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## **The impact of dramatic play centre on promoting the development of children's early writing skills**

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The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of dramatic play centre (DPC) on promoting the development of children's early writing skills in the Jordanian context. It also intends to investigate the forms of children's writing skills that emerge through the use of dramatic play. Observations and interviews were conducted to obtain information from kindergarten children involved in this study. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in the writing behaviors of children in the experimental group, showing that children's early writing behaviors improved following the employment of dramatic play activities. The results also indicated that these children produced different forms of writing. The production of letter-like forms was the most common form of writing exhibited by children in the DPC, followed by writing via drawing, and writing via reproducing well-learned units or letter strings. In addition, the results demonstrated that children who have been exposed to dramatic play activities developed more positive attitudes toward the process of writing. Finally, the results are discussed and suggestions for future research are offered.

**Keywords:** dramatic play centre; early writing development; literacy; children; learning centres

### **Introduction**

This study took place in Jordan to investigate how dramatic play centre (DPC) helps foster children's early writing skills. In particular, the focus was on the impact of DPC on the writing behaviors of kindergarten children and on the attitudes the kindergarten children have towards the process of writing after the integration of writing into DPC – an area lacking in consistent empirical research.

There is a belief among most early childhood educators that young children learn best through play. Play is central to every child's development and considered to be the principal source of learning during the early years. The work of pioneering early childhood educators such as Froebel, Montessori and Steiner has influenced our understanding of the value of play in early childhood education. Play allows children to build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with their environment, with others, and on their own (Glover 1999).

Young children are playful by nature. They choose how to play and what to play with by using their imagination (Ashiabi 2007). In the view of Bergen (1988), play allows children to select their learning focus and promotes a broad range of developmental goals; and therefore, should be integrated as an essential learning element. In

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early childhood classrooms, children need to regularly engage in cooperative play experiences in which they are involved in interactions with two or more children with assigned roles to achieve specific objectives (Hughes 1999). One of the most common cooperative play exercise in the early childhood classroom is dramatic play. Dramatic play is central to healthy development and learning during the early childhood years. This kind of play was most often seen in children between the ages of four and six.

In dramatic play, children engage in a variety of different real-life scenarios, pretending to be someone or something different from themselves, and making up situations and actions that accord with the role they have chosen (Dodge, Colker, and Heroman 2010). Such pretend play often occurs in the DPC, which can be set up in the classroom with child-size kitchen furniture such as sink, stove, refrigerator, cupboards, table, chairs, and all sorts of smaller props (Beaty 2009). In this centre children might share common experiences such as parents taking care of babies, or a mum cooking, or a family eating or serving food. This is valuable learning of life skills, and for this reason, early childhood researchers such as (Christie, Enz, and Vukelich 2010) have suggested that all preschool classrooms should contain a housekeeping centre equipped with props that remind children of their own homes. In the view of McGee and Morrow (2005), a DPC, which is usually arranged to look like a house, can be changed or extended to build theme DPCs, such as a grocery store, a beauty shop, a gas station, a business office, a restaurant, or a garage.

Developing children's language and literacy skills is one of the most important aims of the early childhood curriculum, so researchers started to find out how children acquire literacy and observe the way literacy is taught. The results of the researchers' work have provided valuable information about instructional practices that are associated with growth in literacy development – and one of these practices is dramatic play (Neuman and Roskos 1993; International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children 1998; Burns, Griffin, and Snow 1999; Mielonen and Paterson 2009; Morrow 2009).

Research studies have indicated that when children are given an opportunity to engage in dramatic play experiences, literacy skills evolve naturally (Mielonen and Paterson 2009). Dodge et al. (2010, 280) indicated that a DPC has a number of valuable advantages in terms of promoting children's literacy development as follows: (1) promoting vocabulary and language by introducing and teaching children the names of props (e.g. stethoscope, briefcase, hard hat, and menu), and reading stories on topics that children use in their dramatic play, such as buying new shoes or going to the clinic; (2) encourage children to explore print letters and words by placing writing tools and paper in the DPC (e.g. note pads, prescription, pads, eye charts, posters, stationery, and envelopes); and (3) promote understanding of books and other text by including story books, phone books, calendars, cookbooks, newspapers, magazines, and other print materials in the DPC. Moreover, dramatic play extends children's awareness of how printed text is used in real-life situations (McGee and Morrow 2005), and promotes children's early writing development (Burns, Griffin, and Snow 1999).

