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A Study of Preschool Children Telling “Book Stories”

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A STUDY OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN TELLING "BOOK STORIES"

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of information preschool children who had been exposed to books and stories had internalized about books and stories. Developmental differences regarding knowledge of story elements and book-reading conventions observed between 3- and 5-year-olds were also probed. A wordless picture book was used to prompt the children to produce oral versions of the story depicted.

The subjects were eight 3-year-olds and eight 5-year-olds enrolled in nursery schools in western New York.

The researcher tape-recorded the children telling or "reading" their stories and also recorded book-reading behaviors exhibited. The stories were then transcribed. These transcribed stories and the recorded observations were analyzed to determine the story elements and book-reading conventions demonstrated by the children. Multiple raters were utilized in analyzing the children's stories.

The results, including portions of the children's stories, were reported in a qualitative manner.

The findings of the study indicate that both 3- and 5-year-olds have some knowledge of story elements and book-reading conventions. Differences by age included 5-year-olds' greater use of structured introductions and endings for their stories; their production of longer, more focused stories; and the tendency to take greater ownership of the task. Three-year-olds' strengths included noting the activating event in the picture book, using dialogue, and varying their tones of voice.

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Every young child represents unlimited potential to grow and to learn, yet many will never reach their educational potential because of an inability to read. Literacy Volunteers of America estimates that one-twentieth of the adult population in the United States is functionally illiterate, that is, reading at or below the fifth-grade level (Chisman, 1990). Thus, a challenge for society is to find ways to change this statistic -- to help all children grow up literate.

Events involving literacy begin as soon as a child is born, according to Yetta Goodman (1991). She maintains that all children, by about age 3, have knowledge about reading and writing. "As the child lives in a literate world, the child begins to say, 'What is literacy all about?' "

Life itself is an important teacher of what is referred to as story schema, a person's set of expectations about the basic structure of stories. Life experiences lead people to understand causal relationships and the methods in which action unfolds.

An internal framework, story schema helps people construct, reconstruct and understand stories. The primary source is listening to stories and to books read aloud. These activities lead to knowledge about sequencing, including, typically, knowledge about how stories begin and end (Mandler & Johnson, 1977).

Reading aloud to young children is a particularly powerful activity. Research has found that it correlates positively with youngsters' language development, vocabulary acquisition, eagerness to read and success at beginning reading instruction in school (Teale, 1981).

Purpose

This study examined children who have been exposed to books and stories (at nursery school and almost certainly, in addition, at home) to see what information they have internalized about books and stories. A wordless picture book was used to prompt the preschool children to produce oral versions of the story depicted.

Questions to be Answered

1. What types of story elements will preschool children include in their stories?
2. What types of book-reading conventions will the preschool children exhibit as they relate their stories?
3. What is the nature of the developmental differences regarding knowledge of story elements and book-reading conventions that will be observed between 3- and 5-year-olds?

Need for the Study

Research involving preschool children is needed to expand the knowledge about how children begin to learn about books and stories and the events that successfully foster reading.

Most of the existing research in the area of preschool children telling stories falls into one of two categories: it asks preschool children to retell books that have been read to them several times (Holdaway, 1979), or it asks preschoolers to create stories without reference to literary forms (Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963).

In this study, children were asked to create their own interpretations of a wordless storybook, which gave

the subjects a chance to demonstrate their knowledge of story schema and book-reading behaviors. The structure of the study forces the children to focus on the book as part of the "reading" event.

Definition of Terms

I. Elements of the simplest stories include:

A. Setting -- sets the stage by introducing the protagonist (may be more than one person as long as they react in similar ways) and other characters; also supplies the time and locale of the story and information the listener/reader needs to understand later events.

B. Beginning -- one or more events which cause the protagonist to do something.

C. Development -- protagonist's response to the beginning.

D. Ending -- brings development as a whole to conclusion; not just a reaction to the last event (Mandler & Johnson, 1977).

