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# Reading aloud to children : is there a relationship to reading achievement?

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# Reading aloud to children : is there a relationship to reading achievement?

## **Abstract**

This qualitative participant research paper focuses on the importance of reading aloud to children at a young age. Results indicated that being read to at an early age was not enough, in and of itself, to predict reading achievement. However, the amount of parental interaction between the parent, child, and text can affect a child's reading achievement. Children who were exposed to dialogic read-alouds tended to become more independent readers, who chose to read on their own, later in elementary school. It is hoped that educators and parents will understand the importance of including children in a dialogic reading approach while reading aloud to children at an early age.

**READING ALOUD TO CHILDREN: IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP TO READING  
ACHIEVEMENT?**

**A Graduate Participant Research Analysis  
Submitted to the  
Division of Literacy Education  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

**By  
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May, 2007**

This Research Paper by Stephanie Gierstorf

Titled: Reading Aloud to Children: Is There a Relationship to Reading Achievement?

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative participant research paper focuses on the importance of reading aloud to children at a young age. Results indicated that being read to at an early age was not enough, in and of itself, to predict reading achievement. However, the amount of parental interaction between the parent, child, and text can affect a child's reading achievement. Children who were exposed to dialogic read alouds tended to become more independent readers, who chose to read on their own, later in elementary school. It is hoped that educators and parents will understand the importance of including children in a dialogic reading approach while reading aloud to children at an early age.

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"The more you read, the more you know; the more you know, the smarter you grow" (Trelease, 2001, p. 3). Six years later, Jim Trelease's statement still holds true. We live in a world that is surrounded by text. The world continues to make advances in technology and with technological gains, the need to read nonfictional materials is ever increasing. Children will need to have the strategies and techniques in order to comprehend the various types of texts in our world. Reading is such a critical component in our daily lives that we need to expose and encourage all children to become readers at a very young age. Research shows that children who are exposed to literature as a form of entertainment and enjoyment are more likely to be motivated readers as they get older (Anderson, 2000). A variety of people can play a crucial role in helping children learn these strategies and techniques. For example, parents, foster parents, day care providers, preschool teachers, early childhood educators, classroom teachers, grandparents, and even siblings, to name a few, have the ability to encourage our children to become better readers. Research has shown that children who have been read to at an early age gain intellectual and academic benefits as well as social and emotional benefits (Becher, 1986; Dickenson & DeTemple, 1998; Ferlazzo, 1994; Krashen, 2004; Wan, 2000; Warren, Prater, & Griswold, 1990). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the earlier children are exposed to print, the better prepared they will be to participate in a world where reading is an essential life long skill. This paper will investigate the relationship between being exposed to literacy in the home at an early age and reading achievement.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this paper is to explore whether reading aloud to children at an early age will help them to become better readers. If a correlation is found, the researcher will investigate how reading achievement could be improved through the use of early

parental interaction.

### *Importance*

Much of a child's literacy learning takes place before school or out of school (Hannon, 1995). At the end of kindergarten, a six-year-old child has spent 700 hours in a classroom compared to the 52,000 hours spent in the home (Trelease, 2001). Thus, parents have more time to nurture their child's reading development compared to the time spent with a classroom teacher. Research has shown a positive correlation between children who have been read aloud to at an early age and reading achievement throughout the school years (Ferlazzo, 1994; Hewison & Tizard, 1980). Therefore, it is important to investigate the role parents play in their child's reading development. Towards this purpose, the investigator conducted interviews that focused on the amount of parental time spent reading aloud and the types of text that are available in the home, as well the types of conversations that may take place during a read aloud session.

### *Limitations*

The purpose of this research paper was to determine if there is a correlation between reading aloud to children at an early age and their reading achievement. However, this study had several limitations. The first limitation had to do with the size of the study. Six two-parent English-as-first-language families were involved. More generalizable data could have been collected had more families been allowed to participate in the study. Also, allowing more families from various cultural backgrounds or socioeconomic groups may have produced different results.

Another limitation deals with the accuracy and reliability of the answers provided by the students and the parents. Parents were told about the interviews ahead of time, so they may have coached their child on how to respond to some of the questions. The

parents may also have responded to the questions based on what they thought would be the "correct" answer rather than accurately replying based on what really happens in their home.

### *Definition of Terms*

Two key terms surfaced through the review of literature on reading aloud to children at an early age. These terms are parental involvement and dialogic reading. Reynolds (1992) describes parental involvement as "any interaction between a parent and a child that may contribute to the child's development or direct parent participation with a child's school in the interest of the child" (p. 61).

Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) describe dialogic reading as an interactive language facilitation technique that occurs between an adult and child during a shared reading experience. Dialogic reading encourages parents to discuss and reread stories with their children. This approach encourages children to be an active participant in the reading process. Dialogic reading may be contrasted with monologic reading, in which the child or listener does not interact with the reader.

### *Research Question*

Research shows that reading aloud to children at an early age will help them to become better readers. The purpose of this research paper was to investigate this finding within the specific context of this researcher - an elementary school teacher in a rural Iowa community. The primary research question guiding this project was: Does reading aloud to children, in a rural Iowa community, at an early age help them to become better readers? There were two secondary questions that stemmed from this primary question and they are as follows:

- What are the perceived benefits by parents and their children of the act of

parents reading aloud to their children?

- What role does parental interaction play in reading aloud to children as reported by parents and children involved in reading aloud?

### Literature Review

This review of the relevant literature reports on past research on reading aloud to children at an early age. The review is divided into three categories. The first category is the benefits of reading aloud to children. The second category is the role of parental interaction when reading aloud. The third category involves the comprehension strategies that good readers use when reading.