Early literacy researchers have stressed that children's early writing could be developed best through dramatic play activities (Neuman and Roskos 1993; Glover 1999; Mielonen and Paterson 2009). In the UK, Boyle and Charles (2010) carried out a case study of a four-year-old child at a very early stage of his journey as a writer. At the beginning of the study, the child demonstrated the tendencies of a pre-alphabetic writer, with little understanding of the relationship between spoken language and the

corresponding graphemes and phonemes. But after the exposure to dramatic play opportunities, his writing developed to the extent that he showed an ability to represent spoken language mapped to the corresponding phonemes. In the same vein, Hall (2000) conducted a study about the development of children's literacy skills through dramatic play. The study consisted of 35 British children aged four to five years. The findings revealed that children, through their involvement in dramatic play experiences, constructed writing pieces that were meaningful and purposeful.

In her study of literacy-enriched dramatic play in kindergarten, Kempen (2009) concluded that dramatic play was beneficial in developing children's literacy development; she noted that children's scribbles were seen as developmentally appropriate for the age group. The same result was also found in Roskos and Christie's (2007) work, indicating that DPC encourages more play with print and writing materials, and motivates children to write.

According to Vukelich (1992), DPC experience helps children by involving their knowledge of the purpose of writing. When children engage in dramatic play activities, they experience realistic settings and functional reasons for using print (Morrow 2009). Christie (1991) indicated that when teachers created a housekeeping centre as a kind of dramatic play experience, children were then observed to engage in many home-literacy routines, such as writing notes to family members and letters to distant relatives, making shopping lists, and jotting down phone messages: research stressed that these activities could help children develop their early writing skills (Neuman and Roskos 2007; Mielonen and Paterson 2009).

At kindergarten, children use many emergent forms of writing prior to develop conventional writing (Sulzby 1992; McGee and Morrow 2005; Mayer 2007). Children's writing in the early childhood stage starts with random marks and ends with conventional writing. During this stage, children produce different forms of writing which reflect some understanding of grapheme-phoneme (Bustos 2007). Sulzby (1992) identified different stages of early writing development such as, scribbling, drawing, letter linked forms, patterned letter strings, invented spelling, and conventional writing. Research suggested that children will progress through these predictable stages if they engaged in dramatic play activities (Neuman and Roskos 2007; Glover 1999).

The relationship between writing development and dramatic play has been summarised by Neuman and Roskos' (2007, 84) work, as they stated: 'dramatic play provides opportunities for writing within the play environment, provides more frequent opportunities to write, and provides a jumping-off place for writing compositions'. Glover (1999) pointed out that by providing the classrooms with writing materials in the DPC, natural writing could emerge in these classrooms. He provided numerous examples of natural integration of writing as follows: (1) writing a phone message on a notepad next to the phone; (2) writing down everyone's orders on a notepad during playing restaurant; (3) writing letters to other friends during playing post office; and (4) using random strings of letters to write a sign for the grocery store (Glover 1999, 72). In the same context, Neuman and Roskos (1993) stressed that writing materials should be clearly marked and be accessible for young children. They also suggested that teachers need to guide the use of these materials. They believed that encouraging children to play in DPCs is a time for writing to be initiated naturally by the children themselves rather than a time for the teachers to be teaching skills.

In DPC teachers encourage children's early writing using developmentally appropriate practices (IRA and NAEYC 1998). Such practices, however, require teachers

to accept all levels of children's early writing and recognise reading and writing attempts as legitimate literacy behaviors (McGee and Morrow 2005). In the view of Glover (1999), teachers who supported children's work during the DPC can lead children to rich writing experiences. The writing that children do in DPC is not intended to represent a specific message. Rather, it is simply a part of acting out a pretended scenario, which is not much different from cooking and serving, that emulates adult activities.

