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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study determined whether reading aloud to young children promoted literacy and enhanced their desire to read. Subjects, 20 second-grade children (aged 6 to 7 years) in Avenel, New Jersey, were exposed to read-aloud sessions on a daily basis for a 6-week period. During each week, a specific genre of books was read aloud daily. At the end of each week, the participants were asked to record the title and author of the book they had chosen during their weekly library period. A questionnaire, relating to reading aloud, was also sent to 43 second-grade teachers within the same school district. Results indicated that 20.8% of boys and 20% of girls selected books of the same genre read aloud to them. Results also indicated a disparity between teacher views on children's selection of books of a similar genre and research results (68% of teachers believed students chose books of the same genre, while only 20% of the students actually did). (Contains 24 references and one table of data; the teacher questionnaire is attached.) (Author/RS)

The Effects of Reading Aloud in Promoting Literacy and Enhancing Desire to Read

By

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree

Kean College of New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine if reading aloud to young children would promote literacy and enhance their desire to read. Twenty 6-7 year old second-grade children were exposed to read aloud sessions on a daily basis for a six week period. During each week of the study, a specific genre of books was read aloud daily. At the end of each week, the participants were asked to record the title and author of the book they had chosen during their weekly library period. A questionnaire, relating to reading aloud, was also sent to 43 second grade teachers within this same school district.

The results of the study indicated that 20.8% of boys and 20% of girls selected books of the same genre read aloud to them. Results also indicated a disparity between teacher views on children's selection of books of a similar genre and research results (teachers 68% - students 20.4%).

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I would like to thank the students in Grade 2 at the Woodbine Avenue School in Avenel, N.J. for their participation in this study. I would also like to thank the second grade teachers in Woodbridge, N.J. who were very helpful in their response to the questionnaire.

My appreciation is extended to my husband and family for their support and understanding during this project. I would also like to express sincere gratitude to my parents whose love, guidance and vision enabled me to pursue this degree.

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it together.
The copyright tells us when
They made the book and then,
Hi Ho Librario, let's sing it once
again!

The above hit song, written by Judy Freeman and Jane Scherer, to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell," was created to teach first, second, and third graders the parts of a book. Beside the obvious objective of teaching the parts of a book, this catchy tune also exemplifies the importance of teacher-pupil interaction with regard to books and literature.

Reading aloud to young children appears to be an extremely important teacher-pupil interaction. When teachers read aloud frequently, tell riddles and stories, try tongue-twisters, and sing silly songs, their students, it is thought, display more creativity and appear more willing to dive into poetry readings, storytelling, and creative drama. Research conducted by Kies, Rodriguez and Ghanato (1993) and Morrow (1989) suggest that students tend to be more imaginative and less structured in their responses.

American youth are said to exhibit an impoverished vocabulary, poor comprehension, negative attitudes and lack of motivation to learn. There are also numerous problems involved with students who have second language acquisition problems. Becoming A Nation of Readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985) tendered a blueprint for a literate society. The authors drew the strong conclusion that reading to children is "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success" (in learning to read)p.23.

Yet, Hoffman, Roser and Battle (1993), in a review of the research on teachers' use of literature in classrooms indicated reading to children is to literacy education as two aspirins and some bed rest were to the family doctors in years past. Literacy problems including poor vocabulary, poor comprehension, negative attitudes and zero motivation are all helped by reading aloud to youngsters. Reading aloud has been prescribed as a preventive measure: it will ensure children's success in school and enable them to read early. Hoffman, Roser and Battle surveyed reading aloud practices and their data indicated that Hall's investigations in 1971 showed fewer than half of the teachers (48%) surveyed read to children on a regular basis and that 76% of the teachers did not seem to plan their

literature programs. Similar studies by Langer, Applebee, Mullis and Foertsch (1900) yielded similar results.

The review summarizes the data and concludes that it is clear that reading aloud is not an integral part of the instructional day and may not be realizing its full potential. Reading aloud in elementary classes, while more prevalent than in the past, may still not be of sufficient quality to engage pupils fully within their literacy group or to maximize literacy growth.

This review also describes a "model" story time which includes the teacher offering the literature in unit format, encouraging connections by genre, topic or theme.

Freeman (1992) reports that reading aloud a diversity of books in school begins to counter some of the harmful messages children are receiving from their VCR's. For a while at least, in the security of our classrooms and libraries, educators can offer a more hopeful, less warped picture of the world.

Freeman views professional educators as the ones most responsible for the success or failure of our students as readers for the joy of it. They must make the allure of reading so intense that our kids are powerless to resist.

Matzen (1992) reports that implementing a reading incentive

program such as H.A.R.P. might appear to be an extraordinary task. It is a student-built database of books and a read-aloud program for younger students. However, it flowed together with great ease because it fulfilled the need for middle school students to be role models for young children. In the elementary schools, H.A.R.P. provided teachers with other people to read to their young pupils. The H.A.R.P.program created a dramatic increase in the circulation of books and interest in reading.

