Benefits of Read-Alouds in Early Childhood Literacy Development

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Benefits of Read-Alouds
in Early Childhood Literacy Development

By

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Abstract

This study examined the benefits of read alouds and early childhood literacy development. Research was conducted in preschool classrooms that use whole group interactive read alouds, as part of the daily literacy instruction. Data was collected through observation, teacher and student questionnaires, and examination and analysis of student work samples, in response to the daily read-aloud. The findings show that interactive read-alouds are highly beneficial for early childhood literacy development resulting in increased engagement, strengthened reading and writing skills, and the students’ abilities to make connections. In order to promote student interaction during learning, teachers must motivate their students by creating authentic, purposeful, and engaging literacy experiences that involve the teacher and students engaging, communicating and collaborating with each other.
Benefits of Read-Alouds in Early Childhood Literacy Development

During read-alouds, it is the teacher who reads the text not the students. Research and current practice support the use of teacher read-alouds as a significant component of instruction across grade levels (Fisher, Flood, Lap, & Frey, 2004). It is crucial that educators incorporate read-alouds into the literacy curriculum as early as pre-school. Read-alouds model expressive, enthusiastic reading while sharing the pleasure of reading, encouraging the listeners to socially interact and become a part of the story.

Literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, but like all human activity, literacy is essentially social and is located in the interaction between people (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Read-alouds can lead to an improvement in language expression throughout all curriculum subjects and help children understand the components, structure, and function of narrative story telling (Fisher et al., 2004). Every read-aloud provides interaction between the teacher and students, as each story provides different means of discussion and interpretation based on how the story is delivered and used for instruction. Reading aloud is one of the most common and easiest means of sharing books in a pleasurable experience (Cohen & Cowen, 2011). During read-alouds the teacher and/or parent reads with expression, modeling and maintaining a slow reading pace, while engaging with the subject/subjects being read aloud to. Not only does reading aloud to students model good reading habits, but it also allows the children to become involved with different genres of literature and introduces them to new vocabulary, and comprehension strategies. The earlier children are exposed to read-alouds, the more immersed they will become in literature. The question is how exactly does reading aloud to children benefit early childhood literacy development? If early exposure to literacy is critical, then the students who are not immersed and engaged in read-alouds truly are at a loss, as there
are many different components of literacy that are involved during daily read-alouds in the classroom, that encourage growth in both oral and written language.

To prove the benefits of read-alouds in early childhood literacy development, a study will be conducted with my current pre-school class. As part of the curriculum, read-alouds are incorporated into instruction each day, every morning during story time. I have found read-alouds as an effective literacy tool that both engages and provides real life understandings for preschoolers. Before, during, and after our read-alouds the children participate in literacy activities such as choral reading early reader books, tracing and discussing vocabulary words from the story, sequencing the events from the story, drawing and interpreting their own perspectives on the story, making predictions through discussion with the integration of math, and constructing projects based on concepts from the theme often pulled right from the books read-aloud. By consistently making an effort to integrate other subjects with literacy instruction, the students continue to make gains in both their oral and written communication. At three and four years old the students are able to identify letters and recognize the relationship between letters and their sounds. They can spell and write their names independently, trace vocabulary words, write vocabulary words independently using guides, discuss vocabulary concepts, make predictions and inferences, and recall important events, places, and characters from the story.

The literacy practices involved in my classroom truly impact and influence oral and written language development, which are driven from read-alouds, and strengthen the literacy abilities of students at the early childhood level.

Further research proved the benefits of reading aloud to students at the early childhood level. This study involved a group of preschool students who were observed as they participated in daily read-alouds in the classroom during literacy instruction. Along with the students,
teachers from the school in which the study was conducted were also included in the study. The students participated in daily interactive read-alouds including discussion and reading and writing instruction. The teachers participated in a read-aloud survey and also completed a classroom literacy environment checklist. The examination of this data was used to understand how read alouds benefit early childhood literacy development. My research suggests that read-alouds benefit students at the early childhood level as students acquire knowledge of new vocabulary, learned skills to comprehend and understand the text, and became aware of the importance of connections and how to make specific text to self, text to text, and text to world connections. Read-alouds model and exhibit the correct way of reading a text aloud through student and teacher discussion and analysis of text, vocabulary, and problems within the story. Teachers constantly point out the author and illustrator's names, and model for the students how to hold a book and turn the pages correctly. Lastly, this exploration of read-alouds provided evidence that children are more engaged in literature that they connect to as it is easier for them to comprehend and make meaning from the text, but in order to make the connections they need to participate in daily read-alouds at the same time each day and complete reading, writing, math, and science instruction that directly correlates to the chosen books and theme each week.

**Theoretical Framework**

Literacy is the control of primary and secondary discourses. A primary discourse or the primary use of language is used within the home. A secondary discourse or a secondary use of language is language used beyond the home (Gee, 2001). The sociocultural theory applies to literacy both inside and outside of the classroom, as literacy does not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, but that like all human activity, literacy is essentially social,
located in the interaction between people. (Larson and Marsh, 2005).

Both primary and secondary discourses stem from our beliefs and values, which essentially make up who we are. For a child to become literate, the child needs to be immersed in an enriched social environment beginning at infancy, throughout the stages of early childhood development providing the child with the necessary tools to accept the beliefs and values of their culture. Once children exchange the primary and secondary discourses that are utilized and valued within their society, they can then begin to communicate and interact with the outside world through the oral and written language as emergent readers and writers. Kucer (2009) states that both oral and written discourses are expressions of language and therefore exhibit shared features, such as dual structures, and rule governed systems. Writing is not oral language expressed through print, and written language is not speech written down, however written language extends and builds on the oral language system but does not replicate it. It is obvious that there is a relationship between oral and written language as oral and written roles both play a play an important part in a child’s social, linguistic, and cognitive language development.

Children need to acquire oral and written language, and be able to use oral and written language effectively in a variety of settings including the classroom environment. There are many reasons to read-aloud to students throughout the year, but the demonstration of different writing styles and forms of written language, as well as the modeling of oral language through the introduction of words and sounds can lead to an improvement in language expression throughout all curriculum subjects at every grade level.

The sociocultural theory applies to my study that read-alouds benefit early childhood literacy development, as social interaction between the students and teacher take place every time a new story is being read aloud. In order for the read-aloud to be effective and create
opportunity for discussion between the students and teacher surrounding the text, it is important that read-alouds are consistently modeled exhibiting discussion of text, establishment of a purpose, incorporation of animation and expression, and modeling of fluent reading.

Student and teacher discussion during and after read-alouds is influenced by the selection of high quality texts based on the interest and needs of the students, and can be further extended through the connection of read-alouds to independent and interactive reading and writing activities. Larson and Marsh (2005), state that literacy lies within the interaction between people. Not only do read-alouds involve social interaction between the teacher and the students, but the sociocultural theory is applied in the classroom when the read-aloud text is being discussed and interpreted based on the ways in which it connects to the teacher and students.

Not only do read-alouds enhance and encourage classroom discussion, they enrich students general knowledge, demonstrate different writing styles and forms of written language, stimulate interest in different subjects, introduce different genres that children may not be inclined to read, expose children to new words and sounds, and introduce children to different authors (Cohen & Cowen, 2011).

**Research Question**

Given that literacy is a social practice, and that children’s discoveries about literacy in a literate society must begin much earlier than at school age, this action research project asks, how can shared reading can be used to benefit early childhood literacy development?

**Literature Review**

A familiar routine in many early childhood and primary elementary classrooms is the teacher-led read-aloud. During read-alouds the teacher sits in front of the students and reads out loud a children’s text. This model is particularly true in whole language classrooms where
sharing a wide variety of books assumes a center place in literacy instruction (Oyler, 1996). Research on teacher-led read-alouds, as well as read-alouds instructed by parents at home, points out the wide variability in the ways adults share books with children (Teale, 2003; Oyler, 1996).

Present research indicates that language in storybooks is richer and more complex than language that children are exposed to in their daily conversations (Linn, Meyer, Stahl, & Wardrop, 2001). Storybooks contain more expressive vocabulary and more multifaceted sentences than ordinary speech. Storybook reading affects children’s reading acquisition indirectly, through facilitation of language development. Children can learn new word meanings through exposure to them in storybook readings, and this incidental learning can measurably improve children’s vocabulary knowledge (Linn, Meyer, Stahl, & Wardrop). The direct benefits from exposure to storybooks can come only if children also develop print-related skills, such as phoneme awareness and word recognition. These skills should be developed in addition to the language development that comes through storybook reading (Linn, Meyer, Stahl, & Wardrop).

Storch and Whitehurst (2002) reported that the preschool years are a significant period of development during which young children acquire knowledge of the code- and meaning-based aspects of both written and spoken language. Many researchers have demonstrated that read-alouds are an effective way to introduce students to the joy of reading and the art of listening while developing their vocabularies, experiential backgrounds, and concepts of print and story (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, Frey, 2004). Kindle (2009) states that read-alouds fill the gap by exposing children to book language, which is rich in descriptive language and unusual words. After observing and learning more information regarding read-alouds, this information leads back to the notion as to what are the benefits of read-alouds in Early Childhood Literacy Development. This literature review seeks to explore the research examining read-alouds and their effect on
early childhood literacy development. In the first section there will be an exploration of the research supporting informational and narrative texts as read-alouds. Secondly, an examination of how students benefit from discussion during and after read-alouds. Next, a comparison of the different roles parents and teachers serve in during parent and teacher driven read-alouds. Finally, a comparison between small and whole group read-alouds, and the benefits each type of instruction offer students during interactive read-alouds. The research indicates that read-alouds benefit early childhood literacy development.

**Informational and Narrative Texts as Read-Alouds**

The selecting of text is a significant aspect for encouraging responses in the classroom. It is important to build on students’ localized, cultural, and personal understandings in ways that are both relatable and engaging (Wiseman, 2011). The types of texts read aloud to students influences the text to text, text to self, and text to world connections students make. Zucker, Justice, and Piasta’s (2009) research demonstrates that there is a dynamic interaction between teacher and students influenced by the quality and type of text chosen for read-alouds. Since text selection is privy to the types of information students are learning about, informational text have found to be very beneficial for teacher led read-alouds. Given the potential benefits of informational genres and the importance of exposing young students to these types of texts, Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, and Kaderavek (2010) conducted a study to analyze the types of texts read in early childhood classrooms. The purpose of the study was to generate a thorough understanding of the types of informational texts early childhood educators use in order to further explore the text, and recognize how the use of informational text in classroom instruction can address and connect to the content area topics, and local state standards. The research
conducted by Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, and Kaderavek (2010) was based on a 30-week book-reading study called Project Sit Together and Read (STAR). As part of Project STAR, the teachers received a new trade book for thirty straight weeks during the school year to read with their peers in whole class read-alouds. The researcher-provided texts were predominantly of the narrative genre however the teachers were informed that they were allowed to incorporate multiple types of texts from any available source into their literacy instruction, particularly during read-alouds (Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, and Kaderavek).

