Emergent Literacy Development Through Storybook Reading: One Head Start Teacher’s Explanations and Practices

by

Salwa B. Jawhar

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APPROVED:

Dr. Rosary Lalik, Committee Chair

Dr. Andrew J. Stremmel

Dr. Kusum Singh

Dr. Susan Magliaro

Dr. Elizabeth A. Barber

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Emergent Literacy Development Through Storybook Reading: One Head Start Teacher’s Explanations and Practices

By Salwa B. Jawhar
Dr. Rosary Lalik, Chair

(ABSTRACT)

My goal in undertaking this research was to contribute to strengthening kindergarten educational practices in Kuwait with particular focus on literacy development. I was interested in the instructional techniques, tools, methods, language activities that would make sense to Arabic kindergartners and help them learn the formal, written register (i.e., formal literary Arabic) required in Kuwait. To this end, I used part of my graduate studies in education visiting and observing several kindergarten classes in the United States. During those visits, I noted that storybook reading was given a great deal of attention. Storybook reading is the process by which the teacher shares the content of storybooks with students, while at the same time encouraging social interaction (reading, showing illustrations, and encouraging student participation and conversation). This early exposure to storybook reading appears to support early literacy for American school children.

My aim in undertaking this study was to develop an appropriate and effective literacy program for young children in my country. Specifically, I wanted a case of literacy development and storybook reading that might reveal important patterns in teaching early literacy. I planned four research objectives: (1) to document and analyze a Head Start teacher’s verbal explanation of literacy teaching and storybook reading; (2) to observe the teacher’s practices with respect to literacy teaching and storybook reading; and (3) to examine the extent and nature of students' participation in classroom literacy activities including storybook reading.

My method of data collection was ethnographic, incorporating participant observation and verbal exchanges. I used the two methods simultaneously. Participant observation (including field notes, jot notes, reflective journal, audio-tapes, video-tapes, pictures, and artifacts) gave me richer access to the internal dynamics of the storybook reading event. Verbal exchanges, including in-depth interviews and informal discussions, enabled me to examine the participants' perceptions of literacy and literacy events. In-depth interviews enabled me to probe for participants’ explanation of any unusual observations. Informal discussion enabled me to probe certain situations that I did not anticipate, ask for explanations of things that just cropped up, and give the teacher and the students opportunities to share with me things they felt I should know.

The Head Start teacher explained that literacy spans most other activities and is a part of everyday life. According to her, literacy occurs naturally while children are engaged in everyday routines at home, school, or in the community. She added that children learn reading and writing long before formal instruction and that there is a connection between print and the visual symbols that surround it. The use of storybook reading, she said, helps children to develop a positive attitude to books and a global sense of the world. To help children acquire literacy, the teacher provides an appropriate physical environment, including storybook reading, interaction with others, extensive involvement in literacy
activities, and a generous display of print. The teacher used a multi-method approach and stimuli before, during, and after reading the story. Storybook reading was used to increase children's access to books, introduce the children to book conventions, integrate literacy and other curricular activities, encourage and empower students to actively participate in their learning, and to encourage cultural appreciation, and intercultural sensitivity. The students played several important roles during storybook reading: listening, conversing, collaborating, making decisions, choosing the books to be read, making seating arrangements, and helping the teacher. The four focal children manifested different reading characteristics including play reading, reading awareness, reading skills, reading development, writing and art, writing play, writing awareness, and writing skills.

The findings of this study indicate that storybook reading is not only a source of enjoyment but an important stepping-stone to other language skills and a great stimulus for creativity in young children. To extend the insights that I have gained from the study to my country, and as instructor in the Kindergarten Curriculum Instruction Department of the Kuwait Basic College of Education, I plan to model some of the most significant findings of the study in my teaching and teacher training activities. Aspects of the findings that I plan to model are: (a) integrated learning; (b) learner-centered education; (c) collaborative learning; (d) variations in method; and (e) student empowerment. In addition, I plan to implement a follow-up action research enabling my students to develop and implement a more child-centered, and more meaningful instructional practices in Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms. Another way in which I plan to extend the benefits of this research to my country and other Arab-speaking countries is to publish this study in Arabic.
Dedication

In Memory of my beloved mother

and

To my wonderful husband, Bader Ali, and my sons Abdulaziz, Abdullah, and Ali for their love, patience, support, and continuing prayers.

this dissertation is affectionately dedicated
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CHAPTER ONE

Rationale

Literacy in Kuwait

Educational reports and research indicate that Arabic speaking countries experience a high rate of primary school drop-out and a generally low literacy rate (McFerren, 1984). This problem resulted from the introduction of Modern Standard Arabic as a medium of instruction in the education system. The goal of Modern Standard Arabic was "Arabization," which necessitated that all citizens in Arab-speaking countries speak standard Arabic as the main language of communication. Although they do not share the problem of primary school drop-outs, Kuwaiti students experience the same levels of frustration in learning to read and write in standard Arabic (Mojawer, 1974; Al-Kandary & Yousef, 1995).

In Kuwait, there are two forms of Arabic: one is the informal, colloquial language, used in everyday life; the other is the formal, written register, used for instruction in schools and university and in written documents in the government and market sectors. The colloquial is used in every day life as a medium of communication among adults. It is the first language that children know and use informally, with parents, relatives, and friends; and it is usually the only language that pre-school and kindergarten students know and use. However, when these children begin to attend school, they are expected to speak and write the written or literary Arabic. Perfect literary Arabic (the formal language) differs in many ways from the informal language. This formal language is meant to be learned through formal education at school, and is intended to
perpetuate a "standard language" for communicating and maintaining the economy and for providing a common language for all Arabic countries.

In a study done on colloquial and literary Arabic, Rosenhouse (1995) noted that one important difference between the acquisitions of the two registers is in the grammatical structure. "The grammatical structure of the colloquial register is learned without explicit discussion of grammatical concepts; the grammar of the literary Arabic is learned [taught] in term of rules and norms to be imitated" (p. 30). Further, Rosenhouse's study of Arabic showed that for Arabic speakers, learning the formal register was like learning a second language. Compared to English, which has several dialectical differences, Arabic is actually a diglossia. A diglossia, according to Ferguson, is the linguistic situation where two different languages coexist. Furthermore, Ferguson (1971, 1996) also supports the existence of two languages in Arabic countries. She explained that in Arabic speaking communities there are two distinct, but related languages that operate simultaneously: the native language and the acquired, scholastic language. Arabic children, therefore, are required to learn a new language other than the language spoken in their home communities.

Rosenhouse (1995) identified several areas of difficulty in learning literary Arabic, which she believes are primarily encountered in the pronunciation of the guttural and emphatic consonants. The Arabic phonological system comprises some segments that require a manipulation at the back of the vocal tract. These phonemes, unfortunately, are challenging to master. Among the particularly difficult consonants are the emphatic (d, t, s, z). Arabic morphology, like the morphology of all Semitic languages, is rich in verbal paradigms and nominal structures. According to Rosenhouse (1995), Arabic
structures adhere to the basic morphological categories and are relatively systematic, having a number of fixed patterns. Because Arabic has no neuter gender, pluralization uses both suffix endings and many "broken plural" patterns which have to be learnt by rote. Rosenhouse also explains that numbers serve as another example of a "frequently-used difficult-to-acquire language category" (p. 8). That is, words like "few," "many," and "much" are used to describe different situations. Their morphological forms vary according to syntactic functions, with complex patterns and rules. In addition, some words include letters that have the same symbols. This lexical element requires special learning efforts. Children who are trying to master the formal language often report confusion with the use of these symbols, and inability to understand what they are reading (Jawhar, 1998).

My five years of experience as a kindergarten teacher indicate to me that some kindergarten students lack sufficient literacy skills with which to enter elementary school. They are unfamiliar with the formal language that they need to begin using in first grade at the elementary level. They are often not able to read books; and many of them cannot use the illustrations to tell the story. They seem reluctant to take ownership of literacy events in the classroom unless assigned by the classroom teacher.

Those and related problems seem to create frustration for many students as they enter elementary school where they begin instruction in the literary Arabic language in first grade. Many children devote as much as one or two years of study but later give up, finding out that despite great effort, their skills are extraordinarily limited (Ryding, 1991). The results of this unfortunate situation include dropping out of school, illiteracy, and a growing unpopularity of Arabic among Arab students.
Efforts must be made to support children's attempts to learn the formal register. One way to help them may be by introducing the formal register before first grade. Of course, to be helpful the introduction would have to be done in a way that is appropriate for young children (Garvin & Walter, 1991; Strickland, Morrow & Feitelson, 1990).

Research Interest

One outcome of my graduate studies in education in the United States is my keen interest in finding meaningful reading activities that would make sense to Arabic kindergartners and help them learn formal Arabic. Through my visits to, and observations of, several kindergarten classes in the United States, I noted that storybook reading was given a great deal of attention. By storybook reading I mean the process by which the teacher shares the content of storybooks with individuals or groups of students, while at the same time encouraging social interaction (read and show illustrations, active participation, and conversation). Teale, Martinez, and Glass (1989) describe storybook reading as a social interaction in which young children are engaged in knowledge construction. The teacher’s role in the process of storybook reading, according to Cochran-Smith (1984), is that of a mediator who builds a bridge during the read-aloud event between the child and the text. Smith identifies three types of interactions: "readiness," "life-to-text," and "text-to-life." In the readiness interaction, teachers expect the children to assume some "appropriate reading behaviors" such as sitting attentively, participating in reading aloud events, etc. In the life-to-text interactions, the teacher helps the students to use their own knowledge to make sense of the text. In the text-to-life interactions, the teacher helps the children to apply the text (information, problems, meaning, etc.) to their own experiences or concrete life situations.
I have observed that American teachers often spend a large portion of the day reading stories to their students. Often, the children engage in dialogue with the teacher after observing the illustrations in the book. This is different from the practice in Kuwait where reading the text for the children while displaying the illustrations and discussing the meaning of both is unheard of. The experience was therefore new to me, even as an experienced kindergarten teacher in Kuwait. Having observed this activity, I sought to explore and learn more why this practice was given so much attention. I discovered that storybook reading is frequently a basic part of the American pre-school and kindergarten program (Dennis & Walter, 1995). It provides children with a variety of literacy benefits (Chomsky, 1972; Clay, 1972, 1991; Durkin, 1966; Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986; Holdaway, 1979; Sulzby & Teale, 1991). It presents examples of good written English and provides children with the opportunity to build up connections between stories and books, and books and reading (Durkin, 1966; Ehri, 1979; Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1986; Garvin & Walter, 1991; Wells, 1985). In addition, I learned that the introduction of storybook reading during infancy is held as a major reason why American children learn to appreciate stories/books long before they can read (Cornell, Senechal, & Broda, 1989; Heath, 1982). Storybook reading is an important part of their lives.

My observations also confirmed what I read in my education courses. In-school, "story time" is a daily routine in American kindergarten classrooms; teachers often read one or more stories, for different pedagogical purposes. This is different from the situation in Kuwait where children are not read to during kindergarten class time. They are told stories on a few rare occasions. Early exposure to storybook reading appears to help American school children in many ways to read and interpret storybooks and talk
about main events (Feilston, 1988; Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1986). Could the same be true in Kuwait? My thoughts led me to reflect on the Kuwaiti system where there is concern about the reading abilities of first graders. Could the introduction of storybook reading to Kuwaiti kindergarten children facilitate the literacy achievement of students entering first grade?

Before examining this question, it will be necessary to learn how storybook reading is used as part of a total literacy program for young children. Storybook reading, as used in this study, is a series of activities including reading the content of the book, showing illustrations, social interaction, and active participation. To understand the context, it would be useful to learn about the teacher's practices as well as her linguistic description of those practices. A discussion of context includes all the components that relates to further understanding of how language develops in young children through storybook reading. This would include the teacher’s practices, the classroom environment, materials, and community of learners. Cole (1996) maintains that that any educational experience--such as storybook reading--contributes to the learner's total literacy environment as a special part, phase, or aspect of that child's total understanding.

Language is an important dimension of life (Cummins, 1998; Dyson, 1997; Fountas & Pinnell, 1998; Halliday, 1975; Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986). In young children, this dimension plays out in the interaction that they have with adults. Studies of children's language development show that as adults communicate with children they contribute to the child’s understanding of language. Adults usually respond to what the children are trying to say rather than how they say it. By doing this, adults help children develop the ability to use language (Cox, 1999). In classroom
settings, teachers support children's growing knowledge of language by providing many instances for meaningful communication experiences. In addition, teachers provide a print-rich environment, putting words on display and providing many books and writing materials in the classrooms. Time for sharing and group work are important as well because children talk to and communicate with their classmates. Teachers also create opportunities for exploring language and vocabulary by displaying words, providing writing materials, and reading books, and encouraging children to respond to them through talking, reading, drawing, and writing. Wells (1981) posits that young children learn oral language during the preschool years in rich contexts through social interactions. They also learn about the register of the written language by hearing such language in read-aloud activities.

I believe that there is a need for people in my culture to move toward change and development and, in particular, to help children learn literacy skills in early years. My goal in this research has been to examine one teacher’s successful linguistic practices and theoretical perspectives. Specifically, I wanted to find out how she explains literacy development and storybook reading and how she embodies the latter in her methods and practices. My research also examined the importance of storybook reading to young children’s literacy development. I wanted to know how children participate in classroom literacy activities, especially storybook reading.

My goal in undertaking this study is to be able to develop an appropriate and effective literacy program for young children in my culture. In this attempt, I am responding to Morse’s (1994) admonition that researchers should select topics that are of personal and professional interest. My first strategy was a pilot study in an American
Head Start classroom, in which I examined the ways a teacher in such an environment used storybook reading with the children. I found this teacher to be very interesting and worth studying because she seems to be able to find opportunities for children to learn literacy by providing them with experiences that encouraged them to explore and discover written language through storybook reading. She facilitated the children in their efforts to use material, as well as modeled and demonstrated the value of literacy in a variety of purposeful ways. The overall result of this teacher’s work is a literacy-rich classroom—an environment where children are surrounded by print.

As useful as the pilot study was, the limited time available did not allow me to develop enough understanding of the learning environment or the teacher's practice, or the children's participation. This research, therefore, is necessary to elaborate on the preliminary study. Its major purpose was to generate the kinds of information that I could use to engage in conversations with Kuwaiti kindergarten teachers. The purpose is also to help those who read my study to see how storybook reading can be incorporated into the kindergarten curriculum for the students' benefit. It is also to develop knowledge that I can use in working with Kuwaiti kindergarten teachers as they help children learn standard Arabic.

Based on all these preliminary observations, I believed that a systematic study of this teacher’s literacy philosophy, methods, and classroom experiences could provide a useful model for organizing this critical learning activity not only in the United States but also in my country, the State of Kuwait. The research was basically an ethnographic case study in which I have documented and examined: (a) the teacher’s verbal explanations of literacy teaching and storybook reading among young children; b) the
teacher's practices with respect to literacy teaching and storybook reading; and (c) the extent and nature of students' participation in classroom literacy activities including storybook reading.

Research Objective

The study has three main objectives: (1) document and analyze the Head Start teacher’s verbal explanation of literacy teaching and storybook reading; (2) observe teacher's practices with respect to literacy teaching and storybook reading; and (3) examine the extent and nature of students' participation in classroom literacy activities including storybook reading. The following specific research questions were addressed:

1. What are the Head Start teacher’s verbal explanations of literacy learning and storybook reading among young children?
   a) How does the teacher describe storybook reading and literacy learning?
   b) What importance does the teacher see in storybook reading and literacy learning?
   c) How does the teacher describe the relationship between storybook reading and literacy learning?
   d) What elements in storybook reading does the teacher see as promoting literacy learning?
   e) How does the teacher explain her role and that of the students in storybook reading and literacy learning?

2. What are the teacher's practices with respect to literacy teaching and storybook reading?
a) How does this teacher construct an environment to encourage literacy development?

b) What kinds of literacy events occur in the classroom?

c) How does the Head Start teacher interact with preschoolers in the literacy context?

d) How does the teacher use storybook reading within literacy activities?

e) How does the teacher assess preschoolers’ literacy performance in a Head Start classroom?

3. What is the extent and nature of students' participation in classroom literacy activities including storybook reading?

a) What aspects of storybook reading engage students?

b) What roles do students play during storybook reading and what is the extent of their participation in those activities?

c) How do students engage in storybook reading and other literacy activities?
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Theoretical Perspectives

This study has been influenced by three concepts related to children’s literacy development: emergent literacy, storybook reading, and constructivism. The first, emergent literacy, supports the belief that literacy is an ongoing growth and learning process that begins from childhood or birth, encompasses the child’s everyday experiences, and grows and expands as a result of those experiences. The second perspective, storybook reading, is the pedagogical process of reading stories to children during which the reader and child dialogue about the text. The third viewpoint, constructivism, is the principle that knowledge is a subjective phenomenon, reflecting the perspectives, interests, and desires of children and the role of the individual child in “constructing” his or her own knowledge.

To properly situate the three theoretical perspectives, it is necessary to review the sociocultural setting or the learning environment (i.e., Head Start classroom) within which this study was conducted.

Head Start Program

One the most significant sociological events of the early 1960’s was the “discovery” of massive social differences in the United State's body politic and, specifically, the relatively large number of educationally “disadvantaged” persons and groups. Commonly referred to as “the other America,” the phenomenon drew attention to the nearly one quarter of the American people who not only lived in poverty, but found it extremely difficult to escape that condition. In order to break the cycle of poverty and,
in particular, rescue the children who grew up in deprivation from adult poverty and dependency, several policy measures were initiated. Some of those measures focused on dependent children, from which grew the establishment of the Head Start Program.

The Head Start Program was proposed by an interdisciplinary panel chaired by Dr. Robert E. Cook, a professor of pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The panel considered several programs that would increase educational achievement and, therefore, economic opportunities for the poor. It then recommended a number of policy initiatives, some of which were designed to afford disadvantaged preschoolers the educational experiences and opportunities they frequently lacked. One of the recommended initiatives was Head Start—an early childhood intervention program (Cooke, 1972).

The Head Start Program was initiated in 1965, and since that time it has helped over 12 million children, making it one of the largest early childhood interventions in the United States. Although its primary goal is to assist and support children whose family income is below the officially designated “poverty line,” the program does permit 10% of the families served to be above that minimum income level. The federal government supports Head Start in a number of critical ways, all of which are intended to provide low income families with the services they need to improve their overall living standards. Researchers in this field describe four related federally-supported programs concerned with education, health care, social services, and parent involvement, each of which are summarized below.

*Education.* The Head Start Program is designed to provide every eligible child with essential educational services that will help him or her develop intellectually,
emotionally, and socially. In order to give disadvantaged children a “head start” in education, the program places these youngsters in a nurturing preschool environment. Another key objective of the program is to encourage parents to take a more active role in the education of their children--in other words, to become the "first teacher" for their family. This has, and continues to be, a critical component of Head Start.

**Health Care.** Head Start furnishes disadvantaged children and their families with basic health care services, including nutritional, medical, psychological, or even dental care. The program also tries to provide target families with knowledge about family health care and helps them to build beneficial relationships with their help providers.

**Social Services.** Head Start is designed to provide low income families with the social services required to assess their needs and to become increasingly independent of welfare and other related public assistance programs. Eligible families are also provided crisis-support services, as well as information about community assistance programs such as counseling, job training, and disease education.

**Parent Involvement.** As alluded to earlier, the Head Start Program seeks to involve parents in decision-making processes with regard to their children's involvement in the program. They are also encouraged to participate in the classroom as volunteers, serve on policy councils, and partake in workshops on children. (Council on Child Day Care and Early Childhood Program, 1991; Lang, 1992; Washington & Bailey, 1995).

One of the prevailing philosophies of the Head Start Program emphasizes that a child is not a passive entity, but rather an active individual who behaves in the context of his or her own world, family, and community. Thus, in order to modify a child's behavior it is necessary to change that youngster's beliefs about how the world functions.
Head Start proponents believe that the program will stimulate attitudinal changes in its classrooms and, especially, strengthen the link between families and other neighborhood institutions. The overall goal of the program is to create an alternative setting that is more nurturing, healthier, and more stimulating than the disadvantaged environments of most impoverished children. Thus, the program views the preschool classroom as a natural ecosystem that can provide children with practical opportunities to reconstruct “reality” (Lang, 1992). Therefore, the teacher’s main role in this reconstructed environment is to expand what children are able to accomplish by developing a nurturing, child-centered environment that will encourage them to discover and build upon their own strengths, as well as develop new competencies. In other words, if children are provided with a friendly and secure environment, they will more adept at learning new ideas and skills, exploring their environment, and making correct choices. Moreover, Head Start encourages children to select their preferred activities from a restricted number of available options, as well as whether they prefer to work/play alone or with others. The goal of allowing a child to have a say in his or her daily activities--and when and with whom to do it--is to teach children that they have the right to choose, as well as what it means to have a choice.

Various researchers have analyzed the impact of Head Start as an early childhood program. For example, in a report that describes the Head Start Program in Broward County, Florida, investigators examined the program's goals and expected outcomes, as well as parental satisfaction. According to the report, parents felt that the program did effectively achieve its goal of providing high quality support for low income families, which included medical and dental screening and follow-up for the children enrolled in
Head Start. Most former and current participants in the study expressed satisfaction with
the program (Blasik & Knight, 1994).

In a longitudinal study designed to evaluate the long-term effects of the Head
Start Program, Marcon (1996) compared Head Start graduates in an urban setting with
comparably poor pre-k graduates who were not enrolled in the program. The results
indicated that the Head Start graduates were more successful than their non-Head Start
counterparts in their transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 (as well as in future academic
pursuits), and also exhibited maladaptive behaviors.

In a study conducted by Nespaca (1995), nine mothers of Head Start children
were interviewed to determine what individualized steps they were taking outside the
classroom to help their children develop literacy skills. Even though the results showed a
significant improvement in the overall degree of parental involvement in literacy
activities, specific levels of interaction varied. For example, while all the mothers agreed
on the importance of reading aloud to their children, the amount of time they actually
spent reading to their children varied somewhat. Moreover, the mothers surveyed rarely
engaged in an oral discourse with their children about the books they read to them. Teale
(1984) studied 50 families to examine literacy development. He concluded that while
reading to young children was an important component in literacy development, it was
not essential to success in reading at school. Purcell-Gates (1989) conducted a study that
examined the language knowledge of low ESE kindergartners, which indicated that they
lacked a basic understanding of written language--primarily because these children
received poor pre-school exposure to printed books. Based on these findings it seems
clear that children from low income families are less likely to be familiar with reading and writing prior to elementary school.

Another study by Robinson and Dixson (1992) compared the literacy knowledge of 33 preschoolers from low income homes with 31 preschoolers from middle income homes. Their results revealed that the middle-income preschoolers significantly outperformed the low income preschoolers on standardized tests.

Other researchers have also looked at the importance of early literacy experiences prior to entering elementary school as a means of helping children to enhance their literacy in later years. In general, it is believed that children do acquire some basic literacy concepts as a result of their interaction with written language, such as listening to stories or pretending to read and write. Regrettably, fewer studies regarding storybook reading have focused on children of low income families who are less likely to be exposed to story reading at home and, thus, are at greater risk of experiencing reading and writing difficulties in elementary school.

In an effort to identify factors that encourage the literacy development of preschoolers who live in impoverished environments, Smith and Rotman (1993) conducted an extensive investigation of three preschoolers who were selected by their teachers because of their relatively advanced interest in the written language. Their results concluded that each of these children were regularly engaged in reading and writing experiences with an older influential individual who often read to them at home. The authors suggest that in order for children to develop literacy they need to be actively involved in reading and writing activities. This study also concluded that children do not
acquire literacy knowledge from socially embedded literacy experiences, but rather through direct involvement with reading and writing activities.

Despite the plethora of research on the performance of the Head Start Program, and its comparison with other educational approaches, considerable confusion and disagreement still exist on the philosophical and pedagogical practices associated with literacy development, including specific strategies for helping children—develop literacy skills. Some of the fundamental issues are highlighted in this review, with particular reference to emergent literacy, storybook reading, and constructivism. A greater appreciation of the interconnections between the three theoretical perspectives, it seems, requires critical review and a greater understanding of the concept of “literacy.”

**Literacy: Definitions and Perspectives**

As yet there is no generally agreed notion of literacy, and no universally acknowledged criteria by which it can be defined. Diverse disciplines, as well as different researchers and writers within a given discipline, define literacy differently. Conventional wisdom defines literacy as the "ability to read and write." More recent theoretical perspectives view it more broadly as a set of competencies that allow individuals not only to read and write, but also to engage in other social activities and to function effectively in the communities where they live (Baker & Luke, 1991; Marshall, 1992; Mikulecky & Drew, 1991). This latter view of literacy also identifies different forms of the concept, corresponding to various human activities: psychology, sociology, computer science, linguistics, anthropology, and education (Robinson, Mckenna, & Wedman, 1996).
At the center of the literacy debates are several critical issues, five of which merit further attention:

1. What constitutes literacy?
2. How much (if any) literacy skills do children entering school already possess?
3. Is literacy an individual or communal activity?
4. What is the interface between literacy and other sociocultural activities?
5. How best can literacy be developed in young children?

Although the debate is multifaceted and involves participants from many divergent fields and disciplines, discussion of the five salient issues can be divided into two contrasting positions. On the issue of what constitutes literacy, there are those who view literacy exclusively in terms of reading and writing skills (including such “discrete and mechanistic tools” as phonological awareness, decoding, and word recognition). There are also those who perceive literacy as language acquisition within the specific social, cultural, institutional, and political practices in which the child is enmeshed (see, for example, Gee, 1999; Heath, 1991; Lalik and Hinchman, 1999). With regard to the literacy abilities of children entering school, some believe that children enter school with limited or no literacy skills, while other researchers maintain that all children, regardless of background, “have impressive language abilities--large vocabularies, complex grammar, and deep understanding of experiences and stories” (Gee, 1999, p. 367; Teal & Sulzby, 1986). On the ownership of literacy abilities, there are those who see literacy as personal competence, and those who appreciate its dynamic, social, and interdependent nature (see, for example, Heath, 1991). Similarly, some theorists view literacy as a purely academic matter (i.e., taught in schools), while others appreciate the embeddedness of
literacy in the social milieu, or the economic, political, and family contexts in which the child lives (see, for example, Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1997; Foster & Purves, 1991; Gibson, 1989; Guthrie & Greaney, 1991; Hill, 1989; Lloyd, 1998; McCarthy, 1995; Rosenhouse, Stahl & Hayes, 1997; Venezky, 1991). Finally, some believe literacy can be defined as a set of reading and writing competencies acquired through formal instruction (i.e., direct learning), while other researchers view literacy as “emerging” throughout the child’s total life experiences (see, for example Labbo & Teale, 1997; Mason & Sinha, 1992; McCarthy, 1995; Sipe, 1998; Sulzby, 1989; Sulzby & Teal, 1991; Teal & Sulzby, 1986; Valencia, 1991).

While the five dichotomous positions contrasted above represent extreme theoretical dissimilarities; but there are also many less controversial views. Underlying them all, however, are important theoretical perspectives regarding the meaning of literacy and how it is acquired. Four major perspectives (psychological, constructivist, sociological, and political) are presented in this section with implications for pre-school language acquisition and literacy practices.

**Literacy as Psychological Construct**

The process by which children learn to read (i.e., learn to recognize words) has intrigued psychologists for decades. Some psychologists believe that children use letter names and letter sounds as cues for word recognition. Others believe that whole words and word shapes are the primary cues for children. Still others believe that children use initial letter, word length, or context as cues for word recognition (see, for example, Samuels, 1976).
Word recognition “cues” is not the only issue over which psychologists are divided. The entire process of language acquisition is another, even more fundamental area of controversy. Some psychologists perceive language acquisition to be an “elaborate association and mediational learning process.” Others perceive the process as a species-specific characteristic that unfolds naturally as the child’s latent structures are triggered physiologically, and which is influenced by the model language available to the child. Some of these perspectives are reviewed in Paris and Wixson (1987), Ruddell (1976), Wardhaugh (1976). The theoretical underpinnings underlying these perspectives include the “behavioristic,” the “nativist,” and the “cognitive” schools of thought.