#### *The Benefits of Reading Aloud*

While minor questions have been raised in the past about whether children who have lots of literacy experiences before entering school might become bored with the continuation of such experiences in school (Wan, 2000), the vastly overwhelming body of research has demonstrated that parents who read aloud to their children are increasing their child's chance for becoming literate. Research has shown that intellectual and academic as well as social and emotional benefits can result from reading aloud to children at a young age (Becher, 1986; Dickenson & DeTemple, 1998; Ferlazzo, 1994; Krashen, 2004; Wan, 2000; Warren, Prater, & Griswold, 1990).

The first intellectual and academic benefit is that the experience of listening to books has beneficial effects on children's cognitive and academic growth (Warren, et al., 1990). Reading aloud is a powerful means of developing reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Children gained better vocabularies when mothers read books interactively and offered support and guidance as a teaching strategy (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006). As children are exposed to more vocabulary,

they develop a greater understanding of the English language (Dickinson & DeTemple, 1998; Wan, 2000; Warren, et al., 1990). Reading aloud on a regular basis stimulates a child's creativity and imagination (Ferlazzo, 1994). Another intellectual and academic benefit of reading aloud is that it can enlarge a child's background knowledge. The more experiences a child has, the more connections they can make with their text. Books can increase a child's knowledge and understanding of the world without the child even leaving their home (Wan, 2000).

Reading aloud also exposes children to the conventions of print such as capital letters and punctuation marks. In addition, students are able to see how to turn the pages of a book correctly as modeled by their parents. They will also learn about concepts of print such as reading pages in a book from top to bottom and left to right. Furthermore, children develop a sense of story structure. They become aware of stories that have a beginning, middle, and end (Wan, 2000).

With proper modeling of text being read aloud, children also acquire social and emotional benefits. The socio-emotional context of early literacy experiences is particularly influential because children whose early encounters with literacy are enjoyable are more likely to develop a predisposition to read frequently and broadly in subsequent years (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997). Reading aloud creates a bond between the child and parent. Children view books as a valued personal activity when their parents, the most important role model, take the time to read aloud. Reading aloud also promotes positive social and emotional interactions among family members (Becher, 1986). "Reading prepares the mind, nurtures the spirit, and educates the soul" (Wan, 2000, p. 152). When the socio-emotional climate is positive, children are more interested in reading and are more likely to view reading as enjoyable (Baker et al., 1997).

Being read to at an early age may motivate children to want to read more. Children may be motivated to read because they perceive it as an enjoyable and entertaining activity that is valuable to them. Motivation may also be enhanced as reading aloud may be viewed as an opportunity for social interaction between the parent and child. Children may also be motivated as they receive praise for reading aloud to others. A child's literacy development is greatly influenced by parental beliefs on literacy. Home experiences that promote intrinsic motivation to read are critical for young literacy learners (Baker et al., 1997). Parents who believe that reading is a source of entertainment have children with more positive views about reading than do parents who emphasize the skills aspect of reading. Parents who view reading as entertainment tend to provide more reading opportunities to their children than those parents who view reading with a skills approach (Baker et al., 1997). This finding further reinforces the research showing that parents need to be aware of the importance of reading aloud to their children at an early age.

Most importantly, for the aforementioned reasons, being read to is a much-loved activity and instills the love of books. Children throughout the world settle on laps or snuggle in beds anticipating the pleasure of story time. They listen eagerly as adults transform the printed pages into scenes of enchantment (Warren et al., 1990). Children learn that exciting stories come from books. They associate this excitement with reading for pleasure. Completing a book also provides a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction. In addition, research shows that reading aloud is pleasant and lowers writing apprehension (Krashen, 2004).

For all of the reasons cited above, it is important for parents to realize how reading aloud and interacting with text benefits their children intellectually, academically,

socially, and emotionally. These interactions may provide many positive long term effects.

### *Parental Interaction*

Research has shown that parental interaction and the home environment can have a positive impact on a child's reading achievement. (Anderson, 2000; Silvern, 1985). For example, a study by Anderson (2000) showed that when parents are a part of their child's education, the student is more likely to stay in school and is more likely to achieve. Anderson (2000) mentioned that the Commission on Reading found that parents, not the school, laid the foundation for a child's learning to read. This report also places an obligation on the parents to support their children's continued growth as readers through interaction with text. In addition, research by Silvern (1985) found that issues associated with a child's parents, family, or home environment have a great impact on reading achievement. This section will address the various parental interactions that occur during read- alouds as well as the frequency and duration of parental interactions.

Studies indicate that parents are more likely to value reading to their child if teachers point out the specific benefits to be gained from this activity (Becher, 1986). For example, teachers need to provide specific examples to encourage parents to utilize a variety of experiences with their children. Teachers can recognize and praise the efforts that parents may already be incorporating into their daily routine. Teachers also need to be aware of the parent's capabilities and not ask them to assist their child in an activity they may not even be able to accomplish themselves.

Studies conducted by Ferlazzo (1994), Louizides (1993), and Teale (1986) examined the interactive practices that parents use while reading aloud to their children. The first finding was that children who had higher performance scores on reading tasks

were those who talked more about the story and asked more questions during the read aloud sessions than those children who did not. The second finding was that parents who initiated talk with their child about the books they were reading had higher achievement scores and more highly developed concepts than children whose parents did not initiate talk. The practices in these studies involved the use of questioning before, during, and after a read aloud. Yet another finding by Scarborough, Dobrich, & Hager (1991) found that preschoolers who were read to and participated more in book activities at home became better readers by second grade than children whose parents did not provide book activities.

