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This qualitative study examined the nature of preschoolers' composing and processes in a Head Start classroom, prioritizing children's intrinsic motivation to engage in a project-like composing activity. Eighteen three- to five-year-old students participated. Data were collected across 33 classroom visits over a 3-month period. Primary data were 106 audio-video recordings of children working on and reading picture books they made, routine observations, and audio recordings of conversations around children's literature read alouds by the classroom teacher. Analysis yielded the following properties of engaged composing: (a) children's book content is inspired by multiple influences, (b) children's composing is multimodal, and (c) children's composing represents a range of literacy skills and knowledge. Analysis also suggested children employed the following writing process when they were engaged: (a) children teach and learn from their peers, and (b) children's composing is intentional, strategic, and supported by process talk. Results indicate that studying engaged activity expands our notions of children's compositional development among preschoolers and offers insights into the role peers and adult feedback play in children's engaged composing processes. Future research will help to further illuminate the full range of benefits of engagement in socially situated writing in early childhood classrooms.

Keywords: writing, early literacy, engagement, composing, children's literature

PRIORITIZING ENGAGEMENT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXAMINING THE NATURE OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S COMPOSING AND PROCESSES

by

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Dr. Gay Ivey
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the children I have taught and worked with over the years. I have learned more from all of you than you'll ever know.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

Literacy engagement can be viewed as a hub for meaningful activity and development. It catalyzes both strategic behavior (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Guthrie et al., 2012) and shifts in students' motivations and agency (Ivey & Johnston, 2015; Miller et al., 2021), and it has the potential to improve not only literacy achievement (Guthrie et al., 2012) but also children's socio-emotional lives (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Examining the composing and processes of young children when they are engaged in writing holds much promise for broadening our notions of how preschoolers might accelerate their literacy development while simultaneously developing their interests, motivations, and purposes for reading and writing. For young children, in particular, writing is an especially high-leverage activity because it provides opportunities for them to learn foundational knowledge about print, letters, sounds, and text genres while also making it possible for them to make decisions about writing and to develop positive literate identities (Rowe, 2018).

To this point, though, research has yet to capture the broader potential of either of these two areas in the case of preschool children, much less in a study that combines both. Engagement as a multi-dimensional construct that simultaneously invokes affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004), as well as agentic possibilities for individuals (Reeve, 2013), has rarely been studied among young children acquiring literacy. Few related studies of young children forefront the phenomenon of literacy engagement, but instead, focus on motivational constructs that serve as potential precursors to behavioral engagement (e.g., Mata, 2011; Morgan et al., 2008; Walgermo et al., 2018) and behavioral engagement, when it is included, is simply a variable in relationship to conventional achievement (e.g., Bohlmann & Downer, 2016; Guo, et

al., 2014;Vaknin-Nusbaum et al., 2018). Also, these correlational and predictive studies focus explicitly on reading and, more specifically, on rudimentary sound and print skills. What is missing is research that hovers over young children's engagement, not viewed as a purely behavioral construct but instead with potential cognitive, emotional, and social properties that are not readily observable. For instance, Lysaker and Alicea (2017), zooming in on the engagement of a kindergartner reading a wordless picture book, documented complex comprehension processes, including the activation of the social imagination to develop relationships with characters and to expand his comprehension.

The potential of writing for preschool children's literacy development, though, is not yet fully realized for several reasons. Although basic writing materials are typically available in preschool classrooms, students spend little time actually writing (Gerde et al., 2015; Pelatti et al., 2014; Quinn et al., 2021; Zhang, et al., 2015). When they do write, their efforts are limited to either technical activities such as letter formation, copying, and name writing (Bingham, Quinn, & Gerde, 2017; Gerde et al., 2015; Pelatti et al., 2014) or functional writing, such as writing down food orders in a game of restaurant with peers during center time (Gerde et al., 2015) rather than complex meaning-making projects that make sustained engagement possible. Furthermore, some teacher interactions around writing in preschool might hinder rather than help expand children's growth and sense of agency in writing, for instance, assisting children with hand-over-hand writing (Gerde et al., 2015) or transcribing and spelling words for children (Bingham et al., 2017; Quinn et al., 2021). Currently, we lack empirical research that documents the multiple consequences of engagement with younger children when writing, and we have yet to empirically examine a unifying writing experience that offers the possibility of seeing these dimensions of engagement in a single cohesive, meaning-focused literate event.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine and document the full range of what preschoolers do when they are engaged in composing. More specifically, this study is a descriptive and naturalistic qualitative study that employs a grounded theory approach to investigate preschoolers' composing and their 'in the moment' processes in a setting in which the teacher has intentionally arranged for children to be engaged in project-like writing that both inspires and requires motivated strategic action, sustained attention, and social interaction. This study expands our current body of literature on young children's composing by examining children's composing and processes when they are engaged. Additionally, conversations around high-interest picture books during shared reading times with the teacher were examined to provide insights into how social participation around children's literature and how conversations with others impact how and what children try out in their writing when invited to compose, and how the social interaction shapes the individual writers, as well. The primary research question for this study is:

What is the nature of preschool children's composing and processes when they are engaged?

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into five chapters. Following this introduction, in which I have introduced the rationale for my research and an overview of the study, I describe, in Chapter 2, the theoretical lenses through which I view and understand literacy practices of children's composing and processes. Chapter 2 will also include a review of existing empirical literature that frames my research question. Chapter 3 describes the study's methodology, providing a rationale for a grounded theory approach before introducing a description of the

research site, the classroom context, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Chapter 4 includes the results and findings of my study. I conclude the dissertation in Chapter 5 with a discussion of overarching themes and grounded theory as well as implications for research, practice, and policy.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE & LITERATURE REVIEW

In the first section of this chapter, I explain the multiple theoretical lenses through which this study is conceptualized, and in the second section, I describe the existing bodies of empirical research that frame my research question, followed by an explanation of what gaps the present study aims to fill.

Theoretical Perspectives

Theory should be useful in accomplishing our ultimate goals in research and productively enhance personal and societal well-being and literacy in actual practice (Reinking & Yaden, 2021; Unrau et al., 2019). In this study, I examine young children's composing and processes through lenses offered by sociocultural and student engagement theories and theories about young children's writing, with the ultimate goal of productively theorizing what and how young children compose in an authentic classroom setting. First, I assume a view of literacy as a sociocultural enterprise (Vygotsky, 1978) in which individual development is shaped by and shaping of the social interactions in which learning occurs. Second, although conceptualizations of literacy engagement vary (Hruby et al., 2016), I view engagement as a multi-faceted phenomenon that simultaneously invokes affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004), as well as agentic possibilities for individuals (Reeve, 2013). However, I view literacy engagement not just as a cognitive-oriented, individual experience but one that is inseparably social and emotional, both inside and outside of texts (Ivey & Johnston, 2013).

Prior to elaborating on these theoretical perspectives, it is important to explain the use of "composing" in this study rather than simply "writing." The definition of *composing* in this study is borrowed from the work of Ray and Glover (2008), in which they define composing, or compositional writing, as project-like in nature, that requires writers to think deeply about

purposes, audience, word choice, presentation, planning, craft, tone, and ideas. Additionally, it requires one to bring meaning to the page and to think deeply about the writing itself, unlike functional writing that serves a purpose for the task at hand (i.e., a grocery list that one throws out when it no longer has a purpose). Additionally, to expand their definition of composing, seminal research has demonstrated the connections between writing and other sign systems such as talk, drawing, body language, gesture, and/or dramatic play (Dyson, 1985; Harste et al.,1984; Rowe, 2019; Wohlwend, 2009). Therefore, composing is not limited to what is on the page; rather, print and other sign systems are interwoven to make meaning, requiring the young writer to be present to accurately represent their own writing.

Children's Composing Through a Sociocultural Lens

As others have noted, children's literacy development, from sociocultural perspectives, is not the product of instruction but instead, through interactions with others, such as teachers, peers, and caregivers (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010; Lysaker et al., 2010; Dyson, 2003). Vygotsky (1978) postulated that socially meaningful activity and interactions with others play a critical role in learning and human development as "children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p.88). In this study, I assume that literacy learning is not solely an "in head" phenomenon, rather it is shaped by, and shaping of the interaction's children have with others in social environments. Peer interaction, for example, appears to play a role in children's construction and testing of hypotheses of print (Rowe, 2008) and writing processes (Kissel et al, 2011). When socially interactive with peers during the act of composing, children also appear to grasp why they might write in the first place, who the intended audience might be (e.g., Dyson, 1985; Wohlwend, 2009), and how they might use text to construct social identity affiliations with their peers and accept or negotiate how others view them (Dyson, 2018).

Although peer interaction plays an important role in children's literacy learning, through social participation with adults or knowledgeable others, "children can imitate a variety of actions that go well beyond the limits of their own capabilities… children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under the guidance of adults" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.88). However, this only becomes possible when adults recognize, respect, and encourage children's approximations and provide feedback that appropriately "nudges" children along in their capabilities. Vygotsky would say this "nudging" is best when it is proximal or hits within one's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, the types of social interaction and the feedback loop received must be intentional and help children do and understand a little more than they can or understand by themselves at that moment. In the case of young children, like the focus of this present study, if adults narrowly focus on writing development as mere transcription skills (e.g., spelling and handwriting), they would run the risk of potentially offering feedback that pushes three-, four- and five- year old's way beyond their zones of proximal development. For instance, a child who scribbles as a way to represent meaning on the page–having not yet developed letter knowledge or the alphabetic principle–would be confused and frustrated if required to write words that mirror conventional adult writing.

I view composing as a multidimensional construct which includes a variety of social semiotics as a key component of young children's composing. For Vygotsky (1978), gesture in particular, "is the initial visual sign that contains the children's future writing as an acorn contains a future oak" (p.107). He would argue that when composing is positioned as a socially situated event, young children are not actually separate from their writing, in fact, the writing process includes the use of other communication systems such as talk, drawing, body language, and, of course, gesture (Vygotsky, 1978; Rowe, 2019; Kress, 1998). In this study, I assume,

composing is not limited to what is on the page; instead, print, and other communication systems are intertwined to make meaning (Dyson, 1986, 1989). Moreover, composing is maximized when done in natural settings, such as children's play, where composing is "cultivated rather than imposed" (Vygotsky, p.118) and allows for an authentic, motivating, and comfortable context (Lysaker et al., 2010). For the purposes of this study, I assume that writing as a form of play is part of the process and the act of writing (Wohlwend, 2009). Children appear to use play as a way to express their interests and personal experiences, try out different literate identities, or ways to make connections to text that far exceed the page in front of them (Dyson, 2003, 2008; Lysaker et al., 2010). For example, when children choose topics and interact with peers simultaneously, young children's writing purposes and ideas are influenced by play and peers' interests (Kissel et al., 2011). In sum, in this study, I assume when young children participate in social writing events, composing serves as a multimodal social meaning-making enterprise in which writing, and writers are shaped by and shaping of the interactions, experiences, and conversations with others.

Young Children's Composing Through an Engagement Lens

I also draw from theoretical understandings and research that specifically name engagement or engagement-related constructs (e.g., motivation) and the conditions under which engagement might occur. I view engagement as a meta-construct that incorporates three inseparable components: affective (positive emotions towards activities or individuals in those activities), behavioral (effort, attention, and persistence), and cognitive dimensions (student strategies and thinking) (Fredricks et al., 2004), as well as agentic possibilities for individuals (Reeve, 2013). I refer to agentic engagement as not just the "students' contributions into the flow of instruction but also as an ongoing series of dialectical transactions between student and

teacher" (Reeve, 2013, p. 580). However, I also assume and view literacy engagement not just as a cognitive-oriented, individual experience but one that is inseparably social and emotional, which, I assume, is central to the nature of being engaged (Ivey & Johnston, 2013).

While less is known about what becomes possible when young children appear to be behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively engaged in composing, I draw from theories in related areas: (a) research with older students in which literacy engagement is viewed as a multidimensional construct involving the interplay of, at least, affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions, and (b) research involving young children who might have appeared to be behaviorally, cognitively and affectively engaged in literacy, but in which engagement was not the focus of the initial study. First, research on older readers, particularly which includes not just reader-text relationships, but also social interactions among students as they talk through and about their reading, suggests expansive possibilities that are desirable for young children, including the catalyzing of strategic behaviors (Guthrie et al., 2012; Ivey & Johnston, 2013), and complex and interacting relational, emotional, and philosophical activity in and around reading (Ivey & Johnston, 2013) as well as shifts in classroom culture—including the activity of teaching--connected to students' motivations and agency (Ivey & Johnston, 2015; Miller et al., 2021). Second, since literacy engagement, as I am viewing it, was difficult to find in studies of young children, I am guided by research involving children who might have appeared behaviorally, cognitively, and affectively engaged in literacy, but where the focus of the analysis was on something other than engagement, for instance, identity explorations during play-related literacies (e.g., Wohlwend, 2009) or children's agentic use of popular cultural material in school literacy activities (Dyson, 2003).

While this multidimensional view of engagement provides a rich account for how I define and view children engaged during composing, this view of engagement is not possible without conditions under which engagement is likely to occur. For example, engaged reading is enriched in classrooms that have the following: autonomy support (e.g., choice), interesting texts, strategy instruction, collaboration opportunities, and teacher involvement (Guthrie et al., 2012; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000). With younger children, I assume, these conditions would also be necessary for children to become engaged in writing.

In the present study, I turned to motivational theories to help theorize and envision how to arrange for students to be engaged in composing in the first place. Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn (2009) define engagement as a manifestation of motivated action. In fact, many factors shape student motivation, such as self-efficacy, perceived competence, and goals (Schunk, 2003; Weiner, 2005). For the present study, I turn to Self-determination theory, specifically, which prioritizes the importance of intrinsic motivation, and the ways social contextual features facilitate and support intrinsic motivation to engage in a task (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000), in this case, to help children become engaged in composing. Self-determination theory identifies three human needs that must be met in the social contexts or activities in which children participate: a sense of autonomy, a sense of competence, and a sense of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy refers to self-endorsed behavior where one has a choice in activities that serve their interests and help accomplish their personal goals (Assor, 2012). For example, students who have a sense of autonomy in school are more engaged, satisfied, achieve higher, and are afforded to further their learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Patrick et al., 1993). In addition to having a choice in activities, students need to be immersed in an autonomy-supportive environment that allows for students'

freedom to activate their inner motivation that serves their goals and interests (Reeve, 2006). Competence refers to feeling effective in one's environment and a sense of mastery at things that are important to an individual. Competence has been studied as perceptions of control (Bandura, 1997; Dweck & Molden, 2005). For example, perceptions of self-efficacy, academics, and ability are predictors of student engagement, performance, and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Dweck & Molden, 2005; Schunk & Pajares, 2005; Weiner, 2005). Lastly, relatedness refers to feeling cared for in a community where what they have to say matters to others.

In the case of young children, existing research (e.g., Gutman & Sulzby, 1999; Turner, 1995) suggests that autonomy support is a good start, particularly in arranging for young children to have choices. However, children need not just the option to choose but, per self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), options that are relevant to their interests and goals, not too difficult, and congruent with their culture (Katz & Assor, 2007). As it stands, preschoolers are not likely to choose writing over other available activities (e.g., Quinn et al., 2021), and they are especially disinterested in traditional writing activities such as copying and handwriting practice (Zhang & Quinn, 2020). To take writing seriously, young children, like most of us, need to see how it serves their purposes (Barratt-Pugh et al, 2021), need to believe that it is within their reach, and need to feel like they are accepted and valued in the community in which it happens. Therefore, a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs to be addressed simultaneously. However, getting to choose what to write, and fulfilling the need for autonomy, has little effect in a situation where a child is worried because he believes he is required to write letters correctly–a skill he is still developing. Likewise, a child with stronger competence in letter knowledge but who is feeling disconnected and anxious around his classmates or teacher might struggle to focus his attention on a substantial writing project. Therefore, I assume that contexts

that enable children to become engaged must cultivate a classroom environment that supports intrinsic motivation at its fullest and supports basic human needs to be met.

Summary

Sociocultural perspectives and theories of engagement, as I have defined for this study, really go hand in hand and cannot be viewed as separate from each other. In fact, engagement, as I view it, is inherently social, and without social interaction or collaboration with others, engagement will not be optimal. Sociocultural perspectives and engagement theories shift the unit of analysis from the children's writing behaviors to a study of the children's interaction with their peers and materials that are inseparable from the writer and composing itself. Engagement is fundamentally social, and the idea that social activity is "central to the nature of engaged reading" (Ivey & Johnston, 2013), might also be true for young children's composing. Vygotsky theorized that writing should be meaningful for young children and that "an intrinsic need should be aroused in them, and that writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life" (p.118). From a lens of engagement, children situated in an intrinsically motivating and socially active classroom will have opportunities to write for meaningful reasons. In this study I asked, *what is the nature of preschool children's composing and processes when they are engaged?*

Literature Review

This study is framed by research in the following areas: (a) the nature of young children's writing, (b) research on what children notice and learn about print through writing, (c) research on the roles of writing in the broader lives of young children, and (d) making books as a meaning-making enterprise.

Nature of Young Children's Composing

For over half a century, it has been well documented that reading and writing development occurs way before formal schooling since children learn about reading and writing in their everyday social literate environments (Clay, 1991; Harste et al., 1984; Sulzby & Teale, 1985). Decades ago, we learned that children's initial marks on the page do, in fact, carry meaning and that we should pay close attention to what children do, as it gives us insight as to what they know about reading and writing. Harste and Colleagues (1984) discovered that what looked like "scribbles" are, in fact, "organized and systematic reflections of decisions" (p. 33) children make about the written language. While seminal research demonstrates that children understand that the marks, they make represent meaningful messages (Clay, 1975), researchers (e.g., Dyson, 1985; Harste et al., 1984) have expanded our body of literature examining the connections between writing and other sign systems such as talk, drawing, body language, gesture, and dramatic play (Dyson, 2003; Rowe, 2019). Most recently, Rowe (2019) found that children use objects, such as pens, body posture, and talk, as an initial form of meaningful participation in writing activities with adults. Similarly, Dyson (2008) noted that while kindergartners participated in composing events with peers, children's meaning-making extended far beyond the writing and drawing located on the page in front of them. For example, children used sound effects to elaborate on objects represented in their pictures or dramatic re-enactments of sports events to further express meaning (Dyson, 2008). When young children participate in social writing events, composing serves as a multimodal meaning-making enterprise, which requires researchers to observe the social interaction in addition to what the child records on their paper. Less known is how children use other meaning-making communication systems when they are engaged, rather than merely compliant. In the case of both studies mentioned above

(e.g., Dyson, 2008; Rowe, 2019), the writing event itself was controlled, where children wrote in response to a photo caption (Rowe, 2019) or were prompted to respond to a question in their daily journals (Dyson, 2008). Not yet fully understood is how the use of social semiotics might impact the meaning-making process when children are invited to write for meaningful reasons and where children have opportunities to write in authentic conditions that are not externally controlled.