**Behavioristic Theories**

Behavioristic theories of language acquisition derive principally from B. F. Skinner’s book, *Verbal Behavior*, in which the author suggests that specific linguistic behaviors are acquired through “operant conditioning” (i.e., reinforcement) and then extended through “response generalization” (i.e., internalizing and repeating those behaviors that work or that get rewarded). Alternatively known as “conditioning and reinforcement theories of language acquisition,” the Skinnerian tradition perceives literacy as a set of responses which, if reinforced, get repeated and generalized. In this school of thought, language learning follows the same principles as all other kinds of learning. In other words, a given stimulus (or cue) evokes the same response which, if rewarded, gets repeated and, if punished, is discontinued. In vocabulary acquisition, for example, it is believed that a child learns a new word or concept by seeing it written or hearing it said (“stimulus”), then reading or repeating the word (“response”) and then being commended (“reward”) for pronouncing or saying it correctly or rebuked
(“punishment”) for mispronouncing or saying it incorrectly. This pattern is believed to continue until the child gets the pronunciation right every time, when reward and punishment become irrelevant to further learning.

Whatever their usefulness and persistence, behavioristic theories have been criticized for a number of inadequacies. One problem with behaviorism, critics say, is its failure to take children’s experiences, thoughts, and feelings into account. By seemingly ignoring what goes on in the child’s mind (the experiences, beliefs, and expectations that presumably mediate the significance of the rewards or punishment), behaviorism is not widely regarded as a useful basis for explaining children’s literacy behavior. One of the most telling criticisms of the theory is provided by Norman Chomsky. The renowned linguistic scholar roundly condemns Skinner’s failure to recognize the child’s contribution in language acquisition. In Chomsky’s words:

… a refusal to study the contribution of the child to language learning permits only a superficial account of language acquisition, with a vast and unanalyzed contribution attributed to a step called “generalization” which in fact includes just about everything of interest in this process. If the study of language is limited in these ways, it seems inevitable that major aspects of verbal behavior will remain a mystery (Chomsky, 1959, p. 58).

Nativist Theories

Apparently dissatisfied with “conditioning” and “reinforcement” as explanations of language acquisition, some researchers, notably Lenneberg (1967), have developed a theory of literacy based on physiological maturation. Entitled Nativist theories, these perspectives on language acquisition emphasize the “biological bases of language acquisition” (Wardhaugh, 1976, p. 47) and, therefore, the importance of an organism’s physiological development as a precondition to language acquisition. According to
nativist theories, the ability to learn language is biologically given, and an innate part of
the child’s endowment.

Plausible as they may seem, nativist theories of language acquisition do not go
without criticism, and are challenged by Slobin (1966) and Wardhaugh (1976). One
problem with the nativist theory of language acquisition, as Wardhaugh (1976) has
pointed out, is the tendency to tie language acquisition with the general biological
development of the child and, therefore, an inability to explain how specific linguistic
items are learned. Slobin does not believe that a child is born with a set of linguistic
categories but, alternatively, with certain mechanisms for processing language. In his
words:

It seems to me that the child is born not with a set of linguistic categories
but with some sort of process mechanism – a set of procedures and
inference rules, if you will – that he uses to process linguistic data (Slobin,
1966, p. 87-88).

Critics of the nativist perspective instead regard language acquisition as a process
in which the child is an active participant through which he develops certain “cognitive
abilities,” including the ability to deal with his world.

Cognitive Theories

Many psychologists perceive thought structures (i.e., cognitive and mental
development) as the critical determinant of language acquisition. Researchers in the
cognitive tradition perceive literacy as a set of behaviors involving complex cognitive
capacities. These include the abilities to process information, retain items in short-term
memory, store items in long-term memory, segment utterances into sounds and meanings,
isolate meanings, learn certain types of semantic or conceptual categories, perform a
number of operations in a short time, and think, reason, and make generalizations (see, for
example, Holdaway, 1979; Venezky, 1991; Wardhaugh, 1976). A representative statement of this position is Schlesinger’s (1971) belief that the innate ‘cognitive’ power of the child is determined by their linguistic structures.

Interest in literacy as a psychological construct dates back approximately 75 years to the work of renowned psychologist Edward Thorndike, who analyzed children's question-answering behaviors and concluded that reading is a very elaborate procedure. Although controversial, Thorndike’s study is believed to have been responsible for the tremendous research interest in language acquisition and literacy development. His seminal efforts are also associated with a number of pedagogical changes in literacy education including, for example, the introduction of silent reading, the shift from teaching isolated skills to comprehension, and the practice of encouraging learner's assertiveness and sensitivity (Allington, 1983; Freire, 1986; Goodman, 1985; McNeil, 1992; Nicholson & Imlach, 1981; Pearson & Nicholson, 1976; Rosenblatt, 1978).

**Literacy as “Constructivist” Encounter**

Some researchers define literacy as the use of written text and the process of getting meaning from print. The National Research Council, for example, defines literacy as a “the use of the product and principles of the writing system to get at the meaning of a written text” (Snow, Burns, & Griff, 1998, p. 42). Researchers in this tradition perceive literacy purely as an encounter with the written language or the mastery of spoken language and reading and writing. Garton and Pratt (1998), for example, suggest that “visual representational system for speech is acquired when children learn to read and spell” (p. 333). Olson (1985) concurs and believes that this visual representational system is stored in memory during acquisition and supplies a visual...
spatial model for speech when learning to read and write. Other researchers believe that the use of written text plays a significant part in developing literacy in young children through formal education. Goodman (1976) and Smith (1979), for example, maintain that young children use written text to decode words and abstract meaning in a process called reading. Supporting this viewpoint, Templeton (1995) argues that an individual must be print-literate before he or she can acquire and use most other types of literacy.

Reflecting the “literacy as constructivist encounter” viewpoint, Smith (1988) suggests that in order for children to learn to read meaningfully, they must do so with materials that are familiar to them, rather than through exercises and drills that make no sense to them. According to Smith, before children start to read by and to themselves they need others (adults) to read to them, and to help them learn the written language in the same way they learned the spoken language. Smith believes that adults can help children make sense of print by talking to them in situations that make sense to them (e.g. story telling time). He suggests that children should be surrounded with a great variety of different kinds of written print (signs, labels, and other prints). This type of “environment,” he further suggests, should be used along with stories. Finally, Smith argues that educators should consider what the teacher should know rather than what the teacher should do. Clay (1990) discusses her research on teaching first graders to read and write, which is based on the theoretical perspective of generic learning (i.e., learning that generates further learning). Her belief is that a network of critical competencies, which eventually evolve into sophisticated and independent literacy, is strongly influenced by early reading and writing experiences.
Literacy as Cultural and Social Knowledge

The perception of literacy as motor and cognitive capacities, popular as it seems to have been in the past, is increasingly being challenged and, in some cases, rejected. Gee (1990), for example, argues that defining literacy solely as the ability to read and write is too limited. He further argues that perceiving literacy as an individual's ability to read and write ignores the role of the society of which a person is a member. A more fundamental understanding of the concept, he suggests, should be socially and culturally situated. In this connection, he suggests a view of literacy that takes into account, for example, the relationships of power among people and between groups. For this reason, he criticizes approaches to literacy that perceive competence as an individual activity rather than a social and cultural enterprise.

Many other scholars and researchers also recognize the socio-cultural embeddedness of literacy as cultural construct that enables people to participate in group and societal activities (see, for example McLane & McNamee, 1990). McNeil (1992), for one, perceives meaning as “a cultural process rather than the solitary invention of an individual,” (p. 9). Maureen Hourigan’s (1994) “contention” summarizes these views. According to her:

It is not helpful to think of literacy as an invariant, individual skill. … Literacy is an activity of social groups, and a necessary feature of some kinds of social organization. Like every other human activity or product, it embeds social relations within it. And these relations always include conflict as well as cooperation. Like language itself, literacy is an exchange between classes, races, the sexes, and so on (Hourigan, 1994, p. xiv).

Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1990) also describe meaning as a communal property, rather than an isolated skill that individuals independently acquire–the product
of "social exchanges," produced by, and embedded in cultural forces. Class, race, ethnicity, and gender are all believed to play crucial roles in the production and reception of literate behaviors, as well as in the people's conception of what "literacy" is (Hourigan, 1994).

Graff (1987) suggests that to appreciate the role and importance of literacy in modern societies, researchers have to examine it in a specific context. He further contends that literacy acquisition is not a "universal," but a "function of society-specific tasks, which are sometimes far removed from those of formal schooling" (p. 394), and which also differs from one society to another. According to Graff, literacy is not a skill or competency that is independently or neutrally transmitted via classroom experiences -- and this view is also supported by Langer (1987). She argues that although studies of literacy have explored relationships between particular cultures and ways of learning, educators often fail to consider literacy as existing in a similar context--as a culturally specific phenomenon. Heath's (1983) study suggests that literacy behaviors gain their functional value from contextual settings that cultures and subcultures provide. Her study of language use indicates that the skills of reading and writing are developed in accordance with the cultural practices that a community has developed. Further, culture is presented as learned behavior, and literacy as part of that shared learning. Dyson's (1993) study reveals how children use literacy to represent their ideas and to interact with people, especially in a social setting.

A view of literacy development that is grounded in cultural and social interactions by necessity emphasizes the environment in which children grow up. Thus, how well a child's social and physical milieu provide exposure to writing and reading materials
(books, paper, crayons, and pencils, etc.) is fundamental to becoming literate. Environment in this sense is not only the physical surroundings, but also refers to the human relationships that determine when, how often, and in what situations children are introduced to the tools, materials, uses, and meanings of literacy (McLane & McNamee, 1990). Kaestle (1985), who emphasizes the importance of the environment in the development of the literacy, calls for more research into "the actual human meanings of literacy, including detailed decoding of its contextual values—its cultural price tag" (p. 13).

An approach to literacy that recognizes its socio-cultural embeddedness seems destined to influence pedagogical practices—and already there are indications that this is occurring. Cases are reported where students are encouraged to examine their own experiences and to appreciate how their use of language might be shaped by unexamined assumptions about class, gender, culture, and previous schooling (Hirsch, 1987; Hourigan, 1994).

**Literacy as Political Action**

The belief is growing that reading and writing are more than technical skills, and that the transfer of literacy from one group to another involves more than just the passing of technical competence (Christie & Mission 1998; Freire 1987; Street, 1995). Researchers with a bias for political action look beyond the transfer and acquisition of reading and writing skills. Instead, they point, in particular, to the “shifts in meaning” that are associated with the transfer of literacy—a change that Street (1995) argues strikes “deep at the root of cultural beliefs.” According to Street:

“for those receiving the new literacy, the impact of the culture and of the politico-economic structures of those bringing it is likely to be more
significant than the impact of the technical skills associated with the reading and writing” (p. 15).

The “political” underpinnings of literacy are also acknowledged by several other researchers and writers. Christie and Mission (1998), for example, suggest that literacy is not just about learning the codes of written text, but involve an understanding of the relationship between the codes and societal ideals, identities, and values.

Some writers perceive literacy as a tool for preparing children to fit into the established social order, making them think, reason, and act in accordance with norms of their society, thus depriving them of their ability to think critically and creatively. Paulo Freire (1972), perhaps the best known writer in this tradition, perceives education as the process—and literacy as the major instrument—by which young people are integrated into the logic of the existing system and made to conform to it.

The political aspects of literacy are believed by many to involve reading and writing, as well as thinking, communicating, and problem solving. Furthermore, human beings are thought to be both consciously and unconsciously engaged in acquiring the tools necessary for surviving and functioning effectively in the world (Brandt, 1989; Heath, 1983). Based on that assumption, Freire (1987) argues that educators should help students to learn, to think correctly, and to actively question their social reality. In order for children to understand the political realities of their environment, Freire believes that teachers have a responsibility not only to make literacy materials readily available to students, but also to ensure that students think, and interpret the world, critically. Ira Shore (1987) also believes that critical literacy provides people with a way of understanding their culture and their roles in it. He believes that literacy helps the student
to develop critical awareness, to form judgments, and to draw conclusions – all of which are of greater consequence than basic reading skills.

A systematic examination of the “politics of literacy” is provided by Maureen Hourigan (1994). In a study entitled *Literacy as Social Exchange: Intersections of Class, Gender, and Culture*, she explores the roles that class, gender, and culture seem to play in students’ language use and their abilities to negotiate meaning and the “conventions of academic discourse.” Based on her findings, Hourigan recommends what she calls “multiple literacies,” that is, the cultural factors that influence a student's reading and writing. She concludes that multiple literacies must take into consideration the class, gender, and cultural backgrounds that students bring to the classrooms and the various “interpretations” that these diverse backgrounds generate.

Many scholars deplore what they perceive as cultural imbalances in literacy activities and the tendency, even if unintentional, to silence non-mainstream voices and conventions. Persons sharing these concerns advocate literacy practices aimed at enhancing students' self-esteem and reducing anxiety levels. Peterson (1991), for example, is a leading proponent of an accepting, positive and enriching classroom environment, which encourages and empowers students to develop self-awareness, respect for their fellow-students and adults, and cooperation.

Walsh (1991) argues that although there is no “neutral approach to literacy introduction” and no universal pedagogy to follow, teachers and students should see themselves as "people who in the act knowing and creating, draw upon their histories and on the meanings and experiences which derive from life lived in a world imbricated with social, cultural, economic, political, and ideological interests" (p. 17). Also supporting
this approach to education, Dudley-Marling (1997) posits a critical approach to literacy that seeks to challenge students to work towards a more just and democratic society. He believes that personal literacy (learning to read and write) has the power to overcome the disparity that exists in society, and that critical literacy is a tool to educate students for democracy.

Support for the development of democratic literacy, an element of critical pedagogy in literacy teaching today, is provided by Edelsky (1994), Greene (1993), Shannon (1992), and Sweeney (1997). In the view of these scholars, literacy presents a unique challenge, as well as the opportunity for students to use reading and writing as means for confronting social inequities and assuming responsibilities for forging a more just society.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1972) argues that “literacy” and other traditional educational practices have been used to maintain the status quo to keep the privileged permanently advantaged and the less fortunate permanently disadvantaged. Freire condemns the predominance of ruling class vocabulary and interests and the virtual exclusion of typically underclass words, interests, and preoccupations. In his opinion, much of traditional education is but an instrument used by “oppressors” to deny the “oppressed” of their inalienable right to personhood – to prevent them from “speaking their word,” from “naming their world,” and from participating in “transforming their world.”

Sweeney (1997) encourages students to exploit the power of literacy to examine issues of justice and democracy in Africa as well as in their own communities in the US. Sweeney’s study illustrates the critical importance of literacy not only for students to
share what they learned, but also to raise political consciousness in their fellow students, parents, and the communities in which they live.

Edelsky (1999) advocates literacy developed through use rather than objectified as something to be taught. She sees as the goal of literacy and education to bring about true democracy and to unseat systems of domination and undue influence. To this end, she advocates:

*Child-centered Curriculum:* Grounded in students’ real-live experiences rather than what the teacher thinks students need to learn and to know; gives prominence to objects that children bring to class; uses students questions, interpretations, and experiences as the starting point for much of the curriculum; accepts and celebrates students interpretations and compositions of text which reflect their individually different backgrounds and experiences.

*Systems Questioning:* Critique-infused classroom, encourages and accepts critically provocative problems for consideration; does not presume clear-cut answers to issues.

*Emotional Safety:* A classroom “community” where everybody takes care of each other, listens respectfully to each other, and helps each other to learn.

*Joint Effort:* Students and teacher jointly decide what needs to be done as well as the order and the procedure for doing those things that need to be done.

Perceiving education as a positive force for social justice, Edelsky describes those pedagogical practices that seek to perpetuate the status quo as “bad for democracy.”

Mosenthal (1999) examines two alternative political “agendas” that he perceives as influencing literacy policies and practices in the United States. He describes one of the agendas as “Unum” and the other as “Pluribus.” Unum, according to Mosenthal, purports
to develop readers who are good citizens, while Pluribus focuses on an appreciation of diversity, empowerment of disadvantaged groups, and an enhancement of the reader’s self-esteem. Because Unum focuses on what is good for society, Mosenthal also maintains that what is good for the state is also good for the individuals. Thus, the proper goal of education is to prepare students for responsible citizenship by inculcating common political, cultural, and moral ideals, a belief in shared heritage, universal culture, and faith in the institutions of governance. To produce good citizens, it is further assumed, requires a national curriculum, standardized testing programs, and “universally applicable performance indicators.” In the area of literacy development, this calls for a “common language” including “handwriting, spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, standard dialect, rhetorical style, and genre recognition” (p. 223).

Pluribus, according to Mosenthal, argues that the goal of education and literacy instruction is to “prepare students to function effectively in the real world to the best of their ability.” In this perspective, education and literacy instruction are to be driven by a student's ability level, background, and interests. Perceiving knowledge as a construction (rather than an objective reality), pluribus advocates “situation-specific” pedagogy, with an emphasis on empowerment, individual development, self-esteem, and well-adjusted, “well-functioning” individuals.

Summary

Two views seem to underlie the various notions of literacy that are reviewed above. One view is the perception of literacy as reading and writing and the acquisition of language competencies. The other view is a perception of literacy as consisting not only of reading and writing, but also of attitudes, expectations, feelings, behaviors, and
skills related to the written language. The latter view of literacy emphasizes the action students take in becoming literate, which includes “emergent literacy,” the focus of this study.

**Emergent Literacy**

Different researchers and writers perceive "literacy" differently. Some of those differences, quite frequently, reflect theoretical controversies regarding what constitutes literacy and how it can be developed or promoted.

There are, as already indicated, some who view literacy exclusively as “reading and writing,” as well as a maturational process that begins with formal education, or when a child is chronologically and psychologically “ready.” There are others who view literacy as an ongoing, personal/social development process that begins at infancy and continues throughout life. This section overviews the two theoretical perspectives with particular attention to the latter and its implications for pedagogical practices.

“Emergent literacy” is the view of literacy as an ongoing experience. Its antithesis, the so-called “reading readiness paradigm,” is the belief that literacy acquisition involves abrupt discontinuity and requires certain mental processes or levels of psychological development before it can begin.

Until the idea of emergent literacy, the literature on learning to read and write was largely influenced by what is commonly known as “maturationalist theory.” Underlying this theory is the belief that “the mental processes necessary for reading would unfold automatically at a certain point in development” (Teal and Sulzby, 1986, p. ix). This theory also asserts that two factors are essential for preparing children for reading: mental development (or readiness) and experience. The former, defined as “neural ripening,”
focuses on intrinsic growth and the cognitive development of the child. The latter attributes reading readiness to social dimension of the child’s life such as “experiences” at home, in school, and in the community. According to the theory of “reading readiness,” children need to acquire necessary reading skills, taught by teachers, in order to be able to read.

The theory was used to support a number of educational practices. For example:

- School instruction in reading and writing was postponed until children had acquired a set of prerequisite abilities.
- Writing skills could not be taught simultaneously with reading. Aspects of writing and composing had to wait until children had learned to read.
- Steps to achieve mastery in reading were formalized and sequenced, ignoring the functional uses of reading.
- Children’s previous experience was very largely ignored, with emphasis given to the presumed “logical sequence” of formal competencies.
- All children were required to pass through the presumed logical sequence of reading readiness skills; and their progress was tested and monitored. (Teal and Sulzby, 1986, p. xiii)

Clay is credited with the introduction of the concept of “emergent literacy,” and is believed to be perhaps the first to recognize the difference between literacy acquisition as a sudden and distinct realization that comes with age and maturation vs. a continuous process that begins long before formal instruction. Her research with children led her to question the prevailing belief that literacy acquisition involved an abrupt discontinuity and required a certain level of psychological development before it could start (Clay, 1979). Instead, she suggests that even very young children's interactions with print could be considered "emergent reading." She believes that for young children, literacy acquisition is an ongoing experience. She also rejects the idea that a child could not learn to read until he or she attained a particular level of maturity. Since Clay, many other
researchers have tried to test the usefulness of emergent literacy and some of their findings and conclusions are reported in this section.

Holdaway’s (1979) work is in some respects an extension of Clay’s ideas about how children learn to read. However, Holdaway also identifies six essential features of literacy: 1) literacy as part of language--reading and writing are not discrete subjects isolated from the spoken culture and the world of language; 2) literacy as a human activity--the most complex human activity, engaging the organism concurrently at every level of experience; 3) literacy as developmental--occurring with a minimum of instruction; 4) literacy as learned behavior--punishment and fear are detrimental to the type of learning with which literacy is concerned. 5) literacy as a cultural matter--reflecting the needs, interests, concerns, and the goals of the society; 6) literacy as a complex matter--requiring careful study and analysis.

Holdaway’s analyses of the six features of literacy, coupled with Clay’s studies, seem to have inspired many more explorations of early literacy acquisition. The findings of several of those studies are summarized in Teal and Sulzby (1986), who enumerate evidence that invalidates many characteristics of the reading readiness perspective. For example:

- Children learn to read and write long before formal instruction at school.
- Children learn reading and writing concurrently and complementarily.
- Children develop literacy from real life settings/situations in which they use reading and writing to "get things done."
- Children develop literacy through active engagement and social interaction with adults.
- Children develop literacy by passing through different stages and at different ages.
- Children develop literacy by listening to stories read to them on a daily basis (Teal and Sulzby, 1986, p. xiii).
Perhaps the most significant conclusion of emergent literacy studies is that children are active constructors of their own language and tend to develop all aspects of language (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) simultaneously and interrelatedly. The findings also underscore the importance of the social setting as well as a child’s active interest and participation in language development.

**Storybook Reading**

Storybook reading has become an increasingly influential activity in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Proponents perceive it as one of the most meaningful activities for providing children with positive literacy experiences (Elster, 1994; Karweit, 1989; Reissner, 1994; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Teale, 1978; Wells, 1986). Yaden et al., 1989, describe it as "an activity that facilitates development of preschool children's ability to construct meaning in the context of a book" and as “a model of the rhythm and patterns of written language" (p. 208). Sulzby and Teal (1991) describe storybook reading as a social, creative, and interactive activity.

This section presents: 1) selected research findings on the perceived influence of storybook reading on children’s literacy development; and 2) four areas of recurrent interests in children's literacy development as a result of storybook reading.

**Storybook Reading and Children’s Literacy Development**

Several studies have reported the constructive influence of storybook reading on children’s literacy development. Otto’s (1993) studies suggest that storybook reading programs increase children’s involvement and interaction with storybooks in ways that spark increased literacy skills. For example, the results of one such study, which was designed to encourage urban kindergartners’ daily interaction with storybooks at home
and at school, reveal that seventy five percent of parents reported an increase in their children’s interest in reading and literacy-related behaviors. Moreover, eighty-eight percent of these parents stated that their children engaged in storybook reading daily or several times a week.

Various inquiries into the benefits of storybook reading in the classroom suggest that it significantly improves a child's acquisition of new vocabulary, reading comprehension, book concept, internalization of reading behavior, decoding, and motivation to read. The evidence also suggests that by exposing children to written language via storybook reading, it also introduces important orthographic features or written language, as well as fundamental principles of story structure. As a result of their involvement with storybook reading, children are able to acquire meaning from print, and are also able to make important distinctions between formal written language and informal oral language. Storybook readers also experience increased social interactions with each other and adults through asking questions and conversing with others. Finally, storybook reading is credited with helping children develop comprehension skills, construct meaning by relating their personal experiences to the text of the story, and interact with the text openly as their teacher reads to them (see, for example, Carger, 1993; Clay, 1979; Dennis & Walter, 1995; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Durkin, 1966; Ehri, 1994; Garvin & Walter, 1991; Morrow, 1987; Teale, 1978, 1984, 1987).

In addition to the benefits mentioned previously, storybook reading is also believed to significantly facilitate language and reading development at school (Teale, 1978; Wells, 1986). Fitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986) indicate that exposing children to storybook reading systematically helps them to develop their use of language and
increase their reading comprehension. Other studies on the benefits of storybook reading to children suggest that literacy development does not depend on the act of story reading alone. In fact, other factors such as the interaction between adult and child (which facilitate their ability to construct meaning from text), also contributes to a child's literacy development (Nino & Bruner, 1978). The evidence further implies that the effects of storybook reading on children’s literacy development depends to a very large extent on the teacher's enthusiasm, opportunities for interaction with the teacher, and the size of the group (Kerwit, 1989, Morrow, 1988, Morrow & Smith, 1990). Some even go as far as to say that the social interaction that occurs between an adult and a child is the most important element in storybook reading. In other words, many experts believe that a child’s development of information, attitude, and literacy skills is influenced by their social interactions (Sulzby, 1985; Teale, 1978, 1984, 1987, Teale & Sulzby, 1987). Many investigators suggest a direct correlation between reading to children and their ability to read or succeed at school. Durkin’s (1966) study of children who develop reading skills early demonstrate that these children were read to by others, such as parents or siblings. In keeping with this theory, a report from the National Institute of Education stated that “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

Several studies have explored possible relationships between being read to and particular aspects of literacy development. Clay (1979) and Smith (1979) suggest that reading to children helps them to differentiate between written language and oral language. Wells (1986) longitudinal study of language development establishes that four
specific literacy-related activities conducted at the preschool level (drawing & coloring, listening to stories, looking at picture book/talking about it, and pretending to write), could be positively correlated to a child's higher literacy achievement in elementary school (age 7 & 10). Wells particularly attributes this elevated level of performance to increased vocabulary size—a concept that challenges the belief that children learn vocabulary primarily from daily conversation. Thus, Wells presents a compelling argument in support of the fact that listening to stories and talking about them is a fundamental and significant source for increased vocabulary development.

In a recent study, Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, and Freppon (1995) examined the relationship between language development and literacy acquisition. They tested the hypothesis that children generally develop their knowledge of the written language over time through experiences with books. The study focused on two issues: 1) to determine if differences in “linguistic knowledge” and written language exist between children who were well read to during their preschool years and those who were not read to during the same period; and 2) to investigate the effects of the type of reading instructional method by comparing children who were assigned to a whole-language classroom vs. those who were assigned to a skills-based classroom. Although storybook reading was conducted in both test classes, it was done so in varying degrees. The results of their investigation revealed that while all the kindergartners in the study group had already developed some linguistic knowledge, the disparity in their literacy levels was significantly affected by the different methods of preschool instruction. Children in whole language classrooms learned more about written language than children in the skills-based curriculum. This study provides encouragement for students who begin school with limited exposure to
written language, and further suggests that they can develop their knowledge by listening to stories and actively responding to them.

Recognizing the critical importance of reading stories to children, several researchers have focused on the best ways to maximize the benefits. Peters (1993), for example, emphasizes the role and place of story reading in the classroom, indicating that prescribed guidelines and practices should be considered when reading stories to children. In fact, she argues that story reading at school should not be thought of as a coincidental activity or simple practice. Instead, Peters suggests that teachers regard story reading as a fundamental aspect of the curriculum and carefully consider when and how to engage in story reading.

**Areas of Recurrent Interest: Empirical Findings**

The importance of storybook reading in children’s literacy development has focused on four critical areas: (a) language development and comprehension; (b) word acquisition; (c) environmental influence; and (d) teachers’ instructional practices. The following is a review of some of the research in each of these areas:

**Language Development and Comprehension**

One of the most widely reported studies on how storybook reading promotes language development and comprehension is Karweit’s (1989) story telling and reading program (STaR). The program, entitled “Success for All,” was designed to provide an interesting and developmentally reasonable approach to language development and comprehension for disadvantaged pre-kindergartners and kindergartners. The story reading program consists of a set of materials: story kit, sequence cards, flannel board
figures, and teacher guide sheet. The sequential methods used in the STaR program are as follows: introduce the story, read the story, review the story, retell the story as a group, and retell the story individually. The primary thrust of the program, however, involves retelling and dramatization. Students from the experimental school were compared with students in a control school who were not exposed to the StaR method. Both groups were individually administered the Merril Language Screening Test and the Test of Language Development (TOLD), and the results suggest that the program had a positive effect on language development and comprehension. However, the researcher was not completely sure whether the encouraging results were due to the STaR program or to other factors associated with the “Success for All” model.

