children’s cultural ways of thinking and knowing developed on a social level first between them, and then on the individual level, inside of the children (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). Through a transformational change, Thor followed R2D2’s lead by retelling his own story about a green storm. Captain America followed the other two in his own variation of a story about a green storm:

- **R2D2:** A green storm is coming.
- **Thor:** I have a green storm. There is thunder coming and rain.
- **Captain America:** I have a green storm and a black storm. A storm came and rain came in.
Figure 5.2. R2D2 originates the story about the green storm.
Figure 5.3. Captain America reappropriates R2D2’s words as his own.
Figure 5.4. Thor repurpose R2D2’s idea about the green storm.

*Dora and Kitty used appropriation through song.* During the week of February 13, 2017, I introduced the song “Zoom, Zoom,” a repetitive, simple song about space travel to the children:

Zoom, zoom, we’re going to the moon.

Zoom, zoom, zoom, we’ll get there really soon.

On February 15, 2017, Kitty drew her creative writing piece filling the page with intersecting lines, letter-like markings, and actual letters L, S, Z. Kitty’s story was a near-verbatim rendition of the song:

Kitty: Zoom, zoom, zoom is going to the moon.
Dora drew a large red rocket, with a large purple door on the front, and multicolored flames that emanated from the bottom. Dora similarly told a near-verbatim version of Kitty’s rendition of the song:

Dora: Zoom, zoom is going to the moon.

*Figure 5.5. Kitty appropriates “Zoom, Zoom” into her own words.*
Figure 5.6. Dora appropriates “Zoom, Zoom” into her own words.

Thor introduced the group to black holes. On February 28, 2017, Thor introduced the astronomy concept of black holes to the group. His drawing had a three-dimensional effect since he created a black hole in the center of his paper through the extra effort of repeated markings using his water-based markers in one spot, which made the paper’s fibers weak enough to tear:

Thor: It is a black hole. The marker got stuck in it.

During the creative writing session as I sat beside Thor, I decided to search for artists’ renditions of black holes using my smart phone so Thor could see how his drawing was similar in look and action to a factual black hole. Thor was interested in seeing the artists’ depiction of a black hole; likewise, the other children congregated around my phone screen to see this new concept. I could not show them actual black holes but only artists’
depictions from the NASA website since the gravitational pull within a black hole is so great no light can escape, thus making black holes invisible (Smith, 2015).

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 5.7.** Thor introduces us to black holes.

*Black holes revisited.* On March 8, 2017, more than a week after Thor introduced black holes to the group, Thor resurrected the topic of black holes, allowing the concept to resurface within the preschoolers’ thoughts again. Superman was one of the children who wanted to see the NASA site that depicted black holes. He discussed a distinct tale about the experiences of superheroes and villains with a black hole. In his story, he modified the traditional physicists’ concept of black holes by suggesting Batman could jump out of a black hole. Batman is a superhero, thus in Superman’s story he rightfully possessed the ability to overcome any physical limitations imposed upon humanity,
including the gravitational pull within a black hole. Superman ended his story with, “I smart. Smartie-smartie.”

On March 9, 2017, Thor repurposed the topic of black holes for his ideas, offering a distinctly different story from Superman’s version the day before. Thor’s text was about black holes, but in his story the black hole possessed the ability to accept all of the markers. Later on March 9, from his original comment on March 8 and Thor’s comment, Superman repurposed Thor’s words making the concept of black holes his own again. Also the same day, from Thor’s comment, Captain America developed a similar story about black holes, but in Captain America’s journal, “the black hole is eating people.”
Figure 5.9. Thor continues the black hole theme.
Figure 5.10. Superman finds another way to repurpose the theme of black holes.
Captain America’s decision to adapt his words from Thor’s original thoughts and Superman’s thoughts as a way to reuse the words for new purposes was transformational (Bakhtin, 1981; Maxwell et al., 2017). Both Captain America and Superman transformed their own thinking through Thor’s original prompting to express a concept they had not mentioned in class prior to the March 8 and 9 dates. From their discussion that day, I was again prompted to reuse their topic to search the Internet to help them see what scientists believe a black hole might look like. Although I opened the site for Captain America, Thor, and Superman, again more than half the group came to see the image I downloaded from NASA.gov, an artist’s rendition of a black hole. In the afternoon, after the children left for the day, I searched a popular online bookstore for scientific texts about black holes developed and written for young children. I discovered they are relatively rare, with
most texts with the black hole theme being written for late elementary-aged children. Yet, this research showed young children have an interest in the concept of black holes. Their discourse illuminated their desire and ability to create and share new ideas through piquing each other’s interests and expanding their language to produce novel concepts with relative precision. From my limited understanding of black holes, they would act as the children described, consuming anything that might venture into the gravitational pathway of the black hole (Smith, 2015). At the end, I used print referencing techniques simply to inform the children their words were important, further solidifying their language experience.

**What I learned about repurposing, or appropriation of language.** Appropriation of language occurs during mutual engagement of talk. The children, through their own abilities, transformed language from one to another. To do this, they synchronized their thoughts with their writing partners.

**Using self talk.** Self-talk was used more frequently by the children who possessed less developed language abilities. Self-talk helped the children to comment about their own efforts, guiding behavior and preventing problems.

**Praising through self-talk.** On January 18, 2017 as the children were writing in their journals, Ironman finished drawing the shoe on the red Power Ranger figure in his creative writing journal. Without looking at anyone, Ironman looked at his shoe:

Ironman: I just made a gorgeous shoe.

He did not look around for a response so I inferred it was self-talk to remind himself about his ability to recreate artfully the Power Ranger image he stored in his mind.
What I learned about self-talk and praise. Although I did not often hear audible self-talk in the room as a reflective comment about the children and their writing, Ironman’s comment functioned to let him know his work was worthy of attention. He did not need another child to comment about it since he was able to use self-talk to satisfy his need for assurance.

Guiding behavior through self-talk. On January 25, 2017 during an active play session, Ironman was engaged as a Power Ranger moving his markers in movements that mimicked Power Rangers sword fighting. While Ironman was engrossed in Power Rangers play, a teacher assistant from an adjacent classroom entered the room moving toward the coat cubbies which were near Ironman’s table. Ironman stopped his play, put his markers down and looked down at the table:

Ironman: Stop doing that!

Using his own self-directed command (Berk & Meyers, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978), Ironman worked through his confusion that play is not always a desirable activity in the traditional classroom setting. Berk and Meyers (2013) noted when children are faced with a more complicated task, children will increase the amount of self-talk to work through the problem. The assistant entering the room reminded Ironman that play with markers may not be acceptable in all environments. Through thinking aloud, his use of self-talk served to solve the dilemma he experienced when the assistant glanced toward him (Kozulin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

What I learned about self-talk and behavior. Play is steadily eroded in the early childhood setting as it is replaced by structured academic activities. Children naturally create arenas for play even when traditional toys are not available. Play is an important
aspect in creating stories with which children desire to interact. Children often are told rules about school which, along with the materials that fill the school, inform them that play and learning do not intersect. Throughout the creative writing period, Ironman knew it was fine with the others in his group if he played with his markers while reassigning the markers to other symbols like swords. He followed the agreed-upon classroom guidelines set forth about not hurting anyone. Yet, when he saw the assistant looking at him in play, his response was to cease immediately through self-talk, stopping his play and, thus, stopping his thinking.

**Preventing problems through self-talk.** In another aspect of self-talk, on February 7, 2017, Mickey sat beside Ironman. They were not talking or physically engaged. Mickey was not looking in Ironman’s direction. He produced a phrase not instigated by anything that appeared to be self-talk:

Mickey: Don’t make me hit you.

Ironman heard his statement, replying back to Mickey:

Ironman: I not gonna hit you. Don’t matter.

**What I learned about self-talk to prevent problems.** Although a simple statement, “don’t make me hit you,” Mickey used self-talk as a way of preventing conflict so he could complete his creative writing journal. Mickey used his self-talk to preemptively intervene in a social conflict he suspected was possible. According to Alderson-Day and Fernyhough (2015), a child’s self-talk shapes self-regulation, which in this case, revealed how Mickey’s executive functioning, planning, and behavior control worked to keep him aware of a possible altercation. Mickey’s self-talk allowed him to focus on his writing.
journal instead of worrying how he might address an altercation between himself and another child.

**Needing friends close by.** Inside my classroom on a warm January 31, 2017 afternoon, Spider-Man sat quietly among his peers. Although usually one of the quieter children in the classroom, this date he did not engage with the peers around him. Due to my predetermined seating arrangements, Spider-Man’s best friend, Raphael, was sitting with others this date. As a child with a history of a significant language delay, he had experienced involuntary silence, first due to language delay that silenced him, then by his inability to make himself understood once he was able to speak. He had worked through many of his communication issues with Raphael at his side during the 2015–2016 school year since Raphael, too, was often silent.

**What I learned about friendships.** The stories the children created were dependent upon who they were playing with in the context of the classroom. Thus, being isolated from Raphael kept Spiderman from engaging in his typical action-oriented story. Children need to have stability in their seating arrangements, especially children who are less apt to take the initiative to change the seating for themselves. If Spider-Man wanted to move his chair, I would have honored that choice, however he did not make his needs known, a common trait among children with language disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 42).
Needing to be understood. Throughout the years I have worked with children with language disorders, parents have frequently shared that their children often give up trying to speak when the family does not understand them. On January 17, 2017 during our dyadic discussion of Superman’s creative writing piece, he was overly excited to tell me about his picture:

Superman: Glass-Men-O-Wipe.

Sanderson: Glass-Men-O-Wipe, is that what you said?

Superman shook his head affirmatively, then quickly responded with a negative head shake:

Superman: Glass-Men-O-Wipe.

He and I exchanged his phrasing back and forth with my awareness that I had no knowledge of what he was trying to express. He kept telling me “glass-men-o-wipe.”
Sanderson:  What does he look like?

Superman:  Green ears. He a boy. My daddy know.

With that information, I texted another person in his life who might know: his mother. She responded that he was probably talking about The Flash, the Fastest Man Alive. I responded to Superman what his mother shared. He smiled and shook his head affirmatively:

Superman:  Yeah, Glass-Men-O-Wipe.

This example illustrates how children like Superman, who have an affinity toward superheroes and superhero talk find joy in talking about characters they wish to emulate even when they find it difficult for others to understand their words. Superman’s response of “my daddy know” expressed how his family shared stories about The Flash at home, making the print referencing activity even more personal as a home activity.

On February 7, 2017, Superman, as a routine behavior, shared his ideas about superheroes again through his creative writing. Like before, he was excited and persistent to share his words, yet it was still difficult for the children and me to understand him.

With careful listening, I was able to piece together more of his thoughts than I could with his “Glass-Men -O-Wipe” statement from the January 17, 2017 episode:

Sanderson:  Ok, Superman, Superman. Sorry to make you wait.

Superman:  That’s ok.

Sanderson:  You’re so nice. Wow. Look at all those marks. That is amazing.

Superman:  That somebody wiving.

Sanderson:  That’s somebody living? No, no.

Superman:  That’s somebody wiwee.
Because I was unable to understand what he was referring to, I sat silently for approximately 4 seconds thinking about what he said but still unable to respond back to him:

Sanderson: And what is that?
Superman: Ummm, That is a-a-a-a…

He desperately attempted to think of a way to answer my question as evidenced by “a-a-a-a-a….” To help him, I changed my tactic:

Sanderson: What’s that person doing?
Superman: He trying to get me and I got him.
Sanderson: Is that somebody’s webbing?
Superman: (shook his head affirmatively) He got me and I got him back.
Sanderson: What’s this?
Superman: My daddy. My mommy. And everybody house.

It sounded like “and everybody house.” I began to scribe his words.

Sanderson: My-daddy-and-my-mommy and everybody at the house?

I looked at his face again. He responded with confusion.

Sanderson: No, you didn’t say that. What did you say?
Superman: Everybody horse.
Sanderson: Everybody horse. No. (I looked at him, again, thinking about what word would make sense.) And everybody else. And everybody else.
Superman: (He responded with an head shake.) It going and I wanna go right there.
Sanderson: And everybody else. Alright. That’s fun. So it says he tried to get me and I got him back. My daddy, my mommy…

Superman: Green Goblin.

Sanderson: And everybody else. Is that the Green Goblin?

Superman: Uh, huh. It was Green Goblin, too.

Sanderson: So Green Goblin.

Superman: And Venom.

Sanderson: And V-v-v-venom (I produced an over-articulated v phoneme).

You have to bite your lip for that.

Superman: V-v-v-venom.

Sanderson: V-v-v-venom.

Superman: V-v-v-venom.

Sanderson: And Venom, that’s it.

Superman: That all.

Sanderson: That’s all. Ok.

As a print mediating activity, I prompted him to find “he” in his scribed story which was followed by a discussion of “he” and “she” pronoun use. If I had not spent the time with him listening to his words, we would not have had print available that matched his thoughts. Because his stories were meaningful to him, he attended to the words I scribed at the bottom of his drawing page. His ability to see the word “Venom” in print operated as a visual cue for how the word should be pronounced. After my scribing, Superman sat at his table repeating “Venom” while biting his lip and looking at his page.
Like Superman, Thor experienced much difficulty making himself understood by others. In Thor’s situation, he possessed fine motor weaknesses that impacted his ability to make marks on paper, perform self-help tasks, and produce the motor movements for speaking. On March 1, 2017, Thor made multiple attempts to share his story with me:

Thor: That’s cheese.

Thor: And Benom (Venom) is coming.

Thor: Maybe because, um, Ironman… (followed by something unintelligible to me).

I informed Thor I did not understand what he told me about Ironman. To respond as if I did understand, when I clearly did not, would have denied him of his opportunity to share, negating learning from his experience.

Thor: He a-talking.

Sanderson: Is Ironman talking?

Thor: Ironman is attack Benom.

Sanderson: Oh, so he’s attacking?

Thor shook his head from left to right telling me again that I was incorrect. Reluctantly, he decided to gesture his thoughts through a punching motion with his fists so that I might understand.

Sanderson: Are you saying “punching?”

With a head nod, Thor agreed to “punching.” I began to scribe while at the same time I read his sentence:

Sanderson: Venom-is-punching.
As I finished writing Thor’s words, he continued his story:

Thor: And Spider-Man and Captain America. Spider-Man and Captain America!

I continued to scribe Thor’s story while praising him for the exciting story he had written. Seeing that I had written Venom twice, I reread Thor’s words asking him to find two words that looked the same. I anticipated he would point to Venom, thus offering me an opportunity to highlight the production of the \(v\) phoneme. Instead, Thor pointed to “coming” and “punching,” showing he had developed the ability to locate letter patterns within words. It was the first time he identified a series of letters within two words that were the same. Clay (2010) noted children will begin to look at letters within words showing the adult nearby that they are beginning to notice print features of letters and words (p. 43). After I explained how he correctly pointed to the “ing” parts, I first nonevocatively showed him “Venom” and “Venom” so he could see the sameness in both words. He responded by commenting about the print patterns before him:

Thor: I said that two times.

Sanderson: Yes, you did. It’s right here.

I followed with the production of Venom, a nonevocative approach, so Thor could see my mouth movements and how they matched the first sound in the printed word. He was able to make a similar movement that closely matched mine.

On March 1, 2017, Raphael wanted to be understood by his peers and his teachers, even if it meant he felt he had to change his words. This day, he brought a blue stuffed rabbit to school as his artifact from home. He told the group his brother no longer
wanted the blue rabbit, allowing Raphael to have it. While looking at his journal, I asked him some questions:

Sanderson: Is that your brother?
Raphael: No, it’s the bunny rabbit.
Sanderson: Why do you think your brother said you could have it?
Raphael: He not want it. My mom give my brother another one—a teddy bear.

What I heard him say was a “jelly” bear. Easter was a few weeks away and I thought he was referring to jelly beans. I realized later that day when I listened to the transcript that what I mistakenly heard as “jelly” was “teddy”:

Sanderson: A jelly bear?
Raphael: A bear.

Instead of trying to correct me, Raphael opted to delete the word “teddy” from his description, preventing me from hearing it again. I wrote his words then we talked about them. I asked him to look for the word “mom.” He pointed to “my.” I told him he was really close since both began with the same sound, “mmmm.” He looked carefully at his scribed words, again:

Raphael: They not the same.

I used a nonevocative approach by showing and talking about both “mom” and “my,” reminding him that they both began with “mmmm.” He began to look at the words I scribed with greater attention. Raphael pointed to “brother” and “brother”:

Raphael: This the same as this the same.
Sanderson: Yeah, that’s right. Brother and brother.
Raphael shook his head up and down.

Sanderson: Thank you for sharing that.

Figure 5.13. Raphael shows his friends his blue rabbit.

**What I learned about children who struggle to be understood.** Children are willing to work diligently to be understood when they believe their words are important, meaningful, and useful to them and those around them. Both Spiderman and Thor’s routine talking patterns revolved around superhero characters. All three children needed for me to understand their words and were willing to work toward that understanding. Superman was even willing to modify his words for greater clarity. Raphael deleted a word to increase understanding. Thor supported his words through gestures. Goldin-Meadow (2003) noted gestures like Thor’s punching movement along with the words that were not intelligible to me helped to convey meaning that was integrated with his speech through a synchronous, expressive “unified system” (pp. 16–17). The social context in which Superman and Thor practiced their acquisition of communication abilities allowed
them to move toward the goals the school district had formulated, and also offered them a chance to observe the words they had struggled to share, written in print. Law et al. (2017) noted children “learn most effectively if they are trained in a social context” (p. 3), which is what the creative writing period offered. I knew the children well because of the large amount of one-to-one time we spent together, so I knew that I could prompt correct articulatory movements, such as Superman’s production of “Venom.” I also knew Thor would experience some difficulty with the production of “Venom.” I did not expect Raphael to delete the word “teddy” without additional attempts.

With Superman’s story, he was receptive to engaging in print referencing mediations through identifying the pronouns “he” and “she.” Thor was engaged through looking at word patterns of “ing,” followed by attending to the words “Venom” I scribed twice to match his verbal output. In contrast, Raphael, while talking about a “teddy bear” (when I thought he was saying “jelly bear”) did not correct my misunderstanding even though we used a “conversational approach” (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2012, p. 150). He decided to eliminate the descriptive word “teddy” without making an attempt for me to understand him. Raphael’s response may have been an indicator of someone requiring him to over-self-correct, which resulted in reduced motivation, lower self-confidence, and anxiety (Soltero, 2011, p. 27).