Research on What Children Notice and Learn about Print Through Writing

Although studies of preschool children voluntarily engaged in writing meaningfully for sustained periods are rare, research provides useful evidence of what preschool children, well before formal instruction, notice and learn about print through writing. For instance, they learn that it is confined to the boundaries of the page, that they can revisit and revise their writing, and that their attempts are social contracts to participate as writers (Rowe, 2008). While their writing progresses from scribbles to more conventional forms (Sulzby & Teale, 1985), they also begin to generate their own topics and ideas for composing (Kissel et al., 2011). For example, Kissel and colleagues (2011) documented that four-year-olds revise their own work to respond to their classmates' interests and develop understandings about choosing a topic, generating ideas, and genre-specific organization when participating in daily writing time with their peers.

Additionally, studies confirm that when preschool children have opportunities to write their own messages, they form and test out their knowledge about print concepts and traditional conventions (Harste et al, 1984). For example, Rowe and Wilson's (2015) study observing ways children approached an open-ended composing task, which required children to generate and write a short message, confirmed seminal research (Harste et al., 1984) that over time, their writing forms, understandings of directionality, and speech-print matching become more

conventional. Additionally, when given the opportunity to write, children start to figure out the similarities between drawings and writing in terms of representation and differences in how to approach each (Pinto & Incognito, 2022).

However, researchers over the years have focused more on children's code-related skills they produce, and as a result, a considerable amount of quantitative research has examined the influences of cognitive and linguistic skills (e.g., letter identification, phonological awareness) and critical foundational literacy skills (e.g., concepts about print, letter names) to explore the relationship between children's reading and writing abilities (e.g., Drouin & Harmon, 2009; Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2008). After all, theories linking reading and writing for the youngest literacy learners have been around for a while (e.g., Clay, 1975; Teale, 1982). The synchrony of reading/writing is foundational to the lexicon of emergent literacy. The most common associations link invented spelling with learning rudimentary code-related reading skills. The idea that before even starting school, children who write spellings of words begin to associate letters with sounds (Read, 1971; 1975), for instance, is now commonplace, and children's ability to represent most or all of the phonemes in their spellings is related both to their phonological awareness (e.g., Martins & Silvas, 2001) and to the understanding that a printed word, unlike a word in speech, is a distinct unit bound by spaces (Morris, 1983). Bissex (1985), captured a fitting, succinct statement on the intertwining of learning to read and write words when her son, Paul, whose literacy development she documented over time, declared, "Mother, once you know how to spell something, you know how to read it" (p. 5).

For kindergarten children, experimental studies show that invented spellings coupled with teacher feedback improves code-related skills such as phonological awareness, letter names, and letter-sound relationships (Levin & Aram, 2013; Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2008). Although

preschoolers' writing has been studied less in terms of these code-related skills, there is evidence that writing by hand may be linked to increasing letter recognition among preschoolers (Longcamp et al., 2005).

However, most of the quantitative measures of children's literacy abilities are conducted "outside the act of writing" (Rowe & Wilson, 2015, p. 248). In fact, in the studies mentioned above, children were not composing as defined for this present study. For example, most of these studies require the administration of tests, such as pre- and post-spelling tests and measures of phonological and letter knowledge (Martins & Silva, 2001; Ouellette and Sénéchal, 2008) that isolate individual skills (e.g., alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness) and that which do not offer insight into practical writing experiences that can be naturally woven into authentic classroom everyday writing experiences. While this work has enhanced our knowledge of the benefits that invented spellings have on, for example, code-related skills, this research is not directly applicable to a natural classroom setting. Researchers' methodological decisions did not allow children's code-related skills to be tested out and observed in authentic writing experiences; instead, children participated in tasks out of context, with questionable meaningfulness for children. What is missing from the body of literature is an understanding of how these code-related skills are shaped by the social interactions with others in the classroom and what would become possible if children have opportunities to try out their code-based literacy knowledge in authentic writing events rather than isolated tests.

Though basic writing materials are typically available in preschool, students spend little time actually writing (Gerde et al., 2015; Pelatti et al., 2014; Quinn et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2015), and when they do, they are likely encouraged to copy letters and words rather than generate their own marks, spellings, and meanings. Or children are likely to participate in name-

writing activities (Pelatti et al., 2014), which might provide a way for children to increase some foundational literacy skills (e.g., letter knowledge; Bloodgood, 1999; Diamond et al., 2013; Molfese et al., 2006). However, research has documented children, instead, may learn their name as a string of letters (Levin & Ehri, 2009) or by rote memory (Drouin & Harmon, 2009). So, we have incomplete knowledge of the potential writing has for young children to learn about code-related skills not only due to the limited types of instruction or lack thereof in preschool classrooms but also, due to the limited research methods that have been used.

Composing in the Broader Lives of Children

There is also reason to believe that through writing, preschool children begin to explore and expand other dimensions of their lives. The potential, however, is drawn from studies of kindergarten children. For instance, Dyson's (1993) work emphasizes the links between young children's composing and the writing of themselves into social worlds and relationships. She suggested that writing involves a "social voice" that reflects their interests and cultures, which is used to shape or negotiate their identities in the social system of the classroom (Dyson, 2001, 2018). For example, Dyson (2018) documented a kindergartener's ability to negotiate friendships through writing. He used writing to mediate friendships with peers outside of his social circle (e.g., created birthday invitations for girls in his class), as a way to communicate with peers in other classes (wrote letters to another student in a different class), and as a way to secure social activities (e.g., created his field trip form when his mother did not sign off on the official form quick enough). Wohlwend (2009) documented girls exploring identities through writing and play-related literacy activities. Lysaker and colleagues (2010) observed kindergarten children using play during writer's workshop and theorized that the fusion of play with academics provided an authentic, motivating, and comfortable context for writing.

A clear pattern across these studies is the importance of social activity for meaningful and sustained activity that involves writing. Although these studies do not invoke the lens of "engagement," it appears that children were affectively, behaviorally, cognitively, and agentically engaged. This engagement also appears to be linked to not just to writing, its technical dimensions, and processes, but also to other parts of children's lives.

Taken together, existing research suggests that writing for preschoolers is a potentially fertile site both for experimenting with print and sound knowledge and for expanding multiple dimensions of themselves. However, although particular dimensions of children's writing processes and uses have been investigated separately, the research base still lacks a comprehensive look at the full range of phenomena described above, and possibly more, in a unifying activity and within a naturalistic setting.

Making Books as a Meaning-Making Enterprise

Perhaps the closest example can be found not in an empirical study, but in an activity Katie Wood Ray and her colleagues (Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Ray & Glover, 2008) in professional resources written for teachers, call "making books", in which children are provided blank books and writing instruments and simply invited to create what they want. Ray and Glover (2008) explain two important distinctions regarding making books that are essential to how the present study is conceptualized. They first distinguish compositional writing, which is what they suggest is involved in bookmaking, from functional writing. The latter, they explain, includes writing that supports some other activity and that serves no additional purpose beyond accomplishing that activity, for instance, writing a message to someone, making a to-do list, or creating a sign to hang over the toy area. This, in fact, is more akin to the kind of writing that is currently most prevalent in preschool classrooms. In contrast, in compositional writing, such as a

poem, book, or song, the writing itself is the project and product. It requires the writer to bring meaning to a project and make decisions and is more likely to make a person feel like a writer.

The second distinction deals with what would make writing appealing for preschoolers. They suggest making picture books because books are already familiar to preschoolers, whereas "write a story" signals something more abstract. Also, the multiple pages in a book, in contrast to a single sheet of paper, suggests the notion of composition, the expansion, and elaboration of meaning over extended text, and builds stamina for writing for longer periods and over time. Making books nudges children to read like a writer. Being a writer inspires children to consider authors' and illustrators' intentions, how characters feel, and foundational concepts about print, and in turn, invites children to make decisions just like authors and illustrators. Finally, making books also expands avenues for meaning making, because children can use both art and writing to represent their ideas, and young children need a variety of ways to communicate their thinking.

These links between reading books and making books are particularly crucial, because reading is routinely separated from writing in early literacy curricula, and both are separated from speaking and listening, even though these are all connected parts of the same meaning-making process (Johnston, 2019). In general, reading aloud of children's books in a preschool context has multiple positive consequences for nurturing children's literacy development, such as vocabulary growth, (Hadley & Dickinson, 2019; Hindman et al., 2012; Lennox, 2013) and story comprehension (Dickerson & Smith, 1994). Particularly, when children participate in dialogic (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000) and co-constructed conversations (Dickerson & Smith, 1994) which includes attending to characters' feelings, and-the teacher facilitates rather than leads conversations (Dickerson & Smith, 1994). In the case of making books, reading and writing are

seen as complementary activities (Clay, 1991), as the relationship between the two simultaneously supports the development of foundational literacy skills for young children (Harste et al., 1984; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). While, theoretically, reading and writing are known to be reciprocal activities, existing research does not document the full potential of the impact reading and conversations around children's picture books have on both writers and their writing.

Additionally, although research shows how children display traditional print concepts in their writing (e.g., writing left to right, top to bottom) (e.g., Rowe & Wilson, 2015), we know less about how children might notice and use the expanded concepts about print (Hassett, 2006) afforded by exposure to contemporary multimodal picture books. Today, images and words expand each other's meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) in unprecedented ways, and as Hassett (2006) points out, modern children's literature combines graphics, symbols, and nonlinear elements that defy the idea that "concepts about print" is a stable construct. For instance, when speech bubbles and conventional, left-to-right, top-to-bottom text are used on one page or across the double-page spread, there are no hard and fast rules for where to begin reading and where to go next. Additionally, even seemingly straightforward concepts like book handling need tentative and flexible understandings and have been challenged as some contemporary children's books have pages that must be turned from top to bottom rather than side to side. Today's concepts about print differ from that of previous generations, and it is necessary that, from the start, emergent readers' development should be expanded by access to sophisticated multimodal books. In fact, Clay (2004) advised, "Beware of deferring the opportunities for working with complexity until later" (p. 9). However, if we are forward-thinking and aim for children to learn *expanded* concepts about print to support their reading, or more precisely, to

develop an open stance toward how print and images work together, it is possible, in their own composing, this could be a way to extend their meaning-making and perhaps transcend conventional literacy learning.

Extending the Current Body of Literature

Bookmaking as a site for learning about preschoolers' writing and preschoolers as writers makes sense because it is an activity in which young children are likely to become engaged and to be sustained in complex meaning making. Engagement in literacy first requires that children are intrinsically motivated to participate, and in this case, for children to choose to make books. This is especially important since, in most cases, preschoolers are not likely to choose writing as a free-time activity in the classroom (e.g., Quinn et al., 2021). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), children will become motivated to engage when they experience, simultaneously, a sense of autonomy–the feeling that they are pursuing their own valued goals, a sense of competence–the feeling that the task is not beyond their capabilities, and a sense of relatedness–the feeling that they belong socially and that the task at hand is congruent with their cultural identities. A parallel example is Cremin's (2016) study documenting that when adults served as a scribe for children's stories and then invited them to act it out, young children initiated their own writing activities, co-wrote their own stories with friends, and transcribed their peers' stories for dramatization purposes. Children can choose what to make their books about in bookmaking, supporting a sense of autonomy. They are familiar with how books work, and they notice and take up from published books what authors and illustrators do, including using both art and words to represent meaning, supporting a sense of competence.

The sense of relatedness can be supported by encouraging bookmaking as a social practice, which is crucial to young children's engagement with writing. Conversations between

children while composing will support the notion of local social practice, which will also foster a sense of belonging (Dyson, 2003, 2018).

Thus, picture books, particularly contemporary multimodal books that support children's notions of how they might make books and create meaning through multimodal resources, are essential to setting up a context for preschoolers' engaged writing. Making these books easily accessible is crucial because some children might not have access to books otherwise. For instance, Neuman and Celano (2001) found substantial differences between access to print in two low-income communities as contrasted with two middle income communities, and Luo and colleagues (2020) found that in particular, young children from families with low income had limited exposure to narrative picture books at home. Obtaining and making available an abundance of highly engaging, vibrantly illustrated, contemporary picture books to be read and accessed every day is crucial in terms of equipping the children to put their best foot forward in their composing and also in terms of making it possible to observe and document the breadth of what children do when they write.

Summary

Research gives us a good reason to believe that when young children are engaged in composing, the consequences could be far-reaching and transcend multiple dimensions of achievement. However, we do not have empirical research documenting the multiple consequences of engagement, particularly in the context of young children's composing. In order for children to be engaged, research suggests arranging for an autonomy-supportive environment that focuses on intrinsic motivation is necessary. This includes a socially interactive community where children simultaneously feel a sense of belonging and their fundamental human needs are satisfied. In the context of early childhood classrooms, this includes allowing children access to

writing activities that support their needs, interests, and motivations. We have good reason to believe that the social practice of making and reading books with peers, for example, will support children's intrinsic motivation and allow them to put their best foot forward. Existing research suggests that writing in preschool allows children to experiment with print and sound knowledge and expand multiple dimensions of themselves. As it stands, specific dimensions of children's writing processes and uses have been investigated separately, leaving a gap in the current body of literature that neglects to take a comprehensive look at the full range of phenomena described above and possibly more, in a unifying activity and within a naturalistic classroom setting.

However, what becomes possible when children are engaged in composing and its impact on the writer and writing itself, is still unknown. More specifically, it is unknown what the possibilities are for children's composing when they are engaged in a socially situated, cohesive, meaning-focused composing activity. Driven by the theoretical framework described above, current research, and the need to explore what young children do when engaged in composing, the study answers the following research question: *What is the nature of preschool children's composing and processes when they are engaged?*

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

I begin by providing the rationale and theoretical assumptions behind the present study's design. I then explain in detail the researcher's background, research site, participants, classroom context, and the data collection and analysis processes in which findings emerged.

Rationale and Theoretical Assumptions

This study is a descriptive and naturalistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) qualitative study examining the nature of preschoolers' composing and processes when they are engaged in a writing activity. Due to the broad and open nature of the research question, grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is the most appropriate methodology. Grounded theory is ideal for the rigorous and deep exploration of a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), or in this study, necessary to explore and understand the nature of preschoolers' composing, processes and patterns during the act of being engaged in a composing activity.

Reinking and Yaden (2021) suggest that "researchers should connect theory to research designs and to how data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, ideally with a commitment to allowing data to push back against the theory" (p.396). This study rests on the assumptions that writing for young children is a social practice and that engagement in meaningful writing activity will reveal complex literate activity among young children. Yet, grounded theory approaches are designed to build theories and modify existing theories, which requires openness, flexibility, and the ability to be skeptical (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, my theoretical perspectives at the onset of the study served as a "dialectical scaffold" (Dressman, 2007; Reinking & Yaden, 2021), allowing "an opportunity for connecting empirical data to building new, consequential theory or refining existing theory" (Reinking & Yaden, 2021, p.388). Nonetheless, exploring these phenomena in this study align with assumptions guiding grounded theory which include:

a) The need to get out into the field, if one wants to understand what is going on
b) The importance of theory grounded in reality to the development of a discipline
c) The nature of experience and undergoing as continually evolving
d) The active role of persons shaping the worlds they live in
e) An emphasis on change and process, and the variability and complexity of life (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 25).

These assumptions, which are the driving force for the origin of grounded theory, assume that to understand up-close the "multiple factors coming together and interacting in complex and often unanticipated ways" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), it is equally important to understand and experience the natural social environment one is immersed within.

In a classroom context, using a grounded theory approach, young children as participants have helped to further explain a wide range of phenomena (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010; Rowe, 2019; Sipe, 2000). For example, Sipe's (2000) grounded theory study examining children's responses to whole class read alouds of children's literature helped to reveal the "what is" and interpret and generate theory about children's constructions of literacy understandings in a naturalistic setting. In this present study, my first goal was to examine the up-close qualities of children's composing and processes when engaged in a socially interactive writing activity which was located at the writing center. Second, I was interested in exploring how conversations and interactions with peers, and if about and around children's literature during whole class read-aloud time impacted or related to young children's composing and processes. Therefore, I was able to develop a grounded theoretical construct to describe what it is children do when they are engaged in composing and how social interactions with peers around children's literature impacts what they do in their writing or their composing processes.

Researchers are warned that the grounded theory process requires theoretical sensitivity, which Strauss and Corbin (1990) define as "the ability to recognize what is important in the data and to give it meaning" (p.46). Theoretical sensitivity is derived from two main sources, (a) professional and personal experience and (b) an understanding of the literature. With that said, while the current research has informed my professional knowledge of what might become possible when children compose, I did not approach data with set a priori theoretical expectations but rather built a grounded theory generated by the patterns that emerged from the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). My knowledge of the literature was channeled toward generating questions, guiding theoretical sampling, and providing supplementary validation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Background of Researcher

As a white, middle-class woman, I am a former elementary school teacher who has taught in both a Title 1 public school and private school setting. When this study began in September of 2022, I was in the final year of my doctoral studies in literacy education, focusing on early literacy. I believe my past experience teaching literacy and interacting with children in the primary grades enabled me to build strong relationships with the young children who participated in this study. Additionally, my experience collaborating, problem-solving, and establishing relationships with my colleagues in the past enabled me to have a healthy and respectful relationship with the teacher whose classroom I was fortunate to join for twelve weeks. Although I have shifted my role from elementary teacher to a researcher, I believe the knowledge I have gained over the last three years regarding young children's literacy learning and diving deep into the research on young children, specifically children's composing, played a role in my ability to understand why and what children do.

Setting

This study was conducted in one Head Start classroom located in a rural southeastern U.S. town with a population of approximately 14,520. United States Census Bureau (2020) data indicate the median household income in this community is $32,339, with 24.3% living below the poverty line. The elementary school housing the Head Start classroom had an enrollment of 510 students, 100% of whom were eligible for free school lunch. The school population was Caucasian 42%, Black 21%, Hispanic 31%, and other ethnicities less than 1%.

Classroom Selection

The primary goal of this study was to understand the nature and processes of preschoolers' engaged writing; thus, it was necessary to identify a classroom where children were motivated to write and likely to become engaged in writing. This would require a teacher who cultivates an environment that supports intrinsic motivation by supporting children's need for a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Specific to this study, at a starting point, children would need choices in activities that are relevant to their interests and goals and a socially healthy literate environment where all children feel accepted and valued by their teacher and peers.

One year prior to the present study, I co-facilitated a professional development workshop with the Head Start teachers in the district where it was conducted. This workshop focused on how to arrange for bookmaking, how to conduct shared reading experiences (Holdaway, 1979), and how to arrange for student talk and conversations during read alouds (e.g., Dickerson &, 1994). Consequently, I established a relationship with not only teachers but also the Head Start director, who was interested in the potential of my proposed study, particularly the idea of children making books, to connect with the program's curriculum philosophy. Specifically, it

linked with the idea that children learn best by actively experimenting and by becoming enthusiastic, curious, self-assured learners.

Following this meeting, I visited seven different Head Start classrooms in the district, volunteering during morning group time and free choice center time to help establish a rapport with the teachers and to identify a classroom where it seemed motivated, engaged writing could be facilitated most readily. These visits made it possible to identify Andrea's classroom as a potential research site. What set her classroom apart was children's welcomed participation during read-alouds, self-selected play during free-choice time, and positive classroom interactions, including peaceful resolution of conflicts. For instance, when one boy on the playground took the basketball out of another's hand, the latter said, "I don't like it when you take the ball out of my hands." Immediately, his classmate responded, "I hear your words," and gently returned the ball. My assumption was that Andrea had worked to nurture the socio-emotional lives of her students. Although I did not observe children writing during my short visits volunteering, my other observations and conversations with the children and their teacher piqued my interest, and this seemed to be a place that would welcome a socially interactive writing center.