### **The significance of the study**

Over the past eight years, the Jordanian Ministry of Education (MOE) launched a new kindergarten curriculum in conformity with the recent theories in early childhood education to enhance children's learning based on developmentally appropriate practices (MOE and NCFA 2004). In this curriculum framework, teachers have been encouraged to create learning centres in their classroom, including DPCs called Housekeeping Centre. Despite MOE's efforts in this regard, few kindergarten teachers employ learning centres in their teaching practices and there is an obvious absence of a DPC in most kindergarten classrooms (Ihmeideh and Al-Farra 2010).

It is the absence of learning centres in the classroom that reflects traditional methods of teaching young children (Copple and Bredekamp 2009). During visits to kindergartens, the researcher noticed that teachers do not expose the children to early writing experiences during the kindergarten stage, as they believe that children are too young to be taught to write at this early stage; others teach kindergarteners how to write in much the same way as if they were in the primary stages, without their earlier development level being taken into account. Moreover, the researcher noticed that most kindergarten teachers do not employ play in their daily teaching practices. They do not schedule playtimes, and there was no DPC in their classrooms. These teachers place little value on play as they do not see it as a core factor in the teaching and learning process. In today's Jordanian kindergarten classrooms, writing is taught by these teachers in a traditional way; writing is seen as a prerequisite to reading. Children should master prerequisite skills in order for them to learn to write. These skills are: visual and auditory discrimination, letter name knowledge, discrimination and associations, the ability to identify and differentiate familiar sounds, similar sounds, rhyming words and the sound of letters, left to right eye progression and visual motor skills. Children who have not mastered these skills are not considered ready for instruction in writing. According to Morrow (2009), when teachers do not employ DPC in teaching literacy, classrooms will not be relaxed and child-centred, because children spend most of their time working on one skill worksheet after another.

There is a scarcity of empirical studies which tackle the impact of DPC on promoting children's early writing development in the Jordanian kindergarten context. This study strives to provide empirical evidence concerning the importance of the DPC in the classroom for early writing development. This study contributes valuable data and information to the literature on kindergarten children's attempts at writing. It also determines the developmental stages of writing in early childhood from the child's point of view, and examines changes over time in how the child thinks of the writing process. This could make early childhood educators pursue ways of changing the current perspectives and practices that affect the development of early writing in kindergartens. The researcher hopes that the Jordanian decision-makers, curriculum designers, and kindergarten teachers will make use of the study results in making

changes and improvements in early writing development. Finally, it is hoped this study will pave the way for more research in this particular field.

Based on a tentative review of literature, one may be inclined to say that there have been no serious studies that have worked on identifying the impact DPC has on promoting children's learning in general and early writing development in particular as this line of research seems to be scarce in the Jordanian kindergarten context. Therefore, the call for fresh studies in the role of DPC in fostering children's early writing has become urgent. The purpose of this current study is to examine the impact of DPC on promoting the early writing development of children in the Jordanian context, and to investigate the forms of writing that emerge through the use of dramatic play, as well as to identify children's attitudes toward the process of writing following the integration of writing into the DPC.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

Amman, the capital and administrative centre of Jordan, has a large population density and contains a large proportion of the kindergartens in the country, since kindergartens were first launched in Amman at the beginning of the 1950s. Unlike the primary and secondary educational stages, which are compulsory, preschool education is still non-compulsory in Jordan and is mainly run by the private sector. According to statistics from the MOE, 7412 teachers work in 1194 private kindergartens, with 75,042 children enrolled in these kindergartens. The teacher-child ratio in most kindergartens is about 1:25 (Ministry of Education, 2010).

In this study, the researcher selected one private kindergarten in Amman. The 'case study' kindergarten was chosen purposefully for the following reasons: (1) it employs learning centres in its daily routine, whereas many kindergartens in Jordan do not employ learning centres in their teaching practice; (2) its proximity to the researcher; and (3) the kindergarten staff were willing to allow the study to be conducted in their classrooms. In order to gather rich and comprehensive data, 46 kindergarten children aged four- to five-years-old were randomly selected from two classes. The sample was divided into two groups: the experimental group with 25 children (12 males and 13 females) who were taught in a learning centres environment in which they were exposed to writing activities in a DPC, and the control group with 21 children (10 males and 11 females) who were taught in a learning centres environment without integrating writing into the activities of the DPC.

### ***Research instruments***

In order to examine the impact of DPC on children's early writing development, observation and interviews were utilised.