**Answering questions from creative writing.** The children’s stories provided a foundation for asking and answering questions that were related to their topics of choice, not a predetermined text I had chosen. One example of this was seen in R2D2’s story about the Power Rangers from March 9, 2017. R2D2 had an exceptionally difficult time answering “when” questions, so using his stories worked well for him:
R2D2: The Power Rangers are going to Batman.

Sanderson: The Power Rangers are going to Batman. You wrote a lot so I am going to write your words over here (I pointed to the empty side of the journal). The Power...

R2D2: Rangers...

Sanderson: Are-going-to-Batman. When are they doing that? When are they going to Batman?

R2D2: (He was unable to answer the “when” question initially so he changed his story.) And Spiderman.

Sanderson: And Batman and Spiderman.

R2D2: Uh, huh. And the Joker.

Sanderson: And the Joker? When are they going?

R2D2: They fighting.

Sanderson: That would be “why” they are going, because they are fighting. But “when” would be, uhm, are they going in the morning, in the afternoon?

R2D2: In the morning.

Sanderson: They are going in the morning. Wow!

First I asked R2D2 a when question without assistance but realized he needed guidance to answer my question since he confused it with a why question. I was able to offer some suggestions to him that guided him in the direction of answering the when question to help him determine when they were fighting.
What I learned from using the children’s stories for questioning. Not all children experienced difficulty with answering questions. However, for R2D2, it was something that he often struggled with completing. The small one-to-one nature of the stories offered me an opportunity to personalize the questions based upon his words, making his responses more meaningful. Similar instances occurred with the other children. Although not readily able to answer “why” and “when” questions during storybook literature times, Ironman, Kitty, Captain America, and Spiderman found ways to answer their “why” and “when” questions during the journal time.

Engaging in rhythmic interactions. The children often sang songs including original songs from cartoons, repurposed songs from cartoons and Internet sites, and self-created songs. Dyson (2003) noted music functions as the “ties that bind and the threads that weave through generations in churches, families, schools, and among children themselves” (p. 30). The children also produced onomatopoeic sounds for items during their play to identify how the object they were creating out of markers, whether trucks, cars, or rockets, functioned in their world. The children also scatted, making nonmimetic sounds that appeared to settle them before and while they were creating their drawings.

Singing. Singing was a precursor to writing, used as a way to settle them into the act. R2D2 was the most prolific song writer of all the children as he shared his talent on December 12, 2016:

R2D2: I’m writing my paint. I’m writing my paint. I’m writing my paint, Captain America. I’m writing my paint.

At other times, the children repurposed the songs from one to another adding their own tonal qualities to their created songs. As an example from January 3, 2017:
R2D2: I’m writing my name. I’m writing my name.

Thor: I’m writing my name. I’m writing my name.

The children also repurposed songs from cartoons. The children frequently sang the theme song from PAW Patrol known as “Paw Paw Boogie.” Like the example from January 18, 2017, they sang in harmony as they drew in their creative writing journals:


Dora: Dah, dah, dah, dah.

Ironman: Move. Getta paw-paw-boo-gay.

Mickey: Paw-paw boogie.

Dora: The pa-pa boogie. Do the pa-pa boogie.

Kitty: Goo-gah.

Dora: The paw paw boogie.

Other children repurposed songs from their experiences with media to exchange words in a playful way. On December 13, 2016, Captain America and Ironman exchanged original words through song:

Captain America: It’s going to the Thomas Train. It’s gonna crash this. Can I get a big crayon?

Ironman: No!

Captain America: And draw your face like a stu-gar.

Ironman: Like a lugar. Ha, ha.

Ironman, on January 18, 2017, created his own song as he developed his story. Singing seemed to be a way to settle down to writing that Ironman needed.
Ironman: I like red, too. Nana, red. Make a number of the red, make a number of the red, e-a-4, e-a-4, number may, number may make a church! Say it! Write a c!

The children also repurposed songs created by others. On March 1, 2017, R2D2, a prolific song writer, who often created rich, vibrant, repetitive tunes about commonplace classroom activities, shared one of his stories with the group. Thor and others often repurposed them as their own, changing only the tonal quality:

R2D2: I’m writing my name, I’m writing my name, I’m writing my name, I’m writing my name.

Thor: I’m writing my name, I’m writing my name, I’m writing my name, I’m writing my name, I’m writing my name.

The children’s mutual songs offered an opportunity for the children to play with language before they embarked upon their written stories. Their songs functioned as a primer, a quick story, before the written story took place. Their written stories were developed differently, usually quietly, with less interaction than their songs. The prior social engagements of song and talk made the written stories more appealing to their peers since they had experienced a mutually rewarding experience. Their final stories were personalized in such a way that they desired to interact with their scribed words.

*Producing onomatopoeic sounds.* In addition to the songs they created, the children produced onomatopoeic sounds to support their words and add clarity to their discourse. The children’s onomatopoeic sounds, the sounds they created that represented the realistic noises of the actual items in their minds, operated like function labels helping the children describe their action with more concreteness (Sasamoto & Jackson, 2016).
Tzeng, Nygaard, and Namy (2017) affirmed onomatopoeic words are generally “among the first words to appear in the infant lexicon” (p. 41), therefore it made sense that children who were still learning about language would return to ways of speaking they had experienced earlier in their lives. Considering that onomatopoeic words are the most common first utterances children produce when learning to speak, it is not surprising the children in this research, with their history of language disorders and difficulties gaining language, would gravitate toward concrete representative noises to express their actions.

Here, I provide examples of the children’s onomatopoeic utterances within the context of their uses to show how the children used them to support their actions within the context of stories. In the first example, Superman narrated his rendition of a space gun on December 5, 2016:

Superman: Pee-yuh, pee-yuh, pee-yuh, pee-yuh.

Next, on January 17, 2017, Mickey positioned his markers like a machine gun. While moving his markers forward and backward, he produced the sound of the emanating ammunition:


Following, on February 15, 2017, R2D2, while holding a PAW Patrol toy, moved it through the air as if it was falling to the ground. However, R2D2 quickly moved the toy back to midair to the sound of jet propulsion noises:


Similarly, on February 21, 2017, Spiderman moved his marker about his head while making the sound of a jet:

Spiderman: Vroom, vroom, vroom.
Spiderman moved about the room while making the sound of a jet then changed the sound to a gun:

   Spiderman:   Pee-ow, pee-ow, pee-ow, pee-ow.

Later, on February 22, 2017 Ironman produced the sound of a truck to sound like his artifact, Rocky from PAW Patrol:

   Ironman:   Bbbrrroom, bbbrrroom, bbbrrroom.

Finally, on March 23, 2017 Captain America took a toy motorcycle from Raphael and moved it over his journal. While doing this, he made the noises of someone riding a motorcycle:

   Captain America:   Weeee, weee, weee!

Through the use of onomatopoeic words, the children relied on their earliest representations of “show and say” information they had come to realize through the perceptions of their world (Sasamoto & Jackson, 2016, p. 45).

**Interspersing scatting.** In addition to singing and onomatopoeic sounds, at different times within the creative writing opportunities, the children crafted what I viewed as scatting, repetitive productions of sounds and syllables that provide a rhythm to their talk. Dyson (2003) noted “there is an intimate connection between literary and musical experiences, since stories are constructed with the sounds and rhythm of words” (p. 141). Casmier and Matthews (1999) defined *scatting* as “non-mimetic discourse,” that is a “creative, spontaneous, abstract, and mystical” discreet unit of sound strongly rooted in African culture that stems from an individual’s awareness (p. 166). Edwards (2002) described it as “a secret language, a language of the inside” (p. 628). As Edwards (2002) pointed out, the use of scatting was clearly observed in Dubois’ writing, *Dusk of Dawn*
(2007), in which he explained a song that had been handed down from generation to generation, where “child sang it to his children and they to their children’s children” (p. 58):

Do bana coba, gene me, gene me!
Do bana coba, gene me, gene me!
Ben d’nuli, nuli, nuli, nuli, den d’le. (Dubois, 2007, p. 58)

All children, with the exception of Raphael, the only dual language learner, scatted for some reason and at multiple points throughout the research. Usually the scatting occurred at the end of an utterance as a way to close their comments. During the March 10, 2017 member checking episode, I asked them why they made the repetitive sounds. Captain America summarized it was in reference to the song from his favorite cartoon:

Captain America: We singing Paw Paw Boogie.

I had become accustomed to the song “Paw Paw Boogie,” but this was different, a repetitive sound without words but with a structured beat. The first instance of recorded repetitive scatting occurred on December 6, 2016, the second day of the research. Spider-Man, a child of African heritage, sat with his notebook in front of him, tapping the blank page of his creative writing journal with his marker, and scatted:

Spider-Man: Do, do, do, do, do.

Spider-Man, a child of European heritage, followed a similar pattern:

Superman: Chase. Chase! Where are you? Stobuh, stobuh.
Later, on December 13, 2016, Ironman, a child of African heritage, decided to join the scatters. In an almost conversational tone, R2D2, Thor, and Ironman created a transformational scatting episode while they participated in their creative writing time:


Thor: Hey, hey, raah, raah, raah, raah,

R2D2: I’m making a spider web. Ra, ra, ra, ra, rare, ra, ra, ra, I’m making a spider web.

Iron Man: Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah. Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah.

Then, on February 7, 2017, Mickey, a child of African and European heritages, initiated scatting before he began writing in his journal:

Mickey: Do, do, do, do, daw, daw, daw, daw.

For Mickey, scatting may have functioned as a means of developing his self-confidence by offering him a reduction in social stress. This date, in particular, after scatting and before writing, Mickey felt the need for self-talk about Ironman, the boy sitting beside him. Ironman was a child who often physically intervened with others in the past out of frustration due to his minimal language abilities. Next, on February 17, 2017, Mickey, Captain America, and R2D2, three children of African- and European-heritages, in addition to Thor, a child of Polynesian and European heritages scatted throughout different, and separated, times of their journal development:

R2D2: Joey with ji jay.

Mickey: Do, do, do, do, daw, daw, daw, daw.

Captain America: Pah-pa-to-pah-pa-do-pah-pa-do

Finally, on March, 21, 2017, after sharing his toys with others, Superman began to scat:

Superman: Look what I’m doing! Chi, chee, chee, dooby, doo, doo bee.

**What I learned about singing, onomonopeic sounds, and scatting.** Children create multimodal communication during their creative writing periods that I did not observe during other scheduled activities such as group free-play, group literacy time, cafeteria time, or outside play. Rowe (2013) noted, “authoring for young children involves language, vocalization, gesture, gaze, bodily action, and graphic production” (p. 437). In order for the children to create stories that they wanted to interact with, rhymic productions were an important aspect of the creative writing process.

**Interacting With Print**

The next question I asked was: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based), in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder, impact their ability to interact with print? I aimed to determine, from the culture of the children, how their process of creating play scenarios, creative drawing, talking about their drawings, mutual writing, and mediating print impacted their ability to interact with print.

**Attending to one’s scribed words.** When I wrote meaningful words, the children’s scribed words along with added words that helped them match words in print in their presence, the children actively attended to their scribed words and my added writing, as well as their illustrations. I observed an example of this on December 9, 2016 as Raphael and Captain America worked side-by-side:

Raphael: Somebody needs help.
Sanderson: Oh, no. Somebody needs help. What happened?

Raphael: Somebody died.

Sanderson: Oh, no. I am so sorry.

I decided I needed to have Raphael identify the word “somebody” so I wrote a classmate’s name in the upper right corner of Raphael’s book whose name began with S.

We have a friend whose name is this.

Captain America: Who that name?

Raphael: What’s that name?

Captain America: That Raphael.

Raphael: That me?

Sanderson: No, it’s somebody else in our room. (I wrote another classmate’s name under the first name I wrote that also began with S.) These are two of our friends.

Raphael: Sam?

Sanderson: That’s right. Can you find a word that starts like Sam’s name?

Raphael, by scanning his scribed words, immediately pointed to “somebody.” He followed his response with a two-fisted success gesture. Captain America quickly reached over to Raphael’s journal and pointed to “somebody.” I expressed to Raphael that he could play with the PAW Patrol toys since he was finished with his journal.

Looking at his words, he stated, “I want to do that again.” This two-tier action of looking at the illustration then looking at printed words was repeated over and over again throughout the research period. As time continued in the research, the children began
interaction with others’ texts in the same manner, looking at their illustrations, their scribed words, and often pointing to words that I had written and recalling them.

**Attending to another’s scribed words.** February 22, 2017 revealed one of many instances where the children engaged in each other’s scribed texts. Mickey, who had shared a story about the hurricane, made attempts to respond to code-based mediations by pointing to a word in his story that began with the same phoneme, or sound, as the name of a peer in the room. Mickey quickly pointed to “police” which matched the child’s given name that started with “p.” Raphael, in lieu of playing on the carpet in the room with others, stayed at the table to look at Mickey’s scripted words. Raphael reached across the table, touching two words on Mickey’s journal page showing he also could find two words that were the same, “police” and “police.”

![Figure 5.14. Mickey points to print.](image)

Later, on March 1, 2017, Spider-Man stopped writing in his journal as soon as he heard Mickey produce a word that piqued his interest:
Mickey: That Captain America and that my daddy fighting. Him a police officer and him fighting. That Captain America and that me and I fighting.

I began to scribe his words as he spoke. R2D2 watched as I wrote each word. R2D2 appeared fascinated by Mickey’s story, resulting in an overly excited observer to the point he could no longer contain himself:

R2D2: Captain America. Captain America. Captain America.

I pointed to Mickey’s dad in his drawing.

Sanderson: Who’s he fighting?

Mickey: Captain America.

Sanderson: I thought that’s what you said.

Mickey: He got a shield.

As Mickey, who was talking about police officers, said “shield,” Spider-Man, who frequently talked about weapons in his oral discourse stopped drawing and looked at Mickey’s journal page as I began to scribe “shield.” In watching me write “shield,” Spider-Man was preparing and anticipating the scribing and production of a word that piqued his interest, even though it was not in his journal or own words. Following Rogoff (1995), Spider-Man was preparing and anticipating for upcoming events in which he would need to know “shield,” as noted by his attention to my scribing.

**What I learned about meaningful print.** Although Evans and Saint-Aubin (2005) noted children routinely ignore the printed words in storybook formats and focus on the illustrations as a primary transaction of meaning, when the children used their own stories for interaction, they purposely attended by visual inspection and pointing
responses to their words, and the words of others, often through volitional approaches. This may be due, in part, to the opportunity to observe me scribing their words. As the seminal research by Fadiga et al. (1995) supports, since mirror neurons guide one to neurologically practice an activity by simply watching another, the children may be “writing” neurologically before writing physically. I frequently observed the two-tiered response of the children looking at the illustration first then looking toward the bottom of the page to the scribed words. This was also a routine response I observed when I asked the children to locate a story for take-home purposes. Their eyes gazed at the illustrations first, but then shifted, heads downturned, toward the bottom of the page where I previously scribed their words.

**Quantitative Data From the CELF PreK-2 and PALS-PreK**

I designed this dissertation research to develop multiple points of data, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. This section identifies how quantitative data helped me to answer my three research questions: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based) in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder (a) impact their oral language development, (b) impact their ability to interact with print, and (c) impact their literacy skills attainment?

**The Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals– Prekindergarten, second edition.** I administered the sentence recalling subtest of the CELF PreK-2 (2004) to determine the children’s overall abilities to retain and express progressively difficult utterances of comments and question forms, thus answering my first question: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based), in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder, impact their oral language
development? The sentence repetition task has been identified as the hallmark of the assessment that best measures benchmark and progress of language growth for children with a language disorder. Current research suggests sentence repetition tasks measure word knowledge, grammatical understanding, and the phonological system, the meaning-and code-based skills needed for speech production (Klem et al., 2015). Klem et al. (2015) believed that the ability to repeat sentences of varying grammatical structures offers a prediction of the child’s long-term growth capabilities of his or her language development. The outcomes from the sentence recalling subtest from the CELF PreK-2 helped me to answer my question about the children’s language development.

In order to compare the pre- and post-assessments of the CELF PreK-2, I assessed for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). The Shapiro-Wilk was appropriate due to the small sample size of the case study I chose. The Shapiro-Wilk revealed the pretest and posttest results were normally distributed samples. This outcome resulted in allowing the application of the student t-test to compare datasets, proving the results were not by chance.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable 1</th>
<th>Variable 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>46.94444</td>
<td>45.55556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothesized Mean Difference</td>
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</tr>
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<td>df</td>
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<tr>
<td>t Stat</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>p(T&lt;=t) one-tail</td>
<td>0.005298</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical one-tail</td>
<td>1.833113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p(T&lt;=t) two-tail</td>
<td>0.010597</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Critical two-tail</td>
<td>2.262157</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated by the test developers in the test manual, a standard score of 85–115 is considered within the adequate range for the assessment results. Although not all children scored within the average range at the preintervention stage, all children scored within the average range during the postintervention period. Accordingly, the results from the CELF PreK-2 revealed all children were within the average range of the assessment guidelines at the end of the research period.

![Figure 5.1. CELF PreK-2 recalling sentences subtest.](image)

**PALS-PreK pre- and post-summary.** I administered the PALS-PreK to measure the degree to which the classroom writing activities contributed to the children’s progress in overall print knowledge and literacy growth. The PALS-PreK helped me to answer my last two questions: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based), in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder (a) impact their ability to interact with print, and (b) impact their literacy skills attainment? The authors of the PALS-PreK suggested its use as a beneficial tool for “evaluating the extent to which the preschool environment promotes literacy
development” (Invernizzi et al., 2013, p. 35). Each subtest has a spring developmental scale that offers a “frame of reference” for managing instructional delivery and curricular decision-making (Invernizzi et al., 2013, p. 35). I administered the PALS-PreK as a pretest and a posttest using the subscales of: (a) name writing, (b) uppercase letter naming, (c) lowercase letter naming, (d) letter sounds, and (e) print and word awareness.