Lee (1993) examined the development of young children’s reading and writing behavior, as well as their oral and written language development, using picture cards, picture storybook, and duplo blocks. Two interviews were conducted with each subject—one at the beginning of the study and the second two weeks later. The results revealed that children of different ages exhibit different reading and writing behaviors. While three-year olds were at the stage of “nonunderstanding of reading” or at the stage of “making stories,” four year-old were increasingly able to appreciated the need to learn to read letters in order to read storybooks. In addition, children 3-5 years of age could not distinguish between oral and written language and used greater oral expression in the block activity than they did in the storybook activity. The researcher observed a slight correlation between reading development and recalling the storybook content, whereas no correlation seemed to exist between writing development and oral and written language awareness.
Word Acquisition

Many studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between reading stories to children and their vocabulary acquisition (Morrow, 1984). Robbins and Ehri (1994) concluded from their research that kindergartners who had stories read to them by adults, and for whom unfamiliar words were repeated, experienced increased vocabulary recognition compared to kindergartners who listened to stories read to them once and for whom unfamiliar words were not repeated. Similar observations and conclusions have been reported by other researchers. Snow et al. (1998), for example, suggest that reading aloud to children and actively engaging them in storybook content provides an excellent foundation for exploring many diverse dimensions of language and literacy. Well (1986) found that reading frequently to children is positively correlated to their vocabulary size at ten years of age. Elley (1989) reported that children (7-8 years) who heard the same story read three times were able to identify the meaning of target vocabulary in multiple choice tests. In a study conducted by Eller et al (1988), children were read the same story several times, and were then asked to read the story themselves. Although the youngsters were not fluent readers, they nonetheless pretended to read using identical words from the story—a clear indication that these children had acquired new vocabularies.

The Classroom Environment

The social setting in which storybook reading occurs is another recurrent area of investigation among educational researchers. Typical settings include whole groups, small groups, and, of course, one-on-one. Much of the research concerned with learning in small groups has investigated the effect of students’ cooperation in the academic task,
achievement, attitude, and ethnic integration (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Johnson, Maruyama, Skon, & Nelson, 1981; and Sharan, 1980). These studies concluded that there is a positive relationship between cooperative learning in small groups and students’ increased achievement and attitudinal development. Johnson and Johnson (1975) suggest that oral discussion and heterogeneity among groups are two important factors that affect cooperative learning. In fact, they propose that cooperative learning in small groups is particularly effective because students have the opportunity to listen to each other, explain the materials to each other, and share what they've understood. Another benefit of small group interaction, as suggested by Buckholdt and Wodarski (1978), is that children may use several individualized forms of language, including body language, to help one another understand concepts.

Other studies have focused on the importance of small groups in creating a verbal interaction or dialogue between adult and child, or child and child. Sharan, Ackerman and Lazarwitz-Hertz (1980) indicate that verbal interaction improves children’s comprehension and promotes a more sophisticated level of thinking. Several educational theories also support these findings. Piaget (1959), for example, indicates that children learn behavior and social skills from their peers. In a similar study, Dewey (1916), maintains that children learn more from their interaction with peers than they learn from their teachers.

Morrow (1984, 1985) established that reading stories to an entire classroom increased comprehension and vocabulary acquisition in children. In another study involving small group storybook reading, Morrow (1989) concluded that children who heard stories read in small groups achieved better comprehension and were involved in
more nonverbal exchanges than children who did not participate in storybook reading. Many studies have investigated the benefits of one-on-one reading, seeing it as providing children with the opportunity to interact verbally with adults and giving them the chance to ask questions that may increase children’s comprehension of the story. Morrow (1987) suggests that one-on-one reading increases the level and complexity of questions that were raised by children, as compared with whole group reading, which does not generally provide the same opportunities for questions and answers.

As already mentioned, several notable studies have considered the benefits of whole group reading, small group reading and one-on-one story reading. All of the studies that investigated the benefits of small learning groups concluded that small cooperative groups perform better than the traditional whole-class group (Sharan, AcKerman, & Lazarowitz-Hertz, 1980). Lowenthal (1981), in fact, reveals that small group instruction appears to improve the oral language performance of language-delayed preschoolers, as compared to those receiving large group instruction.

The Teacher

The role of the teacher in storybook reading is another major area of research interest. Not surprisingly, the evidence suggests that adult readers vary in their style of reading to young children and that teachers conduct storybook reading in their classrooms in different ways. For example, Dinkinson, and Keebler (1989) examined three individual teachers’ style of presenting different stories in their preschool classrooms. The investigators taped the teachers reading to groups of 3-4 year olds and then interviewed them with regard to their role during storybook reading. Their results revealed that although each teacher read every book (whether familiar or complex) in the
same style, they did exhibit differences in their interest and role in the activity. For example, the first teacher regularly stopped reading to ask questions to ensure that her students understood the story. Her focus, therefore, was on the children's comprehension of the story. The second teacher viewed story time as a social time and thus encouraged children's questions and responses to engage them in interesting aspects of the text. The third teacher emphasized helping children to build imaginary worlds by imaginatively using her voice and body to make the reading more dramatic. In a similar study, Dunning and Mason (1984) analyzed four teachers--each reading the same story--and concluded that there were significant differences in the teachers’ behaviors. These dissimilarities included the specific story details that they highlighted, how and when they elaborated on the text, and whether or not they reviewed the details of the story and grammar in later discussions.

Martinez and Teale (1993) investigated six kindergarten teachers’ oratory styles reading the same four books. They discovered that the six teachers had distinctively different storybook reading styles, which was relatively consistent across the four books. Martinez and Roser (1985) conducted a study that identifies three important roles that a teacher is likely to assume while reading. First, the teacher as “Correspondent” should start a discussion, describe parts of the story, encourage children to participate and respond, and relate the story to real life as much as possible. Second, the teacher as “Monitor” should explain the story, provide children with information, and help them understand. Finally, the teacher as “Director” should assume leadership, provide an introduction and make the necessary conclusions. It should also be noted that the degree
of social interaction between reader and child is largely dependent on what the reader perceives his or her role to be (Wood, Bruner, & Rose, 1976).

Wolter (1992) also discusses the necessity of teacher flexibility in story reading to groups of children. She advocates whole group storybook reading as a central part of many reading programs because it involves reading aloud, which is critical for emergent literacy and language development. However, Wolter also perceives whole group storybook reading as a difficult task, depending on the children’s level of literacy and maturity. She offers suggestions for teachers to consider when they use whole group storybook reading in their classrooms, which pertain to materials (careful selection, quality, written forms), presentation (effectiveness, expectations, variety of readers), audience (positive experience, opportunities to talk and relate, active participation), and setting (transition into story time, reading time, seat arrangement, free from interruptions).

Soundy (1993) emphasizes the significance of reconstructing the events of the story and provides suggestions for teachers to improve their retelling abilities. She also assesses the effect of storybook reading on a child's ability to distinguish the differences between oral and written language, and encourages the use of story props to assist children to construct and express a better understanding of what they hear. Soundy’s study finally underscores the critical role of the teacher in creating a learning environment where children can collaboratively interact to promote social and cognitive development.
Storybook Reading and Vygotsky

Vygotsky's theory is particularly relevant to storybook reading events and the focus of this research. Its relevance derives from the very important framework that it has provided to understand how children acquire literacy skills, such as reading. Vygotsky views cognitive function and the social experiences of individuals as two elements of an interacting system. He describes the discrepancy between what a child can do alone and what he can do with the help of an adult or more experienced peer as “the zone of proximal development.” This zone focuses on the "complete level of development" (i.e., the stage of development in which the child can solve a problem independently), and the "expected level of development," (i.e., where the child solves the problem with the help of an adult) (Vygotsky, 1978).

From a Vygotskian perspective, higher psychological functions, such as reading and writing, appear on two planes. The first is the social plane; the second is the psychological plane. These planes also appear between people as an interpsychological phenomenon, and within the individual child as an intrapsychological phenomenon (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). In the same way, during storybook reading children are provided with interpsychological experiences because they need to make sense of the text and to move them from dependence to independence. As an example, the teacher in a storybook reading setting is a good adult reader dedicated to helping the learner to be successful. She starts with book conventions, such as introducing the title and author of the book. She might read the book while showing the illustrations and converse with the children about the contents of the story. Children in turn respond by questioning and
commenting. Gradually, the experience of being read to becomes a successful event as children move from dependence on adult reader to becoming independent readers.

Vygotsky's theory also emphasizes interactions with more skilled partners as a means by which children begin to use the intellectual tools of their society (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). In an interaction such as storybook reading, the teacher becomes the skilled partner who knows more about the tools of society, and thus provides a model for the child to imitate.

In essence, Vygotsky's theory states that social guidance aids children in learning to communicate and to deliberately plan and remember from the first years of life (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Through storybook reading and related activities, the teacher gives the necessary guidance that will enable children to participate beyond their own abilities, and to internalize and remember activities practiced socially.

Vygotsky's theory is also significant for its attempt to reconcile two contrasting theories of literacy development: the "cognitive approach" and the "constructionist approach." Researchers who have investigated young children's literacy development from the cognitive approach view literacy as a body of knowledge about written language and a set of processes for using the knowledge that is taught to children over time (Clay, 1967; Ferreiro, 1986). On the other hand, theorists who have attempted to understand young children's construction of meaning during social interaction, define literacy as a cultural practice (Miller, 1990; Rowe, 1989). In other words, they believed that literacy develops naturally through social interaction.
Constructivism

Constructivism, as the term is used in this study, refers to the individual child’s active construction of knowledge and meaning, or the mental structures that the child develops in, or derives from his or her learning environment (Bussis, Edward, Marianne, & Edith, 1985). “Constructivism,” as a theory of cognition, is frequently attributed to John Piaget (See Fosnot, 1996). Central to this theory is a view of learning as a “meaning-making activity,” in which the individual child constructs his or her own personal model of the world and negotiates these meanings with peers and the teacher through cooperative social activities, such as dialogue, debate, and discussion. Catherine Fosnot (1996) describes constructivism in education as:

an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns, raise their own questions, and construct their own models, concepts, and strategies. The classroom in this model is seen as a minisociety, a community of learners engaged in activity, discourse, and reflection. The traditional hierarchy of teacher as autocratic knower and learners as the unknowing, controlled subject studying to learn what the teacher knows begins to dissipate as teachers assume more of a facilitator’s role and learners take on more ownership of the ideas. Indeed, autonomy, mutual reciprocity of social relations, and empowerment become the goals (p. ix).

Examples of this approach to teaching and learning, although currently somewhat limited, are on the increase. One of the better known models is the Reggio Emilia Project in northern Italy, which is being replicated in schools in Europe, America, and many other parts of the world. Key characteristics of this approach to education is the perception of:

- Learning as an interpretive and “recursive” building process by active participants interacting with their physical and social worlds.
- Literacy as developing in response to personal and social needs
• Literacy as an extension of speaking, listening, and interacting with one’s environment.
• Teachers as supporters, rather than controllers of learning.
• Teachers as planners, models, guides, observers of development, creators of opportunity, facilitators, challengers of children’s existing models of the world.
• Literacy as a never-ending process of meaning making, rather than a finite set language skills to be learned.

Other features of the constructivist classroom include:

• Collaboration, rather than competition.
• Encouraging students to express feelings related to the work at hand.
• An atmosphere of playfulness.
• Emphasis on inquiry, rather than orthodoxy.
• Questioning the unspoken assumptions that underlie current instructional practices.
• Re-examination of what we think and belief.
• Confronting new possibilities and generating new questions that would not have occurred in the teacher-directed learning situation (see, for example (Bussis et al, 1985; Dykstra, Jr., 1996; Foreman, 1996; Fosnot, 1996; Gould, 1996; Julyan & Duckworth, 1996).

These are some of the distinguishing features of constructivist education. In promoting such values, this approach to learning challenges both the accepted perception of knowledge and some of the practices by which it is transmitted.

The relevance of constructivism for this study derives, first, from the ethnographic approach of the study and, second, from my perception of children as active constructors of their own language, ideas, and knowledge. An ethnographic approach was adopted for several reasons. The most important of these, as indicated in the chapter on methodology, is my belief in the validity of specific cases and in the all too familiar danger of meaningless generalizations. As Robert Lynd (1940) argues, “ideas are to be suspected and reexamined when extended beyond the domain in which they arose” (p. 147). A view of children as constructors of their own knowledge and meaning is
corroborated both by empirical evidence, as well as by practical application of that theoretical framework.

Experimental studies investigating the constructivist approach to learning, while not many, are nonetheless very instructive. One such effort is Bussis, et al.'s (1986) study of “Children Learning How to Read.” The collaborative reading research venture involved researchers and educational practitioners and was designed to “observe, document, and analyze the ordinary classroom activities and interactions of individual children.” The researchers' emphasis on “ordinary” behavior is said to be based on the belief that such a record of events holds “the most important clues to the meanings children derive from an instructional environment and, therefore, to the nature of their learning.” Systematic observation of children reading-aloud, writing, drawing, painting, and completing worksheets were made, and selected samples of each child’s work were analyzed. The results indicated, among other things, recurring patterns “that characterized the child’s functioning over time and across various classroom settings.”

Entwistle, Entwistle, and Tait’s research (1992) identify some of the factors that seem to influence a student's ability to learn in a university setting. Based on the findings of their study, the researchers constructed a “conceptual model of a teaching-learning system in higher education,” which identifies factors in the learning environment can influence the nature or level of a student's understanding. Their analysis attributes learning outcome to, among other things, instructional practice, the nature of the assessment, perceived relevance and interest, perceived task requirements, and student’s preferred way of learning.
Jones, Knuth, and Duffy (1992) describe their work in teacher education and staff development in which they try to provide a “constructivist learning environment” for educators and educational administrators. One of their projects, known as “Strategic Teacher Frameworks” (STF), is based on seven constructivist principles that the researchers believe to be central in the design of an appropriate teaching/learning environment. The principles are: (1) goals and metaphors that drive learning and instruction; (2) learner characteristics, responsibilities and values; (3) teacher characteristics, responsibilities and values; (4) tasks that define the nature and level of achievement; (5) school characteristics that support teaching and learning; (6) principles of sequencing; and (7) principles of assessment.

Conclusion

Close examination of the central tenets of "constructivism" indicate its relevance for this study. I refer in particular to: the importance of basing instruction on children's previous knowledge, using children's "interests" as a standing point in the classroom, minimizing evaluation, and "assessments," and involving children in the planning of their curriculum and in its implementation.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

In this chapter I describe how I designed the study, the methods I used for collecting the data, and how I analyzed this information. In the section entitled "Research Design,” I explain how I selected the site and participants in the study, how I gained “entry” and became accepted by the participants, and the length of time that I was involved with the participants. In the section entitled "Data Collection,” I identify and explain both the procedures and the “instruments” that I used to collect the necessary information. In the section entitled “Data Analysis,” I explain how I used the information generated to help me answer the questions that motivated this investigation.

Research Design

Qualitative and ethnographic models of research have influenced the design of this research. As Spradley (1980) suggests, the purpose of ethnographic studies is to enable the researcher to understand other people’s perception about the world and how they make sense of it. Ethnography also facilitates an exploration of how study participants perceive the meaning of an event. The focus of qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998), is on process, meaning, and understanding. For that reason, the products of ethnography are richly descriptive. According to her, "words and pictures, rather than numbers, are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon" (p.8). The influence of the two approaches is reflected in the site I selected for the study, the individuals that I chose as participants in the study, and the procedures that I used to enter into the situation, observe events of research interest, and collect the needed data.
As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this study is to understand specific actions and events in a particular classroom setting, and to analyze what those actions and events mean to the people who experience them (Erickson, 1986). My objective has been to identify and describe the process of storybook reading in a particular classroom situation--how a particular teacher and her students experience storybook reading, and what the event means to them.

Consistent with its ethnographic character, I did not seek to make generalizations, but simply to investigate and analyze a specific educational experience; namely the philosophy and practice of storybook reading in a particular classroom setting. My primary aim has been to describe the educational approach and literacy development activities of a preschool teacher in a Head Start classroom and the participation of students in those activities.

**Site Selection**

According to Morse (1994), selecting the research site is a very crucial step in qualitative research–one that can make or break a research effort. I selected this particular setting primarily because I discovered that the teacher was doing something in which I had a specific interest in learning more about for some time. Specifically, she had been using storybook reading as means to facilitate literacy skills. In addition, because of the pilot study that I had conducted in the same classroom--and the resulting mutually satisfying relationship that had been established--I had easy access to the setting, which was critical to this study. In fact, Morse (1994) observes that "it is foolish for the researcher to put too much work into a study that must be conducted in one particular setting, unless he or she can be assured that access will not be denied" (p. 222). Jorgenson
(1989) suggests further that knowing the setting allows the researcher to decide whether or not the investigation is possible.

Before carrying out the study, I sought and secured official permission from the Institutional Review Board to conduct research involving human subjects and to observe and participate in the setting. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argue, having access to a setting does not depend merely on getting permission to enter. What is most important is the ability to collect needed information from the setting and/or the participants. In many cases, a researcher may have access to a setting, but unless the participants are sufficiently accessible and willing to provide him or her with the desired, the effort could be in vain. Beynon (1983) addresses the effects of the researcher's presence in a study setting, which he stresses may increase or decrease the "threat" to the study. On the one hand, the risk may decrease if participants feel that the researcher is familiar with the setting; while on the other hand, it might increase if participants prefer the researcher to be a stranger and thus reduce the worry of being evaluated or judged.

In the case of this study, I believe that, both threats were negligible. My background as a kindergarten teacher with extensive experience working with children proved very useful. The teacher related to me as a colleague, rather than as a stranger to the teaching and school environment. This perception, I believe, significantly minimized any threats to the study. Having limited experience about the process of storybook reading in kindergarten classrooms was also useful. The teacher did not view me as a competitive expert about the subject; nor did the students know that they were being studied. Rather, they related to me as a visitor to the classroom, to which they were quite accustomed. College students, parents, and teachers from other Head Start classrooms
regularly visited the classroom, so it was normal for the children to see new faces. As the study proceeded, the children gradually became aware of my almost daily presence in the classroom, at which point they began to relate to me as a teacher’s aide, and asked for my help or participation in many events. In short, I began to feel that the children saw me as a member of the classroom. For example, the children included me in their field trips by giving me a school nametag and a seat on the bus. They also started to include me in their lunchtime routines by preparing my seat and situating a plate among them.

Classroom Environment

The classroom in which this study was conducted can be described as a print-rich environment, designed to assist developmental and academic instruction. Everything in this classroom is labeled, and is well organized into several distinct sections, most of which contain materials for hand-on learning including interactive storybook reading, puzzles, reading and writing materials, sand box, etc. The center of the room, the "literacy center," includes the Rug Area in which the Morning Circles, group work, and story time sessions are all conducted. The Rug Area is carpeted and is surrounded by bookshelves on two sides and by a paper shelf (featuring writing materials such as pencils, markers, crayons and blank papers) on the third side. At the front of the classroom there is the business board, number board, daily schedule, and children's names. On the right side of the room, there are three large tables with chairs used at lunchtime for dining, and at other times for small group time. On the left side of the room, there is an art area, with a rectangle table, a shelf of art and craft materials, an easel, and a plastic mat for paintings. At the entrance of the class there are cubbies assigned for each child. On the right side of the entrance door, there is the house area and
the dress-up closet, whereas at the front corner of the room, there is the block area. This classroom also includes a writing center, which features a computer and a typewriter, papers, notepads, stamps, envelops, writing materials, and office supplies (see Figure 1 for plan of classroom).

![Figure 1: The map of the classroom](image)

**Entry**

In addition to the pilot study that I had conducted a year earlier and the relationship that I had built with the teacher, I had to acquire certain other competencies to be able to gain entry and acceptance by the student-participants. One such competence was my understanding of the language and culture of the participants. In this respect, I had three distinct advantages. Firstly, years of education and continuous interaction with Americans from different walks of life had given me a very good understanding of their language and culture. The pilot study and previous interaction with the same teacher was
an additional advantage. Finally, my extensive experience as a kindergarten teacher equipped me with the experience to deal with the chosen participants of this study. I must admit, however, that even though I possessed more than adequate credentials to conduct this study, I did not feel that I possessed perfect competence. As a person from another country with limited understanding of American culture, I acknowledge that I brought an outsider's perspective, but one which, as Erickson (1993) observes, was able to engage the American perspective in the dialogue and the search for ways to strengthen storybook reading and literacy development.

Participants

The participants of the study include the Head Start teacher, Elizabeth, her students, and me as the sole researcher.

The Teacher

The Head Start teacher, Elizabeth, has been teaching in this program for nine years. She has an Associate Degree in Early Childhood education and also an Associate Degree in Community and Social services. Elizabeth was recommended to me by a Virginia Tech instructor as an extraordinary teacher; one full of energy and enthusiasm. In my initial interview, Elizabeth shared that her interest in the Head Start program began while seeking a suitable environment for her disabled daughter. Her search led her to enroll her daughter into a Head Start program in which she began to be involved as a parent volunteer. She was eventually named the "outstanding parent of the year." Her role as a parent of a disabled child allowed her to become an advocate of the rights for all children, and a desire for them to become survivors through knowledge. Elizabeth describes herself as a strong, compassionate, creative, single parent with a vision for all children to be empowered and become self sufficient.
At the time of my pilot study, she was in the process of developing a literacy-centered classroom that focused on developing children’s literacy skills through visual representation and prints. Her primary role in this study was to share and explain her views to me concerning literacy learning. I also observed her methods and classroom practices as related to storybook reading and literacy learning.

The Students

The other participants in the research were the 18 four-year-old preschoolers from one Head Start classroom in a school located inside a church in Southwest Virginia. Most of these students--twelve girls and six boys--come from low-income families. Nine of the children were African-American, two were biracial, and seven were European-Americans. According to the teacher, most of the students in last year’s class started with negative attitudes toward books and showed little desire to learn to read.

As the study progressed, I decided to focus on four of the students. Deciding whom to select and what criteria to use in selecting them presented initial difficulties. This was resolved in part by the reluctance of some parents to give needed parental approval for their children to be included. Only eight parents granted permission for their children to be included in the study. I then selected those children with whom I seemed to have the most rapport and who seemed to approach literacy learning in different ways. One of them enjoyed reading books; another used paper and writing tools frequently to draw illustrations and pictures; the third student enjoyed scribbling on notepads; and the fourth student had little or no interest in reading, writing or drawing.

Throughout the study, however, I had friendly conversations about storybook reading with all the students. The purpose of those conversations was to have the students describe storybook reading to me. I observed the students’ literacy activities in the classroom and, in particular, their interaction with peers, the teacher, and books. I also
read stories to the students and asked them questions about those stories. I collected students’ artifacts that reflected their literacy development, such as drawings, writings, painting, modeling, and any other representations. Although I did not purposefully single out students based on their gender or races, the children I finally focused on were two boys and two girls. One of the boys was African-American, and the other was Caucasian. One girl was also Caucasian and the other of mixed parentage (Black father and White mother). My selection of participants for this phase of the study was therefore based on the three main criteria: (1) approach to literacy; (2) gender; and (3) race.

The Researcher

As the sole researcher in this qualitative study, I felt sufficiently prepared in my goal to investigate the issues related to my research. This confidence was a result of the knowledge I obtained in my research courses at the university. In addition, my prior experiences in pilot study gave me the confidence I needed to identify exactly what was needed with regard to data collection.

As a mother of three boys, ages 7-14, and as a former kindergarten teacher, I also felt comfortable in this setting working with and observing the classroom teacher and her students. I knew that in order to produce a good qualitative study, my parental knowledge and skills, as well as my previously acquired research skills, would be instrumental in knowing how to ask good questions, how to communicate with young children at their level, and how to be tolerant and flexible.

Producing a good qualitative study also necessitated an understanding of the issues being studied, a sensitivity to the setting and what I observed therein, and an understanding of any personal biases. The latter, I perceived, was of critical importance since the credibility and the trustworthiness of the study relied on my being aware of these biases and the necessity to be subjective when reporting this study.
Duration of the Study

The research lasted for four months--February to May, 1999. During the first two weeks of the study, I visited the classroom everyday, and stayed there for the whole school day. The school day began at 9:00 a.m. and ended at 1:00 p.m. The purpose of this regular visits was to get to know the students and to build a rapport with the teacher and students. Subsequently, I visited the classroom three to five times a week, and stayed for the entire school day (Table 1).

Table 1

Time Line for the Study (1999-2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
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<th>May</th>
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<th>Jul</th>
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<td>Complete observations</td>
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<td>Tape recording</td>
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<td>Data Analysis</td>
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Data Collection

I used two principal methods of data collection for this study: (1) participant observation; and (2) verbal exchanges. I used the two methods simultaneously. Participant observation (including field notes, audio-tapes, videotapes, pictures, and artifacts) enabled me to "see" the internal dynamics of the storybook reading event. Verbal exchanges, including in-depth interviews and informal discussions, enabled me to assess the participants' perception of literacy and literacy events. In-depth interviews
enabled me to probe for explanations of any unusual observations, while informal discussion enabled me to interpret certain situations that I did not anticipate, and also gave the teacher and students opportunities to share with me any thing they felt I should know or wanted to talk about. These advantages comprise some of the reasons why such methods are recommended in combination, and why many researchers view them as highly valuable tools of data collection in qualitative studies (Lofland, 1971). In the section below, I will describe each method, how I carried it out, and what issues I faced in doing so. A summary of the methods and tools I used to answer each research question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Methods and Tools Used to Collect Data in Response to Each Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data collection Methods</th>
<th>Tools used in collecting data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are the Head Start teacher’s verbal explanation of literacy learning and storybook reading among young children?</strong></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Tape-recording</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal conversations</td>
<td>Note taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are the teacher's practices with respect to literacy teaching and storybook reading?</strong></td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Taking field notes</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Tape-recording</td>
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<td>Informal conversations</td>
<td>Video taping</td>
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<td>Picture taking</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is the extent and nature of students' participation in classroom literacy activities including storybook reading?</strong></td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Taking field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Tape-recording</td>
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<td>Informal conversations</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Picture taking</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collect artifacts</td>
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</table>

Researchers commonly reference the different roles that an investigator may play when observing the natural interactions among participants (Adler & Adler, 1994; Gold, 1958; Jorgensen, 1989). I adopted the four roles that Gold (1958) used and
recommended: (1) complete observer; (2) observer as participant; (3) participant as observer; and (4) complete participant.

The status of "complete observer" refers to the situation in which the researcher observes from outside without being noticed, but which affords no opportunity of asking questions to clarify or qualify what has been observed. As “observer as participant,” the researcher collects data through casual interaction with participants and observes them for a short period of time. The "participant as observer" is evidenced when the researcher participates more than observes, and in which a mutual relationship is built between researcher and participant over time. "Complete participant" refers to a situation in which the researcher interacts with participants as naturally as possible, without in any way revealing the real purpose of the researcher's study. Based on these roles described above, one would note that the more one participates the less one is able to observe.

As a participant-observer, I collected the data while interacting with the participants. In my observations, I focused on five factors: (a) what the teacher and students said and did; (b) how they interacted and related with one another; (c) the items they used; (d) the activities they engaged in; and (e) what those activities meant to them.

I was also able to experience the participant's daily life as an insider and to describe what was going on in this particular classroom; who and what was involved in the process of storybook reading; when and where storybook reading occurred; and how and why it occurred (Spardley, 1980). Jorgensen (1989) contends that participant observation is "exceptional for studying process, relationship among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate socio-cultural context in which human existence in folds" (p. 12). I was
involved in the participants' lives and was able to observe and experience the meaning and interactions of the subjects from the role of an insider.

I maintained a positive relationship with the teacher by not limiting myself to just observing specific situations or for pre-established duration of time. Sometimes I arrived prior to children's arrival in order to converse with the teacher and help her prepare for the day. Other times I stayed after school and helped the teacher clean and organize the classroom. In terms of interacting with the children, I often participated in their group time and work time, and also volunteered to accompany them on the field trips to the hospital, kindergarten classroom, park, and zoo. I also fostered my relationship with the children by conversing with them and participating in their games and work times--both in the classroom and on the playground. I interacted with the children individually and in groups. I played with them, read them stories, listen to their stories and joined them in their dramatization. I walked with them to the bus at the end of the day and rode with them during the field trips. When I reflect on my work as participant-observer, I realize that I did different things depending on the phase of the study.