E. Book/story-type language -- includes dialogue, description, speaker tags, varying tone of voice for various characters and use of past tense (Applebee, 1979).

II. Book-reading conventions include:

- A. Holding book properly.
- B. Left to right eye movements.
- C. Scanning down pages
- D. Turning pages.
- E. Showing or talking about illustrations.
- F. Reading title and/or author (Holdaway, 1979).

Limitations of the Study

Limiting factors are the relatively small number of children studied and the lack of a diverse population pool. All of the children were white, middle class and residing in small-city or rural environments.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Preschool children are far from passive as they climb upon an adult's lap to have a story read or sit raptly gazing at an adult telling a story. Instead, they are learning about books and stories, enlarging upon their story schema, which grows even incidentally (Y. Goodman, 1991). This study takes a look at how knowledge about books and stories develops, and, specifically, at what a group of preschool children know about literacy, after three or five years of listening, speaking, observing, and playing.

Incidental Literacy Learning

Young children are gifted when it comes to learning, taking information even from everyday events where no effort is made at instruction. Heath (1980) studied a working-class community where parents did not read to their children nor consciously model reading and writing. Despite this, children read and wrote independently at young ages. Heath's study emphasizes

the role of context in promoting literacy. She explains that children read to learn information necessary to their lives. The children she studied learned from environmental sources, such as reading words on passing trains, reciting advertisements for taxi companies, and noting prices on store items. "They searched each item for only those messages they judged meaningful," Heath concluded (p. 129).

Yetta Goodman says that adults are unaware of a constant "bombardment of written language" that surrounds everyone, but that children are absorbing this information. "Our kids have been immersed in literacy -- all our kids -- including those whose parents don't have books in the home" (1991). Children demonstrate the knowledge they have internalized when they are able to tell what words on cereal boxes or toothpaste tubes mean (Mason, 1980; Y. Goodman, 1991).

Schickedanz and Sullivan (1984) relate a rich, but unintentional, literacy lesson one child received. A parent involved her child in making a grocery list to give the child something to do as the parent busily prepared to go to a store. During this exchange, the child received instruction about spelling, punctuation, and categorization. "But the parent's goal was not to

teach literacy skills, and if asked about any direct teaching of reading and writing skills, he or she would likely respond with an emphatic 'No!' " (p. 15).

Kenneth Goodman (1991) used a writing sample by his preschool-aged grandson as an example of incidental literacy learning. Initially, the large, shakily written letters on the page could only be deciphered by the proud grandfather, but as Goodman read them, the message conveyed via invented spelling became clear: "Happy Birthday, Grandpa Kenny. Love, Aaron." Goodman explained, "He's using the real world to learn about written language."

Knowledge about Books

Children who have been exposed to books have an opportunity to build upon their knowledge of literacy before formal instruction begins (Ehri, 1975; Mason, 1980; Sulzby, 1985). In her study of reading attempts by 2, 3 and 4-year-olds, Sulzby found that pre-instructional children develop tremendously through interacting with storybooks. As they grow, children adopt speech components found in books and generalize these behaviors across books.

Chomsky (1972) concluded: "The child who reads (or listens to) a variety of rich and complex materials

benefits from a range of linguistic inputs that is unavailable to the non-literary child" (p. 25).

Holdaway (1979) has found that children begin to learn to read naturally when their parents first read to them and let them handle books. Young children learn the language and conventions of print and they learn that the language of books is meaningful. It soon becomes clear that their own language can be written down to communicate meaning to others.

Value of Picture Books

Case studies of preschool children sharing books with parents at home have shown that children are often more interested in the pictures than in the text of storybooks (Many, 1989; Yaden, Smolkin & Conlon, 1989).

Degler (1979) expands upon this, using wordless books in the classroom to help develop reading readiness and language competence and to encourage various types of thinking (from literal to empathetic). She points out: "Books without words insure a successful reading experience; they foster positive attitudes in the child regarding his competence with books" (p. 400).