**Assessing for normality.** I initially addressed the normality of the PALS-PreK pre- and postassessment subtests using the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965) to determine if the scores were normally distributed. From that data, the Shapiro-Wilk revealed a non-normal distribution for at least one of the pairs the dataset. The lack of a non-normal distribution in the subtest datasets resulted in the inability to use a parametric statistical test such as the student t-test to determine if the datasets were significantly different as a result of actual changes and not simply by chance. As such, I used the nonparametric Wilcoxon signed rank test (LaMorte, 2016; Moore, 2010; Wilcoxon, 1945) to determine if the median differences between the pairs of data within the set were equal to zero, as in the null hypothesis, or if the median differences between the pairs was not zero, as in the alternative hypothesis. I followed the same pathway with all subtests (i.e., name writing, uppercase letter naming, lowercase letter naming, letter sounds, and print and word awareness), assessing each dataset for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Therefore, for all five datasets, the Wilcoxon signed rank test was the best option for investigating whether or not the change was due to actual student progress or by chance. For each of the datasets, I compared the pre- and poststudy datasets using the Wilcoxon signed rank test through a hand calculation, as directed by O’Loughlin (2017, June 13).
**Name writing subtest.** In the name writing subtest of the PALS-PreK, the children were asked to draw a self-portrait which was followed by an opportunity for name writing. According to the test developers, a score of 5 or greater in the spring of the 4-year-old kindergarten school year is considered adequate for the upcoming requirements of a beginning 5-year-old kindergartener. According to the PALS-PreK, a score of 5 is given if the printed name shows many correct letters with the name being located away from the self-portrait. It is not surprising that Raphael, Dora, and Kitty scored perfect, or near perfect, on name writing as noted by the prestudy activities, even though 3 summer months separated the 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 school year activities. All of the children were with me during the 2015–2016 school year when they were enrolled in the 3-year-old special needs program. The children practiced purposeful name writing (Calkins, 1994) as 3-year-old children should, not for convention-sake, but for making meaning. They wrote on preprinted name cards after they were prompted to find their names. The cards also functioned as an indicator for a “tell me how you are feeling today” activity. There were no requirements concerning conventions or fine motor grip, only what the children were volitionally led to do with the card containing a highlighted yellow traceable name. Without coercion, the children identified their names, copied their names if they wanted to or could, and posted them on the emotions board. Throughout the class period, they located their names as they manipulated them on the emotions board throughout class time. From the model provided, the children could “choose to look upon, trace over, or copy my examples of print” (Clay, 1977, p. 336).

In the same subtest when looking at the first series of results, two of the children, Ironman and Thor, began the research without recognizable name writing abilities on the
second and eighth bar sets that represented the pre- and postintervention results, when looking at the graph from a left to right orientation. Ironman finished the research with some semblance of his name while Thor was able to write many of the letters in his name with correct formation. Both of the children’s given names (not their pseudonyms) were similar in difficulty. Thor, specifically, had received assistance for fine motor weaknesses through a pull-out occupational therapy program since he began as a public school special needs student in my classroom around his third birthday.

At the beginning of the research, Superman and Spider-Man put a mark on their papers that appeared to have a letter-like formation, though their names would not have been recognizable to someone unfamiliar with their writing habits. By the end of the research, both were writing their names with recognizable letter formations. The skill of name writing is considered a “robust indicator of emergent literacy across diverse areas” (Invernizzi et al., 2013, p. 7). Yet, the ability to hold a pencil in a stable tripod grasp does not fully develop until at least the first grade (Feder & Majnemer, 2007; Schneck & Henderson, 1990). The test developers of the PALS-PreK considered the issues of fine motor differences so they reasoned the self-portrait component of the PALS-PreK would guide a teacher to make judgments about possible fine motor developmental differences. Since everyone functioned on their own developmental timeline, the data informed me that Ironman and Mickey simply needed more opportunities to produce meaningful print. What I observed, however, is that literacy development such as name writing should not be practiced as an isolated skill for the sake of conventions.
Figure 5.16. PALS name writing subtest.

**Uppercase letter naming.** On the uppercase letter naming subtest, all children made gains. Raphael exhibited the most gains in uppercase letter naming. Mickey, as well, made exceptional gains. Unlike R2D2 who had held an affinity for letter naming since his enrollment in the special needs classroom, Mickey rarely exhibited an outward attraction and rarely commented explicitly about letters. Yet, as his mother reported, by the end of the research period, they were beginning to be meaningful for him. Neither Captain America nor Ironman were able to name a letter at the beginning of the research but made modest gains by the end of the 15 weeks. Invernizzi et al. (2013) noted the average 4-year-old child is more often developmentally geared toward naming uppercase letters than lowercase letters. It should be noted that the parents of Mickey, Captain America, and Ironman routinely participated in the journal discussions at home and often extended the discussions beyond the written guidance I provided.
Lowercase letter naming. Within the subtest of lowercase letter naming, Raphael made the greatest gains revealing the most significant progress of all the children assessed. As noted by the chart below, Dora and R2D2 were naming lowercase letters at the beginning of the year. As I mentioned in the prior section, R2D2 held an affinity for letter identification and naming since he entered into the special needs classroom. Although atypical of social development, he was identifying letters before he was producing meaningful language. Raphael, however, entered with no lowercase letter naming knowledge but completed the school year with modest ability. Spider-Man was unable to name lowercase letters at the beginning and end of the year. He rarely interacted with letter naming, with the exception of writing his name or Raphael’s name.
Figure 5.18. PALS lowercase letter naming subtest results.

**Letter sound naming.** The letter sound naming subtest proved to be difficult for all children, even those who made the most made gains on uppercase and lowercase letter naming. While at least one or more children scored a perfect score on the other subtests, no one achieved a perfect score on letter sound naming. Kitty and Mickey made the most significant gains, considering they were unable to name any letter sounds at the beginning of the year.
Print and word awareness. The authors of the PALS-PreK designed the tasks on the print and word awareness subtest as an “ecologically valid means of assessing print and word concepts” (Invernizzi et al., 2013, p. 52). According to Invernizzi et al. (2013), the assessment subtest summary should give the assessor an indication of the child’s working knowledge about the presented text and the ability to interact with printed language. The print and word awareness subtest assesses the child’s understanding of “the form and function of book parts” (Invernizzi et al., 2013, p. 6). Dora and R2D2, both of whom were adept at name writing, naming letter names, and letter sound naming at the beginning of the year, struggled in comparison with Superman on the print and word awareness subtest at the beginning of the year. The pre and post datasets of the print and word awareness portion of the PALS-PreK revealed remarkable growth for most of the children in the study, with the exception of Spider-Man. Although Spider-Man was again singled out as the student who did not show growth, the PALS-PreK is an assessment based upon volitional responses. Although Spider-Man did not make gains
when assessed, it does not mean he did not know the answers. He was already competent enough to score a 5 at the beginning of the year. He was writing other children’s names in his journal as early as January 9, 2017. His mother reported he frequently created his own stories when he volitionally chose books from his home library and retold the stories to himself. Considering Spiderman’s pervasive social trait as quiet, he may have had the ability to create a story but chose not to show excessive abilities of print knowledge during the assessment.

![Figure 5.20. PALS print and word awareness subtest.](image)

Overall, the PALS-PreK results provided more information in my quest to answer my last two research questions. The test results, along with the children’s experiences with print referencing, indicated the use of code- and meaning-based print referencing techniques during the children’s creative writing activities positively impacted their ability to interact with print. The children’ abilities to interact with print successfully, as measured by raw scores on three subtests of the PALS-PreK (i.e., uppercase letter naming, lowercase letter naming, and naming letter sounds) revealed gains for the
majority of the children. The name writing as well as and print and word awareness subtests revealed growth for all children in the area of literacy development. As noted previously, the name writing subtest is considered a strong gauge of “emergent literacy across diverse areas” (Invernizzi, et al. 2013, p. 7). The recalling sentences subtest from the CELF PreK-2 and the five subtests from the PALS thus provided the quantitative data needed to conclude print referencing can positively impact oral language growth, print awareness, and literacy abilities.

**Journals as Artifacts**

Next, I examined how the children’s creative writing experiences developed through their child-directed, play-based engagements while interacting with their journals. I viewed the journals as artifacts, items that offered me a view of the children’s cultural and social experiences. All children brought with them “their symbol-producing predilection to school—their talking, drawing, playing, and storytelling” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 82). I aimed to determine how the children’s individual journal entries addressed my three research questions: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based) in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder (a) impact their oral language development, (b) impact their ability to interact with print, and (c) impact their literacy skills attainment? To fully answer my questions, I examined multiple aspects of the three questions including: (a) oral language development, (b) interaction with print, (c) literacy skills attainment, (d) code-based print referencing techniques, (e) meaning-based print referencing techniques, and (f) play.
Oral Language Development

The children’s oral language developed as an outcome of their verbal interplay between their journals, talk of relevant toys, and self-reflections following my mediations using code- and meaning-based print referencing interventions. Through a participant observation approach, I gleaned how the children’s verbal interactions enhanced their peers’ vocabulary and language use as their words intersected. This repurposing of language helped the children to develop new ideas further that they may have not thought of before the creative writing interactions. Multiple instances of children developing new thought through commenting on the discourse from others helped them to build their vocabularies.

Dual language use. Raphael became accustomed to using Spanish with his friends during play opportunities. On January 24, 2017, I noted in my researcher’s journal that Raphael had completed his journal and was eating his snack when he decided to share a cookie with Spiderman, who was still engaged in writing. Raphael handed Spiderman a cookie from his cup of cookies, smiled, and shook his head affirmatively:

Raphael: Bueno!

Spiderman: Bueno!

They continued to share the mutual snack until Spiderman was finished with his journal writing. I also observed Spiderman and others routinely imitating my Spanish productions to assist Raphael in his oral development as a dual language learner. Children naturally learned Spanish words and phrases for common words such as hello, good-bye, bathroom, water, see you later, see you tomorrow, and thank you that they volitionally used during talk amongst themselves.
**Oral language was maintained between home and school.** I reviewed the journal topics for their thematic basis to determine if the children maintained the same topic at home that they had talked about at school. The similar responses showed the children viewed their drawings as meaningful constructions of their thoughts that were worthy of remembering and retelling. Of the categories that I noted, superheroes was the most talked about subject from the children’s creative writing. Cartoon characters of nonsuperhero status was the second most common topic.

**Interacting with print.** The children’s playful creative writing experiences brought meaningfulness to their printed words. The children were eager to point evocatively, or nonevocatively respond to both code- and meaning-based language and literacy interventions. During the previous year when I implemented some print mediation strategies during storybook reading, I did not witness intense engagement from the children with the printed in the texts, often leading me to think that the task was beyond the developmental level of preschool children with language disorders. I found, however, that the children were more receptive to the idea of interacting with print concepts in their own work, which often resulted in other children commenting about each other’s print. I am aware that certain print referencing strategies were not possible when using children’s personalized journal-type texts such as finding the author’s name, finding the front of the book, or finding the first page in the book. The interactions with the children through their personal texts offered an experience that positively impacted their awareness of print concept. The children developed skills in print awareness, as noted by their comments and acknowledgements about the words I scribed. Much of the time, the awareness was managed as a silent stare at the word and then at me, much like
Mickey’s behavior on March 1, 2017 that I described previously. At other times, the children verbally responded, acknowledging my intervention and adding their own acknowledgement of print.

**Literacy attainment.** In the same way their oral language developed through their need to let me know what was important for them to talk about, I provided an environment that encouraged the children to use their writing to direct their language. Through this platform, the children showed growth in their ability to write through a personal desire to reproduce letters in their journals. Like an artist signing a name to a masterpiece, some of the children wrote the first letter of their given name, while others wrote their entire first names within their journal pages. Others wrote letters that represented the names of their peers. Some practiced writing random letters that held meaning for them. I never asked them to write in their journal, yet they reproduced letters and their own names of their own volition as a “productive strategy,” learning through their own practice how to write for meaning (Clay, 1977, p. 337). Puranik, Lonigan, and Kim (2011) noted that those who write beyond their names may have developed “an increased sensitivity and knowledge about the alphabetic principle” (p. 473). Puranik et al. (2011) verified my belief that name writing served as a “proxy for their letter-writing abilities” (p. 473).

**Captain America.** Throughout the year, Captain America’s morning teacher was concerned with his reluctance to write his name. On December 14, 2016, Captain America wrote the first letter of his given name in the uppercase form in various areas on his journal page. On January 3, 2017, Captain America repeatedly wrote the first letter in his name, yet on that date he opted to write the lowercase form of it. On January 12,
2017, he wrote about a circle with an “x” in it. Although he chose not to write his name in his journal, he ended the research with the ability to write his name. It appeared he needed the practice of writing basic strokes before he decided to write his name.

_Dora._ Dora began the research with a strong ability for personal name writing, as noted by her ability and desire to write her name in the spine of the journal. On February 6, 2017, she continued the process by making attempts to write the name of her brother. On February 24, 2017, she began to write numerals in her creative journal to document the birthday of her close friend Kitty.

_Hello, Kitty._ Before the start of the research, Kitty could write her name with relative clarity. On December 5, 2016, instead of writing her name, Kitty began the research by writing “L, D, P, R” in her creative writing journal. She produced lowercase letter “m” on December, 13, 2016. Lowercase “m” held meaning for her since it was the middle initial in her given name. On January 14, 2017, Kitty introduced uppercase letter “E” and lowercase letter “a” into her journal. Both were letters in her given name, thus they held meaning for her as well. On January, 26, 2017, Kitty wrote the first three letters of her given name. On January, 27, 2017, she wrote the first letter of Mickey’s given name. On January 31, 2017, she wrote the first letter of Superman’s given name. Although she could write her name with relative ease since the beginning of the research, it was not until February 1, 2017 that she wrote her name visibly in her creative writing journal. She again wrote her given name on February 7, 2017. On February 10, 2017, Kitty wrote the first letter of R2D2’s given name. On February 14, 2017, Kitty she wrote the letters “L, T, Z, F, O, R” along with the numeral 2. The letters were embedded throughout her illustration, not in a sentence form. On February 15, 2017, she combined
two letters, “AP” and “AN,” at different times during the creative writing session, possibly to write the words “apple” and “and.” She did not write letters or numerals again until February 27, 2017, when she wrote her own name in a linear fashion with each letter represented from her given name, which was an improvement of her preresearch writing sample. She continued to write a few letter formations throughout March 2017 but never returned to writing her name in her journal. Her name writing functioned as a representation for her new letter writing abilities (Puranik et al., 2011). She used writing was a way to share knowledge and make meaning.

**Ironman.** Throughout the research, Ironman only wrote one letter, “M,” on January 20, 2017. By the end of the research period, Ironman could write the first letter in his given name but had not written any other recognizable letters at school.

**Mickey.** Although Mickey was required to write his name in his morning class, his teacher reported throughout the research period that he experienced significant difficulty doing so, which consequently made her concerned about his upcoming kindergarten readiness (Personal notes, February 22, 2017). Yet, when I reviewed his journal, there were 11 instances showing how he had written, with some semblance, the first letter of his given name within his illustrations during the 15-week research period.

**R2D2.** R2D2 began the year writing his given name. By February 22, 2017, he was attempting to copy some letters to form words that made sense to him. He continued letter and word writing throughout the consecutive sessions throughout the rest of the research period.

**Raphael.** Before the 15-week research period, Raphael could write his name recognizably. Raphael continued to write many letters that were not represented by his
name. He scripted uppercase letter “M” on February 7 and February 8, 2017. He wrote uppercase “P” on February 16, 2017, possibly to represent Spider-Man’s given name. On February 28, 2017, Raphael wrote a string of uppercase letters “O-T-C” as if the letters represented the title of his journal story. He used his knowledge of name writing to transfer those skills to other letter writing activities (Puranik et al., 2011).

*Spider-Man.* On January 9, 2017, Spider-Man wrote his first word, though the word was not his name but very similar to his friend Raphael’s given name. Raphael was Spider-Man’s best friend, therefore it was important for Spider-Man to write Raphael’s name in his journal even before he wrote his own name on January 17, 2017.

*Superman.* On February 13, 2017, Superman wrote his name twice on the same page in his creative writing journal, yet he did not revisit writing his name nor the names of others at any other point in the research.

*Thor.* Thor did not reproduce any letters in his journal included in his name, but appeared to benefit from the creative writing activities as evidenced by his ability to write his name at the completion of the research.

The children in this study who had been diagnosed with a language disorder made attempts to be understood that often may have been unfulfilled even by those closest to them. Since being understood is an issue for all children, especially those with a language disorder, the children’s journals provided a tangible crossing point for them to share their ideas. Using their well-positioned marks on the paper as support for my understanding, I could often gather information about the children’s past experiences, comments, and beliefs, as well as their future desires, goals, and aspirations from listening to them and observing what they illustrated in their journals. When I could not understand the
children, their journals provided me with a starting point from which to pose comments and questions. When that did not work, I looked to the parents as an excellent resource for assistance when the children’s communication was beyond my capabilities of understanding. The “Glass-Men-O-Wipe” episode from previously discussed is a prime example of the use of the teacher–parent interface. After contacting Superman’s mother and learning he meant “The Flash, the Fastest Man Alive,” I was able to return to the conversation with Superman with new knowledge. Without the journal dictation, I may have simply acknowledged “Glass-Men-O-Wipe” verbally with Superman during our conversation, but not taken the time to investigate his underlying meaning, thus misinterpreting the true meaning of the phrase.

**Code-based mediations.** In addition to my prompts, the children often used self-initiation as well as self-reflection to comment about their printed words. On February 1, 2017, Thor initiated his own print referencing with his story before I had the opportunity to consider what he had written. Without prompting, he began to count each word to measure the length of his story as long or short. Since he was having difficulty counting past 10, we counted together determining that his story was, as he had initially predicted, a long story. On the same day, R2D2 responded to my request that he find a word I scribed that began with the same sound as his given name. He quickly responded by pointing to the letter that corresponded correctly.

**Meaning-based mediations.** I used meaning-based mediations to expand the children’s language outputs though sentence completion tasks, identifying descriptive words and new vocabulary. I captured memorable instances of meaning-based mediations in my researcher’s journal. For example, on January 1, 2017, I noted the expression on
R2D2’s face when he was able to identify the scribed word that completed his sentence. As I asked him to find the word that completed his sentence, “The rainbow. It got ______.” He raised his eyebrows and smiled as he pointed to “colors.” The use of meaning-based interventions allowed the children to interact with their thoughts as I scribed their words for them.

**Play.** As the children’s language abilities developed, their abilities to engage in mutual play activities also developed. Wohlwend (2013) noted that play purposely masks meanings, twists language forms, slips cultural constraints, and muddies its own definitions, producing power and stretching ideological limits of the surrounding culture within a deniable, and therefore, safe space. (p. 82)

The children played during the creative writing time, which afforded them increased opportunities for mutual discourse that encouraged the development of friendships that extended beyond the classroom walls. According to my journal notes from February 1, 2017, Spider-Man transitioned from a monolingual speaker to his first attempt as a dual language speaker with his friend Raphael. As they sat beside each other at the lunch table in the cafeteria, Spider-Man addressed Raphael using Raphael’s home language:

Spider-Man: You my amigo.