Smolkin and Yaden (1992) reported that children construct different types of literacy knowledge as they listen to reading of alphabet books. The number of alphabet books written throughout the history of children's literature is impressive and does not show a tendency to diminish. The genre is considered important enough for children's literature experts (e.g. Criscoe, 1988, Huch, Hepler and Hichman, 1987; Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991) to define criteria for the selection of good alphabet books.

Each time a new read-aloud book is presented to children, teachers assume it stimulates them to read it themselves as they remember hearing the echo of the storyteller's voice. In our contemporary society, saturated with television, VCR's computers, etc., parents, teachers and librarians view reading to children as a preventive measure to ensure literacy. In our complicated and complex world, the simplistic art of

reading aloud is thought to be a powerful motivator for learning to love reading. But evidence of an objective nature to support these thoughts, practices and assumptions is scant. A study to determine if, in second grade, reading aloud to children will enhance their literacy and encourage them to read books of the same genre would present such objective evidence.

Hypothesis

To provide some such data, the following study was undertaken. For the purposes of this study, it was hypothesized that reading aloud to second grade children would not motivate them to seek books of the same genre for their own reading pleasure.

Procedure

In order to confirm or reject the hypothesis set forth in this thesis, a six week study was conducted in the fall of 1993 in one second grade at the Woodbine Avenue School in Avenel, N.J. (within the Woodbridge District School System). The participants in this study were twenty 6-7 year old boys and girls in the second grade, 10 of each sex.

During each week of the six week study, a specific genre of books was read aloud daily to the students in one second grade at Woodbine Avenue School. The read aloud session was approximately 25 minutes in length and was conducted in an informal atmosphere within the regular classroom of the participants.

The genre used for each week of the study included fairy tales, biographies, animal stories, machines (bikes, planes, trains, boats, etc.), easy readers and dinosaur/pre-historic animal books.

After hearing a particular genre of books read aloud for a five-day period, each child was asked to record, on a small index card, the titles and authors of books selected by him/her during the school library period scheduled each Friday afternoon. The index cards were collected and the data analyzed and interpreted.

In addition, forty-three questionnaires (Appendix A) were sent to each of the second grade teachers within the Woodbridge School System. Items on the questionnaire related to reading aloud in the classroom and its effect on student selection of books. Thirty questionnaires were completed and returned. The questions were answered with a yes or no response and a short explanation where a yes response was given. Questionnaire responses were also analyzed to determine teacher perceptions and to compare with the reality of children's practice.

Results

The table below represents the results of data gathered during the six week study described under procedure:

Table I

Preferred Rank and Genre Selected

Week	Book	Preferred Rank	Same Genre Selection		Girls (10)	Boys (10)
			Number	%	%	%
1	Fairy tales	5	5/20	25	10	40
2	Biography	3.5	7/20	35	20	50
3	Animal stories	2	10/20	50	40	60
4	Machines	3.5	7/20	35	50	20
5	Easy readers	1	16/20	80	100	60
6	Dinosaur/Pre-historic animals	6	4/20	20	20	20

The data above indicates the number of boys and girls selecting books of the same genre read to them is about the same: boys - 20.8%, girls - 20%.

Girls favored fairy tales, biographies and animal stories; wheras, boys preferred machines and easy readers. Both girls and boys evenly chose dinosaur/pre-historic animal stories.

The children in this sample ranked the genre from most to least preferred in the following order: easy readers, animal stories, biographies, machines, fairy tales and dinosaur/prehistoric animals. Two popular books in the easy reader category were Funny Bunny by Judy Schoder and Don't Make Fun by B.Wiseman.

Questionnaire results are as follows:

	Yes	No	Occasionally
1. What grade level do you teach? 30/30 indicated grade 2			
2. How many students are enrolled in your class? Average pupils per class- 20 Total No. of Teachers - 30 Total No. of Pupils - 601			
3. Do you read stories aloud to your class? If yes, how often? Daily -10 2-3 times weekly -10 4 times weekly - 4 once a week - 4 occasionally - 2	28	0	2
4. Do your students enjoy being read to?	30	0	
5. Upon completion of a read aloud, do your students request reading the same book or similar books for their own reading pleasure?	23	0	7
6. Do your students choose library books which are similar in nature or genre to those read aloud to them?	18	6	6
7. Do you find any correlation between reading aloud to your students and the books they select for their own reading enjoyment?	19	7	4
8. What types of stories or books do your students most enjoy hearing? Answers (in preferred rank): funny stories, fiction, story books and animal stories.			

The findings according to the responses on the questionnaire indicate the majority of teachers presently read aloud to their students several times per week. The majority (68%) also find a correlation between the books they read aloud and the books their students select for their own reading enjoyment.

It is also interesting to note the teachers indicated the books their students preferred hearing most were funny stories. This correlates with the classroom sample in that the high ranked easy reader genre was composed mainly of humorous stories.

There is, however, a disparity between teacher views on children's selection of books of a similar genre and research results (teachers approximately 68% - students 20.4%).

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study indicate some young children will select books of the same genre as those they have been exposed to in read aloud sessions. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. Although the percentage of students selecting books of the same genre is not high (20.4) in this study, it does indicate a correlation between reading aloud and books selected for self-reading pleasure. Further research is necessary to gain more insight into effective techniques which will encourage and motivate students in the read aloud sessions.