Phase One

This phase comprised two weeks. During this phase, I played the role of complete observer (Gold, 1958). My initial participation in the setting was limited until the students and I got to know each other better. My interactions with them at the beginning consisted of very broad questions and general observations. I began by taking a broad view observation as a way to form an impression about the setting by describing the physical landscape of the classroom: How was it organized? What kind of things were in the classroom? I also looked at the people and events in the classroom: How many they
were? Age? Gender? Ethnicity? What they did and how? etc. By starting to describe the physical setting and the subjects and events, I became familiar with the setting. The reason for this strategy was, as Jorgensen (1989) has suggested, to "quickly achieve a feel for the setting and then attempt to fit in, being as unobtrusive as possible" (p. 83). Later in the research, and as I became more involved with the students and the teacher, I was able to ask more focused questions and make more detailed observations.

As researcher of this study, I have been the main instrument of observation. I started out initially as a passive participant-observer. In this role, I observed different situations and recorded my observations through notes and audio tapes. During this phase of the study, I tried to keep my engagements with the participants to the barest minimum. My intention was to enable the children to get used to my presence in the classroom, especially since I was an outsider--one who looks and dresses differently from other teachers in their school. I considered the curiousness of the children having someone who has her hair always covered and who speaks with such a distinctive accent to observe their daily classroom activities. In fact, I was anxious that the children might be uncomfortable and might not even accept me. However, because it was critically important for the study that the children accept me and feel comfortable with my presence in the classroom, I tried very hard to facilitate that bond. The first indication of success was when they started to question about where I was from and why my hair was always covered. Some of the children speculated that I was bald and asked to see my hair. On one occasion, when the children were playing “Hair-dresser” in the house area, some of them asked if they could fix my hair. I agreed and sat down for the pretend-
hairdressing, while three of them combed, brushed, and placed rollers in my hair. That, I believe, was a critical turning point in my relationship with the children.

**Phase Two**

This phase started at the third week and lasted until the end of the study. During this phase, I was really immersed in the study. I played the role of participant as observer (Gold, 1958). When I felt that the children had accepted me as a teacher-aide in the classroom, I became more active as a participant-observer. I observed the participants in every situation possible, during story time, classroom activities, lunch, playground, bus, and field trips. My objective as participant-observer was to gain a better understanding of the literacy events in that classroom, as well as to understand the literacy context and behavior from the teacher's perspective. On some days I would sit quietly in the classroom, just taking notes; on other days I would join the children during their activities and work time. Sometimes, I would read stories to the children individually or in small groups; on other occasions I would have breakfast or lunch with them. Their curiosity about my culture afforded me the opportunity to share information about who I am and where I came from. During one of the work time activities, I participated by sharing one of the local drinks of Kuwait. I brought in several types of fruits and together the children and I prepared the drink. I did these things as a strategy to fit in as a member of the classroom and to be perceived by the children as such.

The various methods and instruments that were used to record my observations include: field notes; audio tape recorder; video recorder; still camera; and artifacts.
Documenting Observations

Note Taking

Some of the most important things in participant-observation is to take notes, keep records, and data files. Field notes were my medium for reflection and further inquiry. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that field notes should present an honest picture of the research environment. According to them, all relevant features should be presented. In this study, however, the research questions determined what was relevant. I took four kinds of notes: field notes, children's notes, jot notes, and reflective journal. I varied my note taking strategies according to my purposes and the context in which I worked.

Field Notes

The bulk of the data that I collected consist of field notes describing some of the classroom interactions, as well as the teacher's and children's behaviors that I observed. I focused particular attention on the physical infrastructure, activities, and conversations within which those interactions and behaviors were observed. The field notes also include my own marginal comments, reflections, feelings, thoughts, and interpretations of what I observed.

I spent considerable time observing and taking notes, in anticipation of salient events, interactions, and activities, I had my note pad and pen with me all the time. I tried to write down as many observations as possible. I developed a sort of coding system made up of symbols, abbreviations and short statements, which I used to minimize my writing time. To ensure that what I observed was accurately recorded and preserved, I developed and typed my field notes the same day. For example, during story time, I
audiotaped all the sessions. My field notes of those sessions comprised the children's nonverbal reactions--their facial expressions, positions, actions, and body movements—which could not be captured on the tape recorder. Later, the same night, I transcribed the session and added my field notes to create a clearer picture of the whole event. In situations such as field trips where I was not able to audiotape or videotape, I took detailed field notes.

Early in the data collection stage, I tried to take notes on everything in the classroom. Later, I started to be more focused and more discerning of the data I needed to answer my research questions. For example, I started by observing and taking notes on almost all the children in the classroom and eventually focused on the four children who were selected for in-depth study. Field notes on these four children were collected both individually and when they were participants in small or large group work. Individual field notes on each of the focus children were based on those observations when we worked together—for example when they read to me or we worked on a project together. When these children were working along with their peers, I observed and wrote about their interactions.

I collected my field notes in five (21.5 x 29.8 cm) notebooks. Later, I entered these notes in my computer (253 1.5 line pages in total). The following is a typical example of a field note. In this excerpt, I was observing the teacher and the children during small group time where they were learning about planting.

For small group work, Elizabeth has brought the children real plants in plastic cups based on their interest the day before to see real plants. The children removed the plant from the cups and looked at the roots closely.
Sally: "Its gushy!"
Elizabeth: "What do mean, Sally?"
Sally pointed at the roots and said: "These white thing."
Elizabeth: "These are called roots. Roots help plants to drink the water."
Elizabeth provided the children with cups of water to water their plants.
The children watched the plants drinking up the water as they said.
Elizabeth: "What part of the plant drink the water?"
David: "The white part."
Elizabeth: "What are they called?"
David: "Roots."
David's plant seemed to be laying a side, Elizabeth explained to him how
his plant is different from Kiki's. She commented: "Your plant laying
down seems it need more water. Kiki's plant standing up straight."
Beth: "You can talk to your plants."
Cindy said that she want to name her plant snuggle. Sally called her plant
Cinderella, and many other children named their plants too. Elizabeth wrote the
name children gave for their plants on the cups and the children's names beneath
the cups. Children explored real plant and what they need to plant it.
Annie: "I'll go to plant in a big and a little box and water seeds."
Gilly: "I'll plant my in a juice bottle and lot of dirt and water."
Allen: "I plant mine in a bottle and put a lot of dirt on it."
Eddie: "I plant in egg box and more dirt."
Rose: "I plant in an oatmeal box. I need every thing to feed [the plant],
outside; so I take plant outside and let it grow." (Field notes, p. 188).

Children's Field Notes

The children's field notes comprised their scribbling and drawing as an addendum
to my field notes. They would often come to look at what I was writing and ask to draw
or write in my notes. I encouraged them to do so, and they did--and this was invariably
useful. I not only allowed the children to write or draw in my notes, but also wrote their
explanations and interpretation of what they drew and wrote in the margins, in case I
needed them later in my study. An example of my notes with children's work is provided
in Figure 2.
Figure 2: Example of children's drawing and writing on my notepad
Jot Notes

I used jot notes that sometimes consisted of two or three sentences, and other times it could be words that I would elaborate on later when I typed my field notes. I used jot notes during story time session to record the participants' facial expressions, body language, and settings. I also used jot notes when I was with the children on field trips or when I observed something that I did not expect. The following is an example of a jot note I took during breakfast, and my elaboration on it later on the same day. The underlined sentences were the jot notes I took. Later, I elaborated on these notes.

Eddie approached Elizabeth with a card to share with her the note that was written in it saying: "Eddie, I love you." He told her that Tabitha wrote that. He was pleased with it. Elizabeth responded that it was nice and told Tabitha that was well written. Tabitha passed on the children on her table showing them the card, reading it to each of them proudly.

Another purpose of using jot notes was to remind myself of what the children would share with me in response to their writing on my notepad (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Example of a jot note
Reflective Journal

I used this journal in which I reflected on my field notes, struggles, and problems. I freely reflected on things that captured my attention. From my journal, important issues or concepts emerged. The same document also “raised” unexpected questions that directed my observations. The following is an example of my journal about an incident

Thursday, 2/25/98

Two weeks ago, when I joined the children on a field trip to the park, we stopped by an elementary school to pick up the children's lunch. When Elizabeth parked beside a police car, some of the children were concerned and scared from the police men in the car. The children were saying that the policemen would take them to the jail. I remember that day I had a conversation with Elizabeth about the children. She shared with me her concern about the children who misunderstood the positive role of the policemen. Elizabeth said that she might invite the policemen to the classroom to help the children better understand their role, rather than being scared of them.

Today, by the end of the story a police officer came into the classroom. Sally held me tight and said she was scared. I told her there was no need to be scared and that the police officer was there as a friend. The police officer introduced himself and told the children that another friend would be there in few minutes. The other person arrived and introduces himself as a detective. He was not in the police uniform. When he took off his jacket, the children saw that he had a gun and cuffs just like any police officer. He explained their roles in protecting the children and their parents from bad people. He showed the children a poster about two children who saw a gun on the ground and were scared to touch it. He talked to the children about the guns and safety. Elizabeth invited the children to ask any questions they wanted.

I think Elizabeth was wonderful in dealing with the children's concerns and interests. By inviting the police officer to the classroom, she included the children in planning their daily activities based on their interests and concerns. It seems that she always looks for the appropriate activities or plans that could build on the children's knowledge and background.

Audio-Taping

I used audio tape recorder on a daily basis to support to my field notes, and to provide additional contextual evidence. Eleven 90-minute audiotapes were filled with
teacher and children's stories and verbal interactions. I audiotaped the story time sessions to make sure that I got most of the children's responses and interaction with the teacher (see Appendix B for list of stories transcribed). I also used this device because during story time, I sat among the children on the rug with one or two children sitting on my lap most of the time, making it impossible for me to do adequate note taking. With the audiotaping, I only had to jot down the children's reaction, facial expression, body language, and the setting. Later on the same day, I would transcribe the story-time session on my computer. I also used the audiotape when the children were engaged with the teacher in particular activities, especially for situations in which there were immediate and multiple responses. Audiotapes were also made of conversations with some of the children on the bus while on fieldtrips. Another use of the audiotape was when I worked with the four focus children. Since I was unable to take notes while working with them, I audiotaped these sessions to record their storybook reading and their responses while working on different activities. Later on, I transcribed all the tapes.

I started audiotaping the children's voices from the first day to make them feel comfortable with the device and the process. The degree of the children's acceptance and comfort with the device is illustrated by the fact that many of the children asked me to tape-record their voices and allow them to listen to those voices. By the time I was working with the focal children, they generally ignored the tape recorder.

**Video-Taping**

As the study proceeded, I started to observe many interesting activities and responses from the children, which led me to suspect that I had not been able to record every thing that I saw and heard simultaneously. After four weeks, I began to videotape
the classroom environment, the children, and the teacher. This helped me to provide
detailed descriptions of the setting. I videotaped twice a week. On those days, I did not
take notes because every thing I wanted was on tape. However, I still used the tape
recorder to record the story time sessions. I felt that the video tape would help me to
capture more details, interaction, facial expression, and body language that could not be
captured by audio-tapes. I made 16 hours of videotape during the period of the study. I
also videotaped the whole school day for more data.

I also videotaped the focal children individually as they retold the same story. By
so doing, I was able to compare the accuracy of their retelling, as well as their attitudes
and facial expressions. The videotapes were particularly helpful when I needed to review
a particular incident, or to search for any changes in the teacher's or the children's
behavior during the period of the study.

Although the videotaping was helpful, there were also disadvantages. For
example, while videotaping I could not interact or actively engage with the children in
their literacy activities. As a result, I felt a conflict between videotaping to obtain highly
detailed data, and personally establishing a clear picture of what was going on in the
classroom. It was as if I was the insider and the camera was the outsider. There were
other times when I felt that by videotaping, I missed many opportunities to interact with
the children, which might have been helpful in answering my research questions.
Sometimes when I was videotaping an interesting situation or activity, I felt the need to
present it to the readers, and so made still photographs of it.
Picture Taking

I observed several situations in which the children were involved in interesting literacy activities that could not be sufficiently described in prose. Therefore, I decided to take pictures of such events and the children who were engaged in those activities. I took my camera with me every time I went to the classroom. I took pictures every time I observed something interesting to me. In total, I collected about 400 pictures of the classroom centers; of the teacher and children involved in different activities, such as story time, field trips, and on the playground. The children's comfort with this device is indicated by their frequent request for me to take their pictures and to allow them take pictures of themselves with my camera. (Parenthetically, I believe that experience is what gave the teacher the idea of bringing a couple of cameras for the children to use in the classroom. Thus, the children felt entirely comfortable with the camera in the classroom). My goal in taking these pictures was also to generate additional information pertaining to the literacy environment in a preschool classroom.

Artifacts

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) use the term artifact to represent the written and symbolic records about a group of people. I collected the artifacts to help me understand and explore the meanings that the children attach to their literacy activities and experiences. These artifacts included drawings of the children and pieces of their writings. Artifacts also included the children's art and drawing. The teachers’ notes on the children's responses during the day also provided useful information on important events that occurred in the classroom. Some of the artifacts were collected while the children
were working as a group. Others were collected while they were working on their individual portfolios.

One of the challenges I faced arose from the teacher's use of colored construction paper (orange, blue, and green) on which to draw or write. Many of these documents provided very useful information of what was happening in the classroom. Unfortunately, when I tried to photocopy them, the images were not clear enough. I had to lighten them several times to get a meaningful picture.

**Verbal Exchanges**

**Interviewing**

To understand how the teacher perceived and interpreted the world around her, I used unstructured, open-ended interviews. By this method, I was able to ask questions about those events and phenomenon with which I was not familiar. I wanted to understand more about classroom situations that could help me formulate questions specific to my research. Using unstructured questions gave me some information regarding the teacher's perspectives. I developed a variety of questions that would help me collect the type of information I needed. These included: questions pertaining to experience, opinion, knowledge, and feelings (Patton, 1980) (see Appendix C).

I conducted three interviews with the teacher. Each interview was about 90 minutes long. All the interviews were conducted in the classroom after the children had been dismissed. I started my first interview by asking about the teacher's background and education. Gradually, I started to ask her views on literacy and literacy activities. The second interview focused on her teaching methods and practices in relation to storybook
reading and other literacy activities. The third interview included indirect questions that reflected her views and practices in relation to emergent literacy.

For each interview, I used a list of my questions and audiotaped all the sessions. I asked questions about the teacher's background, her understanding of the importance of and relationship between storybook reading and other literacy activity, the participants’ role during storybook reading and other literacy activities. I wrote down notes on the non-verbal reactions that could not be captured on the tape. One example of this is the teacher's enthusiasm when she was talking about the changes in her methods and approaches to literacy. I did not predetermine the order of the questions or the exact phrasing, trying to let the session be as natural as possible. I heeded the advice of Rubin and Rubin (1995) that successful interviewing was essentially about the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

I usually went to each interview session with a particular set of questions in mind. However, I often ended up asking more questions and gaining more information than I had anticipated. This teacher was very knowledgeable and provided so much information that she sometimes tended to change the direction of the interview. I did not particularly mind shifting direction, especially when I felt that doing so was likely going to generate some useful information. Even so, there were occasions when I had to stop and get the teacher to focus on the issues of focal research interest. I considered the teacher's mood when I conducted the interviews. I made sure to arrange those exchanges when the teacher seemed to be in a good mood. At such times, she tended to be very responsive and enthusiastic and provided a lot of information. I would cancel and terminate
interviews with this teacher when I felt that she was tired and had many other things to take care of. She appreciated that and was very cooperative.

**Informal Discussions**

By informal discussions I refer to the conversations I had with the participants. After transcribing the interviews on my computer, I often found myself having more questions, and thus having to go back to the teacher for further clarification or elaboration. I did not schedule interview sessions for clarification and elaboration. This was done through informal conversations, which I began to realize was an important source of the data that I needed.

I conducted informal discussions with both the teacher and the children. Through these discussions, I had opportunities to get useful information that I had not anticipated. The informal discussions were self-initiated some of the time, and by the teacher and the children at other times. Unlike the formal interviews, the informal discussions were unscheduled and occurred whenever and wherever it was convenient. For example, before the children come into the classroom, I would informally engage the teacher about what I observed the day before or about her plans for the rest of the day. Breakfast and lunchtime provided many opportunities to hold informal conversation with the teacher or the children. As already indicated, those discussions frequently generated useful but unexpected information. Informal discussions also took place during work time and group time activities. On several occasions, I stayed back after the children had left for home to see how the teacher evaluated the day or planned the activities for the next day. I felt that the teacher was more comfortable during our informal discussions and did not hesitate to talk about the struggles and the problems she was facing. The fact that those
discussions were not taped seemed to have facilitated very frank expressions. However, where I felt that any discussion was critical to the study, I usually audiotaped it. These informal discussions were also instrumental in my decisions of whom to select for the focal group of children with whom I eventually worked.

As mentioned, informal discussions were not limited to the teacher. I had many such discussions with the children during which time I asked them about their background and their literacy activities. We had these conversations anytime and anywhere. Actually, I collected some very useful data on the focal children from the informal conversation that I audiotaped. My informal conversation with the children often yielded new ideas. For example, when I was listening to a story with one of the focal children, she suggested the idea of making up a story, which I had not thought about until she asked me to do so.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the stage at which I tried to make sense of the information that I had collected. My aim at this stage was to search for possible patterns and themes emerging from the data in order to better understand the situation under inquiry (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998; Jorgensen, 1989).

Wolcott (1994) refers to the data analysis stage in the research process as “data transformation.” According to him, this is the stage at which the researcher “transforms” the bits and pieces of what he/she sees and hears into an intelligible account. The process, as Wolcott describes, involves going beyond mere descriptive presentation of the data, trying to make sense of the data as presented. He identifies “description,” “analysis,” and
“interpretation” as the three primary ingredients of qualitative research, and suggests a 40-15-5 ratio of research effort to be allocated to the three elements, respectively (Wolcott, 1994, p. 49-51). The “description” stage, according to Wolcott, is where the researcher provides detailed account of the procedures that he or she used in collecting the data and obtaining the information that he or she is reporting. The concern here is with activities that can be categorized into recognizing, remembering, recording, storing, and retrieving pertinent information. “Analysis,” according to Wolcott, is the process of transforming the collected data in ways that make sense or that provide answers to the research question(s) – coding, entering, processing, summarizing, and highlighting any patterns, structures, properties, themes, relationships, and/or regularities. “Interpretation,” as the term is used by Wolcott, is the stage at which the researcher gives meaning to his or her observations and also draws his or her conclusions. Interpretation also involves stating the implications of the researcher’s findings (to the extent that those findings are valid). I used these explanations in writing up my results.

In “transforming” (i.e., describing, analyzing, and interpreting) the data of this research, I followed a schema developed by Creswell (1998) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). The four-phase schema comprises: (1) data management, (2) reading and memoing, (3) classifying, and, (4) representing. The following is a brief explanation of each phase and the component activities.

**Data Management**

The enormity and complexity of the data collected called for the utmost efficiency and caution in management in order to be able to process them and make use of the useful information they contain. It was vital to the success of the inquiry that I create an
efficient system for organizing and managing my data. That, even more than the data collection itself, posed a big challenge for me.

To meet the challenge, I created files of narratives, audiotapes, and videotapes and organized them in a way that allowed ready access and retrieval of information. I kept a researcher journal in which I included my notes, observations, and thoughts from classroom observations. I also wrote entries after each storybook-reading session, including reflective narratives on the behavior and progress of the student-participants over time. There were many times when I had to refer back to the audiotapes, transcripts, my field notes, and video productions to cross-verify my observations and ensure that my internalized and externalized pictures were representing the same concepts. My data management system soon progressed to a level of great efficiency.

I took field notes on a daily basis to afford detailed documentation of the participants’ activities and interaction. I transcribed these field notes onto my computer and elaborated on them. The field notes gave focus to my research. I read the field notes regularly to tease out the themes that emerged. As I answered each of my research questions, the field notes grew in importance. I put the number of a given question on the field notes where I thought it provided an answer or made a contribution to the question. For example, if I felt that a section answered or gave insight to part B of the first research question, I would write--by that section--(1(b) (Figure 4).
Thursday, 2/4/99

I arrived at 9:10. The children were choosing their duty for the day as helpers. After singing the good morning song the children went to the tables for breakfast by 9:15. During breakfast, I sat between Cory and Taira who asked me nicely if I wanted to eat with them. I told her I had breakfast at home. Rachel did not have breakfast with them because she didn't feel well. She chose to lay down instead and Janet told her that was fine if that was what she wanted. After checking on Rachel, Janet joined our table for breakfast expressing how the strawberry cheese seems delicious. Dominique told her that she could make sandwich with the crackers and cheese.

Janet: tell me how I can make sandwich?

Dominique: Take two crackers, get a knife, take some cheese, put it on one cracker, then put the other one on the top.

Janet put the cracker with cheese on the top of the other and: like this?

Dominique: no, put the other one on the top (meaning the plain one).

Tiara asked me to close my eyes to hide a piece of peach from her plate. When I opened my eyes, she asked me where I thought the peach was. I told her that she ate it and I guessed right.

Ethan approached Janet with a card to share with her the note that was written in it saying: "Ethan, I love you." He told her that Taylor wrote him that. He was pleased with it. Janet responded that it was nice and told Taylor that was well written. Taylor passed on the children on her table showing them the card, reading it to each of them proudly.

Different kinds of conversations occur during breakfast. Corey asked Adrian (parent from last year): why do you work here? She responded because she loves them. Summer at the other table held up two crackers in her hands and told me: "if I eat those two crackers, I'll grow bigger." I told her that I agree with her.

Figure 4. Example of data analysis of field notes.
I started by developing three folders, one for each of the research questions. I then read each folder for any common themes that might emerge, and I used those themes as subheading in writing my findings. Later, with the data collected, I developed two more folders, one on the focal children and the other on emergent literacy.

I also underlined areas of the narrative that I felt answered or were significant to the research questions. Often, I wrote beside key statements one or two cue words about which question is answered (see Figure 4). Another strategy I used was to write in detail my responses to emerging themes. Later I read my detailed writing and tried to develop an outline consisting of long sentences of all the data that I collected. I then compressed these long sentences into one summative sentence. This process forced me to be more focused and selective about what was important. It helped me to look into my data in more depth and try to read between the lines, to be more reflective. After that I classified the sentences based a concept they represent or a common theme that emerged. That helped me in developing my themes. I then compared the emergent themes with my research question to test their relevance. Thereafter, it was easy to report the findings under each theme. Finally, I went back to my field notes and started to look for illustrations that supported my interpretations (see Figure 4).

**Reading and "Memoing"**

I started writing my interpretations after three visits to the setting. This on-going process helped me in developing more focused questions to guide my data collection and to stay on course. It also helped me to clarify what I had learned and what I still had to learn, during subsequent observations. I reviewed my data and wrote my memos regularly to reflect any thoughts and the feelings that emerged. Johnson (1975), who
supports this approach, maintains that "as a field researcher develops a better understanding of activities in a given setting, the observational records will change to reflect the observer's changing understanding" (p. 187).

Interpretation was one of my greatest challenges. I struggled with my language and conceptual differences to move from the literal to abstract interpretation and to be able to make critical sense of the findings. I regularly consulted with colleagues to corroborate my interpretation of a word, sentence, paragraph, or conclusion. I also searched the literature and other relevant studies for information that could strengthen my analysis. Reading the work of other scholars, seeing how they approached their analysis, and noting their personal comments on the issues raised, all provided me with models and encouragement.

In discussing the question about the focal children, for example, I read the field notes several times. I circled each child’s name in my field notes with a different color to make it easy to me to identify them easily (see Figure 4). After that, I developed an outline for each of them that included everything about them in my field notes. Based on the kind of activities and interactions that emerged, I developed my themes. I compared their reading and writing characteristics using some categories that I adopted from Mielenz (1998) (see Appendix D).

**Classifying and Coding**

Classification, as Creswell (1998) suggests, involves taking a text or qualitative information apart, looking for a few “categories, themes, or dimensions” (p. 144) that represent the original information. At the classification and coding stage, the objective is to identify concepts that, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) observe, would help me to
“make sense of what is going on in the scenes documented by the data” (p. 209). Creswell, understandably, recognizes how difficult it is, “especially in a large data base [like my own], to reduce the information down to five or six [themes]” (p. 144). The procedure, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) observe, involves reading the data frequently and carefully to identify and familiarize oneself with any patterns that stand out, and, also, developing a classification that more or less exhausts the various observations that the researcher has made. More specific details include:

1. developing categories (or themes) for the patterns that emerge;
2. giving the “categories” names that reflect the information they represent;
3. changing the names whenever the researcher comes up with more appropriate ones;
4. clarifying the meanings of each concept and exploring their interrelationships; and
5. using those concepts to organize the data and to describe and explain the study.

After streamlining emerging issues in my data, I went through my daily reviews and reflections to identify the recurring patterns and unusual issues that were developing as well as any inconsistencies or relationships between what the teacher told me during my interview about her theoretical perspectives, strategies, and methods and what I observed in her practices. The effectiveness of my data management and the thoroughness of my reading were severely tested during this period of recovering, reviewing, and reorganizing data to reflect my discoveries. At this stage, I recalled Hammersley and Atkinson’s encouragement to researchers to read their notes frequently in order to understand and optimize the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

From the first week, I tried to find connections between the collected data and research questions in order to determine any common themes. I started to look for the themes and wrote my interpretations about what the teacher-participant said. I often went
back to ask her for elaboration or clarification. I also shared my interpretations with her to ensure that my interpretations were correct. I wrote memos on my field notes, highlighting the common themes as they emerged. I read all my field notes, put them aside, and began writing about the processes that I had observed in the classroom. I kept typing until I virtually ran out of things to say. Then I read through what I had expressed and pulled out the main or general themes that were repeated in the teacher's practices during storybook reading events. These provided a basis for the different questions and issues that were raised in my mini-analysis. I went through the transcripts of the interview, as well as my notes, and created labels for the different kinds of engagements children had with text, including my interaction with them. I noted if it was the first or second time they had heard the story. While analyzing the field notes, I noted that several definitions of literacy operated in this classroom as a result of the many literacy events in which the children were engaged in. I began to think about how the storybook reading activity is implicated in all that I had observed. My questions centered on these literacy events.

- What are the various literacy events?
- What are the definitions of reading?
- How does the teacher define literacy?
- How do the children interact during literacy activities?
- How does she interpret different kinds of literacy activities of children?

I was conscious of my own assumptions of literacy and I was trying to understand other people's definitions that might be different from mine. I continued to find answers to these questions across the semester. I studied the transcripts of all my field notes and
tapes for evidence. I looked closely at my data for the kinds of words or language Elizabeth used when she was talking about student reading and performance in their literacy events, to get her conceptualizations and definitions. I systematically looked at the data to see if there was contradictory or supportive evidence.

