Developing literacy through storybook reading events

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Abstract
This study examined the effects of storybook reading on children's emergent literacy. Benefits and challenges were discussed which were associated with facilitating literacy through teacher-read storybook events. Also guidelines were presented for teachers to use storybooks as an emergent developmental and instructional method. Conclusions were drawn from the literature and recommendations were made for the future facilitation of storybook reading events.
DEVELOPING LITERACY THROUGH STORYBOOK READING EVENTS

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by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

"Children’s literature can and should play an integral part in the child’s developmental journey" (Jalongo, 1988, p. 1). However, a look at history reveals that children’s literature only recently became a facet in the early childhood curriculum. Before the 19th century, children saw few books that fit their needs and interests. The agricultural society of the time did not require the use of books or reading to sustain a way of life (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1998). In fact, many children had no formal schooling, and those children who could read were left with reading literature intended for adults.

During the latter part of the 1800s, a shift from agricultural to an industrialized society brought a substantial change to the culture of the United States. With this shift, a need for a formal system of education became evident, and therefore, children’s education received more attention (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1998). Yet even though publishing of children’s literature increased and even though a few proponents (e.g., Elliot, Elson, & Huey) advocated using children’s literature in classrooms, storybooks per se remained an unrecognized instructional component within the educational system.

Benign Neglect

The status of children’s literature did not change between the late 1800s to 1920s; neither research nor practices in the early childhood experiences changed. In fact, Teale and Sulzby (1986) labeled this period benign neglect for “...not much of anyone was addressing the issue of, much less researching, pre-first-grade reading.... The general belief was that literacy development did not begin until the child encountered formal instruction in school” (p. viii). At
this time, the attitude of most educators was that reading should not be formally taught to children under the age of 6 or 7. Parents were encouraged to read stories to their children and to provide a stimulating environment. Yet, the educational system was not helpful in defining a stimulating environment (Teale, 1995).

Early in the 20th century, progressive educators, supported by the views of John Dewey, endorsed the kindergarten classroom as a place to learn about the world around them in ways that were appropriate to their age and developmental characteristics. “Early kindergarten leaders placed primary emphasis on learning from play and from doing, rather than learning from symbols” (Teale, 1995, p. 99). Formal reading instruction for kindergarten students remained non-existent, and furthermore, kindergarten teachers did not even consider challenging this rationale. As such, reading storybooks simply became another play activity and not deemed as an instructional means.

Reading Readiness

By the 1920s a change in thinking began to emerge. Educators looked at early childhood programs and the kindergarten as a period of preparation (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The reading readiness movement took root; thinking from this movement proceeded from the maturation view of *wait and watch* to a later behavioristic model of instruction. Then also, with the increased interest in the scientific approach, testing instruments became an integral part of classroom assessments, as well as an integral part of decision-making for future educational programs—even in early childhood. As such, “educators began to utilize mostly skill-based instruction” (McMahon, Richmond, & Reeves-Kazelskis, 1998, p. 173). Workbooks, pen and pencil tasks, and concept drills became the focus in skill instruction. Young children were expected to develop adequate “speaking and listening skills, to be able to discriminate visually
and auditorily, to recognize the letters of the alphabet, and to associate some letters with sounds. But never was there any intention to teach them to read in the readiness program; they had to get ready first” (Teale, 1995, p. 105). In general, students were taught how to read before attempting any higher-order thinking tasks (e.g., comprehension). Reading readiness programs became firmly entrenched during the 1960s and remained prevalent into the 1980s (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Still, reading storybooks remained on the fringes of those programs.

**Emergent Literacy**

However, during the late 1970s, some educators and researchers began to challenge the thinking behind reading readiness (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Scholars from reading and language arts education, researchers from the field of early childhood education, and others from psychology and linguistics showed an interest in young children’s literacy development. Thence, they began researching and studying literacy development in very young children. The findings of these and other professionals were the following:

[These findings] pushed aside notions that young children needed to get ready to read and write but rather were emergent readers and writers whose development reflected the nature of their experiences with specific storybooks, informational books and texts, and writing rather than with contrived readiness materials. (Martinez & McGee, 2000, p. 161)

Furthermore, a study by Clay (1979) found that children with rich experiences in oral and written language exhibited greater success in learning to read. Her investigations found that similarities existed in families having children entering school as readers. These similarities included the following: (a) Children had been read storybooks regularly, and (b) family members had spent time answering questions about words and reading. In addition, Clay observed that very young children utilize representations, strategies, and rules to make sense of their world. In other words, children were active participants in their learning process (Clay, 1991). Not only
did findings from these researchers challenge the reading readiness theory, but also connected the oral reading of storybooks to a young child’s literacy development.

By the early 1980s, the call for rethinking early childhood literacy development became a movement. Teale and Sulzby (1986) concluded that “current research overwhelmingly indicates the need to reconceptualize reading readiness, and indeed a new developmental perspective is in evidence” (p. xiv); in fact, their research from the same source documented the following conclusions:

1. Development in literacy begins before attending school.
2. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop concurrently.
3. Literacy develops in authentic settings.
4. Children do cognitive work in literacy development from birth on.
5. Written language is learned through active engagement.
6. Stages of literacy development can be described in general terms, but each child passes through these stages in various ways and at different times.

Teale and Sulzby (1986) took interest in the term *emergent literacy*, which was first introduced by Clay in her doctoral dissertation. They soon recognized it as a legitimate term and referred to it as a *process of becoming* literate as opposed to pre-reading. “It suggests development, that there is a direction in which children are progressing” (p. xx). Teale and Sulzby strongly advocated that literacy development started long before conventional reading.

The change to an emergent literacy paradigm in early childhood environments shifted the teaching of reading to a different perspective (Teale, 1995). Rather than the direct instruction of reading skills, opportunities were endorsed where children would interact with embedded print activities. Early childhood education’s connection with *developmentally appropriate practices*
(DAP) supported such a perspective. The DAP, based on Piagetian theory, called for instruction that is informal, child-directed, embedded in everyday activities, and connected to children’s own life experiences. Oral reading of storybooks exemplifies an activity that meets the DAP criteria. Then also, a joint position statement between the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children endorsed the DAP view and promoted reading aloud to children in their early years (International Reading Association, 1998).

In the here and now, “the focus is on making literature the link to literacy” (Schuman & Relihan, 1990, p. 20). Teale (1995) advocated that “emergent literacy recognizes the need to help children learn about phonemic awareness, letters, and sounds, but it sees these facets of reading within the broader context of functionality, purpose, and meaning” (p. 124). The oral reading of storybooks to young children meets these needs and appears to have value as an instructional strategy in the emergent literacy domain.