Researchers have found that not only are the simple acts of reading important; also important are the kinds of conversations adults and children have with one another and the quality of those interactions (Baker et al., 1997). Researchers have also found that reading aloud to children at a young age is particularly effective when the shared reading is highly interactive (Whitehurst, Fako, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca, Caulfield, 1988).

Whitehurst (1988) and colleagues created a highly interactive shared reading program, Dialogic Reading, that promotes the language skills of 2 and 3 year old children. Results of their study show that parent instruction in Dialogic Reading facilitated preschool children's vocabulary development in a sample of middle-class families. Dialogic reading is based on three principles: (1) the use of evocative techniques that encourage the child's active participation in telling the story; (2) the use of feedback to the child in the form of expansions, corrections, and praise; and (3) progressive change to stay at or beyond the child's current level of independent functioning (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994).

Huebner & Meltzoff (2005) also conducted a study in dialogic reading. They found that many parents do not intuitively and naturally use a dialogic reading style without explicit instruction. The results of the study found that parents who were instructed in Dialogic Reading were more likely to interact with their child during the read aloud of a text.

Dialogic Reading has even been used as an intervention procedure for children with language delays. Crain-Thoreson & Dale (1999) conducted a study that involved 32 children with language delays. The results of their study showed that adults who were instructed in Dialogic Reading had children who spoke more, made longer utterances, produced more different words, and participated more in shared book reading.

Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin (2006) conducted a study that described mothers as either storytellers or story readers. The storytellers approached reading as an opportunity to have a conversation with their child. They used more decontextualized language that is associated with the development of literacy skills. Storytellers were found to be more interactive and incorporated more discussion before, during, and after a reading session. On the other hand, story readers did not talk as much to their child while reading text. The results of the study showed that the preschoolers who were involved with parents that used high levels of support through a story telling approach demonstrated higher school readiness scores as well as expressive language than those students whose parents used a story reading approach.

Myers (2005) conducted a study that incorporated reciprocal teaching strategies to teach kindergarten students comprehension strategies through interactive read alouds. The goal of reciprocal teaching, that ties in with Dialogic Reading, is to have students set a purpose for reading by making predictions as they preview a story. Students were then

encouraged to ask questions as they listened to a story in order to monitor their comprehension. After the story, students were given an opportunity to summarize what they heard.

Clark (2005) discussed the importance of reciprocal teaching as a procedure for implementing reading comprehension strategies through the use of scaffolding. Scaffolding is described as a “flexible and adaptable model of instruction that supports students as they acquire basic skills and a higher order thinking process” (p. 579). Scaffolding is another strategy whose goal is to support and improve a child’s comprehension of a story.

Frequency and duration of reading aloud to children at a young age is another necessary element. Although research and studies are limited, studies indicated that parents who read to their children at least four times a week for 8 - 10 minutes enhanced their child’s attitudes and reading achievement than parents who do not read to their children (Henry, 1974).

Research also shows that parental interaction can improve a child's ability to comprehend a story. The following section will discuss research that has been completed on reading aloud to children at an early age and the link to the comprehension of a story.

### *Comprehension Strategies*

Many of the comprehension strategies that literacy researchers recommend be taught in school reading programs bear a striking resemblance to the strategies employed by parents during instances of dialogic read alouds (Block & Israel, 2004; Smolken & Donovan, 2003; Wood & Enders, 2004). As previously mentioned, Dialogic Reading involves students in text that is at their independent reading level in order to encourage them in discussions involving predicting, retelling, and rereading (Arnold & Whitehurst,

1994).

Block & Israel (2004) discussed the importance of using think alouds before, during, and after a read aloud in order to build students' comprehension, decoding, vocabulary, and fluency skills. The purpose of a think aloud is for educators to open up their mind and share the thinking process that goes on in a good reader's mind as they are involved in comprehending a story. By having students hear the thinking that takes place inside the reader's head, they are able to gain a deeper understanding of the reading process. The authors presented 12 processes that students can use before, during, and after reading in order to demonstrate beneficial reading skills. These processes range from predicting, questioning, making connections, looking for important information, and determining word meaning. Students who have been taught these processes, through think alouds have a greater understanding and obtain more pleasure from written text. These students will be more likely to carry these reading strategies with them throughout their life.

Smolkin & Donovan (2003) described another comprehension strategy, called interactive read alouds. During interactive read alouds, students become active participants in the story rather than being passive listeners. The teacher shares authority with the students as they feel comfortable enough to share and ask questions about the read aloud. Through this process, teachers are able to see the connections and experiences that students can relate to the text in order to create a deeper understanding of the story. Teachers are also able to provide additional support and scaffolding that will extend their student's knowledge base.

Wood & Endres (2004) described the Imagine, Elaborate, Predict, and Confirm (IEPC) strategy that can be used to enhance a student's understanding of a story. The

purpose of IEPC is to motivate students while enhancing their ability to comprehend. Imagining allows students to visualize which will help them focus their attention on the topic in order to activate any prior knowledge. Through the use of teacher modeling, students will learn how to elaborate their imagination to make connections from their prior knowledge to the new content being read. Students are involved in predicting by using their connections to predict what will happen in the story. As students begin to read the story, they will be able to confirm their predictions or adjust their predictions to fit the events in the story. Classroom teachers who have used these strategies reported having students who were more motivated and attentive to the story from the beginning to the end. These students were excited to see how accurate their predictions were to the story. Reluctant readers were found to participate more frequently, and students were found to elaborate more on their responses.

The comprehension strategies reviewed in this section are similar to the ways of thinking about text that parents demonstrate to their children during dialogic read-alouds in the home. Children who were encouraged to retell, reread, and discuss a story with their parents in a shared reading setting were more likely to comprehend the story compared to students who just listened to a story (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006). It was because of this similarity that they were included in this review of relevant literature.