The results of this study suggest that teachers' perceptions of children's book selections need to be investigated as they are in marked contrast to reality under controlled conditions.

One implication resulting from this study indicates schools should be saturated with books and that every classroom needs a classroom library. Every school needs a library and a trained librarian. It is important for all communities, wealthy and poor, to have libraries in all schools, trained librarians and real books in every classroom.

A further implication revealed the challenge of setting aside time for story time. The instructional day is already crowded. Many teachers express concern about finding time to fit reading aloud into the class day.

A significant challenge relates to resources. The implementation of a quality story time experience requires that resources be made readily available to teachers. The resource that appears most critical is easy access to carefully selected children's literature.

There are also challenges relating to staff development and administrative support and leadership. Successful implementation of a quality read aloud experience depends on an intensive staff development effort. New strategies and techniques must be learned. Adaptations to old classroom routines must be made. Administrators and teachers need to work together to

negotiate successful change.

Of course, reading aloud to children is not a simple solution to the challenge of teaching literacy. Working toward a planned and seriously constructed read-aloud time requires considerable investment in time, skill, knowledge and resources. Although a simple read-aloud inserted into classroom routine might make everyone feel better; it is really only a treatment of a symptom. Commitment to a quality read aloud experience, well-received and well-constructed, is needed before the maximum effects in language, literacy and literature growth can be realized.

By allowing young children the opportunity to hear their favorite books read over and over again, both parents and teachers of young children can do a great deal to guide those first small steps steadily toward not only literacy development but literary development as well.

The Effects of Reading Aloud in Promoting Literacy and Enhancing Desire to Read: Related Literature

Young children enter school with a desire to read and write. Emergent literacy educators are challenging them with the prerequisite abilities of literacy by involving them in planned and informal type of activities. Literacy development through storytelling has been found to be productive. Storytelling enables youngsters to develop and further their linguistic, social, psychological and physical abilities. Furthermore, through storytelling children become motivated to read and write. In their recent article, "Oral Language Development Through Storytelling: An Approach to Emergent Literacy," Kies, Rodriguez and Ghanato (1993) addressed the relevance of storytelling as an informal technique that gets children hooked onto reading and writing. The technique is also highly regarded as providing children with a wide range of conceptual experiences that prepares them for the challenges of literacy.

They believe effective storytelling is enhanced by props which help the storytelling to come alive, stimulate the imagination and involve the listener. They are helpful in guiding children to remember a story and provide a concrete way to develop concepts. They also provide a sense of security for both the child and adult during the process of storytelling.

When using props for storytelling, clues for creative techniques from the story can help the storyteller decide

which objects, pictures or other props are consistent with the story. After the teacher has modeled a variety of techniques, children should be encouraged to use similar devices. After children become familiarized with a variety of props the teacher should then encourage the youngsters to make their own. A variety of materials should be made available to the children for this purpose.

As children get involved in using props for storytelling, they discover that some stories lend themselves to the use of one kind of prop more than others. For example, some stories are more suitable for puppets, pictures, stuffed animals, feltboards, etc., while others are not. The creative limits are endless. By serving as a model of creative storytelling, the storyteller can motivate and excite children to try their own creations (Morrow, 1989).

The physical environment of the storytelling is an important factor in its effectiveness and usually begins in the home and extends naturally into the classroom, characterized by a warm, nurturing environment. With language as one of the first creative mediums of which children can gain command, storytelling is a good candidate for original expression (Kagee, 1983).

Stories can come from a book or other sources, one's own experience or one's imagination. It is generally suggested for teacher-storytellers to begin with the traditional folk

or fairytales. It is important to prepare for the storytelling event and call for confidence in one's storytelling ability.

There are certain guidelines one must follow to make storytelling enjoyable and authentic. The story must not be memorized; the exception being when a story contains a special rhyme or beginning worth repeating. For example, "Jack and the Beanstalk" would not be the same with "Fe fi fo fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman!" Each character must be given a distinctly recognizable and appropriate voice.

Gestures and facial expressions are important storytelling devices and at times take the place of words (Sherman, 1979). The storyteller is the creative force behind the story, able to create a work of shared pleasure and experience that leads to literacy in young children.

Storytelling and reading aloud, according to Kies, Rodriquez and Ghanato fosters positive adult-child relationships. It implies a personal relationship with a caring adult. It can be a powerful tool for reaching out to young minds. Teachers can use this strong instructional and relationship tool to provide experiences on various topics, encourage oral expression and promote literacy.

Another great strength in storytelling is the opportunity to strengthen the adult-child relationship through devotion, sharing and trust. When teachers read or tell a story with

joy and enthusiasm to a child, the message the child receives is a positive one. The message transmits caring, joy and affection. With large numbers of parents unable to read to their children due to time constraints, storytelling in the classroom is an opportunity to share the gift of time from a caring adult.