Purpose of the Study

One purpose of this study is to examine the literature concerning the value of oral reading of storybooks by teachers of young children in order to encourage emergent literacy. A second purpose is to present guidelines for using storybooks as a tool for literacy development. To accomplish these purposes, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of reading storybooks aloud?
2. What are the benefits of reading storybooks aloud to achieve emergent literacy?
3. What are the challenges encountered in reading storybooks aloud?
4. What are the guidelines to enhance emergent literacy through the use of storybook readings?
Need for the Study

After years of neglect, storybooks have finally found a prominent place in the emergent literacy paradigm. McLane and McNamee (1990) wrote, “Reading books to young children is a powerful way of introducing them to literacy, and it is the one early experience that has been identified as making a difference in later success in learning to read in school” (p. 67). Another endorsement came from Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) in a report titled *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*. Not only did this report promote storybooks, but it also legitimized the discussion of story elements, story relationships, principles of the alphabet, and vocabulary acquisition in an effort to prepare students to enter reading instruction, as well as learn about the world around them.

Yet, even after endorsements from experts, many early childhood teachers still do not recognize storybook reading as an instructional component within the reading program (Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993). The maximum benefits to emergent literacy development require teacher commitment. Without having storybook readings as a part of reading instruction, potentiality of storybook reading events is still in question. Therefore, teachers need to embrace the benefits of storybook reading events, realize their challenges, and be educated on guidelines to maximize the potential from each storybook reading event.

Limitations

A close examination of teacher-read storybooks in relation to emergent literacy and curriculum instruction is a relatively new perspective. And, as of yet, its potential has not been fully realized. Research that does exist has many gaps. However, those research studies that were examined dealt with varying terminology and behaviors. According to Yaden, Rowe, and MacGillivray (2000), there are as many as 20 distinct descriptors (e.g., coconstructive, co-
responders, directors, informers-monitors) to describe various adult reading behaviors in
storybook reading events. Because of the amount and variations in terminology, research is
difficult to synthesize. In other cases, storybook reading was not being directly connected to
emergent literacy. Therefore, finding articles and literature became difficult in supporting the
connection of emergent literacy with storybook reading. In fact, in some cases, secondary
sources were used to provide supporting references.

Definitions

Within the literature read for this study, various terms were used interchangeably. Read
aloud, oral storybook reading, storybook reading experience, storybook reading event, read aloud
event, teacher-read storybooks, and storybook reading are synonymous. For clarity and
understanding the following terms are defined:

Benign neglect: The time frame from the late 1800s to the 1920s which saw a lack of
attention directed to reading instruction in early childhood (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Contracts of literacy: Basic rules related to the use of books and the meaning of text.
These rules are implicitly learned through experiences with books. They are not directly involved
in actual reading and comprehending of books; yet, they must be established in order to promote
literacy development (Snow & Ninio, 1986).

Conventional reading: The reading of unfamiliar text by relying on print material and
comprehending the message from that print. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) refer to it as real
reading.

Directionality: The knowledge that print is read from left to right, print moves from top to
bottom, and stories begin where print starts (Holdaway, 1979).
**Emergent literacy:** A developmental stage of literacy referring to the understanding and the behaviors that children acquire as a result of encounters with print. Usually it occurs from birth to age 5-6 years. The focus during this time is to provide activities which are informal, holistic, constructive, and developmental (Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2000). Schuman and Relihan (1990) saw the emphasis as being development that fosters reading readiness.

**Emergent reading:** (i.e., pretend reading, re-enactment) Students exhibit attitudes, skills, and behaviors that model reading (Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Martinez, 1988). They turn pages, look at illustrations and print, and recreate the story through pictures or memory (Elster, 1994).

**Facilitator:** An individual involved in discussions that keep participants on task by guiding and coaching them. According to Almasi (1996), characteristics of a facilitator’s role include (a) using open-ended questions, (b) encouraging interaction among participants, (c) remaining neutral on interpretations, (d) not monopolizing the conversation, and (e) providing feedback appropriately.

**Linguistic factors:** Elements of written language, which are being incorporated into the child’s oral and written language. The elements include syntax, vocabulary, intonation, and idioms (Holdaway, 1979).

**Literacy development:** A formation of attitudes, skills, and behaviors relating to the functioning of reading and writing. According to Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998), literacy is more than just reading. It includes creative and thinking processes that help in the understanding or triggering of knowledge and skill in other subject specific domains (i.e., math, science).

**Literacy set:** A composite of vital learning that Holdaway (1979) deemed necessary in the progression toward healthy literacy development. The composition of these learnings can be summarized by: (a) motivational factors, (b) linguistic factors, (c) operational factors, and
Motivational factors: The powerful motive for learning to read and write due to highly satisfying experiences and personal joy (Holdaway, 1979).

Operational factors: The essentials for handling written language such as predictive, imaginative, self-monitoring, critical thinking, and comprehending language (Holdaway, 1979).

Orthographic factors: Knowledge of the conventions of print such as directionality, letter-form generalizations, phonetic and consistency principle (Holdaway, 1979).

Piagetian Theory: Cognitively developmental framework in which children actively process information and construct new knowledge.

Predictable book: A story formatted with features that are likely to reoccur. These features include repetition of words, phrases, sentences, rhyming, or story lines (Rasinski & Padak, 2000).

Scaffolding: A Vygotskian term defined as “the teacher or adult structures a learning task and provides directives and clues using dialogue to guide the learner’s participation in the learning task” (Dixon-Krauss, 1996, p. 195).

Storybook reading event: A storybook reading event is a social, collaborative process in which interactions between teachers and students tend to be dialogic and include scaffolding by the teacher. The group reading is followed by some extended authentic experience.

Zone of proximal development: A Vygotskian term that denotes the range where, at one end are learning tasks that a learner can complete independently, and at the other end are those tasks that cannot be completed unless assisted (Graves & Graves, 1994).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Characteristics of Storybook Reading

Storybook reading to young children is a common practice in early childhood programs (Harste & Woodward, 1989; Morrow & Gambrell, 2000), and at first glance, it marks a time of simple enjoyment. However, there is more happening than first perceived. Many early childhood professionals now recognize it as an instructional approach to emergent literacy development (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Teale & Yokota, 2000). Nevertheless, experts are quick to cite that merely reading to children does not automatically bring about development in emergent literacy. What reading a storybook does accomplish is to provide a forum for rich experiences in language and literacy (Huck, 1999). In fact, “children use [book] experiences to make connections and build ‘bridges’ to activities of writing and reading” (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 8). By studying and investigating storybook reading in homes and schools, experts now identify some characteristics and features in those events that enhance emergent literacy behavior. For the purpose of this paper, a clear understanding of storybook reading characteristics is essential.