### ***Observation***

A structured observation was used in this study, aimed at investigating the impact of DPC on promoting the early writing development of children. To achieve this aim, the researcher developed a scale based on Morrow's (2009) work for measuring early writing development. The scale was adapted to the development of early writing in a

Jordanian context. The scale consists of 19 items describing the writing behaviors of children in their early years, reflecting the development of a child's early writing. This scale begins with writing as scribbling, drawings, letter like-forms, and units previously learned, and ends with conventional writing. All items in the scale were identified using a 5-point scale, with 5 indicating 'Always' and 1 indicating 'Never'.

A panel of 10 university professors of early childhood education was asked to validate the instruments. The validation process brought about a number of changes. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated by calculating the internal consistency using the Cronbach-Alpha method for the scale. The scale was 0.88. This result means that the reliability coefficient was acceptable for the purpose of this study.

### ***Individual interviews***

A semi-structured interview technique was adopted because it is more flexible than other interview techniques and enables the researchers to probe and expand the interviewee's answers. The reason for using the semi-structured interview in this study is to explore children's attitudes towards writing process before and after the employment of the DPC. Eleven simple and direct questions were developed. The interview questions in this study included open-ended questions. In this context, Oppenheim (2000) pointed out that by using open-ended questions within the interview, the participants are allowed to share ideas and understanding with greater richness and spontaneity. Interview questions included the following topics:

- The writing ability of children.
- A child's perceptions of the writing process.
- The feelings of children about writing, before and after employing DPC activities.
- The attempts of children to write in kindergarten and at home.

### ***Ethical consideration***

Consent was sought from the MOE to carry out this research and from parents to allow their children to take part in this research. Before the child was included in the study, parents were met, informed of the aims of the study, and given the opportunity to discuss the research project with my research assistants. In addition, the researcher asked for verbal consent from children prior to interview. The participants were given the right to withdraw at any time and were free to decline to answer a particular interview question. Anonymity of the participants was also taken into account: no information identifying the respondents was disclosed.

### ***Procedures***

The data were collected from one private kindergarten in Amman. After obtaining the permission to enter the target kindergarten, the researcher conducted personal visits at the kindergarten involved in this study and met the teachers. Four classrooms were randomly chosen, and were divided randomly into two groups: experimental and control. Each group consisted of two classrooms. Four kindergarten teachers in each class, in both the experimental and the control groups, had been trained in the use of DPC to ensure equivalence and avoid any potential bias. Only kindergarten teachers of the

experimental groups were asked to integrate writing into the activities of DPC under the supervision of the researcher. The researcher explained how to integrate writing in DPC activities. It is worth noting that the discussion with teachers was helpful in order to make sure that the children's writing forms emerged through the use of DPC rather than from the formal instruction of the teachers.

A set of writing activities has been prepared for the DPC and the following activities were integrated in the DPC:

- Grocery shop where children write a grocery list.
- Post office where children write letters to their friends and teachers.
- Doctor's office where children write prescriptions to patients.
- Train station where children write tickets.
- Kitchen activity where children write a recipe.
- Sports club where children fill out membership cards.
- Clothes shop where children write signs.
- Restaurant where children write the customers' orders.
- Mothers' day where children write cards.
- Flower shop where children write signs that state the names of flowers and their costs, signs that showcase the names of specific types of flowers, and write cards.

Two research assistants were recruited. They had been trained in how to implement the research instruments. The research assistants conducted five observations before employing DPC activities with both experimental and control groups. They repeated the same procedures following the employment of DPC activities with both groups.

Furthermore, the research assistants conducted individual interviews with the study participants before employing DPC activities. After DPC activities were implemented, a post-interview was conducted with each child. The interviews were brief and informal, and were aimed at identifying the children's attitudes toward the writing process with the purpose of clarifying any concerns the researchers had about what had been observed. The interviews with children were conducted in their classrooms. Each interview took around ten minutes intermittently.

### ***Data analysis***

The current study utilised quantitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. The observation has been analysed quantitatively. Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations for the writing behaviors were used to describe each item in the scale. *T*-test was used to find any a statistically significant difference between the groups regarding early writing behaviors. The interviews were transcribed word for word and responses were coded at the question level to identify the most frequent responses to each question.