Yopp and Yopp (2006) also believe that informational text plays an important role in the lives of young children. Similar to Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, and Kaderavek (2010), Yopp and Yopp (2006) deem that young children are rarely exposed to informational text at school. Surveys of teacher's practices along with analyses of basal readers suggest that young children receive little exposure to informational text because they are not well represented in the early childhood and primary grade levels (Yopp and Yopp). Both studies confirmed that narrative texts dominate preschool read-alouds and documented that early childhood teachers rarely use informational genres in preschool classrooms (Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, and Kaderavek, 2010; Yopp and Yopp 2006). Findings from both studies suggest that early childhood educators and literacy instructors need to devote serious attention to their selection of choosing information and narrative text for classroom read-alouds. It is important for educators to select different types of text that target a full range of content area topics that are aligned with the local state standards. Integrating different types of information genres into classroom literacy instruction is expected to provide exclusive benefits to students’ language, literacy, content knowledge and interest in reading (Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, and Kaderavek, 2010; Yopp and Yopp, 2006).

Pentimonti, Zucker, and Justice (2011), build upon Yopp and Yopp’s (2006) study
regarding children’s exposure to informational texts with preschool through third-grade classrooms. In an analyzation of 426 titles read by 13 teachers from a systematic sample of seven weeks of classroom instruction collected over an academic year, studies proved that narrative texts overpower the genre of text being utilized in preschool classroom read-alouds during literacy instruction. Not only did the study prove that informational texts are rarely used in the classroom for literacy instruction, but it also showed that students in preschool have little exposure to multicultural content, alphabet books, books that included math concepts, and nursery rhymes or poems. Teale (2003) argues that exposure to various genres is important to children because the ability to understand different genres of text is vital to the process of becoming a proficient reader.

Similarly, Oyler (1996) believes that the use of informational books during interactive read-alouds encourages “expert talk” and action from students in the classroom. Oyler analyzed student initiations in response to informational text and found that impulsive initiations offer the teacher awareness into the understandings children both contribute and take away from the text (Oyler, 2006). Information books afford students with more occasions to ask and answer questions as questioning and classroom interaction go hand and hand. Consistent with Oyler, Smolkin and Donovan (2003) support interactive informational read-alouds as an instructional approach to support both non-readers and fluent readers. They point out that interactive informational read-alouds are beneficial to students. Many primary classrooms encourage the reading of storybooks and neglect the reading of information or non-fiction texts (Smolkin and Donovan, 2003). Smolkin and Donovan (2001) first became curious about how read-alouds of non-fiction might differ from the more commonly occurring read-alouds of fiction in their 2001 study. They noticed that changes in discourse between the students when different genres were
introduced during read-alouds. Although storybooks can be effectively used for teacher led read-alouds, Smolkin and Donovan (2003) found that early exposure to ideas, vocabulary, syntax, and text structures in informational texts helps prepare children when they shift from learning to read, to reading to learn. The difference between the story and informational text read-alouds is that students are provided with opportunities to acquire linguistic features, including text structures of various expository genres (Smolkin and Donovan, 2001).

Read-alouds involving informational text offers multiple opportunities for text comprehension-related discussions (Smolkin and Donovan, 2001; Oyler, 1996). Smolkin and Donovan (2001) believe that different types of adult and child talk take place, as different genres are read aloud during interactive read-alouds. They believe that differences in conversation occur in response to the two distinct functions each genres serves. Storybooks are meant to entertain, and informational texts are meant to inform the reader. Although storybooks seem to be more engaging and appealing to the reader, Smolkin and Donovan (2001) note that children and adults can become too caught up in storybook read-alouds. Often times when students get too caught up in storybook read-alouds, there is little opportunity for any comments or questions. Without the ability to comment or ask questions in response to the text, students become misinformed. Even though storybooks are meant to entertain, teachers realize there are both pro’s and con’s to using storybooks for interactive read-alouds. Unlike narrative or storybooks, Smolkin and Donovan (2001) think informational text do a better job of informing the reader. When informational texts are used for read-alouds, they are presented to the child audience with a great deal of text-related talk (Oyler, 1996). Through discussion of the text students are able to make connections to the text, and links to prior experiences. The teacher can then further analyze the discussion, ensuring whether or not the child audience is able to grasp the information from the text. Although there is
still much debate over the use of storybooks vs. informational text when reading aloud to
students, Smolkin and Donovan (2001) indicate that information book read-alouds offer
numerous opportunities for literate and non-literate children to acquire a large distinct range of
comprehension principles.

Similar to Smolkin and Donovan (2001) who believe that children acquire a distinct
range of comprehension principles, Fien, Santoro, Baker, and Park’s (2011) study on the
enhancement of teacher read-alouds with small group vocabulary instruction suggests that there
is a positive effect on vocabulary development when using informational text during read-alouds.
Research shows that the systematic use of conceptually aligned whole-group and small-group
nonfiction read-aloud texts provide students with opportunities to make text-to-text vocabulary
who found that early exposure to ideas, and vocabulary of informational texts helps prepare
children when they shift from learning to read, to reading to learn; Fien, Santoro, Baker, & Park
(2011) believe that children should learn to read before they read to learn. Informational texts,
while supporting content learning, are critical to literacy development because they “provide
students with opportunities to read for different purpose, utilize different reading strategies,
develop understandings of diverse text structures and features, and build background knowledge,
comprehension, and vocabulary” (Yopp and Yopp, 2006, p.48).

Although storybooks should be incorporated into interactive read-alouds, it is crucial for
teachers to utilize informational text during read-alouds to ensure that the students are making
purposeful text to text, text to self, and text to world connections. When educators incorporate
multiple genres into literacy instruction, students are provided the opportunity to utilize different
reading strategies. As students develop understandings of different text structures and text
features, they build new background knowledge, comprehension, and vocabulary with the introduction of each text which is critical to literacy development.

**Discussion During and After Read-Alouds**

Students understandings of text can be impacted by discussion during and after read-alouds. Heisey and Kucan’s (2010) study investigated potential effects on student understanding of carefully planned questions posed during and after the read-aloud. Heisey and Kucan (2010) were looking to determine whether or not students showed differences of comprehending the text during the read-aloud and after the read-aloud groups based on the different conversations that took place during both read-aloud sessions. After much analysis, it was found that more students in the during-reading group were able to provide evidence to support their answer than students in the after reading group (Heisey and Kucan, 2010). Similarly, Terblanche’s (2002) study on read-alouds enhancing students’ abilities to read indicated from the responses of 22 teachers on a read-aloud survey that 70% of teachers agreed strongly that students are usually engaged during story discussion after read-alouds. During story discussion it is important that students are given the opportunities to make personal connections to the text, responding with life to text or text to life connections where students use some of their own life experiences to comprehend or clarify the text being read.

Like Heisey and Kucan (2010), Terblanche (2002) agrees that the questioning technique and the types of questions asked during read-alouds are important in regards to the meaning children take away from the text and the responses and connections they make. In order to take a more in-depth look at the nature of students’ initiations and teacher responses during read-aloud/discussion events, Maloch and Beutel (2009) conducted a five-month study in a second
grade classroom, examining student initiations to see whether or not students were engaging and making meaning of the text. The students’ abilities to make predictions, observations, connections, clarifying questions/comments, and enter the story world would later prove that student initiations contribute to the instructional conversation within an interactive read-aloud. Maloch and Beutel’s work alongside Oyler’s support that students attach more meaning to the text when student initiations and teacher discussion takes place during read-alouds. When students are able to discuss the text during the read-aloud, they are given the opportunity to make connections to the text right away, instead of having to go back, interpret the text, and then figure out how they can connect it. Discussion during the read-aloud also provides the teacher with the ability to correctly interpret, any of the students misinterpretations, therefore they are not making poor text to text, text to self, and text to world connections. Morrow and Smith (1990) believe that the most valuable read-aloud events involve social interaction between an adult and a child, in which both participants actively construct meaning based on the text during the reading process. Through discussion during read-alouds, students are able to share their thoughts, questions, interpretations, and observations making visible their logicality to both their peers and their teachers.

During read-alouds children’s vocabulary development can be enhanced. In Silverman’s (2007) study on vocabulary development and storybook reading, Silverman investigated the effectiveness of different methods used to promote children’s word learning during storybook reading. Silverman’s findings further supported that engaging children in active analysis of word meanings during the read-aloud is more effective at promoting their learning of new words than instruction that merely has children relate words to the context of a story and to personal experiences in a less analytical, more context bound way after the read-aloud is conducted.
BENEFITS OF READ-ALOUDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

(Silverman, 2007). In correlation to Silverman (2007), Kindle (2009) suggests that read-aloud context is an effective method of vocabulary instruction if teachers recognize the practices that optimize word learning. Kindle (2009) feels that the most effective manner of adding elaborations and explanations take place during the story. Similar to Silverman (2007), Kindle (2009) recognizes the importance of conversation taking place during the read-aloud. Unlike Silverman (2007), Kindle recognizes in her study that student’s questions about word meaning that arise during reading is important but may result in extended discourse on words that are not significant to comprehension. Although the conversation piece is important, Kindle (2009) does recognize that it can detract drastically from the read-aloud experience. Conversely Silverman (2007), Kindle (2009) found too much conversation during the text, can further interrupt the students thought processes, in terms of making text to self, text to text, and text to world connections.

Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey’s (2004) study on the components of an interactive read-aloud, describes seven components that teachers need to incorporate into interactive read-alouds in order for it to be effective. During the study of 120 teachers being observed during read-alouds, all the expert teachers included components to include “teachers stopping periodically, thoughtfully questioning students to focus them on the specifics of the text” (p. 11). Although many teachers are different in terms of their specific read aloud styles, Barrentine (1996) points out that many teachers limit the amount of dialogue during the reading and end the event with critical class discussions regarding the story. These after reading discussions create opportunities for students to make text to self-connections, allowing the teacher to discover the types of connections the students are making. The research points out that “after-reading discussions are reflective and aim to deepen, broaden, and personalize story meaning” (Barrentine, p. 36).
Interactive read-alouds however, where discussion is encouraged “during the reading” allows the children to interact verbally with the text, peers, and the teacher during read-alouds. Interactive read-alouds not only increase vocabulary skills, discussed in previous studies, but as teachers pose questions throughout the reading that enhances meaning construction and also shows how one interprets the text. Interactive read-alouds simply keep students engaged with reading process information as they learn how stories work, how to monitor one’s comprehension, and what to think about a story as it unfolds. While both types of read-alouds are valuable approaches, the interactive read-aloud approach engages children with strategies for composing meaning and to facilitate their ability to respond to stories (Barrentine). When teachers are aware of the discussion-taking place during interactive read-alouds, they are able to form a better understanding of the kinds of contributions students are making during the discussions. Children’s responses to text, both during and after the read-aloud can help the teacher understand the knowledge that the students are taking away from the text in terms of the types of connections they are making, based on their level of interpretation and understanding of the texts. During read-alouds discussions and contributions made by the students also function as a way for teachers to interpret student observations and connections in order to clarify any misconceptions, confusions, and or questions the students may have in response to the text being read-aloud by the teacher.