Naturally, the book itself will be an important feature of the storybook reading event. Rosenblatt (1989) theorized reading as “. . . a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular configuration of marks on a page” (p. 157). By the teacher’s verbalization of the storybook, squiggles and illustrations on the pages take on meaning. Attention is directed to figuring out the mysteries of print—the rules for relating meaning, symbols, and sounds (Neuman, 1996). The oral language heard by students provides the foundation for reading and writing before formal instruction begins (Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, & Paris, 1998). Therefore, storybooks must be selected for their high quality text and illustrations and for their
developmental appropriateness (Barrentine, 1996). "Teachers have a great opportunity to expand their students' horizons by reading aloud from provocative and interesting genres" (Leal, 1996, p. 157).

The interactive nature of the storybook reading event is another feature. To maximize the benefits of storybook reading, it must be a social, interactive event. Teale (1982) stated that "interactive literacy events are essential" (p. 559). According to Vygotskian theory, social interaction is central to the development of language and thought (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky theorized that individuals conversing with other individuals aid in framing the thinking of learners. When students are provided with the opportunity to interact with one another, they are exposed to a variety of higher-level thinking skills, which help internalize each student's thoughts (Almasi, 1996). These interactions expand a student's limited perception (McGee, 1996). Within this framework, storybook discussions are essentially dialogic, controlled not specifically by the teacher, but rather occur as natural conversation in which individuals engage in a free and open exchange of ideas (Gambrell, 1996; McGee, 1996). In other words, students become active learners engaged in the construction of knowledge (Hargrave & Senechal, 2000; Morrow & Gambrell, 2000).

Yet, Teale (1982) raised the ante by connecting literacy development with the increased learning of skills and strategies through interactions between teacher and student. He stated the following:

In fact, the whole process of natural literacy development hinges upon the experience the child has in reading or writing activities which are mediated by literate adults, older siblings, or events in the child's everyday life. Although perhaps not sufficient in and of themselves, the interactive events function as what might usefully be described as the inducer in the process. That is to say, such events serve an absolutely essential role in both triggering and furthering development. (p. 559)
Again, Teale found support from Vygotsky, who maintained that guidance provided by an adult or peer would be called an assisted learning activity. This activity is also known by the term *zone of proximal development*. Teachers use questions and comments activated by the storybook experience to guide students through their zone of proximal development so as to enhance the learning from completing a task (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). Furthermore, when observing students' early literacy activities, researchers found that “children are likely to become interested in writing and reading when they observe and participate in these activities with more competent writers and readers” (McLane & McNamee, 1990, p. 7).

Almasi (1996) stated, “... discussion is viewed as a primary component of the literacy process” (p. 3). However, from her analysis of traditional discussions, she determined that the focus had been primarily on recitation, which evaluates recall from text. In elementary classrooms, she found 93% of the questions were teacher initiated, while 62% of interactions were teacher dominated. Students came to feel that the purpose for the discussion was for the teacher's sake, rather than to construct meaning. In order for teachers to promote the construction of meaning, questions should be framed in such a way as to encourage thought.

Calkins (2001) agreed and wrote, “To help our children think, talk, and eventually write well about texts, we must make a dramatic break from the habit of grilling them with known-answer questions” (p. 61). Rather, the goal of the reading event is to share viewpoints, provide rational arguments, and work together finding new understanding. The meaning of the text comes from the event, rather than extracted from teacher questioning. It is the *scaffolding* by teachers that contributes to the effectiveness of the reading activity (Barrentine, 1996; Graves & Graves, 1994).
Another feature of a storybook reading event is the extension of experiences into other aspects of the classroom. Within the emergent literacy perspective, early childhood programs focus on the understanding that experiences in reading, writing, oral language, and listening create proficient readers and writers (Morrow, 1999). In other words, literacy becomes embedded in the classroom culture. Storybook reading events provide a means to immerse students in talking, reading, listening, and writing (Teale & Yokota, 2000). Nevertheless, Goodman (1986) observed that children learn best in meaningful, interesting, and functional experiences. If children are unable to perceive purpose in print, they will find it difficult to attend, and impossible to learn, no matter how much a teacher urges them (Smith, 1983).

Therefore, the classroom environment must provide opportunities for active exploration and concrete, hands-on experiences. Positive guidance techniques are used, by which children have opportunities to make choices (Hart, Burts, & Charlesworth, 1997), and learners know their comments and questions will be respected and valued (Cardozo, 1997).

Pearson and Dunsmore (1998) also advocated authentic experiences for students to utilize newly acquired skills and strategies which were promoted by storybook reading events. These skills and strategies included the following: (a) reading words by using simple decoding, analogies, context clues, sight words; (b) practicing fluency; (c) writing and spelling; and (d) comprehending and monitoring for understanding. “The most important features of a good literacy curriculum is that it promotes a strong like [link] between these two fundamental features—skill and strategy learning and opportunities to read and write frequently” (p. 3). In other words, the classroom culture connects students and literacy.

Fisher (1991) examined Holdaway’s natural learning classroom model and described it in following manner:
The model includes Demonstration, Participation, Practice or Role-play, and Performance (Holdaway 1986), and supports children through the full cycle of natural learning. It gives them opportunities to become self-regulating learners, as both learner and teacher take dominant roles at different times, always in a social context, cooperating and collaborating in a non competitive environment. (p. 22)

Demonstration and participation happen during the reading storybook event; practice and performance promote a time for emergent reading and writing behaviors. Reading storybooks and utilizing extended classroom activities can implicitly integrate emergent literacy skills and strategies in the context of real print experience.

Emergent Literacy Benefits from Reading Storybooks

While observing parent-child interactions during reading events, Holdaway (1979) uncovered several unique and vital factors occurring during the emergent literacy stage of a child's life. He stated that children are busy working at creating a healthy literacy set. For children not establishing such a set, success in conventional reading is in jeopardy. He emphasized that “... without adequately developed strategies for exploring written language, we would expect such children to experience great difficulty and confusion in facing the highly complex and refined processes of relating cues in early reading” (p. 57). A literacy set consists of the following factors: (a) motivational factors, (b) linguistic factors, (c) operational factors, and (d) orthographic factors. Storybook reading experiences prove beneficial to each of these factors so as to build a viable literacy set.