The audiotaped transcripts of children reading/retelling stories and discussion were analyzed to examine students' participation and comprehension. Following is my itinerary for data generation and analysis (Table 3)

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Itinerary For Data Generation and Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week No.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
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<td>(JAN 26-28)</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
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<td>(FEB 1-5)</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
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<td>(FEB 8-12)</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
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<td>(FEB 22-26)</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
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<td>(MAR 1-5)</td>
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87
| Week 7  | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR event, took pictures of children during literacy activities, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event, read field notes, identified emerging themes, wrote memos |
| Week 8  | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR event, worked with a focus child on making a book, took pictures of children during literacy activities, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event, cross-checked data with teacher, read field notes, identified emerging themes |
| Week 9  | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR event, worked with a focus child on making a book, conducted Interview # 2 with the teacher, took pictures of children during literacy activities, collected artifacts, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event and interview, identified emerging themes |
| Week 10 | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR event, worked with a focus child on making a book, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event, collected artifacts, read field notes, identified emerging themes, early stage analysis |
| Week 11 | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR event, video-typed classroom activities, collected artifacts, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event, read field notes, identified emerging themes, wrote memos, early stage analysis |
| Week 12 | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR event, took pictures of children during literacy activities, collected artifacts, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event, read field notes, identified emerging themes, early stage analysis |
| Week 13 | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-tape SBR event, video-typed classroom activities, conducted Interview # 3 with the teacher, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event and interview, read field notes, identified emerging themes, analysis |
| Week 14 | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR event, took pictures of children during literacy activities, collected artifacts, typed field notes, transcribed tape of SBR event, read field notes, identified emerging themes, analysis |
| Week 15 | M-F  | Observed teacher and selected children, take field notes,
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>M-F</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(MAY 3-7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>tape record SBR event, video-type classroom activities, type field notes,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>transcribe tape of SBR event, read field notes, write memos, identify</td>
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<td>emerging themes, analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 16</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Observe teacher and selected children, took field notes, audio-taped SBR</td>
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<td>(MAY 10-14)</td>
<td></td>
<td>event, video-typed classroom activities, took pictures of children during</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>literacy activities, worked with the focus children individually, collect</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>artifacts, typed field notes, transcribed tapes of SBR event, read field</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>notes, identified emerging themes, analysis</td>
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<td>Week 17</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, taped record</td>
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<tr>
<td>(MAY 17-21)</td>
<td></td>
<td>SBR event, took pictures of children during literacy activities, videotaped</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>the focus children while reading the same story, typed field notes,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>transcribed tape of SBR event and children's stories, read field notes,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>identified important issues and emerging themes, analysis</td>
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<td>Week 18</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Observed teacher and selected children, took field notes, taped record SBR</td>
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<tr>
<td>(MAY 24-28)</td>
<td></td>
<td>event, took pictures of children during literacy activities, Disengagement:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Left the setting, cross-checked data with the teacher, farewell activity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with the children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 19 &amp; 20</td>
<td>M-F</td>
<td>Assembled the data, sorted and categorized data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(MAY 31-JUN 11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Analysis (JUN-SEP)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pulled out any themes that have emerged, cross-analyzed themes, related</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>teacher's practice with emergent literacy, organized direct quotations by</td>
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Thesis Writing (Sept. through March)

Representation

In presenting the narratives, discussions, tables, and visuals of this study, I have tried as much as possible to use the participants' actual words and pictures to give a vivid description of the events that I observed. In addition, I have included my own reflections (journal entry) about the methods that I used, well as the insights I gained, the feelings aroused, and the challenges posed. Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to the researcher's memos (which include reflections, insights, and feelings) as "long pieces." Those "long
pieces" or reflections as Bodgan and Bicklen (1998) observe, have served to significantly authenticate the voices of my participants and afford some verification of my positions.

The findings of the study are presented in the next three chapters. Chapter Four discussed the Head Start teacher's explanation of her practices in literacy learning through storybook reading. Specifically:

1. How she describes storybook reading and literacy learning.
2. What importance she sees in storybook reading and literacy learning;
3. How she sees the relationship between storybook reading and literacy learning.
4. What aspects of storybook reading she identifies as promoting literacy learning.
5. What she sees as her role in preschoolers' literacy learning.

Chapter Five presents findings on the Head Start teacher's methods and approaches to the development of literacy skills:

1. Types of literacy events that occur in the classroom.
2. The type of environment that this teacher constructs to encourage literacy development among preschoolers.
3. How the teacher uses storybook reading as part of the literacy environment.
5. How the teacher assesses preschoolers' literacy performance in a Head Start classroom.

Chapter Six presents the findings on observed impact of storybook reading on preschoolers' literacy learning:
1. Aspects of storybook reading that seem to engage students the most.

2. The role that students play during storybook reading and the extent of their participation in those activities.

3. The ways in which children engage in literacy activities.

These findings are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven. Their implications and recommendations are included in Chapter Eight.

As explained in the "Methodology" section above, data for this study was collected using participant observation and verbal exchanges. The combination of the two methods gave me greater access the extent to which the teacher's views affected her methods and classroom practices.

As an observer, I had to rely very heavily on my own perceptions, which were, of course, results of my situated stance as a researcher. While I have quoted the participants' exact words as much as possible as support for my perceptions and interpretation, I am aware that even the selection of which pieces of transcript to include in my write-up comes from my stance as a researcher. I have also shared my notes and impressions with the teacher for discussion and confirmation. Finally, I have discussed my analysis and interpretation with experienced and knowledgeable professors in qualitative research for review and suggestions.

Summary

This research, like the pilot study from which it was developed, has been designed for me to better understand the processes and practices of early literacy development in a Head Start classroom, so that I may extrapolate from these findings to Kuwaiti classrooms. To this end, I developed and utilized a variety of methods to gain “entry”
and to become accepted by the teacher and the students whom I selected as participants. I was involved with the participants for four continuous months during which I was able to observe their approach (i.e., processes and practices) to early literacy development and, in particular, storybook reading. This chapter has identified and explained both the “instruments” and the procedures that I used to collect necessary data. I have also explained how I used the information generated to help me answer the questions that motivated this study.

It is my belief that the findings presented in the next three chapters will provide new insights regarding the role of storybook reading and other literacy activities in children's language acquisition and social development. It is also my hope that the information generated will serve as a guide and rationale for strengthening storybook reading and other literacy activities both in US and Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms.
CHAPTER FOUR

Head Start Teacher's Understanding and Explanation of Literacy Learning Through Storybook Reading

Introduction

This chapter is the report of the interview that I conducted with a Head Start teacher. The report shows the teacher’s explanation of literacy learning through storybook reading, and is presented in five parts: a) the Head Start teacher's definition of storybook reading and literacy learning; b) the significance the teacher attaches to storybook reading and literacy learning; c) the teacher’s explanation of the relationship between storybook reading and literacy learning; d) aspects of storybook reading that the teacher perceives as promoting literacy learning; and e) the teacher’s description of her and the students’ roles in preschoolers' literacy learning.

Teacher's Explanation of Storybook Reading and Literacy Learning

The Head Start teacher's explanation of storybook reading and literacy learning expresses her visions of the children’s future and how storybook reading and literacy learning can promote that future. First, she described literacy learning as a multi-dimensional activity. Second, she described literacy learning as an all-encompassing activity that transcends all other activities--linguistic and non-linguistic. Third, she saw connections between words and symbols. Fourth, she believed that storybook reading should be a daily activity initiated by the teacher or students. Following is an analysis of the teacher’s opinions by category:
Literacy as a Multi-dimensional Activity

Contrary to popular notions, Elizabeth believed that literacy is broader than just reading and writing skills. According to her, it encompasses a child’s whole world. It consists of a complex set of attitudes, behaviors, expectations, and other skills. Further, she explained that literacy involves communication skills. Elizabeth emphasized the importance of good communication skills, especially when working with young children because it is a way to assertively communicate thoughts, ideas, stories, books, and songs to children. She described literacy as the “basis for all their learning because it involves communication skills. Literacy is more than reading or writing or reading books. It is communication, communicating thoughts and ideas and that words have some meaning to them.”

Elizabeth also described literacy teaching as modeling. She believed that it is important for the children to see the teacher or any adult modeling aspects of literacy through reading, writing, and singing. For Elizabeth, communicating thoughts and ideas with others is important. She provided such opportunities for the children by talking to them, using the language skills that she modeled for them. She believed that children should be taught the proper way of saying things (putting endings on words or enunciating words). She also encouraged the children to communicate their thoughts and ideas throughout the course of the day:

And the children see us writing all the time and they know that we're writing something important enough to keep. And that we can go back and read what we've written because it expresses an idea or a thought that we had or something that we want to remember. So, it's by modeling. Modeling literacy, modeling the importance of communication and the importance of sharing an idea either verbally or on written paper.
Literacy Spans Other Activities

Elizabeth explained that literacy includes everything. It is a part of everyday life and activities. According to her, children are exposed to literacy experiences all the time and one does not have to create a special time for literacy. It could occur any time anywhere. For children, literacy occurs naturally while they are engaged in every day routines at home, school, or in the community. As Elizabeth said,

"Literacy is ALL the time. From the minute they come through the door to the minute they leave. I mean they're still writing the minute they leave. So it's an environment that we've created."

Elizabeth viewed literacy as giving the child access to understanding his/her world. As such, she described literacy learning as being the child's world, and all that takes place in that environment including all experience meaningful to the child. It involves communicating aspects of this environment in verbal or written form, which adds meaning and accessibility to the child. In her words,

"Literacy, I think, encompasses a child’s whole world. It could be the environment. It could be the things that are accessible to the child. And literacy has to have some meaning to them. It takes on many forms. It could be in written form. It could be in verbal form. It is the basis for all their learning."

Connection Between Words and Symbols

Elizabeth asserted that children learn reading and writing long before they begin to say the words as printed on a page. She explained that children make meaning of the print with the help of adults or their peers. They learn that there is a connection between the print and the visual symbols that surround them:

"Reading begins LONG before that. That's what I'm trying to make people understand now. Pictures are ways of helping a group remember details. And it's good for comprehension. And it also is good for them to maybe..."
recreate the story in their own way, and be imaginative and come up with some new ideas.

Elizabeth described her classroom as being set up under the High Scope Curriculum, which is based on the assumption that children should work in a print-rich environment. For example, there should be labels on things to identify the things. There should be pictures because according to Elizabeth, children first learn the meaning of the written word by symbols or by pictures. They come to know and recognize symbols or pictures or shapes. Elizabeth accompanied that with the written word. In her classroom, the children eventually come to know that the written word has some meaning that is attached to that picture. Elizabeth, therefore, organized her classroom in such a way that there were words everywhere.

The room is set up under the High Scope Curriculum. And that curriculum says that there should be words everywhere. We try to write as much as we can and just fill the environment and make it what we call environmentally rich with print—the written word. Children need to understand that symbols have meanings. Symbols like McDonalds’ sign, or the Kentucky Fried Chicken sign, or Hardees, or Burger King. So when they come to understand symbols, then they can come to understand that words are made up of symbols. The symbols are becoming those letters. And so reading takes place long before that.

**Storybook Reading as a Daily Activity Initiated by Teacher or Student**

Elizabeth emphasized the importance of storybook reading as a daily activity. She felt that storybooks should be read daily because storybook reading is relevant to the children's lives, culture, and interests. Reading stories to children every day helps them to increase their ability to understand and retell stories. Elizabeth explained that children learn to read by listening to stories. She further pointed out that children need to be allowed and encouraged to initiate their own stories whenever they want to. In her
classroom, both the student and the teacher could initiate this activity. According to Elizabeth,

The important thing is to read for children every day to get them involved and engaged. If the children have interest to go beyond that story that we’ve chosen for the day, then, we’ll go beyond that. If children want to read during their daily activities, then we’ll read to them there. We will initiate the actual reading time or what we call the story time, but they can initiate other reading times throughout the course of the day and it doesn’t matter when it is that. It could be outside, it could be on the bus, it could be anywhere. If they want us to read a story then we will certainly read to them.

**Importance of Storybook Reading and Literacy Learning**

This section reports the Head Start teacher's explanation of the usefulness of storybook reading in children's development. She described five ways in which storybook reading contributes to children's development in this Head Start classroom: development of life-long learning, recreation activity, academic pursuits, skills development, connecting other areas of the curriculum.

**Development of Life-Long Learning**

Elizabeth viewed storybook reading as an important literacy activity that encourages the development of life-long learning. Therefore, it promotes life-long reading. She saw storybook reading activities as helping children to develop love and appreciation for reading and how to take care of books. In other words, "It gives children a love for books, a love for reading, a love for literacy, and a respect for how to take care of books. And an understanding that books contain fun."

**Recreation Activity**

Elizabeth described storybook reading as a recreation activity through which children can develop a positive response to books. Elizabeth said that one way to
accomplish that is to make reading an enjoyable activity. She explained that providing children with the opportunities to experience the teacher reading to them gave them pleasure and enjoyment. She said that when children experience reading aloud as a relaxing and entertaining activity, they develop a love for words, books, and learning.

And why do repetition with the written word when you can do repetition to make it fun. If you want to teach them ABC's--do the ABC Song. If you want them to learn how to count, you do it in a fun way. Make it fun. Learning should be fun; it shouldn't be drudgery. And teaching should be fun.

**Academic Pursuits**

Elizabeth also described storybook reading as an academic pursuit through which children receive a global sense of the world. They begin to understand what reading is all about. She explained that by reading aloud to children, they would begin to form concepts about books and formal reading. Children will learn that reading moves from left to right, and that there is a proper way of holding a book. Children will learn that books contain meaningful and useful information that they can look for when they need. This will lead them to future success in reading and other content areas.

It gives children an understanding that books contain certain kinds of information, and books can contain different worlds. I want them to know that there is information in the books there. There are worlds that they can go to, that there are different ideas, where there are different people, different cultures and there are different kinds of worlds that they may never heard before, or there are different kinds of ideas that they’ve never thought of before because their world may just be here in ----, but the world is beyond --- where they can get just all kind of different ideas and information that’s there in the book."  

**Development of Skills**

Elizabeth sees storybook reading as playing an important part in the children's learning. They develop language skills, which is critical in providing the foundation for
reading skills and academic success when they start formal instruction at school. In her view, "It’s going to be the foundation for their successes for later, because they will have a connection that the written word has some meaning." Elizabeth also believes that storybook reading nurtures children's creativity. Their creativity is best demonstrated by their responses after listening to a story. Elizabeth explained that this creativity could be expressed in different ways: writing, storytelling, and play-acting.

I want them to be creative too. I want them to change the story if they want to, or add something to it. In some stories we don’t have a name of a person and they say let’s call him something and we’ll do that through the story. We got that name so they are able to do . . . it’s actually the beginning of creative writing, creative storytelling, creative abilities that they have."

Connecting Other Areas of the Curriculum.

Elizabeth saw storybook reading as connecting to other aspects of the curriculum and highlighting the key experiences that are the focus of a Head Start classroom. She explained, "And it’s carried into other parts of their development. It’s carried into Mathematics. It’s carried into Social Sciences. It’s carried into Science. It’s carried into so many other parts of education." Elizabeth maintained that stories are a big part of all activities in the classroom. She explained that storybook reading ties into all other activities: breakfast, house area, block area, work time, and recess. According to Elizabeth, children go into the different areas and they re-enact a story, or they remember a character that they would like to impersonate from that story. They also like to repeat certain words or phrases from a particular story or to draw something in the story that struck their fancy.

Say we read the book, *If You Give A Pig A Pancake*, we might serve waffles that day. So it ties in to breakfast. Or that one day that we read *If You Give A Moose A Muffin*, one of the volunteers actually brought a
muffin to school that morning for her breakfast. It just showed up on the table and I go, ‘Where did this muffin come from?’ And they go because I had already told them what the storybook was going to be. And they go, ‘Well, it is probably for the moose.’ Or if we read stories like *I’ve Been Working on the Railroad*, that will tie into a group time activities, which is ties into language and literacy, which ties into cooperative behaviors with the children, or developing ties with friends that encourage social growth.

I put one book on the shelf. It was a recipe book and it was there for them to look at. And we were reading some of the things. Well, they ended up taking it in the dramatic play or the house area to use it there. One of the little girls today used that book; she said, ‘Now you have read...’ and get this it was the biggest word I’ve ever heard this child use, ‘You have to read the directions.’ So she took it into the dramatic play. We may have books on trucks and planes and that kind of thing, and that will carry over into the block area. We may set the books over there for them to use in the block area. We may set books here in the art area to give them ideas of how to make things. And we’ve done that. And we’ve taken books outside for them to use during outside time, to sit down and read book outside. So ‘... you can use it in so many different ways.

**Relationship Between Storybook Reading and Literacy Learning**

Elizabeth asserted that obvious relationships exist between storybook reading and literacy learning. She explained that storybook reading, as a literacy activity, has positive influences on the child's development. She said that storybook reading provides children with immediate and long-term learning experiences.

**Immediate Learning**

Elizabeth emphasized the relationship between storybook reading and literacy learning. She said that by reading aloud to children, the teacher introduces them to new forms of language in which meanings are discussed. Children learn about the configuration and meaning of written words. As a result, they develop an appreciation for books and an understanding of the importance of text. Elizabeth believes that,

Without an appreciation for books, and without an appreciation that a book contains written words, they may not understand the importance of having things written down, or understanding the importance of having things told to them. So there’s a connection. They have come to know
that books contain something. And if they want to discover something, they can go to a book. That strengthens their literacy skills, if they know they can go to a book, or someone can go to a book for them or with them they can gather information.

Elizabeth explained that this emphasizes that storybook reading should be fun and should allow for active engagement. This active engagement further provides opportunities for new learning about texts. As she asserts, "if we can make storybook reading fun, and they can actively be engaged in it, then that will transfer into their wanting to learn and learn other information after they leave us, which will strengthen their literacy skills."

Without this element of active participation, Elizabeth saw storybook reading and literacy learning as encouraging students to develop a negative attitude toward learning:

If they don’t like the books, or if they don’t like reading or if it becomes drudgery then it is going to be drudgery later. I want them to develop a love reading. But it doesn’t have to be a chore; it doesn’t have to be a task that they just dread.

According to Elizabeth, reading aloud to children reinforces their language development and excites their curiosity. Through storybook reading, children develop their language skills by retelling, predicting, questioning, and thinking aloud.

I want them to be able to remember events in the story. I want them to be able to retell that and build on their language skills and be able to repeat that if necessary. I am not going to sit there and drill them to do remember this or whatever, but also have them have put some ideas, maybe anticipate events, what’s going to happen next or we read a story yesterday and they’re getting to the point now when we read the story for the second time they’ll be able to tell the story and in some cases it is almost word for word. So their ability to focus on what we have been saying to them is increasing.

Long-Term Learning Experiences

Elizabeth also saw the relationship between storybook reading and literacy learning as the basis for future learning. As children are exposed to literacy language,
they are assisted in learning how to use language in reading. Elizabeth said, "Storybook reading is important to their literacy, because literacy is the basis of them being able to learn in the future." Elizabeth is convinced that providing reading and writing materials contributes to children's literacy learning. She explained that learning to read and write is similar to learning to speak. Therefore, children need to be immersed in reading and writing in order to learn how to read and write. According to Elizabeth, this can happen by providing children with a print-rich environment including a variety of books, which are accessible to the children. Elizabeth's way of doing this was by making the bookshelf a focal point of the classroom.

And what we knew we wanted to do was make literacy the center of everything. And we started we actually started with the gathering place and everything went out from that. So we knew that we wanted the room open. We knew we wanted books to be the center of the room. And we knew that we wanted writing materials and all kinds of literacy materials throughout the room. As a preschool teacher and in a preschool classroom, I think you need to have writing materials accessible to them. You need paper, pencils, markers--those kinds of things. I think you just need to have those accessible and if they have an interest in it, they will begin to do the writing, or the invented spelling, or scribbles or whatever. And then eventually the writing will come.

In addition to creating an environment where literacy is the center of children's learning, Elizabeth said that the transfer of literacy skills could be achieved by reading aloud to children. By listening to stories read to them, children will eventually learn to tell their own stories and write them down. They can also talk about them and give more details about what they told or wrote. As she maintains, "I think it will help them come up with ideas and stories. I think that will help with that aspect. It will help them to understand how to write, sequence of events, or how things progress." Elizabeth considered that the main impact of storybook reading was on the children's understanding
of the importance of books and the different ways of using them. This helps them be ready for future learning when they turn to books looking for information as well as enjoyment.

When it comes to reading, they will have that connection again, that the books contain something important that the books, they can elicit information from those books. They can discover new things, new ideas, and new places in those books by reading. It will help them have that interest in what is contained in books. And reading to children can only enhance that understanding that the books have something important.

Elements of Storybook Reading that Promote Literacy Learning

The Head Start teacher identified four elements of storybook reading as assisting literacy learning and as instrumental in children's development. These elements include style, theme, format, and characters.

Style

Elizabeth described the author’s style as critical to capturing the children's attention. Elizabeth explained that the elements of vocabulary and the rhythmic patterns in words facilitate and promote literacy learning. According to her, it helps them develop linguistic rhythm. It helps them appreciate the sound of words, and the music behind the words. And it sets the tone and the comfort level for reading and writing. She stresses, "Vocabulary, vocabulary in books. The rhythm and the rhyme of words found in books, you know, have a singsong sound. It has a nice flow to it."

Themes

Another element of storybook reading that Elizabeth described as promoting literacy was the story themes that the children can connect with. Elizabeth said that storybook reading should be relevant to students’ lives, cultures, and interests. Elizabeth believed that it was very important to take each child into consideration when choosing
what story to read. She explained that when choosing the books to read, she tried to focus on students’ interests or something that came up the day before.

We deliberately try to choose some books that will interest some of the children. I’ve learned that those stories need to capture their interest in order to develop a love for reading or interest in storybooks. I’ve also learned that we may need to look for outside sources to bring books in that will extend their thinking and learning like the snakes, they are developing an interest in the snakes, what they are called. So the next logical step is to get a book and bring it in to the classroom so it has some logical sequence for learning.

In helping children to make connection with the books, Elizabeth put emphasis on choosing books that reflect the Appalachian culture to which many children in this Head Start classroom belong. She explained that these children could relate to the Appalachian story and then develop similar themes in their pretend play:

We choose particular books. My priority has been real strong on the Appalachian culture. The children in our classroom are from the Appalachian culture. A number of the children are African-American. But the one that’s predominant with them all is the Appalachian, and the Appalachian dialect or the Appalachian phrases that come with it. And if I choose books that have those similarities, then that will engage them.

Through storybook reading, Elizabeth exposed the children to situations in stories that are likely to occur in their culture. She asserted that they need to appreciate their Appalachian heritage and the speech patterns of this culture.

Our children need to have appreciation for the Appalachian heritage for the culture they are growing up in, for the dialect that comes along with that. If I bring in an Appalachian book that has phrases like, ‘Git on down the road,’ for people who aren’t from this area, they may not understand what that word means. Or ‘goin’ down yonder,’ the children who grew up in Appalachia will understand that. It actually means we’re going over there.

Elizabeth also shared that mainstream society has portrayed this culture negatively. By reading stories that children can connect with, she said that those
perceptions could change and give the children a sense of self worth and pride. Elizabeth explained, "The misconception of people when they hear the Appalachian dialect is that these people are stupid."

The search for storybooks that reflect the Appalachian culture is one of Elizabeth’s major challenges. As she explained, "We haven’t seen books like that. And there aren’t great numbers of books that celebrate the Appalachian culture."

**Format**

Elizabeth added that by listening to stories read to them, children learn some concepts about books or stories. They learn that while reading, the reader moves from left to right and looks at the print. They learn that illustrations are related to the words being read. They also understand that many people play a part in writing (i.e., that books have a title, author, illustrator, and a beginning and an end). Consequently, children gain an understanding of how books are made. Because of discussions in her class room, "Six of the children now have come to understand what an author is, and what an illustrator is." As such, Elizabeth said that many of the children wanted to be creators of books.

And the one thing that I hadn’t planned on was they have become aware now of the dedication that transferred to "Let me write my own book. Let me write my own stories. Why can’t the book be for me?"

**Characterization**

Elizabeth considered the characters portrayed in the story as one element that can promote literacy. Through them children obtain insights into different people and worlds: "They get an idea of different characters. An idea of different worlds."
Description of Teacher and Students Role in Storybook Reading and Literacy Learning

Storybook reading in this Head Start classroom required both a reader and an audience. Elizabeth explained her role as effective reader, effective planner, and role model. She described the children's role as effective listeners and participants.

Teacher as Effective Reader

One of the important roles that Elizabeth emphasized was making storybook reading a pleasant activity for the children. Elizabeth believed that it is important for the children to see the teacher read to them and enjoying the book herself. That will help the children to develop a love for reading. Consequently, Elizabeth saw her role as providing that medium for engagement and participation:

I think if an adult is reading then that's a good bonding time, or that's good quality time to show that reading isn't just for children or isn't just for adults. Reading is for everybody and reading can be enjoyable for everybody. And adding to the story--each brings a little piece of the story and maybe elaborates on the story and makes it more fun. Or someone may miss a detail that somebody else can offer so I think, yeah, encourage them to join.

Elizabeth tried to capture every child during storybook reading. To do so, Elizabeth used different ways of storytelling or engaging children in literacy activities. As she states, "The way I try to engage them is do something ahead of time, before I do the story. I might do a finger play, or I might do a song or something." Elizabeth emphasized the importance of children's engagement and involvement in literacy activities including storybook reading. In order to encourage such engagement, Elizabeth explained her different ways of stimulating children during storybook reading. Elizabeth described the use of props as a successful way to keep children engaged. In explaining the way she used the props, Elizabeth said: "We can bring props into the stories. When we read The
Turnips, we brought actual turnips and let the children see and taste them after reading the story so there are various numbers of ways.” Elizabeth believed that this approach is highly stimulating and engaging. Her purpose, as she says, is simple:

I want to suck them into it. Just kind of like . . . I’m going to grab you. I’m going to get something to pull you into this. And I’m going to keep you here for this brief time. And then you’re just going to be in amazement, what happens in the story. And you’re going to be in amazement when you find out what happens at the end.

Elizabeth helped the children make connections with the books by using certain phrases that portray Appalachian culture. Through storybook reading Elizabeth exposed the children to situations in stories that are likely to occur in their culture. She explained that they need to appreciate their Appalachian heritage and the speech patterns of this culture.

Teacher as Effective Planner

As an effective planner, Elizabeth used a balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed activities. Her purpose was to ensure children's participation and engagement. In describing these kinds of activities, Elizabeth said:

If I were to describe a typical day, just in a brief sentence, it would be a balance between child-initiated/teacher-directed activities. It’s not teacher lecture type, or children total control. It’s a nice balance of those kinds of activities. It’s also a balance of quiet activities and active, so it’s a give and take. So it’s a nice balance throughout the course of the day.

Elizabeth perceived her role as ensuring the continuity of learning for her children. Children's learning experiences do not end by the end of the day. Elizabeth tried to incorporate what happened in the classroom into what will happen the next day. In describing how she provides the children with the opportunities for continuity for learning, Elizabeth illustrated:

Today, Allen was doing something with coffee filters, so I want to see if I can find something. And he was using eyedroppers too. So I might find
something that will incorporate both of these, something for him, that will tie this together, that will carry over from what he was doing today. And Cory was in his ‘office’ doing work and things. So what ‘we’re thinking is what could we add to this office that would keep her there.’ We might want a pair of glasses; we might want a pair of high heels. We might want a briefcase. You know, all those kinds of things for the office. We might want a clipboard. And there have to be all kinds of materials available and they have to have accessibility to those materials, as they chose not as we dictate it, but as they chose. So it’s readily available as they’re ready to learn.

Elizabeth’s planning also included the recognition of the cultural needs of her children. She realized that many of her children are from the Appalachian culture and need experiences to develop academic and social skills that can assist them in future learning. Through storybook reading she introduced the key experiences that are the focus of the Head Start curriculum. Children are able to incorporate the value of social learning and social play.

When choosing books, they have to be about be "key experiences." When I say key experiences, they’re actually basic developmental milestones. These are basic skills they need for later learning. It's when you are actually giving children information to know . . . and they apply it in a constructive way. We don’t have themes, we may not focus on transportation, zoo animals, or farm animals, but we talk about them every time the opportunity comes up. I am trying to focus on the social initiative, because they’re beginning to develop a bond with each other, and they’re being supportive of each other. There are some children who still stay back from other kids and they don’t have that sense of cooperative play. So we’re trying to foster that a little bit more. So we may go back and revisit some of the experiences. But we look at what the children’s needs are and do the planning based on those things.

Teacher as Role Model

Elizabeth maintained that she tried to present a good model for the children to encourage reading experiences. Elizabeth explained that reading aloud to children on a daily basis is the way to help them learn to read and develop an appreciation for books. Elizabeth emphasized the importance of children seeing their teacher, an adult, reading
constantly with interest to help them understand the value of reading and that books contain all sorts of information. This role, Elizabeth felt, leads to the children developing a positive response to reading and an appreciation for stories and books.