Another time, according to my journal notes, Thor commented about the number of friends he had gained on March 12, 2017 as he finished his journal entry in preparation of going outside:

Thor: I got a lot of friends now, R2D2, Ironman, and Superman.
As the children’s language abilities developed, their abilities to engage in mutual play activities developed. Since this research was based upon giving the children free space through play, the children learned about their world, themselves, and how to influence others. The engagement in play helped the children draft the themes that were important to them in the classroom. To determine the most prevalent play themes, I summarized all of the children’s responses in their journals, as well as the parents’ comments discussing the creative writing samples the children chose to take home. Superheroes and cartoon characters were the most common themes discussed, with the children’s discussions remaining relatively similar between home and school. While the children’s words, at times, reflected the toys they brought to school, the toys were often not mentioned in their stories. Instead, the children shared ideas and words, and wrote similar stories to reflect their verbal and social interactions. Although each child chose a PAW Patrol toy from the classroom for use during creative writing time on February 10, 2017, no one wrote about PAW Patrol. Captain America and Thor, instead, repurposed R2D2’s idea about a green storm into two distinct new ideas, as previously discussed.

In another example, on February 24, 2017, Spiderman and Superman both brought race cars while Captain America brought his Captain America action figure toy to class. Although contrasting the toys I supplied, their toys were special to the children. Spiderman, R2D2, and Dora influenced each other to write about stories with race car themes. Even though Captain America brought a Captain America action figure on this date, he chose to speak about race cars, as well. Interestingly, the main instances children where spoke about the toys they brought to school occurred primarily when there was conflict involved with the toy. The children were prompted to talk about the toys in their
possession when there was an emotional moment at the beginning of the writing session that called into question who might have a toy. As an example, on March 21, 2017, Superman questioned Captain America’s respect for him and his toys. On that day, six out of 10 creative writing pieces referred to one of the superhero toys Superman brought to school. In a similar fashion, on March 23, 2017, Superman brought toys to share with the group again. On this date, R2D2 and Ironman were struggling over a Batman toy. Superman ended the argument by providing another toy for Ironman.

Overall, the toys did not distract from the children’s creativity but encouraged children to engage in talk about certain toys. The literacy experiences developed from meaningful opportunities among the children, so they could talk and write about experiences that were most important in their lives. Superman routinely spoke of superheroes, specifically The Flash. Yet, not all were engaged with superhero talk. It was evident from Spider-Man’s type of engagement with his markers that he enjoyed talking about weapons and pirates. Mickey routinely talked about trick-or-treat. Ironman was heavily connected to Power Rangers as a routine topic. Raphael, at times, wrote about animals dying or emergencies that required a quick response. When I reflected upon the literacy options in my classroom, there were no books with themes related to superheroes, weapons or pirates, dead animals, or Halloween that could have satisfied those particular children’s needs. The only way to engage the children in the printed text was to honor the children’s most beloved themes developed through their scribed stories.

**Journals.** On January 9, 2017, I noted in my research journal that Spider-Man wrote Raphael’s given name on the upper left quadrant of his writing journal on a day Raphael was absent. Spider-Man wrote his friend’s name without adult guidance, prior
practice, or adult coercion out of a meaningful need to acknowledge his friend who was missing from class. From the test data alone, I could have viewed Spider-Man as the lone child who did not make progress; one who may have difficulty developing literacy abilities when he enters kindergarten. Yet, that view is contradicted by the test developers’ key observation that name writing is a “robust indicator” that traverses a wide gamut of skills (Invernizzi et al. 2013, p. 7). Spider-Man’s responses on the PALS-PreK supports my concern that too much emphasis is placed on assessments without incorporating “kid watching” (Goodman, 1985) techniques to balance and inform the results from the assessments.

**How Parents Directed My Thoughts**

I believed the parents who were participants would also help guide my thinking to answer my three research questions: How do print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based) in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder (a) impact their oral language development, (b) impact their ability to interact with print, and (c) impact their literacy skills attainment? Parents were interviewed at the beginning and end of the research period using the same open-ended questions. I audio-recorded our mutual interactions (see Appendix A for questions). From these points of contact, I coded the parents’ responses to determine the most salient points. I used *in vivo* coding as the first cycle coding since it functioned to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). I used focused coding as a second cycle method to locate the most significant categories (Saldaña, 2013). The interview summaries reveal the most significant categories emerging from the interactions.


**Literacy Opportunities Abound**

During the fall of 2016, at the beginning of the research, I interviewed each parent who shared some aspect of the literacy engagement they had observed their child participating in, both in the home and within community settings. From the availability of writing utensils to writers’ notepads to flash cards, the families actively incorporated listening, speaking, reading, and writing into their children’s everyday lives.

**Raphael.** Raphael, now almost 5 years old, had been a student in my classroom since his third birthday. As his mother and I spoke during the initial interview through the assistance of a translator, I reflected on the first time I spoke with Ballentine. I reminded her of our first meeting to enroll Raphael in my classroom. She revealed when she first sought assistance to help Raphael develop his ability to communicate, she had been advised by a speech-language pathologist assessing her son that she should stop speaking Spanish to him in lieu of English. Apparently, the professional thought English-only immersion would function as a remedy for his identified language disorder. It is an unfortunate yet too often propagated deficit-based myth that young children whose home language is not English would benefit from learning English only in lieu of a dual language approach (Cummins, 2009; Puig, 2010; Soltero, 2011). English-only submersion is the least desirable method of learning a language for social as well as academic purposes (Castro, Garcia, & Markos, 2013; Genuk, 2011; Espinoza, 2013). Genuk (2011) summarized that this “unrealistic expectation has led to frustration, confusion, and trauma for many language minority students, parents and educators” (p. 4). Soltero (2011) articulated that “language is so closely tied to all aspects of a child’s development in the early childhood years, ignoring their native-language acquisition
processes greatly weakens teachers’ ability to fully assess and promote young ELLs’
language and literacy development” (p. 88). From the day she shared that experience to
now, Ballentine and I have had brief yet meaningful conversations about the importance
of Raphael’s opportunities to learn his family’s language, Spanish, first while acquiring
English as the language of his school. Ballentine continued to be committed to this goal.
When we spoke during the first interview, she shared a time recently when she was
reading to Raphael using the Spanish books we routinely sent home from my classroom-
based lending library. She excitedly expressed, “The other day I was reading a book in
Spanish to him and he was so excited that he said ‘I know that Mommy. I know that
book.’” Ballentine spoke about how she had worked vigorously to engage Raphael in
texts so one day he would be interested in books. She wanted him to be so absorbed with
the texts that he was almost “inside the book,” as if he was “part of the story.”
Ballentine’s actions and diligence to help Raphael learn both his home and school
languages revealed the idea to me that “materials can accelerate ELL’s [English language
learners’] language acquisition and academic progress” (Soltero, 2011, p. 197).

Marie. Marie shared that Captain America had a love for literacy. Marie
described Captain America’s love for drawing as noted by his constant engagement
whether writing tools were provided or not. When mom did not provide writing tools,
Captain America took it upon himself to find writing tools and paper, often writing on his
siblings’ homework, the car seats, or the walls. Marie described this on November 16,
2016:

Marie: Writing everywhere and anywhere.
As an example, Marie spoke of how Captain America had markers available for writing that he freely used whenever he wished. She honored his love for superhero symbols as she allowed him to select clothes that displayed his favorite cartoon or superhero graphic. Marie expressed that his love of reading was so great that “you can’t get done with the first book because he’s bringing you another book.”

**Victoria.** Victoria spoke of a library of books in their home as well. The books were made available to R2D2 whenever he wished. He had agency in his availability of which books he wanted to look through when he decided it was time to read. He even tracked the words in books when he was sitting “pretending to read to himself.” He did not attempt to track with his finger when she or her husband were reading to R2D2. R2D2 also had a notepad of school-lined paper that his mother purchased for his free-choice writing activities.

**Nique.** Nique also realized early on that early exposure to literacy is beneficial. She and her daughter, Dora, used books for repeated reading, such that Dora was able to “point at the words at the bottom of the page or wherever” because mother had read the books so many times. Through the mother and daughter discourse, Dora was “recognizing them,” thus making literacy more meaningful. Nique’s belief that repeated exposure was important prompted her to speak about making sight word cards for Dora as a way for her to practice literacy learning. Nique also provided a writing board with lines that functioned like lined paper to help Dora practice the writing skills that her mother believed would be expected when she entered kindergarten. Together, they often talked about cartoon characters like Dora the Explorer or Bubble Guppies.
Tiffany. Families pass down cherished items like clothing, toys, and in Tiffany’s home, books. Tiffany had kept many of the books her older daughters enjoyed and shared them with Mickey. She provided crayons, paper, and coloring books for him so he could continue practicing writing and coloring. While traveling through town, Tiffany often incorporated road and public signage from their community as literacy topics of discussion that she and Mickey had when traveling through town. Because of the family’s engagement with community signage, Tiffany shared that Mickey knew signs such as Target and WalMart.

Joan. Joan, while Kevin listened, spoke about the special times she and Spider-Man had when they went to the library. She described him as being enthralled with books of all kinds. Spider-Man’s parents had provided multiple avenues for practicing literacy activities including electronic digital games, paper and pencils, and workbooks. They made a point to talk about print within the community environment like the “M” for McDonalds, “W” for Wendy’s, and the like.

Jake and Grace. In the case of the McDonald family, Jake and Grace revealed a house full of literacy-related opportunities. From books to art easels to literacy games in the car, the McDonalds were busy creating an environment that encouraged Thor to be interactive with literacy experiences.

Becca. Becca knew that Superman’s favorite book characters were The Berenstain Bears (Berenstain & Berenstain, 2012), which she made available to him in his home library. Becca also realized books could become picture books for her son, allowing the illustrations to open the doors to literacy for him. When talking about reading together at home, she noted, “He likes the pictures. He likes to be able to talk
about what he sees in the pictures.” For writing opportunities, she converted the front of their older refrigerator into a dry erase board. Becca said she had to encourage him to join her in writing since he would not initiate that on his own.

**Jane.** Some caregivers, like Jane Burch, Kitty’s grandmother, reflected that opportunities for Kitty to engage in literacy opportunities occurred when she least expected it:

Ms. Burch: I think we were at Walgreens, she was familiar with something and I was surprised. I really was because I didn’t think she paid attention. But you’re surprised what they are doing and watching when you’re driving and stuff. She knows the traffic signs. She will say ‘Go, Grandma, it’s green.’ She can recognize the traffic signs, red and green.

For Ms. Burch, her practice of “kidwatching” (Goodman, 1986) offered her an opportunity to see her granddaughter’s developing language and literacy abilities in a natural environment, abilities that others might overlook.

**Children With Language Disorders Struggle With Acquiring Language and Literacy Abilities**

While the parents and guardians were already providing a literacy-rich environment full of opportunities for language and literacy abilities to develop, the children were still considered language disordered, scored below expectations on language assessments, and experienced difficulty engaging in the prekindergarten curriculum within their preschool classrooms.
**Issues of agency as readers.** Victoria noted R2D2 rarely initiated reading with her or her husband. She noted that he appeared as if he was not interested:

Victoria: With books it’s kind of hit and miss. It’s very rare that he will ask us to read to him. It was always us initiating reading to him.

If they were reading together, it was R2D2’s parents initiating literacy engagements, not R2D2. If parents were the initiating factor, then R2D2 had no agency in the choice of the text since “to be an agent is to influence intentionally ones functioning and life circumstances” (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). Joan responded in a similar manner as Victoria. She thought there may be a causal relationship between Spider-Man’s newfound ability to speak and his reluctance to initiate story time and listen to a book being read. Her theory was his confidence in speaking has resulted in him being bored with many texts she has chosen:

Joan: Since he’s been able to verbalize more frequently now, and with confidence, he tends to want to push books all a little bit. Last year, he wanted books, books, books. I started taking him to the public library for us to look at different books and pictures, but he now seems as though he’s kind of bored with it . . . . If it’s something he likes and picked the book himself, he will become engaged in the story.

Joan, like other parents, asked comprehension questions while she and her child read together. Through her experiences as a mother of a child with a significant communication impairment, she discovered something about children with language disorders: the less their disorder impacts their verbal output, the more demands people
put on them to speak. With the children’s newfound voices, parents may want to use texts with an overly didactic purpose, which may negate the pleasurable aspect of reading. From their words, I realized sharing the children’s creative writing from their journals was important to express to parents what can happen when children have agency to involve themselves in creative writing, choose their own artifacts and topics, create their own stories, choose which ones to take home, and decide whether or not to produce the same words from their take-home story or create anew when in their family’s presence.

**Conventions, Not Meaning, Were Important**

Some of the parents had difficulty accepting multiple aspects of literacy as forms of pleasurable engagement. The parents frequently alluded to the lack of structure when they commented on a child’s creation, in turn desiring there be some semblance in the drawing with the items of representation (Lancaster, 2013). Because of this disconnect, parents were not sure how to describe what was unknown to them.

**Tiffany.** When I asked if Mickey ever drew at home, Tiffany initially perceived Mickey’s work at face value. Unable to dig deeper into his marks, she viewed his work as simply scribbling:

Tiffany: He scribbles. He still scribbles. He doesn’t do much of it, but he just does the scribbling. Even when we ask him to color something, he colors all over the page.

When I asked Joan about Spider-Man’s interaction with print concepts, she similarly viewed his interactions as a good attempt yet without value:

Joan: He is going to scribble to try to fill it up to imitate what he sees. Other than him writing the big p over and over again, or the
big a, and actually form a story, not a lot of words, just the same letter over and over again, but the paper is supposed to be filled up, he thinks he has actually accomplish something if he can just fill up the paper.

Spider-Man’s marks also did not look meaningful to his mother. It was difficult for parents to view the marks as anything more than simply scribbles. From their words, I realized I could use the journals sent home to provide insight to parents on ways “to look beyond the surface of the text to the deep meaning” (Short et al., 1996, p. 21).

Even though the children were too young for formal training to instruct them on the techniques that may constitute a proper writing utensil grip via a tripod grasp, the parents eluded they believed there was a subsumed value in knowing their children could hold a pencil correctly and “stay within the lines.” Yet, these are expectations that can wait until after the preschool years are over, since they often do not completely develop until at least the first grade (Feder & Majnemer, 2007; Schneck & Henderson, 1990). Parents like Nique and Tiffany placed value in their children’s ability to hold pencils and markers “correctly” even though in the research, there is no developmental standard at this age:

Nique: She is learning to stay within the lines that she’s coloring inside a picture. She is learning to stay within the lines. She is learning to write in between the lines on the handwriting tool that she uses at home. She’s able to hold a pencil the correct way, as well as a marker. She is not holding it with the whole hand.
From Nique’s personal understanding of motor development, Nique was encouraged her child could reach a standard that she considered developmentally appropriate for children like Dora. Yet, for many children Dora’s age, many would not be developmentally ready for a goal that is developmentally inappropriate for a parent to thrust upon a child. Nique was not alone in her belief that handwriting conventions were important considerations for preschool children. Tiffany held an underlying belief that it was customary for 4-year-old children to write using a tripod grasp, instead of holding writing utensils with a fist-hold:

Tiffany: He knows how to hold a pencil better. He actually holds it correctly, instead of the whole hand.

Yet, Nique was determined to make sure Dora was more than ready for kindergarten. In the same way she encouraged fine motor development, Nique was also aware of the academic pressure Dora might face when she entered kindergarten in elementary school:

Nique: I have to use note cards like sight word cards, just try to start working with her and learning words by looking at them.

Marie initially responded favorably when she reflected upon Captain America’s writing. Marie noted Captain America wrote everywhere, on the walls, on the other sibling’s homework, on any piece of paper he could find. Through her words, I surmised Captain America was a writer in every sense of the description:

Marie: He loves doing his name because I put fun things with it like up, down, up, down. As long as you add something with it that grabs his attention.
Marie nurtured Captain America’s need for playfulness and encouraged him to have fun with writing for the sake of writing. She described how much he liked to write the “up-down-up-down” way for the first letter in his given name. Captain America was writing to reflect the organized print he saw in his environment (Short et al., 1996, p. 12). However, her thinking began to shift the more she considered his present level of writing. She reflected that he was not writing his name, an expectation that was placed upon 4-year-old children by the school’s 4-year-old early childhood curriculum. She considered his current level of development a weakness as measured by her words:

Marie: As far as you just telling him to write your name, he looks at you. As far as his writing, his writing isn’t good at all.

Since this was the beginning of 4-year-old kindergarten, Marie was already alluding to writing as both a strength and a weakness of Captain America. He loved to write. He was a writer. Yet, because his writing convention did not yet match the adult form, his mother was not able to value his attempts at print since his writing “isn’t good.”

Joan held the same belief as Marie and Nique that hand-writing conventions were as important as the marks on the paper. When I asked Joan about Spider-Man’s engagement with writing, she responded that she continued to guide him in the proper ways of writing. In a sense, she had provided tool mediation. Conventions were a concern for her, as they were for the other parents:

Joan: Very well developed as to the proper way to hold a crayon. He loves to paint. He loves to use markers. Maybe there is a few times I have to tell him that you don’t hold a crayon like that. He wants to hold it like a fist-type hold as opposed to how he holds a
pencil. I have to remind him the proper way to hold a writing instrument. I think he is progressing in that area as well.

Parents Felt Lost Without Guidance

With the plethora of information on the Internet, I, like many teachers, interacted with parents as if they already know what is expected. When I asked parents about their children’s reading and writing practices, parents revealed they were not sure what was appropriate for preschool children. Ms. Reed, speaking about R2D2’s writing practices, hesitated in her response. First, she stated that she felt it was “pretty good,” then retracted her statement saying, “I don’t know how to gauge that.” When I asked Joan about Spider-Man’s skill in retelling a book to himself, her response made me wonder if she realized the magnitude of Spider-Man’s ability to retell a story through a picture book:

Joan: I think he’s probably just trying to formulate his own story even if he isn’t interested in how it would read, he will just probably formulate his own story about what he sees in the pictures in the book.

Maybe Spider-Man’s mother had not considered the literacy level required to “formulate his own story.” Yet, his mother verified through her own words that he had the creative ability to function as a secondary author.