**Parent and Teacher Driven Read-Alouds**

Children respond well to reading, when it is consistently modeled for them by their parents and teachers. According to Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, and Linn (2001) tradition suggests that elementary school teachers should do many of the same things that loving parents do, and
one of the things that warm, loving, parents do is read to their children. The goal in their study “was to begin to unravel the mystique of lore and research from studies of adults’ reading to children” (Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, & Linn, p. 70). Through researching information about reading to children of various ages through engagement of different contexts, and investigating specifically the relationships found between teachers’ reading to students in kindergarten and first grade classrooms, a longitudinal study of reading comprehension and science knowledge development in Grades K-6 was conducted to ultimately address the question of how children learn to comprehend what they read. Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, and Lin (2001) found that children understand text better when they are given the opportunity to discuss the text with an adult.

Similarly, Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, and Welsh, (2004) believe that measures of the quantity of shared reading are inherently inadequate, however, because they do not assess whether critical features of adult-child language interaction is occurring during reading sessions (e.g., attention-following, contingent and reciprocal dialogue, expansions of child-initiated speech).

The most convincing evidence for the effects of shared reading on children’s language comprehension skills comes from intervention studies targeting both the quantity and quality of shared reading sessions (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, & Welsh, 2004). Their research proves that the quantity and quality of shared reading sessions contribute to children’s language comprehension skills. In Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, and Welsh’s study, the focus was on the relationship between parental discipline practices, shared book reading, and children’s emergent literacy skills. The focus was to determine the children’s emergent literacy skills, pending their entry into Kindergarten. Results from the study indicated that the contribution of shared parent-child book reading to children’s language comprehension skills depend on broader patterns of parent and child interaction. The study revealed that there is a positive association between
shared book reading and children’s language comprehension skills as long as parents utilize reasoning and nondirective approaches in discipline situations. There was also some indication that parental spanking was negatively associated with language comprehension skills. These effects were reliable taking into consideration the considerable contributions of parent education and children’s nonverbal reasoning skills to children’s language comprehension skills. (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, and Welsh). In a similar study done by Currenton and Craig (2011) research focused on whether or not mothers use the same amount of emotion talk and evaluative judgments across shared-reading and oral storytelling. Investigations were further made based on whether or not mothers talked about emotions during shared-reading vs. oral storytelling. Unlike Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich and Welch (2004), Currenton and Craig’s (2011) results yielded that parent-child oral stories may provoke more sophisticated talk around negative emotions and misbehavior in comparison to shared-reading interactions. Similarly to Currenton and Craig, Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, and Linn’s (2001) study on the effects of parent and teacher shared reading experiences, did not neglect to point out the negative relationships between teachers’ and parents’ reading to student’s and student achievement in reading. Although it is said that parents can have a negative effect on a child’s emergent literacy skills, plenty of evidence points the finger towards the teachers and their inabilities to contribute to a child’s growth in literacy development. Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, and Linn focused their study on the time adults spend reading to children in Kindergarten and how it affects later reading success in first grade. The research indicated that it is possible that the negative correlation between teacher and student shared reading experiences are a direct result of teachers who spend a lot of time reading also engaged in other activities that are relatively ineffective, or that time spent reading to children displaces other instructional activities that are more effective (Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, and Linn).
The idea that seems to make the most sense in regards to why there is a negative relationship between the time teachers spend reading to children and their performance in reading, is because the amount of time that adults spend time reading stories may displace something else, such as written text that positively affect children’s reading achievement. Although parent’s play a positive role in children’s reading achievement before they begin school, once children are in school their participation in reading appears to be positively related to their growth and achievement in literacy, based on the type of interactive literacy instruction they are receiving (Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, and Linn, 2001).

**Small Group and Whole Group Read-Alouds**

The systematic use of conceptually aligned whole-group and small-group read-alouds provide students with extended opportunities to connect knowledge and vocabulary across different types of text. Sipe (2000) believes that small group read-alouds enable the tracing and tacking of the conceptual relationships in children’s talk. He suggests that the fewer amounts of students in a group would lessen the amount of input and conversation, making relationships and connections between the students and the text stand out more clearly. In his research study on read-alouds, he analyzed children’s verbal responses during large-group read-alouds using storybooks led by the teacher, and compared and contrasted those findings to small-group read-alouds done by the researcher with two groups of five students, and individualized read-alouds conducted with the same ten students. Sipe’s (2011) study found that the children contribute their knowledge from small group sessions, during whole the whole group read-alouds. Contrary to Sipe, Pentimonti and Justice (2010) found that teacher’s limited use of high support scaffolding strategies, negatively affect student’s abilities to participate in whole group read-alouds.
Due to the size of whole group read-alouds, and the amount of interaction involved during the read-alouds in correlation to the time given for literacy instruction, large size read-alouds can be uncomfortable and difficult for some children, as they may require more individualized support during read-alouds (Pentimonti and Justice). Like Pentimonti and Justice (2010), Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and Williams (2010) believe that students benefit more from small-group read-alouds than whole group read-alouds because there is more access to resources, and the instruction time is often individualized and differentiated based on the needs of the students. In order to target specific concepts for those students who need a more intense form of instruction, read-alouds done in small-groups are seen to be more effective than whole-group read-alouds (Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, & Williams). In Baker, Fien, et al., 2010 study comparing whole group and small group, tier 2 instruction, students participated in eight weeks of the whole class Read-Aloud Curriculum, and students from the intervention group received extra support in small groups for 20 minutes, two times a week, during the 8-week implementation of the Read-Aloud Curriculum (Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and William). The purpose of the tier 2, small group intervention was to boost of support the students who showed signs of language difficulties, and vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Similar to Pentimonti and Justice (2010), Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and William’s (2010) findings indicated that small group instruction was more beneficial than whole-group instruction, as the student’s vocabulary growth was positively affected more during the small-group read-alouds. Even though the small group instruction only consisted of two twenty minute sessions each week, research proved that adding a small group component to whole class read-aloud is found to be extremely effective, as it enhances content
and instruction by providing students with more opportunities to learn, and expressively use vocabulary in text-based discussions. By incorporating small group instruction into whole class read-alouds, teachers are able to pre-teach, enhance, and review Read-Aloud Curriculum vocabulary for at-risk, learners (Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and William.)

In correlation with Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and William (2010) Fien, Santoro, Baker, and Park, (2011) conducted a study to determine the effect of small group instruction on the vocabulary and comprehension of first-grade students identified with low language and vocabulary skills. Fien, Santoro, Baker, and Park suggest that it is extremely important to identify children in the early grades with low language and vocabulary levels, so that intervention can take place in order to improve vocabulary and comprehension knowledge. Like Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and William (2010), Baker and Fien (2010) state that small-group vocabulary instruction is a promising mechanism to close the vocabulary achievement gap for at risk students with comprehension difficulties. Similar to Sipe (2000) findings from whole-class Read Aloud studies prompted the development and testing of small group instruction, in order to boost and supplement the whole group read-alouds. In comparison to Fien, Santoro, Baker, and Park’s (2010) study, Fien, Santoro, Baker and Park’s (2011) study targeted support in vocabulary and structured discourse opportunities with expository content that correlated with the expository texts used in the whole-group read-alouds. Together both studies examined whether the use of small-group instruction improved the vocabulary and comprehension performance of students targeted due to low language and vocabulary skills.

In order to compare the effects of the small-group booster lessons, the outcomes of first
grade students who received the small group booster intervention were compared to the outcomes of the first grade student who did not receive additional small-group instruction. The results of Fien, Santoro, Baker, and Park’s (2010) study on the enhancement of student vocabulary and language skills demonstrate that small-group read-alouds appear to enhance the vocabulary knowledge and expository retellings of students identified with low vocabulary and language skills. The findings from the study derive from classrooms in which students were currently receiving high-quality whole-group read-aloud instruction that incorporated direct and explicit vocabulary and informational retells. Ultimately, the study adds to the recent research indicating that designing, planning, and implementing vocabulary interventions that include informational text, encourage critical thinking, and can provide multiple exposure, examples, and connections to promote and enhance vocabulary outcomes during whole-group read-alouds (Fien, Santoro, Baker, and Park).

Similar to Fien, Santoro, Baker, and Park’s (2010) study, Pantaleo (2007) believes that there are impacts of integrating small group read-alouds into whole-group interactive read-aloud sessions. During Pantaleo’s (2007) study, she read eight picture books to her students. The students participated in both small group and whole group interactive read-aloud sessions. The findings from Pantaleo’s study revealed that small group read-aloud sessions present children with opportunities to “tryout, think through, and reflect on their ideas” (Pantaleo, p.445). Through small-group instruction the student’s identities were influenced by the interactions that took place during instructional time. The student’s knowledge about literature and how to discuss literature with other people was constantly changing as each picture book was read and discussed. Pantaleo believes that teachers must do more than simply put children together to converse because if children are not aware of how to apply and interpret classroom discussion,
they lose out on the opportunities group work offers. In accordance to Pentimonti and Justice (2010), Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and William’s (2010) who believe that small group instruction enhances whole-group read-alouds, Pantaleo(2007) believes that small group interaction including small group discussions and peer dialogue, encourages learning. Through small group instruction students are able to strengthen their language and literacy skills. Pantaleo feels that teachers should continue to record small group discussions, and analyze videos of student interaction during small group instructions to help implement the right types of instruction for guided reading, learning centers, inquiry groups, cooperative learning groups, and whole group read-alouds.

Contrary to Pantaleo (2007), Mol, Bus, and de Jong (2009) did a meta-analysis not only on the effects of vocabulary acquisition through interactive read-alouds, but also to determine the knowledge students receive in regards to print. Findings from the study are consistent with Sipe (2000) and revealed that there was not any support in regards to the conclusion that teachers should read to small groups when it is sufficient to do so during whole-group interactive read-alouds. The meta-analysis demonstrated that children’s skills improved when their teachers engaged them in whole-group interactive reading sessions (Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009). Unlike Baker, Fien, Park, Haria, Santoro, Chard, Otterstedt, and William (2010), Mol, Bus, and de Jong (2009) believe that in small group instruction, the amount of extraneous talk and the opportunity for each child to elaborate on his or her own experiences might be distracting, as the time spent in small-group instruction is meant to be resourceful and give students more individualized attention instead.

Whether students are read-aloud to in whole-group instruction, or small-group instruction it is important for teachers to encourage discussion and have students work on making text-to-
text, text-to-world, and text-to-self connections. If students are not engaged by the text, and involved in discussion they will not get a true meaning of what the text is trying to convey. It is important that students read for meaning, in order to connect and apply their knowledge. The exposure to both small group and whole-group read-alouds contribute to student literacy development, as students gain vocabulary and better understandings of text when there is discussion surrounding it.