My role is to help them learn that, or help them appreciate stories and appreciate that . . . when they hear me read a book and if they know that I’m interested in it, or they hear excitement in my voice, then that gives them a role model to look to. Here is an adult who is reading. She enjoys it, so there has to be something to it! It’s not just something for kids.”

Further, Elizabeth described her role in storybook reading as facilitating student's additions to stories, developing plots and characters, and participation. Her aim was to help students to recognize that they can create their own stories.

If they say something that I can blend into the story, then I’m going to incorporate it into that story. If they make a statement I’ll incorporate it in there. So they have a role. They have some importance in telling this story. They have a part in telling this story. They are just as important.

Elizabeth confessed that this was not what she initially learned at school. However, her change came as a result of observing her children and introducing new ways of teaching and learning.

I was taught at school, children were to listen. They don't interrupt. They listen to the story and you ask the questions, but you don't engage them. Over the years, I learned that they need to stay active. So I have changed the way I engage them in the story.

Students’ Role

Effective Listeners

Elizabeth saw the children's role as being good listeners. However, for Elizabeth, being good listeners also means involvement in what they hear:

Their role is to not always to listen and sit quiet because you can’t always. You have to just jump right in. If you’ve got something important to say, or you’ve got something important to share and add to the story - go ahead and do it.
Participants

Elizabeth saw the children’s role as being active participants during all literacy activities, including storybook reading. She emphasized encouraging children to engage in stories by commenting, questioning, reading, and adding. She allowed the children to give additions to stories, such as developing plots and characters. Elizabeth’s role was to encourage the children to create their own stories, ideas, and songs.

They will comment. They will smile. They’ll move closer or they’ll elbow each other. They will read with me. They’ll tell . . . if we’ve read the story before, they’ll say, ‘Well he did this!’ And they will actually help tell the story. They will actually add details to the story or say, ‘Oh, you forgot about . . .’ whatever. So they will help add to the original . . . or enrich the story is what it is. Most often I can see it in their eyes or in their faces, when I know that they’re involved. Because they’ll look toward you instead of off in another way. So I just need to look at their individual personalities and their individual needs. I look at the individual children, because for some children, they may not be looking at me eye-to-eye. They may be hearing the story without looking at me eye-to-eye."

She also explained that through storybook reading, children might relate personally meaningful experiences. When they listen to stories that are similar to experiences they had, they are encouraged to share them with her peers. As Elizabeth observed their enthusiasm to relate personal experiences, she shared that this helped her to know what direction to take in their learning and also include them in the planning process. She noted that with this approach children are able to engage in meaningful hands-on activities and active learning.

Children learn through hands-on, active learning. When they are actively engaged that is how they learn. Anything that happens with the children—if they have an idea, we try to follow along with that idea or what we can plan and help them elaborate on that plan and try to incorporate all the development areas that we can. And with the curriculum that we use, language and literacy is one of those areas of development. So they can express personally meaningful experiences and they can record things, as THEY want to. Things they want to remember. So that’s one of the things that we encourage."
## Table 4

**Head Start Teacher's Understanding and Explanation of Literacy Learning Through Storybook Reading (SBR)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Observations</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A) Perception of SBR and Literacy Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-dimensional</td>
<td>Consists of complex set of attitudes, behaviors, expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pervasive</td>
<td>Involved in every aspect of student's life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing experience</td>
<td>Continuous, precedes after formal instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B) Importance of SBR and Literacy Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulating</td>
<td>- Promotes life-long reading, helps children to develop love and appreciation for reading and how to take care of books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>- By making reading an enjoyable activity children can develop a positive response to books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>- Children receive a global sense of the world, begin to form concepts about books and formal reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>- Stimulate &amp; promote language skills &amp; creativity in different ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative</td>
<td>- Connects other aspects of the curriculum and is central to all classroom activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) Relationship between SBR &amp; Literacy Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental</td>
<td>- Provides children with immediate learning experiences (children learn new forms of language, which reinforces their language development and excites their curiosity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Facilitates future learning and enables them to bring language to reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Key Elements of SBR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author's style</td>
<td>- Vocabulary and the rhythmic patterns in words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story themes</td>
<td>- Relevant to students’ lives, cultures, and interests; i.e., themes that children can connect with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book format</td>
<td>- Helps children understand how books are made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>- Characters with whom children can identify.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(E) Teacher's Role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness as reader</td>
<td>- Makes the storybook reading a pleasant activity for the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness as planner</td>
<td>- Balance child-initiated with teacher-directed activities to ensure children's participation and engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness as role model</td>
<td>- Presents a good model for the children to imitate in reading of storybook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F) Students' Role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective listeners</td>
<td>- Listen attentively and recall information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active participants</td>
<td>- Children question, read, add, develop plots and characters, and relate personally meaningful experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHAPTER FIVE

Head Start Teacher's Methods and Approaches to the Development of Literacy

Introduction

The previous chapter reported the Head Start teacher's understanding and explanation of literacy learning through storybook reading. This chapter presents findings on this Head Start teacher's methods and approaches to the development of literacy skills. The report includes: a) types of literacy events that occur in the classroom; b) the style of environment that the teacher constructed for the promotion of literacy learning; c) how the teacher combines storybook reading with other literacy contexts; d) how the teacher interacts with preschoolers in storybook reading and other literacy events; and e) how the teacher assesses preschoolers' literacy performance.

Types of Literacy Events that Occur in the Classroom

The Head Start teacher, Elizabeth, appeared to rely on two main methods for the promotion of literacy learning in her classroom: (1) storybook reading and (2) other non-reading literacy events. Applications of these methods were observed and the findings are reported in the following section.

Storybook Reading

Storybook reading was a daily activity for students in this Head Start classroom. Through interactive storybook reading, the children were allowed to observe adult role models reading. Also, through this activity, the teacher (Elizabeth) invited the children to actively participate in the storybook reading event. They were encouraged to predict, recall, read with her, reflect, and ask questions about books. Through storybook reading,
Elizabeth introduced the children to many important aspects of literacy. She exposed them to the literature by providing them interactions with books, opportunities which they may lack at home, but may help them develop a better understanding about their world. Most of the time, storybook reading time began with Elizabeth preparing the children and setting the tone for reading the story.

At one story session Elizabeth started singing a “Tick Tock” song with the children and then she asked:

Elizabeth: "What makes the sound tick tock?"
The children: "Clock."
Elizabeth: "A clock says Tick-Tock. What do you think the name of the book is?"
Children: "Tick-Tock."
Elizabeth: "Yes"

Elizabeth started by telling the title and the author: *Tick-Tock* by Lean Anderson. The children were very interested and quiet during the story. At the first page where there was a child's picture, one of the children asked,

Allen: "Is this a girl?"
Elizabeth: "I don't know if it is a boy or a girl. It may be a boy or it may be a girl. Do you know how we can tell Allen?" (Then Elizabeth realized that Allen was asking about the author and the picture of the child.)
Elizabeth: "Are you asking if the author, Lean Anderson, is a boy or a girl, let me see." (Elizabeth looked at the back of the book. She read the short information about the author)
Elizabeth: "It doesn't say if Lean is a boy or a girl. If it says he, then I would know it's a boy, and if it says she, I would know it's a girl."
Allen: "Who is the illustrator?"
Elizabeth: "I am trying to see if they say who the illustrator is. I don't see it. I think the illustrator is Lean Anderson, the author."

In this story, every page started with *Tick-Tock*, and on the upper side was a number, which represented the time on that page. While Elizabeth read the story, the children read the repetitive parts with her (Tick-Tock its _o'clock). They predicted the time by
looking at the number on the top of the page. When they reached the page where the
time was 11:00, Allen asked,

Allen: "Is it morning?"
Elizabeth: "It’s night Allen."
Allen: "Then when is it gonna be morning?"
Elizabeth: "If we went back, one clock is afternoon. This book doesn't
have morning. This book, Allen, doesn't talk about the morning. I
wonder if maybe we can write a story that says Tick-Tock and we
talk about the morning."
Allen: "We can write the sun shine."
Elizabeth: "We can write the sun shine! What do you mean? We can do
that at work time."

Non-Reading Literacy Events

Elizabeth did not use storybook reading as the only activity to promote children's
literacy learning. She provided the children with other literacy activities that did not
necessarily include reading. These non-literacy events included such classroom activities
as morning circle, mealtimes, recall time, small and large group time, free work time, and
field trips. In these activities, the children engaged in conversations, dramatization, and
cooperative learning. These activities appeared to develop oral language. The children
were able to explore their use of oral language, which was encouraged by the teacher. In
a morning circle session a student shared her concern:

Annie: "I lost snuggle."
Elizabeth: "Is it your cat?"
Annie: "Yes, it died. We buried her."
Elizabeth: "Did you know when animals die or got killed, they are not
coming back?"
At one mealtimes a student explained her concept about orphans:
Sally: "I went to the orphans."
Eddie: "What orphan mean."
Thelma (lunch helper): "It means some one who don't have parents, mom and
dad."
Sally: "Pets too."
Sometimes the conversation will lead to the sharing of personal stories:
Cindy: "Do you have stairs in your house."
Elizabeth: "No, But I have one step because I have a disabled daughter."
Kevin: "Is she little?"
Elizabeth: "No. She is 18 years old."
Cindy: "I was gonna asked the same question."
Elizabeth: "Cindy, you saw her. She talks differently and walks differently."
Kevin: "How come every body talks different?"
Elizabeth: "I guess because our voices are different."

During one work time as students engaged in dramatized play, they conversed about popular culture and gender roles. Eddie dressed in a purple gown and danced to the music pretending to be a "Spice Girl."

He said: "I like fast music."
Rose: "You are a boy. You can't be a Spice Girl."

Many of these interactions were spontaneous and initiated by students. More description of these activities will be provided in the next section "Literacy promotion environments."

**Literacy Promotion Environments**

Literacy development in this Head Start classroom took place in two dimensions of the environmental setting: the physical and the social. The physical environment, comprising books, materials, and working spaces, provided the children with the opportunity to interact with the print. The social environment, comprising mainly student/teacher and student/student interactions, provided opportunities for students to exercise and to develop their literacy skills.

This section presents the findings on how the two types of environment are created and maintained. The report focuses on the teacher’s as well as the students’ roles in creating and maintaining what appeared to be a positive and stimulating literacy
environment. The findings on the physical environment are reported first, followed by the findings on the social environment.

The Physical Environment

The teacher seemed very keen to create a suitable environment for storybook reading and literacy development. She did so by providing a variety of physical spaces in which children and teacher could interact and share experiences. Regarding physical spaces, a number of "learning centers" were arranged in such a way that students were able to interact freely and involve themselves in a wide variety of literacy events and activities.

The following is a description of some of the centers. The description indicates the purpose of each center, its location, materials, uses, and perceived impact on children's literacy development.

Art Area

Purpose: The purpose of this area was to provide hands-on activities for the children. The center also encouraged the children to use their imagination and be creative in using materials in various ways.

Location: The art area was located at one corner of the classroom, beside the gathering area.

Materials: This area included a table with eight small chairs around it. On three sides of the table there were three shelves equipped with a variety of materials and tools to encourage the children to draw and write including: crayons, markers, pencils, different size and color papers, paints, glue, scissors, and a variety of other artistic fodder (e.g. beads, fabrics, glitters, yarn and so forth). Also, folders with the children's names
were on the shelf for the children to keep their work in. On the fourth side of the table, was an easel for children to paint on. Every single object and material in this area was labeled with its name. Posters about different colors with the name of the color written out were displayed in this area (see Appendix E, pictures 1a, 1b).

Activities/Uses: The art area was one of the most important areas in the classroom; the children worked there on a daily basis. In this area, the artistic natures of the children were observed. They drew pictures and talked about them and told stories about them. Most of the time the children drew or made their own pictures and always chose the words they wanted to be written on their work. The teacher provided the children with the materials and gave them the opportunity to think of different ways of using them. Every thing in this classroom was based on the idea of developing problem solving skills in these children. However, the children were free to express their artistic nature in other areas. For example, while Elizabeth was reading the story *Rainbow Fish*, Tabitha loved the illustrations in the book and commented, "He is a cool artist because he put sprinkles on the fish."

Another way Elizabeth used this area was to expand on the stories she read in the class. For example, after reading the story of the very hungry caterpillar, the children made wonderful designs of caterpillars using egg cartons, beads, and colors. Although in many classrooms the art area may be used exclusively for artistic expression, in this classroom the children were given opportunities and the choice to use these materials and tools for self-expression and any communication that they wished.

Influence: I observed the children in this area work in many creative ways. They drew pictures, practiced writing, and worked on projects. For example, they decorated
paper bags for Valentine’s Day using color, lace, buttons, fabrics and glitter. On other occasions they made cards for the lunch helper when she did not come to school for a long time. Also, they worked on projects related to special occasions and were able to talk about the materials they used. For example, I observed the children make Easter baskets using small plastic baskets, colorful plastic grass (pink, yellow, and green), strings, and plastic eggs. When I asked Allen how he made his basket, he said: "I made it with grass, yellow, pink, and green."

Drawing, coloring and painting did not necessarily take place only in the art area. I observed the children on many occasions choose to take the materials they wanted to use to paint and draw outside during recess time (see Appendix E, pictures 2a, 2b).

Children had the choice to draw, write, or pretend to write which, from an emergent literacy perspective, is one form of literacy development or communication. Children practiced writing in this area most of the time. For example, I observed Tiffany in the art area practicing writing some letters using water paints. She asked me to read it to her. I told her since she wrote it she could read it to me. She said, "I don't know how to read and what theses says." Then she asked me to write my name on a piece of paper. I told her the letters while she wrote them down. She wrote the letters S and A. She didn't know how to write the letters L and W. I wrote them on a separate piece of paper and she copied them. She glued my name on the picture she made and gave it to me.

On another occasion, I observed Allen using a coffee filter, dropper, and colored water. He added drops of water on the coffee filter once and on a regular paper once. He blew on the water. He said he was making: "something like flubber." Allen discovered that water could come through the filter. He said: "look, it is soaking." This example
shows that learning took place everywhere and that the art area was not just for coloring and drawing. This child was able to learn some science concepts along with developing artistic skills.

Sometimes the children used dramatic play while they were working in the art area. For example, I observed David, in the art area, filling a bottle with colored water while wearing goggles on his eyes. When Allen tried to join him, David told him, "$ you need to put glasses on so the water wouldn't splash in your eyes." Allen cooperated with him and took his suggestion. They were working with the colored water with goggles on as if they were working in a lab.

**Writing Area**

*Purpose:* This center was designed to expose children to writing materials and experiences to help them see themselves as writers. Also, the children learned some concepts about reading and writing, and about the purpose of writing and its importance.

*Location:* The writing center was located in one corner of the classroom, on one side of the classroom, and across from the block area.

*Materials:* In this center Elizabeth provided several writing tools to promote the children's interests. She provided them with the tools they needed to write with, including pens and pencils, tables to work on, and many other materials to make writing more "tempting." For example, she gave the children a typewriter and a computer which were located on two tables with two small chairs for each of them, helping them to become aware of other tools that can be used for writing (see Appendix E, pictures 3a-c). She also provided a variety of papers to meet different needs. Large sized paper was provided for the children to write and draw on and there were small pads of paper for
note taking or messages. Other writing stimulating materials that I observed were calculators, envelopes, plain paper, stapler, clippers, stamps, calendar, daily organizers, paper puncher, rulers, clipboards, phone and address books, suitcase, phone, chalk board, and other office supplies for children to use.

**Uses/Activities:** The children used this center all the time. Although the computer and the typewriter did not work the children pretended to work on them, and thus gained knowledge about each of them. For instance, Allen asked Elizabeth about the mouse and the monitor wanting to know what they are called and why. Also, the children pretended to type on both by pressing on the letters; this helped them to learn about the letters. For example, I observed Gilly pressing on the correct letters on the keyboard to write her name. Then, she asked me to spell my name for her while she typed it and she did a good job identifying the letters. This, by itself, is one good way of helping children develop literacy.

**Influence:** I observed the children pretend to work in offices or doctor clinics and many examples of dramatic play were observed in this area (see Appendix E, picture 4a). For example, I observed Allen working in this area during free period and work time. He was sitting in front of the computer with a note pad and a pencil in his hand. A lot of office materials were on the table in front of him such as folders, clips, glue, pencil, etc. He said, “I am working in the office. I have many stuff to do here, my boss tells me that.” Nancy (carrying a doll as her baby) approached Allen and asked him if she could use the phone in his office to call her baby's father. Allen told her she could use the phone in his office. Nancy asked me to hold the baby for a while she made her phone call. Allen pretended to leave the office and said, "I'm done at my work in the
office, and I am not gonna do every thing my boss says." When I asked him why, he said "because he ask me to do a lot. He tells me to write notes, and I am tired and I wanna go home." Allen started to write something on a piece of paper using a pencil, then he folded it and put it in a small envelope. When I asked him what he was writing, he said, "Some thing that tell my boss get out of here." This example shows how these children were acting like readers and writers.

I observed the children express their understanding of the purpose of writing. For example, Cindy explained why she was working on the typewriter by saying, "I am working in office and doing paper work, and I will typewrite to make letters." (see Appendix E, picture 4b). Most importantly, and as a result of the interactions described above, many conversations took place among children in this area which helped the children to develop their oral language.

The Gathering Area/ Library Area

*Purpose:* This area was used for several purposes. For example, it was used as a gathering area (for morning circle, story time, large group time), as a library area (children interact with books individually or in small or large groups), and as a listening area (see Appendix E, pictures 5a, 5b).

*Location:* This area was in the center of the room which children can see and reach easily.

*Materials:* This area was covered with a colorful blue carpet with different colors of square on the edge. Each square included a picture with its name written below it, and from the outside of the square is the alphabet. This area included a daily helper board/chart, a collection of puppets from the children's favorite characters, a large pillow,
a board that displayed pictures of the Head Start children involved in different literacy activities, a poster of a couple of children reading a book with a sentence that said, "We can share books," and posters of the children's favorite songs (pictures and words) (see Appendix E, picture 5c). One of the shelves, by the wall, right in front of the entrance door, included a tape recorder, record player, tapes, records, musical instruments, folders of nursery rhymes, material for the funnel board, and headphones. The other two shelves of books were on two sides of the gathering area, almost in the center of the classroom, which the children can reach and see easily. The bookshelves included a variety of books that face out to encourage reading. Elizabeth changed the books on the shelves from time to time, based on the theme of the week. She also put some of the children's favorite books on the shelf to promote their interest in books.

**Uses/Activities:** During gathering time, the class met as a whole. Children often sat on the floor grouped around the teacher who, sometimes, sat on the floor too. At some other times, during story time, the teacher sat on a small chair in front of the children. Different kinds of literacy activities took place in this area. For example, during morning circle, children started their day by taking care of *important business*, as they called it. During this important time, each child found a space on one of the squares on the carpet to sit on, as did the teacher and any other adults in the classroom. They sat in a semi-circle in the center of the room. This event was informal; the teacher started by asking the children if they had important business to take care of. The children were given turns to speak. All the children listened to each other’s stories and asked questions. Sometimes the children initiated a turn by announcing that they had some business to
take care of or they approached the teacher with stories. At other times the teacher announced that she has some business to take care of and approached them with stories.

This activity is similar to "Show and Tell" in the kindergarten classroom. However, it was called *important business* because the children are given the chance to express their feelings and talk about experiences they had out of the classroom. Then they decided on the plans for the day. They shared important news with the others by telling short stories about what they did or will do. For example, some of the children shared that they were going to leave the class early for several reasons, one shared his experience with his birthday party, and another shared that she was going to be the flower girl in a wedding.

After taking care of their business, the children chose their duty as daily helpers, for the day. They put their symbol card names on the work they wanted to do; such assignments were written on each hand of an octopus (duty chart). The octopus ended up full with all the name cards (see Appendix E, picture 5d). The jobs that they have to choose from are:

- Breakfast helper
- Lunch helper
- Stack chairs
- Gather the symbol cards
- Check the centers to make sure the toys are put away
- Tooth brush helper
- Empty small trash cans
- Wipe tables

After taking care of business, Elizabeth, along with the children, sang the good morning song before they went to the tables to have breakfast. The song is as follows, "Good Morning, Good Morning, Good Morning to you, The day is beginning, there is so much to do. Good Morning, Good Morning, Good Morning to you." Another important
literacy activity that occurs in the gathering area is story time. This activity was described in detail in a previous section (Storybook Reading).

**Influence:** I observed the children sharing personal stories and expressing their feelings and concerns in the gathering area. For example, Elizabeth talked to the children about a nurse who would come to the class to give some of the children the shots they needed to go to kindergarten. She mentioned the names of the children who needed the shots so there wouldn't be any surprises. Elizabeth talked to the children about the importance of these shots. David said that he was scared about the shot and he asked if they were allowed to scream. Elizabeth told the children that it was okay for them to be scared and she suggested they make a milk muscle, as they do at breakfast, to make it easier for them. When Elizabeth asked the children what could they do to help each other, David answered, "hold hands." Sally suggested they give hugs after the shot.

In using the gathering area as a library or reading area, children interacted with the books on a daily basis individually, with partners, and in small groups. The children were free to read and browse through the books at any time. I observed the children use the books in several situations. I observed them hold the book and pretend to read individually, read for other children, read for adults, and ask adults to read to them.

**House Area**

**Purpose:** The house area provided the children with opportunities, materials, and an appropriate environment, which encouraged them to interact collaboratively with each other as well as with adults. In this area, the children had the opportunity to pretend to be a character of their own choice. Many of them use this opportunity to role-play in collaboration with their peers.
**Location:** The house area was located on one side of the room, in front of the gathering area.

**Materials:** This area was well-supplied with variety of house keeping equipment including oven, refrigerator, sink, microwave, utensils such as plates, silverware, pots, pans, cooking utensils, empty boxes of food products, plastic fruits and vegetables, iron, and cook books. It also included a small round table with four small chairs, a baby crib, a dollhouse with a variety of toys, a dresser and mirror, and a small sofa. In addition, a variety of clothing such as dresses, jackets, shoes, scarves, bags, purses, and jewelry was available for the children to use to dress up. Children made up their own stories using toys in the dollhouse. All the furniture and the storage places for the utensils were labeled with the materials’ names, which provided a vivid connection between the equipment and its print name (see Appendix E, pictures 6a-d).

**Uses/Activities:** This area was well equipped for dramatic play. In the house area children are actually acting stories about real life. They performed stories they heard or saw on movies or at home. Acting out stories in the house area was a daily activity where the children would role play different characters. They used their personal experiences from home and even their imagination in creating these stories and actually dramatizing them. I have been involved in many of their stories by playing a role that they selected for me. Occasionally, I selected the role. Once, I joined the children in the house area by sitting at the table. The children took different roles as mom, dad, and friend. They used the dolls as their children. The children were in the kitchen pretending to prepare dinner. They said that they were going to have a party and they asked me if I would like to come to the party. I accepted the invitation and pretended to have fun at
their party. They served me with the food and drink and I pretended to eat and drink. On another occasion, Rose was working all by herself. She was reading a story loudly by herself in the house area. At that moment she preferred to read a story by herself. When I asked her if I could look at her story with her she said no. Later she had two dolls in a cart and went throughout the classroom and asked me to join her. When she went in the house area she picked the boxes of crackers and other things saying that she was in the grocery shop buying stuff for the children. She told me that a woman was following her. She asked me to follow her so that the woman would follow me and loose her. Then she asked me to sit on the table while she was fixing the food. She had the rabbit and carrots in a pan on the stove. She was enjoying her role.

   The teacher often participated by going along with any story the students created. For example, once Allen, Gilly, and Kiki pretended to prepare things to go for a picnic. Gilly was putting the food and plates they needed in a basket. She asked Allen, who was supposed to be her husband, to take care of the baby (a doll) for her. Allen had the doll in his lap while he was putting some clothes and stuff for the baby in the bag. They children were acting like real adults. Allen and Gilly went to the block area and pretended to be in a car. They sat beside each other with their stuff beside them. While Allen pretended to drive the car, the teacher approached them asking about where they were going. Allen said, “We are going on a picnic. We will drive to Florida.” Allen asked the teacher if she wanted to join them for the picnic and she accepted gladly. He told her to sit in the back seat because there wasn't enough room in the front. When the children pretend to arrive, they went to the gathering area and pretended to be in the park.
They spread out a sheet and took out their stuff and pretended to grill some food. That's when the other children joined them.

Influence: Dramatic plays started in the house area were not limited to that area, but often spilled over to other areas and activities. For example, I joined Tammy who was playing in the house area pretending that she was going to her office. Then she went to the writing area pretending to be to her office. She sat on a desk with the computer, some folders, and two phones in front of her. She pretended to talk on the phone while looking through some papers and a calendar. She was so convincing. When I joined her, she said she had two phones, "This go to my work and this go to my home." While I talked to her she picked the phone and told me, "It's for you, your dad." I pretended to talk with my dad. Tammy told me to tell my dad that I was in her office. When she was talking to me about her office, she picked the phone and pretended to be mad at the one who called saying, "You're not supposed to call me when I am with some one else. I am working with Salwa; don't call me at work." Tammy talked on the phone saying, "Uh huh, uh huh, yes ma'am, Thursday, I can't, . . . (looking in a calendar) ‘that what it says.'" Tammy showed me a book of artifacts that included instructions for doing an artifact. And told me that I could take it home. She said that I could read it and if I liked some thing in it I could make plans for what I wanted to do. Actually, she told me what Elizabeth had told the children using the same words.

Then Tammy received another phone call, "Hello, you must not call me when I am speaking to another person in my office. I told you that. Mom told me to call you. What do you mean? I didn't drive you in jail. Do you see the beeper? That’s why you are in jail. You've been calling me for weeks and that’s why you --- and you're in jail. I
am not lying." Then Tammy used the calculator (pressing on numbers randomly) and said, "I want to get me a shoes and a dress but I don't know if my mom gonna let me get them."

The stories the children made and acted in the house area were always child-defined. They might be stories from personal experiences, heard, or seen on movies, or imaginary stories that evolved out of the classroom context. The audience was the children themselves and, sometimes, an adult.

Music/Listening Area

*Purpose:* The purpose of this area was to provide the children with opportunities to listen to songs or stories of their choice and to help them develop listening skills.

*Location:* The music area was located in the gathering area.

*Materials:* The listening area included a shelf holding a tape recorder, headphones, a record-player, a large number of records and tapes, and musical instruments.

*Uses/Activities:* Children were free to use the instruments in this area in any way they wished. They could choose to listen to songs or stories (see Appendix E, pictures 7a, 7b), or even make their own music. Elizabeth modeled how to use the tape recorder and the record player for children. She labeled the play button with the word "go" in green and labeled the stop button with the word “stop” in red to help the children make connections between the print and the object. I observed one of the children at the music area asking the teacher to put the record *Witch Brew* on for her. She pulled two small chairs to sit on one and put her legs on the other. She sat close to the record player and
had a couple of sheets that had the words of the song. She was holding them with two hands pretending to read while singing the song along with the record player.

**Influence:** In this area, the children built their own stage. They used materials, artifacts, or props. This was done collaboratively with other students. The children have the choice to play any music or song they choose. I saw children performing wonderful concerts. For example, a group of children pretended to be the Spice Girls. Each of them chose to be one of the members by putting their names on their shirts. They put on different clothing from the dress up area. They stood on the stage, with wooden microphones in their hands, and sang the whole song with incredible expression and passion. They were role-playing or imitating particular characters from real life (see Appendix E pictures 7c, 7d).

**Block Area**

**Purpose:** The block area provided children with hands-on activities and opportunities to work in collaboration with each other.

**Location:** This area was in one corner of the classroom, beside the house area, in front of the writing area.

**Materials:** It included two shelves of wooden blocks in different sizes and shapes. It also included a water table that was used in different ways based on the theme of the week (see Appendix E, pictures 8a, 8b).