Andrea has a four-year college degree in early childhood education and 31 years of teaching experience, all in a Head Start classroom, including 11 years in her current district. During this time, she established a strong relationship with children's families and often, per the request of parents, taught multiple siblings. She spoke frequently about her personal teaching philosophy and how it was shaped by participation in professional workshops from twenty-five years earlier focusing on Conscious Discipline (e.g., Bailey, 2019). She believed that children should learn to make their own decisions, learn to respect one another, and learn from and with each other. She was consistent at nurturing independent decision-makers and attending to the social-emotional

dimensions of children's lives. For example, she shared her belief in "a positive way to help children learn what to do instead of using a negative voice to tell them what not to do." She was conscious of her language choices with children, particularly, how she responds to social behaviors, noting that, "Children can see what they could do instead of the negative." When I asked her why children use the phrase, "I hear your words," she responded,

> I kinda developed the phrase, I hear your words, because I don't think children should have to say you're sorry, because sometimes they are not. Sometimes, that may be a reaction they need to have at their home to protect themselves, they see people coming at them, if they hit, somebody could have hurt them yesterday, like, somebody could have taken a toy away from them 15 times and they finally say no and hit back. You just need to just acknowledge that the other person likes it, or they don't like it. For example, when you hit me, [say] I don't like it when you take a toy from me. Acknowledge it. You can't fix what happened, you can move forward with a better decision.

Andrea's philosophies, consistent efforts to nurture positive relationships with and between children, and her efforts to encourage children to work out their social problems, shaped the classroom social environment.

Heather, a Head Start teaching assistant, has worked alongside Andrea for three years, and they worked well together. Like Andrea, she was consistent with her language choices, had positive and nurturing interactions with children, and responded to children's social interactions during play similarly to Andrea.

I served mainly as a participant observer, situated at the writing center every day that I was in the classroom. On a few occasions, I read books with children on the carpet while Andrea and Heather were setting up for nap time, and during one week of data collection, when Andrea

was out sick, I became a more active participant, reading to the whole class for three consecutive days.

Participants

Andrea's class consisted of 18 students (Table 3.1). Seventeen of these students were enrolled at the start of the study, and one child joined in October of the school year. The students, including nine boys and nine girls, ranged in age from three to five years old, and seven of the children had been Andrea's students the previous year. Twelve of the children were Caucasian, three children were Black, one child was Asian-American, and two children were Hispanic. All 18 of the children's parents or caretakers consented for them to participate in the study.

Table 3. 1 Participant Names and Ages

Participant Name	Participant Age
Aaron	4
Avery	5
Elle	5
Fiona	5
Gabriel	4
Gavin	5
Henry	4
Jade	3
Kaiden	4
Liam	4
Micah	3
Nick	3

Rachel	3
Reid	3
Savannah	4
Tessa	3
Viviana	3
Zuri	4

Instructional Context

Although Andrea's positive classroom environment was a necessary condition for facilitating children's engagement in writing, it would not be sufficient. Some modifications to support children's intrinsic motivation to write would be necessary. In this section, I will first describe the classroom prior to the introduction of routines and materials for making books. Then, I will describe in detail the literacy-related modifications I suggested to the teacher prior to the study's beginning to support children's motivation to make books. Finally, I describe the actual context for children's bookmaking, the teacher's actual practices, and my participation in the study.

The Initial Classroom Environment

Children attended Head Start five days per week, for a full school day, starting with breakfast at 7:30 AM and ending with 2:00 PM dismissal. A typical day involved breakfast, morning group time, free choice center time, and outside or inside play which included gross motor skill activities (i.e., balls, hoops, slides, music and movement, stretching, bean bag tosses), then lunch, naptime, snack, and another free choice center time until it was time to clean up for dismissal. Because a foundational philosophy of this district's Head Start child-centered curriculum was the importance of supporting the development of independent, self-confident

learners, most of the activities during the day were child-initiated, socially situated, and play-based. The class came together during morning group time on the carpet, which lasted for about 10 to 20 minutes, and depending on the day, included attendance, announcements, a teacher read-aloud, and "brain breaks" or movement activities. Next, children were released for free center time, and Andrea and Heather routinely completed paperwork required for federally funded programs (e.g., attendance, daily documentation of breakfast eating) and attended to children's personal needs, such as checking for "boo-boo's" and, as necessary, changing diapers. Sometimes, they read one-on-one with children during center time or played with children in centers after completing all the necessary paperwork. Occasionally children participated in pre-planned small group art projects with Heather, which were usually designed around a particular theme (e.g., leaf prints for Fall) which would occur during center time.

During center time, children could choose their center, and as long as they cleaned up after themselves, they were allowed to move freely to join another center. Centers included (a) a building block station, (b) a fully stocked kitchen center that also included dress-up clothing, (c) a reading center with two bookshelves and kid-sized couches, (d) a science center with materials and props such as magnifying glasses, magnets, and science-specific books, (e) a creative play center with objects such as magnetic building blocks and toy animals, and (f) a writing center.

The classroom was physically organized in ways that promoted active, collaborative learning. For example, there was space for different play centers. At the center of the room was a carpet featuring the letters in the alphabet–the only visible area in the room that included the alphabet. There was an additional shelf of books and a board that featured a child-friendly class schedule that included vivid pictures, words, and time of each activity during the day. The classroom walls were lined with children's art projects, and there was some environmental print.

For example, children's personal cubbies, where they stored their coats and personal belongings, included a picture of themselves with their name located underneath it. Centers included labels under bins of objects that included a picture and words to describe the objects.

The socio-emotional environment of the classroom was nurturing. For example, during morning group time, as Andrea noted attendance, she would often share, when appropriate, why certain children were absent and asked the children to think about these classmates:

> Guys, Micah is not here. He didn't feel good. He just doesn't feel good. So, let's put him in our hearts because he's our friend. And put him in our head because we can think about him and say we hope you feel better, Micah. Yeah, we sure do, because he did not feel good, his mama said.

Andrea was also tuned into children's emotions and served as a listening ear for children who needed to discuss their concerns, worries, and feelings. She nudged children to bring these issues to the classroom community when appropriate. For example, during morning group time, Andrea had four-year-old Gabriel share a story about his dog with the class. He told the class that his dog was sick and that he was very sad. With Andrea's prompting, he shared that his dog "went outside then to the animal clinic." Andrea asked how it made him feel, and he responded somberly, "Sad." Andrea asked the class to say, "I hope you feel better Taco, feel better Taco."

Andrea also forged strong relationships with individual children, and it was evident that children felt a strong relationship with her. For instance, after a morning read aloud several weeks into the school year, four-year-old Savannah approached Andrea, gave her a hug, said she "wants to be happy," that she is "happy [at school]" and "don't want to go home." It also was common for children to tell her that they loved Andrea and for her to say it back.

Children were routinely turned toward each other to work out their problems. For example, during a reading of *Shake Dem Bones on Halloween* (Reed, 1997) when Andrea asked the children to shake their own bodies along with the book, some children inadvertently got into others' spaces. When Gavin complained that Gabriel was hitting him, Andrea suggested to Gavin, "Well, you tell him you don't like it," prompting Gavin to redirect with "I don't like it when you hit me," and Gabriel to respond with "I hear your words."

The social environment of this classroom had an impact on how children interacted with each other at the writing center. The relationship children had with their teacher, and their peers, and the expectation that children learn from, work with and solve their problems together, all played a vital role in children's daily interactions at the writing center.

Suggested Modifications for Engaged Writing

Andrea was consistent in nurturing a socially rich, caring classroom environment that supported children's sense of belonging and attending to their social-emotional needs. This was necessary, but not sufficient to facilitate their engagement in writing. Per self-determination theory, in order to become motivated to write children would need to experience, simultaneously, a sense of competence–the feeling that the task is not beyond their capabilities, a sense of autonomy–the feeling that they are pursuing their own valued goals, and a sense of relatedness–the feeling that they belong socially and that the task at hand is congruent with their cultural identities. The following recommendations and modifications were intended to increase the possibility that children would be motivated to visit the writing center and make books.

Supporting a Sense of Competence. Making books, itself, is supportive of students' belief that they can be successful, since picture books are already familiar to them, when they are invited to make books, they can visualize how that might look. Plus, Andrea and Heather, both of

whom attended a professional development workshop about preschool children's composing, believed that children's approximations, not conventionality, should be encouraged in their writing, and that children use multiple resources–not just letters and words–to create meaning, including various combinations of marks, symbols, letters, words, pictures, and gestures (e.g., Harste et al., 1984; Rowe, 2008). Pre-stapled books (3 pages of blank, folded, unlined white paper) were intended to invite children to start with what they knew–regardless of previous knowledge about books, writing, and foundational literacy skills. Conventional, commercially available primary grade journals, by contrast, include lines with blank space above it, suggesting that each page needs pictures and words. Not all three- to five-year olds are aware yet that marks on pages symbolize words, the difference between words and images, or the concept of a printed word. The freedom to write on blank pages regardless of their prior experiences or skill, would support their sense of competence. Some children, though, would want to attempt letters and words. To further expand children's sense of competence at the writing center, and because it was not easy for children to see the one alphabet chart in the classroom, I provided name plates for each child in anticipation that they would want to write their names or that name writing would come up in conversation at the writing center.

Students' confidence to write would also be expanded with models from published children's books, with access provided by routine whole class shared readings facilitated by the teacher, accompanied by discussion of book features and how decisions made by published authors and illustrators could be taken up by children in their own books, if they wished. Fifty-four high-interest, contemporary multimodal children's picture books were donated to the classroom for this purpose. (Appendix A), includes a mix of pattern/predictable picture books, story books, wordless picture books, and an alphabet book. I also suggested that for books with a

predictable pattern, children should be invited to participate in shared reading (e.g., McGee & Schickedanz, 2007), which Holdaway (1979) described as repeated, risk-free encounters with books that begin with a teacher read aloud, followed by successive encounters with the book that allows them to join in as they learn how the book goes, enabling them to more fully explore the features of the text.

Supporting a Sense of Autonomy. As with other centers, student participation at the writing center for making books would be voluntary, and students could also come and go as they pleased. They were to be encouraged to write about topics of their choice and to have freedom to make all authorial decisions, including whether or not to finish a book. Although students might be asked to read or talk about their books, this was not a requirement for participation.

Supporting a Sense of Relatedness. The writing center also needed to be socially interactive. For young children, a relationship with teachers is important (Birch & Ladd, 1997), and children who feel their teachers care for and about them tend to have higher self-esteem, are engaged in school and overall, better well-being (Lavy & Naama-Ghananyim, 2020). As a participant observer, I would be the primary adult connection and proxy teacher at the writing table. My role would be to observe and talk to children, but not to dictate what and how they wrote, but instead to further understand their intentions and to provide feedback that would help them advance their own purposes in writing. In addition, children would be encouraged to talk to and work alongside peers at the writing table as much as they wanted.

Before the study began, Andrea and I discussed what this might look like in the classroom, particularly her role in reading picture books during morning group time. I suggested that collaborative reading experiences in appealing, high-interest multimodal children's literature

would be done every day during morning group time, at least on days I was present. Andrea would decide which books to read and on what days. Also, in an attempt to expose children to as much children's literature as possible, some of the books I donated were placed in the bookshelves at the reading center and included in the bookshelf at the front of the room so children could have access to them on their own terms after they were read to them. Additionally, if time allowed, I would read books to children during transition times.

Actual Context for Engaged Writing

Suggestions for modifications to the instruction and environment were taken up in reality to varying degrees.

Writing and the Writing Center. As promised, Andrea made it clear to the children that they would have regular opportunities to make books, and the writing center was made available on every observed day of class. Per her own report, she mentioned it to children on the first few days of staggered entry prior to the official first day of school. On the first day of school, Andrea reintroduced the idea, saying to the children, "We are going to make books—read the books you make, listen to the books you make, and share them with our friends." Immediately, Avery, a returning student in Andrea's classroom who was familiar with Andrea's free choice center routine, said, "I don't know how to make a book." Smiling, Andrea, quickly responded, "Well, you are going to learn how to make a book." Nonchalantly shrugging her shoulders, Avery mumbled, "OK." At the end of the first read-aloud, Avery approached Andrea and said, "Well, I want to make a book." Bookmaking was not to begin until later that week, but as Avery was eager to learn, we set up the writing center by filling cups with markers, crayons, pencils, and colored pencils, which were then stored in a material caddy that was placed in the middle of

the table. We also prepared a bin filled with pre-stapled books, which were available for children at the designated writing center, Monday through Wednesday from that day forward.

To support Avery's confidence, I read to her a book made by a four-year-old named Hudson, who was not in the class, nor a student in her school. His book, titled *Avengers Assemble*, featured his favorite Marvel characters, such as Spiderman and Green Goblin, and also included his name and the letters he knew. My intention was to share with Avery a book made by a same-aged child to show her that this was something she could do, too. After reading the first two pages, Avery interrupted to announce that she would make a Wonder Woman book. Without missing a beat, she grabbed a blank book, sat down at the table, evaluated the marker and crayon collection, and told me she had to change her mind because she didn't have a crayon that "was the right skin color" to use for Wonder Woman. She switched her subject to Ariel from The Little Mermaid. Forty-five minutes later, she had a completed book featuring mock-like letter forms of her name, which appeared to make her proud. As she intently worked at the writing center, slowly, children started trickling over, one by one. After day one, the making of books at the writing center took off.

During the first week of school, on average, there were about 6-9 children who would visit the writing center over the course of an hour of center time. However, due to the number of children at the writing table at one time during the first week of school, during the next week, the writing center was held to the same expectation as the other free choice centers. For example, three children were allowed to be at the writing center at a time. Due to this established expectation, children, at times, were often turned away from the writing center or told to come back when others left for another center. Additionally, children could come and go as they pleased, they had full access to blank books and writing materials, and children decided what a

book would be about. There were no parameters on what the book included, nor did children have to complete the book if they did not want to.

Andrea regularly directed children to help each other. For example, Andrea asked Avery, who frequented the writing center and had made many books, to help her friends as they needed it. She was consistent in operationalizing her belief that children should teach each other. For example, she told the children before sending them off to free choice centers: "If Karole-Ann is busy talking to a friend reading their book or making their book, you can show or teach your friends where to get blank books and how to get started. You can read your book to yourself or to a friend."

Also, at the writing center, Andrea and Heather consistently turned children towards each other to work out their problems, as some children were learning how to work in an area with others. For example, as Henry returned to the writing center for the second time in one day with the book he was working on earlier in the morning, he sat down next to Savannah. As he placed his book on the table, she threw it on the ground. Heather witnessed the interaction from across the room and asked the children stand up out of their chairs and turn towards each other:

Heather: Tell Savannah you don't like it when she does that.

Henry: I don't like it when you knock my stuff down.

Savannah: I hear your words.

As they both sat down, Henry realized that the markers he needed were located on the other side of Savannah, who, watching Henry, politely handed him a purple marker to use, then both returned to their work.

Read Aloud Time. Over the course of twelve weeks, starting from the first day of school, I observed and recorded Andrea reading children's literature 21 times out of the 33 total

visits I was in the classroom. Which included a mix of repeated readings of particular books on different days. In total, children were exposed to 15 different books on the days I present.

From the bin of 54 books (Appendix A) I provided for the classroom, Andrea read three. During the seventh week of data collection, Andrea was absent for three days, during which I read three books from the collection I provided to the classroom, for a total of twenty-four observed read aloud experiences for the children of eighteen different books.

When read-alouds did occur, children were seated on the carpet at the front of the room, facing a chair where Andrea sat. She would hold the book to the side, allowing children to see the illustrations. She started the reading with the title, the author, and the illustration on the front cover. In most instances, children were encouraged to talk about things they noticed in the illustrations or share their comments. Andrea was very consistent at drawing children's attention to characters' facial expressions and how characters felt and at making connections between books that were written by the same author and/or illustrator. She was very animated, often changing her pitch and voicing sound effects in the story. She did not evaluate children's responses to books, rather, she was accepting, for the most part, of what children had to say and welcomed comments that added to the story. She mostly answered questions children had or responded to their requests, such as turning back in the book to discover that something had happened. However, shared readings, in which books were read repeatedly with the idea that children could become more familiar through successive readings and read along with the teacher, did not occur at all.

In some instances, Andrea chose the book to be read ahead of time, and these were usually books she preferred, as she explained, "I love to read books to children. But I love reading books *I* love reading," In rare cases, children's requests were honored. For example,

Andrea told the class before reading *Pete the Cat, Trick or Pete*, (Dean, 2017) that it was Avery's choice. She told children that she decided to read *Little Gorilla* (Bornstein, 1976), in which a baby gorilla reaches his first birthday, "I think my friend [a student in the class] was interested in this book because she just had a birthday." More frequently, though, children's requests were not honored, such as when Kaiden asked her to choose *The Bad Seed (*John & Oswald, 2017), a book enjoyed by children a week earlier when I had read it to them, she responded, "This is kind of a long book, so maybe we'll read that this afternoon." Then children tried others, but to no avail:

Aaron: Can you do the blue one right there?

Andrea: Can you put that one back? *(Passes the book back to Kaiden)*

Avery: I wanna read the bug one.

Andrea: You wanna read the bug one, it's short.

Aaron: Yeah, I like that one. I wanna read this [bug book] one.

Gabriel: (groaning) One that we haven't read.

Avery: We read that yesterday!

Andrea: We did read that yesterday; we have something we haven't read… *(gets a book from the teacher's collection of books at the front of the classroom)*

On other days, read alouds were cut short. In the sixth-week, Andrea confessed that she was hesitant to read aloud because she worried about, "two runners who cannot handle it," referring to two children who often would sometimes choose to do other things in the room during morning group time.

Reading and Writing Connections. Across observed read aloud times, there were five documented instances in which Andrea drew children's attention to the idea that they make

decisions and that, like published authors and illustrators, they can try out and decide what goes in a book. For example, while reading *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Carle & Martin, 1967), she pointed out, "The purple cat is the illustrator's decision. You can make that decision in the books that you will make." A few pages later, she added, "A red bird sees a yellow duck! So, if you choose to make a book today, you could make one with animals, or you can make one with colors." However, overall, read aloud discussions did not include explicit connections between what published authors and illustrators to and what children might do in their own books.

Similarly, Andrea rarely drew children's attention to fundamental concepts about print in the books she read to them, for instance, the difference between pictures and words, left-to-right and top-to-bottom directionality of print, or specific letters and letter/sound relationships. Also, there were no instances where these rudimentary literacy skills were connected in conversation to what children might do in making their own books. In one instance, however, it was the children who drew Andrea's attention to such a connection. Letters they recognized in a book to their own names. For example, introducing *Shake them Bones on Halloween* (Reed, 1997), she read, "This is called, Shake Them Bones on Halloween. And look, this letter H is made out of…" But before she could say "bones," Henry interjected, "H is in my name." Then, walking up to the book, Avery added, "I have "e" in my name." Gabriel asserted, "Hey, guess what, I see an A, an A!" This was the only observed conversation including the teacher in which children's letter knowledge was discussed.

In some instances, Andrea would tell the group she was placing the book on the writing table, in case anyone wanted to use it for inspiration. However, most books were not placed on bookshelves that children had access to. Only the books that I had placed in the classroom, three

of which she read, were placed back on bookshelves for children to read at their leisure. In an effort to increase children's exposure to children's literature, in some instances, I read books to children on the carpet while teachers were setting up for nap time, and I attempted to read books quickly at the writing center before getting started. However, children preferred to make books at the writing center rather than have me read them unless they decided to bring a book to the table on their own.

There were instances where Andrea would encourage children to make books out of their personal interests, concerns, or what they shared. This happened, for example, when Micah was having a bad day. After screaming while eating his school breakfast, he calmed down and told Andrea that he did not want to come to school that day. She assured him she understood, and that it was hard to get up and want to come to school. She added that the class had missed him very much the previous day when he was absent and that he was in their "heads and in our hearts." Calming down further, he told Andrea what happened on the day he was absent, prompting Andrea to suggest, "You can write about it in a book that you can make with Ms. Karole-Ann."

In general, the most consistent form of support for children's motivation to write was the availability of the writing center itself, along with ample materials for bookmaking, the freedom for children to make books of topics of their choice, making all authorial decisions, and the facilitation of social interaction at the table with the researcher, as participant observer, and with peers.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred during the first half of the 2022/2023 school year and lasted for approximately three months. I visited the classroom 2-3 times per week beginning on the first full day of school in September 2022 and ended in late November. I specifically visited the classroom

Monday through Wednesday during the designated morning group time and free center time in this Head Start classroom. I would arrive by 8:00 AM, depending on the day and their schedule, I stayed until they transitioned to recess around 9:45 AM. I was in the classroom for a total of 33 visits. In order to capture the full range of what children do while engaged in composing, including children's social interactions with peers at the writing center and interactions during read alouds of children's literature, I gathered audio-recordings of read alouds, observations through participation at the writing center, other observation notes, and audio-video recordings and photos of children's composing. These separate data items informed and complemented each other, capturing children engaged in the process of composing and the interactions between children and their teacher.

Audio-Recordings of Read Alouds

Read alouds were recorded to capture detailed conversations between students and their teacher about the books they read, what they noticed about the text, authors' and illustrators' intentions, and various student perspectives on the books. I was interested in how these experiences might shape children's own composing. My role as a researcher in this context for the majority of read-alouds was non-participant observer, with the exception of one week when the classroom teacher was absent, and I read for three consecutive days and was an active participant. A total of 24 read-alouds of children's literature were recorded and transcribed.

Participant Observation

Because I was interested in the minute-by-minute and up-close qualities of engagement, I assumed the role as a participant-observer, what Dyson (2013) calls an "adult friend" (p. 408), at the designated writing center to (a) listen to and observe children's interactions and conversations, (b) engage in conversation about and around the books they composed, and (c) further understand

their thoughts and intentions as they were engaged in the process of making books. I kept a notepad to record what I observed, children's responses to my open-ended questions, and direct interactions with children and between children at the writing center. I looked for connections between what happened in read alouds of picture books and what happened in the writing center when children composed and vice versa.

Adults play an important role in children's literacy learning (e.g., Levin & Aram, 2013; Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2008), and teachers, particularly those who provide feedback, can maximize what children do and what they are capable of, which can expand their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). As a participant-observer, I intentionally aimed to expand what children did and thought about during composing, by asking open-ended questions and drawing their attention to what they did in their composing. Given the practical activity of making books, I documented as much as possible, including the context, what I said, and its implications.

In this context, I viewed children as informants (Harste et al., 1984), where my role was not to put children in a state of "cognitive dissonance" (p. 74.). Rather, I serve as an adult friend offering natural support and a slight "nudge," if necessary, to move children's thinking and abilities forward. My conversations with children were not intended to test their knowledge, rather, there was a blend of casual conversation and open-ended questions (Table 3.2) to understand their composing, their thinking processes and to nudge them forward in their writing. However, this required a level of public and casual process feedback that "motivates children and gives them tools to improve" (Johnston, 2012a, p.3). Johnston (2012a) explains that public feedback is not inseparable from the conversations children have in the larger background of the classroom. In this realm of feedback, it is part of an extension of the larger classroom conversations, which positions children as authors and illustrators. Based on what I noticed in children's books or what children

said, I drew their attention to what they did in their book, and in relevant cases, I connected their work and ideas to picture books that had been read to them. As much as possible, I offered what Johnston (2012a) refers to as casual process feedback, which he asserts "is at the heart of building a sense of agency: it helps demystify the skill of writing" (Johnston, 2012a, p.3). This type of feedback, drawing children's attention to their choices and how they affect their finished product, gives students additional tools for the future when adults are not present. Finally, I intentionally chose my words wisely (e.g., Johnston, 2004) to provide positive feedback that was not praise but rather "phrases that invite a symmetrical power relationship and a message of student contribution" (Johnston, 2012a, p.4). In Table 3.2, I provide an example of the types of open-ended questions I asked children in the process of children's composing that prompted these conversations.

Table 3. 2 Open-Ended Questions

What is your book about?
What colors will you need?
What do you think you're going to do next in your book?
What comes next?

*Adapted from Ray & Cleveland, 2018

Video-Recordings and Pictures of Books

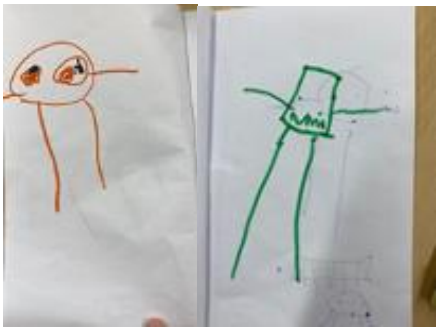
Children's books were not representational on their own, as their composing included not just marks or illustrations on the paper, but also gestures, oral narration, and actions. However, confidentiality restrictions required video recordings of children reading their books to be zoomed in on the book itself rather than including their full bodies and faces. While the videos were focused on the book itself and not the child, per se, the audio recording would pick up conversations that included information about their actions, the inflection in their voices, and my clarifying questions.

In addition to video recordings, I took pictures of each page in children's books to (a) support the video transcriptions and (b) examine children's books page by page. To coherently capture and document the multimodality of a child's book, it required still pictures, a transcription, and notes about gestures or actions to be combined. To illustrate how I connected all these components, consider an example of a book created by Gavin, which featured characters from a popular video game called Rainbow Friends (Figure 3.1). The video recording very clearly captured Gavin's verbal explanations and the movement of his finger, which he often used to point to his drawings while reading. For example, as he pointed to his illustration, a very active Rainbow Friend named Orange, he verbally explained (Figure 3.1, Frame 2), "He goes super-fast…he goes fast like Sonic!" To further support his meaning, Gavin then moved his arms back and forth as fast as he could in his seat. However, due to the up-close examination of the book itself, the video does not capture his body movement, which required me to record in my observation notes his body movements, which I weaved into the transcription (Figure 3.1, Frame 2). On the next page, he verbally described his character Green, "He's taller than everything and taller than all the other persons, and he's kinda creepy." The video captured Gavin running his fingers back and forth over the zig-zag mouth of the rainbow friend when he said, "kinda creepy (Figure 3.1, Frame 2)," which was necessary to include in the transcription. Like children's reading of their books, the transcription process also needed to be multimodal to fully and accurately capture their intentions and meaning-making processes.

Figure 3. 1 Gavin's Rainbow Friends Book

KA: What is the name of this book?
Gavin: It is called Rainbow friends. There is an "O" in rainbow.
KA: There is an "O" in rainbow!
Gavin: This is the front. This is blue with, with one dead eye and a normal eye.

1



KA: Who is this?
Gavin: Orange [rainbow friend]. (P*oints to the page)* He goes super-fast. *(Gavin moves his arms back and forth as fast as he can while sitting in his seat)* He goes fast like sonic!
KA: He goes super-fast!
Gavin: That's [the] green [rainbow friend]. *(Points to the page)* He is really tall, he is taller than everything, and he is taller than all the other persons, and he's very creepy *(runs his finger back and forth over the zig-zag lines representing the mouth)*

2

Gavin: That's the bed *(points to the pencil marks*), and that's the purple [rainbow friend] *(points to both purple figures).*
Gavin: That's yellow [rainbow friend] *(Points to the page).*

3

Gavin: And that's the end.
KA: What are those colors?
Gavin: They are the different persons.
KA: The different Rainbow Friends? What are the those up there?
Gavin: Yeah. That's my name!

4

There were a few criteria for audio-recording children's books and taking pictures. First, a child would decide if their book was finished, and second, they had to be willing to read or share their books in the first place. In some cases, children were not interested in sharing and put their books in their cubby instead, leaving a total of 106 video recordings of children's completed books. In many cases, repeating back to the child what they said or asking clarifying questions served as a quick member-check to confirm I correctly interpreted what they intended. My presence at the writing center became a normalized part of the classroom.

Data for this research study was collected through multiple and varied sources to provide triangulated evidence, which is necessary for establishing credibility in any qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks with children, the Head Start Teacher, and the teacher's assistant throughout the study contributed to establishing the credibility of this study. Collecting data in different classroom events, such as, read alouds of picture books, children's social interactions and making books at the writing center, and children reading finished products (books), allowed for the credible description of any phenomenon in the development of the grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additionally, constant comparative data analysis contributed to establishing credibility (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in three stages and primarily involved inductive analyses of 106 video recordings of children's books, observation notes from 33 days at the writing center, and 24 transcriptions of children's read-aloud conversations to identify the nature of children's composing and processes. Because this study sought to understand the nature of the children's engagement in composing, the properties and processes of young children's engaged composing, and the impact of conversations with peers around children's literature, I employed constant

comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) throughout and after data collection. I did not arrive at the research site having created explicit a priori codes; however, during a second pass at data analysis, sociocultural perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978) and theories of engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004) and understandings of young children's writing that informed my research question also formed the central lenses through which I viewed and interpreted children's engagement in composing. This led to examining teasing apart data into two different layers and required a priori codes for the first layer of data analysis regarding what literacy engagement looked like for young children's composing at the writing center. For example, understanding literacy engagement, as defined above, made me inclined to look for instances in which children displayed they were behaviorally engaged (e.g., effort, attention, and persistence), affectively engaged (positive emotions towards activities or individuals in those activities), cognitively engaged (e.g., strategic), and agentically and socially engaged (e.g., Ivey & Johnston, 2013), and instances that challenged or expanded those theories. During this second pass at data, I tentatively began creating priori codes for data collected at the writing center outside of text, that represented affective, behavioral, cognitive, and social and agentive engagement. While I was inclined to look closely at children's composing and processes to see if they challenged and confirmed our current understandings of young children's writing, a priori codes were not established for children's composing text. While this process was organized linearly, data analysis was ongoing and iterative. Also, during all phases of data analysis, I employed memoing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to document emerging thoughts or ideas, questions, and observations about the process and the generated data.

After the first day of data collection, I watched children's video-recorded books in their entirety, then transcribed the children's verbal responses. In these transcriptions, I included notes

about children's gestures (visible in the video), then cross-checked with observation notes that might have described any gesture or body movement not visible in the video. Then I matched the transcription with still pictures of the children's books in one document. Next, I transcribed the read-aloud transcriptions of conversations around children's literature. Then the open coding process began. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p.61). Because I was the sole researcher in this study, all data sources required an up-close examination, which allowed me to compare and contrast specifics of read alouds interactions and conversations with peers at the writing table and children's books on video. However, as researcher bias, assumptions, or patterns of thinking can be problematic, questioning and analyzing single words, phrases, or sentences helped minimize these concerns.

During this first phase, I tentatively grouped recurring codes into categories. For example, early on, descriptive codes such as "revision," "planning," and "teach each other" frequently appeared in the data. This process was repeated every day after data collection, allowing tentative axial codes to emerge simultaneously. While open and axial coding are different analytic procedures, I began to alternate between the two as I dug deeper into data analysis. I returned to the literature to more adequately theorize codes that emerged from the data. As I viewed the data alongside literature on literacy engagement and young children's composing, I was prompted to incorporate these theories from the literature into my analysis. For example, early on, I had axial codes for, "children's composing is multimodal" (e.g., points to illustrations/marks when reads the book, object movement, and body movement). However, this process produced continual refinements. For example, I had tentative axial codes for, "children's book content is inspired by multiple influences" (personal lives, interests, and knowledge,

intertextuality, and relationships with each other). I also had axial codes for "children's composing is relational" (teach each other, learn from each other, and copy each other). As I realized "copy each other" appeared more as a property of composing rather than a process, I moved, "copy each other" to the axial category, "children's book content is inspired by multiple influences", under the sub-category, "relationships with each other."

I continuously compared data sources for verification. At week 12, I noticed that no new data had emerged and that I had an adequate number of instances per category and subcategory, signaling that data saturation led me to a satisfying conceptual framework. The first layer of data includes four categories representing evidence of children engaged. The second layer of data includes five categories and several subcategories representing (a) properties of engaged composing and (b) processes of engaged composing. The results section of this study is structured around these categories, with clarifying descriptions and multiple examples. In some cases, an example of a children's full book was necessary to include, while other times, examples zooming in on a particular page from a child's book was necessary. Also, the interrelatedness between the dimensions of engagement and the properties of children's engaged composing required looking at the data by individual children to present an example in narrative form to give a sense of how the multiple categories presented were interrelated and inseparable from each other.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define selective coding as "the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (p.116). During this phase, I revisited all categories and sub-categories to examine how the categories were related to each other and how patterns or relationships support the core category of the study, that of engaged

composing. The grounded theory that emerged from the data is presented in the discussion section of this study.

As the sole researcher in this study, I purposefully incorporated multiple data sources to serve as a measure of triangulation and a means of confirming evidence for my findings, assertions, and theory. In addition to multiple data sources, the time spent with the children and conversations at the writing table created multiple chances to revisit the data. Engaging in ongoing analysis enabled me to seek ongoing member checks from children and teachers to fully and accurately capture the details in their books and processes.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Overview of the Chapter

The primary research question, "What is the nature of preschool children's composing and processes when they are engaged?" called for a descriptive analysis of the dimensions of children's composing and processes resulting from engagement in composing at the writing center. This chapter details this study's findings in two layers. The first layer describes the evidence that children were engaged at the writing center based on a conceptualization of engagement as simultaneously behavioral, affective, cognitive, agentive, and social. The second layer describes properties and the processes specific to preschoolers' engaged composing.

Evidence Children Were Engaged at the Writing Center

Andrea nurtured a socially rich environment that supported children's sense of belonging and social-emotional needs. However, this was not sufficient to facilitate preschoolers' engagement in writing. In order for children to be intrinsically motivated, it was necessary to deliberately attend to children's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This involved making available bookmaking as a voluntary, open-ended activity (Turner, 1985) in which children could use multimodal resources to make meaning, where approximations of more conventional writing were encouraged and welcomed, and where children were exposed to interesting published multimodal picture books during shared reading times. This occurred in an interactive context where children were free to relate to each other and also to adults in the room, including the researcher, who served as a participant observer at the writing center. Arranging the context for motivation was meant to pave the way for engagement, which, in this study, is viewed as a meta-construct that incorporates three inseparable components: behavioral (effort, attention, and persistence), affective (positive emotions towards

activities or individuals in those activities), and cognitive dimensions (student strategies and thinking) (Fredricks et al., 2004), as well as agentic possibilities for individuals (Reeve, 2013). However, engagement in literacy is not just a cognitive-oriented, individual experience but one that is inseparably social and emotional, which, I assume, is central to the nature of being engaged (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Although for the sake of presentation, I have separated out each dimension of engagement, all of these components are inseparable from each other.

Behavioral Engagement

Although children were not required to visit the writing center, it was common for them to do so voluntarily, to stay for long periods of time, or make multiple visits within a day to work on their books. In fact, out of the 18 total participating children, individual visits to the writing center ranged from 4 to 24. During my 33 data collection visits to the classroom, I documented a total of 229 children's visits to the writing center. On average, seven children voluntarily joined the writing center each day of data collection. Of the 229 children's visits to the writing center, 32 were "fly-bys," in which children stopped by the writing center briefly, but did not stay, and thus, were not engaged. However, this total of 229 children's visits does not reflect the number of occasions when individual children made clear they wanted to be at the writing center but were prevented from doing so because of the teacher's rule that only three children at a time could be at the center. For example, as Nick walked to the writing center one morning, before he could sit down, Andrea said, "This center is full." Nick decided to sit down anyway. As Andrea walked over and grabbed his hand to physically escort him to another center, Nick started screaming, "NO!"

Children engaged in making books were clear that they did not want to be interrupted or pulled away from the writing center before they were ready. For instance, one day, when the

teacher called girls for a bathroom break, Savannah, hard at work on a book, shook her read in resistance, screaming, "NOT ME! NOT ME!" Other children who were willing to go to the bathroom insisted I knew they would return, such as Micah, who promised, "Ms. Karole-Ann, I am coming right back!" Likewise, as children left the table for the bathroom, some feared that others might take their spot or disturb their materials. For example, as Avery left the writing center for the bathroom, she said, "Make sure no one gets that," referring to her book lying neatly on the table.

Children were also persistent and adamant about finishing what they had started. For instance, as Fiona created a book that featured an assortment of different colored rocks, she announced to the table, "I need a break, but I am not done," and continued to work on her book. Similarly, at clean-up time, when I asked Gavin if he wanted to finish his book the next day, he ignored me and continued to work on the last page of his book, which included a drawing of a green zombie. It was also common for children to store unfinished books in their cubbies and retrieve and work on them later. For example, after Tessa returned from the bathroom one day, she stopped by her cubby, grabbed her book from the previous day, and started making marks on the next blank page.

Children exhibited ongoing, persistent engagement, some creating collections or series of books. For example, one day before Micah started a new book, he arranged a display of his transformer books across the table and said, "[I am] putting them together." After evaluating the eight books in front of him, he grabbed a new blank book and started another transformer book. Likewise, one day after Rachel finished reading her book about her mom at home, she stopped, walked to her cubby, and returned with her collection of books, which also featured her mom at home. She then added her newest book to the top of the pile and brought the collection back to

her cubby. It appeared that Micah and Rachel recognized their own efforts and continuous persistence in making books.

The evidence for behavioral engagement was magnified when contrasted with instances when children were not engaged, for example, when children would join the writing center, sit down, and leave quickly, disinterested in working on a book at that time (n=32). Similarly, some children started books, but when they reached the middle would say, "I'll finish it later," then clean up and move on to a different center (n=22).

Affective Engagement

Behavioral engagement among the children composing was inseparable from their positive emotional engagement. Much of the evidence for their emotional engagement was non-verbal, including facial expressions, gestures, and body movement. For example, as Viviana worked on her book, she often tapped me and pointed to her drawings and marks on her pages. Along with other children, when she finished a page and then turned it to find a blank page, she would look my way with big eyes, smile, and immediately grab a crayon. Although still developing in her oral language, her facial expressions and body language signaled a happy composer. Similarly, as Savannah grabbed a book from her cubby, she walked over to the writing table and continued working on her book from her previous visit. As she turned to where she had left off and realized there was another blank page to be filled, she smiled, wide-eyed, wiggled in her seat, and immediately grabbed a crayon and started drawing with excitement.

Children were also verbally excited over composing. For example, as Micah completed a vibrantly colored illustration of a transformer in his book, he proudly shared with the table, "TA-DA!" as he held his book in the air for others to see. When he turned to the next blank page, in a cheerful voice, he said, "I need to make…" and grabbed a marker and started drawing. In other

scenarios, it was common for children to excitedly announce their intentions at the table, such as Fiona, who turned to the next blank page in her book, quickly grabbed a green marker, and screamed with excitement, “It’s going to be the biggest tornado!” Likewise, as Aaron read what he had in his book so far, he noticed that he had nothing on the two upcoming pages of his book. As his eyes got big, he jumped up and down out of his seat:

KA: Oh, what is author Aaron going to add?

Aaron: I am going to add red to this page! This is a crazy werewolf!

KA: Why is it crazy?

Aaron: (yells) Crazy werewolf!

Although children were visibly happy at the writing center, they also got upset and frustrated if they wanted to join the writing center and could not. For example, Rachel, who had made a book every day since the first day of school, cried when she was turned away by her teacher because of the three-student-maximum rule at the writing center. Even then, she lingered around the table for at least five minutes before Andrea redirected her to find another center. Avery was more vocal about her frustration:

Avery: I wanna make a book.

Andrea: You need to let your friends have a turn.

Avery: But I want to make a book.

She stormed off to another center, but about 20 minutes later, she reiterated her displeasure to Andrea, who responded, “You almost make a book every day, and you need to give your friends a turn.” Unrelenting, Avery explained, “But I didn’t get to make a princess one.”

Cognitive Engagement

Intertwined with the behavioral and affective dimensions of engagement was their cognitive engagement. Children acted strategically and solved problems while composing. For example, as Reid sat at the table one day to get started on his book, he took specific-colored markers and laid them across the table. Before making any marks, he put his left index finger on his face and tapped as if deep in thought, staring at the markers for a few seconds before picking up the one he needed. Similarly, as he was authoring *Family Zombie Book*, he stopped what he was doing to stare out towards the door. When I asked what he was doing, he responded, "I was thinking [about] what to draw on this page." After a few seconds, he announced, "I know what to draw now … When you step into the water, you turn into zombies." He then strategically picked a green marker to represent the zombies and green water.

Children also asked each other about their choices and decisions, prompting useful explanations. For example, while Avery was working on her book, she noticed that Elle had made blue clouds on her paper and advised, "Clouds aren't blue, they are white." But Elle explained, "White marker don't show up on white paper, so I used blue," demonstrating that not only was she strategic but also aware of how readers of her book might make sense of it.

Social and Agentive Engagement

Children were routinely socially interactive at the writing center. They were comfortable helping each other with materials, asking questions about their peers' books, commenting, sharing ideas, and giving unsolicited advice. For example, when Liam told me that he wanted to make a book, his brother Nick took a blank book out of the bin where they were stored and handed it to him, making it unnecessary for me to respond. Similarly, because children noticed each others' work, they frequently offered preemptive assistance in anticipation of what their

peers might need. For instance, noticing that Rachel was drawing a person, Avery asked if she wanted a “skin color marker,” to which Rachel nodded in response.

Conversations among the children about bookmaking became typical, and children noticed each other’s work not only in the moment, but also over time, including their writing interests. For example, Elle and Jade had been at the writing center at the same time on multiple occasions, and along the way, Elle noticed Jade’s preference for the animated character, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, and its associated characters. On one particular day, Elle asked, "Where is Sonic? Who's this, Tails?” Jade pointed, nodded her head, and smiled. Similarly, eavesdropping on my question to Viviana about what she had put on her page, Avery inserted, ““It could be a dog?" no doubt because she had been at the writing table and had witnessed Viviana often naming her marks on her page as a puppy. Even children not at the writing center at a particular moment were aware of their peers’ activity in it. For instance, as Kaiden and I talked about the drone he was drawing in his book, Liam, overhearing our conversation from the art table nearby, said to Kaiden, "I want to see the drone." From across the table, Kaiden lifted his book and showed Liam his illustration.

Unsolicited advice and response were also common. For instance, Fiona asked Elle about her drawing, "What is that?" and Elle responded, "That is my house." Joining in, Avery offered in a teachable moment, "You can make a house like this," as she used her hands to draw the shape of a house in the air. As another example, noticing Rachel’s drawing of herself in her book, Aaron said to all at the table, “That does not look like her [Rachel], she looks creepy!" Whether wanted or not, children’s input on their peers’ work was evidence of their interest in each other.

Children's decisions to be at the writing center were frequently influenced by peers. In these cases, the primary reason to be there was social, and their decision to return was influenced by who was at the table, thus, for social reasons. For example, one day, Fiona, Avery, and Zuri were coloring princess sheets at the art table next to the writing center. When Avery decided to return to the writing table to make a book, Fiona and Zuri left behind their coloring sheets to join her in starting new books. While it was common for children to arrive at the writing center with their friends, they also worked to orchestrate the social scene, such as Elle telling Avery, "Sit beside me." As Avery took the seat next to Elle, she said, "I am sitting beside my friend!" Similarly, children who had conversations with each other at the writing table did not necessarily play together in other social situations. The writing table was a safe space to make new friends. For instance, one day after Reid joined the table, he sat next to Savannah. She turned to him and said, "Reid, you be my friend?" As Reid nodded in response, they continued making marks on their books in front of them. Consequently, when children had experienced positive interactions with each other at the writing center, their play continued at other centers. For example, Elle, Avery, and Savannah talking about what they were doing in their books, then collectively, the three of them decided to move on to play together at the kitchen center. However, the three of them playing together was a new phenomenon, as Andrea confirmed that it was the first time, she had seen Savannah play with her new friends, Avery, and Elle.

Bookmaking seemed to become a part of the class's collective identity, and children took it upon themselves to ensure everyone was included in this collective social practice. For example, to ensure the "new girl," Elle, who joined the class during the sixth week of school, got acclimated to making books, Henry, Fiona, and Kaiden took it upon themselves to show her the lay of the land and how things were run in the classroom. After about 30 minutes of center time,

Fiona tells Elle, “Hey, let’s make a book.” As all four children walked to the writing center, they sat down, and Fiona grabbed a blank book for Elle, a marker out of the bin, and started drawing on her book to show her what to do.

Multidimensional Engagement as a Unified Construct

To give a sense of how all dimensions of engagement are inseparable from each other, I offer an example of four-year-old Elle, who was simultaneously behaviorally, affectively, cognitively, agentically, and socially engaged at the writing center. Elle was a frequent bookmaker, as she completed 13 books, often continued working on an unfinished book that was stored in her cubby, gave others advice and help, asked her peers questions, and enjoyed the company of her friends while making books.

To illustrate, one day, Elle joined the writing center at 8:29 a.m. to make a book, accompanied by her peers. In the middle of creating their books, Gavin, and Elle, who are situated across from each other, talked in-depth about Elle’s neighbor and Gavin’s cousin, as they discover both were named Ed, a conversation prompted by Gavin’s book, which had featured his cousin Ed in his storyline. After much talk about the similarities in their personal lives, Elle and Gavin decided to add their names to their books, which prompted them to compare and contrast the letters, thinking through what letters they had in common and naming the different letters in each other’s names. When Elle was called for the bathroom at 9:00 AM, she turned to me and said, “Make sure nobody takes my book,” to which Micah, who was sitting at the table at that time, confirmed, “I am not taking your book.” As she swiftly returned to the writing center, she was joined by her new friend, Zuri, who immediately started adding triangles to the front page of her book, which caught Elle’s eye. Curious about how to make a triangle, Elle stopped what she was doing, turned to Zuri, and asked for her help in drawing one. Without

hesitation, Zuri drew a triangle on Elle's book and then returned to her book. Elle worked until 9:26 a.m. and completed her *All About Everything Book*.

In this example, while Elle was making her book, she was socially interactive with her peers and appeared affectively engaged, as she was happy to make a book and enjoyed the company of others at the table. She was behaviorally engaged, attentive, and persistently working on her book for about 57 minutes, with the exception of the time she went to the bathroom. She also seemed cognitively engaged. Elle, like most of her classmates, were still learning the letters of their names and learning letter knowledge in general. Writing her own name in her book required her to think about letter formation and the letters needed in her name, but she also was motivated and curious to figure out what her name had in common with Gavin's name.

A bit of history is in order, though. As previously mentioned, Elle joined the class during the sixth week of school, appearing shy and nervous, as she did not speak at breakfast, during morning group time, or in the first 30 minutes of free choice center time on that first day in the classroom. However, because her peers took it upon themselves to teach and show her how the classroom was run, her interactions with her new friends allowed Elle to feel comfortable enough to open up. While Elle and I were reminiscing about her first day in early November, I asked her if she remembered anything about her first experience at the writing center. She quickly responded, "Fiona taught me how to make my first book because I didn't know how." To understand what made her open up, I asked her if she recalled the first time, she talked that morning and when her friend, Kaiden, who was so shocked when she mumbled words for the first time, had said in a high-pitched voice, "She talks!" As she laughed, she explained, "Yeah, I was really shy; I didn't talk to nobody. Then I knew they were people, not monsters, so I

talked." For Elle, coming to the writing center in the first place required her to feel comfortable and safe in her social environment.

While this example is only one account of what young preschool children's engagement at the writing center looked like, it was common for all dimensions of engagement to be inseparable from each other in many instances. In the next section, I will describe what young children's engagement in composing looked like, thus the consequences of engagement on preschoolers' composing.

Properties and Processes of Engaged Composing

The second layer of this data shifts the focus from overall engagement to the specific properties and processes of engaged composing. First, I describe the properties of children's engaged composing, which includes what children wrote about and included in their books. Second, I describe children's composing processes, revealing children's strategies and skills activated while composing books. Although I have teased apart the properties and processes for organizational purposes, there is much overlap between the two.

Properties of Engaged Composing

Children's Book Content is Inspired by Multiple Influences

Personal Lives, Interests, and Knowledge

Consistently, what children chose to write about was inseparable from themselves and their interests. Many of their books included connections to their everyday lives, which often included immediate or extended family members. For example, after Henry completed a book, he read it in its entirety, and as he pointed to the marks at the top corner on the second page of his book (Figure A.1, Frame 2) he read, "This is my house. That is Aiden, AJ, Brian, Momma, Daddy, Papa, Mama, and that is me. Daddy don't live there." When I asked about his father, he

explained, “Daddy is in jail, and I don’t like that much.” After quickly reading his entire book, he talked about his siblings, whose names he mentioned, and he clarified that he lived with his stepdad and that his biological dad was in jail. Noticing that he also drew a tornado in this same book (Figure A.1, Frames 3 and 4), I asked him to tell me about it. His grandma, “Mawmaw,” as he called her, had a cousin who recently experienced a tornado at his house, which was a topic of conversation at home. At first glance, the tornado dills seemed irrelevant to his book about family members, but his explanation helped illuminate the connection. This would not have been evident without Henry’s presence with his book.

Rachel’s books about family on repeated occasions featured her mother and reflected that her mother was on her mind during the school day. As she shared one such finished book, Ms. Heather asked about the drawing on the last page (Figure 4.1), “Is this person happy or sad?” Rachel responded, “Sad. They sad. Mama home.” On another day Rachel made another book about her mother, narrating, “Mama happy.”

Figure 4. 1 Rachel's Illustration of Mama Sad

Viviana often included the family members she lived with in her books, such as “Baby” and “Mama” (Figure A.2, Frame 1) and “Papa” (Figure A.2, Frame 2). However, Viviana, an emerging bilingual child who was still developing in her oral language for both her native language of Spanish and her second language of English, also included words or objects that she knew. For

example, before she described the page in front of her, she pointed to her own eyes, then pointed to the visible blue circles (Figure A.2, Frame 2) and said, "Ojos.". It appeared that "ojos" or eyes were something of interest to her that she could draw and identify, as she drew eyes or "ojos" again on the next page of her book (Figure A.2, Frame 3). She turned the page and pointed to the pink marks (Figure A.2, Frame 4), and said loudly, "Bunny!" It appeared Viviana's bookmaking allowed her to share the words she knew in Spanish and English.

Avery liked hearts and frequently drew them in her books. For example, she read, "This is someone with a yellow heart," in her book she titled, *About Girls* (Figure A.3, Frame 2). She was also very interested in fashion and talked about the different colors in her clothing, along with the makeup kit she played with at home at the writing table. These made their way into her books. For example, as she flipped to the next page of her book (Figure A.3, Frame 3), she explained, "This is a girl with another rainbow dress." Then, "This is a girl with a rainbow dress. I made her green lipstick."

Kaiden's books included drones. For example, pointing to an illustration of an object with vertical lines going through one horizontal line on the cover of a book (Figure 4.2), he explained, "This is a drone, and it stays in the air." To show where the drone would land, he added, "This is a road." As he pointed to the dot strategically placed between the intersecting lines that represented the road, he included, "The drone can land on this thing. It can stop cars."

Figure 4. 2 Kaiden's Drone

Relationships with Each Other

Children's books were also shaped by classroom relationships, such as drawing each other in their books. Fiona and Avery, who arrived together at the writing center one day, worked side-by-side, shared crayons, and discussed the colorful, "sparkly dresses" they were adding to their books. Fiona decided to feature Avery on the front page of her book (Figure 4.3). As she started to read her book in its entirety, she first pointed to the purple "sparkly dress" on the front page of her book and added, "This is Avery."

Figure 4. 3 Fiona's Book Featuring Avery

On several occasions, children drew me in their books, and for Rachel, it happened at least four times. As she was reading one of her books (Figure 4.4) to me, she pointed to me, then to her paper, and when I asked if she had drawn me, she smiled, nodded, and replied, "Yah."

Figure 4. 4 Rachel's Drawing of Karole-Ann

Children also routinely imitated ideas from their peers' books. On the first day of school, Rachel's idea of tracing her hand in her book appeared to start a trend, with other children featuring a handprint in their books. For example, after Avery witnessed Rachel trace her hand for the first time, a few days later, Avery included a tracing of her hand in her book (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4. 5 Avery's Hand

Similarly, because Avery often talked about and drew hearts in her books, others tried it out. For example, Gavin decided to add hearts to the last page of one of his books (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4. 6 Gavin's Hearts

When children read their books out loud, it was impossible for others working at the table not to hear. As a result, it was common to see children copy others' ideas. As Gabriel read his book at the writing table one day, he explained, "And that's a ghost...and this is a fake ghost." Kaiden, who had overheard Gabriel talk about the ghosts in his book, was inspired to do the

same, as he described the purple circle located at the top center and lower left-hand quadrant in the illustration shown in Figure 4.7 as, “Those are two ghosts.”

Figure 4. 7 Kaiden's Ghosts

Intertextuality

Pop Culture. Forty-seven of the total number of books made by children featured characters from children’s favorite TV shows, Disney, holiday characters, or video games. For instance, Jade’s books often featured *Sonic the Hedgehog* and his sidekicks named Shadow and Tails, from a television series she knew well. *Sonic* was repeatedly used to represent the marks on each of her pages. For example, when I asked about the pink marks on the front cover of one book (Figure 4.8, Frame 1) she replied, “Tails” in a high-pitched voice, then pointed to the purple marks and said, “Sonic!” As she flipped the page, she again pointed and said, “This is Sonic again.” Her book included three more pages with purple marks she identified as Sonic.

Figure 4. 8 Jade's Supersonic Book

Jade: Goo-Ga-Ga *(Laughing)*
KA: Who is this?
Jade: Tails (Points to pink), *(high-pitched voice)* Sonic!
KA: What is this? (Points to bottom left marks)
Jade: Shadow

1

Jade: This is sonic again *(left mark).*

2

Jade: This is Sonic.
Jade: This is Sonic.

3

As she turned the page, it was blank. She immediately grabs a purple marker and starts making marks.
Jade: This is Sonic.

4

Micah was very knowledgeable about *Transformers,* and his books included different types of transformers. For example, he began reading one book (Figure 4.9) with, "This is a blaze," then turned the page and said loudly, "This is Boulder. A new Boulder." I asked if the gray marks on top of the transformer's head represented hair, but he explained, "It has one of those metal things," which I inferred was some sort of protection gear. The rest of his book reads

like a list: “Octopus transformer. It’s from the show…Another transformer. This is Optimus Prime and Bumblebee (Figure 4.9, Frames 3 and 4).” When he arrived at the page with the “Black transformer,” he elaborated, unprompted, “A monster transformer. The red means he is scary (Figure 4.9, Frame 5).”

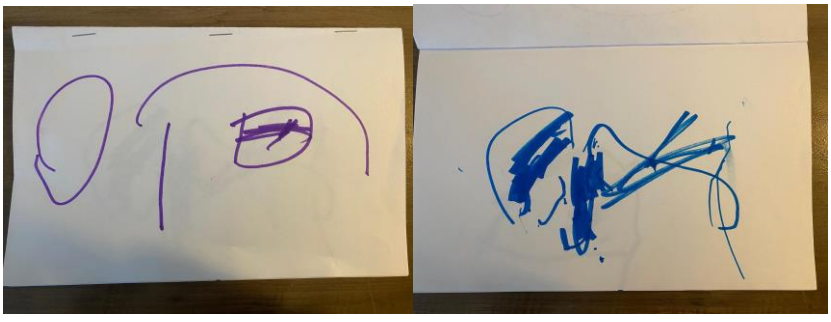
Figure 4. 9 Micah's Transformer Book

 Micah: That is blaze. 1	 Micah: Boulder! A new Boulder. KA: Does it have gray hair? Micah: It has one of those metal things. 2
 Micah: Octopus transformer. It’s from the show. 3	 Micah: Another transformer. This is Optimus Prime and Bumblebee. 4
 Micah: Black transformer. A monster transformer. The red means he is scary. 5	 *KA: What transformer is that?* Micah: Brown. 6

Avery's books featured the popular Disney movie, *The Little Mermaid.* Like Micah, she read her book like a list, including details of each character from page to page. For example, pointing to each illustration on the front cover of one book (Figure A.4, Frame 1), she explained, "That's Ariel, that's the sea and seashells, and my name." She continued to the next page and read, "That's Ursula, that's her name, that's people." Unsure of what she meant by "that's people," when she pointed to the orange lines, I asked, "What are those?" She pointed to the purple lines first and said, "Her snakies…" and then clarified that the orange marks (Figure A.4, Frame 2) were Ursula's "family."

Trade Books. Though much less frequently, elements from published books made their way into children's books. For example, after a whole-class shared reading of *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (Martin & Carle, 1967), Savannah sat down at the writing center, but pointed to the book, which was placed at the front of the classroom, and said, "I make track-track. I wanna make track-track." Unsure of what she was intending to say, I asked, "Track-track, what is a track-track?" She again pointed at *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*, prompting Andrea to open it and find the page that featured a yellow duck. When I asked, "Quack-quack, like a duck? Are you talking about the duck?" She nodded, "Yah!" and drew a duck in purple on her page (Figure 4.10). I stated, "So, we have a purple duck, a quack-quack. Love it! What's going to be on the second page?" She flipped to the next page and said, "A birdie."

Figure 4. 10 Savannah's Quack-Quack



Likewise, Gabriel, who actively participated in a read aloud of *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything* (Williams, 1986), a story about a little old lady who was not afraid of lively characters such as a talking pumpkin head she encountered on her walk in the forest, immediately started on a similar book of his own. As he completed his first page (Figure 4.11), I asked him to tell me about it: "It's a pumpkin man!"

Figure 4. 11 Gavin's Pumpkin Man

However, children's inspiration from trade books was not limited to the books their teacher read aloud as a whole class. For example, after reading *Green* (Seeger, 2012) on the carpet with friends and me during morning group time, Nick decided to make a book. He immediately grabbed a green marker and said, "Geen!" and then proceeded to also add purple marks, which he identified as such (Figure 4.12). This was the first documented instance of Nick connecting any sort of meaning to the marks he was making on the page, and in this case, it was inspired by reading *Green*.

Figure 4. 12 Nick's Green and Purple Marks

Children's Composing is Multimodal

Children frequently used multiple sign systems, such as gesture, body movement, and use of objects, to read or explain the content in their books. It was imperative that children were physically present to read their books, as their drawings and transcription attempts did not yet reach conventional forms, and the use of semiotics further supported their meaning-making. For example, as Jade moved the marker back and forth on the paper quickly to represent motion, she narrated, "Super Sonic! This [is] Super Sonic! You gotta go fast!" (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4. 13 Jade's Super Sonic

Gabriel pointed and used his finger to first describe the meaning of his marks in his book. For example, as Gabriel read the first page of his book (Figure 4.14), he pointed to the green marks and said, "This is my mama-uh. This is my two mamas." When I asked about the orange marks, he started to swirl his finger in the air and replied, "It's like the one..." Because I was aware of the conversation about tornados that transpired at the table earlier, I asked, "A tornado?" He replied, "Yeah, a tornado (Figure 4.14, Frame 1)." A few pages later, Gabriel swirled his finger again to indicate a tornado (Figure 4.14, Frame 4).

Figure 4. 14 Gabriel's Book

<table>
<tr>
<td> 
Gabriel: Ey, this is my mama-uh. This is my two mamas. (Points to the green dots)
KA: What's the orange?
Gabriel: It's like the one… (Swirls his finger in the air.)
KA: A tornado?
Gabriel: Yah, it's a tornado.
1</td>
<td> 
Gabriel: And then, this my dog's poop everywhere.
KA: That's your dog's poop everywhere?
Gabriel: Yah, it's my dog's poop on my grass.
2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
KA: And what is this? Is that the poop on the grass, too?
Gabriel: Hm, no, that is the pee on the grass. It's a lot of grass.
Gabriel: right page This, this is my sweatshirt (Points to his sweatshirt).
3</td>
<td> 
Gabriel: This is like the same (Swirls his index finger in the air)
KA: the tornado?
Gabriel: Yah, again.
4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
KA: What's this?
Gabriel: That's the same thing. Tornado.
5</td>
<td> 
Gabriel: And this is the ghosts'.
KA: That's a ghost?
Gabriel: And that's a ghost.
Gabriel: And this is a fake ghost. And that's the end.
6</td>
</tr>
</table>

Similarly, I asked Micah as he read one of his books about a red transformer he had drawn (Figure 4.15). He responded, “Red transformer. He is crushing people.” He then demonstrated by making a fist and pounding on the table.

Figure 4. 15 Micah's Crushing Transformer

Gavin’s book had a magical portal that could move people into another world, inspired by the popular video game Roblox, featured active characters. Reading his book, Gavin augmented the illustrations by physically acting out the characters’ moves. For example, on a page (Figure, 4.16) where one character is stepping out of the portal, explained, “This is Tiger the EXE,” as he twisted his body in his seat and thrashed his arms in the air, adding, “He has a lotta arms.” When I asked about the part of the drawing done in pencil, he made some unintelligible noises, and said, “He is a person. He has a gavel [hook] thing.”

Figure 4. 16 Gavin's Tiger the EXE

For children who were the least developed in oral language abilities, multimodal composing was particularly useful. For instance, Rachel, who spoke few words, placed her hands

under arms and started flapping in connection with the bird she had drawn in her book (Figure 4.17).

Figure 4. 17 Rachel's Bird

Children's Composing Represents a Range of Literacy Skills and Knowledge

Bookmaking as an open activity in which children could work within their zones of proximal development made evident the wide range of knowledge about reading and writing that children knew and the areas where they were experimenting. The differences in children's efforts related to literacy skills and knowledge in the moment reflect the experiential differences among children in the class.

Exploring Writing Materials and Marking on the Page

For some children, making books presented early experiences to investigate writing tools (e.g., pencils, colored pencils, markers) and what they could accomplish with them. For example, rummaging through the material bin, Gavin discovered a pencil with an eraser top, and he asked me how to use it. After I modeled erasing on my own notepad, he tried it out on his book. For some children, like Tessa, working with writing materials appeared to be a new experience in general, and their initial bookmaking efforts centered on simply making marks on the pages. When she visited the writing center, she slowly started to make marks on the page (Figure 4.18), but when I asked her what she was doing, she had no response.

Figure 4. 18 Tessa's Marks

Similarly, Reid liked making dots on his pages in different colors. One day, he repeatedly dabbed green and black markers on one page as fast as he could (Figure 4.19), and when I asked what he was doing, he shrugged his shoulders and continued.

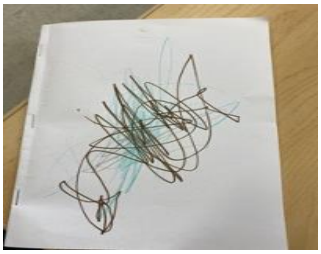
Figure 4. 19 Reid's Marks on Page

Likewise, Nick placed a blue marker and green marker on the table in front of his book, then grabbed the blue marker and started making circular marks on his paper. When I asked what he was drawing he responded, “I don’t know,” and continued making marks on his page with different colored markers (Figure 4.20). These children had figured out they could populate the book with their own markings, but these efforts did not yet represent any particular sort of meaning.

Figure 4. 20 Nick's Marks

At first glance, Liam's book (Figure 4.21) appeared to be a series of scribbles. Upon closer examination with Liam, it was clear these were not random scribbles, but that his interest was in the colors he was using. He had grabbed a brown and blue marker from the bin and placed them on the table. He first took the blue marker and started quickly making marks in the middle of the front page. Then he grabbed a brown marker and did the same thing on top of the blue marks. When I asked him what was on his page, he pointed and said, "Blue," then pointed to the brown marks and said, "Brown." For Liam, his marks on the page consistently represented colors.

Figure 4. 21 Liam's Book of Colors



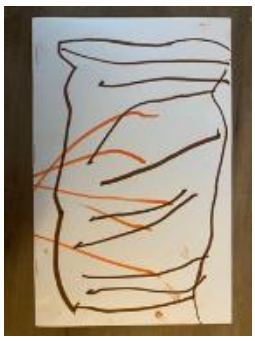
Marks on the Page Have Meaning

Other children provided evidence their marks held specific meanings. On her first visit to the writing center for Zuri demonstrated that the marks could represent something. When she read her book to me in its entirety (Figure A.5), she pointed to the yellow mark on her front page and said, "That's mommy," then pointed to the purple marks below, explaining, "That's me"

(Figure A.5, Frame 1). Zuri proceeded book page by page, explaining illustrations featuring herself, her mom, and also what she called "scribble scrabble" (Figure A.5, Frame 3), which appeared to indicate different sorts of marks that, in contrast, held no meaning for her. It was imperative that Zuri was physically present when reading her books, as I would have no idea what the marks on the page represented, and definitely would not have known the difference between the marks that represented "mommy" and the marks that were, "scribble scrabble."

Similarly, after Savannah announced that she had completed her book–which might be undecipherable to an outsider—she quickly pointed to the front cover of her book (Figure 4.22), and said, "Ice cream!" Then quickly turned to the back page of her book and said again, "Ice Cream!"

Figure 4. 22 Savannah's Ice Cream Book

 Savannah: Ice Cream.	 Savannah: Ice Cream.

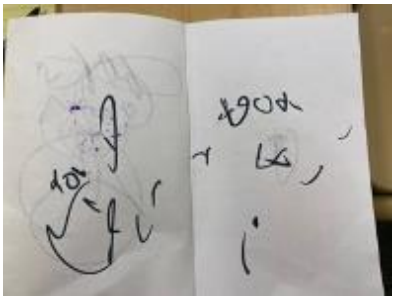
Name Writing and Code-Based Skills

Children's knowledge about letters varied, including the letters in their names, as well as other code-based skills, and this was evident across children, some of whom did not attempt to write words, and others who represented a range of rudimentary knowledge. Name writing was a point of interest at the table, as it often came up in conversation. Children's attempts ranged from scribbles that they identified as their names, shape-like forms, mock-like letters, and for some,

more conventional forms of letters. Some children asked to see their names in print, and name plates and alphabet strips were available in those cases.

Jade incorporated her name into her books. For example, as she explained the marks on her pages, she started with the left page, (Figure 4.23) and said, “Me and Daddy.” Then pointed to the string of three black marks at the top of the right page and said, “My name!”

Figure 4. 23 Jade's Name



Others represented their names with first initial letters. For example, in Henry’s books (Figure 4.24), Hs would often appear on a page or two in his book. One day when I asked, “What is that?” He responded, “That’s my name.”

Figure 4. 24 Henry's Name

Children would write their full first names as a visible string of letters that included a combination of conventional and mock-like forms. For example, Fiona often asked to see her name plate as a resource. Intently, she would copy the letters from the nameplate to her page in the best way she knew how. As a result, her name on her paper appeared to include visible letters she knew how to write, such as “F” and “A”, and other letters represented mock-like forms.

When I would ask her what letters, she used to write her name, she could name only the letter "F." Similarly, Gavin would often ask for his name plate and he too, would add his full name on his books. However, the letters in his name would be written all over the page as isolated letters rather than a coherent string of letters. Over time, he started to recognize most of the letters in his name.

From the first day of school, Avery wrote her name on almost every book she made. In the beginning, she wrote her name as a visible string of letters in the best way she knew how. Over time, her transcription improved, and her letter recognition grew. In later observations, she recognized and named all the letters in her name by memory. Similarly, Elle included her full first name on the majority of the books she created. She wrote her full name as a legible, coherent string of conventional forms of letters and could name each letter.

With few exceptions, alphabet writing in books was limited to the letters in children's names. One exception was Micah, who loved to read the alphabet book *LMNO Peas* (Baker, 2010), a book he often asked me to read with him while at the writing center. Over time, he started adding the letters L-M-N-O-P to his books. Even though the book was near the writing table, it was clear observing him that he was writing these letters by memory and could identify each one. Some of his books featured these letters via alphabet people fighting off transformers (Figure 4.25).

Figure 4. 25 Micah's Alphabet People

It was also rare for children to try to spell or read words in their book by linking letters and sounds. Gavin was twice the exception. For example, Gavin announced at the table that he had drawn a Ghostbuster (Figure 4.26), then moved his finger across the letters he had written, from right to left, and said, “That says ghostbusters.” When I asked why he used those letters, he responded, “Ghostbusters. Ghostbusters has [an] O.” The letter “A” was added because it was a letter he knew, and the last letter he identified as a “G.” Both the letters “A” and “G” were letters in his name. It appeared that Gavin was still learning how to transcribe and form the letters in writing on his paper, the letter he described as “G” in print looks more like a “B”. It was imperative that Gavin was there to explain what was on his paper.

Figure 4. 26 Gavin's Ghostbuster

Elle appeared to become interested in adding words during an interaction with me at the writing table. Noticing me jotting down observational notes on a pad, she asked, “When will I learn to write like that?” I explained that as a person much other than her, I had lots of experience and that she is expected at this point to write like a 4-year-old might write. With that, she picked up a marker and began making mock-like letters on her page (Figure 4.27), then began to read, gliding her finger underneath the marks from left to right, "This is us writing in the car." She then said, "I gotta make all my books have words." It is important that this was also

a rare instance of one of the children narrating the activity in their books rather than simply naming objects as a list.

Figure 4. 27 Elle Reading Her List Book

Children's Processes of Engaged Composing

This section focuses on children's composing processes when engaged in making books. First, I detail the social processes of children's composing. Second, I describe children's strategic processes. This section concludes with one example of how these processes occur simultaneously.

Children's Composing is Relational

Although children made their own individual books, their efforts were shaped by and shaping of the social interactions at the writing center.

Teaching Each Other

Closely tied to the social environment established by the teacher were children's interactions with each other and their willingness to teach and help each other out. For example, on the same day that Andrea encouraged the children to help each other at the writing center, Zuri, later in the day making a book, turned to Avery, and asked, "Can you teach me?" I asked what she wanted help with, and she said, "Cat," and Avery clarified, "She wants me to help her," as she helped Zuri with the drawing.

Moments later, as Zuri turned her page, she looked at Avery and asked, "Can you help me again?" and Avery helped for quite a while. In the completed book (Figure 4.28), Avery's contributions, more distinctly shape-like, were distinguishable from Zuri's drawings, which could be characterized as marks, similar to her drawings in other books she had made up to that point. But in this book, after Avery showed her how to draw, Zuri added marks to represent Avery in her book (Figure 4.28, Frame 4).

Figure 4. 28 Zuri's Book with Avery's Help

 Zuri: Cat. 1	 KA: What is that? Zuri: A scary thing. 2
 Zuri: That's me and mom. 3	 Zuri: The circle is me, and that is mommy *(She points to the purple coloring)* and that's her [Avery] *(Points to green)* 4

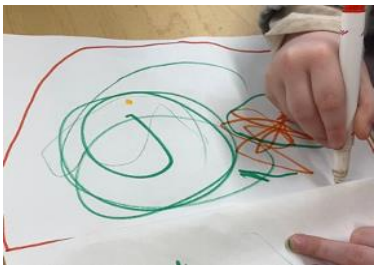
Children were inspired by their peers' work, and sometimes they wanted to copy and learn what it was they were doing at that moment. When Elle made a book that featured a "jail

with people in it," (Figure 4.29) she talked out the details of her book at the table, prompting Savannah to shout, "I wanna make that!" pointing to Elle's page.

Figure 4. 29 Elle's Jail

Elle quickly responded, "You gotta trace the book" and then demonstrated in her own book saying, "I can help you if you need help to do it. You gotta trace the line up. And like this…there we go, see, just trace it." Savannah then took a red marker and attempted to trace the line along the edges of her book (Figure 4.30).

Figure 4. 30 Savannah's Jail



Elle further encouraged her, "If you miss up on the line, [you] can start back over," prompting Savannah to turn the page in her book and try again. Struggling to trace the lines a second time, she pushed her book toward which Elle, who asked, "Need me to draw it for you?" She then showed Savannah how to trace the lines along the page.

Others taught their peers by demonstrating in their own books and then letting their peers do it themselves. For instance, after reading a Fall themed book, *The Little Old Lady Who Wasn't*

Afraid of Anything (Williams, 1979), Savannah asked Gavin, who was sitting across from her at the writing table, how to draw a pumpkin. Gavin, who had already completed a book at this point, took a new blank book from the bin, grabbed a green marker, held the blank book up in the air with the green maker in his right hand, and said to her as he drew, "You draw a circle, then a line." As he added a face to the pumpkin on his paper he said, "That's how you draw a pumpkin." She hesitated, then screamed, "I can't! I can't!" and started to shove her blank book toward Gavin. Gavin, who didn't budge, watched Savannah slowly slide her book back toward her body, and I added, "Sure you can! What do you need first?" Moments later, she drew a circle on her page, and then a line, to represent the stem of her pumpkin. With a big smile on her face, she appeared proud.

Learning From Each Other

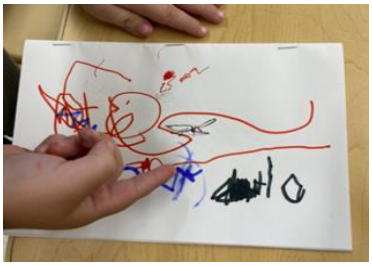
Children got ideas from listening to their peers talk about their books, and sometimes mimicked them. For instance, as Reid overheard Elle explain that her illustration was a pond with sharks, he decided his marks meant "fishes in a pond." Prior to this instance, Reid had not previously ascribed any meaning to what he drew on the page (Figure 4.31).

Figure 4. 31 Reid's Fishpond

In most cases when children wrote their names in their books, it was because they were nudged by their peers. For instance, after Kaiden overheard Avery, Elle, and Gavin compare the

letters in their names, he decided to try out his own in his book. When I asked what he was doing, he responded, “That's my name! That's where I draw it,” as he pointed to the black line and circle-like form on the bottom right quadrant of the front page of his book (Figure 4.32).

Figure 4. 32 Kaiden's Name



Similarly, Savannah, hearing Gavin talk about the different letters of his name that he added to the front of his book, grabbed a pencil from the bin, added four circles to the top of her front page (Figure 4.33), and said, “Name!” It appeared that Savannah’s decision to use a pencil to write her name, rather than the markers she had used to draw, suggested she knew that her name was something different from her illustration.

Figure 4. 33 Savannah's Name in Pencil

Children’s spontaneous comments about what they were doing in their books sparked conversations that often led to peers making suggestions to each other. For example, Gavin was working on his book, while, simultaneously, he was having a conversation with Micah about spiders, prompting Micah to suggest he should add a spider to his transformer book. As Gavin turned to the final page of his book (Figure 4.34), he narrated his illustration as a picture of his

mom and a spider as, “She is going to walk away.” When I asked for clarification, he added, “She is walking away from the spider. My mommy really doesn’t like spiders. When she sees a spider she goes, AH!” Micah informed me, “I told him to put a spider in his book.”

Figure 4. 34 Gavin's Spider Inspired by Micah

Fiona showed Elle that she could trace her hand in her book, a strategy first used by Rachel, and noticed by other children. Fiona’s teaching resulted in Elle creating her first list book that featured a collection of handprint tracings which she labeled as her family members’ hands (Figure A.6). When I asked how she got the idea, she pointed to Fiona, who was sitting next to her, and said, “Her.” (Figure A.6, Frame 2).

For the most part, peer help was welcomed, but a contrasting example showed how the wrong kind of help or help that went too far appeared to undermine Gabriel’s sense of autonomy, and thus, his motivation and engagement. Henry had recruited him to go to the writing table to make a book about a frog, but once at the table Gabriel worried, “I can’t make a frog,” Henry quickly responded, “Watch what I do.” Trying to mimic Henry’s efforts, Gabriel began drawing and showed me, “I got the eyes.” He quickly grew frustrated though that his effort was not as precise as he wanted. Andrea, sitting next to him, then intervened with a strategy: “You can add a circle first and then add to it.” Gabriel appeared to grow even more frustrated, prompting Henry to offer, “You want help? Come on! You can’t make a frog? Here let me do it.” As Henry

started drawing on Gabriel's book, he became more visibly upset and left the table, unwilling to finish what he had started.

Children's Composing is Intentional and Strategic and Supported by Process Talk

Without children present to read and explain their books, their composing would appear to be random and haphazard. Some children spontaneously announced their plans for writing in the moment. For example, as Jade joined the writing table, she picked a black and green marker out of the material bin and placed them on the table next to her blank book, and said, "I draw supersonic, and knuckles, and Dr. Eggman," referring to the characters of the popular animated TV show, *Sonic Action,* which often appeared in her books. After telling me what she was doing, she immediately got to work on her book.

For other children, it was useful and necessary to ask children about their processes, and when that was the case, children revealed that they were planful and deliberate. For example, when I asked Avery what her new book was going to be about, she was quick with, "A puppy! She is this little, tiny, Mia. It is little, and she's like a Husky." I then asked, simply, what colors she thought she would need, but she took it further: "The doggy is going to be right there (points to the paper), and I am going to draw another heart…Mia has [a] black eye. White with a black eye. I am making the skin." These plans came to fruition, as shown in Figure 4.35. This page reveals the red heart at the top, Mia with her one black eye in the lower left quadrant, and Avery's name (Signified by "A") in the lower right quadrant.

Figure 4. 35 Avery's Dog Mia

With some children, though, it appeared that my questions and comments played a significant role in catalyzing or advancing students' processes. For example, Gavin had shared without prompting that he was drawing his dog Sadie on the first page of his book, and as he drew, he simultaneously shared a story about how Sadie got hurt by another dog a few days prior. I interrupted briefly to ask if he planned to add that information to his book. He nodded and went on to say more about that encounter, adding details to his book as he went along. For instance, after explaining that Sadie had wandered outside because she could not find him in the house, and thus encountered and was bitten by the neighbor's dog, Willie, he turned the page and drew Willie. He went on to say that he had been in the house with his cousin and his "Maw-Maw," who was upset by the incident. As Gavin drew Sadie again in his book, he reached for a red marker and added a dot to one of Sadie's legs in his illustration, explaining when I asked that it showed that Sadie was bleeding. Then, on the last page, he drew Sadie with a gray dot on her leg to illustrate that her wound eventually healed. (Figure A.7, Frame 6). This process of talking, planning, and composing lasted for 45 minutes, and afterward, Gavin read, *Sadie Got Hurt by a Dog* (Figure A.7), in its entirety with the same details from page to page he provided when he created it.

Similarly, as Elle sat down and grabbed a blank book, I asked her what she would add to her first page. She explained that she wanted to draw a princess but said, "I don't know how to make a princess." I responded, "Sure you do, what do you need?" After a few moments of thinking, she started to list the things she needed: "a dress, a crown, heels." In our conversation, we concluded that a crown would need a head. To make the head, she strategically made dots in the form of a circle (Figure 4.36), and later explained, "I didn't know how to draw a circle, so I put dots first."

Figure 4. 36 Elle's Princess with Dots Around the Head

Weeks later, Elle used this strategy again, this time sharing with peers at the table, "Do you know what the dots are for? They help me draw things."

Some children took their cues from authors and illustrators of published books. One of the books shared with the whole was *I Want My Hat Back* (Jon Klassen, 2012), and a part of their conversation about it centered on a particular page that featured a deep red backdrop to represent the main character's anger at realizing who had stolen his hat. Micah used this same strategy (Figure 4.37) in one of his transformer books, as he explained to me, "This is Hotshot. He is probably tired. I make him mad," then grabbed a red marker and added red lines out of the transformer's eyes.

Figure 4. 37 Micah's Mad Transformer

It was also evident that children voluntarily revised their books when they were asked clarifying questions or in the process of reading their books in their entirety to me, often orally changing their storyline or adding to their illustrations, particularly when listeners asked questions. For instance, when she got to a drawing of me, she had included in a completed book she was reading aloud, she stopped and realized, "Oh, I forgot to make the eyes" (Figure 4.38). As she added two dots and lines going down from my face in her illustration, she laughed and said, "This is you crying!" When I asked why I was crying, she explained, "Because your dress looks like that!" causing us both to chuckle. I assured her, "I think it is a beautiful dress! I don't think I'd be crying over that!" On the next page, I asked about some squiggly lines she had made, and she explained and revised, "Tornado…you are crying because of the tornado.".

Figure 4. 38 Fiona's Tornado & Illustration of Karole-Ann

Children also revised when they realized there were missing details in their illustrations. For example, after reading the first page of her book, Savannah, unsatisfied with the empty circle

she described as her face, grabbed a marker, and said, “eyes and teeth,” as she added them in. Similarly, reading his werewolf book aloud, Aaron reached a page featuring a daddy werewolf playing in the snow, and exclaimed, “Oh! I forgot to make the mouth.” He revised with a blue colored pencil and said in a high-pitched voice, “I make the mouth!” and continued to the next page of his book (Figure 4.39).

Figure 4. 39 Aaron's Werewolf

Properties of Engaged Composing Occur Simultaneously

It is important to point out that while these findings are presented as separate, the different properties of young children’s composing were interconnected and, in most cases, appeared simultaneously during the coherent writing event of making books. However, it is important to note that these engagement properties and processes were not experienced similarly by different children. To give a sense of how these appeared simultaneously, I offer an example of a book written by Micah, which illustrates how multiple properties and processes of engaged composing appeared during a single experience of making a book.

Micah was inspired and motivated to write about what he was knowledgeable about and interested in--- transformers. One day as Micah skipped over to the writing center, he announced that he was making another transformer book. As I watched him get started, he immediately grabbed a black and red marker and drew his first transformer. After a few minutes of silence, he

announced to the table, unprompted, that his next page will have a "two-headed transformer." As he drew what looked like two green heads (Figure A.8, Frame 4), he added yellow marks, which he described as arms. When he finished the final touches on his two-headed transformer, he squealed, "TA-DA!" Which prompted me to ask, "Are you done?" He responded, "I am making another one," and flipped to the next blank page. It was clear that Micah had planned what transformers he was going to add to his book. After Micah finished, he participated in reading it from the beginning in which he described each illustration by listing the different transformers from page to page. As he arrived back at the two-headed transformer (Figure A.8, Frame 4), he read, "[This is a] two-headed transformer with yellow arms…" He then moved his right arm in the air, flexed, and said, "And [he is] strong," then continued to describe that the green scribble marks to the left of his page represented the transformer's name. As he flipped to the next page (Figure A.8, Frame 5), he read, "The long transformer. [He has] long arms and he is touching his toes." At that moment, he revised, as he realized he had forgotten to add lines to represent the long arms touching the transformer's toes. Then, as he arrived at the last page of his book (Figure A.8, Frame 6), he said, "Ninja Transformer. Let me draw the knives." It appeared again, Micah realized he had forgotten an important feature in his illustration, thus prompting him to revise again.

In this example, Micah's transformer book is one example of how multiple properties and processes of engaged composing appear simultaneously. Which became possible because of his engagement in the coherent meaning-focused literacy event of making books. First, Micah was intrinsically motivated to make a book about something he was extremely interested in and knowledgeable about. In the process of creating, he displayed he had strategically planned the content of his book from page to page, by announcing to the table his next steps. During the final

reading of his book, he also revised the content of his book, and on pages, he realized he forgot something. Also, Micah demonstrated his knowledge of the difference between print and pictures, as he mentioned the green scribble marks on his page represented the transformer's name.

Summary

In summary, when children became behaviorally, affectively, cognitively, and socially engaged at the writing center, these properties and processes of children's composing were inseparable from each other. When children were engaged, they wrote about their personal lives, interests, and knowledge and were inspired by their relationships and popular culture interests. Children's composing became a multimodal enterprise, and their composing was not separate from themselves as they used gesture, body movement, and objects to further their meaning-making. Bookmaking allowed for children to bring their knowledge of literacy to the writing table, as a result, a range of children's experiential differences became visible all at once. However, these properties of engaged composing were not separate from children's social and strategic processes. Children taught and learned from each other, and social activity and feedback played a role in children's intentional and strategic acts, such as planning and revision. All in all, when children were engaged in composing, the consequences were far-reaching.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this naturalistic qualitative study was to understand the full range of what preschoolers do when they are engaged in composing. Specifically, this study addresses the question, "What is the nature of preschool children's composing and processes when they are engaged?" This study demonstrates that in an intrinsically motivating classroom atmosphere where young children's individual knowledge and backgrounds were valued, a community of engaged writers became strategic, intentional meaning-makers who collaborated with and learned from peers, serving as teachers to each other while simultaneously exploring writing materials, their motivations and interests for writing, and their growing knowledge of print. This study provides insights into how engagement in composing can serve as a hub for meaningful activity that supports both literate and human development. In this concluding chapter, I discuss how this study confirms, extends, and adds to existing understandings of young children's composing. Then I discuss the study's limitations and implications for research, early learning practices, and policy.

Children's Engaged Composing

This study draws from sociocultural perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978) and theories (Fredricks et al., 2004) and studies of engagement (Guthrie et al., 2012; Ivey & Johnston, 2013) as lenses through which to understand preschool children's engaged composing. Children engaged in bookmaking in a classroom setting deliberately set up to fuel their motivation to write confirmed some existing theories and research on preschoolers' writing. They demonstrated that even very young children, before they know the conventions of print and sound, can create meaning through writing (Harste et al., 1984) and learn that writing can be revisited and revised (Rowe, 2008; Kissel et al., 2011). Also, children's compositions were not separate from

themselves (Vygotsky, 1978), as they used social semiotics such as gestures, body movement, and objects to support their composing (Rowe, 2019) and extend their meaning-making far beyond what was on the page in front of them (Dyson, 2008). Likewise, children's composing served as a way to test rudimentary code-related skills such as letter knowledge (Levin & Aram, 2013; Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2008). In previous studies, however, these properties of young children's writing have been studied separately and frequently not in naturalistic settings. The present study, by contrast, captured all of these dimensions of children's composing together in an authentic, coherent meaning-making literate event. This study suggests that these dimensions are sometimes inseparable from each other and occur simultaneously.

In addition, these dimensions of children's writing have previously been examined not only as separate components but also as directed activities not always initiated by children themselves. Children's writings in the present study were products of an autonomy-supportive environment (Gutman & Sulzby, 1999; Turner, 1995) that fostered children's intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000), thus enabling their engagement in composing.

Related, extant research suggests that although basic writing materials are typically available in preschool children's classrooms, children spend little time writing (Gerde et al., 2015; Pelatti et al., 2014; Quinn et al., 2021; Zhang, et al., 2015). When they do write, activities are limited to technical activities such as letter formation, copying, and name writing (Bingham, Quinn, & Gerde, 2017; Gerde et al., 2015; Pelatti et al., 2014) or functional writing activities (Gerde et al., 2015). However, in the present study, this was not the case, and the deliberate creation of a motivating context that arranged for children to have a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) offers a contrast to what research suggests is

the current status of writing in preschool. When preschoolers are arranged to be intrinsically motivated, they want to write, and they do so enthusiastically. Children in this study appeared intrinsically motivated to come to the writing center because they had the freedom to make books on topics of their choice, were the sole decision-makers and could be socially interactive with their peers and the researcher.

Intrinsic motivation paved the way for children to be engaged, and consequently, engagement both expanded the properties of both children's composing, provided a more nuanced view of early writing development, and inspired complex social processes that facilitated and extended their composing.

Expanding Notions of Composition Development Among Preschoolers

The project-like, open (Turner, 1995) literate activity of making books, served as a blank palette, where children started with what they knew, making it possible to document a more nuanced look at the range of complexity and children's writing development than previous empirical research has offered. First, the present study provided a more detailed look at the range of ways that preschoolers perceive the purpose and organization of composition. In their book on facilitating composition among preschoolers and kindergarteners, Ray and Glover (2008) described two distinct categories for how young children organize their books. They suggest that children with less experience about what constitutes a book tend to organize their books around lists of ideas, with a non-narrative structure, and children further along in their development might make books around one coherent idea that moves through time, creating narrative possibilities. The present study provided both. For instance, Gabriel's book read more like a list, which featured his two mamas, tornados, and ghosts. In contrast, Gavin's book about his dog Sadie resembled more of a narrative book. But there were also children whose compositions

preceded, developmentally- or experientially-wise, either of these categories. This would include children like Reid, who made marks on single pages, but when asked, did not ascribe any meaning to those marks, indicating they were yet to think about purpose or sense of audience in their writing. It is unclear and outside the scope of the present study whether these children were yet making the connection that published books read to them could serve the same purposes of books they might create on their own. These unstructured books, though, seemed important to the children because they persisted at making them multiple times despite the fact that it was not required. Further, these appeared to be important entry points into composition.

Second, this study provided a broader look into the overall literacy development of children still developing in their oral language, offering both expanded information for assessment and opportunity to engage fully in literate activity. Children who were speaking little in class and were still learning to articulate words nonetheless demonstrated milestone literate knowledge, such as understanding that marks on the page represent meaning, even before they could articulate that meaning verbally. In this study, advanced oral language ability was not a prerequisite for children's composing. The practice of making books, due to its multimodal nature, facilitated children's communication, for example when children drew to communicate their meaning or used their bodies to clarify meaning (e.g., Rachel moved her arms like a bird to represent the drawing on her page). For some children, their books were spaces to experiment with labels for concepts, such as when Savannah referred to the duck in her book as "quack-quack." Existing research provides a solid base to advise how we might build preschool children's vocabulary, for example, through interactive read-alouds (Hadley & Dickinson, 2019) which include dialogic conversation (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000) and intentional teacher feedback (Hindman et al., 2022). It appears that making books, or some similar project-like

writing activity, could be a promising site for furthering vocabulary development, but also as a place for children to expand their literate development while still developing linguistically.

The children in the present study also demonstrated hints of other dimensions of literacy development not typically associated with young children's writing. For instance, Lysaker and colleagues (Lysaker & Arvelo-Alicea, 2017; Lysaker & Miller, 2013; Lysaker et al., 2011) have examined the extent to which young children attend to the mental lives of characters in books, what they refer to as social imagination and what others, in examining the links between imagining mental states and reading comprehension, refer to as Theory of Mind (e.g., Guajardo & Cartwright, 2016). Although not typically examined in the context of young children's writing, some children did, indeed, ascribe mental states to the characters in their books, such as Rachel's explanation of, "Mama Sad. Mama Home," or Gavin expressing that his Mawmaw was sad when his dog Sadie got hurt by another dog. Their teacher consistently drew children's attention to the emotional states of characters when reading published books to them. However, she did not make explicit connections between inferring characters' thoughts and feelings in published books with how the children might think about or represent mental and emotional states in their own composing. Nonetheless, some children did. Future research might explore the possibilities of this phenomenon, particularly in a context in which children were more regularly exposed to narrative picture books and where a teacher made explicit connections between children's social imaginations in text read to them and imagining and representing characters' mental and emotional states in the books they make.

Making Books as a Vibrant Social Practice

The present study brings expanded life to the theory that children's composing is shaped by and shaping of social interaction with peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Making books, in this study,

was, at its core, an engaging and complex social practice. Specifically, the activity of making books was a sort of affinity space (Gee, 2004; 2014) for its participants. Gee asserts that affinity spaces, initially attributed to video-gaming, are organized around a common activity of persons with shared interests, and participants of different ages, knowledge, and skills share this space. Participation in this space can take on many forms as they choose to stay for as long as they wish. Individuals also can work side-by-side and help in this space is normalized and encouraged. Peer mentoring, if one wishes, is always available. However, any participant can serve as a teacher in a particular dimension of an activity where they have expertise, even if they are novices needing help in other instances. Also, social interaction consistently transforms the content, conversations, and material within this space.

Similar to participants in the world of gaming, children in the present study came together around a shared project—in this case, book-making, which became an affinity space (Gee, 2004). In Andrea's classroom, all children could make books regardless of their prior experience or specific skills. Also, children voluntarily participated at the writing center and decided when to leave and how long to stay. There were no fixed expectations for making a book and no prerequisites to start. This space allowed for the children's range of knowledge to become visible while sustaining their competence, confidence, and identities as writers. In a classroom, it can be challenging to serve children's individual needs and simultaneously provide instruction to each child that hovers within their proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Making books, however, appeared to nurture children's capabilities by allowing them to start with what they knew while keeping intact their positive emotions towards literate activity and identities as writers.

Through talk and observation among the children making books, children identified problems they cared about solving and new strategies, and they routinely looked to each other for help and to give help. A key feature of affinity spaces, and also prevalent among the preschoolers in the present study, was distributed teaching. In affinity spaces (Gee, 2014), any participant can take on the role of teacher, and in the writing center, that included children along a wide range of general development in language and literacy. In affinity spaces (Gee, 2014), novices can teach more advanced children and vice versa. It was not surprising to see an older more experienced writer help a less experienced peer, for example, Avery taught Zuri, a less experienced illustrator, how to draw a cat in her book. However, it was also the case that novices had things to teach, for example, Zuri helped Elle draw triangles on her page, and Rachel taught others how to trace their hand in their books.

The development of an affinity space and the related practice of distributed teaching was inextricably linked to the context that supported students' self-determination. The social vibrancy of the activity resulted from and added to the strong sense of belonging (Dyson, 2003) children felt within the classroom community, and the availability of resources in the form of peer support and also the acknowledgment of individual expertise in their roles as "teacher" of peers were likewise linked to maintaining and strengthening their not only their sense of competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985) but also their sense of social agency (Reeve, 2006). This was accomplished without undermining their sense of autonomy, as they were all still allowed to pursue their own interests within the larger project.

The significance of engaged learning supported by distributed teaching among children is significant particularly when one considers everyday classrooms that can include 18 or more children, representing a wide range of literacy knowledge, life experiences, cultural identities,

and linguistic knowledge. In these cases, limiting the role of teacher to one or two individuals–usually the adults in the room–is insufficient to respond to individual needs and to maximize learning. In the present study, three, four, and five-year-olds took on the role of "knowledgeable others" (Vygotsky, 1978) at the writing center, not only distributing the work of teaching, but also, in the process, helping to expand each others' zones of proximal development.

The Importance of Adult "Feedforward"

Children's efforts were notably expanded by distributed teaching among peers, but having an adult situated at the writing center was also important. My conversations with the children, fueled by observations of their processes and products, subsequently transformed their thinking and composing. As the "adult friend" (Dyson, 2013, p. 408) at the writing center, I mainly talked to children informally about what they were doing by asking them to describe what they were doing, to explain their planning, and to clarify what they said and wrote. Research suggests adults play an important role in children's literacy learning (e.g., Levin & Aram, 2013; Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2008). In this study, the casual process feedback (Johnston, 2012) I provided appeared to draw children's attention to their decision-making, which catalyzed complex strategies such as planning, revision, and strategic behaviors. For example, children talked through their step-by-step planning from page to page, they were intentional about how they went about drawing and the colors they used, and they often revised when asked open-ended questions about their books. Johnston (2012) states, "...the more process talk becomes part of classroom conversations, the more strategy instruction will be occurring incidentally, without the teacher having to do it" (p. 40). My role became a critical piece necessary for children's processes of engaged composing. Johnston (2012b) asserts that feedback should be *feedforward*, as "the purpose of feedback is to improve conceptual understanding or increase strategic options

while developing stamina, resilience, and motivation --- expanding the vision of what is possible and how to get there" (p.47). Research suggests, teachers' support is often limited to handwriting or spelling assistance, and teachers rarely support young children's composing (Bingham et al., 2017). These findings help to highlight the importance and contribute to the literature by including a new perspective on teachers' role in children's composing processes.