## Methodology

### *Participants*

This study involved six third grade students and their parents/guardians from five various classrooms in a rural, West Central Iowa, public elementary school. These students were selected based on their reading level as determined on the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2005). The participants included two students who performed above

grade level, two students who performed at grade level , and two students who performed below grade level on the comprehension part of the BRI. The parents had to agree to complete an interview and give permission for their child to be interviewed. The students were from two parent homes where English is the native language. The students were not identified for special services in the school district, and were not in the researcher's classroom. The students and parents were invited to participate in an interview that included the types and amount of reading that takes place in the home, the verbal interaction during reading aloud sessions, and other types of reading and writing activities that may take place in the home. All participants were volunteers and no compensation in the form of money, gifts, or academic credit was provided for the participants' time. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time and would not be penalized. Individual responses were kept anonymous and confidential.

The interviews consisted of a two-step process. Initially, the six students and their parents were interviewed. Analysis of initial interview data yielded a general finding that, while all children had been read to at an early age, there may have been differences in the nature of these reading experiences. Because this theme surfaced as a major finding during the initial round of interviews, the researcher decided that a second round of interviews should be held to investigate this category more thoroughly. Subsequently, three students and their parents from the initial pool were chosen for a follow-up interview in order to collect more detailed data. As with the initial round of interviews, follow up interviews included students who performed above grade level, at grade level, and below grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005).

#### *Procedure*

*Selection.* All third grade students were given the BRI (Johns, 2005) as part of the

school district's assessment policy. As a part of the regular curriculum, third grade reading level material was used rather than instructional level material in order to minimize the problems associated with comparing children who are reading at different levels. The results for all students who were administered the BRI were made available to all third grade teachers.

After the BRI (Johns, 2005) was administered, the scores were analyzed in order to find two students who read and comprehended above the third grade reading level as determined by the BRI, two students who read and comprehended at the third grade level on the BRI, and two students who read and comprehended below the third grade level on the BRI. Phone calls were made to those families who met the qualifications until six families agreed to participate. Informed letters of consent were sent home for authorization to conduct the interviews.

*Interviews.* During the initial round of interviews, parents and children were interviewed separately. A tape recorder was also used to accurately record the results of the interview. Parent interview times were set up in the home or another place that was convenient for the family. Questions focused on the frequency and length of read aloud sessions, the person who usually read to the child, and verbal interactions during read aloud sessions. The list of parent and student interview questions are included in Appendices A and B. Student interviews were conducted during the school day at a time that was convenient for the student and the classroom teacher while keeping the student's information confidential.

As mentioned previously, follow-up interviews were conducted to further investigate the initial finding regarding the qualitative differences in the various early reading experiences. Follow up interviews were conducted with one family and child who

performed above grade level, one family and child who performed at grade level, and one family and child who performed below grade level in order to gain a deeper understanding of each family's reading experiences in the home. Questions focused on the routine of the read aloud sessions at home, feelings about reading, as well as effective reading strategies. Lists of parent and student follow-up interview questions are included in Appendices C and D.

### *Data Analysis*

This study combined two methods of data collection to achieve a deeper understanding of the participants and to increase the validity of the findings. Methods of data collection included parent and student interviews and student reading scores on the BRI (Johns, 2005). The constant comparative method of data analysis served as the model for interpreting the interview transcripts (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The student and parent interviews (see Appendices A and B) were qualitatively analyzed in order to look for recurring themes. Data were tabulated for each child and correlations between BRI scores and how often the child was read to and how often the child chose to read independently were considered in order to determine whether there was a correlation between being read to, independent reading, and reading achievement.

### Results

This section will present the results of the data collected from the student and parent interviews that were completed by the six parents of the participating third grade students. The data were collected from six third grade students from two parent homes where English is the native language. The students were not identified for special services and were not in the researcher's classroom. The participants included two students who

read and comprehended above grade level on a third grade Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) (Johns, 2005) passage, two students who read and comprehended at the third grade level on the BRI passage, and two students who read and comprehended below the third grade level on the BRI passage.

The results of the first round of interviews showed that all students, regardless of their BRI (Johns, 2005), scores, were read to at an early age. All the families who were interviewed believe that reading is an important life long skill. All six children also reported seeing other family members reading for a variety of purposes. However, the data also indicated that the nature of the reading and listening experiences may have varied from home to home in significant ways. In order to more fully investigate these differences, the aforementioned follow-up interviews were held. Unless otherwise indicated, data and quotations in the following discussion were gathered during these follow-up interviews.

In the following summaries, the results of the second round of interviews showed three students and their parents described the amount of exposure to texts found in their home environment; reading as a shared theme throughout the family members in the household; and connections that were made between books read and real life experiences. Where relevant, information from the interviews of the other three students is also included.

*Scott*

Scott, a third grade student, is a fluent reader who comprehended above grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005). He enjoys reading a variety of fiction and nonfiction books because he gets to learn new things.

Scott's parents have exposed him to print beginning when he was just an infant

with the use of board books and soft books. His parents would take turns reading to him every night on the couch when he was younger. He has had exposure to a variety of books in the home ranging from preschool books, chapter books, mysteries, nonfiction books, magazines, and newspapers. These books can be found throughout the house between his headboard in the bedroom and book boxes in the living room. Now that he is becoming a more independent reader, he reads more on his own. He reads every day in school and between 20 to 30 minutes each night. Scott also visits the public library with his mother one or two times a month. They visit the library more frequently in the summer when he does not have access to the school library. Scott also participates in the summer reading program at the public library and enjoys the craft activities that relate to the story being read for the day. Even though Scott doesn't seem to have a favorite book or author, his mother expressed,

He seems to go and find one interest and stick with that for a while until he finds another interest. There for a while he was reading *Magic Tree House* books, and then he kind of picks through a variety of things from school.

