

**Pre-literacy 12-24 months: what behaviors demonstrate
engagement and what strategies support increased
engagement?**

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Abstract

When adults indulge in a good book, it is because it captures his or her interest in some shape or form. The same is true for 12-24 month-olds. A book may capture the interest of a child for a particular reason. When this interest occurs, parents become an essential piece in the engagement puzzle. They have a choice to acknowledge engagement and extend it using various strategies or to let the moment pass. This action research studied the engagement behaviors of 12-24 month-olds in the pre-literacy phases of reading and the strategies that support increased engagement. The study involved four children ranging between the ages of 12-24 months. They were recorded reading with a parent during two different sessions. Parents were also interviewed before and after the study to get a better understanding of the nature of reading experiences they had with their children and to see if parents learned anything new about their children and how to engage them while reading together. The Developmental Continuum for Reading: Pre-Verbal Phase (Engagement) was utilized to give an idea for what the children were already demonstrating and to provide a focus for where they needed support to increase engagement. A focus group was also conducted to gain insight into reading and engagement through a parent's eyes. Results indicated that parents need to be aware of engagement behaviors and strategies in order to support increased engagement in their 12-24 month-olds.

Literature Review

Brain Development and Language

Language development is all about making connections in the brain. Arnold and Colburn (2010) confirm, "In the first three years of life, trillions of connections are made between brain cells as the brain grows to 80 percent of its adult size. The connections create pathways that are the key to learning and remembering" (p. 16). Therefore, the early years of child development become critical for building language. Honig (2009) states, "Before age 2, children have more neural connections in the brain than adults do. By age 10, the brain discards those connections that are not well wired in" (p. 96). Since neural connections are in abundance before 24 months of age, it is vital that they become hard-wired. Neurobiologist Lise Eliot (1999) states, "Brain wiring involves an intricate dance between nature and nurture" (Chap. 2, p.28). Genes in the body guide axons and dendrites, neural fibers that take and bring information to and from cells, to their proper

place. Once they start to link up with each other and begin working, experience comes to the forefront and solidifies the connections to fit each child's environment (Eliot, 1999).

Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl (1999) concede that the brain loves to learn from other people and these people influence how the brain gets shaped (p. 195-196). Parents are often the ones that have the most influence on a child's brain development, especially with the hard-wiring stage. They help their children build neural connections and work to keep them strengthened. Reading is one gateway to building and strengthening these neural connections. When parents engage their children in rich sensory and literacy experiences, such as interactive reading, these neural connections have a chance to multiply and to be reinforced. Strauss, Goodman, and Paulson (2009) looked at emerging brain research and how it linked to reading. They gathered that the brain puts together a model of the world and stores it in memory. When reading, the brain selectively searches its memory for information it uses to formulate instructions that will be sent from the cortex, a highly developed area of the brain, to sub-cortical structures, which are other thinking areas of the brain (p. 31). Without quality reading experiences in the first three years of life, children may lose out on the many neural connections needed to understand the world around them.

Parent Involvement and Literacy Development

A child's first teacher is his or her parents. For that reason, parent involvement is necessary for the development of a child's literacy skills. In a study that taught parents how to use interactive reading, or dialogic reading, with their children to promote early vocabulary skills, researchers Huebner and Payne (2010) were adamant about the fact that "parents must be recognized as essential partners in helping all children prepare for the demands of formal schooling and learning to read" (p. 200). Jacobs and Eccles (2000) assert, "Parents provide a context that engages a child and encourages interest and

participation in a learning task by facilitating experiences, translating and interpreting these experiences, and communicating value and efficacy for the task at hand” (as cited in Newland, L.A., Gapp, S.C., Jacobs, G.M., Reisetter, M.F., Syed, D., & Chih-Hsiu, W., 2011, p.68).

In a study that examined mothers’ beliefs regarding involvement in literacy activities and child literacy skills, it was found that “the interactive nature of book reading is more predictive of child literacy skills than the simple frequency of reading books at home” (Newland et al., p. 83). When parents provide interactive reading experiences, it means that there is mutual questioning and responding between parent and child, stories are made relevant to the child’s life, praise, feedback, and explanations are given, the books are physically shared, and comprehension is carefully monitored (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, p.8-9 as cited in Newland et al., pp. 71-72). Through these interactive reading experiences, parents often act as a guide, but also work to build meaning with their child. Makin (2006) describes how “child and adult co-construct the foundations of literacy concepts and behaviors” (p. 268). Neuman (1996) adds value to this statement by proposing that “shared reading in home contexts goes beyond traditional teaching in educational contexts, in that, through such events, the ‘content’ is primarily the transmission of parental values rather than literacy skills” (as cited in Makin, 2006, pp. 268-269). With this in mind, it becomes clear that parents do much more than simply say the words on the page when reading with their children. Parents not only build literacy skills and a passion for learning and exploring, but also teach their children about their own values and experiences. Newland et al. (2011, p. 85) states that “If adults invest in children’s literacy, children may have opportunities to discover the joys of literacy across multiple contexts and acquire the literacy skills necessary to have a full, productive life.”

Engagement and Reading: How Do They Work Together?

Blair and Johnson (2003) explain that “Reading is more than a cognitive process of decoding the words, reading fluently, or comprehending the text. It is becoming deeply involved, captivated, absorbed and immersed in a text – in other words, engaged” (p. 182). When considering all of the facets included in the reading process, engagement is an important, if not the most important, component. Phinney and Ward (2009) refer to engagement as “the affective side of the reading process” (Chap. 2, p. 18). If a child wants to read a book again and again, it is usually because he or she has formed some type of attachment to it. For 12-24 month-olds, the attachment might be the flaps of a board book, the sharp contrast between colors in a book, or the animal sounds that are heard with the press of a button. Blair and Johnson (2003) maintain, “[I]t is the “interestingness” of the books that leads to enjoyment and increases in positive attitudes toward reading by children” (p. 185). Without engagement, the satisfaction a child might garner from a text dwindles, reading becomes more or less “word-calling,” and comprehension, which defines reading, may suffer (Phinney & Ward, Chap. 2, p. 18). Engagement needs to be at the forefront if a child is to develop a love for reading.

Reading Developmental Continuum: Pre-Verbal Phase

Just as there are developmental phases one goes through from infancy to adulthood, there are also phases one may go through as he or she grows as a reader. The Reading Developmental Continuum describes these seven phases: Pre-Verbal Phase, Pre-Print Phase, Emergent Phase, Print-Focused Phase, Consolidation Phase, Silent Phase, and Flexible Phase (see Table 1).

Pre-Verbal Phase: Literacy is Awareness
Pre-Print Phase: Literacy is Enactment
Emergent Phase: Literacy is Exploration
Print-Focused Phase: Literacy is Work
Consolidation Phase: Literacy is Possibility
Silent Phase: Literacy is Personalization
Flexible Phase: Literacy is Essence

Table 1 – Phases of Reading Developmental Continuum

The Reading Developmental Continuum (Phinney & Ward, 2002) “is a tool for providing individually appropriate instruction to all literacy learners, regardless of their age or grade level. It is, above all, a framework for determining learning needs and for organizing and guiding reading instruction” (Chap. 2, pp. 13-14). It looks at all of the phases a reader may go through and highlights engagement as central to quality reading experiences; engagement is the first component to be assessed when looking at how a reader is developing in his or her reading phase.

The Pre-Verbal Phase of the Continuum, which looks at literacy as awareness, is where many 12-24 month-old readers operate. Learners are in this phase often before they have developed recognizable oral language (Phinney & Ward, 2009, Chap. 2, p. 15). “Behavioral indicators that reflect a child is listening and engaged in the story are appropriate physical movements and gestures, emotional expressions and comments” (Phinney & Ward, 2009, Chap. 3, p. 12). Some examples of these indicators in the Pre-Verbal Phase signifying engagement include attending to the illustrations or the reader during a read-aloud or the telling of a story, imitating the page turning action, using babbling to emulate the reading process, and seeking books as play objects. These

engagement behaviors in addition to others are assessed using questions to see whether a reader is consistent, developing, or not there yet (see Appendix A). If behaviors are marked as “developing,” it means they can be supported and fostered so that they have the chance to become “consistent” or regularly seen. If behaviors are marked as “not there yet,” it means that these behaviors have not been observed yet and need more time to develop. Using various engagement strategies with readers who are primarily showing developing behaviors in the Pre-Verbal Phase is essential if behaviors are to move from “developing” to “consistent.” When behaviors become “consistent,” engagement with a text increases.

Strategies to Support Increased Engagement:

Emotional and Physical Well-Being

Before trying various engagement strategies with 12-24 month-olds, it is important to consider their emotional well-being. Honig (2009) discusses that babies need to feel secure and safe before they are able to focus all of their energy on early learning. Snuggling close, gently rocking together, singing in low, sweet tones, reading stories, and having a conversation with a baby or child are all ways to help them feel emotionally secure (p.96). When parent and child read together, it is a time of physical closeness. The physical closeness works to build a stronger relationship between parent and child - a big part early literacy (Makin, p. 269). Arnold and Colburn (2010) reiterate, “When a child feels secure and loved, the brain secretes a substance called serotonin, which facilitates learning. . . . [allowing him or her] to learn more, and more easily” (p. 16). To ensure physical well-being, parents are encouraged to choose books that are made from cloth, hard cardboard, or washable plastic. These types of books are durable and can withstand

teething and play sessions (Honig, 2004, p. 24). They are also developmentally appropriate for 12-24 month olds.