Motivational Benefits

Trelease (1989), a staunch advocate of reading books aloud, wrote, “The human species is pleasure oriented . . . [and] what we teach children to love and desire will always weigh more heavily than what we teach them to learn” (p. 201). Children who enjoy books benefit by developing a curiosity for the printed word and by increasing their appetite for more stories.
Positive experiences help children approach learning to read with the expectation of pleasure and success (Galda & Cullinan, 2000). Trelease also wrote that "reading aloud is the most effective advertisement for the pleasures of reading" (p. 201). The teacher who models the way and the why of reading entices children to try this magic.

Martinez and Teale (1988) witnessed the magic of this enticement when they studied a kindergarten class that possessed an excellent classroom library. This library collection was organized according to storybooks that the teacher had (a) read only once, (b) read repeatedly, and (c) not read at all. During independent reading time, children had the choice of selecting from among these three categories of storybooks. Martinez and Teale found that children chose very familiar books (read repeatedly) three times as often, and familiar books (read once) twice as often as unfamiliar books (not read). Storybook reading to young children breeds familiarity and in turn breeds reading-like behaviors deemed necessary in emergent literacy.

Experts agree that repeated story readings show positive effects on early literacy development by attracting students to books and by increasing their oral language and thinking processes (Calkins, 2001; Parkes, 2000). Three studies verify such a claim. A study done by Martinez and Roser (1985) demonstrated that, as children became familiar with the story, their comments and questions increased, changed form and focus, and became more interpretive and evaluative. Yaden, Smolkin, and Conlon (1989) found that children's questions and comments during the original reading were associated with illustrations, while subsequent readings brought more in depth associations with the text. A case study illustrated this process when Parkes (2000) wrote the following:

Opportunities to return to favorite books, either with an experienced reader or independently, allowed Sarah time to savor and experiment with the language and illustrations; to see connections between characters, places, and events in the book and in
her world; to make connections to other books; to experiment with the language in her own way; and, finally, to make the story her own. (p. 8)

According to Schwartz (1988), students who revisited books utilized print more at each rereading. They imitated the storybook reader’s intonation and fluency in their re-enactment and performed as readers. Schwartz reasoned that this built their confidence, and the feeling of success had a powerful impact on their motivation to learn to read.

**Linguistic Benefits**

Holdaway (1979) viewed storybook reading as a time to assist linguistic factors. He commented on how children do this reading by--

operating at a level of deep semantic processing, they are manipulating their own syntax in relationship to the deep syntactical structure of the text, and they are sorting out possibilities, striving to maintain grammatical agreement while experimenting with complex transformations. (p. 52)

As such, storybook reading events stimulate children’s auditory sensory system and provide a model of what fluent reading sounds like (Rasinski & Padak, 2000; Teale & Yokota, 2000). They hear the written dialect where grammatical structures, intonations, vocabulary, and other features of language are verbalized. Even idioms so prevalent in today’s society are naturally grasped through reading aloud storybooks. Likewise, reading aloud storybooks provide students with models for their own fluent reading. “Tunes of language ring in their ears and sing in their voices” (Holdaway, 1979, p. 53).

Then also, reading aloud is the primary means of enriching students’ vocabulary in the early years (Neuman & Bredekemp, 2000). As students listen to a reader, new words become part of their receptive vocabulary and are then available for use in their reading and writing (Galda & Cullin, 2000). If students never hear particular words, they will never say those words.
And if they never hear or say the words, imagine how difficult for children to read and write them.

Several research studies substantiated the vocabulary gains through means of teacher-read storybooks. Elley (1989) conducted an experimental study with seven classrooms of 7- and 8-year-olds. The teachers read the same book three times over a seven-day period. During the first two readings, the teacher led a discussion about title, cover page, and main characters. In the last reading, students shared some predictions and some remarks about the story. Target words were neither defined nor explained. However, the results from the study indicated that the net gain of knowing the targeted words was between 15% to 20% over the initial word knowledge. Elley (1989) extended this study by designing three experimental groups: (a) teacher-read storybooks in which the teacher explained targeted words, (b) teacher-read storybooks with no explanation of targeted words, and (c) storybooks the teacher did not read. The gain for those students hearing the words explained was 40% over their initial knowledge of targeted words. Elley stated, “stories read aloud in this way thus appear to offer a potential source for vocabulary acquisition” (p. 180).

Dickinson and Smith (1994) also noted the increased vocabulary acquisition through teacher-read storybooks. They found that students in experimental classrooms who were read to daily over long periods of time scored significantly better on measures of vocabulary than children in control groups who were not read to by an adult. Therefore, storybook reading proved beneficial as a means to increase the vocabulary base of students.

Operational Benefits

Reading storybook events benefit operational factors of a child’s literacy set. Students need to master strategies and operations in order to make meaning from print. They are required
to delve beyond the here-and-now (McLane & McNamee, 1990) and move their thinking from the concrete to the abstract (McCord, 1995). Exposure to storybooks promotes an understanding of how written language works, as opposed to the workings of conversational language. With conversational language, students can rely on their other senses to help with interpretations. On the other hand, with written language, they must take the meaning from their own images of reality. In other words, students rely on prior knowledge to assist with text understanding.

Prior knowledge has long been recognized as a significant predictor of comprehension, and after all, "Comprehension—understanding what one reads—is the essence of reading" (Teale & Yokota, 2000, p. 8). Reading storybooks strengthen and build students' background knowledge and therefore, develop comprehension skills (Gambrell & Dromsky, 2000). The foundation for this thinking stemmed from Piaget's theory of assimilation and accommodation. To assimilate, children assess what they already know and introduce the new information into an existing pattern or scheme. If the new object or idea is so different from existing knowledge that it cannot be assimilated into an existing scheme, the child's pattern of thinking or acting must then be changed to accommodate or incorporate the new information (Catron & Allen, 1999). In order for schemata to affect text processing (i.e., predicting, inferencing, drawing conclusions, and other essential strategies for handling written language), the readers must have experiences that permit them to form the schemata. Storybook reading events increase the storehouse of experiences, from which to bridge the unknown to the known (Galda & Cullinan, 2000; Neuman & Bredekamp, 2000).

A study by Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1997) revealed that "both exposure to and discussion of numerous stories in class teach children story schemata and enable them to internalise [sic] the necessary elements of the story's structure. These elements are later
used in children's own story productions" (p. 179). For example, students began to distinguish patterns of literature such as *once upon a time*, to recognize that stories have a beginning, middle, and end, and to develop an understanding of what literature is and how it works. The researchers felt that the students made a connection to their schemata, which positively affected their reading comprehension.

Teale and Yokota (2000) stated that, as children hear stories read, they tap their prior knowledge, discuss the texts, learn about comprehension strategies, and then respond through role play, art, music, writing, or dramatic activities. The stories simply give students a central focus and common knowledge of a scenario. "The story line is a scaffold providing a vehicle for becoming an active playful participant at a variety of cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional levels with feedback from peers serving as a social reinforcement" (McCord, 1995, p. 20).

Students who have experienced storybooks are better prepared to make predictions, to make inferences, and to draw conclusions when comprehending a story. And furthermore, engaging children in thinking critically and solving problems prepares them for challenges in reading more complex text types (Gambrell & Dromsky, 2000).

**Orthographic Benefits**

With the analysis of the bedtime story situations, Holdaway (1979) noticed various print concepts—orthographic factors—being formulated into children's literacy sets. He saw reactions from children that indicate their knowledge about books and print. Furthermore, Snow and Ninio (1986) reasoned that communication from books occurred because individuals knew a complex set of rules about uses of books and meanings of text. They identified several rules called *contracts of literacy*. Often these rules are not explicitly taught, but children come to know them through participating in frequent storybook reading. These rules include the following:
1. Books are for reading, not for manipulating.

2. The book’s role is to control what the reader is to think about while reading.

3. Pictures are representations of things.

4. Words go with the print and pictures.

5. Pictures can represent events.

Galda and Cullinan (2000) and McLane and McNamee (1990) added directionality, page turning, and coordination of context and graphic clues. They further advocated that students to whom adults read know how to handle books, understand that print and pictures work together to tell a story, and learn that the words are always the same, no matter how many times a book is read.

Schickedanz (1989) found that literacy skills could be embedded in story-time activities, and as such, prove beneficial to students in acquiring necessary emergent literacy skills.

Challenges Associated with Reading Storybooks

Those educators who strongly believe that reading storybooks is an easy solution for learning to read have the occasion to abuse the practice (Teale & Yokota, 2000). The possibility of overuse and misuse of reading aloud is a major challenge. Their thoughts are that simply finding high-quality literature and reading it in engaging ways will lead to significant reading results. This thinking attributes too much to the activity. In fact, Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, and Linn (1994) found a negative correlation between achievement and the amount of time spent reading to children in kindergarten classes. According to their study, the farther the activity moved away from activities directly related to the reading process, the lower the correlation between that activity and reading achievement. For example, reading to students showed a negative effect on students’ knowledge of decoding skills, but a positive effect on their listening skills. The idea that simply reading aloud to students constitutes the entire reading program is
detrimental thinking; rather, the essential ingredient is having the child actively participating with the print. Meyer et al. (1994) endorsed the following:

> It [reading storybooks] is part of a reading program. The direct benefits from exposure to storybooks can come only if children develop print-related skills, such as phoneme awareness and some word recognition. These skills should be developed in addition to the language development that can come through storybook reading. (p. 84)

Pearson and Dunsmore (1998) acknowledged that a debate exists between skill-based teaching and authentic reading and writing activities. This debate forces many administrators and educators to make a choice. If skill-based instruction is selected, teachers frequently revert to practices of worksheets and workbooks to meet the demands for acquiring specific skills. However, Strickland (1998b) advocated that "... skills and meaning should never be separated" (p. 9). Students should learn how to apply decoding skills along side learning how to apply strategies that guide reading comprehension. In other words, the challenge is to provide a comprehensive and balanced instructional program.

However, many teachers simply are unaware or only vaguely aware of cognitive and social dimensions of story time (Teale & Sulzby, 1989). Research done by Hoffman, Roser and Battle (1993) indicated that 77% of primary teachers read a storybook each day. Nevertheless, they found that time spent in discussion was minimal. Less than 5 minutes were spent in discussion before the reading, and less than 10 minutes were spent in discussion after the reading. The researchers concluded that "reading aloud is not an integral part of the instructional day and may not be realizing its full potential" (p. 500).

In addition, storybook discussions are often ineffective. Beck and McKeown (2001) observed teachers discussing stories with kindergarten and first-grade students. The discussion questions did not involve focusing on and discussing major story ideas. Too often, teachers concentrate on specific information from the story (McConaghy, 1990). When the emphasis of
reading storybooks is mainly on finding answers to specific teacher-initiated questions, students concentrate on gathering story details, rather than encompassing the meaning behind the story.

However, even with awareness of what makes reading aloud most effective, it is difficult to keep discussions consistently focused on the most productive features (Beck & McKeown, 2001). There is much to manage when conducting a good storybook discussion. Questions will be ineffective if they are too hard or too easy (Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, & Fischel, 1994). Too many questions can be distracting, since children’s answers often are not brief or to the point (Neuman & Bredekamp, 2000). Then also, comments that over-correct or do not provide a good correction model inhibit the student’s early attempts to read (Clay, 1991).

Reading a story to students is not a difficult task for a literate adult, but maximizing the experience so as to develop children’s literacy is difficult. “Key to the task is keeping important text ideas in focus while monitoring children’s often limited responses and scaffolding their ideas toward constructing meaning” (Beck & McKeown, 2001, p. 19).

There are also educators who fall into the trap of designing one program to fit all students (Clay, 1991). Yet, not all children come to school with the same experiences and opportunities in hearing storybooks (Neuman & Bredekamp, 2000). This diversity brings many challenges for the reader of the storybook. For example, children with few book experiences tend to have limited attention spans (Trelease, 1995). Simply, students who have little knowledge about print lack the very foundation for developing their literacy set. They have difficulty grasping the concept of stories and the pleasure they can impart from books. Holdaway (1979) contended that children who have had little experience with written language are not skilled at getting meaning from the abstractness of print for they have relied on their concrete surroundings and senses to get meaning while interpreting oral language. Because of individuality and life experiences, each
student is unique and requires teachers to use diverse responses to fit each student's needs in the classroom. Students cannot be expected to move into a pre-selected sequence of learning.

Administratively, working toward a planned and seriously constructed storybook event demands considerable investment in time, skill, knowledge, and resources (Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993). For example, developing quality oral presentation skills (i.e., intonation, pacing, tone) and reading presence demands practice and thought (Galda & Cullinan, 2000). Scheduling time for teachers to develop such skills is a challenge. Not only is time a challenge, but also the need to obtain necessary resources—both books and human. According to Hoffman, Roser, and Battle (1993), the resource that appeared most critical is quality children's literature. Yet, a close second is quality personnel. Smaller group size lends itself to more interaction; however, it also requires more teachers, as well as more books (Hargrave & Senechal, 2000; Whitehurst et al., 1994). Then too, reinventing old classroom routines, learning new strategies, and perfecting new techniques require taking on various staff development ventures. All in all, administrators and educators face a challenge of working together to implement a quality storybook reading event so as to maximize language, literacy, and literature growth in students.
CHAPTER 3
GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING LITERACY THROUGH STORYBOOK READING

Developing Guidelines

Storybook reading events put a high premium on student involvement, for it is fundamental to a literacy program in early childhood (Hennings, 1992), and teachers are a key component in stimulating that involvement in the classroom (Teale & Martinez, 1988). Teachers become guides, facilitators, and models, always eager to assist children in initiating curiosity and a desire to learn about the reading process. In fact, teachers are decision-makers who shape classroom environments, respond to children, and reflect continuously on the results of their decisions. Salinger (1993) remarked, “What teachers do affects what children will in turn do in the classroom and by extension what they will learn; what teachers think and believe is equally important” (p. 6). A set of guidelines for teachers is necessary because facilitating emergent literacy during a storybook reading event is a difficult undertaking. The following guidelines can assist teachers in procuring maximum benefits from storybook reading events.

1. Teachers should select quality literature for storybook reading events.

To augment the storybook reading event, teachers should choose books which represent literature at its best (Calkins, 2001; Huck, 1999). “There are many high-quality books appropriate for young children; to include anything less than excellent selections in what is read aloud lowers the quality of literacy instruction” (Teale & Yokota, 2000, p. 15). Selecting quality literature requires serious evaluation of such literary elements as plot, setting, character, theme, style, and mood (Galda & Cullinan, 2000). Then too, books are to be “examples of visual and verbal artistry at its finest” (p. 137), with both text and illustrations working together.
Schwartz (1988) cited six other characteristics for teachers to consider. They include (a) length of story, (b) length and complexity of sentences, (c) size and complexity of vocabulary, (d) complexity of plot, (e) size of print, and (f) number and size of illustrations. To help in choosing high-quality children’s literature, teachers can refer to book reviews in professional journals such as Book Links, Language Arts, The Reading Teacher, and Horn Book.

The selection of storybooks can come from a variety of genres, styles, and content (Galda & Cullinan, 2000). Yet, experts claim that text types influence development of emergent literacy in varying ways. Teale and Yokota (2000) are quick to point out that each type has advantages as well as shortcomings. For instance, predictable text stimulates emergent reading behavior, but does not encourage attention to individual words or sound-symbol clues. Decodable (controlled vocabulary) text focuses attention on sound-symbol aspects, but is usually not very interesting and is often semantically or syntactically distorted. Furthermore, a study by Neuman (1996) claimed that highly predictable stories stimulate a collaborative form of oral reading between student and adult because children can repeat the language patterns or plots of predictable text (Martinez & Teale, 1988). On the other hand, Neuman took the position that narrative text enhanced greater interaction between adult and student on the meaning of the story and its connection to personal experiences (i.e., prior knowledge).

Elster (1994) wrote, “Features of the book being read, including salience of illustration, predictable language patterns, and changing print formats, can influence the strategies selected [in a student’s emergent reading]” (p. 413). His findings suggested that books with detailed and interesting illustrations draw students to non-narrative strategies such as picture reading, while books with story language help students move to narrative emergent readings relying more on their memories from the reading event.
According to McGee (1996), some storybooks possess a capacity for deep thinking. In other words, the plot has multiple layers of meaning which provide opportunities for interpretive analyses. The purpose is not to identify one right interpretation, but rather, stimulate a conversation requiring deeper thinking. McGee used the example of *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins. The plot of the book is simple—a fox tries to capture a hen. Yet, students and teacher can discuss whether the hen is fortunate because of fox's ignorance or whether the hen is really sly and enjoys teasing the fox. The goal for the teacher is to find stimulating literature which can produce interpretations of life to text and text to life type conversations. Beck and McKeown (2001) wrote, "Texts that are effective for developing language and comprehension ability need to be conceptually challenging enough to require grappling with ideas and taking an active stance toward constructing meaning" (p. 10).

All in all, when selecting storybooks, teachers need to be aware of the varying influences that text types have upon literacy development of students. In addition, teachers are well advised to keep in mind the following:

There is no magic formula for the mix of what types of texts a teacher should use.... Yet the challenge for teachers will always be to keep in mind the individual child's prior experiences, needs, interests, and abilities in determining appropriate texts for given situations. (Teale & Yokota, 2000, p. 16)

2. Teachers should prepare for storybook reading events.

Because teachers play a significant role in guiding students during storybook reading events, teachers should spend time planning and preparing for events. According to research studies, literacy learning is affected by the way teachers conduct reading events (Teale & Yokota, 2000). For instance, Martinez and Teale (1988) found that even though six teachers read the same story, what the students discussed and how the book was discussed varied significantly.
In a study by Dickinson and Smith (1994), variations in storybook reading styles affected how students approached books, how much they comprehended, and how students learned from being read to. Therefore, reading to students presents teachers with challenges that need careful preparations. Preplanning is required to consider storybook qualities, students' developmental level, and purposes and goals for reading events.

Barrenteine (1996) suggested the following reflective planning considerations for teachers or readers of storybooks:

A. Teachers need to analyze the students, the text, and its illustrations to determine strategies in order to meet the objective of the reading event. For example, what will be the focus—text structure, vocabulary, summarizing, personal connections, story, or character comparisons? Looking at the objectives will help in crafting the appropriate strategies for the event. For example, if vocabulary is an objective for the teacher, selection of the text is important. A study done by Elley (1989) found that several identifiable features in the story helped with vocabulary acquisition. These features were the following: (a) frequency of occurrence of the word, (b) helpfulness of the context, and (c) frequency of pictorial representation of the word. Therefore, an appropriate storybook would incorporate these features into the text. Above all, teachers need to coordinate their efforts to match their objective.

B. Teachers need to anticipate interactive moments and consider where students could need additional background information, share personal connections, make predictions, or simply clarify episodes in the story. Teachers are to remain flexible, follow students' lead, and use good judgement in balancing talk and text. Reading a story interactively usually doubles the amount of time it takes to read the story through. Therefore, teachers need to provide adequate time for completing the storybook reading event.
C. Teachers need to think about questions and comments that will stimulate interaction between teacher and all students. One technique that is particularly useful is to prepare one interpretive question that may or may not be used in the interaction (McGee, 1996). These questions are open-ended and focus attention on one or more interpretations. This approach will give a starting point in case students are not able to focus on an interpretive type of discussion. A teacher might use a question such as "Do you think Rosie knew that the fox was behind her?" Students can begin to make inferences about the knowledge and intentions of the characters.

3. Teachers should engage students in discussions about the storybook reading.

"Discussion brings together listening, speaking, and thinking skills as participants engage in exchanging ideas, responding, and reacting to text as well as to the ideas of others" (Gambrell, 1996, p. 27). Conclusions from several research studies found interactive conversation enhanced emergent literacy development. Whitehurst et al. (1994) demonstrated that teachers who used a dialogic reading style in a day care facility brought positive effects on language development. Ewers and Brownson (1999) wrote, "... children acquire more new words when storybook reading incorporated methodology which elicits active participation [italics added] from the listener" (p. 17). A study conducted by Dickinson and Smith (1994) claimed that reading storybooks supports literacy development in students as long as some child-involved analytical talk takes place.

Therefore, teachers should adopt a dialogic style of conversation as methodology. In so doing, attention may be drawn to specific skills and strategies necessary in the development of emergent literacy. Such an approach includes the following techniques: (a) use of who, what, when, where, how, and which questions; (b) use of open-ended questions so as to avoid one-
Perhaps, the most encompassing term for the teacher’s role is one of facilitator. “In a discussion teachers act more as facilitators, scaffolding student interaction and interpretation when needed” (Almasi, 1996, p. 11). Teachers need to know the time to question, the time to step back and allow students to converse freely, and the time to return to the discussion. These times also include moments that ask for clarification of specific thinking, invite shy students into the conversation, scaffold students’ thinking to higher levels, and raise the level of talk when it hits a stalemate. “The real purpose of response-centered talk is to use children’s responses or ideas as a springboard to reasoning and problem solving that results in new discoveries or understandings” (McGee, 1996, p. 202).

However, to maximize the interaction, teachers need to evaluate group size for the storybook reading event. In a study by Morrow and Smith (1990), kindergarten students assigned to discussion groups, consisting of three students, tested superior in story recall when compared to students who discussed the story one-to-one or whole-class. In addition, students who heard stories read in small groups or one-to-one settings generated significantly more comments and questions than children did within the whole-class setting. They concluded that a small group discussion structure facilitates literacy development because students have more opportunity to speak, interact, interpret, clarify, and exchange points of view.

4. Teachers should provide opportunities for extending storybook reading events.

According to Teale and Martinez (1988), responding to literature is a means of strengthening students’ understanding and appreciation of stories, and it helps them to internalize the structure of stories. Therefore, teachers need to plan extended activities as a means of
response to the storybook reading. Some extended activities include writing responses, drama, artwork, music activities, and independent reading. Whatever the extended activity may be, teachers must be mindful of (a) the age and developmental levels of students, (b) the engagement quality of the activity, and (c) the connection between activities and literacy (Strickland, 1998a).

Response writing is a natural follow-up activity to stories (Hennings, 1992). However, students need to use writing for purposes they feel are significant (Booth, 1996). Activities must be authentic writing for authentic audiences. Authentic writing purposes could (a) entertain as in the form of stories, poems, skits, and plays; (b) inform as in reports, ads, labels, and invitations; (c) persuade as in letters, speeches, ads, and stories; or (d) express personal feelings as in journals, poetry, and stories. Authentic audiences could include classmates, parents, teachers, or self. Teachers need to provide resources, time, and feedback when students participate in extended activities originating from the storybook reading. Students are especially eager to write if teachers encourage their efforts (Hennings, 1992). Writings could be in any number of formats as charts, post-it notes, web organizers, or one-line sentences (Calkins, 2001).

5. Teachers should model reading strategies during storybook reading events.

Gambrell and Dromsky (2000) defined strategies as “plans that engage the reader in gathering, monitoring, evaluating, and using text information to construct meaning” (p. 145). They saw two ways that would support students in developing and using effective reading strategies: (a) modeling and demonstrating and (b) creating a classroom environment that encourages experiences in reading. Hennings (1992) called the modeling of cognitive thinking processes think aloud. She wrote, “Teachers orally model the kind of thinking they do while listening and reading by saying out loud the thoughts that go through their heads. Teachers make their inner speech public” (p. 22). As an example, McConaghy (1990) suggested that pausing to
wonder what’s going to happen next or to comment on parallel stories invites students to notice, recall, predict, question, infer, synthesize, interpret and make connections of all sorts. Teachers need to model good reading habits and strategies as well as design appealing reading events.

Then too, Booth (1996) advocated that teachers act as language role models. Research studies supported fluency as a critical component of reading success. Teachers who modeled appropriate rate, accuracy, phrasing, and expression during storybook reading events promoted fluency (Richards, 2000). Likewise, fluency and reading comprehension had a reciprocal relationship, each fostering the other. Therefore, teachers need to give students opportunities to hear the rhythm and patterning of storybooks by reading in a fluent manner.

Nonetheless, Schwartz (1988) endorsed using a light touch in reading instruction. “First and foremost, literature is to be enjoyed. The teaching that you do with literature should be subtle, occasional, and unpressured” (Schwartz, 1988, p. 84). Teachers model the joy of reading and the satisfaction that comes from making meaning with print (Booth, 1996). They share their excitement and enthusiasm with students.

In order to make storybook readings pleasurable, teachers need to be sensitive to the developmental needs of students. Trelease (1995) depicted storybook reading in schools by the following:

Every time we read to a child, we’re sending a pleasure message to the child’s brain. You could even call it a commercial, conditioning the child to associate books and print with pleasure. There are, however, unpleasures associated with reading and school. The learning experience can be tedious or boring, threatening, and without meaning. There are endless hours of worksheets (a thousand a school year for most elementary students), hours of intensive phonics instruction, public performance that risks embarrassment (round-robin reading in front of the class), and hours of unconnected test questions. If a child never or seldom experiences the pleasures of reading and meets only the unpleasures, then the natural reaction will be withdrawal. (p. 9)
Above all, teachers must remember the ultimate goal is for students to enjoy literature (Barrentine, 1996).

6. Teachers should assess students’ literacy behavior during storybook reading events.

Not only do teachers need to model and demonstrate various reading strategies, they also need continuously to observe students’ responses. Elster (1994) suggested tape recording and studying responses from students. Teachers can analyze book talk, speech patterns, and recall clues that each student utilizes. In a developmental study by Sulzby (1985), a classification scheme was designed to indicate developmental levels of emergent reading. Each level gave descriptions to help teachers determine appropriate experiences to scaffold students toward conventional reading. The role of the teacher becomes making inferences about each student’s thinking and acting in accordance with the teacher’s knowledge of literacy development. Jones and Smith-Burke (1999) wrote, “The continuous interplay between what teacher and children are doing and thinking facilitates teacher’s construction of personal theories about each child that are grounded in observational data” (p. 273).

7. Teachers should handle distractions appropriately during storybook reading events.

A clearly defined expectation of acceptable behavior, an engaging format, and an established routine aid in conducting a successful storybook reading event (Neuman & Bredekamp, 2000). Yet, teachers are often faced with distractions or off-track comments and questions from students during storybook reading events. Goplerud (2001) provided the following suggestions for handling interruptions:

A. Teachers need to use a cue signal to indicate quiet time. Students are taught that this cue means time for less talking and more listening. This could be as simple as raising a hand.
B. Teachers need to parallel a student’s comment with the story. A student’s comment has a personal element and needs to be acknowledged. Therefore, if at all possible, the teacher needs to relate the comment back to the story. For example, if a student relates an incident with riding a horse, the teacher can relate it to the zebra in the story.

C. Teachers need to spin a question from a student’s comment. In other words, the teacher allows a student to comment, brings in new information, and then involves the other students by asking a question.

D. Teachers need to involve other students in answering a student’s question. By giving other students a chance to become involved in the discussion, new ideas are formed by both the inquiring student and the other students. Furthermore, the teacher has positively reinforced a student’s question.

E. Teachers need to be cautious about too many questions and comments lengthening the story beyond the attention span of the students. Goplerud (2001) suggested responding by saying, “You are really interested in this story. We need to go on or we won’t be able to finish it. You will have time to learn more later” (handout 2).

Teachers have the occasion to turn storybook reading events into effective emergent literacy experiences. The guidelines provided in this study assist teachers in maximizing the effectiveness of storybook reading events. While quality storybooks have their appeal, teachers facilitate learning through group interactions and activities. Therefore, teachers need to be prepared to engage students in thoughtful discussions and extended opportunities, to model reading strategies, to assess students’ literacy behaviors, and to be able to handle distractions.
CHAPTER 4
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The intent of this study was to examine the literature concerning the value of oral reading of storybooks by teachers of young children in order to encourage emergent literacy. A second purpose was to present guidelines for using storybooks as a tool for literacy development. The paper addressed four questions to accomplish these two purposes:

1. What are the characteristics of reading storybooks aloud?
2. What are the benefits of reading storybooks aloud to achieve emergent literacy?
3. What are the challenges encountered in reading storybooks aloud?
4. What are the guidelines to enhance emergent literacy through the use of storybook readings?

1. What are the characteristics of reading storybooks aloud?

Through the examination of literature, three common characteristics described storybook reading events. Storybook reading events consist of a storybook, social interaction between participants, and experiences extending into the classroom culture. Basically, storybook reading events become a means by which students interact in a dialogic discussion of story traits and extend experiences through various classroom activities. The focus of this study connected the print experience of storybook reading events to emergent literacy development.

2. What are the benefits of reading storybooks aloud to achieve emergent literacy?

The value of storybook reading events to emergent literacy has been affirmed through research and observational studies. Holdaway (1979) credited storybook reading to establishing a
healthy literacy set in children. He and other experts cited benefits to the four components (i.e., factors of motivational, linguistic, operational, and orthographic) of literacy sets. Trelease (1989, 1995) stressed that students who experience storybooks are enticed by what they hear. They experience pleasure, as well as familiarity, with books which in turn motivates them in wanting to learn to read. Rasinski and Padak (2000) and Teale and Yokota (2000) highlighted that oral reading by teachers models fluency of written language. Studies by Neuman and Bredekamp (2000), Elley (1989), and Dickinson and Smith (1994) affirmed that students gained in vocabulary acquisition by implementing storybook reading events. Therefore, fluent language and vocabulary benefit linguistic factors in children's literacy sets. Experts agreed that prior knowledge is necessary in predicting, inferencing, critical thinking, and problem solving. Galda and Cullinan (2000) and Neuman and Bredekamp (2000) noted storybook reading increased students' prior knowledge and therefore, is instrumental in benefiting the operational factors in children's literacy sets. Also, students who are exposed to storybooks acquire knowledge about books and print which proves beneficial to the orthographic component of their literacy sets. For example, students learn about book handling, directionality, and connections between print and pictures (Galda & Cullinan, 2000; McLane & McNamee, 1990; Snow & Ninio, 1986).

3. What are the challenges encountered in reading storybooks aloud?

Although experts have demonstrated storybook readings' numerous benefits, storybook reading events are not without challenges. Educators are often faced with the debate between skill-based teaching and authentic reading. Either the educator attributes too much to storybook reading as the entire reading program, or the educator does not utilize the storybook reading to its potential. Strickland (1998b) endorsed implementing a balanced and comprehensive instructional program. Yet, to make teachers aware of necessary strategies and skills in
conducting developmentally appropriate storybook reading events requires time, commitment, resources, and training. Also, Clay (1991) saw educators designing one-size-fits-all type of curriculum. However, children come to school with such diverse experiences and knowledge base that one design can not benefit all students all the time.

4. What are the guidelines to enhance emergent literacy through the use of storybook readings?

This study determined that teachers need a set of guidelines to follow in order to maximize the benefits of storybook reading events. The first guideline is to select quality literature by evaluating story qualities (i.e., plot, complexity, text type) and book features (i.e., length, illustrations, size). Next, teachers need to plan and prepare by analyzing, anticipating, practicing, and organizing each storybook reading event. In addition, teachers take on the role of facilitating the discussion. Each student should become actively engaged in the event. After reading the storybook, students should be encouraged to respond about their reading experience though drama, music, artwork, play, or response writing. Then too, teachers should not only model reading strategies through think alouds, but also support fluency by modeling appropriate rate, accuracy, phrasing, and intonation. Teachers must assess students’ literacy behavior for scaffolding purposes. Lastly, teachers need to anticipate and manage distractions by continually keeping students involved with the story through questions and comments.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Storybook reading events are a valuable instructional tool for emergent literacy development.
2. A balanced literacy approach of both formal and informal instruction makes up the components of storybook reading events.

3. Extensions of the storybook reading facilitate independent reading and writing.

4. Teachers play a vital role in facilitating and modeling skills and strategies necessary for successful literacy development.

5. Teachers must have the knowledge base and skills necessary for developing literacy in their students.

6. Students are actively engaged in the storybook event.

Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Early childhood educators should read a storybook to students daily and provide extended opportunities for independent reading and writing.

2. Sufficient resources—human as well as books—are necessary to get maximum benefit from storybook reading events.

3. Staff development training is needed to provide educators with new knowledge, skills, and strategies concerning facilitating emergent literacy development.

4. Further research studies are needed to inform educators about how to maximize the value of storybook reading in a child’s development.
References


