Using Storybooks to Enhance Literacy Development in Early Emergent Readers:

A Closer Look at the Use of Dialogic Reading and Concept of Print Development through Print Referencing

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Abstract

Kindergarten preparedness is commonly presumed to be an academic focus of preschool classrooms across the nation; however, an estimated one third of school-aged children entering kindergarten do not demonstrate skills commonly associated with adequate literacy development for this age group (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1991). There exists an increasing amount of research data to suggest that storybook read alouds, using specific guidelines or strategies including dialogic reading, can increase student comprehension, aid in story retell, and advance critical thinking. In this study, the number of session participants ranged from one-on-one to small groups of 3-5 children. Data was collected for each session using videotapes which were then analyzed for visual cues that indicated student engagement, picture citations in retells and the number of words in a student response (directly related to the book). Data was also collected to determine how many questions the researcher was able to ask with reference to group size. Based on this research, students demonstrated an increased level of engagement, increasingly used pictures as clues during the retell process, and steadily increased the detailed length of responses as process repetition occurred.

Keywords:

Dialogic reading, emergent readers, retell, questions, preschool, read aloud, vocabulary, visual cues

Using Storybooks to Enhance Literacy Development in Early Emergent Readers:

A Closer Look at the Use of Dialogic Reading

With my research I am looking for possible ways to encourage literacy development in both the classroom, and at home, starting in the preschool years. I am concerned that a growing number of children (particularly those from low-income families) begin kindergarten far behind their peers (often from middle/upper middle class families) in terms of literacy development (Whitehurst, 2014). I am particularly interested in finding strategies that both teachers and parents alike can implement into their storybook reading time (whenever that may be).

My original intent was to determine if dialogic reading would, simply put, improve students' attitudes towards reading. Throughout my initial readings on the subject of dialogic reading I am finding many more possible outcomes, one of which is vocabulary instruction, which I think is equally as important/valuable, especially when looking ahead to kindergarten.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research is to answer the question, « What effects does dialogic reading have on preschool-aged children in the school setting?'' by determining the effectiveness of dialogic reading, when implemented with preschool-aged children in both small group and individual one-on-one settings. Data, in the form of observation notes and video recordings, was collected and analyzed after each of the 10 sessions to assess whether or not dialogic reading has any effect on:

Engagement (as evidenced by visual indication)

Participation

Critical Thinking

<div style="text-align: center;">**Literature Review**</div>

Introduction

Kindergarten preparedness is commonly presumed to be an "academic" focus of preschool classrooms across the nation, however an estimated one third of school-aged children entering kindergarten do not demonstrate skills commonly associated with adequate literacy development, according to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report, *Ready to learn: A Mandate for the Nation* (1991). These literacy developmental traits include: language development, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking, among others. In an effort to combat these achievement gaps, both the federal and 40 state governments, as well as the District of Columbia, currently allocate money for children from low SES backgrounds who qualify to attend preschool for free through two programs: Head Start (federally funded), which targets children from families with combined incomes less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level; and state-funded programs which, in addition to poverty-level children, also assist middle-class children as well (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2014).

A recent data collection reported approximately 28 percent of 4-year-olds and four percent of 3-year-olds in the United States are served in state-funded preschools according to "The State of Preschool Yearbook 2013" and, nationwide, Head Start (a federal program) provides services to nearly 1.1 million additional preschool-aged children (Samuels, 2014). Head Start and other federally funded preschool programs with targeted enrollment share an important goal: "...offset the myriad developmental risks associated with disability and poverty by improving children's readiness for schooling and, by extension, their short- and long-term academic success" (Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010, p. 504). Students with

developmental risks such as language impairments (LI) are at risk of future reading disorders (RD) (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009; Rvachew, 2007; Paul, & Norbury, 2012; Owens, 2012; Skebo et al., 2013). Consequently, as enrollment in free pre-K programs increases, and students with LI at risk of developing RDs are entering the pre-K classroom, more attention is being given to the quality and amount of time allocated to providing children with the best instructional practices associated with early literacy and language development (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009).

Within these classroom settings the goal then must be to implement and explicitly-teach research-based practices and programs that have positive developmental impacts on both normally-developing and language-impaired preschool-aged children (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010); the key to promoting reading development is through prevention. Currently there is general consensus among researchers, educators, and policy makers alike who believe preventative measures and interventions are key to *reducing* the number of elementary-aged children, particularly the nation's most disadvantaged, who are unable to demonstrate skilled, fluent reading and writing (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009). Furthermore, researchers are understanding the importance of explicitly teaching metalinguistic, phonological awareness, and letter-sound correspondence skills coupled with sufficient opportunities to practice in order to make word recognition easier and consequently enable the child to be a better reader (Paul & Norbury, 2012).

In order to meet the needs of both normally developing and language impaired children, reading experts (including SLPs and interventionists) are calling on a *balanced literacy* approach to reading instruction; one which includes dialogic reading and print awareness in the emergent

(pre-k through elementary) years as well as engaging children with meaningful literature and focusing on providing them with many opportunities to develop their oral language skills, all while deepening their understandings of the functions of print and enhancing literacy development (Gillon, 2000; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Gillon, 2005; Rvachew, 2007; Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Paul & Norbury, 2012; Carson, Gillon, & Boustead; 2013; Whitehurst 1992; Whitehurst, 2014).

Importance of supporting literacy development

Literacy development is a complex process that begins long before a child enters kindergarten (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994). The complex development of literacy relies on many skills and is highly influenced by different factors (Skebo et al., 2013). Long before they are actually able to decode print, children develop ideas about written language – how it works and what it's used for – during the emergent literacy phase of development. Emergent literacy skills develop largely in part due to "social interactions," most often through parent-child storybook read-alouds. It is during these interactions that children are able to listen and learn a lot about the different aspects and functions of these books (Paul & Norbury, 2012). For example, children learn which way to hold a book correctly; they begin to realize the black squiggles on a page represent meaning and that those markings tell the reader what to say on each page, every time; and most importantly, these social interactions expose children to different genres or styles of literacy language, different from their usual spoken language / oral conversation (Paul & Norbury, 2012).

Reading, and being read to, beginning in the earliest stages of life and through the preschool years has been shown to enhance both literacy and language development throughout a child's elementary years and beyond (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Chomsky,

1972; Elley, 1989; Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002; Snow, 1983; Whitehurst et al., 1988).

Research suggests that children who are read to frequently as preschoolers are more likely to become better readers in the later school years than their peers from non-reading families (Crain-Thorenson, Dale, 1992; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010; Paul, & Norbury, 2012; Snow, 1983; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999). Additionally, children benefit substantially more through engaging discussion about the story, as well as through explicit conversations drawing attention to print awareness (Justice & Ezell, 2001; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010; Paul & Norbury, 2012). Consequently, time spent reading to children in these early years has been proven to positively relate to linguistic development (Chomsky, 1972), and children who read (or listen to) rich and complex materials benefit from what Chomsky refers to as "a range of linguistic inputs," which are unavailable to the non-literary child (23).

Children's books can provide a wealth of information to young readers and serve as excellent tools from which children gain knowledge. In their research, Crain-Thoreson & Dale (1992) theorized the knowledge gleaned from children's books serves as a possible explanation as to why story book reading with parents might facilitate both language and literacy development. According to the 1991 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report, *Ready to learn: A Mandate for the Nation*, 35% of U.S. children enter kindergarten unprepared to learn, with literacy developments most commonly lacking in the areas of vocabulary and language development. Studies have further shown (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1991; Whitehurst et al., 1999) many of the students entering school behind in language skills are from low-income families when compared to peers from higher-

income families, and these varying social-classes have shown to make a difference in exposure to early language development (Whitehurst et al., 1994).