**Uses/Activities:** In this area of the room, children played with blocks together and they used different toys to play. They told stories using toys in the block area. They used the blocks and built a bridge or a stage to dance on. They applied what they experienced through storybook reading about real life situations and objects. I observed the children...
using different plastic toys of animals, worms, and so on, in the water table. I also observed them using the water table as a soil table in which they planted many plants (see Appendix E, pictures 8c, 8d).

**Influence:** Although the block area did not involve reading and writing, it was a rich ground for oral language development. It helps children develop other literacy behaviors such as speaking and listening, thinking, and imagination. Children regularly put notes on their work that says who made that and what they want to do with it. They told the teacher to write what they said word for word. For example, a small group of children made a tent in the block area and pretended to drive cars, using blocks.

**Puppet Show Area**

**Purpose:** This area encouraged the children to create their own stories using artifacts in the different play areas.

**Materials:** This area included a small theater and many puppets and the children's favorite characters (see Appendix E, pictures 9a, 9b).

**Uses/Activities:** Children used this area during work time. They were allowed to move the theater around the classroom. Children told stories, individually or collaboratively, using the puppets and the theater. I observed the children choose the character they wanted to act out and stand behind the curtain getting ready to tell the story.

Elizabeth involved the children in planning for the puppet show based on their interest. For example, once she noticed Cory very interested in the puppet show, telling a story, using the puppets without a theater. Elizabeth told Kevin that if he were interested she could bring out the Puppet Theater the next day and he agreed. She asked him what
else he wanted her to prepare for the theater and Cory started to tell her about the puppets he preferred. This is one example of how children participate in planning for the literacy activities based on their needs and interests.

*Influence:* Some of the children chose to be the narrator and others chose to be the audience. They pulled up chairs and sat in front of the theater. Sometimes they created their own stories. Sometimes they retold stories the teacher read to them. The children also used the puppets in other areas in the classroom. I observed some of the children using some of the puppets and the bookshelf as the theater to tell stories.

The centers are not the only areas where literacy activities take place. The classroom teacher employs other strategies in her practice to continue literacy learning. Her morning routines are arranged so that students are placed in small groups in order to engage in literacy activities. I observed the teacher working with half of the children while her assistant worked with the other half. During this time, the teacher engaged the children in activities that were stimulated through story time and other curricular activities such as math, science, and language arts.

**Breakfast/Lunch Time**

During breakfast the teachers had all kinds of informal conversations and discussions with the children. Lots of stories were raised. Many important concepts or facts were gained from these stories. For example, one of the children, Al, had an appointment with the dentist. He was scared and almost cried. He did not want to go. A teacher’s assistant, who was sitting between him and another student, Carl, asked the other student to show them how clean his teeth were. Carl showed his teeth and Al
looked at him, but was still not convinced. Another student, Dan, then said: “Al, don’t be afraid of dentists, I am not afraid of him.”

Children started to tell stories about their visits to the dentist, about their initial fears, and how after the event everything was all right. They all helped to encourage Al not to be afraid. Then, the teacher’s aide explained the importance of checking teeth every few months to make sure they are white, nice, and healthy. In this example I see a mixture of discourse forms, because when children started to tell Al personal stories, Al was presumably the audience of the story. However, a shift started to occur when the aide talked in a more expository style explaining the importance of checking teeth. She appeared to be talking to all the children at the table. The story started with Al as an audience and ended up with a large group being the audience. Basically, the content of the stories was defined collaboratively by both children and adults.

Many opportunities for stories and literacy development occurred during mealtime, when they asked many interesting questions. For instance, while the children were having cereal for breakfast (Cheerios), Elizabeth read on the back of the box, "free Fruitopia juice." David, who was sitting beside her and the box, was also looking at it. He noticed the different kinds of Cheerios that were on the back of the cereal box. He asked Elizabeth to read the names of the different kinds of Cheerios on the box, "What these say?" Elizabeth read to him all the kinds of cereal. On another occasion, when it was breakfast time, Cory asked Carolyn about a pin she was wearing, “What does that say?” Carolyn read it to him while pointing at the words, “together we can make it.” Then she took it off and handed it to him while he looked at it closely and read, “together we can make it.” Children also learned nutrition facts during mealtime. For example,
once Rose was drinking fat free milk. I remembered that Elizabeth had answered a question from the children about the difference between fat free and low fat milk. When I asked her about the difference between fat free and reduced fat milk, she said that the fat free tasted better because it had sugar in it. Tammy asked Elizabeth to read what was written on the two different milks and Elizabeth did so.

**Group Time**

Group time was a daily practice in which the class was divided into two groups, one with Elizabeth and the other with her assistant who organizes the activity. It occurred right after story time and before children worked on their plans. During group work Elizabeth focused on a specific concept. Various kinds of activities related to all concepts of literacy were assigned during this period; mostly, they were hand-on activities that promoted the children’s participation. Although often these activities involved stories, the children were also exposed to Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies. For example, in Math the children worked with number stencils and rubber stamps using watercolors to make patterns of the numbers. After, they counted the numbers.

In Science, the children discovered how things work. For example, in one science activity, after having finished reading the story, Elizabeth brought a large soda bottle filled with blue water and oil. She called it the *wave machine*. She showed the children, who were sitting in circle in the rug area, how the water and the oil did not mix together. She moved the bottle in different ways. The children thought that that was cool. Elizabeth passed two bottles, one orange and one blue, around the class. Each child had the chance to hold a bottle and see that the water and the oil did not mix together. Then
at small group work, one of the children suggested they make their own wave machines. Elizabeth suggested that they could use some empty bottles that were available in the kitchen if they wanted to. The children loved the idea. They ran to the kitchen and each brought an empty bottle and poured their cups of colored water into it. Then they added more water. At the end they went to Elizabeth who had the oil to pour in their bottles. Tiffany shook hers hard and told Elizabeth, “After you shake it, see the small bubbles, and then on the top they are separated.” (See Appendix E, picture 10a).

The children also created several nutrition activities, most of which were based on stories they had read, such as strawberry cheese cake, apple pie, strawberry and banana shake, and spider crackers. During these activities the children were involved in discussions and exploration. For instance, when Elizabeth prepared the materials and ingredients to make spider crackers she had already made a sample for the children to see and follow. She asked them how they thought she started and what she had used. Children started to figure out the materials and the steps (see Appendix E, picture 10 b):

Elizabeth: "What's the first step I would do?"
Sally: "Cookie."
Elizabeth: "What would I do with the cookie?"
Tiffany: "Put a cookie on a napkin."
Elizabeth: "Then what?"
Tiffany: "Then put peanut butter."
Elizabeth: "Then put peanut butter. Where?"
David: "Inside."
Elizabeth: "Inside the?"
Sally: "Inside the cookie."
David: "Then put the top of cookie on."/ David: " put another one (cookie) on the top." Elizabeth: "Then put the top of cookie on. Then what would I do?"
Sally: "Then, put the raisins. Put the peanut, then put the raisins."
Elizabeth: "Wait a minute. Put the peanut butter where?"
Children: "On the top."
Elizabeth: "On the top. Then?"
Children: "Put the raisins."
Elizabeth: "Put the raisins, then what?"
Tiffany: "Put the pretzels inside."
Elizabeth: "Put the pretzels inside. Then what do I do?"
Tiffany: "Eat it."
Elizabeth: "I will eat it. Did you realize what you just did? All of you taught me how to do it."

Language arts activities included book reading and writing. I observed the children pulling books from the shelf to read or pretend to read. This was a usual occurrence after breakfast. They would select different books and begin to read individually or in small groups of twos or threes. It was very interesting the way these children discussed the content of the stories and read to each other. Often the children would bring a story to Elizabeth to read to them. This practice also occurred after lunch. It seems that these children learned the times that were appropriate for them to read stories.

I observed the children pretend to write all the time (see Appendix E, pictures 11a-d). I remember the many times that these children surrounded me and asked me if they could write on my notepad. Sometimes they would ask Elizabeth or me to write down what they said. On these occasions, they would watch us intently as we wrote. Elizabeth provided the children with many opportunities to help them develop an understanding about the concept of writing. She provided the class with all necessary writing materials such as paper, pencils, crayons, and markers. She provided the class with many small note boards that the children had easy access to. Children used these note boards to write things to remember, to copy from books, or just to pretend to write like the teacher.
One of the striking features in this classroom was how print rich it is. Print was everywhere in Elizabeth's environment and served many functions. Children's names were written on their cubbies, coat hooks, and toothbrushes. A duty chart in an octopus shape with a different daily job written on each hand of an octopus was displayed for the children. They chose a daily helper job by putting their symbol card names on the work they wanted to do. The octopus ended up full with all the name cards.

All the areas, including the materials, items, and activities that occurred in it, were extensively labeled. For example, the art area was labeled to indicate where the object or materials were stored. The materials in the house area were labeled with print and pictures to indicate where things belonged, in order to help the children see the connection between the materials and words. Children had the chance to interact with print all the time:

- Children's work was displayed in the classroom.
- Children's favorite songs with pictures were displayed in the gathering area. On several occasions, I observed the children approach the displayed songs and try to read. Once Sally asked me to read one of the songs for her. While I was singing it to her, she asked me to point at a word.
- Children's symbol cards were used every day by children during planning time in which they share their plans of where they want to work and put their symbol name in the area they chose.
- Other examples of print display are the calendar, daily agenda, key experiences, rules of the classroom, posters about the five senses, poster about colors, group names, children's birthdays, and how plants grow (graphic materials).
The Social Environment

The following is a report of some of the interpersonal tools and techniques that the teacher used to promote literacy learning and development among the students. The report focuses mainly on the teacher’s roles as organizer, facilitator, instructor, participant, and model. Where available, the report also indicates the perceived impact of the teacher’s role on children's literacy development.

Teacher as Organizer

Elizabeth began each day by organizing the environment so the children could engage in positive learning experiences. She ensured that the school day was planned for all types of literacy learning so that the children spent a reasonable amount of time in each activity. One of Elizabeth's strengths is flexibility. She did not adhere to the daily routines slavishly, but allowed the children to determine the time spent on a given activity, especially when it centered on their interests.

One morning Eddie, a child, brought in a jar of tadpoles. He was very excited about them. Elizabeth took the opportunity to use the tadpoles at group time. For this activity, the children were able to share their knowledge about tadpoles and learn new concepts as well. The following is a part of the conversation that took place on that occasion.

Elizabeth: "What are these?"
Tammy: "These are baby fish."
Sally: "These are frogs."
David: "No. They are tadpoles."
Elizabeth: "What will they become when they grow up."
Annie: "Grown ups."
David: "No they become frogs."
Elizabeth: "Why does the water look funny."
Sally: "Because it’s muddy."
Elizabeth: "Yes, because it’s pond water."
Elizabeth: "Do they have arms and legs?"
Sally: "When they grow up."
Elizabeth: "Oh, how do they do that?"
Sally: "Cause they are frogs."
Elizabeth: "What happen to their tails?"
Thelma (lunch helper): "They regenerate."
Elizabeth: "Did you hear what Thelma said. She said they regenerate. Do you know what that means?"
Thelma: "When frog looses a leg or arm they have the ability to build another one."

The day usually ended with Elizabeth reviewing the day’s activities and making plans for the next day based on children's request and interests.

Teacher as facilitator

As a facilitator, Elizabeth encouraged the children to work collaboratively with peers and adults in the classroom to gain a sense of community. She considered the children's interests, and gave them the opportunities to choose and become involved in learning activities.

One of the children wanted to use finger paint without his hands becoming dirty. The following day, Elizabeth brought in Ziploc bags filled with different colors. She allowed the children to choose the colors they preferred and to do any thing they wanted. The children began to discover different ways of using the paint. They also compared the ways they were using it from within the group.

Tammy: "Me and Cindy got blue!"
David: "Look we can write on it."
Sally: (feeling the bag) "It feels slimy and cold."
Deborah: "Look at colors, swishy. Mix it up together."
Cindy: (showing Elizabeth) "I made a sun."
Rose: (demonstrating to her peers) "Put your hand on here hard. Make a hand print."
David: (after making a hole in his bag) "Look, I made a nice picture" (holding up a sheet of construction paper).
Tammy: (rolls the bag up and shows Sally) "It’s a burrito. I'll show you how to do this."

Teacher as Instructor

Elizabeth seemed to have realized that certain information must be given to the children in order for them to develop literacy skills and maintain a caring community. She spent time exploring how some tasks were to be completed. After the children were grouped for instruction, Elizabeth helped them to move into their tasks each day. She created symbol cards containing the name of each child. After small group, she instructed them to share with their peers what "plans" they had for free work time (a time when children selected the activity and center they would like to work in). Children selected their symbol cards with their names, shared their plans, and moved into the area in which they wanted to work. On one occasion, Elizabeth pretended to be their mother.

Elizabeth: "All right my daughter, what are your plans?"
Sally: "I'll be at the house area."
Elizabeth: "Since I am your mama, I want to know everything you want to do in the house area."
Sally: (smiling) "I'll play and then I'll sneak out."
Elizabeth: "Mamas don't like their daughters to sneak out."
Sally: "Please mama."
Elizabeth: "Don't forget to hang your symbol card in the house area."

The idea behind this was that Elizabeth would know where students were in the classroom. Also, the children knew they were responsible for cleaning up the area they worked in at the end of the session if they moved into another activity. Elizabeth explained these procedures so that the children were aware of her expectations. Elizabeth's main role as instructor occurred during activities where the children were learning how to make something new. One day, Elizabeth showed the children how to make "frog eyes" (a rolled sandwich using pickles, sliced bread, cream cheese). They
were each given a paper plate, a plastic knife, one slice of bread, and a small bowl of cheese. Two bowls of pickles were placed in the center of the group.

Elizabeth: "Cut the edge of the bread and spread the cheese on it."
(Children followed using plastic knives).
Sally: "How much cheese?"
Elizabeth: "As much as you like."
Elizabeth: "Put the pickle in the middle and roll it this way."
Paul: "I want a big pickle."
Elizabeth: "Pick the one you like."
(Children follow)

Teacher as Participant

One of Elizabeth's main roles within the social environment of this Head Start classroom was being a participant. She constantly found the time to read with the children and in so doing seemed to learn along with them. One way for the teacher to learn along with the children was by sharing new vocabulary.

While reading *All Pigs Are Beautiful*, by King-Smith, Elizabeth read the word "herd."

David: "What herd means?"
Elizabeth: "Herd means when you have a group of pigs together and you want them to go from one place to another and you move them and you keep them moving, that is herding. It’s like herding sheep and cattle to make them all go together."

Elizabeth questioned the children to discover what they knew. Her questions encouraged them to give answers that allowed her to participate in learning activities with them. The situation occurred one day when a student asked Elizabeth if they could make a gingerbread house for her plan for the day.

Elizabeth: "What materials do we need for this plan?"
Cindy: "Ginger bread and house."
Tiffany: "And a scissors."
Elizabeth: "Can you find a gingerbread shape in the classroom?"
Cindy (went to a basket on a shelf and returned to the group): Here, I have one." (Held up a pattern).
Elizabeth: "Let's go to the art area and work on it."

Teacher as Model

One way Elizabeth reinforced classroom activities and literacy procedures was through modeling. The children usually modeled her practice of illustrating regular book conventions. (See Appendix E, picture 26a). In pretend play, the children would model Elizabeth and ask their peers similar questions as Elizabeth would such as, "who are the illustrators," "who is the author," and "what is the name of the book."

Elizabeth ensured that the social environment was a predictable and safe place where the children could take risks. In addition, Elizabeth reinforced those attitudes, which promoted and developed literacy skills. For example, the children frequently saw Elizabeth using a note pad and a pencil to write down information or notes.

On one occasion, they wanted some materials to make a cage in the block area using pieces of Styrofoam.

Roger: "Can we make a cage with this?" (pointing to Styrofoam).
Elizabeth: "How can we make that? What materials do you want me to bring?"
Children: "Screwdriver, hammer, wrench."
Elizabeth: "I can't remember this. What can I do?"
David: "Write it on a paper."
Annie: (Brings a pencil) "Write with this."

The children dictated a plan to make a door to keep the animals in. They gave Elizabeth a list of materials; she wrote on the paper: "A plan to make a door to keep animals in. Screwdriver, hammer, wrench, nails."

To encourage them to write down the things they wanted to do, Elizabeth provided all the children with note-pads (that were available in all areas) and necklace pens and told them to use them at any time. The opportunities to use these writing tools
often occurred in the classroom. For example, one child was interested in making play-
dough

Elizabeth: "Do you want us to do it tomorrow?"
Allen: "Yes."
Elizabeth: "Do you want to make it at group time or work time?"
Allen: "Work time."
Elizabeth: "Why don't you write a note about it for tomorrow?"

Allen brought a paper and a marker and started writing or pretending to write the recipe
and a note for the next day.

**Multiple Uses of Storybook Reading**

Storybook reading in this classroom was not just a simple literacy event; it was
also an opportunity for students to exchange ideas between themselves, a medium for
self-expression, an occasion for student-teacher interaction, and a strategy for integrating
various aspects of learning. Storybook reading also served as quiet time for students’
relaxation, a transitional activity between events, an opportunity for students to explore
their language and culture, and a literacy event for the children to develop their language
skills.

This section reports some of the strategies and methods employed to achieve
those goals. The report identifies specific learning tools and methods employed by the
teacher to make storybook reading practical, relevant, useful, interesting, and fun. The
findings include: (a) multi-method approach and stimuli; (b) introduction to book
conventions; (c) understanding and comprehension; (d) increased access to books; (e)
integration of learning; (f) challenge to children’s imagination and comprehension; (g)
active student participation; (h) key experiences; (i) cultural relevance; (j) cultural
appreciation; (k) intercultural sensitivity. Each of these methods and tools is explained and illustrated in the following paragraphs:

**Multi-Method Approach and Stimuli**

Elizabeth approached story time in various ways. The approach varied depending on the story she was reading to the children and whether this story had been told before or whether it was a new story. Generally, her approach to storybook reading could be decided as a before, during, and after each storybook event.

Before reading the story, Elizabeth used a stimulus to arouse the children's attention. The stimulus included the use of songs, poem, props, pretend play, games, activities and finger play. The following dialogue is an example of how Elizabeth used songs to motivate and interest the children in a story:

Elizabeth (singing): "Take a little bean and put it in the ground, let's all watch it grow."
Elizabeth: "What they can do next."
Allen: "Eat it."
Elizabeth: "That comes last."
David: "Cover it."
Elizabeth (singing): "Cover up the seed and watch it grow . . ."
Elizabeth: "What will they do next,"
Cindy: "Water it."
Elizabeth (singing): "Take a little water and sprinkle on the ground and let's all watch it grow."
Children: "We can eat it"
Elizabeth (singing): "Pull it out of the ground and eat it all up, yum yum yum yum."

Another example of a stimulus is the way Elizabeth used props. For instance, when reading the story *A Hat So Simple*, Elizabeth brought in a basket of different kinds of hats and distributed them to the children (see Appendix E, picture 12a). When she read the story *Beach Play*, she brought in beach towels, a beach ring, and a beach ball. She had the children take off their shoes, sit on the beach towels, and pretend to be on the
beach. She wore sunglasses while reading the story. Also, When she read *The Red Striped Strawberry*, she brought in real strawberries and let the children see and taste them after reading the story.

During each story, the teacher read with variations in voice, facial expression, dramatization, and enthusiasm. The teacher changed her voice to imitate story characters as well as used facial expressions to reveal different emotions. Some times, the flannel board helped the teacher illustrate some of the concepts in the story. When telling the story *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown, Elizabeth used the flannel board to illustrate a number concept. She would remove one of the bunnies from the flannel board and ask the children how many bunnies were left:

Elizabeth: "Five little bunnies in the bakery shop. Lightly sprinkled with cinnamon on top, along came a boy with a penny to pay. He bought one little bunny and ran away."

(Elizabeth removed one bunny)

Elizabeth: "How many bunnies are left?"

Children: "Four."

Elizabeth: "Four little bunnies in the bakery shop. Lightly sprinkled with cinnamon on top, along came a boy with a penny to pay. He bought one little bunny and ran away. How many bunnies are left?"

Other times, Elizabeth would share the dialogue with her classroom assistant to help the story come alive as she did when reading the story *Tell Me A Story Mama*. She took the role of the child while the assistant was the mother. Occasionally, Elizabeth used songs to tell the story. She sang the song *I know An Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly* for the children to learn the words. Another time she used a musical instrument, an auto harp, with the story *Mama Don’t Allow Children*, which attracted the children’s attention and helped them learn the words (see Appendix E, picture 1b). The children participated through singing and verbal play. Elizabeth also used background music to
accompany certain themes; for example, when she focused on Hawaii, she played Hawaiian music as she read the story *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*.

After reading a story, Elizabeth usually encouraged the students in discussion of the story. She might question them orally as she did when reading the book of *The Last No No*.

Elizabeth: "What did he grow?"
Children: "A nono tree."
Elizabeth: "A nono tree. How did it grow?"
Annie: "He plant it."
Elizabeth: "How did he plant it?"
David: "He put the nono in a hole."
Tiffany: "He put the nono in dirt."
David: "He put the nono in hole and put water."

Most times, however, she engaged them in a role-play recapturing significant aspects of the story. For example, after reading *Jasper's Beanstalk*, by Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen, Elizabeth allowed the children to role-play the concept of seeds growing:

Elizabeth: "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to pretend to be a seed. And what I want you to do is to put your head down on the carpet, and I want you to hide under the ground, like someone has planted a seed. All the seeds are planted in the garden. All the seeds are planted in the ground. We have the water and the soil. Oh, we need something else. What else do we need?"
Children: "We need the sun."
Elizabeth: "We need the sunshine. Who can be the sunshine?"
Annie: "I will be the sunshine."
Elizabeth: "Thank you Annie. Annie is going to be shining down on these seeds. Let me see. I'm going to choose a seed who's ready to grow."
Child: "I'm not ready."
Elizabeth: "The seeds are under the ground, they're hiding, and let's see the sun is shining. I'm coming here to water Gilly. We're watering, she's growing, she's growing, she's growing."
When the children heard the rhythm behind the spoken words and behind the written words, they had a tendency to remember the book better. If the written words in a book had a tune or a melody or a rhythm to it, they remembered them.

**Introduction of Book Conventions**

The teacher used storybook reading as an opportunity to introduce children to reading conventions. Before reading any storybook, the teacher showed the children the cover of the book she was about to read. She then announced the title of the book, the author, and the illustrator. She explained to the children what each of those conventions meant. For example, she explained that the title of the book is the name the author gives to his book. She told them that the author wrote the book and the illustrator drew the pictures in the book (see Appendix E, picture 13).

On one occasion, based on a question from a child, Elizabeth introduced the children to the concept of dedication. On another occasion, Elizabeth introduced the concept of publication based on a question from Rose.

Elizabeth read the book from left to right. Sometimes, she pointed at the specific words she was reading. In other words, she modeled the process of reading a book to the children. That helped the children to learn the reading techniques. I observed Rose bringing Elizabeth a book and asking her about the title, which Elizabeth read to her. Rose asked Elizabeth "who made the book?" Elizabeth explained that person is called the illustrator and she read the illustrator's name. Rose asked Elizabeth "who wrote the book?" Elizabeth read her the author’s name. However, Rose asked again about how the book was made. Elizabeth said " do you mean who put the book all together, that is
called the publisher," and she read her the publisher's name. These concepts were introduced on a daily basis:

Elizabeth: "The name of my story--do you see what I brought with me today? I brought my hat."
Child: "And that's a hat over there."
Elizabeth: "And that's a hat over there out of the dress ____. The name of the book is called, *A Hat So Simple*, and it's written by Jerry Smap."
Child: "Who is that for?"
Elizabeth: "Who is the book written for? You mean whom it is dedicated to. Let me see. *A Hat So Simple*, for Leslie Bauman and Bonnie Brook."
Child: "Where's a book written for me?"
Elizabeth: "I don't know the answer to that, Allen. Do you know an author who's wanting to write a book just for you?"
Allen: "No."
Elizabeth:"Can I tell you one who would be able to do that for you? You and Mom could write a book and she could write the book just for you, a story just for Allen. And all the other boys and girls' moms or dads or grandmas can write a book just for them."

Introducing the children to book conventions was not limited to the books in the classroom or what was brought in by the teacher. On one occasion when the teacher’s assistant brought in a book from the library, Elizabeth took the opportunity to talk about features of library books:

Elizabeth: "I'm going to turn the music down real soft in the background. And we're going to read a book that Karen and Kathy picked out."
Child: "They bought it ____."
Elizabeth: "I think it is from the library. See, when you get a book from the library--let me show you. See here on the end, that little sticker that has the letters. That tells the librarian where to find the book. But let me show you what's in the back. See back there. See that pocket? They put a little card in that pocket that tells when to bring it back. That's how we know that's a library book. But see here, this one does not have a pocket, so that tells us that we bought that book. May I read this book to you?"

During the reading of the story, Elizabeth sat either on the rug or on a low chair facing the children who sat on the rug in a semicircle. Elizabeth held the book in the typical read-aloud position so that the words and the pictures were clearly seen by the
children. She read the story while showing the children the illustrations both (see Appendix E, picture 14). She paused while reading, giving the children a chance to comment and ask questions. She allowed the children to interrupt and to talk about the pictures or the story. The teacher encouraged the children’s participation; she tried to keep them active during story time. She engaged them in the story in every way possible.

**Understanding/Comprehension**

The teacher emphasized the children's understanding of stories read to them. She paused while reading, giving the children a chance to comment and ask questions for clarification and comprehension. For example, when Elizabeth was reading the book *Mama's Perfect Present*, the children were curious about a dog going into a store to shop for the present.

Elizabeth (reading): "Today is Mama's birthday. Hold on to Zaza's leash. She can help us find the perfect present.

Child: "Well, dogs aren't supposed to go into stores."

Elizabeth: "Dogs aren't supposed to go into stores?"

Child: "They make a mess."

Elizabeth: "They make a mess. Some dogs CAN go into stores. Do know what kind of dogs those are? They're called guide dogs."

Child: "Guide dogs?"

Elizabeth: They're special dogs like when people can't see. Those dogs can go into the store and help people get around in the store. And there are also dogs that help people who have disabilities—who walk differently and who need help. So I'm not sure what kind of dog this one is. This one is called a dachshund."

Elizabeth often encouraged the children to describe what they were sharing in detail and to give explanations. She believed this would improve the understanding of some of the concepts they were learning. Toward the end of *A Hat So Simple*, one of the children described the fish that was caught:

Allen: "She got a catfish."
Elizabeth: "You said you saw her catch a catfish? How do you know, Allen, that that's a catfish."
Allen: "Because they have whiskers."
Elizabeth: "Catfish have whiskers. They do. See the fish, it has whiskers. That's how Allen knew that it's a catfish."
Allen: "It's a blue fish."
Elizabeth: "See the whiskers. It looks like a mustache on the fish."
Allen: "I know it's a blue one."

The child's descriptions gave the teacher an understanding of how much comprehension took place.

To assess the children's understanding, she encouraged them to act out the stories. I observed the children dramatizing the story of the Goldilocks and the Three Bears. The children acted the story perfectly. By imagining themselves as the characters, the children were able to understand the main point of the story. For example, at one of the large group times, Sally shared with the others that she found a marble while she was digging in the sandbox. At once, Elizabeth said that the marble reminded her of the story of the Rooster and the Sultan. She started to tell the story while the children sat in circle, very interested. Children participated in telling the story and dramatizing it. When Elizabeth talked about the Sultan living in the castle, Cindy brought a picture of a castle she drew and her crown. They put it on the carpet and Elizabeth said that that was the castle where the sultan lived and that was his crown. Kevin brought a drawing of his and they used it as the Rooster's house. Children brought different materials from the classroom for Elizabeth to use as a part of her story. The children told the story with Elizabeth. There were two repetitive sentences that the children said while acting it. They pretended to be the rooster by putting their hands under their arms like a rooster and said: "Give me back my diamond button." In other incidents, the children rubbed on their tummies saying: “magic stomach, magic stomach." (see Appendix E, picture15).
Increased Access to Books

Another use of storybook reading in this classroom was to make reading materials readily accessible to the children. The teacher not only read storybooks to children and kept books in the reading area, she placed books all around the classroom. For example, Elizabeth would put a cookbook or a storybook related to cooking in the house area. One of the children saw the book and she picked a recipe for "Avocado guacamole dip." The teacher photocopied the page for the child to take home. Later that week, Elizabeth engaged the children in a nutrition activity, where they made the "Avocado Guacamole Dip."