In addition to the bonding between adult and child, researchers (Teale, 1978; Teale, 1981; Morrow, 1988) have found that the quality of the interaction between the storyteller and the child may be a significant component in the establishment of early literacy. The positive relationship between storybook reading and storytelling and oral and written language development is well documented in research. Being read to at home positively correlates with the level of language development in prereaders, their vocabulary development, eagerness to read, early reading and success in beginning reading at school (Teale, 1981). These children are also above average in literacy and language development.

David Brown and L.D. Briggs (1992) state that, according to research, to develop story awareness, teachers should provide literacy experiences for children. Specifically, children should be encouraged to tell and read stories to the class and to listen to stories read by the teacher and fellow class members. In essence, children must be exposed to various types

of literature to broaden their story knowledge.

Brown and Briggs further report that children develop story awareness as a result of contact with stories in the cultural environment. Clearly, the social and psychological conditions in the home dictate the level and extent of children's participation in literacy activities. It is in the home that the children experience a wide or narrow range of verbal stimuli. Consequently, the foundation for story awareness is developed in the home during the early years, and the children enter the classroom with these formative experiences.

If parents are the ones providing exposure in the formative years, are there proper procedures for them to follow? According to Whitehurst and Valdez-Menchaca, there are proper procedures for parents to follow. They state that linguistic advances in middle-class 2 year olds in the United States resulted from training parents to read with their children following a particular style. This style, called dialogic reading, encourages children to talk about picture books and gives them models and feedback for progressively more sophisticated language use. Their research extends these procedures to a day-care setting using 20 Mexican 2 year olds from low-income backgrounds. Children in the intervention group were read to individually by a teacher using dialogic reading techniques. The control group children were given individual arts and crafts instruction by the same

teacher. Effects of the intervention were assessed through standardized language tests and by comparing the children's spontaneous language while they shared a picture book with an adult who was unaware of their group assignment. Differences favoring the intervention group were found on all standardized language posttests and on some measures of language production.

Whitehurst and Valdez-Menchaca report the issue of how to implement dialogic reading within the organizational and resource constraints of a typical day care or preschool classroom is, they believe, the most important applied question for future research.

Agreeing with Freeman's views, Charlotte Huck saw television as eroding the amount of time children spend reading. She believes today's children are too busy passively watching T.V. or videos to take time to read. Or they are so overprogrammed as they go to music lessons, dance lessons, art lessons, etc. that they are too exhausted to concentrate on reading.

Huck believes you don't fully appreciate something until you lose it. With the threat of the death of reading, we have seen increased interest in the development of the habit of reading. Parents are being urged to read aloud daily. Libraries have started parent groups which share and discuss books to read aloud to their children. Large corporations provide

programs which bring educators, librarians and parents together with the goal of improving reading skills in local communities. Libraries have invited celebrities to read aloud and schools have promoted "read-ins." Never before have so many people worked so hard to promote wide reading.

Huck maintains that in a comprehensive reading program, all children hear stories read aloud everyday and primary children hear them three and four times a day.

In Gordon Wells' book, The Meaning Makers, he reports his study of fifteen years on the developing literacy of children in Bristol, England. He found the most significant factor of whether children were good readers in second grade and again when they left school was whether they had been read to before coming to school.

Considering the value of reading aloud, how can one evaluate the effectiveness of this technique? Peter Johnston's (1993) article, "Learning to Listen" assesses the value of circle discussions in determining the value of reading aloud. He suggests that circle discussions after a read aloud are well worth the time they take. He reports children initially less comfortable or experienced in this format were now better able to contribute because of their participation in the whole-language dialogue. Johnston was able to understand listening

as an active rather than passive stance.

While the circle discussions have as a focal point a specific book that was read aloud or a question related to the reading and writing processes, the children are encouraged to make connections with whatever else they have experienced.

Reading aloud is not limited to reading trade books and literature. It also includes the reading of poetry. In her article, "Crossroads of literacy and orality: Reading poetry aloud," Lisa Lenz reports that reading poetry aloud in different situations and to different audiences helps first and second graders bring together oral and written language. When teachers and children share their love of literature by reading aloud, classrooms become places where children learn to read and write with a sense of listening to the words on the page. Listening to poetry and reading it aloud helps first and second graders develop a feel for the texture and power of language. Poetry can become alive and step off the printed page to become part of the lives of the listeners.

Lenz explains by reading poems, her students found that they had the potential to capture the ear, imagination and souls of those who listened. Students had to learn to use their voices to convey their meanings of what was being read. To accomplish this goal, youngsters first chose poems they loved. Then they moved through a series of rehearsals with peer

coaches who helped them learn to listen to themselves and consider how they thought each poem should sound. After the children were comfortable with the mechanics of reading a poem, they delved back into the heart of the poem and remembered what had made them love it in the first place. With the assistance of a coach, children would mark up a photocopy of their poem, circling special words and making notes to remind themselves how to sound when they read aloud. The last step involved videotaping the reading aloud and each gesture and reaction was captured in the way they read.

In this way, building bridges between orality and literacy came to them naturally. Actually, the bridges were already there. Children were adept at identifying the repeated sounds and rhythms on the printed page, in part because they spent time every morning reading poetry aloud, moving to its beat, or doing hand clapping rhymes.. But even those experiences were simple reinforcements of the rhythms that surrounded them from infancy: the feel of being rocked, hearing lullabies sung, playing jump-rope games, etc.. Rhythm was built into their actions and conversation; it was there in the context of their everyday lives.