It is important to note that while working-class and minority children's use of language may differ from that of their middle-class peers, they are not deficient in language ability (Snow, 1983). Furthermore, in her 1983 publication *Literacy and Language: Relationships during the Preschool Years*, Snow cites studies which have shown that there are preschool-aged children from low-income families with, "considerable access to and experience with books," who *have* been socialized for school by their mothers in explicit and direct ways, proving that *access* to literacy materials alone is simply not enough to explain the reading achievement gap between working and middle-class children (185). In reality, more recent correlational studies have shown evidence which supports a relationship between a child's preschool narrative skills and later academic achievement which suggests fostering personal narratives in the preschool years influences oral language skills and development (Zevenbergen, Whitehurst, & Zevenbergen, 2003). Therefore, regardless of the SES background of the child, it is because these and other language differences exist that an inexpensive and effective best practice is needed to close the language gap.

In a time in education when the term *best practice* is used frequently to describe the practices and techniques that *should* be implemented in the classroom to help even the playing field for all students, careful consideration must be given to the evidence that demonstrates whether or not the effectiveness of the activities and/or strategies we use with our students exists, as supported by objective and comprehensive research and evaluation. The What Works Clearinghouse (2007) has deemed, based on evaluative research, that dialogic reading, one particular shared book reading technique, when used with preschool-aged children, is an

effective tool in increasing language development both at home and the school setting. Dialogic reading and print awareness are two research based methods that have been used effectively to support language and literacy development.

Dialogic reading is an intervention program developed by Whitehurst et al. (1988) designed to, "accelerate young children's language development [and] based on the assumption that practice, feedback, and appropriately scaffolded interactions facilitate language development" (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst & Epstein, 1994, p. 236). During dialogic reading the child is encouraged to increasingly, "take on the role of the storyteller," while the adult uses prompts, response expansions, and positive reinforcement to scaffold learning and role-reversal (LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013).

The concept behind dialogic reading is far from new, however. Even before Whitehurst and his colleagues coined the phrase *dialogic reading*, many educational researchers were recognizing that semantic contingency in adult speech was a major "facilitator" in language acquisition (Snow, 1983). Adult utterances that continue the topics introduced by the child's utterances (previously made statements) are considered semantically contingent. Snow (1983) defined such utterances to include: (1) expansions, which are limited to the content of the previous child utterance; (2) semantic extensions, which add new information to the topic; (3) clarifying questions, which demand clarification of the child utterance; and (4) answers to child questions. According to her research, Snow identifies semantic contingency, along with scaffolding, and what she calls *accountability procedures* (1983). In short, semantic contingency is essentially continuing the topic started by the child. The idea behind this adult-child interaction is that it promotes language acquisition within the child.

Though dialogic reading is sometimes referred to as shared reading, it really is different in the fact that unlike shared reading in which the teacher / adult reads to an entire class, with dialogic reading the adult works one-on-one or with small groups of children (no more than 5, fewer is better), and is therefore able to give direct response and feedback to the child in a more intimate setting (Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; Flynn, 2011). Dialogic reading is a specific type of social interaction; an event which involves sharing the storybook *reading itself* between the parent and the child, making the child a participant in the reading of the story (Whitehurst, 1992).

Dialogic Reading Principles and Their Effectiveness

Dialogic reading consists of seven essential principles which help distinguish the process itself from shared reading. The effectiveness of these principles has been researched and evaluated, with a widely-accepted conclusion that supports dialogic reading practices in both school and home settings. In 1994, *Accelerating Language Development Through Picture Book Reading: Replication and Extension to a Videotape Training Format* was published as a follow-up to another influential study, *Accelerating Language Development Through Picture Book Reading* (Whitehurst et al., 1988) in which the effectiveness of one-on-one picture book reading between a mother and a child using dialogic reading techniques was evaluated. In both studies the mothers' efforts, following a set of specific interactive techniques, "produced substantial effects on preschool children's language development" (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994). In this 1994, and the previous 1988, study the adult participants in the experimental group were to follow guidelines, or principles, meant to navigate them through the dialogic reading process. The seven guiding principles were then divided into two assignments which were meant

to scaffold instruction. The *seven principles of dialogic reading* are (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994, p. 238):

1. *Ask "what" questions.* When children practice language they develop their language skills, and when parents ask "what" questions they evoke speech from the child. Such questions more effectively elicit language than does either pointing or asking "yes/no" questions.

2. *Follow answers with questions.* Once the child knows the name of a pictured object, parents should ask a further question about the object. Examples include attribute questions, which require the child to describe aspects of the object such as its shape, its color, or its parts, and action questions, require the child to describe what the object is used for or who is using it.

3. *Repeat what the child says.* Parents should repeat the child's correct responses to provide encouragement and to indicate when the child is correct.

4. *Help the child as needed.* Parents should provide models of a good answer and have the child imitate the models.

5. *Praise and encourage.* Parents should provide feedback and praise when the child says something about the book, for example, "good talking," That's right," or "nice job."

6. *Shadow the child's interests.* It is important for parents to talk about the things that the child wants to talk about. When the child points at a picture or begins to talk about part of a page, parents should use this interest as a chance to encourage the child to talk.

7. *Have fun.* Parents can make reading fun by using a game-like, turn-taking approach. Parents should keep the procedures in proportion by simply reading to the child part of the time (p. 238).

Since its inception, dialogic reading has been studied, researched, and implemented in classrooms, homes, and university laboratories alike (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; Flynn, 2011; LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith & Fischel, 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999). The findings of these studies, and perhaps countless others, both

strongly suggest and demonstrate the effectiveness of dialogic reading when used as an intervention strategy aimed at increasing language development among emergent readers. In fact the findings in Elley's research concluded that through activities such as listening to entertaining stories read aloud, children both learned and retained more information (1989). In their 2013 study, LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason found that through dialogic storybook reading the child was able to enjoy books, thus developing an attitude which led to further interest in reading and literacy. Furthermore, their study also echoed previous studies (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith & Fischel, 1994; Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; Flynn, 2011) which found that dialogic reading encourages literacy development through the *social interaction* between adult and child. Based on such research, the evidence strongly suggests implementing dialogic reading in the shared reading experience between an adult and a preschool-aged child.

Implementing Dialogic Reading

The principles of dialogic reading remain the same whether implemented in the home or school setting. Regardless of the setting in which dialogic reading takes place, the important aspect to remember is *how* parents/adults talk to their children/students *makes a difference*.

Because the goal of dialogic reading is to enhance language development, successful implementation is crucial. Such implementation depends on a solid understanding of both the *fundamental reading technique*, also known as PEER, and what Whitehurst refers to as *the five prompts* used in dialogic reading, or CROWD, (1992). Whitehurst developed the following two acronyms to help guide the teacher/parent in the dialogic reading process (1992):

PEER technique

PEER is the fundamental reading technique used in dialogic reading (LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013, p. 2). It is a short interaction between the child and the adult in which the adult:

Prompts the child to say something related to the book,

Evaluates the child's response, related to the book,

Expands the child's response by rephrasing and adding additional information to it, and

Repeats the prompt (making sure the child has learned from the expansion).

CROWD questions

CROWD questions are used at the *prompting* stage of the PEER sequence (Whitehurst, 1992) and are designed to assist the child in further development of emergent literacy skills (LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013). There are five types of prompts used in dialogic reading (Whitehurst, 1992):

Completion prompts – usually used with rhyming books or books with repetitive phrases, reader leaves a blank at the end of the sentence for the child to fill in. *Aim*: provides child with information about the structure of language that is critical to later reading.

Recall prompts – questions about what happened (to be used after a child has read the story). Recall prompts can work with nearly every book, with the exception of alphabet books. Aim: helps child understand story plots as well as describing sequences of events.

Open-ended prompts – these questions work best with books that have detailed illustrations as the prompts focus on the pictures themselves. Aim: assisting the child in increasing expressive fluency and attention to detail.

Wh- prompts – focus on the what, where, when, why, and how questions. Aim: using the pictures in the book to teach new vocabulary.

Distancing prompts – help form a bridge between books and the real world by asking the child to relate their own experiences to a picture or words in the book. Aim: to

form a bridge between the books and the real world, as well as increasing verbal fluency, conversational abilities, and narrative skills.