## **Results**

### ***Results of the observation***

This study investigated two issues using observation: the impact of DPC on promoting kindergarten children's early writing development, and the forms of kindergarten children's writing revealed after the introduction of DPC activities. To ensure the



Table 1. Means, standard deviations and *t*-test statistics for children before the employment of DPC activities.

Group	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i>	Df	Sig.
Experimental	25	2.27	0.21	1.07	44	0.288
Control	21	2.20	0.22			

equivalence of the experimental and control groups, the pre-observations were conducted simultaneously before the introduction of DPC activities. Means, standard deviations and *t*-test were utilised to detect any differences between the two groups, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows no statistically significant difference at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the two groups. The control group has a mean of 2.20, while the experimental group has a mean of 2.27, which indicates that their level of achievement is quite similar.

After the DPC activities were implemented, post-observations were administrated for the same groups. Morrow's (2009) Scale for measuring early writing development was utilised for both pre- and post-observations. Table 2 shows the calculated mean and standard deviations, and a *t*-test for the children's scores after the integration of writing into the DPC.

Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) in children's scores after the introduction of DPC activities between the control and experimental groups in favor of the latter. This indicates that the experimental group, having been exposed to the DPC writing activities, showed more gains in writing development than the control group.

Table 3 shows the changes in kindergarten children's early writing behaviors before and after employing the DPC activities for the experimental group.

Specifically, Table 3 reveals that the scores in children's writing behaviors increased after employing DPC activities in most items. Prior to employing DPC, the mean values of children's writing behaviors were low compared to the means of these behaviors after the introduction of DPC activities. The data presented in Table 3 show that the mean value of all items increased significantly after employing DPC activities. For instance, before DPC activities, the mean value of the following items was low: using punctuation correctly (1.08), using invented spelling for writing (1.24), writing for functional purposes (1.56), attempting independently writing to cover meaning, regardless of writing level (1.60), and exploring with writing materials (1.76). After DPC activities were introduced the mean values positively changed (1.80, 2.24, 3.24, 2.92, and 3.20, respectively).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and *t*-test statistics for children after the employment of DPC activities.

Group	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i>	Df	Sig.
Experimental	25	3.21	0.16	5.35	44	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
Control	21	2.69	0.45			

<sup>a</sup>The mean difference is significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of children's early writing behaviors before and after employing DPC activities.

No.	Writing behaviors	Before DPC	After DPC
1	Explores with writing materials	M 1.76 SD 0.43	M 3.20 S 0.86
2	Dictates stories, sentences, or words s/he wants written down	M 2.24 SD 0.66	M 3.56 S 0.71
3	Copies letters and words	M 3.28 SD 1.10	M 3.84 S 0.80
4	Collaborates with others in writing experience	M 1.80 SD 0.76	M 2.32 S 0.55
5	Can write his or her name	M 3.00 SD 0.81	M 3.64 S 0.81
6	Differentiates between writing and drawings	M 2.48 SD 0.82	M 3.24 S 0.87
7	Uses drawing for writing and drawing	M 2.24 SD 0.72	M 3.76 S 0.77
8	Uses scribble writing for writing	M 2.08 SD 0.70	M 2.64 S 0.48
9	Uses letter-like forms for writing	M 3.64 SD 1.31	M 3.84 S 0.89
10	Uses leaned letter in random fashion	M 2.12 SD 0.60	M 3.08 S 0.86
11	Uses invented spelling for writing	M 1.24 SD 0.43	M 2.24 S 0.59
12	Writes conventionally with conventional spelling	M 1.92 SD 0.75	M 2.84 S 0.62
13	Independently attempts writing to cover meaning, regardless of writing level	M 1.60 SD 0.70	M 2.92 S 0.99
14	Writes in varied genres	M 1.84 SD 0.68	M 3.32 S 0.69
15	Writes for functional purposes	M 1.56 SD 0.65	M 3.24 S 1.01
16	Writes letters forms legibly	M 2.44 SD 0.96	M 3.64 S 0.70
17	Writes from right to left	M 4.16 SD 0.80	M 4.40 S 0.70
18	Leaves spaces between words	M 2.76 SD 0.96	M 3.36 S 0.86
19	Uses punctuations (dots) correctly	M 1.08 SD 0.27	M 1.80 S 0.61

Note: M: Mean, SD: Standard Deviation.