When conducting interactive read-alouds it is important that the reading of the storybook is characterized by clear routines and objectives (Pentimonti & Justice, 2010). Read-alouds to students should be integrated into the daily routines of classrooms of all ages, and integrated into all subject areas. In order for interactive read-alouds to be seen as an enjoyable literacy experience for students, the teacher needs to choose books connecting to the themes and concepts being taught in the classroom, keeping in mind the behaviors and interest of the students who will be taking place in the experience. All books chosen for small-group and whole-group read-alouds need to be age appropriate and at the student’s comprehension level in order for the students to be able to make meaning from the text, and text to text, text to self, and text to world connections. Children need to be arranged in an appropriate sized space, and be seated in close proximity to the adult who is constructing the interactive read-aloud in order to see illustrations and words in different forms of context (Terblance, 2002). Students should be guided to utilize the pictures as a way to better understand the concepts and vocabulary within the text.

From the very front cover to the back of the book, no part should be ignored or left out during an interactive read-aloud (Terblance, 2002). Students should be encouraged to discuss the story, particularly if they are able to make connections between the story and their own
individual lives. However, if a student is unable to connect to the text, they should never be forced to talk, as long as it is evident that the children can interpret and comprehend the true meaning and concepts within the text. Although conversation can take place both during and after the interactive read-alouds it is important to make sure that none of the conversations go on too long, as the teacher needs to make sure that the students don’t get too lost in discussion, and get distracted from the text (Terblance, 2002). Every child should be allowed to respond to the text, as it is important that students are given an equal amount of time to share their thoughts about the story being read-aloud. Not only do read-alouds benefit students comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, but when conducted appropriately the students become familiar and exposed to different authors and forms of writing which also help students develop more concepts of print, as well as better understand the writing process therefore they can prosper as young readers and writers.

Methods

Context

Research for this study took place at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) is a private early childhood development center located in Upstate New York. Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) has a current enrollment of 29 students, within three grade levels. Of those students 10 are at the preschool level, 10 are at the Pre-K level, and 9 students are in Kindergarten. Of all 29 students, 70% are Caucasian, 13% are African American, 13% are Indian, and 4% are Asian. Since Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) is a private school and does not receive any state funding, none of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) uses a standards based curriculum, following the current themes that
align with the NYS Standards and common core. Following a standards based curriculum ensures that all of the students are provided with an early childhood foundation that meet and exceed standards in all subject areas. Each classroom provides students with developmentally appropriate literacy instruction, integrated with mathematics, sciences, social studies, dramatic play, creative arts, and music in order to enhance student engagement and interests. Although Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) does not mandate a specific amount of time designated for literacy instruction, each grade level spends at least 1-1 ½ hours on Language Arts instruction daily. During this time students engage in reading, writing, speaking, and listening through participating in read-alouds, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, independent writing, and many other forms of literacy instruction.

Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) has been in operation for three years, and has made great strides to integrate technology into the literacy program. Although every classroom has access to cd players for books on tape, only the kindergarteners have daily access to a computer, as it was specifically purchased for the kindergarten students. Since the majority of the students have not been provided with much exposure to digital literacy, the director wanted to incorporate more technology into the classrooms. With the help of the Scholastic Book Fair, Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) raised enough money through the school, book fair to purchase a smart board, which will be available to all grade levels in the fall of 2012.

Although all of the classrooms consist of literacy enriched environments, the preschool classroom in which the research was being conducted, was immersed in literacy. There is a cozy classroom library, where books are alphabetized and categorized by the beginning letter of the title, as the preschool literacy curriculum includes students learning letters and their corresponding sounds making it possible for the students to make connections between the books
they are reading and the letters/sounds they are learning, building on their phonemic awareness skills. Within the classroom library, there are stuffed animal characters for the students to use as reading buddies, and all the themed books are put on display for the week, for the students to access at anytime during independent reading. Above the library, there is a large Dr. Seuss poster on the wall that says, “Reading is Fun” to clarify a positive message to the students regarding the importance of literacy within the classroom environment.

Participants

My current colleagues agreed to be a part of this study. They were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the benefits to read-aloud to students, and the amount of time in which they participate in literacy instruction involving whole group read-alouds within their classroom.

Eliza Cowen (pseudonym) the current director of education, graduated from Triceratops University with a Bachelor’s Degree in Inclusive Special Education, and General Education in 1997. After completion of her undergraduate, Eliza received her certifications in Special Education K-12, and General Education Newborn-6. Eliza then moved home to Rocket, N.Y. where she attended Nose College (pseudonym) and completed her Master’s Degree in Special and Regular Education in 2000. After earning her bachelors while completing her Master’s program at Nose College, Eliza taught as a Special Education Teacher in the Greasey Central School District (pseudonym) from 1997-2001. From 2001-2002 Eliza took a position as a Special Education Teacher in the Wish Star School District (pseudonym), but then took off seven years to be a stay at home mom for her three children. In 2009, along with her husband, Eliza designed and opened Kangaroo Academy in Star, New York. (pseudonym) She has been the Director of Education since the opening.
Rae Erins (pseudonym) the current Kindergarten teacher at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) received her Undergraduate Degree in Elementary Education, and Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. Following the completion of her Master's degree, Rae taught second and third grade in the Walt Disney Central School District (pseudonym) for two years following the completion of her Master’s Degree for two years as a second and third grade teacher. After two years in Walt Disney, Rae moved to Kings, N.Y. where she taught Pre-K for only a year. After teaching in Kings for only a year, Rae relocated to Madhatters where she taught Pre-K for two more years. After meeting her husband, and making the decision to start a family, Rae moved home to Rocket, N.Y. and was hired at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) in Star, where she taught preschool for a year, and is now currently the full-time Kindergarten teacher. Rae Erins has been teaching for a total of 7 years.

Abbygurl Bush (pseudonym) the current Pre-K teacher at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) received her Bachelors of Science Degree in Communication Disorders and Sciences at SUNY Friends, outside of Western New York. After completion of her Bachelor’s Degree, Abbygurl relocated to the Rocket, N.Y. area where she began her Master’s Program at SUNY Rockypoint in School Counseling. While attending SUNY Rockypoint, Abbygurl was hired as a classroom aide at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) in September of 2011, but after only two short months was promoted to the full-time Pre-K teaching position. While working as a Pre-K teacher, Abbygurl decided to leave SUNY Rockypoint at the end of her first semester in her Master’s Program, and transfer to St. Fish Bowl College where she will be working towards her degree in Childhood and Special Education, in the fall of 2012.

My 10 students at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) played an active role as participants in this study.
Megan Angell (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 3 year old female, who is currently enrolled full-time in the preschool program at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Megan was born in Rocket, New York and currently lives in Webber with her mom and dad. Megan is an only child and often takes on the role of the leader in the classroom. She is an active participant in school, and enjoys reading, writing her name independently, and being involved in classroom discussions. Megan spends time participating in dance classes outside of school, and loves playing outside with her friends.

Renee Marquart (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 3 year old female, who is currently enrolled in the preschool program full time at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Renee was born in Rocket, New York and currently lives in Star with her mom and dad. Renee is an only child and often exhibits characteristics of leadership and independence in the classroom. Renee is the youngest student currently enrolled in the preschool program and will be attending preschool for one more year in the fall, as she just turned 3 in March of 2011. Renee enjoys playing with her stuffed animals, taking naps, and playing with her older male cousins, as she is the youngest and the only girl out of all the children in her extended family.

Adelaid Brown (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 3 year old female, who is currently enrolled in the preschool program part-time at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Adelaid attends preschool twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursday’s only. Adelaid was born in Georgia as an only child, and her parents are currently divorced. She lives with her mommy in Webber, and visits her daddy who is still located in Georgia. Adelaid is a very introverted child, who plays well with her friends but often shows sign of separation anxiety in school when her dad is visiting from out of town. Adelaid is a follower who goes along with the flow, and gets along with all of her peers.
Jean Hunts (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 3 year old female who is currently enrolled at Kangaroo Academy full time for preschool. Jean is the youngest of 4 children, as her older siblings are between 6-12 years older than her. Jean is independent, but quiet as she often has trouble exhibiting her full potential in the classroom without asking for assistance. Outside of school Jean is involved in gymnastics, where she loves to do flips and tumbles. Jean enjoys reading and loves to read princess stories with her daddy every night before bed.

Joanna Gilbert (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 3 year old female who currently attends preschool at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) part time. Although Joanna was attending preschool full-time in the fall, she was reduced down to part time in February after the birth of her twin sisters. Joanna has attended the early childhood program since it began, when she was only a newborn in the infant room. Joanna is an independent leader, who loves being the center of attention and showing off all of her skills. She enjoys reading princess books to her sisters, and practicing writing the names of all the members of her growing family.

Marshall Glizer (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 4 year old male who currently attends preschool at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym) full time. Marshall has been attending the early childhood program since he was just a toddler. Marshall is one of two children, as he has an older sister who he loves to spend time with. Marshall’s parents are currently in the midst of divorce, and his actions at school have been a result of the new changes he is facing at home. Marshall works very well independently and is a strong leader. He is in the beginning phases of reading and can read and recognize every name of all the students in his class. Marshall enjoys reading The Biscuit Series every night before bed with his mom and sister.

Thomas Casey (pseudonym) is a Caucasian 4 year old male who currently attends preschool full time at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Thomas had a very inconsistent
schedule in the beginning of the year, as he came to school every other Monday, for half a day on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and stayed home on Friday’s. Thomas is an only child to his parents who have been in the process of mediation throughout the whole school year trying to get a custody schedule set between both mom and dad in order to benefit his educational, physical, and emotional needs. Thomas is very attentive during story time and loves to participate. He is an active learner, and loves to read books about super heroes.

Henry Manciney (pseudonym) is a 3 year old Caucasian male who attends preschool full time at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Henry is the youngest of 4 children, and the son of a librarian and former pre-school director. Henry is extremely intelligent, as he engages in classroom discussions and often makes text to text, text to self, and text to text connections considering he is immersed in a world of literacy, both inside and outside of school. Henry loves to dance, play basketball, and read Thomas books!

Max Rae (pseudonym) is a 3 year old Caucasian male who attends preschool full time at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Max is the oldest of two children, and the son of the full time kindergarten teacher. Max enjoys learning how to write his name, playing with his friends, and watching Mickey Mouse Clubhouse. He comprehends information very well during read-alouds, and is always making connections between the stories and his real life. Max gets along with all of his classmates, and is very well behaved and mannered. His parents spend a lot of time reading and playing with him at home.

Paul Betsy (pseudonym) is a 4 year old Caucasian male who attends preschool part time at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). Paul is the oldest of two children. Paul was born in Rocket, New York where he currently lives at home with his mom, dad, and baby sister. Paul attends school on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. He enjoys reading books and watching movies
about trains. Paul’s favorite series is the Thomas the Tank Engine Series, as he can name and identify all the names of the trains and what their job is. Paul is very active and enjoys being out on the playground as long as he has the company of his toy trains and friends. He likes reading to his baby sister and is really trying hard to write his own name independently.

**Researcher Stance**

As an active participant of the study, I was considered to be an active participant observer as I was so immersed in what I was doing with my students that I didn’t have time to record my observations in a systematic way during the school day (Mills, 2007). As an active participant I tried to engage my students as I encouraged them to apply their understandings of literacy through class discussion and application as the students were always encouraged to make text to text, text to self, and text to world connections.