Using a wordless picture book as stimulus, Nurss, Hough, and Goodson (1981) found that 4-year-old

children were able to tell stories with a variety of vocabulary words and relatively long syntactic structures. They concluded: "Young children's natural expectations of story structure, a skill essential for successful reading, can be developed through use of wordless picture books" (p. 30).

Importance of Play

Roskos (1988) draws a correspondence between the stages of play and the stages of story grammar, or schema. In her study of 4- and 5-year-old children, she maintains that the setting of a story is similar to the readying of the "stage" and directing of a play episode. A story's plot can be likened to the acting out of a play episode.

Play should not be separated from literacy learning, but instead should be used as a way of expanding children's literacy bases (Cohn, 1981; Schickedanz & Sullivan, 1984; Snow, 1983).

Schickedanz and Sullivan suggest that when children enter school, literacy events be kept meaningful and playful, as they often are at home. They advise adding items such as typewriters, steno pads, and carbon paper (for office play) or note pads, menus, and signs (for restaurant play).

Snow explains that infants easily acquire language because it is learned in a totally contextualized manner. Yet, when these same children go to school and are taught to read, the process is often wholly removed from meaningful situations. She argues that the decontextualization of literacy into subskills practice is what makes literacy so difficult to attain.

Yetta Goodman draws a closer bond between literacy and play, explaining that play is a child's way of experimenting with and learning about his world. "As kids begin to play with their world, they begin to realize there are other things in their world, like books. They become aware that written language is meaningful" (1991).

Social Aspects of Story

As children grow in age, they have more things to say and are better at expressing them. Umiker-Sebeok (1979) studied intraconversational narratives (verbal descriptions of one or more past events) of children ages 3 to 5, and found that such narratives increased from 23 percent per conversation for 3-year-olds to 35 percent per conversation for 5-year-olds. Narratives concerning events occurring outside the classroom increased even more strikingly with age: from 11

percent per conversation for 3-year-olds to 53 percent per conversation for the increasingly social 5-year-old children.

Oral stories share a strong link with the social event. Yetta Goodman (1991) said: "Story only takes place in a social community. That's what the purpose of story and narration is: to share your stories with your peers, with other people in your community."

Moffett (1968) maintains that children's continued discourse is also an important component of early writing, and writing is a crucial part of literacy.

Developing Expectations about Books and Stories

Research has shown that although children sometimes use sustained speech in conversation, they do so more often in stories they tell and retell (King and Rentel, 1979). A further connection is made with the internalization of story schema. King and Rentel wrote:

Whether or not it is made explicit, all (studies about emerging writing) are based on the assumption that individuals tell, retell or recall stories on the basis of an internalization of the story structure -- a story schema -- that has been acquired and guides the production or reproduction of a story. (p. 245)

Applebee (1978) points to a gradual development in our understanding of story. "We function psychologically by building systematic 'representations' of experience which provide both an interpretation (or structuring) of the past and a system for anticipating the future" (p. 3). He goes on to say that each person builds his own representation, or model, of the rules of language and that these rules are extended and corrected as we gain experience using them.

Young children are adept at telling stories, the sophistication of which increases as the children's experiential bases expand (Applebee, 1978; Brown, 1975; Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963; Whaley, 1981).

Studying children ages 2 through 5, Pitcher and Prelinger (1963) found that children grow increasingly imaginative in telling stories as they mature.

Analyzing the same set of stories as Pitcher and Prelinger, Applebee (1978) determined that preschoolers had internalized many of the elements of simple stories. Three-year-olds, he found, used a formal beginning 43 percent of the time; a formal ending 13 percent of the time; and past-tense verbs in 80 percent of their stories. At age 5, children's competence in

telling stories had grown, according to his findings that 87 percent used a formal beginning, 47 percent a formal ending; and 87 percent past tense.