In the home, Scott also sees his parents reading a variety of materials including books from the public library, work related materials, magazines, and newspapers. His parents also encourage Scott to read with his younger sister. However, Scott acted as though his sister did not like to read with him because she preferred to read with their parents. Scott's parents wanted to expose him to books at an early age in hopes that he would start school with experiences as a reader.

Reading is also valued as a shared reading time throughout his family. When he was younger, his parents would read a lot of books on the alphabet, numbers, and shapes. They would make a game out of it by having him point to a specific number or letter.

Scott would also play by testing his parents on the correct numbers or letters. The parents' goal for reading aloud to Scott at such a young age was so that he would have memories of being read to. His parents view books as important and have always bought books that looked "interesting and fun." Both Scott and his parents agreed that the last time they read together, it was Scott who initiated the idea. He read the story to his mother. They talked about the pictures; however, both the parents and Scott agree that they now discuss the pictures less frequently than they did when he was younger. Now, they are more likely to share and talk about the book or ask questions about what happened in the story. They also do some predicting and retelling. When he comes across an unknown word, his parents will give examples and talk about the word so he can develop a better understanding of the word. Scott's mother commented,

Our family believes in reading. Parents need to be a good role model. If children see you value reading, they will also value reading. It's not just reading the book to them as a parent, but talking about the pictures in the books. Because we have been doing that with both Scott and our daughter. You know, they definitely liked reading that same book over and over when they were younger. Then we got into the habit of, you know, telling what was going to happen next, or predicting. We even let the kids do their own reading of the book, or telling their own version of the story from memory. I think it is just showing your interest in the book and maybe adding more to it than just with what the book says. Making it interesting by reading it the way the characters would speak and not just monotone can make it more interesting.

Scott's father admitted that before he had children he "never realized how important it was to keep reading that new book and talking about something different

each time, or letting them tell you what they saw.” Scott also recalled a time reading a *Magic Tree House* book and completing predictions and stated, “You always wonder what will happen next with Jack and Annie.” He believes that you can become a good reader through practice. He added, “You need someone who knows how to read so they can watch and make sure you don’t read it the wrong way.”

Scott and his parents noted several connections between the books they have read and things they have done in real life. For example, Scott wants to work on cars and trucks when he gets older. Therefore, he likes to read books about cars and trucks. He said, “I like to see how they are built. I like to see what kind of model they are.” His parents also recalled the time they were eating out in a restaurant and Scott had the hiccups. He remembered reading in a kid’s book that sucking on an ice cube would make the hiccups go away. Reading a *Magic School Bus* book also triggered a conversation with Scott and his mom about a previous picnic the family had been on. His mother also said, “The other day he was reading an animal book, and he was telling me that it reminded him of the gorillas that we saw at the zoo last summer.” Scott has also learned to connect his past learning experiences to his present reading strategies. When asked “How did you learn to read?” Scott responded by saying, “I had to look at the pictures, and I had to look for smaller words inside bigger words.”

The other student, Sue, who performed above grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005), reported during the first round of interviews that many family members were involved in reading with her from a young age. These family members included mom, dad, grandparents, and nieces. Sue’s mother reported reading and listening to music with Sue while she was in the womb. Her parents stated they read with her approximately 30 - 60 minutes each night. Throughout these reading sessions, Sue’s parents have incorporated

many interactive reading strategies including predicting, rereading, and making up stories which began when she was younger, and still continues now that she is in third grade. Sue's family also reported visiting the public library a couple times a month during the school year and a couple times a week throughout the summer.

### *Amber*

Amber is a third grade student who performed at grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005) comprehension passage. She feels good about reading because it helps her learn new words. She is the type of student who wants to have a purpose for reading. Her mother stated,

She is more of a reluctant reader. I just never see her pick up a book just to sit and read. She has been exposed to all the different methods of reading, but, it's like the books just kind of sit around. I haven't seen her take as much of an interest as I would like her to.

Amber has been exposed to books since she was an infant when her parents would read aloud to her and her older sister. Her mother, and once in awhile her father, would read to her before bed three to four times a week for at least ten minutes, and possibly longer depending on the book. Now that she is in third grade and becoming more of an independent reader, her mother said, "I don't read to her as much as I used to when she was younger, although I know I should read more. On average, I read with her, maybe, once a week." Amber's mother also noted, "She reads almost every night independently." However, Amber admits to not reading very much on her own. Amber has been exposed to a variety of books including picture books, chapter books, poetry books, magazines, and nonfiction books about airplanes and machines. These books are kept on bookshelves in Amber's room. Amber's mother stated, "I try to have some nonfiction books on why

do things happen. I try to include not just girl type things because I want the girls to have a lot of knowledge about different things.”

Amber also has exposure to the public library a couple times a year. Amber picks out her own books from the library and her mother then monitors the readability levels of the book to make sure she is choosing an appropriate book at her reading level. Her parents try to have Amber participate in the summer reading programs, but find they find they are busy with camping and swimming lessons.

Amber also sees her mother read the newspaper, magazines, and novels on a weekly basis. She also notices her father reading the newspaper or a magazine while her older sister is reading chapter books or homework assignments. Amber’s mother thinks reading is important because, “They can see that reading can be for pleasure, and it can be for work, and it can also be just for your everyday needs.”