Along with having the privilege of being an active observer of the study, I also had the opportunity to be what Mills (2007) suggests is a Privileged, Active Observer. Every day I was fully engaged with my students during our read-alouds at story time. Not only did I read-aloud the text that I selected to my students every day, but I also made sure that the text was connected to our current theme, which correlated to the NYS Early Childhood standards. I truly believed that if the read-alouds were effective, then students would be able to apply their knowledge and understanding from the text, as they worked on other skill areas such as writing, word study, math, science, and social studies. With the help of my assistants on a daily basis, there were many times where I was able to observe my students from the background, as my assistants took on the role as “teacher” and guided my students through specific literacy activities, that were extensions of the read-alouds, to build on the students comprehension and understanding of the
text. I felt privileged to be an active observer, as there were many times where I could sit in the background and observe my students, moving back and forth between the role of teacher, assistant, and observer.

I have had many privileges while conducting the study, considering that I am working with my own class, as I am currently the full time pre-school teacher at Kangaroo Academy (pseudonym). While teaching full time I am also a current graduate student at St. Fish Bowl College. I am presently working to obtain my degree in Literacy, and extend my certifications as I currently have a Bachelor’s Degree in Childhood/Special Education 1-6, and Early Childhood Birth-2. Even though I have been working as an early childhood educator for the past year, I also taught in the Webber Central School District (pseudonym) as a math resource specialist, during the 2010-2011 school year.

Method

Having had the opportunity to conduct my research with my current preschoolers, I was able to implement classroom read-alouds every day for a little over a week. Although I was the teacher conducting the read-alouds, I was able to make observations and take mental notes based on what and how I saw the students interact and discuss the text during our daily read-alouds. The constant interaction and class discussion helped me to see how well the students were able to comprehend the choice of text being read-aloud for the given day. Since read-alouds are not the only form of reading that takes place within the classroom, I was also able to observe the students when they were independently reading the themed books designated for their use during the week. Through exposure to different types of literacy practices, I was able to see the student’s interactions with the themed books as they were read-aloud, and read quietly on the
carpet in our classroom library. I was able to make these careful observations every day for an hour and half, consecutively for a week and a half. When reading the story my assistants took audio recording, therefore I could go back and analyze the types of feedback the students had to offer in terms of their responses to questions, vocabulary terms, and whole group discussion.

Prior to reading the story the students in my classroom would first discuss the theme of the week, which allowed them to make text-to-text connections, and develop an understanding as to why we were reading the chosen story for the day. One reading strategy that I hoped the students would utilize was their ability to draw connections based on looking at the title and picture of the book, and the current theme of the week. Since the students had an understanding of what it meant to make predictions, I wanted them to predict what they thought the story was about based on the discussion surrounding our theme, and their interpretations of the front cover and pictures within the text.

In order to interpret and analyze student commentary throughout the read-aloud, I thought having each read-aloud recorded would be beneficial in order to capture the dialog between the students as they engaged in discussion surrounding the text. To keep students focused and engaged, each student had been designated their own space on a little animal print carpet square, in order to have their own space, and feel secure thus keeping their attention on me, as I participated in the read-aloud. Since the students are young, and still at the early childhood level, only few vocabulary words were introduced to them initially. I wanted to focus on discussion and misinterpretations during the reading, to keep from overwhelming the students with too much content, taking away from the text. While reading, I felt as the teacher that it was necessary to stop periodically and ask questions, in order to check for understanding and make sure the students could comprehend any new vocabulary or illustrations within the text.
Concluding the read-aloud, the students were then guided to make connections based on discussion of new concepts and vocabulary they had taken away from the text. The students then participated in class work, projects, and activities after the read-aloud as an extension to further integrate concepts, and make connects from the reading to our weekly theme.

After the read-aloud, and while engaging in extensions of learning through class work, projects, and activities, the students were given every opportunity to discuss the text read-aloud, and they were encouraged to make text to self, text to text, and text to world connections based on their understanding and comprehension of the text. Through the creation of reading comprehension activities, and correlating specific books with specific literacy instruction, I was able to be an active participant in my own study.

Along with the participation of the students, it was crucial to involve the teacher participants as in my study. In order to understand the importance of read-alouds in other early childhood classrooms, all of my teacher participants completed a classroom literacy environment checklist (Appendix B). The checklist enabled the teachers to decipher whether or not their classroom environment was a true literacy environment in which the teachers and students engaged in literacy activities. The teachers all described their classrooms as being well beyond the literate environment in which reading and writing is modeled and literacy instruction is fully supported with developmentally appropriate resources.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

Mills (2007) believes that there are four essential aspects that characterize the validity of qualitative research. In order for the research to be considered “valid” it is important that research has credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Based on Mills (2007)
explanation of credibility, the researcher should take into account the complexities that are presented within the study, in order to deal with patterns and information that is not easily explained. I exhibited means of credibility within my study, by collecting student work samples after each read-aloud, that directly connected to each text. Each read-aloud session was also recorded in order to capture and analyze any dialogue that took place in response to the text, between the students and the teacher.

Along with credibility, transferability was also present within my research study. According to Mills (2007) transferability references qualitative beliefs that everything studied within the research is context bound, given that the goal of their investigation is not to develop “truth” statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people (Mills, 2007, p.104). Through collecting detailed and descriptive data of my students participation and discussions before, during, and after read-alouds, my study allows for interpretation of both the classroom literacy environment, and interactions and discussions that took place between the students with each read-aloud.

Along with credibility, and transferability, Mills (2007) believes that research should be dependable. Mills (2007) states that dependability is the constancy of data. By overlapping the methods in which the data is collected, Mills (2007) supports Guba’s (1981) theory that the weakness of one method can be compensated by the strength of another method. During my study I was able to have my read-aloud sessions digitally recorded, in addition to taking notes and making personal observations of student interaction. Through the utilization of both methods, my research is more consistent, making it easier and possible to capture all of the necessary and important interactions taking place among the students.

The final characteristic that Mills (2007) supports is the confirmability or neutrality of the
data that has been collected throughout the research study. Confirmability took place within my study, through the process of triangulation. Mills (2007) in support of Guba’s (1981) argument states that the practice of triangulation involves the utilization of a variety of data sources, as different methods are compared to one another in order to cross-check the data. Although I have not kept any type of journal reflecting on my study or current literacy instruction, I always self reflect after each lesson in terms of thinking of what I would change, or do different during the next lesson to help the students become more engaged and gain a better understanding of the text. By looking back and re-viewing the digital recordings of all my read-aloud sessions with the students, I am able to reflect on so many different aspects of literacy instruction within my classroom. Furthermore, I have the ability to compare the different types of student work and activities my students participated in how well the students accomplished the work, in correlation to the types of discussion and connections that were made by the students each read-aloud session.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

In order to obtain and collect any data throughout this research study, consent and assent was mandated from all of the participants included within the study. It is important that the rights of every single individual participant, which is why all participants are required to print and sign their name giving consent to the researcher that they are aware of their role as a participant during the study. Since I am the teacher, I immediately discussed with my director of education, colleagues, and parent’s the extent of my study, and what I was looking to find during my research. I verbally explained to all of the participants that every member of the studies rights would be protected, as I explained that all names would be changed for confidentiality purposes. Since the majority of my participants are minors, all of my parents willingly agreed to sign the
permission forms for their children to be able to fully participate and engage in my research study. I made sure to ask the parents if they had any questions or concerns, and consistently discussed with them on a daily basis the components of my study that took place during instruction each day that the research was conducted. I also explained the extent and purpose of my study to the teacher participants, and made sure to have them sign consent forms for their participation.

**Data Collection**

As an active participant observer, and a privileged active observer I was able to collect multiple forms of data throughout my research study. With the privilege of conducting research within my very own classroom, using my very own students I was able to take notes and observe student interactions during the read-alouds, have my assistants digitally record the discussions and interactions between the students and myself during the read-alouds, create informal comprehension assessments and literacy activities to determine whether or not the students comprehended the text, encourage the participation of my students in reading and writing activities to extend their understandings from the readings, walk around my classroom to determine my students level of engagement, encourage my students to make predictions, and inferences during the read alouds, and discuss with my colleagues the importance of read-alouds and the benefits of incorporating them into daily literacy instruction (Appendix A).

**Data Analysis**

When analyzing all of my data, and interpreting student discussion, conversations, body language, and comprehension levels I found that every single one of my students benefited from
daily read-alouds. I was able to notice these findings as I went back and previewed the video recordings, observing student behavior, initiations, and writing down specific quotations and remarks made by my students, in connection with the read-aloud material. When looking at the teacher surveys and questionnaires I specifically looked for specific trends. For example, all of the participating teachers noted that they participate in read-alouds daily, and that they use read-alouds to drive their instruction. The classroom literacy environment checklist findings acknowledged that each and every classroom was equipped with the proper literacy materials, as well as consistent teacher modeling. I analyzed the checklist by noting the trends in terms of which statements the teachers responded with true or false in correlation to their classroom literacy practices and environment.

Not only did I base my findings on observations that were made during literacy instruction, and after instruction from reviewing the digital recordings, but also by grading my students work in order to see if they were truly applying what they had learned from the text, based on their text to text, text to self, and text to world connections. If the student work samples were accurate then their answers matched my master key with all of the right answers that I made directly from the answers within the book. I also analyzed student work when asking the students specifically why we working on specific reading, writing, or math piece and wrote down the responses that showed the students could make a connection between the read-aloud and the following literacy instruction. When analyzing the teacher surveys by looking for specific trends, and common answers within each, I noted all the answers in which the teachers responded with true, in regards to their responses in correlation to the benefits and frequency of reading aloud to students at the early childhood level.
Findings and Discussion

After careful examination and analysis of the data collected throughout my research, a few themes emerged. These themes were found consistently throughout the data and demonstrate how read-alouds benefit early childhood literacy development. The themes include the following: connecting text to instruction during read-alouds, teacher and student interactions during read-alouds, and the classroom literacy environment.

Connecting Text to Instruction During Read-Alouds

The first major theme that emerged from my research was that interactive read-alouds make it easier for students to connect what they have learned from the story, and discussion surrounding the story to classroom instruction. This theme was evident throughout several aspects of my research, including the teacher questionnaires, student work samples, and recorded read-aloud observations. Student connections due to the implementation of interactive read-alouds in the classroom is one topic that I came across during my review of literature found in Heisey and Kucan’s (2010) study, and Terblance’s (2002) study. The idea of using interactive read-alouds to help students make text to text, text to self, and text to text connections during student work and instruction was a trend that continuously appeared in my review of current research on the topic of read-alouds benefiting early childhood literacy development.