Writing Viewed as Busy Work

The children enrolled in the research also attended a half-day public-school general education preschool program within the same campus that purported to have a “no homework” policy. I did not ask about their children’s prekindergarten classroom experiences, yet the parents felt compelled to share. To the disappointment of many
parents, they reported their children’s teachers dispensed homework assignments that required tedious fine-motor letter formation activities each evening. Parents tried to comply because they believed it was the correct step to take since the teacher suggested this activity. The actions of the teachers pressed upon the parents that the convention of writing, even when it is a task too advanced for a 4-year-old, is more important than the actual meaning-making process that can be achieved through fun, creative-writing classroom opportunities. Victoria spoke of the homework activity with disparagement:

Victoria: R2D2, he’s learning the alphabet, but it’s a challenge to get him to write it. He’s tasked with that for homework in his 4K classroom and it’s always a chore to get him to sit down and write those letters. He just doesn’t want to do it.

There are always chores children do not want to do but must do, like brushing teeth, taking a bath, or potty training. Writing, however, should not be viewed as a displeasing chore that must be checked off from a daily list. The theme ‘less play and more work’ has been taking over preschool classrooms like R2D2’s class with the one-size-fits-one-kind-of-a-kid approach assigning banal homework assignments. As if she was talking to R2D2 about a chore, Victoria shared that she often had to remind R2D2, “Once you’re done, you’re done.” When I asked her how he handled homework, she responded, “He cries and whines a little bit. We just encourage [him].”

Much like R2D2’s mother, Becca was faced with the same dilemma with her son Superman. Becca did not think Superman had developed an interest in writing. Much like asking a child to try liver and onions, Superman avoided what was uncomfortable for him. When I asked Becca if Superman ever wrote at home, she responded half-jokingly,
“Does he try to write at home? When we make him.” For Superman, like R2D2, writing was a chore, a punishment. Even though he had a refrigerator set up with dry erase markers, he opted to stay away. Becca was confused. He could recognize various print formats. As she stated, her son was “automatically drawn” to words that began with the letter of his name:

Becca: He says “it’s like my name,” even if it’s not the first letter. If he sees a bullseye, he says, “Oh, that’s Target.” If he sees the symbol from the grocery store that we go to, he knows, “Oh, that’s the store.”

Since he was able to do these tasks, his mother could not reason why he was anxious when required to write repeated marks at night. She worried about the amount of time he was spending working on something that caused him apprehension and anxiety. She viewed each homework assignment as a struggle, a challenge:

Becca: There’s some homework assignments we have to do right now where he is supposed to write 10 capital letters and 10 lowercase letters at night. After being at school, where he is at school 11 1/2 hours with after-school, having to write 20 letters is extremely difficult and tiring. He gets very anxious and he gets to the point where it is very upsetting for him. So to be honest with you, things like drawing and writing right now is a big challenge for us. It’s a very big struggle we face. He gets to the point where he is just overwhelmed and done. He even says “I’m done” and doesn’t want
to do it anymore. It’s almost taking the fun out of what he could have done.

Clay (1977) explained what the parents and children experienced through repeated, purposeless letter copying. Repetitive letter copying is not a very productive strategy. Some words, some letters and some word groups must be imitated to get novel behaviors into the child’s repertoire but I observed it to be a slow and laborious way to establish the first units in printing behavior. (p. 337)

With almost half of the parents reporting their children—and maybe they as well—did not like the repetitive homework required in the 4K class, it was disheartening to see writing reduced to letter formation activities for all children, and especially for these children with language disorders.

**Parents Provided Insight Into the Questions**

After the first full week of April 2017, the research period had ended. It was time for me to interview the parents a second time to gain needed perspectives to determine if parents’ responses would address my three research questions. I employed *in vivo* and focused coding to determine the most salient points from the parents’ responses to my open-ended questions. From my interactions with parents, like my interactions with the children, I wanted to sufficiently answer the research questions: How did print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based), in the context of playful creative writing with preschoolers diagnosed with a language disorder (a) impact their oral language development, (b) impact their ability to interact with print, and (c) impact their literacy skills attainment?
Oral language development. The children made growth in their language development from December 5, 2016 through April 3, 2017. Parents reported they were pleased they had the opportunity to engage with their children about their self-selected journal entries, which allowed them to engage more effectively with their children overall. When I looked at the parents’ responses to my first interview question, the concept of growth emerged throughout the parents’ comments as they described their children’s transformational change in their oral language abilities.

Talk increased. Parents commented how the children were eager to just talk. They were astounded by the amount of talk their children could provide. Whether talk was based upon summarizing the day, discussing what antics they and their friends found themselves engaged in at recess, or reviewing their journal entry, children began talking. Joan, the parent of Spider-Man, affirmed her belief that the journals aided her child’s desire to communicate since he was typically very quiet:

Joan: Oh, he goes on about those little pictures he drew. They’re long stories! They’re long stories! He gets into them with his, I think, his imagination. It just runs rampant when he’s describing his journal picture and journal writing. He enjoyed . . . personally telling me what those journal writings was about in detail.

Fully formed thoughts emerged. Parents also noted the children gave facts through fully formed thoughts. Gone were the days of one-word responses and shrugging shoulders so often seen in children with language disorders (Camarata, 2014). When parents queried their children through the long-standing question of “how was your day,” gone was the simple “good.” The children, instead, engaged in vivid accounts of who did
what, where it happened, and how and why it happened. They drew pictures of their lives in order to tell their families about their experiences at school. They were engaged and eager to tell all about the day, events at the playground, issues at lunch, and events after the day ended. Prior to their interactive, socioculturally-based journaling experiences, these understandings would have been held tightly in the recesses of their young minds. However, through the scripting of their words and their day became permanent in print. Through their scripted words, we honored their language, language that had been characterized by many as deficient, disordered. The children were determined to share their words at home with the people who most loved them and who wanted to hear their voices. Like so many parents described, the children were determined to share their lives through the still images of their journal entries. Thor’s parents, Jake and Grace, summarized their perspective on Thor:

Grace: We’ve seen big improvements even from the last interview. You know, complete sentences, retelling what went on at school. Now we get the facts.

Jake: He has started to give us a lot more specifics and the details and he’s very careful about the order in which things happen now.

Grace: He liked the journal each week when he would bring home the journal. He was proud of that picture. And he could retell his story pretty close to what you had written down.

**Asking questions increased.** Instead being the receiver of questions as the children often were, the children through their experiences of engaging in creative journal writing with their peers learned to question others to gain information about their world
and the lives of those around them. Valentina, Raphael’s mother, expressed her excitement about Raphael’s newfound voice:

Valentina: Better. Much, much, much better. He says everything! He expresses himself, he asks questions.

**Making their needs known.** Parents shared that children learned to make their parents aware of their needs instead of crying when they were confused or scared. The journaling appeared to open the discourse since children had already practiced their concerns on paper before sharing with their parents. The personal drawings, at times, depicted extreme weather, people dying in fires, guns, parents being kidnapped, and even death. One child drew his father dying at the hands of an evil villain, yet the child made sure he noted in his drawing that his father was fine after he saved him from death. It was not surprising children drew pictures of devastating events because these events affected the children personally and were often hidden within the children’s thinking through their skill of masking their emotions. Autumn frequently shared with me that she was worried about Ironman’s inability to share his feelings and his frustrations (Personal interviews, December 15, 2016; January 18, 2017). Yet, as he reached the end of the year, Autumn described her observations and summary of his language development:

Autumn: Wow! A big difference! Our man is very, very talkative. And a great imagination and can… I mean, it’s just, it’s different. Very, very, very detailed. He sees a lot and we can go on and on about the pictures.

Marie had also voiced her concerns about Captain America’s frustration during the first interview on November 18, 2016. She worried about him crying when others did
not understand what he wanted. She shared her perception of growth with Captain America’s language development:

Marie: Before he would get frustrated and cry a whole lot more. Now he’s learning more to use his words than cry. He used to cry a lot. Just being able to tell you how his day went is a whole lot better. He can actually tell you how it went.

Mickey, at the beginning of the year, would similarly often cry instead of communicating his needs and concerns, thus making it difficult for him, in a group of 4-year-old children, to make friends. Mickey’s mother, Tiffany, shared her perspective related to Mickey’s overall language development:

Tiffany: He is doing a lot better. He is able to tell exactly all his needs that he needs. He’s able to voice that and I’m impressed with his learning. He has made leaps and bounds.

It was evident from the parents’ responses that they had witnessed a transformational change in their children’s language development. No parent stated their child’s language had remained stagnant or regressed in form, content, or use.

**Ability to Interact With Print**

Next, I sought to determine how the use of print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based) using the children’s play-based creative writing experiences impacted the children’s ability to interact with print. This question was answered through both the interviews and the journal responses from the parents. Through *in vivo* coding and focused coding, I determined the parents’ perspectives on how their children interacted with print. The parents shared that their children initiated the experiences.
They commented about how much the children enjoyed talking about their creative writing pieces with the family, and that the children were most contented when they were in control of their literacy. The most frequently coded categories were self-initiation, enjoyment, meaningfulness, and creativity. When I analyzed the parents’ responses to the journal talk, I heard frequent responses such as “able to talk about,” “showed me,” “told me,” “told us,” “excited to show me,” “explained,” “excited to tell me,” and “picked out the word.” Such statements revealed the children were in command of their responses and participation.

**Self-initiation.** I gathered responses at the end of the research period from the interviews with parents that I held from April through May 2017. The parents revealed their children chose to be engaged in print concepts when the children initiated the task. Much like their journal opportunities in the classroom were based upon free-thought experiences, their experiences at home were also child-initiated. Parents reflected upon their children’s natural development of print engagements because they had not instituted a formal practice in the home, but had chosen the alternative, providing an environment that honored the children’s natural inclination and initiation to express themselves through oral and written forms. Marie proudly spoke of Captain America’s need to share the work of his journal pages. She noted that because of his initiation to share his work, he often took pages out of his book bag while on the way home before his mother had a chance to address his work carefully:

**Marie:** I’m like, Captain America, do not take your stuff out of the book sack until we get to the house. So, like, he be so excited to show it to you then we get home, by the time we make it home, he forgets
it and the older kids sits on it or spills something on it and it don’t make it home. So some weeks you’ll see that he’ll get it. Them are the weeks I tell Captain America, do not take nothing out your book sack but then the weeks that you don’t get it, it’s Captain America has done took it out and it’s in either the car or the truck.

Jake and Grace also shared that Thor initiated his own engagement with literacy. They shared how he initiated writing, an ability they knew as not conventional print to them but to him, he was making meaning.

Grace: He will, you know, write like in the birthday, like for my birthday card earlier this week. Like he wrote like his name in there. And to him he’d written “happy birthday.” You know, it probably said happy birthday. You know, love, Thor and with the picture and stuff. He wants to do it. Like he wants to make the card or sign the grandparents’ card.

Other parents also noted their children’s excitement about discussing their self-initiated engagement with print in everyday activities that extended beyond the journal entries. Autumn, for example, was keenly aware of her son Ironman’s new abilities to engage with print concepts:

Autumn: Ironman says “Yes, like, like that’s the letter in my name!” You know, that’s in such and such’s name. Or that letter is in the color blue or green.

Parents provided an environment that encouraged the children to develop their awareness of print concepts that extended from school to home. Tiffany, in our interview,
realized her 4-year-old child, Mickey, had developed abilities without pressure from her or outside forces to engage in print concepts:

Tiffany: He’s not really writing any letters or anything like that. But, I take that back. He is. He does an x. He knows how to do that. He does a y. He does a b. He’s done an a. We hadn’t really practiced much with writing. He’s more engaged and wanting to do it. I noticed the other day he was fussing with his sister. [He was saying] “I want a pen so I can write.”

Mickey was initiating interactions with print because he was “more engaged and wanting to do it.” Children were creative and made opportunities for writing possible even when traditional tools were not available. Becca shared how Superman initiated interactions with print concepts when they were on grocery shopping trips together:

Becca: Even in the grocery store, he’ll open up the freezer door and try to write on the inside. It’s really cool cause he knows it will actually… he’ll draw a picture there. And he loves writing his name.

Enjoyment. Other parents spoke of their children’s enjoyment through their engagement in print opportunities. Parents, through their supportive engagement through the home journal discussions and home-based literacy activities, observed through personal experiences how much the children enjoyed interacting with their individual creative writing pieces. For example, Marie proudly spoke of Captain America’s enjoyment and his desire to share his work with her. She noted that because of his
excitement to share his work, he often took it out of his book bag before they arrived home:

Marie: He’s like “I’m doing this in class, Mama.” He be like it just be one little thing standing there [on his paper] and he had a million different words to say. He be like “the reason they got mad over the boat mama is because…” And I was like “okay.” And then he was like “they were fighting.” And I was like “oh, all that in one picture?” He’s got a lot of stuff to say. He’s got a big imagination.

Jane also shared how her child, Spider-Man, experienced enjoyment when he talked about his journal entries with her. She jested she was surprised at how little space some of his drawings took on the page yet how much he had to say about them:

Jane: Oh, he goes on about those little pictures he drew. They’re long stories! They’re long stories! He gets into them with his, I think, his imagination. It just runs rampant when he’s describing his journal picture and journal writing. He enjoyed . . . personally telling me what those journal writings was about in detail.

Raphael’s mother also described Raphael’s deep desire to share his creative writing work with her. Raphael’s first undertaking he completed when he arrived home after school was to remove his creative writing journal sheet to show to his mother. Through an interpreter’s translation, she asserted:

Ballentine: The first thing he does is to get home and take off the book bag and show it to me.
Finally, Marie, as well, spoke about Captain America’s desire and excitement to share his journal entry. Marie commented that often Captain America would not wait to get home. Marie explained that as soon as Captain America was in the car, he had removed his journal page for his mother to see:

Marie: I’m like Captain America, do not take your stuff out of the book sack until we get to the house. So like he be so excited to show it to you.

The journal entries had become the children’s artifacts from school and acted as a bridge to connect school and home experiences.

**Meaningfulness.** Children displayed that their verbal engagement with print was relevant to their lives. Their interactions with their storied creative writing reflected considerations of important events and people in their lives. Talking through print offered a way to have their needs and desires met.

**Creativity.** Parents marveled at the level of their children’s imagination as they developed their stories through the creative writing process. As the parents noted, many of the children saw themselves performing Herculean feats, as illustrated by their journal entries. Stick figures, dots, and squiggles were actually examples of the children saving humanity from burning buildings, saving their parents from evil villains, and even watching superheroes fly in and out of black holes. Parents spoke of how the children’s creative imagination kept them engaged in discourse longer than would be expected by the simplistic images on the journal pages. Autumn chuckled as she recalled how Ironman was able to retell a story about his favorite action heroes from a combination of simple squiggles, lines, and dots:
Autumn: I mean, he knows what he is drawing. Uhm, and has a very, I guess, imagination of what he sees in his head and puts it down on paper and is able to tell you “well, this story is a, it’s about Power Rangers now.”

Literacy Skills Attainment

Through the interviews, I learned how the use of print referencing techniques (code- and meaning-based) using the children’s play-based creative writing experiences impacted their literacy skills attainment. Children made choices to initiate behavior to become independent meaning makers through their volitional engagement as readers of texts. Nique shared that her daughter, Dora, often made attempts to read by herself and would come to the parent’s aid with questions as needed:

Nique: She’ll bring a book to me and she’ll start reading it or she may ask me to read it to her. Most of the time, she tries to read it herself and tells you the story.

Marie spoke of Captain America’s love for writing and reading books, and his newfound ability to put letters together that he heard to make a meaningful word. She shared a recent memory of Captain America listening to her and his sister speak about having some ice cream. To keep their plan a secret from him, she shared she decided to spell “ice cream” instead of saying the words:

Marie: The other day I tried to spell out ice cream . . . [speaking to his sister]. I said go downstairs and fix me some i-c-e. He said “I want some ice cream.” He was like “I want some ice cream.” And I was
like [shocked face] so he knew I was starting off with ice. I have no clue where that came from.

Nique shared that Dora was able to write her own name. Dora was also interested in writing her brother’s name. She had two younger siblings and five older sisters, yet she chose to learn to write the name of the sibling closest in age to her:

Nique: She’s able to write her first and last name although sometimes she spells it backwards. She’ll write her brother’s name.

Joan also expressed that Spider-Man was able to write and spell his own first name. I concluded Spider-Man had decided that writing and spelling his first name was of importance to him since his name was the most meaningful word to him:

Jane: But now he’s able to write and he spells his name, letter by letter. He can write it, and spell it correctly.

The parents were amazed by the amount and degree of elaborate language their children could produce over a seemingly ill-conceived page of scribbles, lines, and dots from their children’s journals. What seemed inconsequential through the adults’ perspectives functioned as a significant piece of information to the children. Each mark the children placed in a strategic location on their paper was a meaningful symbol that allowed the children to express their thoughts deliberately, through both verbal and written means. The parents viewed the children’s drawings as secret messages of sorts. The parents were not always certain of the children’s reiterations, thus my scribing served as a subtitle making sure the parents did not read information into the drawings that the children had not shared. The children’s work, plus my scribing, developed into an interdependent, cohesive map of the children’s thoughts at a particular moment in time.
The parents frequently shared how important the scribed words were for them to be able to synthesize their children’s words into a meaningful context.

**The New Requirements of School**

As I discussed earlier, the state I work in is beginning to measure the literacy and print abilities of preschool children before they exit preschool for program planning and to determine the children’s projected trajectory of literacy and print abilities by Grade 3. Although this ethnographic study did not focus on the parents’ attitudes toward homework, it is something they talked about extensively during the second interview with the overall view of busy work as a negative experience. Instead of words that would indicate growth, self-initiation, enjoyment, and meaningfulness, parents, in direct conflict, used words like “laziness,” “anxiety,” “lack of interest,” “dislike,” “mundane,” and “frustration” as they described their children’s responses when they complied with the teachers’ expectations that the 4-year-old children complete home writing assignments.

Even though the parents felt frustration, many parents placed guilt upon themselves for not being more aggressive with their children to complete homework assignments requiring repetitive alphabetic letter writing practices requested by their general education 4-year-old kindergarten classroom teachers. Other parents like Nique, Joan, and Ms. Birch, wanting to help their children advance in what they viewed as important skills for school, provided workbooks for their children to practice alphabetic letter mechanics. When I asked the parents to describe their views on how their children engaged in required print, many resorted to describing the frustration their children expressed when performed repetitive letter writing activities.
**Conventions Are Not for Preschoolers**

Ballentine had opinions on why Raphael did not want to do repetitive homework. She surmised that his lack of enthusiasm and enjoyment to complete homework assignments that required writing repetitive alphabetic letter formations was from his laziness:

Ballentine: I think sometimes he can be lazy. He just wants to go outside and play.