Reading Aloud and Parentese

Reading aloud often not only gives a child the chance to hear the sounds and rhythms of their language, but it also exposes them to the reading voice very early on (Phinney & Ward, 2009, Chap. 3, p. 16). Dodge and Heroman (1999) tell about how most babies enjoy listening to the sounds of words that are being read (p. 22). *Parentese*, which is a special kind of talk, engages babies and children in the sounds and rhythms of a language like reading does. This talk is characterized by simple language, lots of voice and facial expression, and speaking in a slow, sing-song voice (Dodge & Heroman, 1999, p. 20). *Parentese* may also be referred to as *motherese* or *child-directed speech* (Makin, 2006, p. 268). Makin adds that this kind of talk has a high amount of repetition, forms of physical action are linked to the words spoken, and the adult's tone is higher, which seems to increase child responsiveness. Intonation is exaggerated as well (p. 268). Through *parentese* children "are developing their dispositions to engage, or not to engage, in various activities, and they are learning with whom it is appropriate to engage in which activities, and what their own role is in the activities" (Makin, p. 268). Children are figuring out how interact with their surrounding environment.

Dialogic Reading

Research continually supports dialogic reading as a strategy for early literacy development. Whitehurst (2001) describes dialogic reading as "an approach to reading that engages the child by making them an active participant in the story" (as cited in Dennis & Horn, 2011, p. 31). Flynn (2011) further explains it as an adult and a child basically having a conversation about a book. Eventually, the adult begins to talk less so that the child may increase his or her expressive language by talking more (p. 9). Doyle

and Bramwell (2006) convey that this technique involves multiple readings and conversations about books. It is over the course of these readings that children are encouraged to become the storytellers. Adults help with this transition by prompting children with questions and responding carefully to their words in order to support and give them the confidence to say more and more (p. 555). “The familiarity of a known story offers children a safe place to practice new skills, such as retelling a story or trying out a new vocabulary word” (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006, p. 556). Embedded in dialogic reading is the notion of rereading. Lewman (1999) and Shedd and Duke (2008) support rereading to enhance cognitive and social skills.

[R]epetition helps children develop memory, sequencing, and communication and social skills, while broadening their knowledge base and helping them predict events. Children may also begin to understand sentence structure and vocabulary and perhaps even incorporate these into their own conversations. (as cited in Dennis & Horn, 2011, p. 35)

Dialogic reading is a strategy that allows a child to extend his or her understanding of new vocabulary and concepts. With a little guidance from an adult, it becomes a powerful engagement method.

The Significance of Choice

Giving a child choice in what they want to read makes for a more enjoyable reading session between parent and child. Honig (2004) confirms, “Listening to preferred choices again and again increases a toddler’s sense of self and security” (p. 24). They take ownership in the reading session. “Being able to make choices positively affects the educational development of children. It helps children become both independent and responsible” (Johnson & Blaire, 2003, p. 184). The accessibility and location of books directly influences choice. “Books must be in close proximity on shelves either at or below . . . eye level” (Johnson & Blaire, 2003, p. 189). If a child cannot see a book or it is

not within his or her reach, the book has a minimal chance of being selected, read, and enjoyed.

Illustrations

Since children in the Pre-Verbal Phase of reading are not always aware of the print on a page, the illustrations become most important until they are ready to explore the print. To increase engagement, enticing illustrations are a must. They should be simple, bright, and colorful with good contrast; these types of illustrations will often catch the eye of a child. If the books have interactive features such as holes or finger puppets, the engagement potential is even better (Phinney & Ward, 2009, pp. 13-14). Quality illustrations aid in bringing about a deeper connection to what a child is hearing and seeing.

Conclusion

According to recent brain research, the first three years of life is an active time for the brain; a time when neural connections are at their peak. It is within this time frame, the Pre-Verbal Phase, that parents have the opportunity to foster a child's love for language and reading. Healy (1987) asserted, "Babies come equipped with the 'need to know'; our job is to give them love, acceptance, and the raw material of appropriate stimulation at each level of development" (p. 41). By sharing books together, a child is exposed to new vocabulary and concepts. This, in turn, allows him or her to learn about his or her environment and how the world works. Often, parents want to know how to share books together in a meaningful way. What strategies can they use to keep their child coming back for more? With this information in mind, my topic for research is: What behaviors in 12-24 month-olds demonstrate engagement and what strategies increase engagement in book exploration or in reading?

Action Research:**Pre-literacy 12-24 months: what behaviors demonstrate engagement and what strategies support increased engagement?****Methodology****Participants**

This action research project included two female and two male children ranging between the ages of 12-24 months. All recruited children had parents with an educational status beyond high school and with stable incomes due to both parents being employed. Three out of the four parents were female, while one parent was male. An invitation to participate in the study was extended to parents to identify what they were already doing to engage their children in literacy and to learn new strategies to further support this development. Each child was observed and recorded while interacting with books alongside of his or her parent in two separate fifteen minute sessions. The recording sessions were done in each child's own home with familiar surroundings. Table 2 presents pseudonyms, or fictitious names, of the children as well as their gender and age.

Child (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age at Recording (months) (Start of Study/ End of Study)
Olivia	Female	14 mo./15 mo.
Gwendolyn	Female	18 mo./20 mo.
Luke	Male	19 mo./21 mo.
Grayson	Male	20 mo./23 mo.

Table 2 – Participant Information

Procedure

Permission letters were read to parents and then signed in January of 2012 (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews were given on the same day in which the permission letters were signed (see Appendix C – Interview I). Parents answered questions about reading experiences they have had with their children as well as the emphasis they put on reading to their children. A similar interview was repeated at the end of the study in May of 2012 (see Appendix C – Interview II). In the second interview, parents answered questions regarding reading experiences and how their reading experiences with their children changed as a result of the study.

In January and February of 2012, parents and children were observed and recorded while interacting with books for fifteen minutes in their homes (Reading Session I). The researcher then talked with parents about what was observed with respect to each child's engagement level and behaviors. The researcher also made suggestions for what to try when reading together to increase the child's engagement. The Developmental Continuum for Reading: Pre-Verbal Phase was referenced to make sure the engagement strategies suggested to parents were appropriate for the child's reading development (see Appendix A). Behaviors observed were placed on the continuum in the "consistent," "developing," or "not yet" columns. Two behaviors were then selected from the "developing" column. For the behaviors that were selected, strategies were described and modeled with parents to build comfort and confidence in using them while reading with their children.

At the close of Reading Session I, parents were given a Reading Journal to document their child's engagement with books over the course of twenty-one days (see Appendix D). For these subsequent reading sessions, parents were asked to try out the strategies explained and modeled in Reading Session I. The Reading Journal included a

space to note the date and time of the reading session, a likert scale to rate engagement, and spaces to write book titles shared together, strategies tried and any child responses. The researcher encouraged parents to document as many reading sessions as their schedules allowed.

Reading Session II was held in March and April of 2012 and was parallel in format to the first session. Children and parents were observed and recorded reading together for fifteen minutes. The researcher and parents discussed and compared behaviors seen in the reading sessions and examined strategies already tried. At this session parents were given at least one new strategy to explore with their children during future reading sessions. Additionally, a new Reading Journal was given to parents to document engagement information for twenty-one reading sessions.

After the completion of both reading sessions and the second interview, three of the four parents participated in a forty-five minute focus group meeting led by the researcher at the beginning of June 2012. The goal of the focus group was to debrief and collect stories about shared reading experiences between parent and child and to learn more about reading engagement and engagement strategies in the Pre-Verbal and Pre-Print Phases (see Appendix E).

Findings and Results

Interview I – Key Themes

Two out of the four parents started reading with their child at about three months of age. One parent started reading before the child was born and one started reading between 6-9 months. All parents described first books as being simple and basic. Frequency of shared reading sessions appeared to be daily except for one child that did not have a set reading schedule. A typical reading session between parent and child

included the parent having the child sit next to him or her or having the child sit on his or her lap. One parent indicated that her child curls up on the couch to get comfortable while reading together. Child behaviors suggesting enjoyment included carrying books to the parent, helping to turn pages of the book, choosing books together or independently, and being animated while reading.

Favorite books varied by household. One parent stated that favorite books changed depending on her attention span at the time. They went from pretty simple to more interactive. Another parent confirmed that favorite books tended to be ones the child had seen before and was familiar with the content. The number of books per household ranged from 10-20 and were located primarily in living rooms and bedrooms. Parents stated that their children probably viewed reading time as fun, relaxing, and time alone with Mom or Dad. One parent thought his child viewed books as a type of toy. All parents viewed reading as important or definitely important. Reading was seen as both a learning tool and a time for bonding.