Preschool children have also mastered many important book-reading conventions, Marie Clay (1985) has shown. Utilizing her "Concepts About Print" test, she found that 5-year-olds enjoy, and have little difficulty, identifying items such as the front of a book, a letter, a word, the first letter in a word, the function of the space and the uses of punctuation. Success with her test is a positive indicator of one group of behaviors which support reading acquisition.

Summary

Children as young as 3 have already internalized a great deal of information about literacy. If they have been read to or listened to stories they also know much about books and stories. Research has shown that play and the social group are important in gaining literacy, and that picture books may be especially well suited toward giving young children success with books. This study incorporates the information gleaned by research to determine the knowledge about books and stories that a specific population of young children has developed.

Chapter III

Research Design

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of information preschoolers had internalized about books and stories and the differences in this accumulated knowledge that would be demonstrated by 3-year-olds, as compared to 5-year-olds. A wordless picture book was used to prompt the children to produce oral versions of the story depicted.

Questions

The questions investigated in this study were:

1. What types of story elements will preschool children include in their stories?
2. What types of book-reading conventions will the preschool children exhibit as they relate their stories?
3. What is the nature of the developmental differences regarding knowledge of story elements and

book-reading conventions that will be observed between 3- and 5-year-olds?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 16 children enrolled in nursery schools in western New York. They included eight 5-year-olds, four girls and four boys; and eight 3-year-olds, likewise, four girls and four boys. They were chosen at random to represent a range of abilities, personalities and backgrounds.

Materials

Materials used for this study included:

1. A wordless storybook, Peter Spier's Rain (1982).
2. A tape recorder.
3. A checklist devised by the researcher for recording reading-related behaviors as children were being taped.
4. A scoring sheet the researcher formulated to assist the researcher and two additional raters in evaluating the children's stories.

Procedure

The researcher spent time in each of the classrooms, letting the children become comfortable with her, before beginning one-on-one meetings with the subjects. The subjects then met with the researcher individually in quiet areas separated from the other nursery school students. The setting for the meetings between the researcher and the subjects included child-sized tables and chairs and stuffed animals and dolls.

To establish rapport, the researcher began each session with casual conversation with the children. Most were eager to begin the task, but a few children needed additional time interacting in order to become comfortable with the researcher. When the children were ready to begin, the researcher invited the children to look at the storybook used in this study, Peter Spier's Rain. The children were told that they would be given time to look at the book and that they would be asked to tell the story the pictures in the book showed them. The researcher handed each child the book, face up with the book's spine on the child's left side.

After looking through the book, the children were asked to sit or stand, however they were comfortable,

to pretend to "read" the story. The children had the option of reading the book to the researcher or to the stuffed animals and dolls (Cohn, 1981). The researcher tape-recorded the children's renderings of the storybook and kept a written record of observations. Several of the subjects needed prompting. In those cases, the researcher would say, "What do you think is happening here? Can you tell me?" Invariably, the children were able to "read" the storybook, which is a colorful representation of a sister and brother's adventures on a rainy day. The children were enthusiastic about being taped and hearing themselves on tape, so the researcher played back part of the readings for the children when taping was finished.

When the children stopped telling their stories, unless they signaled it was the end (e.g. by saying "the end"), the researcher asked the children, "Is that the end of your story?" If the children answered no, they were asked to finish the story and to tell the researcher when it was completed. At the end of the readings, the researcher thanked and praised the children.

Analysis of Data

After the reading sessions, the researcher transcribed the tape-recorded interviews. The typed stories were then carefully read and analyzed to determine what story elements children used. Two additional raters, both professional educators with more than five years' experience in working with young children, assisted in analyzing the children's stories after meeting with the researcher to discuss the criteria important in this study.

The multiple raters were found to have strong inter-rater reliability by running a simple correlation between responses given in scoring five sample story passages that had been devised by the researcher. The results from the five samples were averaged to reveal the following highly positive correlations: between Rater A (researcher) and Rater B: .87; between Rater A and Rater C: .90; and between Rater B and Rater C: .77.