Lenz alludes to the hypothesis presented in this thesis when she states,"Her oral reading opened up the hearts of an entire class to a genre we had never explored in depth and created a new sense of community based on the delight we

shared in reading aloud."[1]

Lenz concludes that in an age when schools insist that every literacy gain be supported by statistics, we have discovered again a bridge between orality and literacy that many times has been overlooked. We found an ongoing sense of joy in the sound of language and have recaptured it as a vital part of our literacy.

Reading aloud to children is also reported by Linda Fondas (1992) to be an alternative method of teaching vocabulary to students characterized as disabled readers. This method is a naturalistic approach of reading stories aloud to students, combined with guided discussion before, during, and after the reading to develop critical thinking skills. A target group of 11 first graders participated in the program. The overall objective was the acquisition of vocabulary through reading aloud to students. The target groups listened to 5 books over a 10-week period. A selected group of vocabulary words unfamiliar to first graders were used as the test words. Pretests and posttests were given to measure the extent of new vocabulary the target group acquired from listening to the same story being read several times. The results showed that reading aloud constitutes a major source of incidental vocabulary acquisition and that teacher explanation of a word meaning and related activities allow a significant amount of vocabulary to be learned.

In addition to its value in vocabulary development, reading aloud has also been found effective in fostering story comprehension. Martinez and Roser's (1985) study thoroughly explores the value of repeated readings. They report that when a parent or teacher reads the same story to children several times, the children begin to attend to different aspects of the story than they did on the first reading. Martinez and Roser noted that a multitude of guidelines for effectively reading aloud to young children serves as testimony to the widespread belief in sharing books with children before they read. Upon examination of those lists of guidelines, Martinez and Roser found them very similar in that each urged the adult reader to (1) choose books carefully, (2) read well, (3) provide the appropriate responses to the shared book.

However, they did find one suggestion which was absent from the guidelines and that was the suggestion to "read it again." Martinez and Roser are aware that those who share books with children might want to expose children to as many books as possible; yet, they suspect that the advantages to be gained by repeatedly sharing a book with children may outweigh the relatively few disadvantages and provide the young listeners with something more than just a rerun of a pleasurable experience.

It seems obvious that repetition and young children are

happy partners. As preschoolers practice oral language, stack blocks, fill and dump their toy boxes or repeatedly turn the pages of a favorite book, they appear to be attempting to gain mastery of their world. When adult observers consider how children structure their own experiences, it makes sense that returning to a story again and again is simply following an existing pattern. However, in classrooms of young children, very seldom do teachers have the luxury of returning to a book for a second time.

It was this interest in the value of repeated readings that led Martinez and Roser to investigate how children's responses to literature changed with increasing familiarity with a story. Case studies were conducted in both homes and pre-schools. Their studies focused on the storytime interactions of four pre-school children (ranging in age from 4 to 5) and their parents, while the school studies focused on the interactions of two groups of 4 year olds with their nursery school teachers.

Martinez and Roser discovered that at least four changes signalled the difference between children's responses as they listened to unfamiliar and familiar texts: (1) Children in both settings (home and school) talked more when they were familiar with the story, (2) the children's talk changed "form" when they were familiar with the story, (3) the children's story talk tended to focus on different aspects of the story

as the story was reread, and (4) when the story was read repeatedly, the children's responses indicated greater depth of understanding.

As these preschoolers had more opportunities to listen to a story, their range of responses widened. They appeared to have more opportunity to clarify, to fill gaps, and to make connections. In effect, the children gained increased control over stories they heard more than once.

The analysis of changes in children's responses to stories in two settings indicates that their responses continue to develop in repeated readings. These findings are important for educators. Reading a variety of books to children should remain a priority, but we must also extend our goals to include valuing repetition of literature for the divergent responses that repetition encourages. Only then can we be assured that children will have the opportunity to fully appreciate books as familiar old friends.

David Yaden's (1988) report is in agreement with Martinez and Roser's analysis. He states that there is increasing complexity of children's questions about stories as familiarity with them grows. Hoffman (1976) recorded the responses of a 3 year old to one book over 11 rereadings in 10 days and found that while "early responses were more likely to involve affective content - later responses, based on greater understanding of text, were more cognitive in nature."[2]

What seems clear from these studies is that young children do assimilate stories "bit by bit." Comprehension is not an all or nothing matter decided by one exposure to a book.

The main purpose of Yaden's study was to more specifically document over several readings of one story the kinds of spontaneous questions that a kindergarten aged child asked while being read to, and to analyze the effect of repeated read-aloud sessions on the emergence of higher levels of questions as noted in previous studies with slightly younger children.

Examination of Yaden's table reveals two distinct trends in the children's inquires about books: (a) Questions about illustrations occurred more frequently than inquires about story or word meaning, and (b) higher levels of questions occurred less frequently and did not occur in either the first or second reading.