Reading Session I

Olivia (14 months) and Mom

Olivia's mom sat on the living room floor and encouraged Olivia to explore a book bin that was sitting out. When Olivia heard their family dog barking, she quickly walked over to the gate at the top of the stairs seemingly to find the dog. Mom then went over and picked Olivia up, sat her down on her lap as she fussed a bit, and proceeded to take a book out from the bin. Olivia sat for a little bit, but then went over to the book bin to search for a different book. Olivia's mom was able to get her attention for a short period of time and then away Olivia would go to check out a new book or another toy she found in her living room. This sequence went on throughout the fifteen-minute session. Olivia's mom used several strategies to interest her in the book she was holding or that Olivia was exploring - she pointed to the front and back covers, labeled characters on the covers, read a page or two with inviting vocalization, made animal noises, encouraged her to look through the book bin independently, asked questions or made statements to bring Olivia back to a book or to look at a new one. She said, "Want to read that one?" and "Let's read some more books." For one book about glittery snow, Olivia became more involved and sat for a longer period of time. It had an interactive feature - a hole. Olivia's mom put her finger in the hole and

wiggled it at Olivia. Olivia then did the same. She also went to lick the part of the book where the hole was and made high-pitched squeals.

Olivia seemed to be developing in two Pre-Verbal Phase behaviors – imitating the reading process through babbling and looking at the illustrations during reading. Therefore, the researcher had Olivia’s mom try more “wait time” when reading with her. This meant she would give Olivia more time to respond through babbling, pointing, or touching before she herself would respond to the book. The researcher also suggested that she try reading books to Olivia that attracted her over and over again. This strategy would not only set the scene for vocabulary development, but it would also help Olivia predict what happens next in her favorite books, which may aid in engagement.

Gwendolyn (18 months) and Dad

When the reading session started, Gwendolyn was sitting on her dad’s lap reading a bedtime book. Gwendolyn’s dad read the text on each page, told about the story through pointing and labeling, asked questions, and put his thumb under pages so that Gwendolyn could grab and turn them. After the book was done, Gwendolyn’s dad said, “Want to go get another one?” and “What good book are you going to get me?” Instead of a book, Gwendolyn brought over a farm animal puzzle. They worked on it together while making the noises of the animals. Once the puzzle was put back, Gwendolyn went over to the pile of books in the living room and looked to find which one she wanted. Her dad commented, “I see one of your favorite books over there.” and then said, “Do you like this one?” as he held it up. Gwendolyn did not seem interested in the book. When he held up a book called *Ten Little Ladybugs* (Gerth, 2000), she immediately crawled up on his lap. He read some of the text (a few pages were skipped), counted the ladybugs on the pages while she touched them, and let her play with the holes seen on each page. On the second to last page, Gwendolyn’s dad read, “And then she was...” Gwendolyn then turned to the last page and chimed in, “Home!” Gwendolyn’s dad also read books that had several flaps embedded in them. Gwendolyn would put them up and down. In *All About Me* (Sirett, 2008), he encouraged her to do actions present in the book and followed her lead as far as when to turn pages. For instance, when she didn’t turn a page right away, he repeated the text and then continued to wait until she was ready.

Gwendolyn seemed to be developing in two Pre-Verbal Phase behaviors – imitating the reading process through babbling and looking at the illustrations during reading. To help make these behaviors more consistent, the researcher had Gwendolyn’s dad try more “wait time” when reading with her as well as choosing and exploring books with enticing illustrations. Gwendolyn also seemed to be developing in two Pre-Print Phase behaviors as well. The Pre-Print Phase is the next phase after the Pre-Verbal Phase. By offering the word “home” on the last page of *Ten Little Ladybugs*, she was showing development in the behavior of supplying a word or short phrase in a familiar repetitive text and in responding to characters and events through purposeful movement, emotional expression, and verbal labeling. Although Gwendolyn was demonstrating behaviors in both

phases, the researcher had her dad concentrate on just the two behaviors from the Pre-Verbal Phase.

Luke (19 months) and Mom

To begin the reading session, Luke and his mom walked over to a bookshelf in their living room. His mom started pulling a few books off the shelf and showed book covers to Luke. When he pointed to particular books or touched books on the shelf, she pulled them out and put them in a pile. From there, they carried the pile of books over to the couch together. Luke's mom lifted him up and put him on the couch right beside her and proceeded to pull a cozy blanket up over their legs. As she put her arm around his waist, Luke said, "Baby!" Luke's mom responded, "Oh, the baby one!" and pulled *Baby Colors* (Hale, 2009) from the pile to read. As soon as Luke saw it, he got excited and hit the book cover. Luke's mom held the book while they read and turned the pages. When Luke went to turn a page, his mom gently moved the book out of his reach. While reading, she pointed out objects in the book. When Luke pointed to something, his mom responded to his words with either a label for what he was pointing to or a comment about the object. For example, Luke pointed to a banana and said, "Nana." His mom replied, "Nana. You like nanas, too!" After the book was done, both of them pulled a book from the pile. Luke's book was chosen to read next. He chose the following book as well. In this book about first words, Luke pointed to pictures and babbled. His mom would ask him questions such as, "Where's the duck? Which one is the duck?" When they came to a picture of a pair of socks, she labeled the picture and pointed out Luke's own socks he was wearing. If they happened to be enjoying a book with more text, Luke's mom would often talk about the pictures and skim over the text. Luke didn't seem to mind. Half way through the session, Luke jumped off the couch to get more books to read. Once they settled on a few more, they went back to the couch to cozy up with a blanket again. After reading and interacting with a book called *Daddy Kisses* (Gutman, 2003), Luke picked up the book again after his mom set it down. She started to read another book while he continued to explore *Daddy Kisses*, but then stopped to explore the book again with Luke. Luke explored it one more time during the reading session.

It was apparent that Luke was developing in two Pre-Verbal Phase behaviors – page turning and imitating the reading process through babbling. Therefore, the researcher had Luke's mom work on having him turn the pages in books. The researcher modeled putting a thumb underneath pages to help Luke grasp it more easily. This was suggested to help Luke take ownership in his reading. The researcher also recommended using the strategy of "wait time" when reading with him. This meant she would give Luke more time to respond through babbling, pointing, or touching before she herself would respond to the book. Luke seemed to also be developing in the Pre-Print Phase. The behavior of seeking familiar books with favorite objects was noted when he recognized the baby in a book and wanted to read *Daddy Kisses* again and again. However, the researcher had his mom concentrate on just the two developing behaviors in the Pre-Verbal Phase.

Grayson (20 months) and Mom

The reading session took place right before bedtime. Grayson had his pajamas on and went over to his bookshelf to pick out a book to read to mom. Grayson seemed familiar with this routine because there was no hesitation. Once he had one picked, he sat up on her lap in a rocking chair. They first explored the pictures of balloons seen on the front cover of *Dot and Dash: Lots of Love* (Dodd, 2010). As they read the book together, Grayson's mom turned the pages as he sat relaxed on her lap. When she turned to a page with balloons on it, Grayson squealed and babbled "balloons" with excitement. This brought laughter and a smile to his mom's face. Soon after, Grayson's big brother came into the room. While his mom advised his brother to go read books in his own room, Grayson continued to look at the book and move his lips as though he was reading it. When his mom needed to step out to talk with the older brother again, she gave Grayson the book and sat him on the chair by himself. She asked him to find the balloons. When he found a page with balloons, Grayson got down out of the chair and brought the book over to the researcher who was recording. He held the book up to her with expectant expression and began babbling. "Balloons" was the only recognizable word. Grayson's interest quickly turned to the recording device the researcher was holding. He began to poke at it. When his mom was back, she picked him up and they continued to read *Dot and Dash: Lots of Love*. Grayson's mom labeled objects and pointed to them. They also looked for balloons on several pages. Before the book was done, his mom asked Grayson if he wanted to pick out a different book. Grayson said, "Ok" and headed back to his bookshelf. He held on to *Lots of Love* for a few seconds, raised it up and showed it to his mom. She said, "Pick out a different one." When he held it up again, she responded with a smile, "Pick out a new one. I know you like that one." Grayson complied and put it back on the shelf. He then grabbed *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969). Grayson's mom stated, "Oh, that's a good one!" While reading some pages, she stopped to ask Grayson to point out objects such as the sun and the caterpillar. These objects were some of the actual words found in the book. Grayson's mom also let him take the lead turning some pages and reminded him which way to turn them. Throughout this book, she had good expression, which seemed to excite Grayson. He showed excitement through loud and high-pitched sounds and squeals. This was apparent with other books they read together as well. Throughout the reading session, Grayson's mom responded to his babbling and pointing promptly. She would tell about what was happening in the pictures and asked him questions.

Grayson seemed to be developing in two Pre-Verbal Phase behaviors – page turning and imitating the reading process through babbling. Therefore, Grayson's mom was encouraged to have him turn the pages more often in books they read together. The researcher observed that he could do it already, but just needed the opportunity to try it out more often for it to become a consistent behavior. The researcher also recommended using the strategy of "wait time" when reading with Grayson. This meant she would give Grayson a few more seconds than she already was giving him to respond to a book or a page in a book through babbling, pointing, or touching. This would help him initiate a conversation instead of his mom initiating each time. Like with Gwendolyn and Luke, Grayson also had some developing behaviors in the Pre-Print Phase. These behaviors

included responding to characters and events through purposeful movement, emotional expression, and verbal labeling as well as seeking familiar books with favorite objects. Grayson labeled balloons several times in *Lots of Love* and wanted to read the book over again.

Reading Session II

Olivia (15 months) and Mom

As in the first reading session, Olivia and her mom looked at books together in their living room. They pulled books from their book bin that was sitting out. She asked, “Do you want to read *Biscuit*?” and “Where’s *Biscuit*?” She continued, “We got to find it.” Once they found *Biscuit’s Pet & Play Halloween* (Capucilli, 2007) in the bin, Olivia sat on her mom’s lap and pointed out the kitty on the cover as well as Biscuit, the main character. They explored the touch and feel pages of the book together and took turns initiating the touches. After reading a page, Olivia would often point to an object and her mom would respond with its label or ask a question about it. On one page, Olivia pointed to grandparents and her mom said, “That’s grandma and grandpa.” After Olivia closed the book, her mom inquired, “Which other one do you want to read?” Olivia quickly grabbed a new book called *My Pretty Pink Alphabet Purse* (Bugbird, 2010). She pointed out objects like an apple and a ball and repeated “ball” after her mom asked, “Where’s the ball?” When Olivia wanted to move to a different book after the A and B alphabet pages, her mom tried different strategies to reel her back in to the book. She continued reading and also pointed to the cupcake and ducky while showing Olivia the pictures. Even after the effort, Olivia was still ready to try a new book. This book was also a touch and feel book. Olivia interacted with it by grabbing the book and licking, kissing, and touching the touch and feel areas of the pages. Olivia’s mom would let out a light-hearted laughter when this occurred. When deciding on a new book from the bin, her mom encouraged her to pick one that interested her. She suggested titles and pulled out books until one caught Olivia’s eye. It was a rhyming book called *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star: And other favorite bedtime rhymes* (Rescek, 2006). After reading a few rhymes out loud, Olivia’s mom said, “Here’s your favorite one...Teddy Bear.” As Olivia moved away from her lap, she continued with the rhyme trying to draw Olivia back again. It worked for about a second or so and then she was off to explore the camera and the researcher. However, when her mom brought out the book *Goodnight Moon* (Brown, 1947), she wandered right back over to her lap and sat and listened for a little over a minute. Although she got up again and began to play with her toy kitchen, Olivia’s mom continued reading the book as she played. This concluded the session.

After this session, Olivia seemed to become more consistent with imitating the reading process through babbling and re-reading favorite books. Therefore, the researcher suggested two new strategies to develop the behaviors of responding to text through body movement, sensory exploration, and babbling as well as seeking books as play objects. To illicit a response from Olivia and engage her in the sounds and rhythms of language, the researcher encouraged her mom to read stories, nursery rhymes, and poems to Olivia with more of a reading voice. The other strategy to help Olivia seek books as play objects was to explore books in

new ways. For example, Olivia's mom was asked to lie on the floor and read with Olivia instead of having Olivia in her lap all of the time.

Gwendolyn (20 months) and Dad

During this reading session, Gwendolyn and her dad read books in the living room. He asked, "Want to read some books?" She was reluctant and wanted to go for a walk with Dad. After they walked around the living room once, he pointed to books sprawled out on the floor and said, "Oh...do you see all the good books?" He then suggested reading *My First Words: Let's get talking!* (Sirett, 2008). After she heard the title, she immediately repeated the word "words" several times as she settled in on his lap. Throughout the book, Gwendolyn's dad would engage her in conversation with statements and questions. For example, he would say, "Show me clapping." or ask, "Where's the skirt?" If Gwendolyn didn't know where an object was on the page, he would point it out and label it once again or he would guide her finger to the object. She seemed to enjoy labeling and kissing objects when she found them as well. When she pointed objects correctly, he would praise her with comments like, "Good job!" He also waited for Gwendolyn to dictate when to go on to the next page. After more than half the reading session with this book, Gwendolyn suddenly closed it, got up and said "walk" repeatedly while trying to pull her dad to get up with her. He decided to stay on the floor and played with a puppet book called *Curious George: Pat-A-Cake!* (Rey, 2011). Gwendolyn eventually turned to the book and gave the puppet a hug. After she was done reading the book, her dad asked if she wanted to read *Goodnight Moon*. Gwendolyn just kept saying "monkey." Her dad thought she wanted to read the Curious George puppet book again, but it was actually *Eight Silly Monkeys* (Haskamp, 2003). Once she had the book in hand, Gwendolyn sat in her dad's lap smiling ready for the book to begin. He used a few strategies to keep Gwendolyn engaged throughout the book. He bounced her on his legs, used a voice for the doctor character, and allowed her time to play with the finger holes in the book.

During the reading session, the researcher observed that the behaviors of imitating the reading process through babbling and looking at the illustrations during reading were more consistent. As a result, two new strategies were given to him to try: read stories, nursery rhymes, and poems to Gwendolyn with more of a reading voice since she seemed to be engaged as he did the doctor voice and offer contributions by linking key words to her own everyday experiences. This strategy comes from a developing behavior in the Pre-Print Phase. It can also be considered an extension of the wait time strategy in the Pre-Verbal Phase where children are learning to imitate the reading process through babbling.

Additionally, it was apparent that Gwendolyn was developing with another Pre-Print behavior - supplying a word or short phrase in a familiar repetitive text. To help her make this a more consistent behavior it was suggested that her dad use the strategy of transferring the reader. This means that Gwendolyn would essentially take over the lead in a passage while her dad's voice diminishes. For example, he would say "Eight Silly _____" and she would say "monkeys" to finish the passage.

Luke (21 months) and Mom

As in the first reading session, Luke and his mom picked books out together from the living room bookshelf. Once they had their pile of books ready to go, they sat on the couch next to each other and pulled a blanket over their legs. Luke's mom first grabbed *Baby Giggles* (Hale, 2009) to share with Luke. In this book, Luke turned pages by himself. His mom put her thumb under pages to help him grasp them more easily. Throughout the reading session, Luke continued turning pages on his own with his mom's support. With a flap book on feelings, Luke's mom encouraged him to open the flaps on his own as well. She had said, "Open it," and "Can you open?" He would often re-open flaps to see what was inside again. When his mom got out a number book about kisses, Luke stopped to explore pictures for a longer time than he had with other books during the session. He would even move his face closer toward the book to get a better look at some pictures. His mom used the strategy of asking questions about the pictures he seemed to like the most to help him stay engaged. With one page about giving six kisses to a baby's chin, she asked, "Where's your chin?" and "Do you know where your chin is?" She then gently tapped his chin while saying, "See...there's your chin." Each book read in the session was picked by Luke's mom to read. However, if a book was chosen that Luke was not too excited about, it was put down until she had a book in hand that he was interested in reading. The strategy of giving Luke more time on pages in books to point, babble, and touch was observed frequently as well. This seemed to keep him interested in books for longer.

The researcher observed that the Pre-Verbal behaviors of imitating the page turning action and imitating the reading process through babbling were noticeably more consistent during this session compared to the first reading session. Therefore, the researcher had Luke's mom work on a new strategy, which was to provide repetition and choice when reading to Luke. The researcher asked Luke's mom to gather books she knows he enjoys and then let him choose which book he wants to read first, second, third, etc... The other strategy the researcher suggested was to continue working on the page turning action and extend it by following Luke's lead even more so by letting him dictate when to turn each page. This would hopefully give way to more conversation between him and his mom.

Grayson (23 months) and Mom

The reading session took place right before bedtime, which was similar to the first reading session. Grayson had his pajamas on, but did not go to the bookshelf when his mom asked him to pick out a book to read. He was more content with playing with his slipper and the rocking chair in the room. Therefore, his mom went over to the bookshelf and started pulling books off the shelf. Each time she took one off the shelf, she would say, "Do you want to read this one?" Eventually, Grayson wandered back over to the shelf, picked out his own book called *Baby Einstein: First Words* (Aigner-Clark, 2008), and sat up on his mom's lap in the rocking chair. Grayson turned pages and his mom asked questions about objects seen in the book. He responded to her questions by saying "there" or "right there" while pointing at the objects. When they came to a picture of a tambourine, she asked, "Where's the tambourine?" with a hint of doubt in her voice. When he

pointed to the tambourine, she laughed with excitement and replied, “How did you know that?” Grayson wore a faint grin on his face. Throughout the book, Grayson would also point to objects and his mom would label them or Grayson would label them himself. For instance, he labeled train with “choo-choo.” When he labeled something incorrectly, Grayson’s mom would politely chime in with the correct word. In response, Grayson would sometimes say, “Oh.” It was as though a conversation was taking place. The next book Grayson picked out was *Goodnight Moon*. After his mom read the first page, he grabbed the book and headed back for the bookshelf. She commented, “No, not having it?” Grayson replied quickly, “Nope.” He then picked up *Baby Einstein: First Words* again and brought it to his mom. She held on to it while advocating for a truck book of his on the shelf. When he turned to the bookshelf to find it, Grayson’s mom set *Baby Einstein: First Words* on the ground next to the rocking chair. When trying to decide on a new one, Grayson seemed to be having a hard time. Therefore, his mom asked, “Which book? Should I pick one out?” Grayson then turned back to the bookshelf and went to pick one out on his own. For about a minute or two, Grayson and his mom had a conversation about which one to read. He would show a book to his mom and she’d say, “That one?” and then he’d put it back on the shelf. Grayson would respond to her suggestions with words such as “oh,” “yeah,” and “there.” Soon he settled on a book about the ABC’s. The first time reading it, Grayson’s mom touched the letters as she said them stopping to talk about a picture when Grayson reached out to touch it. She also put her thumb under pages so that he could grasp and turn them easily. When reading the book a second time, Grayson read to his mom while she turned the pages. He babbled while pointing to the letters and had similar intonation to his mom when she first read it to him.

According to observations from Reading Session I to Reading Session II, Grayson proved to be more consistent in the Pre-Verbal Phase behaviors of page turning and imitating the reading process through babbling. Thus, the researcher suggested to Grayson’s mom that she try a strategy to help Grayson make more connections with stories he was reading. She could do this by offering contributions to his babbling by linking key words to his own everyday experiences. This strategy comes from a developing behavior in the Pre-Print Phase. In addition, to help Grayson become more consistent in the behavior of looking at illustrations while reading, the researcher recommended the strategy of repetition. His mom would work to encourage him to re-read books again and again to help him with vocabulary development.

Reading Journal Results

The following line graphs depict the level of engagement of participants during eight randomly picked reading sessions at home. These eight reading sessions took place after the researcher observed and recorded parents with their children during Reading Session I and Reading Session II. Parents documented the level of their child’s

engagement in Reading Journals using a rating scale from one to five (1 = no engagement and 5 = high engagement). This rating scale is seen on the vertical axis of each graph. The graphs also show the average rating between all participants on the eight random days.

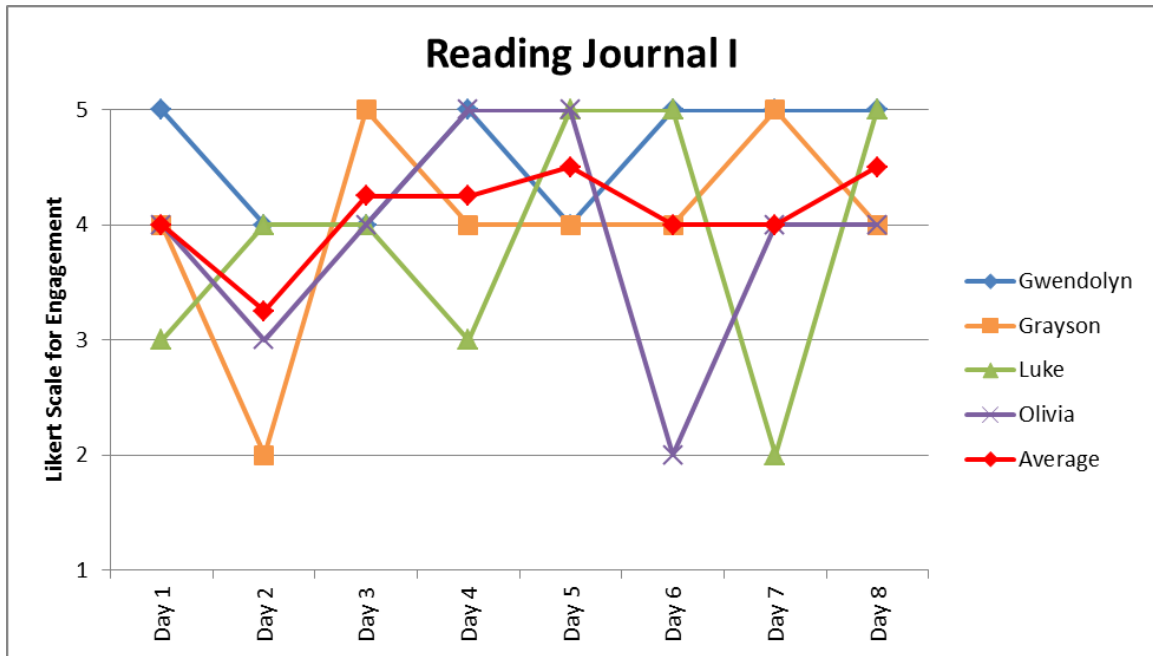


Figure 1 - Reading Journal I

The graph for Reading Journal I illustrates that the average engagement rating between all four children was between a three and five on each of the eight randomly picked days. One out of four children had an engagement rating of four or five on each of the eight days. Three out of four children had a rating of two on at least one of the eight days. Two was the lowest rating given to any of the children within the eight days. The strategies parents tried on these days with a rating of two were independent reading time and wait time. In regards to the low rating, one parent recorded, “She wanted to play.” Another parent wrote, “Started off good looking at books - lost interest quick and started being silly slapping and throwing books. Then sat by himself – looked and practiced page turning.”

Days in which parents rated their children at a four or five with engagement, strategies included repetition of books, wait time, and page turning. One parent who used the strategy of wait time wrote, “He loved this book because he could point out things he knew like bananas, socks, train, etc...” Another parent who used the same strategy in addition to page turning documented, “pointed and touched textures of touch and feel books...pointed out own body parts with books...had pages ready and independently turned them.”

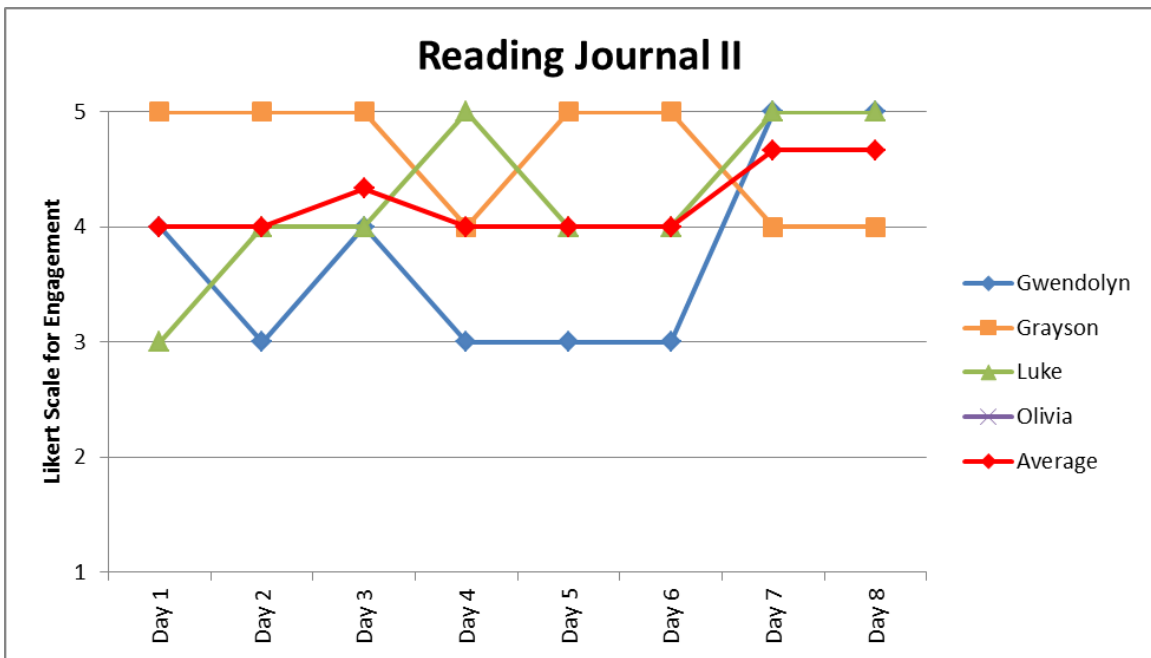


Figure 2 - Reading Journal II

With Reading Journal II, engagement ratings for Olivia are not shown because her mom had to withdraw from this portion of the study due to illness. The average engagement rating between the remaining three children was between a four and five for the eight randomly picked days. This is a slight increase from the average seen in Reading Journal I. One out of three children had an engagement rating of four or five on each of the eight days. One out of three children had a rating of four or five on all but one of the eight days. Two out of three children had a rating of three on at least one of the

eight days. Not one child was given an engagement rating below a three. One child, Gwendolyn, had engagement ratings that decreased from Reading Journal I to Reading Journal II. She was given a three for four of the eight days. In response to the lower engagement rating on those days, Gwendolyn's dad suggested that she would look at things in a book but didn't necessarily get excited over them and that she seemed to want to speed through pages in books. On one of the days in which he gave her engagement a rating of five, he was working with her on the strategy of relating items to experiences. He recorded, "She enjoyed relating the body parts in the book to her own and the animals to those she saw over the weekend." Grayson's mom, who was working on the same strategy, read the book *Goodnight Moon*. After this session, she wrote, "He LOVES the moon...even when we are outside he would point out the moon."

Other strategies parents worked on included reading aloud with rhythm and expression, repeating favorite books, giving choice when reading together, and following the child's lead when turning pages. Luke had consistent engagement ratings of four and five within Reading Journal II. His mom worked on repetition with Luke and made several positive comments. She noted, "knew interactions to *Daddy Kisses* before reading...loves that book." She also wrote after one session, "laid out stack of books and wanted all Sesame Street...loves pointing out the characters."

The following bar graph (Figure 3) compares the average engagement rating for each child from Reading Journal I to Reading Journal II. In this graph, the slight increase in engagement for the majority of children is evident as well.

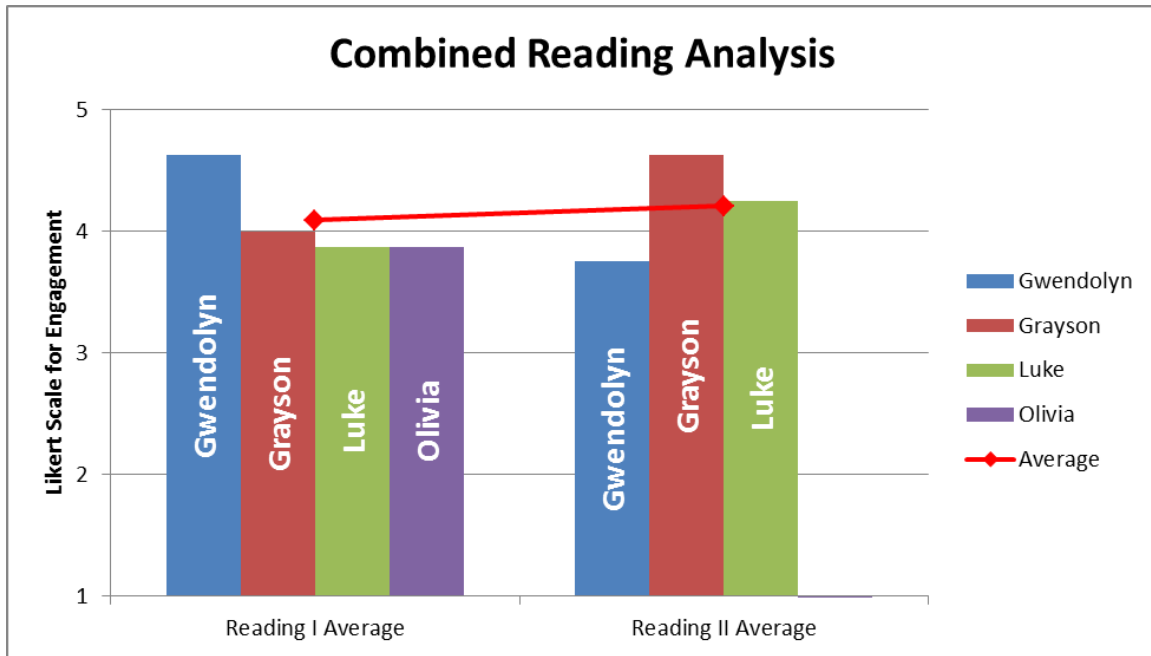


Figure 3 - Combined Analysis of Reading Journal I and II

Interview II – Key Themes

Five months following the initial interview, second interviews were held in the same setting. One parent e-mailed responses instead of completing an in-person interview. A typical reading session between parent and child included the parent or child initiating the reading time together; only one parent specified that some reading sessions were spontaneous. The parent would find her child up in his room reading independently. Another parent noted that reading sessions were usually right before bed as a part of a nightly routine. The parent knew her child enjoyed this reading time at night because of how much he wanted to read as soon as they walked in his room to get ready for bed. Other child behaviors suggesting enjoyment included an animated face, big smiles, and giggling. One parent expressed that he knew his daughter was enjoying their reading session because she flipped through pages in a book and picked out what she recognized.

Favorite books varied by household. *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown (1947) and *Daddy Kisses* by Anne Gutman (2003) were titles mentioned by two of the

four parents. One parent stated that anything interactive caught her child's eye. Another parent said that his child's favorite books were those that related to her everyday life. He gave the example of a photo album in which she likes to point to the people she knows and say their names. Another parent affirmed, "We have received some new books as gifts and after we read them a few times they become her new favorites." All parents thought their children viewed books in a positive way. One parent commented that her child loves books and appreciates reading time. Another parent responded, "[Reading is] something different than playing with toys and [it's] a good way to bond with Mommy and Daddy."

When parents were asked whether or not they viewed reading experiences with their children differently now as a result of the study, parents agreed they had. One parent explained, "I find myself paying more attention to different reading/learning techniques I have learned which I believe make the reading session more of a learning experience." Another parent told about how she has been more aware of her child's growths by writing down her observations. She remarked that it was only just a few months ago that he didn't know how to turn pages and would read books upside down. All parents viewed reading as important. One answered, "No question about it." Reasons given for its importance included that it's time well spent with your child, it is enjoyable, it gives your child a head start and gets them ready for school, and vocabulary improves as well as comprehension. One parent discussed that his child is able to learn about the world through reading.

Focus Group – Key Themes

To conclude the study, parents were invited to participate in a focus group. One parent did not participate due to illness. The focus group meeting was intended to take time to share reading experiences between parent and child and to learn more about

reading engagement and engagement strategies in the Pre-Verbal Phase and Pre-Print Phase. The researcher served as guide and story collector during the open discussion. To begin the meeting, the researcher asked the parents to share a memorable reading experience they had with their children during the study. All parents had a moment to share. Luke's mom shared about how *Daddy Kisses* (Gutman, 2003) was read so many times that Luke knew what was coming next even before the page was turned. He'd be waiting for the kiss on the nose or kiss on the hand.

Parents also discussed ways they could tell their child was engaged when reading together. Behaviors included squealing, laughing or giggling, looking at the pictures more, relating pictures to what was already known, and pointing objects out when prompted with a question like "Where is the truck?" Parents described behaviors that indicated low engagement as well. Some of the behaviors apparent during reading sessions were jumping and moving around a lot, switching books frequently, throwing books, and getting up to find new toys. Parents told about how it was as though their children didn't know what they wanted at that time or were thinking, "What else can I do?" Gwendolyn's dad and Grayson's mom pointed out that level of engagement often had to do with the time of day in which the reading session occurred. Both stated that before naptime and bedtime were times when engagement with books was the highest.

To increase engagement, parents tried several strategies. All parents agreed that a main strategy was to read interactive books. Flaps and holes were stated as features for the interactive books mentioned. One parent told about how she buys really hard covered books for wear and tear purposes. As conversation unfolded about flap, pull, pop-up, and hard covered books, a parent announced, "I don't think we have any left that are not broken!" This brought laughter into the room. Other strategies parents mentioned were to use an exciting voice when talking about a book to reel the child in, keep reading a story

if the child moves or walks away, choose books that have favorite items in them like balloons, or read books in which the child can point out several objects they already know or recite lines in which they are familiar.

When parents were asked to discuss the specific strategies they worked on with their children during the study, they all brought up seeing improvement in reading behaviors. One of the strategies Grayson's mom worked on was relating the books to real experiences. She explained that reading became more like a conversation that happened between the two of them. She continued, "It was cool to see those strategies work 'cause a lot of those things I don't think about." Luke's mom discussed how she see saw a lot of progress with Luke's ability to turn pages after she worked with him. At the very beginning, she always turned the pages for him and didn't think about letting him do it. Once she started helping Luke to do the turning, she noticed how much he improved and how he wanted to do it together when they read. At the end of the study, Luke got excited when she'd tell him to turn the page in a book they were reading and he could also sit on his own and turn pages independently. Luke's mom also explained that in the beginning of the study she was more protective of the books Luke wanted to read. She'd say, "Don't wreck it. Don't wreck it." However, as the study went on, she became more comfortable with putting books, especially those purchased from garage sales, in different places of the house for him to read on his own. Books were seen in his room and his little fort he created in the living room. Gwendolyn's dad further explained that he makes books accessible by Gwendolyn's toys so that she'd view them as toy and not something separate.

Parents also talked about how often their child initiates reading time. Luke's mom stated that she sees it more often now and that he could spend house thumbing through books. She went on to say that he has always loved books. Grayson's mom said that she's

not sure if she's seen an increase. However, she has noticed that the older he gets, the more interaction he has with books. He will a lot of times follow his big brother and do what he does. If his big brother is reading a book, he'll grab one, too. When Grayson does read on his own, his mom is quick to praise him. After discussion arose about reading in the car, Gwendolyn's dad chimed in that he does see Gwendolyn wanting to read more in the car. Before she preferred a toy, but now she'll ask for a book.

All parents agreed that reading is important. Two parents stated that the sooner you get your child interested in reading, the better off he or she will be in school. Parents also concluded that reading stimulates a child's brain, builds vocabulary through repetition of books, expands what they know, is a good learning tool, and is bonding time with your child. Parents also remarked that their views changed as a result of the study. One parent regarded the study as an "eye-opener." She affirmed that reading is really good to have as a part of your day. She even noticed that she's been reading more. Another parent identified that taking part in the study made you really sit down and read and think about strategies you were using with your child. One acknowledged that this study helped him realize how much a child can actually pick up when reading a book. He gave the example of his daughter identifying a giraffe in a book when he didn't even know she knew that animal.

As the focus group meeting came to a close, the researcher asked parents to share any other thoughts about reading. Grayson's mom declared that Grayson appeared to be a different kid after making reading a routine at night. She said it was almost as though he behaved differently because of the structure and bonding time – he seemed to go bed better and he was more respectful. Additionally, Luke's mom responded that reading is so valuable because not only is it bonding time and a way to build vocabulary, it is also "learning outside their world." She went on to say that it makes her a little sad to know

that there are some children out there that don't get read to and don't have those experiences with books.

Interpretation and Analysis of Findings and Results

Qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews, observations and recordings, journal responses, and a focus group verified that reading engagement is likely to increase in 12-24 month-olds when parents are *aware* of behaviors that demonstrate engagement and are *aware* of the strategies that can help increase engagement. Just by being aware of engagement behaviors and strategies in the Pre-Verbal Phase, parents who participated in the study proved to be more in tune with what their children were demonstrating and the progress they were making. For instance, Luke showed significant progress with the page-turning action from the beginning to the end of the study. His mom could see this specific behavior improving when they read together and when she observed him reading independently. Luke needed help turning pages at first, but then he could do it all by himself. It went from a developing behavior to a consistent behavior.

During the study, the researcher modeled strategies for parents and noticed that the behaviors targeted by the strategies modeled had improved. Two parents who worked on the strategy of linking key words to their child's experiences had the strategy modeled for them after Reading Session II. The researcher showed parents what the conversation would potentially sound like when reading with their children. During the focus group meeting, these same parents mentioned the strategy as one they worked on and gave examples in which they linked objects in a book to experiences they had either earlier in the day or in previous experiences. These examples backed up their understanding of the strategy and showed how well their children were responding to the conversations.

In addition to the qualitative data, quantitative data in the form of an engagement rating scale in Reading Journals I and II, also revealed that reading engagement is likely to increase when parents utilize strategies with their children. By looking at the line graphs, it is apparent that the engagement ratings in Reading Journal I compared to the ratings seen in Reading Journal II, rose for the majority of children. The average between all of the children showed a solid increase from Reading Journal I to Reading Journal II. This qualitative and the quantitative data supports the notion that parents can greatly affect the engagement level of their children when reading books.

Implications and Conclusions

This action research pointed out that 12-24 month-olds benefit from parent knowledge about engagement behaviors and strategies in the Pre-Verbal and Pre-Print Phases. With this awareness, levels of engagement tend to increase. If engagement increases, a child's love for reading may increase as well. Brain research points to the importance of building connections within the first three years of life. Therefore, it becomes pertinent that parents are given the tools to help their children become engaged readers so they are able to build more and more connections. The parent interviews and focus group really honed in on the fact that reading with your child is much more than just saying the words on the page. It is about a special bond between parent and child as well as a chance to learn about the world. A parent is a child's first teacher and by empowering parents with information on engagement and how to increase it, children may come to know their parents as the best teachers they've ever had!

Limitations

After reviewing the research and data, limitations surfaced. One limitation was the amount of participants. Only four children and parents participated, which gave the researcher just a small glimpse into the behaviors that demonstrate engagement and the strategies that could be used to increase it. Every child is different and having more participants would have allowed the researcher to possibly observe additional engagement behaviors and/or strategies. Furthermore, there was not a randomized controlled experimental group to compare the engagement levels of the 12-24 month-olds in the study. Also, the validity of results would have been enhanced by having another person note the engagement level on the likert scale.

Another limitation was the fact that the researcher knew all of the participants. They were either family or friends. Therefore, the findings and results could have been different if participants were selected at random. Moreover, the mood and health of the 12-24 month-olds and the time of day in which the recordings took place appeared to have some impact on the actual engagement levels noticed and behaviors demonstrated. One child was sick during a recording and was not herself. As a result, the researcher found it challenging to place her accurately on the Reading Developmental Continuum based on those observations. Also, the age range of the children at the start and end of the study proved to be variable. One child had one month in between reading sessions, two children had two months in between, and one child had three months in between sessions. The scheduling aspect of the reading sessions seemed to have caused the variable range. The researcher worked to arrange the reading sessions on days or nights that were most convenient for the families. Therefore, the amount of time between reading sessions may have had an impact on each child's progress with Pre-Verbal or Pre-Print behaviors. Even with these limitations, the study is a building block for research in this area.

Reflection

Before delving into the data collection, it was thought that parents would already know the importance of reading to their 12-24 month-olds. Research revealed that parents understand the importance of reading, but need more guidance in identifying engagement behaviors and in using strategies to support increased engagement. Modeling and discussion about engagement behaviors and strategies proved to be the guidance they needed. The researcher felt parents walked away from the study with a richer understanding of reading and the effect engagement has on the reading process. The focus group supported this notion. Parents shared what they learned about reading engagement and gave examples of behaviors that demonstrate engagement along with strategies they used with their 12-24 month old throughout the study. What they shared often reverted back to previous discussions they held with the researcher. It was evident that both the children and parents became more engaged with reading over the course of the study. Learning took place.

This action research is only a beginning to what all can be gleaned from research in the area of pre-literacy and engagement. There is a need to know more. The following questions merit more research:

- Would the same results occur if there were more participants?
- Are there differences in engagement behaviors between boys at 12-24 months and girls at 12-24 months?
- What tend to be the earliest behaviors displayed in the Pre-Print Phase?
- If a 12-24 month-old does not have a parent(s) that can read with him or her regularly, does the child display behaviors that show limited engagement with

books? Is limited engagement with books linked to less developed language skills?

Both the literature review and the action research project point to the conclusion that parents need to be aware of engagement behaviors and strategies in order to support increased engagement in their 12-24 month olds. Modeling strategies with parents and having conversations about the importance of reading engagement will empower them to read more with their children and pass on the love of reading.

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Appendix A

Reading Developmental Continuum:
 Reading Behavior Checklist for Pre-Verbal, Pre-Print, and Emergent Phases
 Margaret Y. Phinney and Gay C. Ward

ENGAGEMENT												
	Pre-Verbal (Awareness)				Pre-Print (Enactment)				Emergent (Exploration)			
Does the reader:												
CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N
demonstrate attentiveness through social participation, imitation & performance?	— attend to the illustrations or the reader during read-aloud or telling of stories? — imitate the page turning action? — imitate the reading process through babbling?				— offer contributions by commenting on ideas, pictures, and key words? — supply a word or short phrase in a familiar repetitive text or correct misreadings?				— readily participate orally in choral recitation, cloze activities with texts, and prediction and discussion of texts and picture content? — imitate the reading process by turning the pages systematically and sequentially, focusing on each page in turn?			
respond emotionally?	— respond to the text through body movement, sensory exploration, and babbling?				— respond to characters and events through purposeful movement, emotional expression, and verbal labeling? — respond to connections between texts and family roles and experiences?				— identify personal experiences in books? — respond to connections between texts and high visibility community roles and localities?			
take ownership by reading to learn and to satisfy curiosity?	— look at the illustrations during reading? — seek books as play objects?				— seek familiar books with favorite objects? — spontaneously offer comments on the story using the illustrations as cues?				— spontaneously ask to revisit introduced texts with an experienced reader? — role-play reading independently? — ask questions closely related to words and pictures? — spontaneously quote repetitive and 'catchy' phrases <i>heard</i> from the text?			
demonstrate metacognition?					— explain preferences?				— talk about own reading and offer definitions of reading and writing?			
express interest in reading through writing?					— put squiggles on paper, pictures?				— spontaneously imitate writing-like behavior?			

C=Consistent D=Developing N=Not yet

Appendix B

Parent Letter

Dear Parents,

As you may know, I am currently working toward my Master's Degree in Reading at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. As a part of my coursework, I am required to complete a thesis/action research project related to literacy. For this project, I have chosen to study what behaviors demonstrate engagement and what strategies support increased engagement in 12-24 month-olds.

I am requesting permission to work with you and your child for this project. The research involves video recording two reading experiences with your child, keeping a journal of reading behaviors seen and strategies used with your child regarding his or her engagement while reading, and being interviewed before and after reading sessions. A focus group will also be put together at the end of the research to discuss your reading experiences with the other parents involved in the project.

The recordings may be used in the research presentation to help other educators and students learn about the engagement piece of reading. However, everything will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for names and locations. All recordings will be kept under lock and key so as to retain anonymity and will be destroyed after 4 years. If you don't want your recordings to be used during the presentation, please say so on the permission form.

If you agree to have your child participate in this action research project, please complete the attached permission form and return it to me as soon as possible. You may withdraw from the research project at any time. I appreciate your assistance.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Permission for Participation

I, _____, give permission for participation in a thesis/research project. My permission states I understand:

- Recordings made involving myself may be used for the presentation of the project findings with a pseudonym created to protect my identity and that of my child.
- These recordings may be used for educational purposes with other students and educators.
- The recordings will be completely destroyed in the year 2016.
- I may have access to all reports and records put together during the research project.
- I may withdraw from the research at any time.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C – Interview I**Interview I – Before the Study**

Child: _____ Parent: _____

- 1) Tell me about your reading experiences with your child. When did you start reading with your child?
- 2) How often do you engage in these reading experiences?
- 3) Does your child enjoy your time reading together? How do you know?
- 4) Describe a reading session.
- 5) When did you start reading with your child? What did you start reading to your child?
- 6) Do you have favorite books you read to your child?
- 7) Does your child have favorite books he or she keeps coming back to?
- 8) Where do you keep your books?
- 9) How many books are available to you child (estimate 5-10, 10-20, etc...)?
- 10) How do you think your child views books?
- 11) Do you think reading to your child is important?
Why or why not?

Appendix C – Interview II**Interview II – After the Study**

Child: _____ Parent: _____

- 1) Describe a reading session.
- 2) Does your child enjoy your time reading together? How do you know?
- 3) Do you have favorite books you read to your child? Have you discovered any new favorites along the way?
- 4) Does your child have favorite books that he or she chooses?
- 5) How do you think your child views books?
- 6) Do you view your experiences with your child differently now as a result of this study?
- 7) Do you think reading to your child is important?
Why or why not?

Appendix D

Reading Journal

Child: _____ Parent: _____

Scale (1 = no engagement and 5 = high engagement)

Date and Time	Rate your child's engagement during this reading session (1-5)	What did you and your child read?	What strategies did you try?	How did your child respond?
Day 1 Date: Time:				
Day 2 Date: Time:				
Day 3 Date: Time:				
Day 4 Date: Time:				
Day 5 Date: Time:				
Day 6 Date: Time:				

Appendix E

Focus Group Meeting – Saturday, June 2, 2012

Welcome

- Thank participants for being a part of the study.
- Discuss purpose and goal of meeting. “This focus group meeting is an open discussion to debrief and share experiences had throughout the study. It is a time to learn more about reading engagement behaviors and strategies. Please see me as merely a story collector and guide throughout the meeting. It will run anywhere from thirty minutes to one hour.”

Ground Rules

- Participate as much as possible.
- Ask questions as they come up.
- Respect each other’s opinions and don’t interrupt one another.

Introductions

- Have participants state their names, their child’s name and age, and their favorite reading experience when they were children.

Questions to Guide Discussion

- Can you tell me about some memorable experiences you’ve had reading to your child during this study?
- What are some ways you could tell your child was engaged when you read together?
- Were there times when you knew your child was not engaged? How could you tell?
- What did you try to help your child become engaged again?
- What strategies did you use to keep your child engaged during reading sessions? Did you try any other strategies? What were they?
- How often does your child pick up books to read without you initiating the reading session?
- Has their time with books increased as a result of this study?
- Do you feel reading is important?
- Have your views about reading changed as a result of this study? How so?
- If this study were done again, what is something else that could have helped you when reading with your child? Is there something you would have wanted to know more about?
- Are there any other thoughts about reading with your child or reading in general that you’d like to share?

Closing Remarks – Thank everyone again for their participation in the study. ☺

Appendix F

Olivia

• Reading Session I (2-13-12)

• Reading Session II (2-23-12) Reading Developmental Continuum:
Reading Behavior Checklist for Pre-Verbal, Pre-Print, and Emergent Phases

Margaret Y. Phinney and Gay C. Ward

ENGAGEMENT												
Pre-Verbal (Awareness)				Pre-Print (Enactment)				Emergent (Exploration)				
Does the reader:												
CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N
demonstrate attentiveness through social participation, imitation & performance?	— attend to the illustrations or the reader during read-aloud or telling of stories? — imitate the page turning action? — imitate the reading process through babbling?		✓	✓	— offer contributions by commenting on ideas, pictures, and key words? — supply a word or short phrase in a familiar repetitive text or correct misreadings?				— readily participate orally in choral recitation, cloze activities with texts, and prediction and discussion of texts and picture content? — imitate the reading process by turning the pages systematically and sequentially, focusing on each page in turn?			
respond emotionally?	— respond to the text through body movement, sensory exploration, and babbling?		✓	✓	— respond to characters and events through purposeful movement, emotional expression, and verbal labeling? — respond to connections between texts and family roles and experiences?				— identify personal experiences in books? — respond to connections between texts and high visibility community roles and localities?			
take ownership by reading to learn and to satisfy curiosity?	— look at the illustrations during reading? — seek books as play objects?	✓	✓	✓	— seek familiar books with favorite objects? — spontaneously offer comments on the story using the illustrations as cues?				— spontaneously ask to revisit introduced texts with an experienced reader? — role-play reading independently? — ask questions closely related to words and pictures? — spontaneously quote repetitive and 'catchy' phrases heard from the text?			
demonstrate metacognition?					— explain preferences?				— talk about own reading and offer definitions of reading and writing?			
express interest in reading through writing?					— put squiggles on paper, pictures?				— spontaneously imitate writing-like behavior?			

C=Consistent D=Developing N=Not yet

Gwendolyn

- Reading Session I (1-30-12)
 - Reading Session II (4-15-12)
- Reading Developmental Continuum:**
Reading Behavior Checklist for Pre-Verbal, Pre-Print, and Emergent Phases
Margaret Y. Phinney and Gay C. Ward

ENGAGEMENT												
	Pre-Verbal (Awareness)			Pre-Print (Enactment)			Emergent (Exploration)					
Does the reader:												
CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N
demonstrate attentiveness through social participation, imitation & performance?	— attend to the illustrations or the reader during read-aloud or telling of stories? — imitate the page turning action? — imitate the reading process through babbling?	✓	✓		— offer contributions by commenting on ideas, pictures, and key words? — supply a word or short phrase in a familiar repetitive text or correct misreadings?	✓	✓		— readily participate orally in choral recitation, cloze activities with texts, and prediction and discussion of texts and picture content? — imitate the reading process by turning the pages systematically and sequentially, focusing on each page in turn?			
respond emotionally?	— respond to the text through body movement, sensory exploration, and babbling?		✓	✓	— respond to characters and events through purposeful movement, emotional expression, and verbal labeling? — respond to connections between texts and family roles and experiences?				— identify personal experiences in books? — respond to connections between texts and high visibility community roles and localities?			
take ownership by reading to learn and to satisfy curiosity?	— look at the illustrations during reading? — seek books as play objects?	✓	✓		— seek familiar books with favorite objects? — spontaneously offer comments on the story using the illustrations as cues?				— spontaneously ask to revisit introduced texts with an experienced reader? — role-play reading independently? — ask questions closely related to words and pictures? — spontaneously quote repetitive and 'catchy' phrases heard from the text?			
demonstrate metacognition?					— explain preferences?				— talk about own reading and offer definitions of reading and writing?			
express interest in reading through writing?					— put squiggles on paper, pictures?				— spontaneously imitate writing-like behavior?			

C=Consistent D=Developing N=Not yet

Luke

• Reading session I (2-11-12)

• Reading Session II (3-25-12) Reading Developmental Continuum:

Reading Behavior Checklist for Pre-Verbal, Pre-Print, and Emergent Phases

Margaret Y. Phinney and Gay C. Ward

ENGAGEMENT												
	Pre-Verbal (Awareness)			Pre-Print (Enactment)			Emergent (Exploration)					
Does the reader:												
CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N
demonstrate attentiveness through social participation, imitation & performance?	— attend to the illustrations or the reader during read-aloud or telling of stories? — imitate the page turning action? — imitate the reading process through babbling?	✓	✓		— offer contributions by commenting on ideas, pictures, and key words? — supply a word or short phrase in a familiar repetitive text or correct misreadings?				— readily participate orally in choral recitation, cloze activities with texts, and prediction and discussion of texts and picture content? — imitate the reading process by turning the pages systematically and sequentially, focusing on each page in turn?			
respond emotionally?	— respond to the text through body movement, sensory exploration, and babbling?		✓	✓	— respond to characters and events through purposeful movement, emotional expression, and verbal labeling? — respond to connections between texts and family roles and experiences?				— identify personal experiences in books? — respond to connections between texts and high visibility community roles and localities?			
take ownership by reading to learn and to satisfy curiosity?	— look at the illustrations during reading? — seek books as play objects?		✓	✓	— seek familiar books with favorite objects? — spontaneously offer comments on the story using the illustrations as cues?		✓		— spontaneously ask to revisit introduced texts with an experienced reader? — role-play reading independently? — ask questions closely related to words and pictures? — spontaneously quote repetitive and 'catchy' phrases heard from the text?			
demonstrate metacognition?					— explain preferences?				— talk about own reading and offer definitions of reading and writing?			
express interest in reading through writing?					— put squiggles on paper, pictures?				— spontaneously imitate writing-like behavior?			

C=Consistent D=Developing N=Not yet

Grayson

• Reading Session I (2-1-12)

• Reading Session II (4-11-12)

**Reading Developmental Continuum:
Reading Behavior Checklist for Pre-Verbal, Pre-Print, and Emergent Phases**

Margaret Y. Phinney and Gay C. Ward

ENGAGEMENT												
	Pre-Verbal (Awareness)			Pre-Print (Enactment)			Emergent (Exploration)					
Does the reader:												
CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N	ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	C	D	N
demonstrate attentiveness through social participation, imitation & performance?	— attend to the illustrations or the reader during read-aloud or telling of stories? — imitate the page turning action? — imitate the reading process through babbling?	✓			— offer contributions by commenting on ideas, pictures, and key words? — supply a word or short phrase in a familiar repetitive text or correct misreadings?		✓		— readily participate orally in choral recitation, cloze activities with texts, and prediction and discussion of texts and picture content? — imitate the reading process by turning the pages systematically and sequentially, focusing on each page in turn?			
respond emotionally?	— respond to the text through body movement, sensory exploration, and babbling?		✓		— respond to characters and events through purposeful movement, emotional expression, and verbal labeling? — respond to connections between texts and family roles and experiences?		✓		— identify personal experiences in books? — respond to connections between texts and high visibility community roles and localities?			
take ownership by reading to learn and to satisfy curiosity?	— look at the illustrations during reading? — seek books as play objects?		✓	✓	— seek familiar books with favorite objects? — spontaneously offer comments on the story using the illustrations as cues?		✓		— spontaneously ask to revisit introduced texts with an experienced reader? — role-play reading independently? — ask questions closely related to words and pictures? — spontaneously quote repetitive and 'catchy' phrases heard from the text?			
demonstrate metacognition?					— explain preferences?				— talk about own reading and offer definitions of reading and writing?			
express interest in reading through writing?					— put squiggles on paper, pictures?				— spontaneously imitate writing-like behavior?			

C=Consistent D=Developing N=Not yet