In addition, the researcher used information collected on the checklist of book-reading behaviors to determine what conventions of book reading the children exhibited. The data were organized according to the subjects' ages. Findings were then reported in a descriptive manner.

Chapter IV

Analysis of the Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent of information nursery school students had internalized about books and stories and the differences in this accumulated knowledge that would be demonstrated by 3- and 5-year-old children respectively. A wordless picture book was used to prompt the children to produce oral versions of the story depicted.

Findings and Interpretations

I. Knowledge about Story Elements

The first question of the study asked what types of story elements the preschool children would include in their stories.

All of the elements of simple stories, as outlined by Mandler and Johnson (1977) and Applebee (1979), were exhibited among the story samples of the 16 children studied; however, no one child displayed all of the

elements.

Setting Most of the children, 13 out of 16, started their stories with narrative details about what they saw in the pictures rather than using an introduction. Only three 5-year-olds used what the raters determined to be structured beginnings. Of these, Annie (5.2) appeared to give the story's start the most thought, as she began: "Well, it would probably start like: One day, I guess." She then added, parenthetically, "I can't really read." John (5.3) began this way: "Once it was raining." Mary Beth's (5.0) introduction was: "First it is getting a little dark and they're playing in the sandbox."

Thirteen of the children introduced the protagonists and/or other characters appearing in the picture book, but with varying degrees of complexity. Tamara (5.0) called the brother and sister protagonists "boy and girl" and alternately "boys and girls," although there are only one girl and boy depicted (see Appendix A for the researcher's description of the complete picture book). She also named most of the animals in the story, including "birdies," "cat,"

"kitty," "doggy," "ducks," "squirrels," "chicks," and "bunny rabbit." She also identified the mother in the story, as did five other children, four of whom were 3-year-olds. John (5.3) and Annie (5.2) were the only subjects to identify the father, who appears in only one picture in the book. John said: "And it's dinner time when Dad gets home, and their father is reading a book." When Annie named the father, it was not at the point he is pictured but at a place where the brother and sister are looking out their bedroom window at night. She said: "They're in somebody's room waiting for Daddy to come home."

Fourteen out of 16 children mentioned some aspect of the physical setting of the story. The most often cited locales were inside, outside, and home. The most frequently mentioned times were nighttime and morning. Mary Beth (5.0) described the physical setting in the most detail. Her descriptions included: "Now it's almost starting to rain, and they're playing in the sandbox....And they walked on the grass and walked through lots of water....And they see cars outside and they see their backyard outside."

All of the children studied supplied information necessary for a reader or listener to understand later

events in the story. This shows that they all had some understanding of the stimulus picture book and were able to communicate this information.

Beginning The picture book's beginning event, which causes the protagonists to take action, is that it starts to rain. Only four of the 5-year-olds and six of the 3-year-olds included this detail in their stories. Generally, the children who included the activating event said, "It's raining" or "It's starting to rain." Emily (3.3) was more creative, saying: "Flash of lightning got on their heads." Actually, no lightning is depicted in the book.

Development Despite the fact that not all the children included the activating event, all 16 included the protagonists' response to that event. This agrees with the assessment by Bower (1976) that because young children have not fully internalized all aspects of story schema, they are likely to tell fractured stories with elements missing, unexplained, or out of sequence. The subjects articulated the development of the story with phrases to the effect that the boy and girl were running into the house, putting on their raincoats and boots, taking their umbrella and going back outside.

Ending Four of the eight 5-year-olds and two of

the eight 3-year-olds brought the story as a whole to conclusion with a formal ending. Concluding the story with a simple "the end" were C.J. (5.9), John (5.3), Mary Beth (5.0), Diana (3.11), and Emily (3.3). Annie (5.2) embellished on the standard ending, however, observing the puddles left by the book's rainstorm and saying: "I guess maybe we're done with this story. This is a mess. A mess. The end."

Book/story-type language Dialogue was utilized by only three of the subjects, two of whom were 3-year-olds. Emily (3.3) made the greatest use of dialogue and other literary devices, as she wove the fairy tale, The Little Red Hen, into her story:

They putted on their raincoats
and boots and snowpants. So.
Their mother surprised: "You
might come outside and plant the
wheat and cut the wheat and take
it to the mill to be ground into
flour. And plant the wheat,
okay, girl?"

Nicholas (3.9) used a speaker tag and dialogue in a more traditional way: "And she's saying, 'Come over. Come over!' " John (5.3) used dialogue without attributing it to a specific speaker: "It's morning time! We can go outside and play!"

All of the children used description to some extent, from describing the blocks as "big" that the

boy and girl used for building a castle (Jimmy, 3.10), to John's (5.3) more involved descriptions:

Sometimes it's windy; sometimes it's raining; sometimes it's snowing by the birds; sometimes it's raining by the water. Sometimes, what the heck they doing? Can they jump over that big thing? I can't read that part. Oh, it's a bee thing.

Six of the 3-year-olds and three of the 5-year-olds varied the tones of their voices when relating their stories. In most cases, it was excitement that the children conveyed by changing their voices. When Kendra (3.11) saw the large raindrop-covered spider web, she responded: "Whoa!" When a car passed the boy and girl in the book, she said: "Splash!" C.J. (5.9) seemed to purposely look for humor as he read the picture book, and laughed several times.

Almost all of the children related the story of the picture book in present tense. Only Ryan (5.3), Mary Beth (5.0), and Emily (3.3) used past-tense verbs for most of their stories.

II. Knowledge of Book-Reading Conventions

The study's second question concerned the book-reading conventions the children would exhibit as they related their stories.

All of the children studied held the book and turned its pages properly. They all used left to right eye movements when scanning pages, but most also scanned from right to left. In the researcher's opinion, this was due to the layout of the picture book. Some of the pages contain as many as seven pictures in a comic strip-type layout. In many cases, the children began scanning left to right, but then continued in a circular manner to try to take in all the information the pictures presented. None of the children announced the author or title of the book.

III. Differences observed between 3- and 5-year-olds

The study's third question concerned developmental differences displayed by 3- and 5-year-olds respectively in the areas of story elements and book-reading conventions.

A. Story Elements

Both age groups showed strengths regarding some story elements. The researcher also notes attitudinal differences exhibited by the two age groups studied.

The 5-year-olds were better at formally introducing and at bringing it to conclusion. The 3-year-olds were better at noting the beginning event and at using dialogue. Otherwise, the children exhibited

knowledge of simple stories nearly equally.

However, the children's approach to completing the researcher's task did vary along age lines. Most of the 3-year-olds needed prompting to help them get started telling a story. Among the 5-year-olds, only C.J. (5.9) needed prompting, but he was behaving in a rather playful way with the researcher -- pretending he didn't want to participate, then laughing and displaying his skill with books and stories when he was prompted.

The other 5-year-olds took part eagerly, and in many cases were intent on performing well. Consequently, the stories related by the 5-year-olds were generally twice or three times as long as those given by the younger children.

Mary Beth (5.0) seemed interested in excelling by relating all the information from the book that she possibly could. Similarly, Tamara (5.0) labeled almost every item pictured, though at three points in the book mentioned that the book was "way too hard." Dan (5.3) took the task very seriously and was not satisfied until he had made one statement to correspond with every page. John (5.3) also tried to excel, but in a more light-hearted, interactive manner. When he came

to a picture where the boy's pants were falling down, he shouted: "Oh no!" and "Ooh!" A couple of pages later, he told the researcher: "I know how to read books."

The 5-year-olds in general were more focused on the task, whereas the 3-year-olds tended to drift to other subjects. Whitney (3.5) and Diana (3.11) talked about having colds; Nicholas (3.9) discussed his turtle, sticker and Dumbo books and the fact that his "other red football is broken." Sam (3.8) was overwhelmed by the amount of rain pictured in the book. About half of his story referred to the rain, and when he wasn't talking about it, he mouthed the word "rain" over and over.

When the 5-year-olds supplied pieces of previous knowledge it generally added information to the content of the picture book. C.J. (5.9) offered:

Looks like there's a flood. Do you know what a flash flood is? It's a flood where water comes from the ocean and all that stuff. A flood is over that (pointing to the book). They couldn't be walking in it; they'd have to be wearing life jackets. They'd have to be swimming, cuz it would be higher.

B. Book-Reading Conventions

All of the children studied were found to have knowledge about the mechanics of book reading, but the 5-year-olds took more ownership of the task, holding the book themselves in all but one case. Among the 3-year-olds, only three of the children held the book while relating the story. The others "read" the story while the researcher held the book.

Another age-related finding involves illustrations. The 5-year-olds seemed to be more involved with the pictures. Six of the older children pointed to the illustrations and talked about them, as compared to only three of the 3-year-olds.

The 5-year-olds also expressed more awareness of the lack of words. Annie (5.2) pointed to a blank space under a picture near the front of the book, and said: "There's no story here."

Summary

All 16 children studied were found to have some knowledge about story elements and book-reading conventions. However, some age-related differences were found. Five-year-olds were found to be more skilled than 3-year-olds at supplying introductions and endings for stories, at producing the stories without prompting, at telling longer stories with greater detail, at staying on task, at discussing illustrations, and at holding the book while relating the story. Three-year-olds showed strengths at noting the story's beginning event, at using dialogue, and at varying their tones of voice while "reading."

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

This study was conducted to investigate the extent of information nursery school students had internalized about books and stories and the differences in this accumulated knowledge that would be demonstrated by 3- and 5-year-old children respectively. A wordless picture book was used to prompt the children to relate oral versions of the story depicted.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest a number of conclusions that can be drawn about preschoolers who have been exposed to books and stories. These conclusions will be summarized in this chapter.

The study demonstrates that preschool children who have been exposed to books and stories have internalized a diverse range of information about the elements of simple stories. They have knowledge of characters, setting, description, and details. And,

when prompted by a picture book, these children are able to tell or "read" a story themselves.

These children are able to hold a book correctly, to turn pages properly, and to scan pages for information.

As regards age-related differences, 5-year-olds are more apt to use a formal introduction and ending to a story than are 3-year-olds. Five-year-olds are more focused at producing a story than 3-year-olds, who tend to include extraneous information. Five-year-old children take greater ownership of the reading task than 3-year-olds by holding the book themselves. Five-year-old children have more involvement with a book's illustrations than do 3-year-olds. Finally, 5-year-olds are more aware of the existence of words in books than are 3-year-olds.

Three-year-olds exhibit a greater tendency to use dialogue and to lay a groundwork for future action in the story by including an activating event. Three-year-olds also show greater excitement in reading or telling a story. Three-year-olds need more prompting than 5-year-olds to relate a story.

The results of this study demonstrate that children who have been read to and who have listened to

stories internalize a great deal of information about these literacy events.

Implications for Further Research

The results of this study point to several areas that necessitate further research.

Longitudinal studies are needed to follow children who have literate beginnings in the preschool years to see whether the information they have learned about books and stories transfers to ease in reading acquisition. Attitude surveys should also be employed to see whether the subjects continue their enthusiasm toward books and stories.

Conversely, researchers need to study young children who have not been involved with books and stories to determine what they are learning about literacy incidentally.

Classroom Implications

Research, including the current study, has shown the importance of having children tell stories orally (McKeough, 1987; Morrow, 1985; Olson, 1977; Willy, 1975). Willy calls young children's early literary endeavors "important tributaries to the mainstream of cultural progress," as opposed to what Piaget would

have labeled "egocentric chatter." Collecting of oral stories from children allows teachers to assess what children know about books and stories at an age when children are unable to communicate this information through reading and writing.