Shared reading seems to be something that was done with the family when Amber was younger. Her parents would read picture books, word books, or number books when she was younger. The father said, “In fact, we read one word book over and over so much that the cover actually tore off.” Now that Amber is older they don’t reread as many books. Now they are more likely to focus on the vocabulary words that are unfamiliar to Amber and use the pictures to predict and discuss what the story may be about. Amber’s mother admits to reading to her because,

Reading can open up several avenues. You can explore through reading. You can become a character through reading. I think she is starting to see what reading can bring her, and I believe that is making her more excited about reading. I don’t know if she’ll be the kind of child who always has her nose in a book because she enjoys other things like watching T.V., and she likes to play. My purpose is to

see her love reading like I do. I want to expose her to the good authors and good literature that she may not pick up on her own.

Her parents could not pinpoint a favorite book or author for Amber. However, Amber said, “My favorite author is Joy Cowley because I liked her books for homework in kindergarten. I liked the pictures because they had a lot of color.”

Amber recalls making one connection when her mother read her *The Night Before Christmas*. The story reminded her of a teacher who had to memorize the story when she was younger. On the other hand, her parents recalled several connections they have made to books they have read. For example, Amber’s mother recalled reading *The Night Before Christmas*. Amber was excited because the book was purchased in the same year that Amber was born. They also enjoyed looking at the pictures and discussing Santa Claus because they happened to read the story on Christmas Eve.

Amber’s father recalled her interest in his fishing magazines. He said, “As she got older, she liked to read more books about camping and fishing with me because that is what we like to do in the summer.”

The family also traveled to Chicago this past summer. They visited an American Girl’s store. Amber’s mother said,

I have been noticing that once we visited the American Girl’s store, and Amber actually had the Kitt doll, then the books really seemed to be something she wanted to pursue. She was so interested in the books based on the doll she had chosen. We also saw a stage play, too, which featured all of the American Doll characters, and that’s helped bring it to life.

The family also visited the Laura Ingalls Wilder homestead and grave site in Missouri. Amber was able to connect with the characters in the book to their actual home.

Amber's mother also wants her to apply reading to daily life. For Christmas, each daughter received a local cookbook that had some recipes in their name. Amber's mother said,

I noticed Amber was paging through there looking for her recipes. I think they need to see that reading isn't just reading the daily newspaper or picking up a thousand page novel, but reading can be something as simple as understanding the directions for cooking.

Amber's mother has a purpose for providing Amber with all these connections to reading. She says,

I just want reading to be enjoyable for her, and I want her to have a high level of reading skills, one that will hopefully take her through whatever she wants to do in life, whether it be a professor or be a hairstylist. I just want her to have competency in reading and also a love of reading that will last her whole life.

The other student, Ann, who performed at grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005), reported during the first round of interviews that only her mother read to her. Ann's mother admitted reading to Ann when she was approximately one year old. Although Ann needs a push from her mother to read, they do read anywhere between two and four nights a week while discussing the pictures in the story. Ann's mother will also ask Ann questions about the story when they complete a book. Ann and her mother also stated that they hardly ever visit the public library.

### *Tina*

Tina is a third grade student who performed below grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005) comprehension passage. When asked how she feels about reading, Tina said, "It's fun to do because you learn how to say more words. You can pretend you are with the

people in the story, doing what they are doing."

Tina has had some exposure to books. She has an older brother and sister, so her mother would read to all of them at the same time. As the children were learning to read, they would take turns reading to each other. Although Tina's mother would usually read to them, her father would read to them on a few occasions. Tina has been exposed to books including *The Magic Tree House* books, *Henry and Mudge*, Jan Brett's books, *The National Geographic Magazine*, and *Girl's Talk* magazine. Tina also recalled having *Junie B. Jones* and *The Box Car Children* books at home. Tina keeps her books on a bookshelf in her bedroom. Her siblings also have a bookshelf in their bedrooms. The living room also contains a bookshelf that has books for the whole family.

Tina is exposed to the public library quite frequently. The older siblings go to the public library every couple of weeks for homework purposes. Tina's mother usually assists the older siblings with their homework, and Tina visits the children's department and picks out books on her own. Tina's mother also said, "Sometimes if we are traveling in the van to go shopping in the city, she will pack a book along in her purse so she has something to read."

Tina also sees other members in her family reading. Her mother will read *Harry Potter* books, her older siblings will read chapter books for their homework assignments, and once in awhile, her dad will read the newspaper. Tina's mother sees her read independently a couple times a week. Her mother said,

Sometimes you have to prod her to do it, but for the most part, the older children are usually doing their reading as well. She likes to pretend she is reading to a group of people. She'll hold the book up like a librarian would, and she'll read like she's reading to someone. She'll just sit on her bed and be reading and have

the arm motions going like she is talking to people.

As the children have become independent readers, the shared reading time has not been as frequent as it was when they were younger. Tina's parents don't remember ever rereading any books with their children. They were always busy reading the books they brought home from school and didn't have time to reread any books. Tina didn't recall reading to any of her family members while she has been in third grade. However, she recalls reading to her mother when she was in second grade. Tina would read the story to her mother and ask her about any unknown words. Tina didn't recall making any predictions or asking any questions before, during, or after the story. She does recall looking at the cover and other pictures for clues as to what the story could be about. Tina's parents couldn't recall the last book they had read with her. They thought it might have been a *Magic Tree House* book, but couldn't recall any other details. Tina's mother did recall reading Jan Brett books when they were younger. The children enjoyed looking at the illustrations. Her mother went on to say, "If you look close, you can find all the little details in her books. Your imagination moves with you a little more. It makes you think more about what's going on in the story." When asked about her favorite books, Tina's mother said, "*The Magic Tree House* books are probably her favorite right now. She's got a whole list of which ones are available, and she's got them all checked off, at least the ones that she has read." Tina also admitted, "I like the *Magic Tree House* books 'cause they go on little journeys and everything. They do all the fun stuff."