### *Forms of children's early writing*

Table 4 demonstrates that while children have shown almost all forms of writing before and after employing DPC activities, their early attempts at writing have since developed after employing these activities in all writing forms. It can be noticed from Table 2 that 'writing via making letter-like forms' was the most common form of writing exhibited by children after the introduction of DPC activities (a mean of 3.84), followed by writing via drawings (3.76), and writing via reproducing well-learned units or letter strings (3.20).

Table 4. Means, standard deviations of the forms of children's writing before and after employing DPC activities.

No.	Writing forms	Before DPC		After DPC	
		M	SD	M	SD
1	Writing via drawing	2.24	0.72	3.76	0.77
		M	SD	M	SD
2	Writing via scribbling	2.08	0.70	2.64	0.48
		M	SD	M	SD
3	Writing via making letter-like forms	3.64	1.31	3.84	0.89
		M	SD	M	SD
4	Writing via reproducing well-learned units or letters strings	1.76	0.43	3.20	0.86
		M	SD	M	SD
5	Writing via invented spelling	1.24	0.43	2.24	0.59
		M	SD	M	SD
6	Writing via conventional spelling	1.92	0.75	2.84	0.62
		M	SD	M	SD

### Results of the interviews

Individual interviews with children were conducted before and after employing DPC activities, aimed at identifying children's attitudes toward the writing process. The specific aim was to explore whether children like writing or not, whether they consider writing as a difficult or an easy process, what forms of writing they produce, and how they feel when writing was integrated into DPC activities.

Before the employment of writing in DPC, most children interviewed (17 out of 25) indicated that they are able to write and can write letters and words. However, six children indicated that they are unable to write. One child said:

I cannot write, but my teacher can write

More than half of children (14 out of 25) revealed that they do not like writing. However, when they were asked about the reason for that, nine children (64%) indicated that writing is a difficult process. One of them explained:

Sometimes I write words, but they are always incorrect. It is difficult. Writing is difficult.

Another child confirmed the above view when he said:

The teacher asks us to write the letter 10 times. I just write one or two, I always cry because I did it incorrectly, Samer [*his classmate*] always did it correctly.

Children were also asked about their feelings when they write. Few children (7 out of 25) indicated that they enjoyed writing; on the contrary, most of them said that they write because teachers want them to write. Four children reported that they felt bored when they wrote. One child made the following statement:

I write alphabets many times. It is boring. Every day we write letters.

After the employment of DPC activities, the situation notably changed and children's attitudes towards writing developed positively. As children engaged in DPC activities, they did not form letters over and over again, and did not write words and

sentences in a drill and practice technique. Instead; they were observed writing for the purpose of real communication, creating their own invented spelling, and writing their stories using different writing forms regardless of their writing level.

After the employment of DPC, the children were asked about their feelings about writing, and they were keen to talk about their experience in writing; the majority of children in the sample interviewed (19 out of 25) indicated that they enjoyed these writing experiences. Examples of children's responses are presented here:

- I feel happy when I wrote to Amr a prescription, because he was ill. (Areg)
- I can write checks. (Anas)
- I like to go to the grocery with my shopping list. (Yara)
- I wrote a letter to my mum and send it by the post office. (Mustafa)
- I enjoy writing cards to my friends. (Karam)
- I like to play with crayons in the dramatic centre. (Abdulaziz)

## Discussion

Most of the general themes arising from recent research regarding the impact of DPC on the development of children's literacy indicated that DPC improves children's early writing behaviors (Pellegrini and Galda 1993; McGee and Richgels 1996; McGee and Morrow 2005; Roskos and Christie 2007; Kempen 2009). In the case of the Arab world, no attempt has made to investigate this line of research. The aim of this study was to examine the impact of DPC on promoting children's early writing development, and to investigate the forms of children's writing that emerge through the use of DPC, as well as to identify their attitudes towards the writing process. Observations and interviews were adopted to gain information from 46 children involved in this study.