Wordless picture books are especially well suited as a classroom tool. Using wordless books, teachers can help their students develop reading readiness, language competence, and strategies necessary for future success in reading (Degler, 1979). Specific suggestions include using the children's transcribed stories as language experience activities; asking open-ended questions to increase language output and to encourage creative language; and using the children's stories to clarify concepts and practice sentence form.

A final classroom application is a reminder that early literacy learning needs to be done in conjunction with play, or experimentation with the surroundings. Literacy materials, including books and writing materials, should be available as a play option to children in primary grades. This would naturally increase children's capacity for incidental literacy learning, keeping the activities meaningful and enjoyable.

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Appendices

Appendix A

A brief description of the action depicted
in Peter Spier's Rain:

Page Description of Pictures

- 1,2 Girl and boy playing in sandbox in backyard; gray clouds approaching.
- 3,4 Rain starts to fall; cat runs away.
- 5,6 Girl and boy run toward house where mother beckons from porch.
- 7,8 Kids (girl and boy) put on raincoats, hats, and boots; get umbrella from mother; go for walk in rain.
- 9,10 Kids explore bee house, wet laundry, water pouring out pipe, birds on wire, water from house gutters, water in sandbox.
- 11,12 Kids walk through huge puddle.
- 13,14 Kids look at spiderweb, chipmunks and birds keeping dry; climb under overturned boat; girl squirts boy with hose; boy dumps wheelbarrow full of water; car splashes them.
- 15, 16 Boy falls in puddle; kids see woodpile and raccoon, birds hiding in pipes, water swirling down drain, dog in doghouse, birds in birdhouse; boy swings on swingset rings; stands in stream with ducks.
- 17,18 Girl and boy on bridge, feeding ducks one of which pokes inside boy's hat.
- 19,20 Kids sit on park bench; see reflection in puddle; stand on curbside water; see cat under car; girl shakes water off branch.
- 21,22 Kids see planter box, rabbits in cage, flowers; run down sidewalk.
- 23,24 Kids running hard; umbrella turns inside-out.

Page Description of Pictures

25,26 Kids go in house; mother dumps water from boots out door; kids take bath; mother takes wet clothes away; kids and mother have snack of cookies and hot chocolate.

27,28 Kids read books; look out window; build castle of blocks; eat dinner with father and mother; play with marbles; watch television.

29,30 Kids look out window; get ready for bed.

31,32 Kids look out window onto darkened street below; bedroom light is on, then out.

33,34 In middle of night, rain begins to stop.

35,36 Rain is stopped; moon goes down; sun comes up.

37,38 Boy wakes up; sister still sleeping; both awake, look out window.

39,40 Sunny morning; boy and girl in backyard with dog.

Appendix B

Checklist of Book-Reading Conventions:

(for noting observations during tape-recording)

Name _____ Age _____

- _____ holds book right side up
- _____ reads title and/or author
- _____ left to right eye movements
- _____ scans down pages
- _____ scans left page first, then right page
- _____ turns pages properly
- _____ shows or talks about illustrations
- _____ mentions some aspect of physical book (e.g. lack of words, size of book)

Other observations:

Appendix C

Scoring Children's Stories

(Please include examples from child's story.)

Name _____ Age _____

1. Does the child introduce book/story in some way (e.g. by announcing title or author or by saying Once upon a time or Once...)?
2. Does the child name characters (e.g. mother, sister, brother, dog)?
3. Does the child provide setting details (e.g. time and/or locale)?
4. Does the child mention activating event(s) which cause protagonists to do something?
5. Does the child include details of protagonists' responses to activating events?
6. Does the child bring story to conclusion (e.g. by saying "the end" or "they lived happily ever after")?
7. Does the child use:
Dialogue?
8. Speaker tags?
9. Description?
10. Past tense? (exclusively? frequently?
sometimes? never?)
11. Different tones of voice for various characters and/or developments (marked in text by exclamation points or words written in all-capital letters)?
12. Phrasing such as found in books, rather than in conversation?