When I went back and analyzed the video recordings of myself conducting daily read-alouds with my preschool students, the students appeared to be focused and engaged during story time. Students like Megan Angell, Henry Manciney, Max Rae, Renee Marquart and Thomas
Casey (2012) always say “Zip it lock it put it in your pocket” out loud when they come to the
carpet and are ready for me to begin reading the story. It is the students’ way of showing me they
are ready to listen. Looking back at the video recordings, I noticed that all the students were
sitting nicely on their carpet squares, asking questions and making remarks in response to the
stories. Some of the questions the students asked when first being introduced to our first book for
the Father’s Day Theme included “Are we reading books about our dad’s this week?” (Henry,
June 2012) and “We are going to learn all about Father’s Day to make things for our dad’s for
Father’s Day right Miss Megan?” (Joanna, June 2012). Although it is not always easy to keep
three and four year olds engaged, I purposely selected books for our Father’s Day Theme that I
knew my students could relate too. Once our daily routine of calendar, weather, and discussing
the letter and theme of the week were completed, I began to shift the students focus towards the
stories I chose to read-aloud each day. With a few reminders here and there, once I began to
discuss the text the students recognized that they needed to pay attention to the story. Discussion
began with the very front cover, as the students often pointed out the author and illustrator and
made predictions about the story. From the discussion of vocabulary words, to pointing out and
discussing rhyming words, the students seemed very engaged as they were raising their hands
eagerly, all asking questions in response to the text. During interactive storybook reading,
engagement refers to the points at which the listeners have opportunity to respond personally and
interpersonally with the story and with the process and strategy information used to make sense
of the story (Barrentine, 1996). Often times, an event would take place in the story consistent to
our weekly theme, leading the students to connect the text to their lives, as they shared examples
of silly stories, or memories they re-called. Marshall for example would not stop waving his
hand until he was able to share how his Dad was his hero because he makes him feel better when
he gets a boo boo. After reading Hero Dad, some of the other responses from the kids were “My
dad’s a hero because he makes me feel better when I am sick” (Megan Angell, June 2012). When
student make direct connections between the text and their personal lives it gives the text more
meaning. Students should be encouraged to discuss the story, particularly if they are able to
make connections between the story and their own individual lives as such responses validate the
connections and interpretations students make from the text (Terblance, 2000). When students
can connect to a story they often comprehend the story better, and can essentially make meaning
from the text.

After analyzing the teacher questionnaires, it was clear to me that Mrs. Cowens, Mrs.
Erins and Ms. Bush truly believed that there were several benefits of interactive read-alouds in
the classroom. When classroom teachers stimulate conditions available to learners in natural
classroom settings, students will achieve success in literacy teaching and learning (Barrentine,
1996). According to Mrs. Cowen, “The benefits students gain from the read-aloud experience
include connecting text to weekly instruction, comprehension of story and topic, increased
vocabulary, increased student-student and teacher-student conversations, and the ability to learn
and enjoy stories using their imaginations” (Teacher questionnaire, July, 2012). Like Mrs.
Cowens, Mrs. Erins also states “the benefits students gain from the read-aloud experience
include listening and comprehension skills, increase in vocabulary, memory and language skills,
development of interest, and the gaining and connecting of information surrounding the world
around students” (Teacher questionnaire, July, 2012). Students have the potential to gain so
many academic and social skills through their experience and engagement with read alouds.
Students learn how to discuss and interpret the text, along with the asking and answering of
questions in order to comprehend and make connects with the text. In addition, Ms. Bush
believes “that students gain the ability to build reading comprehension, which helps with the
development of pre-reading skills and strengthens and encourages students attending skills
therefore they can make better connections” (Teacher questionnaire, July, 2012). When students
are given an early literacy foundation they are able to make more meaningful connections, thus
grasping a better understanding from the stories their teachers read aloud. Heisey and Kucan
(2010), Terblanche (2002) agree that the types of questions asked during read-alouds are
important in regards to the meaning children take away from the text and the responses and
connections they make. When the students were asking questions during the read-alouds, it was
evident to me that they were trying to make sure they were interpreting the story correctly.
Through their ability to make inferences like Max Rae (2012) who would always say things
along the lines of “We are reading books about fathers because it’s father day this week” and
Thomas Casey who made frequent predictions. In the story What Dad’s Can’t Do Thomas
looked at the covered and stated “I think the dad wants to be like the little dinosaur but he is too
big” (Thomas Casey, June 2012). Through the students’ inferences and predictions, I was able to
tell whether or not they comprehended the story and were making proper connections. Most of
my students were able to connect the stories to other stories we had read that week, significant
events in their life and then take it one step further and discuss the story during academic
instruction.

In order to keep the connections flowing, I would ask the students why they were
participating in specific academic activities, while they were partaking in them. During the first
week of my research, our academic theme was Father’s Day. During Father’s Day Week, my
students were read-aloud the following titles: The Daddy Book by Todd Parr, My Daddy and Me
by Jerry Spinelli, Hero Dad by Melinda Hardin, Just Like Daddy by Frank Asch, and What
Dad’s Can’t Do by Douglas Wood. For every story, I made sure to implement lessons where student instruction centered on the theme, and a concept or skill present within the text. For example, after reading aloud the book Hero Dad, the students participated in a writing activity where they had to choral read, and trace a poem called “My Daddy is My Superhero!” After reading the poem and interpreting it together, I asked the students questions as to why they would be tracing a poem about daddy being a superhero? And what makes a daddy a superhero? After looking back at the video recordings reveal that the preschooler’s responses revealed statements such as “Because we read a book about a daddy who was a hero!” (Max Rae, June 2012) and “A daddy is a superhero because they are brave and keep me safe” (Thomas Casey, June 2012). These types of statements prove that the students are making text to text and text to self-connections, as they understand the reason why their work is important. As children respond to texts, they are informed by their own lives and conceptual understanding, drawing from their ideas to build and create knowledge from all different types of content within the classroom (Wiseman, 2010).

When the students participated in another academic piece following the story What Dad’s Can’t Do by Douglas Wood, their comprehension level was being assessed, as their task was to use a graphic organizer and sort and glue pictures of all the things that the dad from the story could and could not do. The seven out of nine of my students that were in attendance that day all completed the graphic organizer completely accurate matching all the correct pictures in each category. The student work samples clearly indicated that the students were able to comprehend the text well enough to independently sort the events from the story correctly because every student was able to put all of the pictures of the dinosaur dad and what he could do on the page of their worksheet that said “What dads CAN do” and all of the pictures of the dinosaur dad and
what he couldn’t do on the page of their worksheet that said “What dads CAN’T do”. As an extension to see whether or not the students really understand the concept of what dad can’t do, I had the students respond to a written prompt at the bottom of the graphic organized which was then transcribed for them to trace. Many theorist agree that children’s understanding of print accumulates in large part through mediated contact with print during shared reading and writing experiences (Justine, McGinty, Piasta, Kadervek & Fan, 2010). The written prompt asked the students what their dads couldn’t do. The students then needed to use their knowledge from the read aloud to construct a well-written response in relation to the story. The student responses ranged from answers like “My dad can’t play in the climbing structure because he is too big” (Jean Hunts, June 2012) and “My daddy can’t dress up in my princess clothes” (Megan Angell, June 2012). The responses were yet again another indication that the students were able to understand the concepts and events that took place within the story. Along with reading, writing, and math activities, the students also completed books for their fathers as apart of their Father’s Day gifts titled “My Dad and I” and “My Daddy and Me” (Appendix B) that were completed during shared reading and writing lessons. The students were responsible for tracing the responses they had provided in response to the pre written prompts in the book, and then draw a picture to represent their statements. Although the pictures were not as detailed as the responses, the students showed great success with being able to describe important facts and events in regards to their dads!

**Teacher and Student Initiations During Read-Alouds**

Another theme that emerged from my research was how teacher responses to student initiations invite, accept, and build on students' abilities to contribute to literature discussions.
Barrentine (1996) described interactive read-alouds as instructional conversations in which the teacher poses questions throughout the reading that “enhance meaning construction and also show how one make sense of the text” (p. 36). After conducting my own research, I found that students add to the discussion, whether it is based on the connections they are making or the spontaneous thoughts in their head.

In order to really analyze the initiations between the students and myself I had my classroom aide’s video tape me reading aloud to the students for a week and half. Since I chose my books based on the weekly theme, all of the discussion taking place between the students and myself were centered around our Father’s Day and Summer Vacation themes. Everyday our read-alouds began with me initiating the conversation. After introducing the story to the students I would immediately ask the students questions such as “Why are we reading about kids and their dads?” or “What do you see on the front cover of this book?” The point of me doing this was to get the students brains activated. Once I did that, I found that the student’s responses mostly bounced off my initiations with a few “He is kicking me” (Megan Angell, June 2012) and “I have to go to the bathroom,” (Jean Hunts, June 2012) comments in between. Whenever I asked the students why we were reading stories about specific themes Max Raes (2012) always responded I was able to really depict that the students who made the most initiations were the students who were focused and paying attention during the whole story. These students sat still, gave direct eye contact, constantly raised their hand, and sat quietly while I read the story aloud. My frequent bathroom goers, fuzz finding, disruptive friends were the students who lacked initiations that connected with the text or initiations all together. If the students were preoccupied with something else then they weren’t giving their full attention to the story. Not paying attention to the read-aloud in turn made it very difficult for the students to comprehend the text as they did
not have any desire to want to participate in conversation surrounding the text simply because they couldn’t understand it. Barrentine and Oyler (1996) and Sipe (2000) believe that when students are encouraged to verbally interact with text, peers, and teachers, meaning construction is enhanced and it becomes more evident how one is making sense of text.

Student initiations during interactive read-alouds can provide insights into the ways students are connecting to and making sense of the text. Not only does the video recordings show the students making connecting initiations, but also there are many examples where the students are shown making predictions, observing text and illustrations, entering the story world, and asking questions for clarification. The students made predictions when I asked them specific questions such as “What do you think the little boy thinks his dad is a hero?” or “What types of things do you think the dad can’t do?” One particular prediction that stands out is from Adelaid. Adelaid predicted that the dad was a hero because “The daddy is wearing the camouflage and he fights and protects our country like we learned on Amorial Day” (Adelaid, June 2010). Megan Angell showed her ability to enter the story world when she looked at the cover of the book Hero Dad and replied “My Uncle Mark is a daddy and he is a hero because he is in Afghanistan fighting the bad guys and then when he is done fighting the bad guys he will come home and meet baby Mason” (Megan Angell, June 2012). By initiating these types of conversations, my students became more engaged, as there are many instances where they were all putting up their hands, desperately wanting to share their responses. Initiating predictions demonstrated to be extremely beneficial, as many of the students became more engaged as they were eager to see what was going to happen by the end of the story. When students make predictions, it indicates that they want to be involved with the story (Maloch & Beutel, 2010). Predictions can be made in any children’s book and encourage students to think about and remember what they have read.
as they make connections to the text based on their predictions. When students become directly involved with the story they remain engaged, as students want to know if what they think will happen actually take place in the story. When making initiations in regards to observation of text and illustration, I noticed my students sometimes got carried away. For my younger and immature students, these were the times when a student would focus on something silly like the little boy having a yellow face, on the front cover of Todd Parr’s The Daddy Book, and ramble on and on about how little boy’s can’t have yellow faces. My youngest student Renee Marquart (2010) commented right away “But Miss Megan a daddy can’t have a yellow face, that’s not a daddy!” Marshall Glizer (2010) immediately followed Renee’s comment with “Haha a daddy with a yellow face is so funny” In situations like these, I noticed that one student’s initiations could negatively affect the initiations of the rest of the students, causing them to bring up conversation that did not connect to the text. It was in times like these when I had to do my best to transition the students with initiations that would re-engage them with the text. Although it was often a distraction, I tried to use those examples as teachable moments to explain to the students the things they can and cannot share when they raise their hand in response to the story. Contrary, it was also through observations and illustrations of the text in which some of my students really saw the connection. When looking at the cover of the book “What Dad’s Can’t Do” by Douglas Wood, one of my students was able to depict that the dad wasn’t able to hide under the fountain like the boy because he was too big. “But Miss Megan the daddy dinosaur is too big to play hide and sike under the water fountain. See he can’t fit under there” (Henry Manciney, June 2010). Student initiations like the one Henry made are a direct example of how students make meaning from the text, as observations and illustrations of the text can provide the student with the opportunity to make their own initiations, instead of drawing from the teacher
initiation first. According to Maloch and Beutel (2010) student initiations during these kinds of events can provide insights into the ways students are connecting to and making sense of the text. When a student can connect to the text without the influence of the teacher then it shows that the student can truly comprehend and understand the story at an independent level.