Repeated Readings

Research has shown that as children listen to stories being read, much language is learned incidentally (Snow, 1983; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Elley, 1989; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Roth, Speece, & Cooper, 2002). Therefore, through repeated readings of texts, children gain a deeper understanding of words and their meanings. Brief discussion throughout the reading experience further aids in comprehension and development. The importance of repeated readings was reported in Elley's 1989 study, *Vocabulary acquisition from stories* (p.177): "Given *three* readings of the story over a week, *without* any explanation of the target words, the first class showed a mean gain of 19 percent in their understanding of words; given *one* reading, *with* brief explanation of target words as they were read, the second class produced a mean gain of 20 percent; and given *three* readings, *as well as* brief explanations, the third class achieved a mean gain of 33 percent."

Through repeated readings and opportunities to discuss the text, dialogic reading helps to strengthen oral narration abilities. The findings of Roth, Speece, & Cooper (2002) concluded the converse effect in which, "deficits in oral narration may have a substantial impact on children's reading achievement when narrative structure has not been sufficiently developed or cannot be effectively accessed" (p.262). Currently in Wisconsin, CCSS.ELA-Literature.RL.K.2 exists to promote kindergarten students' abilities to, "retell familiar stories, including key details," with prompting and support (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014). Based on this research we can conclude that the repeated reading aspect of dialogic reading is vital to its success among children.

Print Referencing

Another form of instruction known to enhance reading development prior to reading is print referencing (Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010). Print knowledge, and it's relation to reading development, has been studied by researchers over the past few decades, including Catherine Snow (1983). Her work, along with others', has led to our understanding of print knowledge to be a combination of a child's interest and awareness of print; understanding of print concepts; and knowledge of printed words and letters (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009). Children's understanding of written language advances over time, but those who are raised in literate homes during their preschool years (and earlier) begin to develop an interest in print and demonstrate a basic knowledge of its importance, with regard to the meaning it carries, at an earlier age than peers from environments lacking in literacy stimulation. Additionally, print referencing has been shown to be strongly influenced by the environments in which children are raised, though it is an aspect of development that through changes to the environment can easily be modified (Clay, 1995; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009).

Knowledge and an awareness of print is rarely something children pick up on independently at an early age, given young children's demonstrated lack of interest in print during shared reading activities as they are more interested in, and likely more aware of, the pictures (not the print) on the pages (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009). In fact, according to the studies presented in the research findings of Zucker, Justice, & Piasta (2009), parents seldom discuss print when they read to their children and their findings suggest it is in most cases unlikely that teachers do beyond the title of a book in a classroom setting. Considering these findings and the implications they have on children's awareness of print (and its importance), the

researchers suggest that adults themselves, "…[must] adopt specific interactive techniques that actively engage children with print" as the adults themselves, "play a critical role in actively supporting and scaffolding children's interactions with written language and their development of print knowledge" (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009).

Print referencing is the deliberate act of directing a child's attention to print during shared reading and aids in children's development of print knowledge (Ezell & Justice, 2001; Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice, Pullen, & Pence, 2008; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010). Drawing attention to print within the shared reading context is far more meaningful than a drill-and-practice setting (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009), and during shared reading adults should use a combination of nonverbal print references (e.g. pointing to print) and verbal references (e.g. comments and questions) when drawing the child's attention to the print on the page.

In their print referencing study, Justice, Pullen, & Pence (2008) found that as adults read, whether they talk about print or point to print, children look at the print more, and both verbal and nonverbal print references elicit similar effects on children's visual attention to print (as reported through examining time children spent looking at pictures vs. looking at print). The findings of Justice and others suggests that through explicit print referencing during shared reading adults can play a, "critical role in actively supporting and scaffolding children's interactions with written language and their development of print knowledge" (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009) and, additionally, adults who do not typically use print referencing during their reading interactions with children can, "readily be taught to do so" (Ezell & Justice, 2000).

Print Referencing Intervention was designed to (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009):

1. Focus on a single activity in context (e.g. storybook reading) vs. implementing in various activities that range throughout the day.

2. Focus on one specific domain of development (print organization, print meaning, letters, or words); one that is relevant to the scaffolded learning taking place in the classroom at any given point in time.

3. Require very few resources for effective implementation.

Following the Scope and Objectives of the Print Referencing Intervention (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009), the 30 week intervention covers four instructional domains: *print organization* (page order, author, page organization, book title, and print direction)*, print meaning* (print function, environmental print, and metalinguistic concept of print)*, letters* (upper and lower-case letters, letter names, and metalinguistic concept of letter)*, and *words* (word identification, short vs. long words, letters vs. words, and concept of word in print)*. Each week, explicit instruction is given on one specific objective. For example, if the objective is *page order* (under the "print organization" instructional domain), the objective might state, "Knows the order in which pages are read in a book." A sample of the explicit print reference used by the adult might be, "I am going to read this page first and then this over here next." And so-on and so-forth. By directly focusing on one objective through the use of both verbal and non-verbal instruction, the adult is increasing the children's chances of mastering the chosen literacy skill.

Print referencing, when used in classroom-based storybook reading sessions over the course of a year, has been proven to positively impact the gains students made in three standardized measure of print knowledge, one of which: print concept knowledge (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009).

Conclusions and Clinical Implications

Reading aloud to children with explicit reference to print (both verbally and nonverbally) through the use of children's books can: help to provide a wealth of information to young

readers; support early literacy and language development; and, when coupled with explicit and meaningful discussion, serve as excellent tools from which children gain knowledge (Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010). In their research, Crain-Thoreson & Dale theorized the knowledge gleaned from children's books serves as a possible explanation as to why story book reading with parents at home might facilitate both language and literacy development.

Furthermore, there exists an increasing amount of research data to suggest the use of storybook readings as a context for explicitly-taught intervention strategies can increase student comprehension, aid in story retell, and advance critical thinking. Educational researchers have identified a key correlation between the time, and *quality* of time, spent reading to pre-kindergarten aged children and the effects it has on the children's literacy growth (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Brooke & Bramwell, 2006; U.S Department of Education, 2007; Flynn, 2011; LaCour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013). It is important to note here, however, explicit and systematic literacy instruction in whole-group, drill-and-practice style is not appropriate for young children, but rather: instruction that embeds explicit instruction into meaningful, "naturalistic" learning activities using a variety of instructional approaches is best for pre-K learners (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009). Shared book reading, thus, can serve as a means for embedding intentional and systematic literacy and language instruction (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009), especially through the use of print referencing interventions in the early years of reading development. Because early literacy and language intervention is critical, not only aiding in reading development for normally developing children (both from middle and

low-SES backgrounds) but for language impaired children as well, the early identification of students at risk of reading difficulties is critical.

The demand for research-based, effective instructional strategies and interventions to be implemented in our nation's preschools and elementary schools is growing. Preventative measures, such as an increase in dialogic reading practices and explicit print referencing during shared reading in the emergent literacy development years is a must. Therefore the collaboration between classroom teachers, parents, reading specialists, SLPs, and interventionists alike is necessary to increase the practice of effective intervention throughout our schools and, ultimately, to achieve the goal of implementing effective *preventative* measures and interventions in order to *reduce* the number of elementary-aged children, particularly the nation's most disadvantaged, who are unable to demonstrate skilled, fluent reading and writing.

Based on this research and the evidence that suggests dialogic reading and explicitly-teaching print concepts through print referencing enhance literacy development, I have decided within my own research to examine the effects dialogic reading and print referencing has on three and four year old children within a preschool setting, in both small-group and individualized instruction to determine whether or not these processes have a positive effect on student engagement, participation, and/or critical thinking in either large/small group or individual sessions. My research involved two separate studies: Part 1 and Part 2.