The parent summarized he was lazy rather than acknowledge what most 4- and 5-year-old children do best, go outside and play. When given a choice between playing and working on hand-writing skills, Raphael, like most children, would rather be engaged in play than to be corralled inside writing letter formations. However, the current wave of educational paradigms has indoctrinated parents into thinking children should be acutely skilled in the nonconstrained skills of literacy, the readily teachable, finite print and sound-related skills, to be considered successful, ready for the successive academic year, and on par with peers (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Ballentine reflected upon Raphael and his lack of motivation for what the other parents considered mundane homework tasks and decided his lack of motivation was probably because he was a special needs student.

Like the other parents, Marie spoke about Captain America not being ready for the independent literacy tasks expected of children in the 4-year-old kindergarten classroom. Marie spoke about Captain America’s frustration level when she attempted to encourage him to engage in print activities:

Marie: He seems like he gets really frustrated with it. He seems like he already do what he wants to do. I’ll tell him to write an N or in M,
and I’ll lose him. Like lose focus of it. He really doesn’t want to do it.

Marie soon realized that Captain America would only respond to her requests for writing when she turned it into a game. From her observations, she began using games downloaded to her cell phone as a way of keeping Captain America engaged in literacy learning. With that came other problems, since she was not sure that was the best learning format for him either. She was perplexed when she tried to reason why Captain America might be interested in using the cell phone for engagement in literacy, yet he often refused paper and pencil tasks that were similar in skill and outcome. Victoria similarly remarked at how difficult it was to encourage R2D2 to complete repetitive writing tasks as a school assignment. She described him as now enjoying books, engaged with his journal work, and identifying words in print, concluding he appeared ready for kindergarten:

Victoria: As far as practicing anything that’s repetitive or… he just doesn’t like to do it.

Superman, the boy whose mother shared he was agitated by writing, requested his parents buy him a personal journal. His parents, realizing his love for journaling, bought him his own notebook, markers, and pencils that he brought to school for writing opportunities that might occur. Superman frequently brought his personal writing journal to school and used it faithfully during center time to draw his thoughts. His enjoyment of self-initiated engagement was evident as he clutched his journal, made marks, and shared his ideas. Becca expressed that Superman enjoyed writing, even looking for opportunities to write when traditional writing tools were not available. However, she described
Superman’s response to having to complete homework assignments as overwhelming, a stark contrast to his typical classroom behavior:

   Becca: As soon as I start requesting “say your alphabet or write your alphabet” or as soon as I make it an assignment form he doesn’t want to do it anymore.

Superman’s described home behavior of rejecting activities involving print engagement was in stark opposition to the behavior I saw in the classroom. In the classroom, Superman begged for journal time. When it was not possible due to my schedule or preplanned school activities, Superman was visibly and audibly agitated.

**Lack of Meaningfulness**

   Nique described Dora’s need to be interested in her work. Dora wanted there to be purpose and meaning in what she did. When Dora did not initiated print-based activities, she often found it difficult to maintain attention:

   Nique: If it’s something she’s not interested in, she may walk away.

Similarly, Jane and Kevin noticed that their son, Spider-Man, changed his temperament from a positive attitude to impatience. Jane summarized his observed frustration was caused by his realization that he had to write and “no longer scribble, scrabble.” Parents enlisted family help with activities they believed would be beneficial for Spider-Man. According to Joan, Spider-Man’s maternal grandmother agreed to work with him in the afternoons after school:

   Jane: At first, when she started with him he was all on board but now he has become easily frustrated, aggravated and he doesn’t want to do it anymore for some reason.
Jane spoke of Spider-Man’s aggravation with having to do repetitive homework that was described by many of the parents as something the children had to get through:

Jane: He gets frustrated when we do the workbook work. He gets frustrated, and doesn’t want to practice writing his letters. He’ll get sloppy. He doesn’t do that type of work when he’s focused. He does it intentionally because he doesn’t want to do it. He prefers to go play, or get his trucks, or do something other than that.

Kevin: Or ride his bike.

**Using Print Referencing at Home**

In addition to relying on the parents’ thoughtful responses during the pre- and postinterviews, I also encouraged parents to respond to the children’s creative writing. Each week, after I scanned the journal entry each child selected, I scripted information at the bottom of each sheet referring the parent to the possible interventions the particular journal entry supported. The training opportunities offered information for both code-based (constrained) and meaning-based (unconstrained) home literacy activities. For example, with guidance related to code-based knowledge, I noted to parents that certain journal responses offered possibilities to find words that started like a friend’s name, counting words that were the same, or finding the beginning of their story. I also noted meaning-based literacy opportunities such as constructing questions, generating synonyms of the children’s words that were said, naming the color words chosen, or creating categories of their topics of interest. I believed parents would use the strategies, balancing guidance and personal discretion, in the literacy process with their children. The parents regularly responded referencing their children’s journal selection, the
interventions I had suggested, and the overall outcomes. The parents thus guided my thinking to provide insight to my three research questions. Here, I selected the salient areas from Snow and Matthews’ (2016, p. 59) definition of print/code-based skills (constrained) and meaning-based language/knowledge skills (unconstrained). I combined this information with the important areas identified by Justice et al. (2009) to determine the type of talk parents used with their children during their journal discussions at home with print referencing supports.

**What the Parent/Home Interaction Revealed**

When engaging in print referencing techniques with their children, the parents’ comments revealed they interacted through unconstrained forms 66% of the opportunities in contrast to focusing on constrained skills during 32% of the opportunities. Snow and Matthews (2016) noted unconstrained skills become progressively vital in the prediction of long-term literacy outcomes for children (p. 59). The authors noted that unconstrained skills are essential skills children must possess to become prepared for the increasingly complex texts they will be confronted with in the future. Unfortunately, however, constrained skills are still the focus in many preschool classrooms since they are “easy to teach as well as easy to test” (Snow & Matthews, 2016, p. 59). The parents’ interactions with their children revealed development in all of the three areas, with the strongest area being language. The children, with their parents as guides, did not spend time on segmenting phonemes, reciting the alphabet, or generating rhyming words but devoted their time to more important areas of development such as letter recognition, telling narratives, and describing the world around them.
Table 5.2

*Summary of Parent and Child Journal Talk*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Constrained Skills=32%</th>
<th>Unconstrained Skills=66%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Print-Related</td>
<td>Code-Based</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter recognition</td>
<td>11% Reciting the alphabet</td>
<td>0% Vocabulary 2% Topic-specific knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name writing</td>
<td>1% Rhyming</td>
<td>0% Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing print in the environment</td>
<td>1% Segmenting phonemes</td>
<td>0% Story structure 3% Requesting explanations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book manipulation</td>
<td>Invented spelling</td>
<td>0% Telling narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print order</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Giving descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word identification</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Engaging in pretend play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long vs short words</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept of word in print</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents and children talked. In addition to the measurement of the type of talk parents used, I analyzed their comments to determine how discussing the journal at home aided the children. The parents’ interactions revealed illustrations were meaningful to the children especially when adults could not discern meaning from the children’s drawings. Because the stories were personal, the children recalled their scribed stories with minimal reminders. The personal connections between the children and their stories helped the children to develop important connections within their families and friends. For example, Marie noticed a deeper connection develop with Captain America. She was dedicated to
helping him talk and interact with his journal entries, which gave them quiet time together. She believed it gave them a chance to bond.

Figure 5.21. Marie responds to Captain America’s journal entry.

Through their personal journals, children interacted with language concepts like answering questions using their own printed words. Through the parents and children’s interactions, children had opportunities to discuss language concepts such as categories through a natural approach. For example, Thor and his parents delved into the category of transportation simply because of Thor’s creative writing piece. His work offered an experience in print referencing related to meaning-based talk that he created. The
children’s journals also opened the doors to science topics like black holes, weather patterns, and animals. At times, the children’s journals revealed issues about safety the parents felt compelled to talk about with their children. At other times, the drawing and scribing was sufficient without the child or parent needing to add any words.

*Figure 5.22. Thor’s choice for his take-home story, February 15, 2017.*
Figure 5.23. Grace and Jake respond to Thor’s story.

Specific needs addressed. The creative writing pieces were more than simple stories the children took home. They were mutual representations of the children and parents’ lives presented on paper through the lens of the preschooler. The parents and children spoke together about their stories because the stories were representations of their mutually-lived experiences. For example, at the beginning of the research, Spiderman frequently spoke about robbers, jail, and guns. His mother reported to me on January 11, 2017 that his discourse stemmed from an incident at their house in which a
burglar attempted to break into their trailer, but his father frightened the burglar off the property.

The parent–child interaction between Raphael and his family also revealed they read through the directions I posted with his drawing. His parents felt the need to reassure him about fire safety and to discuss more deeply issues about safety if strangers come to the house. I included the print referencing instructions I sent to parents as an example of print referencing techniques for meaning-based interactions. For Raphael’s parents, I used the Google translator application to offer guidance in both English and Spanish.

Figure 5.24. Raphael chose his story to share with his family.
How the Parents’ Attitudes Enlightened My Thinking

Although the research aimed to address the three research questions, in their conversations with me the also parents stressed that writing homework from the general education classrooms was not always an enjoyable task for their children. They specifically wanted me to know about the concerns they had when it came to their 4-year-old children receiving repetitive writing homework assignments from their morning classroom teachers. Although not intentional, this extension of thought beyond my questions helped to answer the questions. The children enjoyed interacting with print
concepts during creative journal writing since the activity was generated around self-initiated, enjoyable, meaningful, and creative journal writing. The parents extended the same thinking into the home through their focus on the unconstrained skills required for success. The parents helped me to understand that the nature of this research was the antithesis of the conventional banking model of schools in which the teacher functions as the dispenser of knowledge and children as receptacles of facts (Freire, 2011, p. 73).

In this research, the children chose their own toys often sharing with others, decided on their own topics often after exchanging ideas with one another, crafted their own words often repurposed for another child’s use, identified issues about their own print as well as the print of others, and selected their own stories to take home. These actions mark this research as heavily socioculturally- and child-centered in contrast to the teacher-assigned homework that parents discussed. Here, the parents inspired me to consider reasons the children struggled with their homework assignments: they were boring, required without choice, repetitive, and meaningless busy work (Kohn, 2007).

The same reasons the parents gave for their homework struggles also made me reflect upon my previous strategies with print referencing with storybooks during the previous year. At times, I attempted an evocative or nonevocative print referencing approach during group storybook reading time, sensing the children felt helpless since I was in control of what they attended to within the text. They often departed from attention to the text, looking for ways to find self-control in their environment which, at times, resorted to physical interactions with others, distracting others to look elsewhere, or simply nonengagement as evidenced by one little boy looking at the bottom of his shoe. As I did not use print referencing strategies through storybook formats for an
extended period of time (probably no more than six times), my opinion is based on minimal data. It is possible the children may have become accustomed to addressing print through storybook formats but I did not continue the intervention throughout the year. However, when I realized there could be a potential to use print referencing through the short, creative writing activities in a personalized one-to-one setting, offering the children the chance to follow my interventions or counteract with their own interventions, I knew must assess if this method offered a better way of asking the children to engage in print concepts.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I present discussion addressing my theoretical framework, a Vygotskian lens, which supported my thinking from the onset. I also return to the seminal research on print referencing for code- and meaning-based interactions. I consider the implications of this research and its potential impact on preschool children who possess early language weaknesses that may have long-term effects on their academics and beyond. I discuss future implications for researchers and teachers who may be interested in revisiting this research through the same process or adding components that may enrich the already abundant findings. I add to this chapter the limitations of the research.

Discussion of the Results

To discuss the findings from this research adequately, I need to return back to the theoretical foundation from which my thinking emanated. To summarize this research, I reflected upon the sociocultural approaches to learning as described by Vygotsky (1978):

Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice; first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intra psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)
My findings support my sociocultural-based, constructivist belief that the children’s knowledge development takes place in the midst of, and in connection with, others in cultural contexts of the classroom and at home. The sociocultural aspects that were actualized during the research were: (a) the ZPD, (b) thought and language, (c) human and symbolic mediation, (d) play, and (e) the dilemma of socially-constructed labels.

**The zone of proximal development.** My understanding of the children’s ZPD was necessary throughout the 15-week study, as children relied on more knowledgeable others, such as peers, parents, and teachers, to help them interact with their scribed words and craft their ideas. Evans and Saint-Aubin (2005) noted children routinely ignore the printed words in texts but focus on illustrations as a primary type of transaction of meaning. Initially, I guided the children to inspect their own words visually. In turn, they responded to my guidance and verbal prompts, thus making their language meaningful while impacting their abilities to interact with print, increasing their literacy development, and improving their oral language abilities. With minimal time involved, the children purposefully engaged in mediating their own scribed words and those of others through eye gazing, head gesturing, pointing, and talking. The parents also served as the more knowledgeable others helping the children reach the next level of their abilities through the support they provided at home. When assisting their children, the parents reported they followed the print referencing directions I wrote at the bottom of each creative writing page the children took home.

The children also functioned as more knowable others with each other assisting their peers in improving their drawings, teaching facts about their toys, and developing creative writing ideas. In my first example, I reflected upon Dora’s ways of teaching
Kitty to see her drawing in a different way. Kitty tried to draw something but had not labeled it until Dora provided guidance that Kitty might be interested in drawing a castle. When the finished product was available, Dora only saw circles on Kitty’s paper. Kitty’s response was to change the language of her drawing instead of trying to modify her artwork to be received by Dora better. Dora’s effective use of language inadvertently swayed Kitty from her original thought of drawing castles to accepting Dora’s constructive comments, thus ultimately renaming her circles as fruit. My second example revealed how Superman and Spiderman possessed abilities to see the needs of others, often sharing their toys or markers. My final example showed how the children impacted each ZPD through conceptual thought. Thor frequently spoke of science-related topics such as space, rockets, robots, and black holes. On March 9, 2017, Thor created a black hole by puncturing his paper with his marker. Captain America, on the contrary, rarely spoke of science topics. Yet, on the same day, as Captain America sat near Thor, he too created a black hole. I used this opportunity to show the two boys photos of what a black hole is suspected to look like. Thor and Captain America used their markers to pretend gravity was pulling the markers through the holes made in their papers.

**Thought and language.** The children’s language functioned as artifacts for the group in which the children repurposed others’ thoughts into new and novel ideas. Traits such as scatting, singing songs from media, and simply repurposing each other’s creative writing were artifactual languages that the children shared with one another.

**Sociocultural context.** As a sociocultural engagement, through creative writing, the children’s discourses revealed their “way of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking and, often reading and writing” (Gee, 2012, p. 3). I made attempts to
honor the language of the children’s cultures through our everyday practices of talk and creative writing. Being a classroom of a variety of dialects and two different languages, English and Spanish, I welcomed the language diversity. I understand “the linguistic form a child brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity” (Deloit, 2006, p. 53). While working with the children, I was often reminded what Gay (2010) labeled as the “myths of language diversity” (p. 83). Before this research, I did not espouse the belief that: (a) only one form of standard English exists, (b) a “nonmainstream dialect or another language impedes mastery of English,” or (c) language was more about grammar, word endings, and plurals than the actual use (Gay, 2010, pp. 83–84). I am even more persuaded to reject these myths now since I have seen how honoring speakers through their dialects and languages provides an environment where all children can flourish. As Gay (2010) noted, the pragmatic “use” of language is more important than grammar and vocabulary (p. 84).

**African American vernacular.** Genishi and Dyson (2009) defined *dialects* as “systematic variations in a language’s grammatical rules, associated with geographic, social, and cultural boundaries” (p. 20). In the classroom of this study, I observed variations of dialect in the production of sounds, organization of words within a sentence, literal and figurative meanings of words, and how language was used for the situation (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). Some of the children of African heritage shared their ideas through African American Language (AAL), which exemplified their relationships within the meaningful sociocultural relationships that reflected their “human relationships and daily experiences” (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 18).
Therefore, when I scribed the children’s words, I attempted to keep their comments as similar to their original production as possible. I reflected upon the words from Delpit (2006) that “form is considerably less important . . . in the area of cognitive development” (p. 49) than the skillful use of language to persuade, negotiate, and argue beliefs and understandings. For example, I felt compelled to acknowledge Captain America and Spider-Man’s use of AAL as I scribed their comments. On January 10, 2017, I scribed Captain America’s comments to reflect his thoughts:

Captain America: I been trick-or-treat when it be dark.

As another example, I wrote Captain America’s comments on January 18, 2017:

Captain America: Two of them is the monster.

A third example is from Spider-Man dated March 1, 2017:

Spider-Man: We at the park. The fire came. Somebody got left at the park. The fire came and burned them.

If I had been inclined to ask Captain America or Spider-Man to change their grammatical structures to reflect the dialect of the ruling societal class, I might have ultimately dissuaded them from sharing their thoughts, which were reflections of their relationships with family and daily experiences in their community. This, in turn, may have resulted in the children being overly focused on the production of form rather than the true meaning of their experiences.

Another aspect of AAV that I understood prior to the research and observed during the scribing was the need for children of African heritage to summarize their topics before providing the supporting statements related to it. As an example, on January 9, 2017, Captain America shared, “A spaceship. I watched a spaceship on Peppa Pig.”
Gay (2010) noted children of color who have deep affiliations within their cultures are inclined to think through solving a problem through an inductive, collaborative process. She explained children of African heritage often reason “from the whole to parts, from the general to the specific” (Gay, 2010, p. 108). It was imperative I remembered this during the research so I did not assume the children had finished their thoughts when they had only told me the topic of the story.

**Dual language learners.** Although I knew a little French and a little less Spanish at the beginning of this research, it was important for me to recognize Raphael’s home language, Spanish, to interpret as best as I could when he would ask “how you say that, Mrs. Sanderson?” Using the Google translator application on my iPhone, I valued his requests by recording the Spanish word he was saying as his attempt to recall the English cognate. Raphael was extremely patient with me yet honest about my minimal skills. According to my researcher’s journal, Raphael expressed “your Español not good, Mrs. Sanderson” (Personal notes, February 9, 2017). I accepted the wisdom of his experience as a 4-year-old dual language learner but I did not let my weaknesses demotivate me. I continued to translate what I needed to share with him from English to Spanish on my phone, sharing with him orally, then I provided the Spanish to English translation so he would have both words to compare. Although the classroom language was predominately English, the English-only children often imitated me speaking Spanish in an attempt to learn a new word, engage with Raphael in Spanish, or simply for the experience. Spider-Man said on February 1, 2017, during lunch while sitting beside Raphael, “You my amigo.”
Human and symbolic mediation. Language was the tool the children used to regulate their relationships with others through a transformative process. My goal was to determine if I could help the children rethink how they saw their language in print: could they act upon it? Could it become meaningful? It was evident from the children’s interactions that their literacy and language growth were mediated by their interactive language, artifacts, writing tools, play, and location in the environment, since “literacy is always shaped by the social context in which it occurs” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 3).