Another type of student initiation evident throughout my research was what Sipe (2000) called entering story world. In these types of initiations, students relate to the characters and act as if they are apart of the story, making suggestions about what they would change as the author. Sipe (2000) argues that these kinds of initiations are expressive and performative in nature and indicate a deep engagement with the storied world. Most of my students take pride in relating to the characters and get excited when they see that they have something in common from the characters in our stories. During the second week of my research, our classroom theme was Summer Vacation. During that week, I read the story Curious George Goes to an Ice Cream Shop by Margaret and H.A. Rey’s. Since ice cream is something we often enjoy during summer time, I thought the story would be extremely appropriate for my students and our weekly theme. Right away, the students began discussing their favorite types of ice cream. Particularly, one of my students instantly connected Curious George’s experience at the ice cream shop with his first visit to the new frozen yogurt shop in town. Just from discussing the front cover his immediate response was “I went to get ice cream at Yo-icecreamery (pseudonym) last night with my family just like Curious George went to get ice cream” (Henry Manciny, June 2012). Another student made an entering the story connection by stating “I want to work at an ice cream parlor when I get big, just like Curious George!” (Marshall Glizer, June 2012). By validating my students’ responses with positive feedback to their comments, it helped keep their interest and desire to want to read-on through the story, making the read-aloud extremely successful.
Having a better understanding of the kinds of contributions my students made in response to our literacy discussions helped me to expand my understanding of how students make meaning from text. Maloch and Beutel (2010) believe that the kinds of contributions students make to discussions, when not directly influenced by the teacher, expands teacher’s theoretical knowledge of the way in which children respond to text, further highlighting the ways in which teachers can better support and encourage meaning making. It is through student and teacher initiations that student contributions function as a way to express their observations and connections, in order to clarify any misconceptions or confusion the students may have during interactive read-alouds.

**Classroom Literacy Environment**

The final theme that I discovered in my research was the classroom literacy environment. In order for all of the research to connect, and make sense it is important that classroom literacy environment properly supports and meets the needs of all the students. As young learners still in the emergent phase of reading, it is important that the classroom is organized to reflect the philosophy of active learning (Sipe, 2000). The classroom literacy environment should include various developmental appropriate spaces, contained with the tools and materials students needs.

In order to research the environment of Kangaroo Academy’s current classrooms, all of the teacher participants were given a Classroom Literacy Environment Checklist (Appendix B). Table 1 below describes the results from the Classroom Literacy Environment Checklist in percentages; based on the number of statements each of the teacher’s checked off as true.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Literacy Environment Checklist</th>
<th>% of Statements Checked as True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Availability of learning materials</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Children’s use of learning materials</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What the teacher or assistant does</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The teacher’s background</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. About the classroom and school, preschool, or center</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. T/1 represents Teacher Rae Erins, T/2 represents Teacher Abbygurl Bush, and T/3 represents Teacher Eliza Cowens.

The table indicates how each teacher had to indicate whether or not the statements were true or false based on whether or not their classrooms were literacy friendly. The checklist was broken down into five categories, and within each category there were a number of questions in which the teachers checked true or false. The first category of the Classroom Literacy Environment Checklist (Appendix B) measures the Availability of learning materials. The statements range from “Alphabet books are readily available for children’s use,” “Crayons and pencils are readily available for children’s writing and drawing,” to “At least 25 picture books are readily available for children’s use.” Out of eight total statements, all three of the teachers that participated in my study checked off true to all 8 of the statements totaling 100% in the availability of learning materials category.
The second category of the checklist measures *Children’s use of learning materials*. Six statements are listed within the category, and some of the statements include “Children in the class engage with an adult in shared book reading sessions with an adult at least four times a week,” to “Games, materials, and activities are used regularly to help children learn to print the letter of the alphabet.” Out of all six statements, the three participating teachers all checked off true to all 6 of the statements totaling 100% in *Children’s use of learning materials* category.

The third category went on to measure the *Roles of the teachers and assistants*. Some of the sixteen statements read “The teacher frequently introduces new words to children while reading picture books,” to “The teacher regularly has detailed and informative conversations with children about things that interest the child.” The statements also included “The teacher sends home materials that encourage parents to help their children learn the letters of the alphabet,” to “The teacher is enthusiastic about the literacy and language activities that are included in the classroom curriculum.” Findings showed that in this category only Eliza Cowens and Rae Erins were able to check off true to all of the statements totaling 100% in the *Roles of the teachers and assistants* category while Abbygurl Bush checked off false to statements such as “Teacher encourages children to express themselves using complete sentences,” and “Teacher helps children learn to write other people’s names. Abbygurl checked 14 out of the 16 statements true totaling 87.5% Since Abbygurl is a pre-k teacher, it is understandable as to why her students aren’t using complete sentences when writing, or writing other people’s names for that matter. Abbygurl’s students are in the beginning phases of writing, and although they are practicing their letters and writing their names along with small fragments, they cannot achieve those concepts simply because they aren’t at that stage of writing yet.

The last two categories of the checklist measure *Teacher’s background*, and *The*
The five statements included on the checklist under teacher background include, “The teacher is a good read,” “The teacher has a large vocabulary,” “The teacher graduated from college,” and “The teacher has received training in early literacy or reading readiness.” Out of all the statements, Abbygurl is the only one who was unable to check off true as she does not have any formal early literacy and reading readiness training, therefore in that category Abbygurl checked only 3 out of 4 statements true, totaling 75%. Abbygurl is beginning her masters in the fall at St. Fish Bowl College where she will be taking early literacy classes at that time. The last category pertaining to the classroom environment describes statements that discuss student engagement, literacy instruction, health and developmental screenings, and children enjoyment. Out of all seven statements, all three of the teachers were able to check false, proving that the students are immersed in developmentally appropriate literacy friendly classrooms, where they are engaged and instructed academically in order to succeed as a reader and writer.

Out of a total of 41 statements, both Eliza Cowen and Rae Erin’s were able to truthfully select true over false in regards to their classroom literacy environments totaling 100% in all five categories. Abbygurl checked off that 38 of the 41 statements were true totaling 92.6%, proving that she too has a great environment for literacy learning. The Classroom Environment Check List includes a chart to determine how literacy friendly teacher classrooms are, based on the number of true/false checks. Since all three teachers checked off 38 or more checks, they are all classified in the 31-41 areas, which state that their classroom literacy environments have most of the necessary elements!

With the help of classroom libraries that contain an abundance of literacy, the integration of literacy practices and modeling, the proper utilization of resources, positive praise and
encouragement, classroom literacy environments is crucial to a child’s literacy development.

Children respond to literature in a many ways: through art, drama, creative play, music, and in the everyday conversations of the classroom (Sipe, 2000). In my research, I found that children’s writing, art, and so much more can modeled based on books they hear or read, but a strong classroom literacy environment provides more then a model, as it truly influences the attitudes and development of children as readers and writers.

**Implications and Conclusions**

The findings from my research suggest several implications for me as I continue to teach at the early childhood level. While it is very evident that there are many benefits in reading aloud to students, every read-aloud experience is different for each individual. When participating in read-alouds, students are able to increase their vocabulary, comprehension, and make meaning of the text through discussion, application, and text to text, text to self, and text to world connections. In my findings, I was able to see how well students are able to engage in interactive read-alouds by their abilities to make different connections to the text and apply their literacy skills in specific literacy activities following the read-aloud. Not only did I examine how read alouds benefit early childhood literacy development through observation and analyzation of student work in their writing responses and interactive discussion but also through student participation and engagement. Using a classroom literacy environment checklist and a teacher read-aloud questionnaire, I also discovered the importance of read-alouds to educators at different early childhood levels, and the specific benefits of developmentally appropriate literacy instruction using interactive read-alouds. Read-alouds are important as they truly provide students and teachers with engagement and interaction at all levels. Read alouds provide teachers
with the ability to integrate reading and writing instruction with an interactive and engaging experience for the students as they learn important skills and concepts from all different content areas. Through in depth discussions, behavior, and application teachers can truly utilize read alouds as an effective way to teach to students and be able to truly understand their strengths and weaknesses as a reader and writer. As an early childhood educator, I truly feel that it is crucial to read and discuss literature with students everyday. It is also important to model to students the importance of literacy by creating a literacy equipped environment within the classroom, incorporating numerous resources for student and teacher use during literacy activities, and modeling to the students the importance of reading, by showing your love for reading too.

During the time given for the daily interactive read-alouds, the students were always engaged in the different stories that were being read. During the week of the study, our current theme was Father’s Day, so all of the books read-aloud during the week were all books about being a dad. Prior to reading each book, the students made predictions about what the books would be about based on their observations of the front cover. The students would also ask questions and make statements connecting the theme to the story, as we discussed how each specific book related to our weekly theme, and the instruction and activities we were participating in. While reading the books aloud, I made sure to discuss the important events and characters in the book as they appeared and took place. I would engage the students in conversation throughout the interactive read-aloud to make sure they comprehended the story correctly. I also wanted to make sure that any misunderstandings or misinterpretations were addressed, to ensure the students were making proper meaning of the text. According to Barrentine (1996), during interactive read-alouds, teachers pose questions throughout the reading that enhance the meaning construction and also show how one makes sense of the text. When
students connect to the text, they are more engaged with the reading process. With each daily read-aloud the students were all able to connect to the text because the theme of the week was Father’s Day and each student held a special place in their hearts for their daddy’s. After more discussion following the read-alouds the students were then sent to their seats for instruction following the text that somehow connected to each story and the main theme, through reading, writing, and creative arts.