Another observation regarding the occurrence of questions is that while there is steady growth from questions about illustrations toward more interest and understanding of the language and story itself, there are gaps in this pattern of questions between readings. However, as White (1954) observed, there is frequently a "latency" of response from the time of the reading to the actual question. In other words, the lack of response to a story during the actual reading in no way indicates a lack of attention or disinterest. In fact, silence usually means one is deeply involved with the story.

This gap between the session of story reading and response or question is an important time. As White (1954) states, it is a time when questions "seem to simmer and brew for days before the lid is taken off."[3]

Comprehension takes time. Since the increasing sophistication of children's questions about books over several readings has been documented by others (Crago and Crago, 1976; Harkness and Mitler, 1983; Kiefer, 1986; Martineq, 1983; Martinez & Roser, 1985; White, 1954), to expect young children's comprehension of stories to be very complete after only one reading seems unrealistic.

This tendency to expect full comprehension after one hearing of oral text, however, is common in today's schools and is a poor story pattern adopted by some parents and teachers. It may be premature for parents and teachers to expect an immediate response to the first readings of any story.

A growing knowledge of books and stories takes time to develop. It builds up slowly - step by step. By allowing young children the opportunity to hear their favorite books read repeatedly, both teachers and parents of young children can do much to guide those first "small steps" toward literacy development.

Another noted researcher, Sandra McCormick (1977) also

agrees with the reports that reading aloud promotes comprehension. In her article, "Should You Read Aloud To Your Children?", McCormick reviews research which provides evidence that reading aloud to children significantly improves their reading comprehension. It also demonstrates that hearing literature read can affect reading interests and the quality of a child's language development. Her article reviews research which relates reading performance, reading interests, and language development of children to experiences they have had in being read to by their parents and teachers.

Regarding reading aloud and reading performance, McCormick states that for economically disadvantaged children in grades one and two, and in grades four through six, investigations of the effects of reading aloud to children on a regular basis have shown significant increases in quality of vocabulary growth, knowledge of word meanings, visual decoding, motor encoding, total score on the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, and reading comprehension achievement (Bailey, 1970; Chen, 1968; Porter, 1970).

Keys to producing the desired effect of higher reading performance appears to be both the regularity of exposure to the treatment of hearing literature read aloud and the length of time that the treatment is applied. In many studies in which significant increases were noted, the frequency with

which children were read to was stressed. For example, second graders were read to every day of the school year (Cohen, 1968). First graders participated in a library resource program which consisted of reading to children and storytelling activities for one hour a day, five days per week for twelve weeks, for a total of sixty hours of participation (Baily, 1970). In the one study reviewed in which children who were read to do not show significantly higher reading scores, the treatment had been applied for a shorter period of time (Lyons, 1972). Lyons states that the length of this study may have been one factor in the lack of reading growth, and reports that the results of his investigation indicate a short period of specialized treatment is not enough to override the general nature of teaching practices.

Children from homes of lower socioeconomic status may receive greater benefit from being read to than other children. In many previous studies, in which reading aloud was the experimental treatment, the population consisted of disadvantaged children. Lyons suggests that the language provided by the literature read was in greater contrast to the child's daily linguistic environment for the children in the previous studies than for the middle class subjects in her investigation.

McCormick also concludes that reading aloud to children

to produce reading growth also seems to be most effective with children who are in the lowest ranges of reading achievement. She cites the studies of Cohen (1968) and Fearns (1971) to support her conclusions.

Of particular note in McCormick's article is her report that reading aloud to young children can also affect their reading interests. She cites the studies of Mason and Blanton (1971) for support. Since the children were pre-readers, stories were read aloud to them. One important finding of the study was that, after the children learned to read, they were more eager to read for themselves the books which had been read aloud to them, or books of the same type, than to read other books. Mason and Blanton say, "Apparently, exposure to a good story increases one's desire to read it for himself."[4] Porter (1970) found that reading aloud to fourth, fifth, and sixth graders affected their reading interests as well as their comprehension achievement. These two studies are of particular importance in that they support the premise of this thesis.

McCormick concludes by stating that research now provides evidence of the direct relationship between reading aloud to children and reading performance, language development and development of reading interests. The evidence indicates that reading to children is an activity that should be scheduled regularly. Hearing literature read is as important as any other element of the curriculum, or any other activity in the pre-school child's day.

Roser, Hoffman and Farest (1990) explain that no one seems to question the fact that nurturing a child in a home that values literacy produces a forceful effect on that child's literacy development. It is disturbing to note that children from economically disadvantaged homes enter school with fewer exposures to the tools of literacy and therefore are "at risk" in their literacy acquisition. Their beliefs correlate with McCormick's report outlined earlier in this paper. They, therefore, made a combined effort to infuse quality literature and instructional strategies into a traditional reading/language arts program serving primarily limited English speaking students from economically disadvantaged home environments.

One of the components of the project focused on helping low-achieving children to read their basal readers with fluency and accuracy in either Spanish or English. The recitation framework was based on research conducted in first and second grade classrooms (Hoffman, 1987) and drew upon research in comprehension instruction, particularly in the use of story grammar, as well as research in the development of fluency through oral reading using modeling and repeated reading techniques.