Human mediation. The children’s interactive language enabled them to create dynamic stories about issues I would not have been able to share with them considering the type of texts that authors, illustrators, and publishers typically create for preschool children. As an example, I have never possessed a text on black holes that could be considered developmentally appropriate for prekindergarten children. I am sure one exists, but better than a published text, Thor, Captain America, and Superman created short stories using markers and their imaginations during the month of March. The only step I used to support their work was to share a visual description of an artist’s rendition of a black hole with them and the other interested children who walked over to see it. Likewise, I did not have books with weapons to satisfy Spider-Man’s insatiable enthusiasm for armaments. His purpose for discussing weapons was not one of rage, but one of family talk as well as imitating media, as reflected by his scribed creative writing samples from December 13, 2016 and March 6, 2017, respectively:

Spider-Man: It is a spaceship. It shoots cannonballs.

Spider-Man: A spaceship. The aliens have people. They fight. The people shoot them.
The children mediated their language and literacy abilities through their engagement in artifacts from the classroom and those brought to school from home. The artifacts helped the children engage in play, develop scenarios, gain power, and move in social positions. Through many of their artifacts, the children developed literacies that combined home, school, and community into fluid texts.

**Symbolic mediation.** The children’s drawings were symbols that required the children’s interpretation so the adults and other children could realize what they were sharing. Although their symbols often appeared as squiggles, lines, or dots on paper, our incomprehension was fleeting as soon as the children interpreted their art. To understand the children’s thoughts through their pictures, the parents and I had to surrender to the children’s guidance, allowing ourselves to be moved to a greater understanding of what the drawing represented. From their thoughts verbalized, I scribed their words so the children, parents, and I could interact through symbolic mediation. If not adequately mediated, the children’s words that I scribed would have remained useless: “The mere availability of signs or texts does not imply that they will be used by students as psychological tools” (Kozulin, 2003, p. 24).

My use of print mediation with the children through various references to print concepts of meaning- or code-based interventions brought their words to life for them. From my past experiences with using print referencing techniques during group storybook reading time, the children rarely acknowledged nor responded to my prompts with the same enthusiasm as they responded to their personal texts. From this research, I can conclude that print referencing is best when utilized in a one-to-one setting through texts that are meaningful and personal for the children. As Kozulin (2003) noted:
It is true by their very nature symbolic mediators have the capacity to become cognitive tools. However, in order to realize this capacity the mediators should be appropriated under very special conditions that emphasizes their meaning as cognitive tools (p. 25).

The children experienced a unique opportunity to engage in creative writing through a play-based format that resulted in their symbols being highlighted for them. Before this research, the children may have never had the opportunity to know that their words were actually symbolic pieces of information that reflected them and their thinking.

**Play.** The children used the unfettered opportunity for play as an environment for them to move in and out of situations and scenarios that would not have been possible if the environment had been constrained and regulated. Their play created a foundation for their work of developing their language abilities required for the academic environment of the general education classroom. The children were excited to be able to write in an environment that was child-centric, as R2D2 loudly sang on March 6, 2017 as the children were retrieving their pencil boxes from their cubbies:

R2D2: It’s journal time, it’s journal time, it’s journal time, it’s journal time!

The children used their language during play as a tool for mediating their interconnections with their peers, teacher, and the language abilities they needed to learn.

**Artifacts.** The children’s artifacts were not distractors but instead helped them to think cooperatively with each other. The artifacts that they selected and brought to the classroom impacted the children’s play-related language as revealed by the topics of their journal entries. Out of the 371 total journal entries, the use of superhero-type
themes appeared 28% of the time, with supervillains occupying 15% of their creative writing themes and positive superheroes comprising 13% of the themes within their journals. Fifteen percent of their talk was devoted to family, 7% to places, and 6% to friends. Weather, food, animals, celebrations, and transportation, including space vehicles, occupied approximately 6% of their talk evenly, 3% of their comments were related to space as a destination, 3% were devoted to cartoon characters, 2% related to death, and 2% to make-believe characters. Topics of their journal entries that were less than 2% of the entries included spiders, robots, toys, shapes, letters, and reptiles.

**Sharing.** The preschool children with language disorders were eager and willing to share markers, toys, topic ideas, assistance, print referencing gestures, and constructive criticism without prompting or guidance from an adult. This finding is consistent with Wu and Su (2014), who noted 4-year-old children who have the ability to infer the feelings of others, often called “theory of the mind,” are more apt to share their toys and markers than someone who cannot empathize with others. Wu and Su (2014) stated, “if a child attends only to his or her own desires and emotions and has no understanding of the others’ desires and emotions, sharing processes are not likely to be activated” (p. 83). Utilizing toys as a significant part of this research showed how teachers can observe children during opportunities that lend themselves to sharing opportunities and provide scaffolding for children who are developing more slowly in the skills of prosocial behaviors.

**Playful movement.** The children in this classroom, who many times struggled to find the words needed for discourse, needed multimodal experiences through gestured play to create and engage in language, print, and literacy experiences. Their playful
movements with markers, toys, and child-to-child interactions functioned as ways to arouse “visual images, either concrete images or metaphoric images” (Goldin-Meadow, 2003, p. 185). As an example, through concrete images, markers became pointers, tools to indicate the location and shapes of items. At other times, markers held a metaphoric place in the children’s minds and were used as cannons, swords, wands, guns, and sticks.

**Socially-constructed labels.** Throughout the process of this research and the development of this dissertation, I have reflected upon Vygotsky’s belief that while there is a primary language issue that I must address to help the children prosper in their academic and social worlds, there is a secondary disabling condition, the “negative social consequences of the primary disability” (Gindis, 2003, p. 208). According to Vygotsky (1993), while special needs traits have a biological basis, it is the social consequences of the disability that result in negative attitudes within society. Socially-constructed labels for children with language differences use deficit terms such as *language disordered, language impaired, language disability,* or *specific language impairment,* which highlight weaknesses in their description creating a negative attitude and perspective from others simply by their labels alone. For the children engaged in this research because of their *language needs* (my attempt at a less negative term), their positive outcomes stemmed from my perception of them through the lens of their strengths that resided within them or, as Howard (2010) described, their “leadership skills, creative and artistic ability, initiative in analyzing tasks, risk taking, persuasive speaking, consensus building, resiliency, and emotional maturity” (p. 13). For me to do otherwise, I would have placed a limit on their culture (Harry & Klingner, 2007).
Harry and Klingner (2007) noted “the habit of looking for an intrinsic deficit intertwines with the habit of interpreting the cultural and racial differences as a deficit” (p. 22). Negative outcomes arose when I suggested the children in the research were ready to leave their socially-constructed labels and join their kindergarten peers in all-day general education programming without a label. Although the language scores from the sentence repetition test were in the average range at the end of the research (i.e., the end of the 2016–2017 school year) for all children, the negative societal labels imposed upon them restricted the children to a certain disabled group, making it very difficult for me to persuade school district personnel that these children were ready for kindergarten without the need for extended special needs programing. Farrell (2014) affirmed once children receive a label that sets them apart from their peers, they are often regarded differently, and often negatively, by the very individuals who held the power to label them initially.

**Importance of This Research**

This research summarized the culture of a group of children who, labeled as children with a language disorder and served in a therapeutic language classroom within an early childhood setting, created an environment that worked for them and their needs. By the end of the research, I understood that the children needed to talk, gesture, move, sing, scat, use sounds, and find ways to be creative with their materials. These were the children’s cultural aspects evidenced by their “patterns of behavior, artifacts, and knowledge” (Spradley, 1980, p. 86). The children were provided a relatively unencumbered child-based environment in which to interact, play, and gain knowledge about oral language, print, and literacy abilities. The research also revealed the benefits of
play to promote interactions that encouraged the final piece, the creative writing from which the children and I mediated print.

**Print referencing for young children with language impairments.** Using print referencing techniques (i.e., structured, preplanned references to text) provides focus to “meaning-related talk . . . and code-related talk” (Zucker et al., 2013, p. 1425). Through the playful creative journal writing, the children chose to have fun while also engaging in a language, print, and literacy-based activity. Paley (2005) noted play is the job of preschoolers and through it, there is “nothing more dependable and risk-free, and the dangers are only in the pretend” (Paley, 2005, p. 8). Through understanding the benefits of play, it made sense when I heard R2D2 sing, “It’s journal time, it’s journal time, it’s journal time!” as he gathered his writing utensils and readied himself for writing and print referencing.

Print referencing using the children’s words revealed benefits. First, the use of print referencing through child-created, teacher-scribed texts revealed greater attention toward print concepts than I had observed with print referencing techniques using storybook formats. The child-created, teacher-scribed texts were nonprompted outcomes of play the children devised through the use of toys and objects, many classroom-based and some child-owned. The artifacts were used as prompts for engagement and talk. For the children’s needs, I used print referencing for two purposes: to highlight code-based structures and to identify meaning-based concepts. As examples, for code-based structures, I used print referencing techniques with the children to find words with the same beginning sounds, words that were the same, words that began with the sound of a friend’s name, identifying where the beginning and end of the children’s statements were
located, how their reading patterns moved from left to right, and the length of their utterances (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). The children’s scribed words also offered a format for engaging in meaning-based concepts of print related to such areas as vocabulary, categories, questions, story retelling, cause and effect, problem solving, and pronoun use.

Second, the references I made to concepts of print contributed to the children’s knowledge about how print worked and how we could interact with it to extract meaning (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2014; Justice & Ezell, 2004). I realized, as Lovelace and Stewart (2007) described, that I did not have to ask them evocatively to identify their words. Often, I nonevocatively pointed and spoke about the words with the children. Children began in the research passively observing as I scribed their words but within a few days of the onset of the research, the children were engaged in talking about print and many had begun to point to words within their texts and the scribed words within the other children’s journals. I realized what Gettinger and Stoiber (2014) discovered, that print referencing does not require an extensive amount of time to be effective. While the journal period lasted as long as the children needed, sometimes as long as an hour, the time required to interact with a child through print referencing lasted approximately 5 minutes.

Third, I observed children continuing to attend to print when the creative writing period was over. The activities from the research motivated the children to locate print volitionally in texts, on the walls, in the bathroom, and in the cafeteria. I watched as they looked for letters on their milk cartons at lunch, read the names in the classroom, pointed to words during free reading time, and eagerly told me about their knowledge of words posted in the room and words I had written that day on the board. As such, from my
careful observations, children benefitted from this manner of exposure to print. Mediating print through the children’s words was beneficial for language, print, and literacy growth. It was purposeful and personal. It required minimal time and money, resources that are valued in a public-school setting. The children continued to engage in print after the creative writing sessions ended.

**Creative writing for young children with language disorder.** Puranik and Lonigan (2014) noted creative writing through journal use has a not received as much attention as other aspects of literacy engagements. There is an even smaller research history of using creative writing with the special needs population (Mannix, 2001). Using creative writing opportunities with children with language disorders enabled them to place marks on paper often when they had difficulty sharing their thoughts verbally.

The journals functioned as a bridge connecting the children’s thoughts, words, and graphic output so children could share information they believed was important about them, information we needed to know. From my research, I concur with Aram and Biron (2004), who observed a noticeable difference when using small group writing interventions as opposed to storybook reading when addressing outcomes related to word writing, grapheme (letter) awareness, phoneme (sound) awareness, vocabulary, and general knowledge. I, too, noticed a greater attention from the children toward print through the use of journals. What Works Clearinghouse (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) also noted what I observed, that storybook reading, while excellent at building oral language skills, does not impact print knowledge. Similar to Kissel et al. (2011), I further observed when free talk interaction was used during creative writing opportunities, writing impacted the children’s sense of self and others, helped develop new knowledge,
and encouraged more peer-to-peer assistance. As Jones et al. (2010) affirmed, I found writing is important since it becomes an integral part of language and literacy development. Gerde, Bingham, and Wasik (2012) suggested teachers plan opportunities for daily writing experiences in many of the same ways I planned the daily writing for this research. Gerde et al. (2012) suggested connecting with families through home writing activities in a similar manner to how I shared the children’s journal entries, guiding parents through written notes and comments.

**Implications**

The findings from this research are applicable and would be beneficial for speech-language pathologists, preschool teachers including 4K and 5K classrooms, and daycare providers who want to provide an inclusive writing program in their preschool classrooms but are not sure where to begin.

**Children’s words are at the center of their playful work.** The children were willing to connect with their own words since they were already captivated by what they shared even during the moments they shared a minimal amount. The parents were exceedingly willing to help their children through regular reviews of the creative writing and participating in print referencing techniques with their children. The parents, in fact, wanted more of this type of home assignment and less of the mundane, repetitive alphabet letter writing experiences their children were being exposed to in the general education classes. Using children’s writing as the platform for print referencing revealed greater engagement with the children in connection with their printed words and less need to redirect them than with my previous experiences using print referencing with storybook formats.
**Writing is omitted in many therapeutic and classroom settings.** Using this intervention may fill a void that currently exists for children who have oral and written language disorders. Fallon and Katz (2011) noted there exists a divide between children who need assistance with written language services and the speech-language pathologists who are professionally comfortable with providing the service. Fallon and Katz (2011) urged speech-language pathologists to address written language services with their students. Gerde et al. (2012) reported that writing is too often “an underrepresented activity in preschool classrooms” (p. 251). They further noted in some cases opportunities for writing do not exist.

**Play, although beneficial, can be messy.** I urge those who wish to use this technique to keep the mindset that although “play is messy” it offers a “literate potential that is often overlooked and unrealized in many schools” (Wohlwend, 2013, p. 90). Before you begin, understand there will be talk, movement, nonspeech noises, singing, and overall engagement. The customary context of a Westernized education is a quiet room in which children are doing their own work independently. Preschool teachers commonly use phrases such as “keep your hands to yourself,” “do your own work,” and “sit quietly,” which is the antithesis of this research method. Smagorinsky (2017) noted working through a Vygotskian lens that “mediating contexts could make schools far more responsive to diverse students than their current, Eurocentrically monolithic structures have thus far allowed” (p. 5).

**Artifacts enhance, not distract.** Preschool teachers and speech-language pathologists need not worry about personal artifacts being a distractor in the classroom because the children who were unable to bring toys to school, often repurposed toy
themes using the toys of others as topics in their stories. The artifacts functioned more as a means of getting the children’s thought process in motion. The markers performed the same function, a simple object to move about the space in front of them to stir their creative juices. However, teachers and speech-language pathologists would better serve their student populations with a working knowledge of common media figures such as superheroes and supervillains.

Suggestions for Future Research

Although the original research on print referencing used published texts that were teacher selected, my research results indicate other areas of possible research. One area that deserves further investigation is incorporating child-created multipage texts as a possible storybook format. The other area I believe needs to be investigated is adding a dramatic role-playing piece.

Child-created texts. An area that I think needs further investigation is the use of a child-developed storybook format with applied print-referencing techniques. Children love to talk about what they know best, themselves. Using a child-created, child-centered text with added print-referencing strategies would offer other opportunities to respond to print such as finding the title, identifying the author’s name, and finding the last word in the book that the writing journal format does not afford.

Dramatic role-playing. I also believe the addition of a dramatic role-playing component should be investigated to add to the knowledge this research has offered. I personally have an interest in further investigating how adding a dramatic role-playing portion might impact oral language, print awareness, and literacy skills for the children in my classroom (Paley, 2005). My suggestion would be to use the creative writing pieces to
dramatically role-play the children’s scribed experiences while continuing to use print referencing techniques, offering the children an opportunity to witness their words coming to life.

**Limitations**

A mini-ethnographic case study utilizing participant observation was difficult to conduct because of having to observe while trying to be the teacher of record in the room. It was a true balancing act. Participant observation, rightly described by Merriam (2001), is “a schizophrenic activity” (p. 103) requiring the researcher to be removed while at the same time being involved. The children had to be monitored continuously because of their ages; 4-year-old children are not self-reliant and are quite capable of making age-appropriate, unsafe decisions. The children were talkative, interactive little beings who were not concerned, in the least, that I might not be able to hear all of the nuances spoken by the other children, that the digital recorder was covered by their journals, that the recording iPad was blocked, or that their artifact from home was exceedingly noisy. They were not concerned, nor should they have been. Since I was required to write in their journals, note taking with a pad and pencil was often nearly impossible until the end of the day. I relied heavily on my iPhone as a means of writing memos and notes that I transferred to my computer or researcher’s notebook at night.

**Length of observation.** With my prior experience using journal writing with preschool children, the 15-week study period was ample time to observe the children interacting with print but not long enough to show how preschool children progress through writing. Usually by April in the school year, the children begin writing lines at the bottom of their journals in preparation for the words I scribe. Their ability to mark the
number of lines needed is usually remarkably correct. Children also begin to write words through invented spelling, words that appear similar to the actual grapheme-sequenced words that they will eventually progress to writing. Their stories become longer with my scribing many of their words up the side of the page and on to the back of the page. They also become their own scribe as the year comes to a close. Due to the 15-week period, those developments did not materialize. However, my observations during the 15-week period allowed me to answer my research questions.

Audit trail. I maintained multiple copies of files to protect items from loss. I have a large fireproof and waterproof, combination-locked storage cabinet in which I keep my valuables. To protect the individuals in this study, the children’s journal documents, my researcher’s journal, a file containing the parents’ original responses to their children’s journals, the flash drive containing with video and audio-recordings, the terabyte storage containing the backup of all documents pertaining to this research will remain in the safe unless I need it for further research. I plan to use this material to research additional aspects of print referencing with student-authored texts and dramatic interpretation. I also believe a text is possible from the data so I will be revisiting the documents, recordings, and artifacts.

My positionality. Although my positionality, as I devised it at the onset of this research, stayed intact, I did realize an area that I should have addressed earlier in the study. My positionality as an adult without young children at home impacted my knowledge about the media culture of children. Even though I have interacted with preschool children for 1800 school days over the last 10 years, I did not know enough about the children’s culture related to media representations such as superheroes,
cartoons, and cartoon-related songs. I found myself routinely looking up characters on Internet websites to find information, trying to watch cartoons when time allowed, and using search engines to find descriptions and related songs, so I would be as knowledgeable as the children.

**Member checking.** Through member checking I shared pertinent information from the research applicable to the two groups, the children and their parents. Member checking through my participants confirmed my observations were trustworthy.