The results indicated that children's early behaviors increased significantly after the introduction of DPC activities. This result could be due to the fact that children have done real writing activities in which they were asked to write freely without being blamed for their own writing mistakes. Teachers in the experimental groups did not teach manuscript letter formation, neither did they ask children to write correctly; instead, children were observed writing for purposes, using their emerging writing skills. This result is consistent with the findings of a number of studies like Boyle and Charles (2010), Kempen (2009), and Roskos and Christie (2007) who found that dramatic play allowed children to access writing materials and motivated them to make writing attempts.

The DPC encouraged children to write for functional purposes. Children have been observed using invented spelling while they write shopping lists, prescriptions, cards, and messages. It should be mentioned that these writing behaviors were not noticed before the introduction of DPC activities because teachers used to focus on mastering formatting letters and handwriting rather than writing for purposes. The DPC allowed children to see writing in a different way, and to write while playing; thus, children practiced writing as a means and not an end. This result is similar to Boyle and Charles' (2010) work where children's writing developed after exposure to dramatic play opportunities because their understanding of how writing language works positively changed. In this context, Walmsley and Walmsley (1996) stressed that children should be provided with many opportunities in kindergarten to write and share their writing including exposing them to DPC activities.

After the employment of DPC activities, the findings indicated that the production of letter-like forms was the most common form of writing exhibited by children in the DPC, followed by writing via drawing. This result was not surprising because children were encouraged to write freely regardless of their writing level. According to Beaty (2009), when children engage in dramatic play activities, they experience realistic settings and functional reasons for using print, and therefore, their writing attempts will increasingly emerge. This result is different from Ihmeideh's (2009) study who found that writing via scribbling was the most form of writing that reveals when children have been exposed to daily writing activities.

In addition, writing via reproducing well-learned units has significantly increased. Prior to employing DPC, invented spelling has received the lowest mean (1.24) among the writing forms. This was an interesting result because the focus of kindergarten teachers was on mastering writing skills correctly and acceptably. Children were not allowed to make mistakes in their writing attempts. This result is similar to reading readiness perspective which believes that until a child can spell accurately, teachers should always correct the children's spelling (Sowers 2000). Consequently, writing attempts including making well-learned units and invented spelling were completely forbidden in their classroom where early attempts at writing are not necessary until children become ready to write. Morrow (2009, 24) described the circumstances in the classrooms where reading readiness takes place by saying 'Teachers no longer schedule playtime. Block centre and DPC disappeared from many rooms. Classrooms are not relaxed, nor are they child-centred. Children spend most of their time working on one skill worksheet after another'. In a study conducted about the development of early writing in Jordan, Ihmeideh, Al-Bsheer, and Al-Momani (2008) found that the experienced kindergarten teachers were more likely to be reading readiness-oriented in their perceptions of teaching practice.

Finally, the results revealed that children developed more positive attitudes toward the process of writing following the employment of DPC activities and saw writing as an enjoyable process. The reason for this is that children did not form letters, nor did they write words and sentences using drill and practice technique. DPC encouraged children to write using their own spelling, using different forms of writing to express themselves and to write for purposes regardless of their writing level. This result is consulted with Ihmeideh's (2009) work who found that children who have been involved in daily meaningful writing activities, viewed the process of writing as an easy and pleasurable. On the contrary, when teachers do not integrate early writing into children's learning experiences, they contribute to the anti-writing attitudes that some children could develop later (Randolph and Robertson 1995).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Several implications can be drawn from the results of the study. After the integration of writing activities into DPC, the development of early writing skills increased significantly, children produced different forms of writing, and making letter-like. Moreover, the attitudes of children toward writing changed positively as a result of their involvement in DPC activities.

Since this current study stressed the importance of DPC in developing children's writing skills, it is necessary to provide each kindergarten classroom with DPC. It is recommended that the kindergarten curriculum should include writing activities to be undertaken in a DPC. Kindergarten teachers need to appreciate children's early

attempts at writing, and children's scribbling and invented spelling should be accepted and encouraged in order to develop their writing skills.

Further research is needed to examine the impact of using DPC to promote early reading skills and oral language skills. Additional research is also needed to investigate the kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the use of DPC in promoting the development of children's early literacy skills. This study sample was limited to just one kindergarten from one region in Jordan (Amman). Other regions of the country have not been investigated. It is recommended that further studies are carried out in different regions which may yield different results.

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