Tina's mother goes into the classroom a couple times a year to read a book to the class. She said, "I think it is kind of fun, and the kids really like that." Tina has an aunt who is a big reader. She will give Tina gift cards to local book stores so Tina can pick out her own books.

Tina does not remember making any connections to the books she reads with events that have happened in her life. However, Tina's mother recalls, "Tina has always been a fan of going to the library for story time because that is where she picked up on reading like a librarian."

Tina's mother's purpose for reading to her children is to get everyone together. She said,

It's nice just to sit down and everyone is quiet. We find a corner somewhere and everyone just listens. If one of the kids wants to read, I can just sit there and relax, and not have to worry about doing something else. I can just sit and listen to them read. It's just kind of fun. It's good for the kids to read.

Obviously, it broadens their imagination. It strengthens their reading skills.

I try to stress to them that the more you do this now, the easier it is going to be later.

The other student, Todd, who performed below grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005), stated during the first round of interviews that he only remembers reading with his mother. Todd's mother admitted to reading with him around the age of one and a half. They continue to read approximately two times a week for 15 minutes. Todd listens to the story while his mother reads and there isn't any discussion about the story. Todd and his mother reported that they never visit the public library.

The results of the two interviews show that even though children can be exposed to a variety of text at an early age, it is the type and amount of parental interaction between the parent, child, and text that can affect a child's reading achievement. Children who were exposed to dialogic read alouds tended to become more independent readers who chose to read more frequently on their own.

## Conclusions

Analysis of the interviews conducted in this research project show that the home literacy environment of all of these third graders included a considerable amount of exposure to text at a young age, regardless of their performance on the third grade BRI (Johns, 2005). However, a major finding of this research is that the types of reading strategies the participants were exposed to as a part of those home literacy experiences appear to differ according to the results of the BRI (Johns, 2005). This section will look at those differences according to the effects of reading aloud to children at a young age, the benefits of reading aloud to children at a young age, as well as the effects of parental interaction when reading aloud to children at a young age.

### *Reading Aloud to Children at a Young Age*

These interviews appear to support the previous research findings that show the importance of having both parents take an active role in reading aloud to their child at an early age. Scott, who performed above grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005), had both parents reading to him when he was an infant. On the other hand, Amber, who performed at grade level on the BRI, and Tina, who performed below grade level on the BRI, reported their mother reading to them more frequently while their father read to them only on occasion.

Although all six participants were read to at an early age, there appears to be a difference in the amount of time the participants presently read now, as third grade students, compared to when they were younger. For example, Scott, who performed above grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005), reads 20 - 30 minutes every night without any prompting. Sue, who also performed above grade level on the BRI, reads

approximately 30 to 60 minutes every night as reported in the first round of interviews.

Amber, who performed at grade level on the BRI, is more of a reluctant reader who needs a purpose for reading. She does not read as much on her own. Now, her mother listens to her read about once a week. Ann, who also performed at grade level on the BRI, reported in the first round of interviews that she reads two to four nights a week. Tina, who performed below grade level on the BRI, needs a prod from her mother to encourage her to read. Tina does not recall reading to her mother since she has started third grade, which was five months ago. Todd, who performed below grade level on the BRI, reported in the first round of interviews that he reads two nights a week. Therefore, the amount of time these children currently spend voluntarily reading independently appear to correlate with reading achievement according to the BRI.

### *Benefits of Reading Aloud*

This research also suggests that reading aloud to children at a young age may produce intellectual and academic benefits as well as social and emotional benefits. All participants reported that they enjoyed reading for a variety of reasons. Scott, who performed above grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005), sees the value and enjoyment in reading as he reads each night. He also knows that reading is a way to learn. Another student who performed above grade level stated in the first round of interviews that the more she read, the more her grades went up, therefore, the prouder she felt about herself. Amber, who performed at grade level on the BRI, has been exposed to literature at an early age. Tina, who performed below grade level on the BRI, enjoys reading because you can learn new words and pretend you are the characters in the story. She is also intrigued by the way the children's librarian reads books to children because she enjoys holding up the book and reading to her pretend audience. The six participants also noticed other

family members, including parents and siblings, reading a variety of texts for pleasure or homework purposes. Therefore, these participants appear to notice the value that is placed on reading in the home.

### *Parental Interaction*

The information the parents and students provided indicate that the interactions and reading strategies that parents implement vary greatly, and that the variance correlates with the results of the BRI (Johns, 2005). The amount and type of parent and student interaction included during a read aloud session appears to correlate with a child's reading achievement. The students who performed above grade level on the BRI reported being involved in dialogic read aloud sessions with their parents. They described predicting activities, having the opportunity to make up the story as they went, talking about the pictures, choral reading, and discussing the story once the story was finished as ways they interacted with the story being read. For example, Scott, who performed above grade level on the BRI, has been involved in sharing and talking about the books he has read. He has been exposed to predicting, retelling, and repeated readings of many stories. He has been allowed to make connections to his reading as well as telling his own version of stories. Amber, who performed at grade level on the BRI, has also been exposed to many repeated readings when she was younger. She has also been given the opportunity to make predictions and discuss new vocabulary with the books she has read. She has also been given numerous opportunities to make connections to books that she has read through real life experiences with the vacations the family has taken over the years.