The steps included children's listening to the story as it was modeled by the teacher, responding to the story in the same kind of ways they were responding during storytime, reconstructing the story using a simple mapping procedure,

practicing the story given teacher support, and finally "reciting" the story - performing by rereading orally a section of the story fluently and expressively for the group.

The effect of the program was indeed encouraging. After one and one half years, five out of the six schools made statistically significant growth in their scores on the state-mandated test of basic skills (TEAMS). The results indicate that a literature-based program can be implemented successfully in schools that serve at-risk students. Further, there is every indication that these students respond to such a program in the same positive ways as any student would - with enthusiasm for books, with willingness to share ideas, and with growth in language and literacy.

Group size also seems to have an effect on storybook reading. Morrow and Smith (1980) investigated children's comprehension of stories and their verbal interactions during storybook readings in groups of varying sizes. Adults read storybooks to 27 kindergarten and first-grade children from five U.S. school districts. Each child heard three stories read in each of three settings: one-to-one, small group (3 children per group), and whole- class (15 children or more). Measures were taken on only the third reading in each setting. On probed and free-recall comprehension tests, children who heard stories in the small-group setting performed significantly

better than children who heard stories read one-to-one, who in turn performed significantly better than children who heard stories read to the whole class. Also, children who heard stories read in a small group or one-to-one generated significantly more comments and questions than children in the whole-class setting. Thus, reading to children in small groups appears to offer as much interaction as one-to-one readings, and appears to lead to greater comprehension than whole-class or even one-to-one reading.

Morrow and Smith further report that in small groups, children serve as models for other children. The teacher can keep track of all of the children in the group and can encourage responses from children who are passive. Questions and comments serve as springboards for discussion more frequently in small groups than in other settings. They suggest reading to children in small groups should be common practice in schools.

Literacy development before school reflects the practices of the child's society or culture (Heath, 1982; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). These practices are the recurring activities involving print used by different sociocultural groups to achieve particular goals in their daily lives. Children are socialized into these practices through direct and indirect involvement, and through deliberate and incidental occasions for learning. If, as Vygotsky

argues (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978) intrapsychological phenomena have their roots in interpsychological phenomena, then literacy development is mediated by earlier socialization experiences, and a child's independent use of printed materials represents an internalized form of those experiences (Sulzby, 1985).

Recently, investigators have focused attention on a particular literacy activity: the practice of reading storybooks. The focus has generally been on middle-class (typically Anglo) families reading to their preschool children. This activity is of interest because of its possible significance for later school achievement, which could help explain differiented achievement patterns at school for children of different backgrounds (e.g. Snow, 1983; Teale, 1984; Wells, 1985).

Phillips and McNaughton investigated the social practice of book reading in 10 mainstream New Zealand families where parents read regularly to the 3 and 4 year old children in their homes. In Study 1, the researchers collected data for one month on the frequency of book reading, the time of day, the participants, and the types of books selected. They found that reading stories was a frequent child-centered event in the homes studied. In Study 2, unfamiliar but similar storybooks were given to the families to read, and the parent-child interactions were recorded and analyzed. Both adult and child-initiated insertions most often focused on the

meaning of the immediate text, particularly on the events and goals of the narrative. Few interactions on concepts about print or illustrations were noted. Some changes occurred across successive reading: At first, parents concentrated on making the meaning of the story clear to the children, but later they frequently fostered anticipation and prompted the children to make inferences. The results suggest that children from such mainstream families in New Zealand will already have some knowledge of constructing meaning from stories when they begin to attend school.

The roles adults play in preschoolers response to literature has also been studied by Roser and Martinez (1985). They state that reading aloud to children is a universally recommended activity for parents and teachers. Researchers who have studied storytime at home and in schools indicate that reading to children and talking with them about books not only motivates reading but fosters active reasoning about text and lays the foundation for later text comprehension (Adams & Fruce, 1982).

In an attempt to gather clues to the ways children attempt to construct meaning with their storytime partners, Roser and Martinez observed the storytime of preschoolers at home and in schools. They wanted to define the roles adults serve in these interactions. The results indicated that adults tended to serve as (1) co-responders, (2) as informers/monitors, and (3) as directors. As a co-responder, the adult initiated

topics of discussion for the purposes of describing information in illustrations, recounting parts of stories, sharing personal reactions to stories, and inviting the child to share responses. In the second role, that of informer/monitor, the adult explained different aspects of stories, provided information to broaden the child's story-related world knowledge, and assessed and monitored the child's understanding of the story. The third role was that of director of the story time, occurring as the adult introduced stories, announced their conclusion, or assumed the management role in discussion. This role is one naturally assumed by readers in a storytime interaction.

It was in the roles of co-responder and informer/monitor that clues to the richness of children's responses appeared to lie. In the role of co-responder, the parent and teacher appeared to model for the children the process of the mature reader in interaction with text.

Story content is also an important aspect in motivating and capturing children's interest in reading. Mason and Blanton (1971) conducted a study to identify and quantify the reading interests of preschool children. A stratified sampling of 180 three-, four- and five-year-old children representing a normal national sample was selected from Clayton County, Georgia. Each child was interviewed individually and asked questions dealing with his reading interests. Specifically, the children were asked: "Do you like to have stories read to

you?" "What stories do you like to hear best?" "What stories would you read if you could read all by yourself?"