**Children.** The children watched some of the videos at the end of the study, often resulting in group laughter, peer teasing, and a few reflections. It was difficult for the preschool children in this research to summarize from their observations what was happening. As honest as 10 4- and 5-year-old children could be, they offered their opinions about why they shook markers in the air, sang, brought toys to school, and the importance of taking care of each other’s toys.

**Families.** Of the 10 families who participated, I contacted all but three of the mothers to determine if I observed their children in the manner they did. The parents and I were in agreement with what I observed last year. They also wanted me to know their children are continuing to progress in language, print, and literacy abilities in the academic world of kindergarten. Dora and Kitty are reading and writing. Spiderman has his own journal, which he uses volitionally. Superman continues to write about superheroes. Raphael is doing well and loves school. Captain America continues to write his name whenever possible. Thor, the children with fine motor issues, was in a public school but will soon move to a private child-centered kindergarten because he was losing recess and snack time for not writing sentences from the board as quickly as his other
kindergarten peers. Mickey is progressing with writing and practices writing his name whenever he can. Ironman has had a smooth transition to kindergarten and continues to write in school. R2D2 has made a positive transition to kindergarten. He is reading and writing volitionally.

**Summary**

In this study, I sought to understand the culture of children who, with a diagnosis of language disorder, used playful experiences during creative writing to interact with print through mediated print experiences. I understand the knowledge I gained was seen through my eyes, subjectivity, experiences, and knowledge base. My interpretation may not be the same as another’s interpretation. I attempted to represent the participants fully when possible while also protecting their anonymity. Through the knowledge I have gained and the resulting publication process, I hope others will apply these findings so more children can be positively impacted through opportunities for playful writing and print experiences in their preschool classrooms.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Title: The Language and Literacy Abilities of Preschool Children Identified with Specific Language Impairment: The Impact of Using Print Awareness Strategies through Authentic Student-Generated Texts

Principal Investigator: Catherine Sanderson

Parent Questionnaire:

1. How do you describe your child’s language development?

2. How do you describe your child’s current interaction with books?

3. How do you describe your child’s current interaction with drawing/writing?

4. How do you describe your child’s current interaction with writing alphabetic letters?

5. How do you describe your child’s current interaction when you and your child talk about print
   a. in books?
   b. in commercials?
   c. on commercial materials such as cereal boxes, clothing, cartoons, movies, and signage?

6. How do you describe your child’s development in the use of writing tools, like markers, pencils, crayons, and paints?

7. How do you describe your child’s current level of literacy
   a. when listening to books?
   b. when looking at books alone?
   c. when talking about illustrations in books with you?
   d. when talking about the words in books?
   e. when attempting to write?
Título: Las habilidades de lenguaje y alfabetización de niños preescolares identificados con trastorno específico del lenguaje: El Impacto del empleo de estrategias de sensibilización de impresión a través de textos generados por estudiantes auténticos

Investigadora: Catherine Sanderson

Cuestionario para padres:

1. ¿Cómo se describe el desarrollo del lenguaje de su hijo?

2. ¿Cómo se describe la interacción actual de su hijo con los libros?

3. ¿Cómo se describe la interacción actual de su hijo con el dibujo / escritura?

4. ¿Cómo se describe la interacción actual de su hijo con la escritura de cartas?

5. ¿Cómo se describe la interacción actual de su hijo cuando usted y su hijo hablan de la impresión
   a. ¿en libros?
   b. ¿en comerciales?
   c. ¿en los materiales comerciales, tales como cajas de cereales, ropa, dibujos animados, películas y señalización?

6. ¿Cómo se describe el desarrollo de su hijo en el uso de herramientas de escritura, como marcadores, lápices, lápices de colores, pinturas?

7. ¿Cómo describe el nivel actual de la alfabetización de su hijo?
   a. ¿al escuchar libros?
   b. ¿cuando mira a libros por sí solos?
   c. ¿cuando habla de las ilustraciones de los libros con usted?
   d. ¿cuando habla de las palabras en los libros
   e. ¿cuando intenta escribir?
APPENDIX B

CHILD PARTICIPATION FORMS

Dear Parent,

I am a student in the language and literacy department in the School of Education at the University of South Carolina. As a child identified language needs, your child and others are invited to participate in a study summarizing children’s interactions with their journals when print concepts are acknowledged. The research project is to fulfill my degree requirements as a component of EDTE 899-Dissertation under the direction of Lucy Spence, Ph.D.

Your child will be pre- and post-assessed using the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening for Preschool (Invernizzi, Meier, Sullivan, & Swank, 2004) and the Sentence Repetition subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Preschool (Semel, Wiig, & Secord, 2004).

All children in the study will receive a personal journal and writing tools to be kept at school for daily use during a 15 minute journal time for a 15 week segment. I will keep hand-written notes on the other days to document your child’s involvement. Since this is a study to show if a child’s journal can be used to impact reading development, I will send copies of journal entries home for your child to share with you. Audio-recordings and digital-video recordings will be used twice weekly. Your child will wear a necklace microphone during recording which may be bothersome but will allow your child to be free to move eliminating the risks associated with small children being required to sit for video-taping. Risks may include writing on their hands and clothing. I will offer a clean-up break after to clean hands and clothing.

Confidentiality will be protected. After the study is finished, the recordings and assessment results will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results will be presented during my dissertation defense, made public through archives, and may be presented at professional meetings, but your child’s identity will never be revealed by me. However, understand, with young children, there is a possibility of children talking about other children in the group.

Your child is under no obligation to participate nor will you or your child experience negative consequences if you withdraw from the research study. Your child’s anticipated payment is a wire-bound journal accompanied by writing utensils to continue using journal writing after the study is finished.
You may contact me with questions by phone (843-610-1124) or e-mail at sande248@email.sc.edu. You may contact my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Lucy Spence at SPENCE2@mailbox.sc.edu if you have further questions. Lastly, a staff member at the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-7095 is available if you have any questions about your rights, or your child’s rights, as a research participant.

With kind regards,

Catherine Sanderson, M.Ed., M.C.D.-CCC/SLP, NBPT-Literacy, PhD Candidate
Querido Padre/Madre,

Soy un estudiante de doctorado en el departamento de idiomas y alfabetización en el campus de la Escuela de Educación de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur-Columbia. Se invita a su hijo a participar en un estudio de tesis que resume las experiencias de la utilización de diarios construidos por los estudiantes con los conceptos de impresión. El proyecto de investigación es para cumplir mis requisitos de grado como un componente de EDTE 899-Tesis bajo la dirección de Lucy Spence, Ph.D.


Su hijo recibirá un diario y utensilios de escritura en la escuela. La escritura de un diario y discusión requieren aproximadamente 15 minutos. Tanto una grabación digital de audio como una grabación de video digital capturarán la discusión de los estudiantes para ayudar a determinar los efectos de la escritura del diario, cuando se incorporen los conceptos de impresión. El uso de un Swivl, una plataforma robótica para el seguimiento y la captura de video, se utiliza para asegurar que su hijo, durante la grabación, no esté comprometido, libre de moverse en la silla, de pie, si así lo desea, o pasar de estudiante a estudiante para ofrecer ayuda. Yo quisiera su retroalimentación acerca del progreso de su hijo al final así que voy a enviar copias de entradas del diario a usted para que usted y su hijo las discutan juntos. Formación relacionada con las técnicas de discusión será proporcionada en persona.

Este es un estudio de tesis que revela el impacto de los diarios creados por los estudiantes en el desarrollo de la lectura de los niños. Si bien se mantendrá la confidencialidad, pequeños grupos de niños estarán colaborando por lo que siempre hay la posibilidad de que un niño discuta con otros niños como parte de la experiencia. Tras el estudio, las grabaciones y resultados de la evaluación se mantendrán en un lugar seguro en la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Los resultados serán presentados durante la defensa de mi tesis, hechos públicos a través de los archivos de tesis, y se podrán presentar en reuniones profesionales, pero la identidad de su hijo nunca será revelada.

Su hijo no tiene ninguna obligación de participar ni usted o su hijo experimentarán consecuencias negativas si se retira del estudio de investigación. El pago anticipado de su hijo es un nuevo diario, utensilios de escritura, y una tarjeta de regalo de $10.00.

Usted puede ponerse en contacto conmigo con preguntas por teléfono (843-610-1124) o por correo electrónico a sande248@email.sc.edu. Puede ponerse en contacto con mi asesora y jefe de tesis, Dr. Lucy Spence en SPENCE2@mailbox.sc.edu si tiene más preguntas. Por último, un miembro del personal de la Universidad de la Oficina de Cumplimiento de Investigación (803) 777-7095) de Carolina del Sur estará disponible si tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos o los derechos de su hijo, como un participante en la investigación.
Gracias por su interés en este estudio tesis.

Atentamente,

Catherine Sanderson, M.Ed., M.C.D.-CCC/SLP, NBPT- Alfabetización, candidato a doctorando
Florence, South Carolina 29501
sande248@email.sc.edu
APPENDIX C

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Study Title: The Language and Literacy Abilities of Children Identified with Specific Language Impairment: The Impact of Using Print Awareness Strategies through Authentic Student-generated Texts

I have read the information contained in the letter about the above titled study, which described what my child will be asked to do if s/he wants to participate in the study and

_________Yes—I give permission for my child to participate in the study including permission for the pre- and post-testing to determine the impact of the research treatment.

_________No—I do not give permission for my child to participate in the study.

Child’s Name ___________________________________ Birthdate____________

Race/Ethnicity_____________________________ Gender______________

_________________________________________ ______________________
Parent Signature Date

_________________________________________ ______________________
Parent Signature Date
Título del estudio: las habilidades de lenguaje y alfabetización de los niños identificados con Deterioro específico del lenguaje: el impacto del uso de estrategias de conocimiento de la escritura a través de textos auténticos generados por los estudiantes.

He leído la información contenida en la carta sobre el estudio titulado anteriormente, que describe lo que se le pedirá a mi hijo que haga si él (ella) quiere participar en el estudio y

_________ Sí, doy permiso para que mi hijo participe en el estudio, incluido el permiso para las pruebas previas y posteriores para determinar el impacto del tratamiento de investigación.

_________ No, no doy permiso para que mi hijo participe en el estudio.

Nombre del niño ______________________________________ Fecha de nacimiento ____________

Raza / origen étnico ____________________________ Género ________________

Fecha de firma del padre ______________________________________________________________________

Fecha de firma del padre ______________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D

MEDIA RELEASE FORMS

As part of this project we will gather photos, audio, and/or video recordings of your child. We are asking your permission to share photographs and recordings with people who are not part of this research team. Images may be helpful for teaching, presentation, and publication purposes with your understanding that your child’s identity will be protected through coverings, photo effects, and other masking methods.

Please indicate below, by initialing, your consent to each type of research use. These choices are up to you. We will only use the records in the way(s) that you allow us. Understand your child’s name will not be used and your child’s image will not be included.

1. The photographs/recordings can be included in publications and presentations about this research study that are seen by other researchers and by the general public.

   Photo __________ Audio _________ Video _________
   initials initials initials

2. The photographs/recordings can be stored indefinitely in an archive/stimulus set that will be available to other researchers for use in their research studies, including showing the photographs/recordings to participants in other research studies.

   Photo __________ Audio _________ Video _________
   initials initials initials

3. The records can be shown in classrooms to students.

   Photo __________ Audio _________ Video _________
   initials initials initials

I have read this form and give my consent for use of the records as indicated above for my child.

Child______________________________

Parent Signature _______________________________ Date ________________

Parent Signature _______________________________ Date ________________
Como parte de este proyecto haremos fotografías, grabaciones de audio y/o video de su hijo, mientras que en participa en la investigación. Estamos pidiendo su permiso para compartir esas fotografías/grabaciones con personas que no sean parte de este equipo de investigación, en las formas que se describen a continuación. Por favor, indique a continuación sus iniciales en qué usos de estos registros se autoriza la utilización de la investigación. Estas opciones son totalmente suyas. Sólo utilizaremos los registros en la forma(s) que esté de acuerdo para que nosotros utilicemos. En cualquier uso de estos registros, no se incluirán el nombre o imagen de su hijo.

1. Las fotografías/grabaciones pueden ser incluidas en las publicaciones y presentaciones sobre este estudio de investigación que son vistos por otros investigadores y el público en general.

   Foto __________ Audio __________ Video __________
   iniciales     iniciales     iniciales

2. Las fotografías/grabaciones se pueden almacenar indefinidamente en un conjunto de archivos/estímulo que estará a disposición de otros investigadores para su uso en sus estudios de investigación, incluyendo mostrando las fotografías/grabaciones a los participantes en otros estudios de investigación.

   Foto __________ Audio __________ Video __________
   iniciales     iniciales     iniciales

3. Los registros se pueden mostrar en las aulas a los estudiantes.

   Foto __________ Audio __________ Video __________
   iniciales     iniciales     iniciales

He leído este formulario y doy mi consentimiento para el uso de los registros como se ha indicado anteriormente para mi hijo.

Niño______________________________
Firma del padre/madre _________________________________ Fecha __________________
APPENDIX E

PARENT PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT FORMS

Dear Participant,

I am Catherine Sanderson, a doctoral student in the language and literacy department in the School of Education at the University of South Carolina-Columbia campus. You have been invited to participate in research to identify the impact of using children’s journals with a focus on print concepts. The research project that I am completing is to fulfil my degree requirements as a component of EDTE 899-Dissertation under the direction of Lucy Spence, Ph.D.

I will provide you with seven interview questions to answer about your child’s experiences with print concepts. The time needed for the interview should be between thirty minutes to one hour. Since this is a dissertation study, I desire your answers to the questions and any additional questions or comments you can think of to add to our discussion.

I will maintain your confidentiality. Once your non-identifiable interview responses have been collected, I will store the responses in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results of this study will be made public and may be presented at professional meetings, but your identity will never be revealed.

The compensation for your time and input is a $10.00 gift card for each interview you complete. I anticipate two interviews will be sufficient to gather the data needed. You are under no obligation to participate nor will you experience negative consequences if you withdraw from the research study.

You may contact me with questions by phone (843-610-1124) or e-mail at sande248@email.sc.edu. For further questions or concerns, you may contact my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Lucy Spence at SPENCE2@mailbox.sc.edu. Finally, a staff member at the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-7095) is available if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Thank you for your interest in this dissertation study.

With kind regards,
Catherine Sanderson, M.Ed., M.C.D.-CCC/SLP, NBPT-Literacy, PhD candidate
Florence, South Carolina 29501
sande248@email.sc.edu
Querido participante,

Soy Catalina Sanderson, un estudiante de doctorado en el departamento de idiomas y alfabetización en la Escuela de Educación de la Universidad de Carolina del Sur del campus-Columbia. Se le ha invitado a participar en un estudio de tesis que resume las experiencias de los Niños En Edad Preescolar Adquiriendo Habilidades Del Lenguaje (PALS) en el salón de clase que se relacionan con el impacto de la utilización de diarios hechos por los estudiantes para influir en el cambio de conocimiento de los niños de los conceptos de impresión. El proyecto de investigación que estoy llenando es para cumplir mis requisitos de grado como un componente de EDTE 899-Tésis bajo la dirección de Lucy Spence, Ph.D.

Usted recibirá siete preguntas de la entrevista semiestructurada para animar a su retroalimentación destacando las experiencias de su hijo con la escritura de un diario en el aula PALS. Su tiempo para la entrevista debería requerir entre treinta minutos y una hora. Las preguntas están dirigidas a determinar el impacto de la escritura del diario cuando las referencias a los conceptos de impresión se incorporen en los maestros y en las discusiones diádicas entre estudiantes o padres e hijos. Dado que este es un estudio de tesis, quiero su opinión acerca de las preguntas y cualquier pregunta o comentarios adicionales relacionados con nuestra discusión.

Se mantendrá su confidencialidad. Una vez que se hayan recolectados sus respuestas de la entrevista no identificables, las respuestas serán almacenadas en un lugar seguro en la Universidad de Carolina del Sur. Este es un estudio de tesis que revelará las actitudes de los padres hacia el desarrollo de la lectura de sus hijos cuando el hogar y la escuela colaboran. Los resultados de este estudio se harán públicos y se pueden presentar en reuniones profesionales, pero su identidad no será revelada.

El pago anticipado por su retroalimentación es una tarjeta de regalo de $10.00 por cada entrevista completada. Se anticipa que dos entrevistas serán suficientes para reunir los datos necesarios.

Usted no está bajo ninguna obligación de participar ni va a experimentar consecuencias negativas si se retira del estudio de investigación.

Puede ponerse en contacto conmigo con preguntas por teléfono (843-610-1124) o por correo electrónico en sande248@email.sc.edu. Si tiene más preguntas o inquietudes, puede comunicarse con mi asesor de tesis y presidenta en SPENCE2@mailbox.sc.edu. Por último, un miembro del personal de la Universidad de la Oficina de Cumplimiento de Investigación de Carolina del Sur (803) 777-7095) está disponible si tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante en la investigación.

Gracias por su interés en este estudio tesis.

Atentamente, Catherine Sanderson, M.Ed., M.C.D.-CCC/SLP, NBPT- Alfabetización, estudiante de doctorado
APPENDIX F

PARENT INTERVIEW PERMISSION FORMS

____ I give permission for the interviews with the understanding that my confidentiality and identity will be protected. I know I can choose a replacement name (pseudonym) to protect my and my child’s identity. I understand I will receive a small compensation for my time and participation. I understand documents will be housed at the University of South Carolina in a secure location.

____ I do not give permission for the interviews.

Parent______________________________ Date_______

Parent______________________________ Date_______
Doy permiso para las entrevistas con el entendimiento de que mi confidencialidad e identidad estarán protegidas. Sé que puedo elegir un nombre de reemplazo (seudónimo) para proteger mi identidad y la de mi hijo. Entiendo que recibirá una pequeña compensación por mi tiempo y participación. Entiendo que los documentos estarán alojados en la Universidad de Carolina del Sur en un lugar seguro.

No doy permiso para las entrevistas.

Padre______________________________ Fecha__________

Padre______________________________ Fecha__________
## APPENDIX G

### DECISION MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0- Never, 1- Rarely, 2- Sometimes, 3- About half the time, 4- Frequently, 5- Always</th>
<th>Name steps to mitigate the issues as needed as needed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child has writing utensils ready at the beginning of journal writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child keeps the writing utensils usable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child quickly develops ideas for writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child talks to others prior to engaging in journal writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child talks to others during the journal engagement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child talks with others about others’ journal entries commenting about illustrations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child talks with others about others’ journal entries commenting about words/invented spelling.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is eager to share the journal entry with others within the group dyad or triad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is eager to share the journal in large group setting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is eager to take the journal entries home to share with parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: