Reading the Writing of a Five-Year-Old Through Three Perspectives about Early Literacy

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Running head: READING THE WRITING OF A FIVE-YEAR-OLD

Reading the Writing of a Five-Year-Old Through
Three Perspectives about Early Literacy

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Abstract

By evaluating a five-year-old's writing through three perspectives about early literacy, the researcher determined that examining and understanding one's own beliefs on how children learn to read and write offer insight on learning.
Reading the Writing of a Five-Year-Old Through Three Perspectives about Early Literacy

One of the most researched areas in early literacy has been readiness. What is readiness? Is it phonemic awareness that Adams (1990) states is so critical to have before beginning reading instruction? Or is it the child's ability to understand the concepts of print that Clay (1975) advocates? Or is it something completely different? Is the ability to be "ready" affected by our gender, class, and society (Solsken, 1985)?

A recent article written by Crawford (1995) provides an overview of several perspectives about early literacy, including the concept of readiness. In this article Crawford stated, "Although the concept of readiness has come to the foreground as part of both the America 2000 and Goals 2000 agendas, the concept of readiness has roots that extend far deeper into America's education past" (p. 71). Crawford also noted that there seems to have been a prevailing belief in education that children need a certain amount of time and the achievement of specific skills in order to be ready to learn how to read. Recently, several researchers (Clay, 1975; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984, cited in Crawford, 1995; Teale & Sulzby, 1986, cited in Crawford, 1995, and Solsken, 1993) have begun to question that line of thinking. These researchers have provided alternate views about early literacy and how it is acquired. Actually, early literacy has different meanings to different people depending on their
backgrounds and interests (Crawford, 1995). Therefore, the real
debate that surrounds readiness is about people's beliefs about
literacy and how children learn about literacy.

In this paper I will take the writing of a five-year-old
child living in a Midwestern college town, and discuss this
writing from three different perspectives about early literacy,
especially as each perspective pertains to literacy readiness.
By comparing the actual writing of a five-year-old from three
different perspectives, I hope to gain more insight into the
products that young writers create and share. The three well-
known, but differing perspectives that will be discussed are a
connectionist view supported by Adams (1990), an emerging
literacy view supported by Clay (1975), and a social status and
identity view supported by Solsken (1993).

In the time that I have spent reading, writing, and sharing
stories with young readers and writers, I have found that they
learn best in an environment that is child-centered, print-rich,
and collaborative. Here learners can take risks within the
context of real and meaningful literacy experiences. There are
numerous opportunities for children to read by themselves,
together, and with adults. And because their writing is
influenced by their reading, there are also many opportunities
for the children to write. In this type of classroom, as well as
home setting, young readers and writers learn about print, both
in what it means and what it does.
Three Perspectives

Literacy from a Connectionist View

The connectionist viewpoint is one that is supported by Adams. "The central assumption of connectionist theories of learning is that knowledge is built upon the elements, pieces, or components of our experiences but that it consists of learned relations among them" (Adams, 1990, p. 196). Stressing the importance of automatic word recognition and the fact that all children must pass through stages on their way to literacy, this perspective is based on the following assumptions:

- Learning is the creation or strengthening of associations.
- Learning the alphabetic code and word recognition are the keys to successful literacy development.
- Direct, explicit, teacher-led instruction is effective and efficient for facilitating beginning reading.
- Automaticity in decoding facilitates and precedes reading comprehension.
- The act of reading can be broken down into a series of isolated skills, which can be arranged into a hierarchy, taught directly, and then brought back to the whole.

(Crawford, 1995, p. 78)

With this in mind, Adams promotes a bottom-up perspective of learning focusing on the text and what skilled readers and writers can and cannot do. In other words, the teacher starts with letters, paying careful attention to the student’s
attendance to the letters until they begin to have expectations for the words the letters will spell. As students identify words, they will have further expectations on how these words will be strung together and what they will mean when put together into phrases and sentences (Adams, Anderson, & Durkin, 1978). To Adams, a skills-based curriculum focused on "learning the code" is extremely important and vital to the child's success. This "code" is learned through direct, explicit instruction from the teacher focusing on the sound-symbol relationships or phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the understanding of the smaller-than-a-syllable unit of spoken language, and "the key to phonemic awareness seems to lie more in training than in maturation" (Adams, 1990, p. 331).

The knowledge of the letters of the alphabet is of little value unless the child knows and is interested in their use. In a response to critiques by literacy professionals, Adams stated that:

Effective literacy growth depends on a delicate balance between extending one's confidence with the code of text (where that includes its syntax as well as the spellings and meanings of its words) and expanding one's appreciation of its larger forms, functions, and values. (Adams et al., 1991, p. 394)

In her book *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print* (1990), Adams further stated that "a child who can recognize most
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letters with thorough confidence will have an easier time learning about letter sounds and word spellings than a child who has to work at remembering what is what" (p. 63). She also stated that "there is also abundant evidence that many children basically understand the alphabetic principle before they have fully mastered—or even been taught—our language's set of letter-to-sound correspondences" (p. 63).

Along with increasing familiarity with letters, children also become aware of the spatial relationships that distinguish one letter from another (Adams, 1990). In children's writing, reversals and letter orientation are nothing more than a demonstration of a lack of knowledge regarding letter shapes (Liberman, Shankweiler, Orlando, Harris, & Berti, 1971, cited in Adams, 1990). But, if children voice the sound or name of each letter as they print it, this helps bind all of the images (visual, motor, and phonological) of the letter together at once (Adams). Research by Tinker in 1931 (cited in Adams), found that uppercase letters are more discernible from one another, which connects well with later research that found whatever knowledge a prereader has is likely to be about uppercase letters (McCormick & Mason, 1986, cited in Adams, 1990; Smythe, Stennett, Hardy, & Wilson, 1970-1971, cited in Adams, 1990). Letter recognition skills and basic print awareness are reasonably established even before entering school (Adams). To Adams, "solid familiarity with the visual shapes of the individual letters is an absolute
prerequisite for learning to read" (p. 361). Overall, Adams believes that children must first become aware of the structure of language: sentences, words, and phonemes.

Literacy from an Emerging Literacy View

Clay's perspective of literacy is based on the cognitive construction of knowledge where children are active literacy learners who change and develop over time. Within this perspective, children acquire literacy best through active, meaningful experiences, not direct, explicit teaching of skills. Clay calls her perspective one of emerging literacy, and is based on the following assumptions:

- Reading, writing, and oral language are all integral parts of literacy learning.
- Literacy learning begins very early in life.
- Literacy learning happens best through active and meaningful engagement with written language.
- Children's literacy learning is characterized by a progression through a series of developmental stages.

Clay suggested a movement away from a teacher-directed classroom toward child-centered instruction. Children in
emerging literacy classrooms spend a majority of their language arts time writing and reading, and are encouraged to do so.

According to Clay (1975), in her book *What Did I Write?* Students must learn to understand that print talks, to form letters, to build up common words they can construct out of letters, to use those words to write messages, to increase the number and range of sentence used, to become flexible in the use of sentences, and to discipline the expression of ideas within the spelling and punctuation conventions of English. (pp. 11-12)

Clay believes that, on average, children who enter school may be able to write their own name, but there may be a limit of skill in written language, and some may know more while others know less. In the emerging literacy perspective there is no set sequence of letter discovery because individual experiences differ greatly, where early attempts at drawing and scribbling develop into writing (Clay). Children’s first attempts at making letters are gross approximations. Their letter forms are weird-looking, and they use invented words and make-believe sentences.

Through many meaningful writing experiences, these become more and more refined (Clay). As children learn how to write their names, they pay attention only to the first letter, not to any of the others, having it represent his whole name (Clay). When a child imitates people’s writing, the child may make scribble writing, linear mock writing, or mock letters (Clay). If the
child writes a message, he hopes that the squiggles are understandable and correspond in some way with what he wrote (Clay). Within this framework, Clay has suggested several principles that children learn as they become more literate. These include the recurring principle, where children learn that they can construct long messages by writing strings of letters or symbols; the directional principle, which means that students have figured out the movements of print; the flexibility principle, where children can create new letters or symbols when they do not know how to form the ones they want to use, and the inventory principle, where students can group members to a set, such as Aa.

Literacy as Social Status and Identity

In 1993, Solsken published a book dealing with a different perspective on literacy learning. In Literacy, Gender, and Work in Families and in School (Solsken, 1993), she discussed literacy as social status and identity. This perspective "examines the learning and teaching of literacy as part of stories and dominance relations in the larger society" (p. 6). In her book, Solsken researched children's literacy learning by observing and documenting two classes from kindergarten through second grade. Children come to school from different cultural backgrounds and have language, behaviors, values, and beliefs about their own personal culture (Gee, 1987, cited in Crawford, 1995). And for these children, the culture of the school is often different than
that of the home. Solsken found that language and literacy learning is best when there is a close match between school and home, but language and literacy learning create tensions when there is a large gap between home and school. It is these gaps that help establish and maintain the hierarchical power relationships in schools, communities and societies (Gee, cited in Crawford).

Solsken's critical perspective of literacy as social status and identity is based on the following assumptions:

Language and literacy are socially constructed.
Language and literacy are culturally and community specific.
There is no set of universal, invariant developmental stages.
Literacy is based on the intent to make sense of social events.
Young readers and writers engage in the same types of literacy processes, though at a less sophisticated level, as those engaged in by older children and adults. (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978, all cited in Crawford, 1995, p. 81)

There are historical and sociopolitical relationships embedded within. (Crawford, 1995, p. 82)

Furthermore, it is recognized that the power bases within these sociopolitical contexts are not equal ones: social agendas that meet the needs and help to maintain the
privileged position and power of the dominant culture are accepted more readily and have more influence than those social agendas that seek to disrupt these power relationships. (Freire, 1970, cited in Crawford)

"Thus within the social construction of literacy perspective, individuals have been framed by cultural patterns and individuality has been described as socially constructed in the local dynamics of interaction within families and classrooms" (Solsken, 1993, p. 70). According to Solsken,

The children's motivations and self-perceptions as readers and writers were the ground of meaning making and thus of authorship. The connections children made to texts in reading and writing were related to their motivations and self-perceptions, as were their uses of these connections in developing their strategies and competence with written language. (Solsken, 1985, p. 497)

In dealing with adults and other children during literacy activities, the children continue to form and enact their changes toward literacy (Solsken, 1993). As part of this perspective,

In learning to read and write, children make choices through which they construct definitions of themselves and their relations with parents, siblings, teachers, and peers. In their choices, children, like adults, strive both to be counted as members of social groups and to be recognized as unique individuals. (p. 9)
If the gap between home and school is too large, then children experience what Solsken calls tensions. These tensions come about from the ways that children define themselves in relation to literacy (Solsken, 1993). If there is not any conflict about gender or work relations in the home, then children see literacy as self-initiated and self-regulated in order to serve their own purposes, and they expect work and play to be integrated. If the mother is the main facilitator of literacy in the home while the father has a conflicting role, children may see that becoming literate like their mother may cause them to become separated from their father, or they may become cautious and correct in order to meet adult expectations that are far beyond their reach. If both parents are fully engaged in children’s literacy activities in mutually supportive ways, the children will pursue a wide range of literacy for self-defined purposes and will not feel any anxiety about achievement because becoming literate is not about being male or female. If the single mother in the home models and includes children in all uses of literacy, children have less of a sense of literacy as gender-differentiated and may interact with males in literacy as more of an equal than children from other types of families (Solsken, 1993).

**Procedures**

I met with Jessica (the name has been changed for confidentiality), in her home on a Saturday afternoon.
Jessica is a five-year-old child who lives in a home that is filled with print. Her mother can often be seen reading magazines and books and leaves them lying in the open around the apartment. Jessica’s mother reads magazines, professional journals, newspapers, and books in all genres. Jessica herself has an extensive collection of children’s books and magazines. Her parents are college graduates with degrees in teaching, and her mother is currently a student in reading and writing at the university in the city where they reside. Although no longer married, both her parents feel that a print-rich environment is important in getting Jessica ready for school. In her home, Jessica has numerous crayons, paints, and markers. She has a Little Tikes easel and likes to spend time drawing on it with chalk. The easel comes equipped with rolls of art paper, and Jessica likes to spend time creating new products with her paint, markers, and crayons. As part of her regular routine, Jessica likes to play "school" with her Barbies, reading stories to them she has created or sharing stories that have been read to her. She has been able to recite her alphabet since she was three and a half, and can presently count to 30. She can write the letters of the alphabet in upper-case only, and can write the numbers 0 to 9. She has several sets of symbol blocks which include upper case letters, numbers, and mathematical and punctuation marks. When playing with her blocks, she likes to create trains with the
letters sometimes creating words. For her fifth birthday, Jessica received writing stationery with her name on the top, and enjoys sending letters to friends and family. While she likes to write stories down and draw on blank paper in her home, she also likes to sit in front of the computer and create her own stories. As part of her everyday routine, Jessica’s mother spends approximately 15-20 minutes reading to her out of a book of Jessica’s choosing. Jessica’s mother feels that this is another way of preparing her daughter for school.

Assessments Administered

Jessica was very excited at the prospect of helping a college student with her "homework." We played with the tape recorder at first so she was used to the idea that it would be on at all times. Then I began administering the Diagnostic Survey from *The Early Detection of Reading Difficulties* (3rd ed.) (Clay, 1979). The Diagnostic Survey explores whether or not the child can visually discriminate upper and lower case letters in random order, write the letters of the alphabet, spell words correctly from memory, demonstrate basic text knowledge for reading, and write a story on her own. Concepts About Print is the subtest of the Diagnostic Survey that tests basic text knowledge. By having the child read and follow through the book with the assessor, this subtest explores whether a child knows the front of the book, that print not pictures tells the story, what a letter is, what a word is, where the first letter in a word is to
be found, pairs of upper and lower case letters, when letters in familiar words have been transposed, and the meaning of a few punctuation marks.

First, I had Jessica write the alphabet on paper without lines because her mother had said she used this type of paper at home. I wanted to determine what, if any, letters of the alphabet she knew how to write. Then I showed her upper and lower case letters out of order and had her say them aloud. Again, I wanted to find out if she could recognize the letters of the alphabet and could discriminate between the upper and lower case letters.

Next, I administered Concepts About Print (Clay, 1979). By giving this assessment, I explored what Jessica knew about print and what it meant to her. Following the Concepts About Print assessment, I assessed words Jessica knew how to write. I gave her the same piece of blank white paper that she used earlier for alphabet writing, and asked her to write down all of the words that she knew. When Jessica, after writing two words, became unable to recall any other words, I gave her prompts to keep her thinking, such as the names of friends, places she had visited, and basic sight words. When all known words had been exhausted, we moved on to the writing of a story. Jessica was given a new piece of blank paper and asked to write a story. She could have drawn a picture, written a story, or a combination of both. She was told to spell the words the best she could. When she
Reading the Writing

finished writing, Jessica was to read back the story that she had written. (See Appendix for the complete transcription of this assessment.)

Results

The following are the alphabet, vocabulary words, and the writing sample that was written by Jessica. (See Figure 1.) There are two transcriptions that follow. One is what Jessica was saying as she was writing the story; the other is what Jessica read back as her story.

As she was writing: "There’s a monster at the end of...of...the...the book. What did that first page said? Did that first page said there was a monster at the end of the book? (softly) If we don’t turn any pages, then we never get to the end of the - right back - end of the book. And we never will get to the end of the book. (loud) Oh, you turned the other page! (Me like that part.) You silly. I’m tying the page together together. Now you won’t be able to turn the page. (loud) Oh, you turned the other page! (normal) Now I’m pounding the nails together. So you won’t be able to turn the page. (loud) Oh, you turned the other page! (normal) (I don’t know what comes after page. Go check and see what’s after that page.) (softly) Oh please, oh please, oh please, don’t turn the page. There’s a monster at... This is the last page. Oh, please, oh please, don’t turn the page. (Sigh, normal) Um, um, look it its just
Figure 1
ole me, lovely old Grover. Oh, I'm so embarrassed! (Me like that part.)"

What she read back: (clears throat) "There's a monster at the end of the book. What did that first page said? Did that first page said is there a monster at the end of this book? SHHH. I got idea. Nobody turned any pages so we won't get to the end of this book. Look at me, I'm pounding the pages together so we won't able be to turn the page. (loud) You turned the other page! (normal) Now I'm tying the page together so you won't able to turn the page. (loud) Ahh, you turned the other page! (normal) Now I'm building a strong brick wall so you won't able to turn the page. Did you know that you're strong? (softly) This is the end of the page. Oh please, oh please, don't turn the page. Just me, ole lovely ole Grover. Oh, I'm so embarrassed! (Me like that part. Me so embarrassed.)"

**Interpretations**

Jessica knows all of the letters of the alphabet for she wrote all of the letters of the alphabet without any omissions. Her letter g was made using a lower case letter g and was backwards, as well as the letters j and z. Although her letters u and v are transposed when written, Jessica knows the letters of the alphabet and calls them by their correct names when seen in isolation or in meaningful print. She can construct strings of letters or shapes to create a message. Although her message in
the story was not understandable to adults, what she said as she wrote and what she read back were very similar in content. As she wrote her alphabet, words, and story, she started in the upper left-hand corner and moved to the right. She then made the return sweep to the left and continued writing. She transposed the letters U and V, yet when she read them aloud, she said their correct names. When saying the letters of the alphabet aloud, Jessica made the comment when she got to the lower case that these were "the little ones of the big ones." (See Appendix.)

During the administration of Concepts About Print, Jessica could match upper and lower case letters when asked. She had no difficulty picking out the correct pairs. When working through the Concepts About Print book, Jessica focused on the text, demonstrating that print tells us the message, not the pictures. She could also point word-by-word as the text was being read aloud. Jessica did not see the transposing of letters within a word as making the word incorrect. She knew the difference between a word and a letter and pointed to them when asked. Jessica’s vocabulary list consisted of words that she has seen in print. She tried to write her story the way her mother writes (cursive), but this made it difficult to read her writing because her letters were cursive scribbles. Her writing sample was a story that she borrowed from a *Sesame Street* book.

There are a few things that we can discover about Jessica’s writing. The message she gives is easy to understand and follow.
Reading the Writing

even though we cannot read what is on the paper. When she wrote
the story, she followed the correct directional pattern. She
started on the upper left corner and continued across the page to
the right. Then she made a return sweep to the left and
continued writing.

When writing her vocabulary words and her story, Jessica was
told to spell words the best way she knew. When she did this on
her own during the vocabulary and writing sections, Jessica
looked to the researcher on more than one occasion to check to
see if what she was doing was correct. Several times she also
asked aloud if what she had written down was correct, or if how
she sounded out words was correct.

Discussion

In all three perspectives, students need to learn that print
has messages and meanings to give. Students also need to learn
how to form letters and build up their knowledge of common words
through real and meaningful literacy experiences in order to use
those words to write messages. The major differences across
these perspectives involve how and when these experiences happen,
as well as the social context in which they happen.

Through a Connectionist View

In looking at Jessica’s writing, including the alphabet and
vocabulary sample, Adams would say that this child has reached an
understanding of phonemic awareness by having an ear for the
sounds in words. Jessica knows what words are and that they have
a purpose: they convey meaning. She shows this through her story, even though it is written as marks attempting to write like her mother. Adams would go on to state that this child has strong familiarity with the letters and how they are formed. According to research quoted in Adams’ book (Adams, 1990), most children can write their letters, and do so in upper case letters before going to school. While Jessica was writing, she was going through the actions that Adams discusses as behaviors that children, especially prereaders, do when learning about written language. Jessica remembers the names of letters and says them aloud as she is writing the alphabet, and she subvocalized the names of the letters when printing the words for the vocabulary sample. This is an area where Adams’ perspective cannot account for the learning that has taken place. Jessica did not learn the alphabet through direct, explicit instruction; she learned the alphabet through real and meaningful context in stories and magazines that were read to her throughout her childhood. Overall, Adams would consider this child is on the road to obtaining phonemic awareness and getting ready to read. She would predict that this child, based on the data collected and observed, is one who will be successful in learning how to read and spell.

Through an Emerging Literacy View

Within the emerging literacy framework, Clay has suggested several principles that children learn as they become more
literate (the recurring principle, the directional principle, the flexibility principle, and the inventory principle). When children write using any of the principles for the first time, their writings begin to show more complex thought processes (Clay, 1977). The recurring principle states that children learn they can construct long messages by writing strings of letters or symbols repeatedly. In the directional principle, children have figured out that when reading and writing, the print starts at the top-left, moves from left to right, and returns to the left to begin again. Adults take these movements for granted because we use them automatically all of the time. After approximately six months of school, children have mastered the directional pattern and control its use (Clay, 1975). In Jessica’s alphabet and writing, she shows a good grasp of the recurring and directional principles. She knows that by constructing strings of letters she can create a message. She knows how print is written on the page when we read and write.

The flexibility principle involves experimentation with print. The child can create new symbols by experimenting with the forms and shapes of letters when he does not know how to form ones he wants to use. This can lead to the formation of more conventional letter forms. She uses the flexibility principle when making her letters G, J, and Z. She has experimented with the forms and shapes of these letters, yet they still retain their identity. In this instance, she is still working with the
flexibility principle. She is trying to make sense of the letters and still have them keep their identity. Children realize that letter elements can recur in patterns in the generating principle. When a child discovers that words are built out of signs he knows, he can invent words from those signs. Jessica is beginning to understand the idea of the generating principle. She knows that letters occur in patterns in order to create words while reading, but she has not carried over this concept to her writing. She is unable to take the concepts she knows through reading and transfer them to her writing.

The inventory principle includes those responses that a child has "at his fingertips" (Clay, 1975, p. 31). Here children can group members to a set, such as Aa, or they can list all the words they know. Jessica’s comment about the difference between upper and lower case letters shows that she is beginning to see and make the connection between the two types of letters, in other words, the inventory principle. Evidence of this principle can also be seen in her writing of the alphabet where she made a lower case g and reversed it for the upper case G. She knew that G was the next letter, yet she did not know how to make an upper case G, so she improvised with the lower case letter. Clay has stated that there are studies of children who wrote before entering school, and this research shows that these children were constructing theories about print from their diverse experiences
(Clay, 1982). There are some children who do write a great deal before they know how to read or spell (Read, 1975, cited in Clay, 1982; Chomsky, 1979, cited in Clay, 1982). Jessica struggled with the concept of reordering of the letters within a word during the Concepts About Print assessment. In this assessment, Jessica has seen the words with transposed letters in print before and also has these words in her speaking and listening vocabulary, but she did not recognize, in this instance, that these familiar words contained transposed letters.

**Through a Literacy as Social Status and Identity View**

In looking at Jessica’s writing through this perspective, Solsken would say that Jessica experiences little, if any, tensions regarding herself as a social reader and writer. Her literacy learning is self-initiated and self-regulated for her own purposes. The main reason for this is the fact that both of her parents are engaged in her literacy without the stereotypical gender differences. To Jessica, becoming literate is not about being male or female, it is about becoming a reader and writer for herself. Also, Jessica seems to experience very little anxiety about the achievement of becoming literate. This could be due to the fact that she spends quite a bit of time reading and writing for fun with her mother. Therefore, Jessica may see literacy as play.

One area where Solsken may see the beginnings of tension is in the area of Jessica’s spelling. Because her mother is
Jessica’s main literacy role model, Jessica sees her as a very fluent role model and attempts to be like her. In the literacy as social status and identity perspective, Jessica wants to live up to the fluent standard that has been modeled by her mother. In order to be like her mother, she is very cautious about what she tries to write, and what she does write has to be correct. When she wrote for the samples, she was consistently looking to the researcher as a model, trying to imitate the researcher in writing form and content, and then seeking the researcher’s reactions to what she had written. These strategies that Jessica has incorporated throughout her attempts to write keep her dependent upon adults. Another point that needs to be taken into consideration about Jessica’s literacy is that her parents are divorced, and she spends most of her time with her mother. In this regard, her main role model is a single parent who models and includes both personal and public use of literacy. Given what Solsken has said regarding literacy (Solsken, 1993), Jessica has less of a sense of literacy as gender-differentiated and interacts more with males in literacy as more of an equal than those children who come from a different type of household.

Conclusion

Looking at this five-year-old’s writing through the connectionist viewpoint supported by Adams, we can see that Jessica has a strong familiarity with the letters of the alphabet and how they are formed, as well as an understanding of the
purpose of words. In the emerging literacy view supported by Clay, Jessica demonstrated that she can construct messages by writing strings of letters or symbols, that she knows the direction of print, and that she can experiment with the shapes of letters yet still retain their identities when creating letters whose form she is unsure. Jessica’s writing, through the literacy as social status and identity view supported by Solsken, is self-initiated and done for her own purposes, although she did experience tensions when trying to imitate adult writing and sought confirmation of what she had written. Clearly, Jessica is becoming a reader and writer as seen through the three perspectives contained in this discussion.

Becoming literate is a complex process, and understanding this process as a teacher becomes quite complex due to differing perspectives in early literacy education. This is important because when teachers analyze and evaluate student writing, their beliefs about literacy play a major role in how they understand that child’s writing knowledge and literacy development. This understanding comes from the perspective that underlies each teacher’s beliefs on how students become readers and writers. Before teachers are able to more fully understand what the students in their classrooms are doing in regard to becoming readers and writers, they need to have a better understanding of the various philosophies in early literacy education. In this way, teachers will have insight to where their students are in
the process of becoming literate, as well as a better understanding of their own literacy beliefs.
References


Reading the Writing

Appendix

Transcription of the Diagnostic Survey

Assessment Administered to Jessica
on April 5, 1997

Researcher: The first thing I want you to do for me is....Can you write all the letters?

Jessica: Here?

R: Yeah, right on that piece of paper.

J: But I don't know how to make a C.

R: You make it the best way that you can. All right? Oh, very good. Keep on going. You're doing good.

J: (sings) A, B, C, D, E, F, (time elapses), G (more time elapses). There.

R: Good.

J: What comes after K?

R: What comes after K?

(Jessica draws.)

R: Good job.

J: Now what? (laughs)

R: What letter is next?

J: P.

R: What letter comes after P?

J: Q.