Action Research – Part 1

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 24 preschool-aged children and, specifically, a focus group of three children, two four years of age (one almost-five, the other four and half) and one

three year old (almost four). The focus group was narrowed from an original group of six, see *procedures* section, down to a group of three. The students, all Caucasian females, attended the same Midwestern suburban preschool class two mornings a week. For each of the three girls this was their first year of "school." Two attended daycare in addition to preschool, the other was cared for primarily by her grandparent fulltime. For this study I used the pseudonyms Allison, Cailey, and Jennifer to represent each of the girls within the focus group.**Procedures**

I first began this research by broadly introducing the concept of dialogic reading by reading to the entire preschool class (approx. 24 students). From there I pulled out six children (whose parents had completed and returned a permission slip) with whom to perform the dialogic reading practices. After the first small-group meeting, I quickly determined that at this age, and given the "newness" of this process, the children would not benefit (nor would I) from implementing dialogic reading to a group this large. I also felt that due to the group's size, ultimately, my research would not allow me to examine the true effects of dialogic reading. The materials used for this research were the books, *Bear Snores On* (2002) by Karma Wilson and Virginia Lee Burton's *The Little House* (1988), chosen for their vocabulary words (see Appendix D) and detailed pictures. An iPhone was also used to video-record the sessions primarily for audio purposes, which allowed me the ability to focus strictly on the student(s) vs. record-keeping.

This study consisted of nine sessions, spread out over a five week period, lasting approximately 30 min. each. I collected data during each session. The data collected was then analyzed and categorized into a four session outline, based on material/concepts covered.

Session 1: ALLISON, CAILEY, and JENNIFER *TOGETHER*. For the purposes of this research, I am calling the first small-group meeting consisting of three preschool-aged children

(Allison, Cailey and Jennifer), "Session 1." By the time this meeting took place, the girls had seen and heard me read two other times. After the sessions began I learned that the three girls were not close in the classroom; they choose to play with other children most of the time. Both Cailey and Allison seemed distracted at times perhaps partially due to the new room we were in; also, they expressed curiosity about what was happening in their regular classroom as we could hear loud bursts of noise from time to time. Possibly because of these factors, I noted their inconsistent engagement, with regard to focus (visually), see Appendix E, Table 1. The third child, Jennifer, did not seem to be distracted in this new setting. In this first session I read *Bear Snores On* by Karma Wilson to the three children.

The purpose of this session was to introduce them to the first book by highlighting the title, author, illustrator, taking a picture walk and briefly make predictions, then reading the book with few pauses or questions. After I read the story, I asked each student a few questions while demonstrating how to use pictures as clues/prompts. This session lasted approximately 20 min.

Session 2: JENNIFER and ALLISON TOGETHER; CAILEY SEPARATE.

For this second session Cailey was late getting to school so Jennifer and Allison were paired together. *Bear Snores On* was read for a second time. Prior to reading, I took them back through the book asking them to recall/share what had taken place to that point. Throughout the second reading I paused occasionally to ask what certain words meant and/or explain the meanings, as well as to ask certain questions about what they thought characters might be thinking/feeling, etc. At the end of this reading, I asked the girls to share a time when they might have experienced a similar situation as one of the characters, or whether or not they had felt a certain way, as the characters had. They were also encouraged to look back through the pictures to "retell" the story in their own words. Cailey's session followed the same steps.

Tables 1 & 2 (Appendix E) show their perceived engagement levels, as captured on videotape, and their ability to use the pictures to retell the story. When reviewing the recordings from this day I determined Cailey's independent session had allowed her to focus just on what we were doing, that is to say not the other students themselves, their thoughts/actions/etc., and therefore I felt the dialogic reading process had been more effective. Consequently, I decided moving forward I would work with the girls independently. See Appendix E, Table 2.

Session 3: INDEPENDENT. For the third session, Cailey was absent; Jennifer and Allison each had their own one-on-one session with me. During this time together I began a new book, *The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton. This story was chosen for its pictures as well as its theme. Following the same procedures as before, I introduced the story by highlighting the title, and the author/illustrator. We looked through the pages prior to reading but I did not spend too much time asking predicting questions. The vocabulary was less descriptive in nature but instead contained nouns they might not be as familiar with (skyscrapers, bulldozers, tenement houses, etc.). Following the same format as "Session 1," we discussed the book broadly afterwards. Allison, though her answers continued to be short, one-two word responses, was demonstrating a sense of trust and an increased willingness to participate. She was engaged 100% of the time when it was just she and I; see Appendix E, Table 2. Following the seven principles of dialogic reading, as well as the PEER interaction format, allowed me to encourage and interact with her vs. simply asking her something like, "What happened?" at the end of a reading. See Appendix E, Table 3.

Session 4: INDEPENDENT. Jennifer was absent the day our fourth and last session was scheduled to take place. Because Cailey had been gone for session three she and I repeated what had been during that session, as she was not familiar with the book. By the time this fourth

session took place it was apparent that Allison was finally comfortable with and just getting used to the format and flow of the sessions. This was indicated by level of engagement, ability to use pictures as clues/prompts when retelling, and in the length of detailed responses she provided. See Appendix E, Table 4. In addition to the previous-mentioned data, I noticed that the number of questions I was able to ask the students directly increased the smaller the session, with the greatest gain occurring in our one-on-one sessions. See Appendix E, Table 5.

Action Research – Part 2

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were four preschool-aged children (each four years of age), two females and two males, randomly selected from a larger class of 14 students in a suburban preschool located in the Midwest. The participants were solicited from the M-W a.m. class at the preschool through announced solicitations and sign-up sheets. Participants' parents received consent forms and were asked signed on their child's behalf granting permission to participate in the study. For the purposes of gender equality and neutrality, I divided the signed consent forms into two groups: males and females, and from these groups two names were selected. The selected students were identified by their classroom teachers as typically-developing children of this age group and have no physical and/or mental limitations. It is worth noting that none of the children within the larger group had any known physical and/or mental limitations, nor were such limitations prohibited within this research prior to the start of the study.

The seven-week study was conducted in both the primary preschool classroom for the whole-group instruction and assessment, and in a quiet "nook" located outside the primary

classroom which is where small-group as well as individual instruction and assessments took place. Materials used for this study included pre-selected children's books (see Appendix A), a Concepts of Print Checklist, and an iPhone which served as a recording devise (used for audio recording). All data was collected during face-to-face interactions between myself (the researcher) and the participating children.

Procedures

This study was conducted over a seven week period and consisted of sessions twice weekly; Monday and Wednesday mornings for approximately 20 minutes each. In addition to the regularly-scheduled thematically-based stories the classroom teachers read on a daily basis, participants in the research sessions were read to twice weekly on Monday and Wednesday mornings, while the large group was read to only an additional time during the school week (Monday mornings only). Ultimately, this meant more reading instruction for all of the children and specifically for the participants of this study during the time period in which the study took place. The large-group Monday sessions lasted approximately 10-15 minutes each in length and the objective was aimed at introducing the story to the children via picture walks and prediction-making. Wednesday morning sessions were conducted in small-group then individual, one-on-one sessions lasting approximately 15-20 minutes with a specific focus on dialogic reading techniques and concept of print prompting.

Throughout each of the sessions within this study, participants were encouraged to actively listen to and enjoy the storybooks in both the whole-group and small-group settings, during which time the children were asked to be carefully looking at/examining the pictures within these stories as I read. Following the readings, I would ask the students to voluntarily talk about the stories; emphasizing the importance of using the pictures to guide their thoughts and

trigger their memories. The purpose of talking about what I had just read to them was to help develop oral language skills as well as aid in overall comprehension.

As a part of the dialogic reading process I read the story twice, sometimes three times. Twice was the most common frequency the participants heard the story read to them, which included both the large group as well as the small group (and one-on-one) settings. Large group sessions consisted of reading the story only once. The rationale behind the multiple readings was to make sure I was providing an opportunity for the participants to hear the story more than once, and in doing so hopefully allowing them to gain confidence in interpreting the story's meaning while further developing their oral language abilities through the retelling.

Participants reported their thoughts throughout the study and their responses were noted and recorded upon the completion of each reading session. Data was collected through a combination of audio recordings and observational notes. Audio recording was critical as student responses were able to be carefully analyzed by the researcher (myself) outside the classroom setting in order to ensure details, such as student responses (including pauses, questions asked, etc.), of the session could be reviewed and ultimately kept intact. For this retell portion of the research I used the CROWD prompts from the dialogic reading principles (see Appendix B for examples of CROWD prompts) to aid the children in their responses (see Appendix C).

The structure of the group size changed over time. Participants were together in small group sessions the first four weeks, which was primarily to help them adjust to not only myself but what it was we were doing (keeping in mind this was the start of a preschool school year and a lot of adjusting takes place for children of their age group). After the fourth week the Wednesday sessions alternated between small-group and one-on-one instruction. However, this was not the original intent but due to three absences over the seven week period and a special

event at school, adjustments needed to be made in order to ensure the students were able to participate in the week's lessons, therefore a one-on-one session needed to be converted to another small-group to accommodate the student who had missed a previous session.

The first session of each week was designed to engage the participants in the story and to familiarize them with any key aspects (main idea, specific word, repeated phrase, etc.) important to the story itself (ie: repetition in Rosen's *We're going on a bear hunt*, and the word "share" in Dewdney's *Llama llama time to share*). The key literary features were chosen by me and were the concepts I assessed the participants on within that specific week.

On Mondays I led a whole-group "picture walk," discussing and highlighting various print concepts and clues gathered from the images, as well as any predictions the participants may have had prior to reading. This part of the process I referred to as the "Activating Engagement Stage," or AES. It was within the large-group setting that participants were shown various print concepts to increase print awareness. These were always highlighted prior to each reading. The children in the study were then later asked to identify various book characteristics such as identifying the cover, back of the book, words, letters, etc. These characteristics are also known as concepts of print (see Appendix D).

Following the AES during the Monday sessions, participants listened a second time as I read the same book they had heard on Monday once again on Wednesday, but this time in the smaller group setting (2-3 students). After the second reading, I prompted the children to discuss the story using pictures and personal connections. During the Wednesday sessions occasionally the story was able to be read for a third time, but this was entirely dependent on time and as was most often the case, there was not enough time for a full third reading. In the Wednesday sessions, and after the second reading, I asked participants to recall anything new/different they

hadn't noticed in the previous readings. They were asked to share these differences and once again, retell the events of the story and/or any personal connections they may have with characters/events.

I assessed the participants four separate times in order to collect data for the Visual Indication of Engagement, Using Pictures as Clues, and Quality of Oral Retelling measures. These assessments occurred in the Wednesday sessions of weeks one, three, five, and seven.

Results

At the end of the seven week period, each of the four children in the study showed noticeable improvement in the area of using pictures as aids in their story retells (see TABLE 2.1), as well as significant gains in their ability to identify select/key print concepts (TABLE 4.1 and TABLE 6.1). Additionally, each participant showed gradual, yet steady, improvement in the *quality* of their story retells (TABLE 7).

Given the fact that the participants were only three weeks into the school year, they were not yet totally adjusted to the new routine. Therefore, based at the Visual Indication of Engagement data, we can see that both Matthew and Thomas took slightly longer and that could be based on their initial level of comfort.

TABLE 1.1
Visual indication of engagement

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Matthew	-	o	+	+
Amy	+	+	+	+
Erin	+	+	+	+
Thomas	o	+	+	+
* - Not observed o Not consistently observed + Consistently observed				

Using Pictures as Clues (TABLE 2.1) proved to be challenging for the children. Quite often, they looked up at me or off to the side as if trying to remember what had happened in the story, or of a memory they were thinking of. As a guide, I reminded the students to, "use the pictures [from the book] in front of you." Based on the observations, the act of looking, and perhaps retelling in general, was certainly new the children. While more time would be needed to help them become more familiar as well as comfortable with the process, the data does show they were gradually moving towards the habit of looking back at the pictures to use as a reference and aid in the retelling of the story.

TABLE 2.1
Using pictures as clues

	1	2	3	4
Matthew	-	-	o	+
Amy	-	o	o	+
Erin	-	-	o	o
Thomas	-	-	-	o

* - *Not observed*　　*o Not consistently observed*　　*+ Consistently observed*

It should be noted that Thomas was absent week six, so he not only missed the story that week but also the practice of retelling. After reviewing the final data, it appears Thomas' absence did in fact hinder his progress, which we can suppose is the consequence of a lack of practice overall.

When identifying concepts of print, the majority of the participants were able to correctly identify major book concepts with the exception of the title and the title page (see TABLE 3.1). Erin, on the other hand, was the only one who did not appear to know how to hold the book correctly and as a consequence had difficulty identifying the cover, despite the different books

(hard or soft cover, etc.) offered, the other children were already familiar with basic book concepts.

The two book concepts that three out of the four participants did NOT know were the title and the title page. When asked to identify the title Matthew and Erin pointed to the picture and Amy pointed to the bottom of the book. In Amy's case she happened to be pointing at the word "scholastic" however also judging by the look on her face I am not confident she was even aware that she was pointing to a word to begin with. Based on the initial findings, I focused our attention on finding the title and title page of each book.

I found it interesting that in my in initial assessment, Erin could not identify the cover of the book (TABLE 3.1) but *could* identify the back. My assumption is perhaps the word "cover" was unfamiliar to her, however she did understand the word/concept "back." Once we took a closer look at the pictures on the covers of books vs. those on the backs; the titles; and making sure the binding was on the left side (with the picture in the correct direction) Erin was able to quickly and easily the covers of the subsequent books.

TABLE 3.1
Identifying concepts of print: book concepts (pre-)

	How to hold book	**Cover**	**Back**	**Title**	**Title Page**
Matthew	+	+	+	-	-
Amy	+	+	+	-	-
Erin	-	-	+	-	-
Thomas	+	+	+	+	-

*   *+ Able to   - Unable to*

Based on these initial findings, we examined each of the books together; discussing and comparing the titles of each book. Note: I always had on display the books we had read previously and used up-coming (or extra) books as props for the current lesson.

As a result of the explicit instruction focused on concepts of print, as in *book concepts*, all participants were able to correctly identify each of the five book concepts (TABLE 4.1). Instruction included modeling the correct way to both hold and open a book, using pictures and the act of identifying letters to use as "clues" in determining the correct position. We also examined the difference in both the size and sometimes font of the title itself, when compared to other words on the cover (author's/illustrator's names, publisher, etc.). In the first assessment, only Thomas was able to correctly identify the title of the book. However, when I asked him how he knew what he was pointing to was, in fact, the title he shrugged and replied, "I don't know." I recorded his response as "able to" identify the title but based on his response I explicitly reviewed title concepts with him as well.

TABLE 4.1
Identifying concepts of print: book concepts (post-)

	How to hold book	Cover	Back	Title	Title Page
Matthew	+	+	+	+	+
Amy	+	+	+	+	+
Erin	+	+	+	+	+
Thomas	+	+	+	+	+

*   + Able to   - Unable to

Prior to the print concepts instruction, only Amy out of the four was able to distinguish the difference between the printed words and the pictures. The other three appeared to be either

distracted by and/or more interested in the books' pictures and consequently were not able to find the printed words (see TABLE 5.1). While both Matthew and Amy were able to identify a single word, Erin and Thomas were not. Furthermore, none of the children in this study were able to identify two of the same words within one or two pages. Therefore, I geared my instruction to focus on these specific concepts of print.

Additionally, while each child could identify a single letter when asked directly to do so prior to explicit print concepts instruction, only two (half) of the students could identify a single word. If the student, when asked to point to a single word placed his or her finger on the space between two words or at either the beginning or end of the word with the child's finger overlapping the space between it and the next word, I would ask the child to point to another. In both Matthew and Amy's case, they were able to point to a word; Erin and Thomas were unsure and perhaps as a result were unable to clearly identify a single word.

TABLE 5.1
Identifying concepts of print: text concepts (pre-)

	Print tells a story	Word	Letter	Find two words
Matthew	-	+	+	-
Amy	+	+	+	-
Erin	-	-	+	-
Thomas	-	-	+	-

* + Able to   - Unable to

None of the participants were able to find two or more of the same word. Based on observations, it appeared that they may have hesitated, unsure of which word to select and then look for a similar-looking match. However, being unfamiliar with a word in general may have

also prevented Erin and Thomas to successfully complete this act, though that does not account for Matthew and Amy. Further research would need to be done to determine what factors they were using or creating on their own to help them determine where to start in the word finding activity.

As a result of explicit instruction, participants in this study made noticeable gains in the area of identifying text print concepts (see TABLE 6). By the end of the seven week study each of the four children were able to distinguish between the printed text and the illustrations. Text print concepts were assessed at weeks one, three, and six; however Michael was last assessed during week seven due to an absence week six (see Appendix A for list of books used in order).

Furthermore, at the end of the seven week period each child was able to clearly locate and select both a single word and an individual letter which was an improvement in the area of identifying text concepts for both Erin and Thomas.

TABLE 6
Identifying concepts of print: text concepts (post-)

	Print tells a story	Word	Letter	Find two words
Matthew	+	+	+	-
Amy	+	+	+	+
Erin	+	+	+	-
Thomas	+	+	+	+
* + Able to - Unable to				

After seven weeks, Amy and Thomas were able to find two words on a single page (or combination of two pages, as the book would appear to the child when opened). To do so took a minute or so and it should be noted that simply identifying two words that were spelled the same did not mean they could read the word. The word, *the* for example, was a commonly identified

word. When shown a word such as *the* and given extra time to look - and possibly "hints" as to where in general on the page the other word(s) might be – Michael and Erin were able to identify matches, though the assessment was meant to determine whether or not they could perform this task independently.

Of all of the literacy skills assessed within this study, the oral retellings were the most challenging for the children. Data collected during first session revealed this to be a skill they were least familiar with as evidenced by participants' responses which were very limited. For example, "Play," was a response given by Thomas when asked to share ways in which all [most] children are alike. Matthew's response: "Um, eat…?" "They like to play," said Amy; and Erin's response was, "Um, the play." I am not sure why three of the four children responded with "play" to some degree, other than to suppose it was an aspect within the story they most enjoyed and/or could easily identify with.

Given these very limited responses, the oral retelling, as part of the dialogic reading process, was slow to develop in each of the children (see TABLE 7) and required explicit instruction which included direct modeling.

TABLE 7
Quality of oral retelling / response

	1	2	3	4
Matthew	-	-	o	o
Amy	-	o	o	o
Erin	-	-	o	o
Thomas	-	-	-	o

* - Limited   o Adequate   + Thorough   ++ Personal Connection

For example, to aid the participants' recollection of what was just read to them I would model by first demonstrating the retell process myself and use statements I had prepared such as, "I'm going to look back in this book and carefully look at the pictures in this story and I'll use the pictures as clues to help me remember what I just heard." [turn to the beginning of the book] "Let's see. What happened first? Oh, yes. First…" I would model this after each book and then give the child his/her turn.

During the retell process, the CROWD prompts (Appendix B) were necessary in guiding them in their thought process, though, as the data shows, it was a gradual process and one in which none of the children had demonstrated a thorough ability by the end of the seven week period.

Conclusion/Discussion

Given the relatively short length of the study itself and other factors that may have inhibited the children (their age, the newness of a new school year, familiarizing themselves with me, etc.), the results are especially noticeable when we consider that the findings do support the research in favor of implementing both dialogic reading techniques and explicitly teaching print concepts to preschool aged children. When examining the results of implementing the dialogic reading techniques, the greatest gains of the preschool-aged children in Part 2 of the study were found in the area of Using Pictures as a Guide.

When examining the data at the end of the study I found Amy was more advanced than her peers in her ability to use the story's pictures as a guide to her retelling of the story. Not surprising, then, was the finding that her retells were also the most detailed. In the recording of Amy's final session, the listener can actually hear her turning the pages and while you can't see her expressions the long pauses of silence would clue the listener in as to what she's doing:

examining the illustrations prior to discussing them. Through Amy's dialogic reading instruction, I would prompt her by saying, "Ohhh, so tell about this picture. What do you see happening?" I would repeat her responses and then expand on them with prompts such as, "So then what happens?" or "Why do you think…?" "And then what did they do?"

Matthew also demonstrated the ability to consistently look at and use the pictures in the given story to aid in his retellings towards the end of the seven week period. Though his retellings themselves were not as fluid and detailed as Amy's he *did* use the pictures starting at the beginning of the story all the through to the end. In fact, Matthew became excited as he would retell portions of the story in his own words. This is notable as when I first met Matthew he was extremely shy; almost too shy to visually engage with either myself or the story during the first session of the study (see TABLE 1.1).

At the end of the study, both Erin and Thomas were still not consistently using the pictures to aid in their retellings, even when prompted to do so. In both cases they would look either directly at me or around the room when "searching" for their thoughts. That's not to say they didn't look at all at the pictures, but they were clearly not using them in a consistent manner to help them formulate their ideas.

Though the quality of each of the participants' responses during the oral retellings did improve in both length and content over the seven week period, they varied in degree and I was still needing to use multiple prompts to both lengthen the response and enhance detail. This is an important facet to dialogic reading; a skill which requires both time and practice. And while the children were, as mentioned previously, showing marked improvement in their retelling abilities the direct instruction time over the seven week period was not long enough to transform their

retelling abilities consistently. I do believe, based on the data, that if continued consistently, the children would continue to make further gains in this area.

Despite this small sampling of students and the relatively short length of the study, I believe the data shows a strong correlation between explicitly implementing dialogic reading techniques when reading to smaller groups of children as well as in one-on-one settings. Furthermore, the data collected on the participants' responses to the explicit concepts of print instruction indicated significant gains made by *each* of the children which, despite the small number of itself, it is still very exciting and promising information.

Therefore, reading aloud to children with explicit reference to print (both verbally and nonverbally) using children's books can: help to provide a wealth of information to young readers; support early literacy and language development; and, when coupled with explicit and meaningful discussion, serve as excellent tools from which children gain knowledge (Justice & Ezell, 2002; Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009; Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009; Justice, McGinty, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2010). Shared book reading, thus, can serve as a means for embedding intentional and systematic literacy and language instruction (Zucker, Justice, & Piasta, 2009), especially through the use of print referencing interventions in the early years of reading development. Because early literacy and language intervention is critical, not only aiding in reading development for normally developing children (both from middle and low-SES backgrounds) but for language impaired children as well, the early implementation of literacy-promoting techniques such as dialogic reading and concepts of print instruction during the preschool years is critical.

Unfortunately, for this study, the findings gathered through informal exit surveys asked directly to both of the classroom teachers indicate that while the women said they appreciated the

extra attention this study gave to the students who participated, it is safe to assume they are not likely to embrace making time enough for each child to experience dialogic reading principles in the setting these techniques require in order to be most efficient and meaningful for the child learner. Though, on paper, it would seem that the two classroom teachers would each be able to take two groups of 3-4 students for 10 minutes without disrupting the flow or taking away from other important instruction, the structure of the classroom activities would not permit it. For although there are two adults in the classroom, it is rare for them to both be teaching at the same time. For example, while one may be teaching, the other may be cleaning up, organizing for the next activity, and/or dealing with behavioral issues. This is unfortunate. If the organization of the current-day preschools, such as this, does not allow for a philosophical transformation, as well as curriculum instruction redirection, then it appears the children enrolled in these pre-k programs are at great risk for missing key instructional strategies known to enhance reading development.

Limitations

One of the major benefits of dialogic reading is vocabulary acquisition. However the time frame of the this research study did not allow the opportunity to adequately assess vocabulary acquisition in the children as there wasn't enough time for the students to make noticeable gains in this area. Also, the findings would suggest that absences – though few – had a negative effect in terms of measureable gains for the participants who missed a session or two, especially considering limited time to begin with. My assumption is an absence would be less consequential in terms of measurable gains if the study were longer.

A further limitation to the current research study was the number of participants was not only small, but extremely narrow as well when we consider diversification. The class population did not include children with special needs (mental, physical, etc.). With that being said, when

we look to the larger more inclusive student population, this study leaves unanswered the question of whether students identified with special needs can experience similar results from the dialogic reading techniques and/or concepts of print. Therefore the findings can be in no way used as an accurate representation of a given preschool-age population.

Additionally, the philosophy of this preschool is developmental rather than instructional. Developmental philosophies center on providing a supportive environment which follow the child's lead as determined by the child's interests and needs (Whitehurst et al., 1994). Given the school's current curriculum and philosophy, motivating the staff to implement a technique (dialogic reading, in this case, in small groups – ideally 1 to 3 children at most) that is based on the effects of children learning specific skills would most likely prove to be challenging and in fact not probable. This is discouraging because of the known benefits dialogic reading has on reading and overall literacy development.

Implications for further research

There are many ways in which to continue this research. What this two part study has done for me is it has opened my eyes enough to question what is really happening in today's preschool classrooms. I am concerned that current philosophies in many preschool programs lean towards the developmental rather than the instructional end of the spectrum and that precious time is being lost that could be used in preparing these students for their next step on their educational journey: kindergarten.

While I do not disagree with the importance of fostering the developmental needs of preschool-aged children, I am not convinced teachers and/or parents are holding themselves accountable for the fostering of the instructional needs as well. Perhaps worse, I am concerned that in these instances we as a society aren't *expecting* them to. It is important to note, however,

there will be those who suggest – and rightfully so – that preschools and prek programs do exist which overemphasize instruction and consequently do not allow children enough exploratory time necessary for the development of pre literacy skills. Therefore, a balanced approach – one which focuses on both developmental as well as instructional – is likely the most advantageous for both normally-developing and special-needs children.

Backing up a bit, with regards to this study in particular, I would love to continue this through the school year allowing me the opportunity to assess for vocabulary acquisition as well as looking at the development of complex language features within the students' retells. Providing these students, as well as their classmates, the time and attention needed to further develop their oral language skills would be ideal. Given the findings of this research, and my strong feelings of integrating this instruction into the preschool classroom in general, I will be working towards making this integration possible for this, and hopefully other preschool classrooms, by outlining in detail the need for such instruction and offering continued modeling of these practices (both the dialogic reading principles and the concepts of print features) for the classroom teachers. I feel this is just so important.

My next steps include continuing my research into the development of a non-profit aimed at improving the level of instruction with current preschool classrooms.

Appendix A – Children's books used (in order); fall, '14

Bibliography

Simon, N. (1999). *All kinds of children.* Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co. – wk. 1

* Mantle, B. (2009). *Five little pumpkins.* Wilton, CT: HarperCollins. – wk. 2

* + Rosen, M. (1989). *We're going on a bear hunt.* New York, NY: Aladdin. – wks. 3 & 4

Hoberman, M. A. (1997). *The seven silly eaters.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt. – wk. 5

* Dewdney, A. (2012). *Llama time to share.* New York, NY: Scholastic. – wk. 6

* ^ Meiners, C. (2013). *Feel confident.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc. – wk. 7

Books used for Print Awareness (word concepts)

^ *Book that was read but was not used for data collecting within the research study due to absences*

+ Used over a two week period (three sessions), due to a class scheduling conflict which prohibited the study to be conducted two days in a single week.

Appendix B – PEER & CROWD examples

PEER

Example of a parent/teacher-child interaction using PEER:

PARENT: "What is this?" (prompt – *pointing to a picture of an apple tree*)

CHILD: "Tree."

PARENT: "That's right; (evaluation) It's an apple tree (expansion). Can you say *apple tree*?" (repetition)

CHILD: "Apple tree."

PARENT: "Yes! Very good; an apple tree!"

Adapted from, Dialogic Reading: An Effective Way to Read to Preschoolers (Whitehurst, 1992).

CROWD

Examples of prompting questions:

Completion prompts:
"It's thick to beat and quick to bake – It's fine to eat and fun to _____." The word is *make*.

[Hoberman, M. A. (1997). *The seven silly eaters.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt.]

Recall prompts:
Can you tell me what happened to the little house in this story?"

[Burton, V. L. (1988). *The little house.* New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.]

Open-ended prompts:
"Tell me what's happening in this picture." (Open-ended prompts work with a child who is familiar with the story.

[Rosen, M. (1989). *We're going on a bear hunt.* New York, NY: Aladdin.]

Wh – prompts:
"What's the name of this?" while pointing to an apple-peeler, for example.

[Wimmer, M. (1999). *Summertime.* New York, NY: Aladdin.]

Distancing prompts:
"Do you remember the time you went fishing? What things did you take with you on the boat?"

[Joosse, B. M. (1996). *I love you the purplest.* New York, NY: Scholastic.]

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Appendix C – CROWD

Dialogic Reading, Week Six (Amy, four years)

Line	Amy	Researcher (Sarah)
1.		Amy, now that we've finished reading *Llama llama time to share* twice, let's look back… and will you help me understand what happened in the story?
2.	Um… [looking] Um…	
3.		I see that you're looking at the pictures, that's good. Can you tell us what happened in the story, Amy ?
4.	Um, he was mad because she broke his arm off.	
5.		That's right; and how did that happen? How did the arm on the doll break…or rip?
6.	They pulled. They pulled and they kept pulling.	
7.		And then what happened next?
8.	Then the mom fixed it.	
9.		The mom fixed it! That's good!
10.	[looking at another page] I share my toys with my sister.	
11.		Wonderful! How do you think that makes your sister feel when you share with her?
12.	Good.	
13.		I think you're right, Amy. It does feel good to share with others! How do you feel when people share with you?
14.	I like it.	
15.		That's good, Amy. We *do* like it when others are kind and share with us; just like Llama and his new friend Nelly Gnu! Thank you for sharing with me today!

Appendix D – Concepts of Print Checklist*

Assess	Prompt the Student	Pre-	Post-	Comments
Book Concepts				
Cover of Book	Show me how you hold a book.			
	Show me the front of the book.			
	Show me the name of the author/illustrator.			
	Show me the back of the book.			
Title	Show me the title.			
Title Page	Show me the title page.			
Text Concepts				
Print tells a story	Where does the book tell the story?			
Concept of word	Can you put your fingers around a word?			
	Can you find two words that are the same?			
	Where is the first word on this page?			
	Where is the last word on this page?			
Concept of letter	Can you put your fingers around a letter?			
	Can you tell me the names of same letters on this page?			

   +   = Understands concept

  ✓ = Needs review

-   = Does not understand concept

* taken from Jennifer Arenson Yaeger's *Foundations of Reading* Study Guide 2013

Appendix E – Informed Consent Letters used in fall, '14

Informed Consent

1. Purpose:
   The purpose of this experiment is to study the effect(s) of dialogic reading and print awareness when using storybooks with preschool-aged children.

2. Procedure:
   In addition to regularly-scheduled thematically-based stories the classroom teachers read on a daily basis, participants in the research sessions will be read to and asked to retell, in their own words, events from the story and/or share connections they have with a character or moment within the story. This will mean more reading instruction during the time period in which the study is taking place. Participants will also be shown and later asked to identify various book characteristics (cover, pages, words, etc.). Participants will be encouraged to actively listen to and enjoy the storybooks, In whole-group and small-group settings, participants will look at pictures within these stories and be asked to voluntarily talk about the stories themselves, They will be given the opportunity to hear a story more than once in order to gain confidence in the story's meaning and further develop their oral language through retelling. Participants will report their thoughts throughout the study and their responses will be noted and upon completion of each reading session. Data will be collected through a combination of video/audio recordings and observational notes. Audio recording is critical as student responses will be carefully analyzed by the researcher outside the classroom setting in order to ensure details, such as student responses (including pauses, questions asked, etc.), of the session can be reviewed and not forgotten. The video recording will not be as important to the research, however the recording devise does include a video component and therefore it is possible, though not likely given the positioning of the recording devise (face-down), a participant may be video recorded. After reviewing the recorded materials (this may include multiple times in order to accurately transcribe part/all of a given session) the audio/video/observational notes will be destroyed by erasing the content from the recording devise, as well as shredding and recycling the paper documents (including observational notes). All data will be destroyed within two months of initial collection. This two month time frame will provide the researcher adequate time for transcription and/or data analysis.

3. Time required:
   Your child's participation will involve listening to storybooks in whole-group settings lasting approximately 10 minutes, each. These 10 minute sessions are in addition to regularly-scheduled all-class reading time, however the time used for these sessions will be taken from regular-scheduled class time such as bathroom breaks, or snack time (in which the child will be asked to join the group once his/her snack is finished). Each child will be allowed to participate in all normally-scheduled daily classroom activities and will not miss instruction, individual bathroom breaks when needed, snack time, or other classroom activities). In addition to listening to storybooks, he/she will be asked questions pertaining to the story itself; their thoughts/feelings/reactions; as well as questions pertaining to the print concepts themselves (titles, cover, words, etc.). These measures will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete and will occur on different days than the whole-group readings (time taken will still come from the above-mentioned opportunities within a normal class day).

4. Risks:

In both whole-group and small-group settings participants will be encouraged to listen to the story, the thoughts of others, as well as share ideas of their own. However, the decision about how and at what intensity and frequency, including simple one-or two word responses, is completely up to the participant. Data collected will only be shared to stakeholders in "group" form and pseudonyms (aka "fake" names) will be given to each participant, meaning no identifying information will be used within the study itself.

5. Benefits:

By participating in this study, participants will be exposed to additional reading opportunities aimed at strengthening their oral language and critical thinking skills, as well as further developing and improving overall comprehension skills.

6. Subject rights:

   (i)   The information gathered will be recorded in anonymous form. Data or summarized results will not be released in any way that could identify participants.

   (ii)   If you wish for your child to withdraw from the study at any time, you may do so without penalty. Participation or non-participation in the study will in no way affect your relationship with the classroom teachers, the researchers, or any personal or academic standing. The information collected from the participant up to that point would be destroyed if you so desired.

   (iii)   At the end of the session, you have the right to a complete explanation ("debriefing") of what this experiment was all about. If you have questions afterward, please ask your experimenter or contact:

   Sarah Peterson

   Graduate student, Dept. of Education, UWRF, sarah.peterson@my.uwrf.edu

   Also, once the study is completed, you may request a summary of the results.

7. Contact information for concerns:

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write:

   Molly Van Wagner, Director, Grants & Research, UW-RF

   River Falls, WI 54022 telephone: 715.425.3195

   Email: molly.vanwagner@uwrf.edu

This research project has been approved by the UW-River Falls Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, protocol # _____.

I have read the above information and willingly consent to my child's participation in this experiment.

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix F – Permission Letter used in spring, '14

March 16, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians/Caretakers,

My name is Sarah Peterson. I am a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls.

I am conducting a research study to examine the impact dialogic reading has on language development in emergent readers at the preschool level. Specifically, I am interested in whether or not dialogic reading impacts vocabulary comprehension, oral language acquisition, and attitude towards reading. I plan to interview the classroom teachers regarding ways in which they incorporate reading discussion into class story time. I am also planning to collect some limited data from the preschool students in class and am asking for your child's participation in this research.

Your child's participation will involve responding to a brief, 5-10 question survey regarding their general attitude towards reading, how often/frequently they read or are read to (how many times/days a week), their favorite things to read about, etc. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. They will also be invited to participate in small reading groups led by myself in which (s)he will join 3-4 other students from class. During the small-group reading sessions, which will take approximately 15 minutes, students will participate in book exploration via picture walks, vocabulary development, sharing of ideas and experiences, and brainstorming activities designed to engage and activate prior knowledge.

Understanding the relationship between actively engaging preschool-age children during story time and their comprehension of the content is a large part of my research.

If you or your child chooses not to participate, there will be no penalty. It will not affect your child's grade (if applicable), treatment, services rendered, and so forth, to which you or your child may otherwise be entitled. Your child's participation is voluntary, but highly encouraged and equally appreciated. The results of this research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used. Data collected will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone. I will destroy all data within one year of completing the study.

If you have any questions concerning this study or your child's participation in this study, please feel free to contact me at sarah.peterson@my.uwrf.edu.

Sincerely,

Sarah Peterson
Graduate Student

By signing below, I give consent for my child to participate in the above-referenced study. Please sign and return **by Thursday March 20, 2014**. Thank you.

Parent's Name: _____ Child's Name:_____

Parent's Signature: _____

Appendix G – Key vocabulary words: Spring, '14

from *Bear Snores On*, by Karma Wilson:		from *The Little House*, by Virginia Lee Burton	
Word in book	*Meaning*	*Word in book*	*Meaning*
Lair		Country	
Dank		Buds	
Wee		Brook	
Hare		Blossom	
Scuttles		Harvest	
Divvy		Ripen	
Wren		Coasting	
Raven		Horseless carriage	
Slumbering		Surveyor / surveyed	
Stokes		Steam shovel	
Blubbers		Steam Roller	
Fret		Automobile	
Blustery		Tenement House	
Spins / tall tales		Trolley Cars	
		Cellars	
		Stories	
		Shabby	
		Jack up	
		Foundation	

Appendix H – Partial list of suggested children's books to use in dialogic reading process

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* *denotes books used for Print Awareness (word concepts)*

Appendix I – Data from spring, '14

TABLE 1
Visual Indication of Engagement

	1	2	3	4
Jennifer	+	+	+	n/a
Cailey	o	+	n/a	+
Allison	o	o	+	+

* - Not observed   o Not consistently observed   + Consistently observed

TABLE 2
Using Pictures as Clues

	1	2	3	4
Jennifer	+	+	+	n/a
Cailey	-	-	n/a	+
Allison	-	-	o	+

* - Not observed   o Not consistently observed   + Consistently observed

TABLE 3
Dialogic Reading, Session Three (Alivia, four years)

Line	Allison	Researcher (Sarah)
1		What are these [pointing to trucks]? Can you see what's coming down the road?
2	Smoke	
3		Smoke is coming down the road; you're right! What's making the smoke?
4	A choo-choo train	
5		A choo-choo train? It could be a choo-choo train, yes! What about this? [pointing to a bulldozer] Do you know what this is?

Appendix F – Data from Spring, '14, *cont.*

6	[smile]	
7		[pause] "Do you have a guess?" [smile]
8	A tractor	
9		A tractor, yes! That's a *very* good guess! And on the front of this tractor is, a great big…scoop…and what are these tractors and trucks doing, do you suppose?
10	Digging	
11		Digging! Yes! What? Hmmm…what could, what could they be digging? Do you see? What does it look like they're doing along this road [pointing to picture in book]?
12	Digging dirt	
13		[affirm] They're digging dirt…and do you suppose they're going to be making something?
14	Yeah.	
15		Yeah? What do you think they might be making?"
16	[pause…smile…]	
17		Think of where they are, and what they're, look at what they're doing…what do you think they *might* be making?
18	Dirt	
19		Dirt? Oh, right! [pointing to all the dirt] Well, let's see and find out! It was a dirt road before, let's see what happens…

TABLE 4
Average Number of Words in a Response
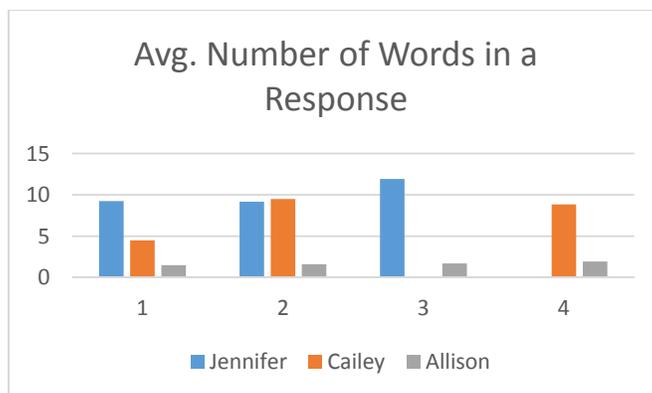
Appendix I – Data from spring, '14, *cont.*

TABLE 5
# of Questions / Prompts Asked Directly to Students

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Jennifer	4	6	12	n/a
Cailey	4	7	n/a	13
Allison	2	5	17	15
* *Number of Questions Attempted*				

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