Conclusion

Many features of an affinity space apply to the social practice of making books while also complementing children's motivation and engagement around children's composing in a socially interactive context. In many ways, the social properties of affinity spaces complement self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness). Although basic human needs are usually associated with motivation at the individual level, the data suggested that the social practice of making books supported an individual and collective motivation to write. This simultaneously allowed for children's varied interests, experiences with print, cultural and linguistic assets, and various levels of knowledge about foundational literacy skills to be brought to the writing center, all at the same time. In return, this allowed children to write for meaningful reasons that served their purposes, interests, and goals, for children to teach and learn with and from each other and participate in conversations around their books, which consequently included supportive and encouraging feedback from others at the writing center. Making books became part of the classroom's identity- a group of writers who make books.

Limitations of the Study

This study has three limitations. First, it involved only one classroom of 18 participating children and teachers whose personal and teaching philosophies shaped a unique instructional context and who worked, with the researcher's influence, towards establishing a motivating

environment. Although contexts such as the one in this study, particularly the children and their learning environment, may resemble other Head Start classrooms around the country, generalizations must be made cautiously. Second, my presence in the classroom, particularly my role as a participant observer at the writing center, influenced this study. I was not the teacher in this classroom nor the focus of this study. However, the relationships between the children and me grew, potentially influencing their decisions to visit the writing center. Third, the assumptions I hold as a former primary grades teacher and as a researcher partly influenced my interpretations of young children's engagement in composing. My observations of and interactions with children in the classroom were influenced by the knowledge and experiences I gained over the years working with children. Thus, my interpretation of the data is partly related to my personal history as an educator of young children.

Implications

In closing, I discuss the implications of this investigation for researchers, early childhood educators, and educational policy.

Implications for Future Research

Theory can and should be useful in accomplishing our ultimate goals in research while simultaneously enhancing our participants' overall personal and societal well-being and literacy learning in practice (Reinking & Yaden, 2021; Unrau et al., 2019). In this study, I turned to motivational theories, specifically, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), to help arrange for a motivating context (e.g., Turner, 1995) in which children would find composing at the writing center an appealing choice. Although this research was not a design-based study (Ivey, 2019), it was beneficial to modify the existing instructional environment in order to be able to observe and theorize expanded notions of composing. Specifically, to study the properties

and processes of engaged composing, it was first necessary to facilitate children's engagement. In this particular case, the theoretically-driven (Deci & Ryan, 1985) modifications appeared to pay off in terms of producing a rich context in which children were meaningfully engaged in writing and expanded theories about composing could be considered.

The actual modifications made by the teacher, in comparison with the full range of suggestions made by the researcher, however, were modest. Future research might emphasize the practices not taken up to a substantial degree by the teacher in the present study. First, there is a need for research that examines children's engaged composing in an instructional context in which a teacher reads more frequently to children and reads a greater variety of contemporary multimodal picture books. Reading and making books are part of the same meaning-making process (Clay, 1991; Johnston, 2019), and together, they support children's foundational literacy development (Harste et al., 1984; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). While this study provided useful information regarding the properties and processes of engaged composing, it only scratched the surface. It is essential that children's sense of relatedness is nurtured with conversations about and around children's literature, particularly authors' and illustrators' intentions and attention around fundamental concepts about print (e.g., the difference between pictures and worlds, letters, letter sounds), and are (a) infused in daily conversation, and (b) connected to what children do in their own books.

Second, research (e.g., Rowe & Wilson, 2015) documented that children display traditional print concepts in their writing (e.g., write left to right, top to bottom). However, it is still unknown how children might notice or use expanded concepts about print (Hassett, 2006) if exposed to a heavy quantity of multimodal picture books. Multimodal children's books parallel nicely with what young children do in their composing as modern children's literature combines

graphics, symbols, and nonlinear elements (Hasset, 2006), such as speech bubbles and text that defy classic left-to-right, top-to-bottom structures (e.g., text that extends across a double page spread or nonlinear fashion). Research exploring this possibility is needed. As Clay (2004) advised, “Beware of deferring the opportunities for working with complexity until later” (p. 9).

Last, examining literacy and human development was not a goal of this study. However, there is reason to believe that over time, making books has the potential to support both, simultaneously. Gee (2014) states when affinity spaces are nurtured, they have the potential to allow for, "miracles of human interaction" (p.127). In this study, when preschoolers learned with and from each other, they inadvertently started to listen, work with, and be respectful towards one another. Given socio-emotional development is extraordinarily relevant during the early years of schooling, research is needed to understand or examine how socially situated literate activity impacts young children’s human development.

Implications for Practice

It was evident that what young children do in writing is far more expansive when we do not limit writing to merely practicing letter formation and name writing. Multimodal composing allowed for children to include words and pictures, and use gestures, body movements, or objects to further support their meaning-making processes. This was crucial, as children’s writing at this age does not yet mirror conventional forms. An invitation to make a book allowed children to write for meaningful reasons, and some engaged in complex composing processes while simultaneously exploring transcription knowledge. Second, what was very visible in this study, was the sheer variation in the knowledge children brought to the table, not only about the world but about literacy. Making books, for instance, allowed for this knowledge to become visible, as

it allows children to start with what they know and, with the influence of others, try out things that might be new to them.

This study offers a practical and coherent model for preschool classrooms to accommodate and allow children's cultural and linguistic knowledge, worldview, and literacy knowledge to be seen as assets while also allowing children to develop positive literate identities. For classrooms filled with a diverse group of young children, socially situated writing activities, such as making books, allow children to share knowledge and teach each other. This is one way to allow children's literacy development to be nurtured within their zone of proximal development, with the help and support of their peers. However, the practices of writing and reading need to be seen as inseparable (Clay, 1991); thus, the reading of children's literature needs to be prioritized, in addition to conversations about children's literature and deliberate attention to rudimentary concepts encountered in print. This will further support the connections between reading and writing stronger for children. Additionally, a teacher's active role in providing consistent feedback (Johnston, 2012) at the writing center is important. It draws children's attention to their thinking and can support children to consequently engage in complex composing processes.

Implications for Policy

For children to participate in literacy learning willingly, they must first be situated in classrooms that allow literacy activities to be meaningful. However, for this to happen, policy must first be shaped to attend to children's motivation and facilitate their engagement in literacy learning. Second, we must be mindful of the range of knowledge children bring into the classrooms and consider a period of development crucial for literacy learning in the early years, a time for exploration, exposure, and experience. Often, pre-packaged curricula neglect to consider

children's literacy knowledge backgrounds. Consequently, children are forced into instructional environments that are far outside of their proximal zones of development, which leads to confusion and frustration, while also hindering their motivation and engagement. Literacy learning activities such as making books should capitalize on what they know, allowing them to test and explore their knowledge and instruction, and to do so using approximations of what is conventional.

Lastly, children need to be emotionally available to put their best foot forward in their learning. Children should be immersed in literacy-rich environments at an early age, which allows them to explore why they might write (and read) in the first place while simultaneously enjoying literacy learning in the company of their peers. The present study suggests that when children are engaged in composing activities that include social interaction, children explore and learn about writing from and with each other while also learning how to work with each other and learn about each other's lives and interests. The policy should take into consideration that literacy learning is inherently social. We should consider our policy intentions and think more broadly about what we want school to be.

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APPENDIX A: FIGURES

Figure A. 1 Henry's Book

<table>
<tr>
<td> 
Henry: That’s me. (Points to the orange H) That’s my daddy (Points to the thick blue squiggle to the left).

1</td>
<td> 
Henry: This is my house. (Points to circle in the middle). That is Aiden, AJ, Brian, Momma, Daddy, Papa, MawMaw, and that is me. (Points to each line up at the top as he says each name). Daddy don’t live there.
KA: Where is your daddy?
Henry: Daddy is in jail, and I don’t like that much.

2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
Henry: That is a tornado. (Points to left page)
Henry: That is a tornado drill. (Points to right page

3</td>
<td> 
Henry: That is a tornado drill. (Points to left page)
Henry: That’s a tornado drill. (Points to right page)

4</td>
</tr>
</table>

Figure A. 2 Viviana's Book

 Viviana: Mama. *(Points to purple circle in the bottom center)* Baby. *(Points to green circle bottom left)* 1	 Viviana: Ojos. *(Points to the blue circles on the right page, then to her own eyes).* Papa *(Points to blue marks on the left side of the page).* *2*
 KA: Que es esto? Viviana: Ojos. *(Points to the circles at the top left page)* Papa. (*Points to the blue circle in the bottom left page).* Viviana: *points to KA and then points to green in the middle of the right page.* KA: Is that me? *Viviana Nods her head.* 3	 Viviana: Bunny! *(Points to marks on the left page then on the right page)* *4*
 Viviana: Papa. *(Points to orange in left corner*) Viviana: Boca. *(Points to the left orange circle on the left side)* *5*	

Figure A. 3 Avery's About Girls Book

<table>
<tr>
<td> 
Avery: That’s wonder woman, this is the sea (points to the blue), that’s the grass (points to the green), and
KA: What’s the pink?
Avery: That’s my name.
1</td>
<td> 
Avery: This is someone with a yellow heart. They are going to the beach.
2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
Avery: This is a girl I made with another rainbow dress. (Points to the left page)
Avery: This is a girl with a rainbow-y dress. I made her, and green lipstick (points to the green).
3</td>
<td> 
Avery: This is a girl, I made up with that girl, and then she has this red heart (points to red), greenish dress (finger runs down the dress), gray hair (points to gray), red lips (rubs finger over red lips) and blue eyes.
4</td>
</tr>
</table>

Figure A. 4 Avery's Ariel Book

<table>
<tr>
<td> 
Avery: That's Ariel (Points to the orange character), that's the seas (moves her hand back and forth over the blue) and seashells (runs her fingers across the yellow), and my name.
1</td>
<td> 
Avery: That's Ursula, that's her name (Points to purple marks), and that's people (orange).
KA: What are those?
Avery: Her snakies (points to purple lines), that's her family. (Orange marks)
2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
Avery: That's Ursula (points to purple), and that's Ariel (points to green with red hair), and that's the…I don't know. (Moves her finger up and down on the marks on top of the page)
3</td>
<td> 
Avery: That is Ariel's house, and I wrote my name.
4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
Avery: That is Ursula, and some hearts, that's her eyeshadow, yellow eyeshadow (points to the eyes). And those are two hearts.
5</td>
<td> 
Avery: This is Ariel's House.
Avery: That's Ursula's house, 'cuz it's crazy!
6</td>
</tr>
</table>

Figure A. 5 Zuri's Mommy and Me Book

 Zuri: That's mommy *(points to the yellow marks).* That's me *(points to the purple marks).* 1	 Zuri: That's me. 2
 Zuri: That's scribble scrabble. 3	 Zuri: That's mommy and me. 4
 Zuri: That's me and her, again. 5	 Zuri: That's me and her *(mommy).* 6

Figure A. 6 Elle's First List Book Featuring Handprints

<table>
<tr>
<td> 
KA: What is that?
Elle: That's a handprint.</td>
<td> 
KA: What's on the next page?
Elle: Another handprint.
KA: Where'd you get that idea from?
Elle: Her (Points to Fiona). That's daddy's handprint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
Elle: Another handprint.
KA: Is this your hand or Fiona's hand?
Elle: No, (Flips back to the previous page) this is my hand, that (points to this page) is mommy's!</td>
<td> 
Elle: That's bubba's hand (her brother) because he likes the color back.</td>
</tr>
</table>

Figure A. 7 Sadie Got Hurt by A Dog by Gavin

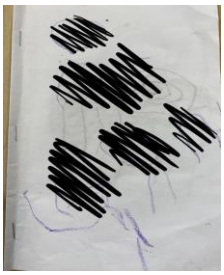
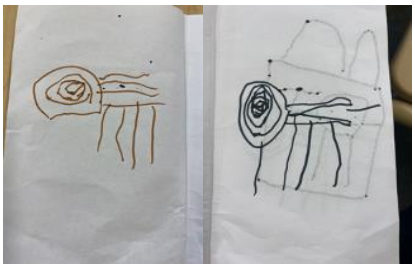
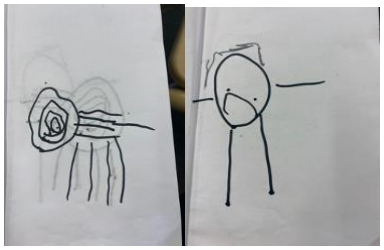
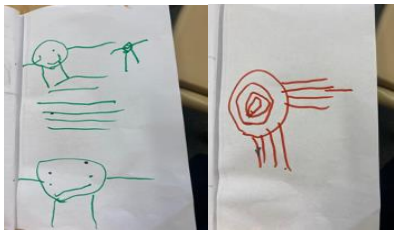
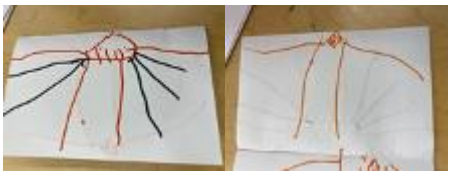
 KA: What is the title of your book? Gavin: Sadie got hurt by a dog. KA: Who is your book by? Gavin: Me. 1	 Gavin: This is Sadie (left) and Willie (right), and Sadie and Allie (his cousin) stayed with me. And Sadie and thinked about something, trying to find me, [but] I was in the house, and I went back out of the house, and her was somewhere else, trying to find me on the golf cart, but I was actually in the house. 2
 Gavin: And Mawmaw is in the house with a big ax, and I don't know why… 3	 Gavin: And then Willie bites some of her fur off. Gavin: And Mawmaw is actually a girl, and Mawmaw has gray hair, and Mawmaw is sad, because… 4
 Gavin: …because Sadie has a hurt leg. 5	 Gavin: And then that is Allie with me, and I was staying with Allie, we were playing on the tablet, and we were at the table, we didn't know about Sadie. Gavin: Then Mawmaw told me that Sadie, hm, Sadie, hm, got hurt at the neighbors, and then Sadie's leg got gray. 6

Figure A. 8 Micah's Transformer Book

<table>
<tr>
<td> 
Micha: Spider transformer.
Micah: Orange transformer.
1</td>
<td> 
Micah: Two orange transformers.
2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
Micah: The Race Car Blue transformer.
3</td>
<td> 
Micah: Two headed transformers with yellow arms. And [he is] strong (MS moves his right arm up in the air and flexes). [The] green is his name (he points to scribbles located on the left side of the transformer's body).
4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> 
Micah: The long transformer. Long arms and he is touching his toes. (He grabs a black marker and adds lines to represent his long arms moving to his toes.
5</td>
<td> 
Micah: The Ninja transformer. Let me draw the knives. (He adds knives to the end of the long arms with a black marker.)
6</td>
</tr>
</table>

APPENDIX B: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE PROVIDED TO THE CLASSROOM

Simple & Predictable Pattern Books

Bloom, S. (2012). *What About Bear?* Astra Young Readers.

Daywalt, D. & Tallec, O. (2019). *This is MY Fort!* Orchard Books.

Gravett, E. (2008). *Monkey and Me.* Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Gravett, E. (2011). *Blue Chameleon*. Simeon & Schuster.

Gravitt, E. (2011). *Orange Pear Apple Bear.* Little Simon.

Henkes, K. (2019). *Egg*. Greenwillow Books.

Henkes, K. (2020). *A Parade of Elephants.* Greenwillow Books.

Pilgrim, C. (2019). *Big and Little.* Holiday House.

Seeger, L.V. (2006) *Lemons Are Not Red.* Square Fish.

Seeger, L.V. (2007). *First the Egg.* Roaring Brook Press.

Seeger, L.V. (2012). *Green.* Roaring Brook Press.

Seeger, L.V. (2016). *One Boy.* Roaring Brook Press.

Seeger, L.V. (2018). *Blue.* Roaring Brook Press.

Seeger, L.V. (2021). *Red.* Neal Porter Books.

Wenzel, B. (2016). *They All Saw A Cat.* Chronicle Books.

Wenzel, B. (2018). *Hello Hello.* Chronicle Books.

Willems, M. (2011). *Should I Share My Ice Cream?* Hyperion Books for Children.

Williams, S. (1996). *I Went Walking.* Clarion Books.

Zuill, A. (2020). *Cat Dog Dog: The Story of a Blended Family.* Schwartz & Wade.

More Complex Pattern Books

Bloom, S. (2009). *A Splendid Friend, Indeed.* Astra Young Readers.

Kang, A. (2015). *That's Not Mine.* Two Lions.

Kang, A. & Weyant, C. (2014). *You are Not Small.* Two Lions.

Klassen, J. (2011). *I Want My Hat Back.* Candlewick.

Klassen, J. (2012). *This is Not My Hat.* Candlewick.

Portis, A. (2006). *Not a Box.* HarperCollins.

Portis, A. (2007). *Not a Stick.* HarperCollins.

Shaw, M. (1988*). It Looked Like Spilt Milk.* HarperCollins.

Sherry, K. (2010). *I'm the Biggest Thing in the Ocean!* Dial Books.

Willems, M. (2003). *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*. Hyperion Books.

Picture Books Inspiring Conversation

Barnett, M. & Klassen, J. (2022). *The Three Billy Goats Gruff.* Orchard Books.

Boelts, M. & Jones, N. (2018). A Bike Like Sergio's. Candlewick.

Cornwall, G. (2020*). Jabari Jumps*. Candlewick.

Henkes, K. (2008). *Chrysanthemum*. Mulberry Books.

Henkes, K. (2010). *Wimberly Worried.* Greenwillow Books.

John, J. & Oswald, P. (2017*). The Bad Seed*. HarperCollins.

John, J. & Oswald, P. (2019). *The Good Egg*. HarperCollins.

John, J. & Oswald, P. (2020). *The Couch Potato*. HarperCollins.

Lies, B. (2018). *The Rough Patch.* Greenwillow Books.

Ludwig, T. & Barton, P. (2013). *The Invisible Boy.* Knopf Books for Young Readers.

Percival, T. (2021). *Ruby has a Worry.* Bloomsbury Children's Books.

Pizzoli, T. (2019*). Tallulah the Tooth Fairy CEO*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Rayner, A. & Rutten, M. (2019). *I am a Thief.* NorthSouth Books.

Tabor, C.R. (2021). *Mell Fell.* Balzer and Bray.

Willems, M. & Muth, J. (2010). *City Dog, Country Frog.* Hyperion Book for Children.

Wordless Picture Books

Boyd, L. (2014). *Flashlight.* Chronicle Books.

Cordell, M. (2017). *Wolf in the Snow*. Feiwel & Friends.

Kerascoët. (2018). *I Walk with Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness.* Random House Studio.

Lee, S. (2008). *Wave.* Chronicle Books.

Pinkney, J. (2009). *The Lion and the Mouse.* Little Brown Books for Young Readers.

Raschka, C. (2011). *A Ball for Daisy.* Random House Studio.

Sima, J. (2019). *Spencer's New Pet.* Simon & Schuster Books.

Teague, M. (2019). *Fly!* Beach Lane Books.

Ziboli, G. & Giorgio, M. (2017). *Professional Crocodile.* Chronicle Books.