R: Okay.
J: Like this?
R: Good job.
J: Now, R. (time elapses). S.
R: Um hmm. (yes)
J: That right? What's that?
R: What letter is that?
J: Y.
R: Okay.
J: Q.
R: 'Kay.
J: Z, X, W.
R: Okay. (time elapses) Very nice.
J: Now what you gonna do?
R: Now what are we gonna do? I want you to do something for me. All right?
J: All right.
R: Okay.
J: What's that?
R: Do you know what these are called?
J: Uh huh. (no)
R: What are these called?
J: The ABC's.
R: The ABC's?
J: Uh huh. (yes)
R: Can you find some that you know?
R: What letter is that?
J: K.
R: Good. Now, should we try to do this? Let's do this. Can you tell me what letter this is?
R: What letter is this? (points to U)
J: V.
R: Okay.
R: Good job. Now how about these letters?
J: They're small of the other letters.
R: Yeah, they are, aren't they? Okay, how about this letter?
J: a, f, k, p, w, z, b, h, o, j, k, a, c, v, l, p, m, d, m, s, x, i, e, g, r, v, t, g.
R: Very good. Now what I would like you to do....
J: What?
R: is, I'm going to read you this story.
J: Um hum. (yes)
R: But, I want you to look at it first. Can you show me where the front of the book is? (does) Good job.
J: What that spell? What's that spell?
R: What do think that says?
J: Stephanie
R: It could, couldn't it?
R: Yeah, um, I'm gonna read this story, but I'm gonna need your help. Can you show me where to start reading? Where do I start reading?

(J points.)

R: Very good. Now, you said that I start reading right here. Which way do I go?

(J points.)

R: And where do I go after that?

(J points.)

R: Good job.

J: What's the tape doing?

R: Now, I want you to point at it while I read. Okay? Can you do that?

J: Okay.

R: "I walked up the hill looking up and down." Show me the bottom. "I saw a bird in the tree and stones on the ground."

J: That's upside down

R: "I kicked a big stone. It rolled this way and that." Did you say that picture was upside down? Where's the bottom of the picture?

(J points.)

R: That's right.

J: But why it's taped together?
R: Where do I begin? I begin right there? Which way do I go? And where do I go after that? Okay. "I pushed it and pushed it over and over." What's wrong with this page?

J: She's kicking.

R: What's wrong with this page?

J: She's kicking.

R: She's kicking? "I swung back my foot and kicked it very hard."

J: But that's not how you start.

R: But that's now how I start? How am I supposed to start?

J: There. (points to "I")

R: That's right.

J: Is that the next page?

R: Where do I start reading?

J: Right there.

R: Good. "Then I stood my on toes I and watched." What's wrong with that?

J: What? Wrong with what? With the 12?

R: Yeah. What was wrong with that page?

J: She was tired.

R: She was tired? What's wrong on this page?

J: It's the same thing.

R: It's the same thing?

J: The gate.

R: Okay. "The stone rolled down the hill bumping this way and
that. Would it stop by the gate? Or go on to the bend?"

J: The bend? What's the bend?

R: What's wrong with the writing on this page?

J: It....She's running after it.

R: "Would that stone roll on to the house with the swing? Or
down to the flowers that are yellow?" What's this for
(pointing to the question mark)?

J: Talking.

R: It's for talking? Okay. What's this for (pointing to a
period)?

J: I don't know.

R: What's this for (pointing to a comma)?

J: Stop.

R: To stop? What's this for (pointing to quotation marks)?

J: To go.

R: To go? "Then I called, 'Stop, stop, Big Stone the water will
be deep.'" Find a little letter like this.

J: What?

R: Find a little letter like this one.

J: The t?

R: Find a little letter.

J: What do these mean, that I was right? That mean that I was
right? What are those for? What are those for?
R: Oh, just so I know that I, that I stopped. Find me a little letter like this.

J: The s?

R: Let me see.

J: Uh huh. (yes)

R: Yes, there is. Very good.


R: Well. "On went the stone till it plopped in the pool. I ran quickly. All I saw was the green, still water. And oh, no stone." Show me was. Show me no.

J: What else? What do we have to do now? Read this book?

R: Um hmm. (yes) "The stone rolled down the hill." Show me two letters. (J does.) Good. Show me one letter. (J does.) Show me one word. (J does.) Show me two words. (J does.) Show me the first letter of a word.

J: Right there.

R: Show me the last letter. (J does.) Show me a capital letter.

J: Like what?

R: A capital letter.

J: A capital letter of what?

R: Show me a capital letter.

J: That one.

R: Good job. Now, what I would like you to do for me is.....I know you know a lot of words, don’t you?