On the other hand, those students who performed below grade level reported just sitting and listening while their mother read the story to them. For example, Tina, who performed below grade level on the BRI (Johns, 2005), reported never rereading any

stories or making any predictions. She does not discuss the stories she reads or make any connections to the books with her parents. In fact, her parents couldn't remember the last book they read with her. Therefore, it appears that more academic benefits may occur when parents take the time to involve their child in a dialogic read aloud session. For example, research has shown that repeated readings help children internalize and understand stories with more detail (Teale & Sulzby, 1987). The results of the interviews with the students in this small survey showed that students who were exposed to more dialogic readings tend to score higher on the BRI.

Those parents who conducted dialogic reading with their children at a young age can also be viewed as teaching them how to comprehend. This becomes clear when one examines the types of curricular comprehension instruction typically advocated by the research. As a result, these students scored higher on the BRI (Johns, 2005).

### Implications

The results of this research project show that children who are exposed to dialogic read alouds will more likely become independent readers who will read more frequently on their own. These findings show that educators, as well as parents, need to be informed of the importance of dialogic read alouds and its positive affect on children at a young age.

#### *Educators*

The results of this research project might help educators, especially those in the early childhood field, to see the importance of reading aloud to children. Early childhood educators may benefit from conducting a similar interview to determine their students' background experiences with dialogic read alouds. The information could be used as a

guide for educators to use when planning the types of lessons and instruction needed for their students.

Some other potential benefits for educators are the following. They could use the results of this research project to help encourage parents to read aloud to their children, especially in a dialogic fashion. They could create brochures or provide tips for parents to incorporate dialogic reading activities into their reading routine. Educators could also implement a series of reading nights into their curriculum. Those programs could focus on a range of parent and child interactions that would be beneficial for a child's transition to school and academic outcomes (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006).

In addition, educators could use this research information as a way to validate the importance of reading aloud to children in their own classrooms. With today's pressures of meeting standards and benchmarks in teaching curriculums, read aloud time is often eliminated due to time constraints. The results of this research project concur that reading aloud time should be a daily event in the classroom. This especially holds true for students who are not given the opportunity to read as frequently in their home environment.

### *Parents*

The results of this research project can reinforce with parents the valuable benefits of reading aloud to children at an early age. These benefits can include intellectual and academic growth as well as social and emotional benefits.

Hopefully, the findings of this research project will demonstrate to parents the importance of dialogic reading. Parents might notice that just reading aloud to their child may not be enough. According to Arnold & Whitehurst (1994), using the dialogic reading approach, parents need to encourage their child's active participation while including

materials that are at the child's instructional level. This parent and child interaction throughout a reading session can boost a child's intellectual and academic growth as well as enhance their social and emotional skills at an early age. A parent who is interested in language development and readiness should provide high levels of guided assistance, flexibility in giving instruction to match a child's need, provide clear verbal cues that a child can understand and information to help a child learn and understand (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006).

Families who provide a rich learning environment for children through dialogic reading have better chances of raising higher achieving children. By having this rich, stable environment, school success can begin at home (Anderson, 2000).

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## Appendix A

## First Interview Questions

## (Parents)

1. How often do you read to your child?
  - a. Who normally reads to your child?
  - b. At what time of the day do you read to your child?
  - c. What types of reading materials do you read to your child?
  - d. How old was your child when you began reading to them?
  - e. Explain what a typical reading session with your child would look and sound like?
2. Approximately how many children's books do you have in your home?
3. Where do you keep these books?
4. At what age did your child begin reading independently?
  - a. How often does your child choose to read independently?
  - b. How often does your child choose books at the school library to read?
  - c. How often does your child read aloud to you?
5. How often do you or your child visit the public library?
6. How does your child feel about reading?
7. Does your child see you read at home?
  - a. How often?
  - b. What types of reading material does your child see you reading?
8. Were you read to as a child?
  - a. If so, by who?

## Appendix B

## First Interview Questions

(Child)

1. Does anyone in your family read to you?
  - a. Who normally reads to you?
  - b. At what time of the day do you read?
  - c. What types of reading materials are read to you?
  - d. How old were you when they started reading to you?
  - e. While you are being read to, do you participate or say anything?
2. Approximately how many children's books do you have in your home?
3. Where do you keep these books?
4. What kinds of reading materials can be found in your home?
5. At what age did you learn to read?
  - a. How often do you read by yourself?
  - b. How often do you check out books from the school library?
  - c. How often do you read to another family member?
6. How often do you visit the public library?
7. How do you feel about reading?
8. What do you like to read?
9. Do you see anyone else reading in your home?
  - a. Who?
  - b. What are they reading?

## Appendix C

## Second Interview Questions

(Parents)

1. Thinking back to the last time you read aloud to your child, describe the process you went through. What was the routine?

- a. Who initiated the read aloud?
- b. What time of the day was it?
- c. Where were you?
- d. Who chose the book? What was the book?
- e. Who read the book?
- f. Was there any conversation that took place outside of reading the book?
- g. Was the book discussed?
- h. Were new words discussed?
- i. How did your child react to the book?

2. Does your child have a favorite book/author?

3. What do you think is the most effective strategy in helping children become good readers?

4. Why do you read to your child?

5. How does your child feel about reading? What is it about reading that your child likes?

## Appendix D

## Second Interview Questions

(Child)

1. Thinking back to the last time you read aloud with someone, describe the process you went through. What was the routine?

- a. Who initiated the read aloud?
- b. What time of the day was it?
- c. Where were you?
- d. Who chose the book? What was the book?
- e. Who read the book?
- f. Was there any conversation that took place outside of reading the book?
- g. Was the book discussed?
- h. Were new words discussed?
- i. What did you think about the book?

2. Do you have a favorite book/author?

3. How did you learn to read?

4. Why do you read?

5. How do you feel about reading? What is it about reading that you like?