Limitations

If given the chance to do further research in this study, there would be several things that I would incorporate to better enhance and support my findings. The first thing I would do is read the book at the same time every day. Since my research took place at the end of the school year when there was a lot of end of the year chaos, our daily read-alouds didn’t always fall at the same time each day. Although the students were engaged, and enjoy daily read-alouds, their level of engagement is always best during the morning hours. Since we have different end of the school year events to coordinate around, sometimes our read-alouds were done in the afternoon when the kids were often tired and not as attentive. Along with more consistency, I would want to provide the students with more in-depth vocabulary instruction. Kindle (2010) states that’s vocabulary is a “critical factor” in building proficiency in reading. Although I always picked a few vocabulary words to highlight and discuss with the students throughout the read-alouds, I would incorporate the use of a vocabulary word wall, to help build the students vocabulary and provide them with a written visual that they could always refer back to. When teachers incorporate vocabulary in the form of word walls, the students can refer back to the words as they come up in each read-aloud.
If more time had permitted, I would have spent more individual time with each student as they were completing reading and writing instruction following the different read-alouds. Since it was important for me to engage in conversations following the read-alouds, I let my assistants sit with the students while doing their work. Although I was up walking around the classroom, observing the students and discussing the text with them I did not have enough time to personally sit down with each student and listen to all of their interpretations of each text. I also did not get the chance to have all of the students explain their work. Although I could grade and analyze their work samples, hearing their explanation would have given me more insight as to what the students really took away from the text. Although I wasn’t able to discuss the text with each individual student, I do feel that as a whole I learned a lot about my class and the students’ abilities to comprehend and make meaning of the different text. Furthermore I was able to create and implement developmentally appropriate lessons and projects correlating with the theme for my students.

Another aspect of this study that I would have liked to explore throughout this study, was a chance to observe another early childhood educator incorporate read-alouds. Although I was able to include the other teachers in my study through the use of a read-aloud survey and a classroom literacy environment checklist, it would have been nice to observe an interactive read-aloud at a different level in another classroom. Since the students build on their foundation at each level, it would have been interesting to see how read-alouds are incorporated at the pre-k and kindergarten level. I feel that it would be beneficial to analyze the type of instruction following the read-alouds, and the literacy abilities of the students at the pre-k and kindergarten levels in order to provide my preschool students with instruction that they can build off once they leave preschool and continue on with pre-k and kindergarten.
Along with analysis of other teachers conducting read-alouds at the pre-k and kindergarten level, it also would have been beneficial to further incorporate parents into my study. With more time I would have liked to assess the students’ abilities to comprehend a story read-aloud to them by their parents. Too get more feedback from the parents I would have also liked to discover the reactions and thoughts of the parents, and their thoughts on as to whether or not they believe read-alouds benefit early childhood literacy development.

Overall, the research that was conducted was for the sole purpose of helping educators, parents, and students understand the benefits of reading aloud to students during their years of early childhood development. The daily interactive read-alouds that were observed and conducted were very conducive to the development of all the students who participated. At the completion of this study, students were able to make meaning of text, and understand the importance of text to text, text to self, and text to world connections.

**Conclusion**

My research study was focused on the question; “How do read-alouds benefit early childhood literacy development?” Through my research, I discovered the importance of language and literacy acquisition. According to Goodman (1984), children begin to acquire language at a very young age, as they begin to engage and actively participate in literate experiences within society. During the process of language and literacy acquisition, children learn how to make meaning of both spoken and written words through the interaction and development of vocabulary using oral and written language. Parents serve as an important model of oral and written language, as they provide children with the necessary tools and resources to develop and acquire language from the moment they are born. Teachers play an important role in a child’s
ability to acquire language as well, as they provide students with the foundations of reading and writing. If children are exposed to the proper resources, and given the necessary tools with support from their parents and teachers at a very young age, student will show a passion towards reading demonstrating their engagement of the text through their level of discussion surrounding the reading material. When the students are engaged and involved in conversations surrounding the text it is then evident whether or not the student is making correct meaning of the text, thus making real text to text, text to self, and text to world connections.

Today, literacy instruction is incorporated into classroom instruction at all levels. Although many teachers’ still conduct read alouds at the intermediate levels, it is found that teachers of primary grades read to their children more often. For many students in today’s society who do not receive early childhood education, the primary level can be the first time a child is introduced to different text. Even though children at the early childhood level are in the beginning phases of emergent literacy, if more text and genres are read-aloud to the students starting in preschool and pre-k, students will be more familiar with literacy practices by the time they get to the primary levels, starting with a bigger foundation, thus displaying more knowledge and skill as readers and writers. When students are emerged in a classroom literacy environment, they often find comfort in books. Even without the ability to read students can connect with literature through pictures, words, and letters. Reading aloud to children promotes discussion and encourages students to ask questions and seek answers about ideas they can connect or relate too, kids want to know the who, the where, the when, they why, and the how? They want to interpret and discuss pictures and vocabulary within the text. Ultimately read-aloud makes a story come to life for younger students, engaging them and capturing their thoughts discussion and interpretation of the text.
When completing my research, I was able to learn and understand the many components of effective read-alouds at the early childhood level. My study was found to be most beneficial for early childhood level teachers as it helps them to understand the literacy abilities of students at the preschool level. My study highlights the important aspects of read-alouds including the benefits of discussion during and after read-alouds, the roles of parents and teachers during read-alouds, the use of informational and narrative text in read-alouds, and the benefits of whole group and small group interactive read-alouds.

Though conducting this research, I have learned some beneficial strategies and information that are necessary to help students at the early childhood level acquire vocabulary even though they may not necessarily be able to read phonetically. Through discussion of vocabulary, modeling of written word, and implementing instruction surrounding the vocabulary students become familiar with specific words and begin to recognize and memorize the meaning of vocabulary. They are also able to further identify the vocabulary words within different context as well.

The importance of modeling was also a key factor learned throughout this research study. Although the students were not able to read independently, by consistently modeling how to properly hold a book, pointing out and discussing key vocabulary, highlight the different parts of the book, discussing the illustrations and key themes in the story the students were provided with the necessary instruction to encourage reading both inside and outside of the classroom.

Read-alouds are beneficial to early childhood literacy development as most students at the early childhood level love to hear stories read-aloud and look forward to storytime. During storytime, young students will readily engage with good books read aloud by a teacher who enjoys books and the read-aloud experience (Barrentine, 1996). The teacher can enhance the read
aloud and a student’s literacy experience by leading students to engage with aspects of literacy that contribute to the meaning-making process. Through on-going interaction during read-alouds, and providing students with instruction that connects to the text after the read-aloud, teachers can target key literacy and process information for the ultimate purpose of supporting individual response and comprehension of the text. Furthermore interactive read-alouds benefit early childhood literacy development providing young students to make text to text, text to self, and text to world connections through written and oral literacy practices.
References


Maloch, B., & Beutel, D. (2010). "Big loud voice. You have important things to say": The Nature of Student Initiations During One Teacher's Interactive Read-Alouds. Journal Of Classroom Interaction, 45(2), 20-29


BENEFITS OF READ-ALOUDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY DEVELOPMENT


Appendix A

My Dad
and I...

By OUNE

©EnchantedLearning.com
My Father...

My father is ____________
special & crazy

16. 3. 2012

©EnchantedLearning.com
IT'S ALL ABOUT MY DAD

THIS IS MY DAD!
### Classroom Literacy Environment Checklist

**Is your classroom literacy-friendly?**
You have an important role in providing the children in your classroom with some of their first experiences with books and reading. Look around your classroom and think about what you do with the children. If the statement on the checklist is true, place a check in the “true” column. If the statement is false, place a check in the “false” column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false:</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability of learning materials:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Alphabet books (e.g., Dr. Seuss’s <em>ABC</em> book) are readily available for children’s use.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Wood or plastic 3-dimensional alphabet letters are readily available for children’s use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Crayons and pencils are readily available for children’s use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Paper is readily available for children’s writing and drawing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Children have tables or other surfaces readily available for writing or drawing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Rhyming books (e.g., Joseph Slate’s <em>Miss Kindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten</em>) are readily available for children’s use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. At least 25 picture books are readily available for children’s use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. At least 50 picture books are readily available for children’s use.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s use of learning materials:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Games, materials, and activities are used regularly to help children learn the names of alphabet letters.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Children are encouraged to scribble and experiment with pretend writing.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Games, materials, and activities are used regularly to help children learn to rhyme.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Children in the class engage in shared book reading sessions with an adult at least twice a week.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Children in the class engage in shared book reading sessions with an adult at least four times a week.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Games, materials, and activities are used regularly to help children learn to print the letters of the alphabet.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What the teacher or assistant teacher does:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The teacher sometimes sounds out printed words when reading picture books to children.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. The teacher frequently introduces new words to children while reading picture books.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. The teacher regularly has detailed and informative conversations with children about things that interest the children (e.g., “How do you think ice cream is made?”).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The teacher sends home materials that encourage parents to read with their children at home.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19. The teacher encourages children to talk about their experiences (e.g., “What happened at the library?”).</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. The teacher asks questions of children and encourages them to talk while reading picture books with them.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false:</th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. The teacher sends home materials that encourage parents to help their children learn the letters of the alphabet.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The teacher helps children learn nursery rhymes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. The teacher encourages children to express themselves using complete sentences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. The teacher keeps a record of how individual children are progressing in their reading readiness skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. The teacher believed that it is important for young children to learn skills that will help them get ready to read.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. The teacher regularly engages children in games and activities that help children break spoken words into sound parts (e.g., “Clip your hands for every sound you hear in ‘be - non - na’”).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. The teacher helps children learn to write their own names.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. The teacher regularly helps children learn the sounds that alphabet letters make (e.g., “M makes the mmmm sound!”).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. The teacher helps children learn to write other people’s names.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. The teacher is enthusiastic about the literacy and language activities that are included in the classroom curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The teacher’s background:**

| 31. The teacher is a good reader. |      |
| 32. The teacher has a large vocabulary. |      |
| 33. The teacher graduated from college. |      |
| 34. The teacher has received training in early literacy or reading readiness. |      |

**About the classroom and school, preschool or center:**

| 35. The classroom has a detailed year-long sequence of planned activities to introduce letters, language sounds, and print. |      |
| 36. Several classroom projects and trips through the year revolve around print (e.g., a visit to the library, making a picture book, visiting the supermarket). |      |
| 37. The classroom day includes some planned teaching activities in which all children are expected to engage. |      |
| 38. Children are generally occupied rather than standing around waiting for the next activity to start. |      |
| 39. The preschool or center screens children for problems with vision and hearing. |      |
| 40. The preschool or center screens children for delays in language and literacy development. |      |
| 41. Children enjoy the literacy and language activities that are included in the classroom curriculum. |      |

Count up the number of statements marked TRUE and put that number in the box to the right. See the chart below to find out how literacy-friendly your classroom is.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>31-41</th>
<th>Classroom literacy environment has most of the necessary supportive elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>Classroom literacy environment has many supportive elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>Classroom literacy environment has some supportive elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>Classroom literacy environment needs improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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References


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