J: Um hum. (yes)
R: Yes. What I would like you to do is to write down-

J: Write down.

R: All the words that you know.

(J starts writing.)

J: (points to paper) Dad, Mom. (time elapses) Don’t know what else to write.

R: Do you know how to write is?

J: Uh huh. (no)

R: How about to? What else do you know how to write?

J: My name.

R: Do you know how to write I or a? How about we or up?


R: Do you know how to write on?

J: I write on.

R: Okay. Do you know how to write off? (time elapses) Do you know how to write any of your friend’s names or your sister’s name?

J: Umm. I don’t how to write my friend’s name or my sister’s name.

R: Do you know how to write the names of any animals?

J: Bambi. (makes a B.) What’s the next letter?

R: You spell it the best way you know how.

J: D.

R: Okay.

J: D’s the next letter of Bambi.
R: Okay.

J: But then it won’t say Bambi.

R: It won’t say Bambi if you put a D next?

J: Yeah. /P/. /P/. /P/. P?

R: Okay.

J: Uh huh. (no)

R: How about-

J: /Bam/..../bam/.....

R: Where did we go when you pet Bambi?

J: Barn.

R: Okay.

J: But I don’t know how-

R: How about when we were in Florida? Where did you go to pet Bambi?

J: Zoo! Zoo! (writes zoo)

R: Do you know how to write things in the house like the names of things in the house? (time elapses) Like do you know how to write the names of things we ride on?

J: Paper.

R: Or that we ride in?


R: Okay. Do you know how to write the names of things you eat?

That’s all? You can’t think of any more words? Can you write the word from?

(J shakes head.)
R: No? That's all you know how to write? All right. Now, what want you to do for me, please....

J: Um hmm.

R: Is I want you to write me a story. Can you do that for me?

J: Okay. I will tell you "The Numbers of Barney." Once there was a number.

R: Can you write that for me?

J: (writing) Once

R: And you just......you spell the words the best way you know how.

J: Once.....once.....once there was a number named one. How spell one? I?

R: Okay.

J: O.B. And he was very sad. He was very sad. How spell sad?

R: I said spell it the best way you know how.

J: What that? What that word? The?

R: You're supposed to be writing me a story.

J: I know one.

R: Okay.

J: I'm gonna copy "The Monster at the End of the Book." I'm gonna get the book.

R: Just.....no, just write it for me.

J: (writing) The monster. How spell monster? D?

R: Okay.
J: O, A, B. "There's a monster at the end of...of...the...the book. What did that first page said? Did that first page said there was a monster at the end of the book? (softly) If we don't turn any pages, then we never get to the end of the - right back - end of the book. And we will never get to the end of the book. (loud) Oh, you turned the other page!" Me like that part.

R: Yeah.

J: "You silly. I'm tying the page together together. Now you won't be able to turn the page. (loud) Oh, you turned the other page! (normal) Now I'm pounding the nails together. So you won't be able to turn the page." (Looking at the TV) See. I had that movie. Sandlot! (loud, back to story) "Oh, you turned the other page!" (normal) I don't know what comes after page. Go check and see what's after that page.

R: Well, you just finish the story the way, you know, you want to finish the story.

J: (softly) "Oh please, oh please, oh please, don't turn the page. There's a monster at...This is the last page. Oh please, oh please don't turn the page." (unintelligible question to researcher. Answer cannot be understood, either.) (Sigh) "Um, um, look it its just ole me, lovely old Grover. Oh, I'm so embarrassed!" Me like that part.

R: Yeah. (laughing)
J: There.

R: Is that it?

J: Um hmm. (yes)

R: There's no more to the story?

J: No.

R: Okay. Can you read, all right, can you read it back to me?

J: (clears throat) "There's a monster at the end of this book. What did that first page said? Did that first page said is there a monster at the end of this book? SHHH! I got idea. Nobody turned any pages so we won't get to the end of this book. Look at me, I'm pounding the pages together so we won't able be to turn the page. (loud) You turned the other page! (normal) Now I'm tying the page together so you won't able to turn the page. (loud) Ahhhh, you turned the other page! Now I'm building a strong brick wall.....so you won't able to turn the page. Did you know that strong! (softly) This is the end of the page. Oh please, oh please, don't turn the page. Just me, ole lovely ole Grover. Oh, I'm so embarrassed!" Me like that part. Me so embarrassed.

Not caught on tape: explanation of why she wrote the way she did. She said she wanted her story written the way her mom writes.
Author Note
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Figure Caption

Figure 1. Jessica’s alphabet, vocabulary words, and writing sample.