The results of the study indicated hearing stories read aloud is an activity most preschoolers enjoyed. The majority of the children seemed to have interest in fairy tales, animals, T.V. characters, storybooks and machines. Most interesting is the preference of boys for the "Machine" category. Many of the older children preferred "easy readers" as stories to listen to. This preference seems to indicate that parents are reading aloud to their children books designed for beginners to read by themselves.

The implications noted in this study were that almost all the preschoolers questioned expressed an appreciation for hearing stories and the vast majority could name a story or a type of story that they preferred. A substantial percentage of the children expressed a preference for the same story or type of story whether it was to be read to them or read by them. This attests to the reliability of their responses. It is also evident that many preschool children have definite preferences for one or more types of reading content.

The fact that most of the children preferred the fairy tales, animals, storybooks, and machine categories lends support to those who would change the content of present beginning reading materials. The fact many children wanted most to read the same story that they liked most to hear read

aloud suggests that young children are much like adults and young adults who rush to the library to read a book just after a movie based on that book has been shown in their community.

Apparently, exposure to a good story increases one's desire to read it for himself. Perhaps young children should routinely be read aloud those stories which will later be used for their early instruction in reading.

In view of the advantages and beneficial effects of reading aloud, it seems logical that perspective teachers be made aware of its importance. This, however, does not seem to be the case. The influence of the student teaching experience on subsequent teaching patterns is documented by Austin and Morrison (1961, 1963) who report that the cooperating teacher's pattern of teaching is more influential in determining teaching techniques than are methods courses.

A study was conducted by Maryanne Hall (1971) to ascertain the extent and types of experiences with children's literature and recreational reading provided by cooperating teachers.

The sample was composed of student teachers in the Department of Early Childhood Elementary Education of the University of Maryland in the Spring Semester of 1969.

These students were sent letters asking them to attend a meeting at which they would be asked to complete a questionnaire to be used in a research project. The two-page question-

naire consisted of thirty-eight items which were to be answered either "yes" or "no". The questionnaire was divided into six categories; one of which concerned reading to children.

In reference to the category, reading to children, in over half the classes the teacher did not read to children daily. In over half the classes there was not a regularly scheduled time for reading to children. In 61 percent of the classes the teacher read to children only if there was free time in the school day. In 76 percent of the classes the selection read aloud did not reflect a planned literature program.

In essence, these findings seem to agree with the findings of Hoffman, Roser and Battle (1993) who reported in their similar study that reading aloud is not an integral part of the instructional day and may not be realizing its full potential.

Of prime importance in elementary reading programs is the goal of developing a permanent interest in and a favorable attitude toward reading according to Hall. Former Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen, Jr. included the development of a desire to read as an essential complement to the development of the skills of reading. Therefore, the importance of a planned literature program in a classroom environment which is conducive to pleasurable experiences with

literature should contain an aspect which allows for reading aloud to children.

Developing a permanent interest in reading cannot be left to chance. Literature experiences are an essential part of the elementary curriculum. The need for improving the quantity and quality of literature experiences is great and must receive attention in both pre-service and in-service education of teachers as a part of the national effort to make the "right to read" a reality.

In conclusion, all research cited in this paper describes in some way the beneficial and positive effects of reading aloud to young children. However, with the exception of McCormick's study, the research does not indicate the extent children will select books of the same genre that was read aloud to them.

In view of the scant research in this particular field, this study will help provide data for future research in this important area.

ENDNOTES

[1]Lisa Lenz, "Crossroads of literacy and orality: Reading poetry aloud," Language Arts, Vol.69, p.602.

[2]Darlene Hoffman, "Ten Days with Inga and 'In the Night Kitchen': An Episode in Language Development," Communication Educator, p.11.

[3]Dorothy White, Books Before Five, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1954, p.162.

[4]George Mason and William Blanton, "Story Content for Beginning Reading Instruction," Elementary English, p. 796.

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APPENDIX

November 29, 1993

Dear Second-Grade Teacher:

I am a teacher at Woodbine Avenue - School #23 and am presently working on a research project at Kean College and I need your help. I am studying the reading habits of children in an attempt to understand more about children's reading interests and literacy.

The attached questionnaire is an important part of my study. I would appreciate if you would take a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire, place in the enclosed envelope and return to me via interschool mail. Your name is not required.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Mildred Primamore

Mildred Primamore

P.S. Please return as soon as possible. Thank you.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What grade level do you teach?_____

2. How many students are enrolled in your class?_____

3. Do you read stories aloud to your class?_____
   If yes, how often?_____

4. Do your students enjoy being read to?_____

5. Upon completion of a read aloud session, do your students request reading the same book or similar books for their own reading pleasure?_____

6. Do your students choose library books which are similar in nature or genre to those read aloud to them?_____

7. Do you find any correlation between reading aloud to your students and the books they select for their own reading enjoyment?_____
   If yes, please explain:_____

8. What types of stories or books do your students most enjoy hearing?_____

Thank you for your time and assistance.