Books related to crafts would be placed in the art area. In this way, she tried to improve children's access to books and to expand their learning throughout the whole classroom and not just the reading area. Cindy was interested in making a crown. She saw the instructions in a craft book and wanted to make one for herself. Elizabeth provided her with all possible materials. Cindy selected the materials she preferred and made the crown. This activity was extended the next day when the child built on her interest and made a castle.

Elizabeth tried to help the children make connections with the contexts of books. Although books are tangible, the content of the book is intangible; children can neither touch it nor see it. Therefore, Elizabeth tried to help the children to make that connection and keep the children involved. For example, after she read the book *Jasper's Beanstalk*, she brought in an onion plumb to plant. She provided the children with onion plumbs, dirt, water, and an aquarium. The children put the dirt, then the onion plumb, and finally
the water into the aquarium. The children watched the onion plumbs growing from day to day.

Integration of Learning

Reading stories in this classroom went beyond what happens in many regular classrooms. Elizabeth did not leave the story after reading it; she tried to expand the story into the daily activities in different ways. It was a way of integrating storybook reading with other curricular activities that also promoted language development. One of the ways she did that was by using the story of The Apple Pie Tree. This story is about two little girls who observed apples growing and eventually using the ripe apples to make apple sauce. After reading the story, on the request of one of the children, Elizabeth brought in the materials needed to make apple pie the next day. They used sliced bread, applesauce, cinnamon, paper plates, and spoons (see Appendix E, picture 16a). As the teacher demonstrated the steps, the students engaged her in a conversation:

Allen: "I see some bread squashed out."
Sally: "It’s cooking?"
Allen: "What's that called?"
Adrian: "Sandwich maker."
After a while, the teacher aide joined the children and asked them how they made that. Allen said: "All you need are bread, apple sauce, and those other stuff (pointing at the several bottles of cinnamon), and that is it and you eat it."

During the reading of the same story, one of the children saw a bird’s nest in the apple tree. Elizabeth used this observation to expand on the children's interest and the story and to develop a science activity. She brought in two different bird’s nests to talk about during small group time on the next day (see Appendix E, picture 16b). Elizabeth held the nest gently and asked the children to be gentle with it too:

Elizabeth: "We need to touch it gently."
Elizabeth: "Do you see what it is made of?"
David: "Wood."
Sally: "Sticks."
David: "If I had a egg, we could put it in here."
Elizabeth (turned the nest over): "What do you see?"
Children: "Mud, grass..."
Kevin: "How did you make it?"
Elizabeth: "The birds pick up piece of grass and stick with peak and use mud."
Elizabeth: "How did the mud get in the nest?"
Tabitha: "Bird carry mud with mouth and feet."
Kevin: "Who did that?"
Elizabeth: "Thelma and I think that robin made it."

Then Elizabeth exchanged the nest with another one that was with the other group. The other nest was smaller. Elizabeth asked: "How is this different than the other?"
David: "Smaller."
Sally: "Made of straw."
Elizabeth: "Made of straw and no mud."
Elizabeth: "How did they make it stay together?"
David: "They pet it."

This activity was eventually expanded into a role-play:

Elizabeth: "I want you to pretend you are little birds and pretend to be in a nest, on the floor.
David: "Are you gonna be our mama?"
Elizabeth: "Yes."
(Children were on the floor pretend to cry).
Elizabeth: "Baby birds do not cry. Open your mouths and I will feed you with worms."

The teacher was constantly initiating the correlation of literacy learning with other classroom activities.

The Preeminence of Children's Interests

Elizabeth chose most of the books based on the children’s interest about what they would like to see and what they would like to know about. For example, in one incident when the children were having strawberries for lunch one of the students suggested making strawberry short cake after lunch;

Elizabeth: “So would you like to do the strawberry short cake tomorrow?"
Children (loudly): "Yeah."
Gilly: "We make strawberry shortcake at home."
Elizabeth: "Oh. Strawberry shortcake is my favorite."
Cindy: "How you make it?"

The next day Elizabeth read the story of *The little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry and the Bear.* Then, for group time she provided the children with all the ingredients to make strawberry short cakes. She provided each child with napkins, cake, two strawberries, whipped cream, and a knife and spoon (see Appendix E, picture 15 b).

Elizabeth: "This is a special kind of cake used for strawberry short cake."
Elizabeth: "Today is Tiffany's birthday."
Children: "Are we gonna make the short cakes for Tiffany's birthday."
Elizabeth: "Yes, if they want to.
Sally (pointing at the cup of whipping cream): "What is this?"
Elizabeth: "Smell your cups and see if you can figure what's in it."
Cindy: "It looks like glue but don't smell like it.
Elizabeth: "It is some thing that you can eat.
Tiffany: "It is ice-cream."
Elizabeth: "What made you think that?"
Tiffany: "Because it is white."

Elizabeth gave the children the directions for making the strawberry short cake and gave them the freedom to do it any way they wanted. Children cut their strawberry in small sizes or large pieces. Some children put the whipping cream on the top of the strawberry and others put it on the cake. Cindy showed Kevin how to hold the knife in a safe way. She said: "hold it from the bottom." Elizabeth wondered loudly: "Why they called it sponge cake. It doesn't look like sponge." David responded: "cause it comes back up when you press on it." Every time Elizabeth called the cream Cool Whip, Sally would tell her that it was not Cool Whip, it was whipping cream.

Another way in which Elizabeth tapped into the children's interests was to expand on things they brought into the classroom. For example, Allen found a caterpillar in the sandbox while he was playing outside. He put it in a plastic pot and put some grass on it
saying: "I will feed him grass." Then he added some water for it to drink. That’s when Sally told him that if he put water on the caterpillar it would die. Allen removed the water and started to watch it. Then he approached Elizabeth and asked her:

Allen: "Do caterpillars eat slow?"
Elizabeth: "Yes."
Allen: "Do they eat grass?"
Elizabeth: "Yes."
Allen: "Why?"
Elizabeth said: "I think because it has a small mouth."
Elizabeth: "Do you know what it turns into?"
Allen: "Butterfly"
Elizabeth: "That’s right."
Allen: "How do they use bathroom?"
Elizabeth: "Same way we do."
Allen: "How they pee?"
Elizabeth: "I don't now."
Allen: "Probably from its butt."
Elizabeth: "Do you see the top of that tree (pointing at a tree)? Do you see like white cotton? That’s called cocoon. There are a lot of caterpillars in there.” Elizabeth explained to him that the caterpillars live in the cocoon until they grow and then they leave and start to build their own homes.

Later in the week, Elizabeth read the story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. The children also engaged in a craft activity making caterpillars using egg cartons and other materials.

**Student Empowerment and Self-Direction**

Elizabeth emphasized children's empowerment by giving them the opportunities for self-direction and decision making. She did so in several ways: (a) allowing the children to decide their seating arrangement, (b) letting the children decide the books to read, (c) role playing. For example, the students decided on the daily seating arrangement during the storybook reading event. They were free to sit on the floor mat or on an adult's lap or to lie down. Other times they could bring their chairs and form a semi-circle around the teacher. Most times they enjoyed sitting or lying on the floor mat.
I observed the children several times telling Elizabeth that they didn't want her to read the story she chose. They ended up choosing the book they wanted Elizabeth to read for them:

Elizabeth: "We are going to read the book Frogs Jump."
Children: "We don't want that story"
Gilly: "We heard that before."
Elizabeth: "Okay, I have two new books. You can choose the one you want me to read."
Children (pointing) "This one."
Elizabeth: "O.K. We'll read Without Wings, Mother How Can I Fly?"

Elizabeth considered experiences she wants the children to have, and gave them opportunities to do so. Children were also empowered to imitate roles that enhanced learning and self-confidence. One of these situations occurred when Elizabeth was reading The Runaway Bunny. Elizabeth had to leave the circle to close the door. As she got up and left, one of the children took her seat and pretended to be the teacher. Sitting next to the flannel board, she began singing a song and removing the rabbit as she had observed her teacher doing (see Appendix E, pictures 17a, 17b). When she returned, Elizabeth encouraged her role-play:

Elizabeth: "Do you want to be the teacher?"
Tiffany: "Yes."
Elizabeth: "O.K. You can take over and finish the last one (rabbit). (Tiffany began singing along with teacher and other students)
Elizabeth: "Thank you teacher Tiffany."

Challenge to Children's Imagination and Comprehension

Elizabeth often challenged the children's imagination. For example, to introduce the story Gilberto and the Wind, Elizabeth started story time by pretending to give each child something in their hands and said:
Elizabeth: "I have something for every one. I will give each of something in your hand but you can't see it. I want you to think about something that the wind can blow.

Cindy: " I've got mine"
Elizabeth: "Hold to it tightly so the wind doesn't blow it."
Kevin: "I don't see a thing."
Elizabeth: "When you use your imagination you can see it."
Elizabeth: "What do you have in your hand? Guess what I have. I have a dandelion seed in my hand."
Kevin: "I don't see it."
Elizabeth: "You can't see it until you use your imagination. Think about it"
Tammy: "I want it to be a princess."
Cindy: "You don't have a thing."
Elizabeth: "You need to use you imagination. Hold to it."
Elizabeth: "I want you to pretend to be the wind. Look at your hands. What do you have in you hands?"
Allen: "I have a piece of dirt."
Elizabeth: "Someone has a piece of dirt."
Tammy: “I have a princess.”
Elizabeth: " Someone has a princess."
David: "I have a horse."
Elizabeth: "Someone has a horse."
Sally: "I got a guinea pig."
Elizabeth: " Sally has a guinea pig."
Elizabeth: "Can you pretend to be the wind and blow what you have in your hands?"

Elizabeth encouraged the children to predict the title of a book or what happens next in the story. If the story had been read before, the teacher showed the cover page to the children and asked them if they remembered the title of the book and the author. Children were also encouraged to be predictive. For example, when the teacher was reading the story *Sweet Dream Pie* and looking at the illustrations, one of the children asked: "why the stuff in the pie like wanna go out" (attempting to describe the over flow of the filling). The children had many different answers. For example, Tabitha said, "because it was scared to be eaten." Another child said it’s like a star while others made various comments.
Appropriation of Children's Insights (Personal meaning and Application to Personal Life)

Elizabeth encouraged the children to share their point of view during storybook reading activities. On one occasion, while reading the book *The Rainbow Fish*, the children were interested in certain body parts and gave their insights about them.

Elizabeth (reading): "The fish didn't answer"
Allen: "Fish doesn't have ears. That's why it didn't hear."
Elizabeth continued to read. When she read where the fish was talking to the octopus, children inquired;
Gilly: "Where is the mouth?"
Elizabeth: "Under its tentacles."
Cindy: "Turn it down so we can see its mouth."
((Elizabeth turned the page upside down.))

Eddie: "Why it has mouth down?"
Elizabeth: "Because everybody is different."

At times, conversations were about characters in the story. When Elizabeth read *A Hat So Simple*, the children were eager to share their experiences.

Elizabeth (reads): "Edna thanked her husband for the fishing pole he bought her. Let's go fishing now, she said."
Allen: "They're too little to be married."
Elizabeth: "They're too little to be married?"
Allen: "He could be a friend."
Elizabeth: "Well, it says here they were husband and wife. I don’t know how big husbands and wives are. They can be different sizes."
Allen: "Well I'd never get married when I was little."
Elizabeth: "You're never going to get married when you're little. I hope you wait until you're a grownup."

Simple objects in the classroom were used as aids for teaching. For example, Elizabeth used the clock on the wall to talk about different times of the day or events that occurred or will occur. She talked about time in the sequencing of events: this happened yesterday, this will happen tomorrow. Though, she did not do themes, per se, she always focused on developmental skills.
Active Participation

The teacher encouraged the children’s participation. She tried to keep them active during story time. She engaged them in the story in every way possible. She kept their attention during storybook reading events by using her voice creatively. She made sounds and she tried to get them to make sounds from the story. In some of the stories, some phrases or sounds were repetitive. After a while the children remembered the words and repeated them as the story was read to them. So, they were actually helping to tell or read that story. On one occasion one of the children participated by holding the book and turning the pages of the story while Elizabeth was reading. Children were allowed to participate by listening, reading along, asking questions, commenting, or even changing the story. Elizabeth had just turned the last page of *The Rainbow Fish* and when she read the last page, one of the children added,

Allen: "The End."
(He left to go to the art area and returned with a marker.)
Allen: "Write ‘The End’ there (pointing to the bottom of the page).

Another time when Elizabeth was reading *Sweet Dream Pie*, one of the children asked about a man in one of the scenes in the story. Elizabeth explained that he was one of the neighbors and that the author did not mention his name. Kevin suggested they call him "Mr. Noodle." At other times children listened and read along, repeating lines of the story, or responding to situations as the teacher read:

Elizabeth: "Mr. Pig, Mr. Pig, Are you in there?"
Paul: "Yes"
Elizabeth: "Go away wolf."
Paul: "Go away wolf."
Elizabeth: "You can't come in."
Paul: "You can't come in."
Elizabeth: "I am shaving the hair on my chinny chin chin.
Paul: "I am shaving the hair on my chinny chin chin."
These were truly moments of active participation when children were engaged in storybook reading.

"Key Experiences": Relating Literacy to Key Experiences

As a part of the curriculum in all Head Start classes in this area, teachers must provide Key Experiences. Elizabeth selected books based on these key experiences which are categorized and are reflective of the High Scope Model Curriculum which emphasizes child-initiated learning experiences. They focus on the developmental skills that children build on as they progress from a Head Start program to kindergarten and into elementary school. Some of these skills include classifying, number sequencing, understanding spatial relations, social/emotional behavior, and creative presentation.

Jane brought in books that related to a specific developmental skill from which the children could gain an understanding of that skill and then transfer that knowledge to other areas of learning. For example, I observed Elizabeth using the clock on the wall to illustrate the concept of time after reading the book *Tick Tock*. She demonstrated to the children how events that they did each day could be sequenced according to the hands of the clock, for example, breakfast and lunch, group time, story time, and recess time. She extended the concept of time to include how time can also be sequenced as today, yesterday, and tomorrow. The children also demonstrated these time concepts as they used them within the group. I recall two of the children arguing during free play time about how long either of them should play with a toy. One of them suggested that they each should play with the toy for 3 minutes. Elizabeth witnessed this and gave them the opportunity to solve this problem.

Tammy: "I wanna play with it."
David: "You'll play with it all day long."
Tammy: "No. How about three minute?"
Elizabeth: "How about this solution?"
David: "Okay."
Elizabeth: "Who will be the time keeper?"
David: "You"
Elizabeth: "I have a watch and I can be the time keeper. I will tell you once it’s your turn."

Cultural Relevance

In seeking to be responsive to the needs of these students, who come from diverse cultures, Elizabeth organized her curriculum with a multicultural perspective. She selected books and materials that reflected the children's way of life. Examples of storybooks that she selected to reflect cultural relevance are *Pigs in Mud* and *So Much*. When reading these books, Elizabeth would change the tone of her voice to reflect the dialect that the children were familiar with. Her purpose was to capture their interest and to help them make a connection between themselves and the story. My observations of her reading *Pigs in Mud* show how Elizabeth constantly kept her children's diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds in mind. *Pigs in Mud* is a story that many of Elizabeth's children identified with. Many of the families own farm animals, including pigs. Even those who did not, knew someone who did or had seen pigs in mud. When Elizabeth read a part when the grandmother imitated a pig by saying “ooooo-eeeee!” the children joined in. As an outsider to this "cultural language," I was amazed by their performance because I was not able to read the story the way that they did. Later, when I asked one of the children to read the story, he read it the same way Elizabeth did, enthusiastically and with the same tone and inflections. I also observed that when Elizabeth read books that were based on the children's background and interest, they actively participated.
Cultural Appreciation

Elizabeth sought to develop the children's appreciation for their cultures. In her classroom, they had access to their national, cultural, and social heritage through the materials she provided. Her perception was that children who have access to such learning experiences and materials appear to be better prepared for later education opportunities. Her use of storybooks reflected and valued each child's origin. She felt that children in this Head Start program could benefit from the diversity among them by developing positive self-concepts without any ethnic group feeling superior or inferior to the other.

Using storybooks is one way in which Elizabeth encouraged the development of cultural appreciation. Often, through storybook reading, other questions were generated regarding child rearing practices and family traditions. Such a book is *So Much*. This story shows the involvement of an extended family in the life of a baby. “So Much” is the way the book quantifies how much the family members wanted to hug, kiss, love, and play with the baby. As Elizabeth discussed family life, the children shared some of their personal experiences with their own family members. Later in another class session, Elizabeth invited one of the children's grand parents, Native Americans, to share some of the family traditions they practiced. Together with his grandmother and grandfather, the child shared with his peers some of the cultural artifacts that he made and activities he did with his grandfather. The other children were delighted to feel, touch, or see these artifacts (bead work, buffalo hair, necklaces, turtle shell bags, wooden knives, moccasins, breech, cloths, herbs, and holy pipe). Their greatest excitement was playing the tom-tom drum and looking at the grandmother and her grandson dance to Native American music.

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By extending the contents of the storybook, Elizabeth was able to provide a meaningful experience through which the entire class could appreciate the culture of one of their peers.

Intercultural Sensitivity

Elizabeth introduced the children to other cultures by reading books like *Gilberto and the Wind* and *The Legend the Poinsettia*. By reading these kinds of books, Elizabeth helped the children to appreciate the similarities and the differences between them and other children who live in different parts of the world.

Elizabeth (reading): "The title of the book is *The Legend the Poinsettia.*"
David: "What is Poinsettia?"
Elizabeth: "It means a Christmas flower and it looks like this (pointing to a picture on the cover)."
Allen: "Do you know how to speak Spanish?"
Elizabeth: "I don't know how, but I look at the letters and the letters have sounds to them and I make those sounds."
Allen: "Do they have snow?"
Elizabeth: "In this town they don't have snow, because the weather is so very warm."

The children learned that different cultures have different beliefs, names, customs, and clothing (see Appendix E, pictures 18a-d).

Development of Listening Skills

Elizabeth encouraged what she termed "listening skills." She saw stories as important for the children's future, because they help children with learning to read, developing listening skills, and being more attentive. While observing how the teacher opened the book to show the children the illustration, one of the children shared her interest in learning to read:

Sally: "If I can be a teacher, I can do that, I can do the words."
Elizabeth: "You know what, you don't have to be just a teacher to do the words. You can be a child and do the words; It will happen, I promise. Do you
want me to tell you where you start Sally? How you will learn to read, by listening to stories?"

Through storybook reading, when these children move up into the public schools they will have good listening skills and they will be ready to listen to more structured activities. Elizabeth also thinks that they can “develop their listening skills and they’ll be able to hear the stories or the events in the story, or remember key elements of that story which will increase their comprehension skills.” These, she believes, are very important for getting into higher education, which is more structured. They need to remember sequences or specific things that happened to story characters and events in the story.

**Teacher Interaction with Preschoolers in Literacy Environment**

Part of children's literacy development was provided through interaction with peers and with adults. Much of the interaction with peers that I observed involved decision making, taking responsibility, exploring, and making choices. Some of these are reported under “peer interactions.” This section describes some of the teacher/student interactions that I observed and how those activities appear to have promoted literacy development in the classroom. The material is divided into conversation, dramatization, singing, questioning, discussion, and instruction.

**Conversation**

Conversation was one of the important aspects of this classroom. During conversation, Elizabeth tried to provide the children with the experiences they need to develop one of the important aspects of literacy, verbal language. Through conversation, children develop their listening, speaking, and thinking skills. Conversations occurred all day, during literacy activities and in all the "centers" of this classroom. Elizabeth used
conversation as one of the literacy activities. Through this activity, children expressed their interests and feelings, and learned new concepts.

The concept of death was explained to one of the children when she was playing outside. Rose noticed many cars in the parking lot, which was unusual. Then she noticed many people leaving the church. That’s when she wondered:

Rose: "What all these people were doing."
Elizabeth: "Maybe they came for a funeral."
Rose: "Is someone dead."
Elizabeth: "Yes."
Rose: "What they do when its funnel time."
Elizabeth: "They put the dead body in a coffin."
Rose: "In that coffin (making a square with her hand)?"
Elizabeth: "Yes"
Rose: "Are they gonna save it?"
Elizabeth: "They can save a person, but not the body"
Elizabeth: "They put the coffin in a special grave."
Rose: "Do they eat people? How they put body in the coffin?"
Elizabeth: "They carry him like a baby and put him in the coffin."
Rose: "And cover the legs?"
Elizabeth: "Yes"
Elizabeth: "And see their face?"
Elizabeth: "Yes"
Rose: "We prayed for a lady who died. And gone to the place where people pray for the dead lady. What’s that place?"
Elizabeth: "You are talking about the cemetery?"

**Dramatization**

Dramatization was a daily activity in this classroom. Both the children and the teacher used dramatization. Elizabeth was involved in the children's dramatization most of the time and in almost all the areas. In most of the pre-school and kindergarten classrooms that I have observed, dramatization only took place in the house area or during free play time. However, in this classroom, dramatization took place any time and anywhere. For instance, children often asked Elizabeth to be their mom. I observed the
children talk to Elizabeth as their mom even when they were involved in different literacy activities. On one occasion, when Kevin arrived at the end of the small group time, David told Elizabeth: "Mom, your other son is there."

Some times the children dramatized and kept their roles for the whole school day. For example, while the children were working on a nutrition activity in their small groups, Tabitha came from the other group to ask Elizabeth to help her zip the dress she put on from the dressing area. That's when Sally said:

Sally: "Daughter, you are not supposed to visit me at work time."
Tabitha: "Yes mom."
Sally looking at me: "She has a new boyfriend. She wants to go out with him, but she can't."
Salwa: "Why can't she?"
Sally: "Why! Because she called him without my permission."
Sally: "Daughter, you are supposed to be in your room studying."
Tabitha: "Yes mom." And she went to another area.

Singing

Singing is one of the methods Elizabeth used in her interaction with the children. In addition to school songs, Elizabeth used other types of songs that she made up. Elizabeth used songs in most of her literacy activities. Her purpose was to get the children's attention, involve them in activities, keep them interested, and to encourage a full and active participation on the children's part.

I observed Elizabeth on many occasions, when children were demonstrating particular songs by singing and dancing, join the children by singing and dancing. Actually, her presence seemed to have some positive influence on the children's participation and excitement. With Elizabeth the children were fully active and engaged. On one occasion, when Elizabeth was focusing on Hawaii as the theme of the week, Elizabeth taught the children how to dance the Hula. She had a paper that included
instructions about the moves and modeled them for the children while she read and the children followed her with a lot of joy and excitement.

Songs were important part of story time. Elizabeth used songs as props or stimuli to engage the children. She started many of the stories with songs that were related to the story. Elizabeth also sang some of the stories, as described previously. Sometimes Elizabeth made up songs that included the children's name. I observed Elizabeth making up these songs for planning time, recall time, and other literacy activities. She has an incredible way of turning conversations into song, especially because she has a very nice voice.

During one of the recall times, Elizabeth made a song for children to recall: "I look around the circle to see who I could see, I think I saw (child's name) looking back at m;" (child's name) what did you do for work time?"

Questioning

One of the ways Elizabeth interacted with children was questioning. Elizabeth used different type of questions with different children based on their own levels. Elizabeth used questions to lead children to solutions or to the answer they wanted. She always tried to help the children to be independent, to take responsibility for their learning, and to reach their goal or answer through exploring and discovering.

Elizabeth asked questions, not necessarily to assess the child's understanding, but to ask about what they needed, what problems they had, how they felt about particular things, what they thought, and how could solve a problem they created. The purpose of these kinds of questions were to show the children that she cared about them and that sometimes they needed to express themselves.
During a group time activity when the children were mixing liquid starch and glue, Tiffany noticed the look on David’s face who did not like working on this plan.

Tiffany: "We made him sad."
Elizabeth: "Who?"
Tiffany: "David."
Elizabeth: "Why do you think we made him sad?"
Tiffany: "Because we made him touch this stuff."
Elizabeth: "I don't think we made him sad. He may look like he is sad, but he is not."

David approached Elizabeth complaining: "Rose put her hands on me."
Elizabeth: "Are you concerned about that?"
David: "Yes"
Elizabeth: "Why?"
David: "I don't want her put that on me."
Elizabeth: "Can you tell Rose that?"
David went to Rose and told her not to put that stuff on him because he didn't like it.

Discussion

Elizabeth encouraged discussions with the children or among the children. Discussions took place at all times and at different areas, not only during literacy activities. Elizabeth also encouraged the children to discuss a problem when it was raised. I observed Elizabeth discuss problems with a couple of children and small groups of children. When a discussion was raised, Elizabeth would not leave it until it is concluded. Many discussions occurred during storybook reading. Elizabeth did not only encourage children to discuss classroom situations, but also to discuss personal issues. The purpose, it seems, was to help children express and feel that the classroom was a community.

Instruction

Elizabeth provided the children with instruction at all times during literacy activities and as needed. Instruction took place throughout the whole day. Elizabeth
provided instructions to individuals, small groups, and large groups, based on their purpose. For example, individual instruction was provided when Elizabeth directed one of the children to observe the print on a symbol card while copying it. Also, individual instruction was provided when Elizabeth informed one of the children how to use the tape recorder in the listening area. Instruction for small groups took place on a daily basis, since the class is divided into two groups of children for small group work. Instruction for the whole class occurred when the children went on a field trip. Elizabeth instructed the children to follow safety rules.

**Teacher Assessment of Preschoolers’ Literacy Performance in a Head Start Classroom.**

My observations led me to perceive that the purpose of the assessment in this Head Start classroom was to measure the children's understanding and their level of literacy learning. I also perceived that assessment gave the children a positive sense of their progress toward their literacy learning. These perceptions were based on the following methods that the teacher used for assessment.

**Observation**

One way in which Elizabeth assessed was through daily observation. Elizabeth observed children while involved in different literacy activities, such as speaking, reading, pretend writing, story telling, and dramatization. In her observations, Elizabeth focused more on the process rather than on the product. She was interested in the children's thinking processes, concepts of print, and so on. She was not interested in what they made, but how they made it. Every time the children worked on a project, Elizabeth asked them how they made it.
Portfolio

Elizabeth provided each child in the classroom with a portfolio that included the child's works (drawings, attempted writings) that reflect progress toward literacy learning.

Note Taking

Elizabeth keeps notepads in almost every area in the classroom. She always carries a notepad and a pen at all times. She consistently made notes about the children during their interaction with others and with literacy materials.

Questioning

Elizabeth used questioning as a way to assess the children's understanding, as was explained previously. Also, during story reading time, Elizabeth asked the children questions to assess their understanding of the main themes of the story, the characters, and so on. For example, while reading the story *Hills of Fire*, the teacher asked:

Teacher: "Why ring a bell?"
Allen: "Because people would know that happen."
When the teacher read the part about something moving down in the land, most the children said: "Devil."
Allen predicted right: "Volcano!"
Teacher: "What comes out of it?"
David: "Fire."
Allen: "Lava"
Allen: "God make the volcano."

Records

Elizabeth included all the information and observations about the children in records. She included children's behavior during literacy activities in such records to help her know each child's progress toward literacy learning. Elizabeth shared this information about children with their parents, during conferences, to inform them of their
child's progress. During these conferences, Elizabeth discussed with the parents what their children were able to do and what areas they needed help in.

**Teacher's Self Assessment**

Elizabeth assessed the children by observing them while they were engaged with peers and adults during literacy activities. Elizabeth took a further step by assessing herself and not only the children. This led her to develop new activities and change her methods and strategies as needed. She always looked for the children's best interests and she reevaluated her strategies, methods, and approaches to literacy, constantly. She listened to adults', as well as children's, comments and suggestions to provide a better literacy learning environment.

Elizabeth's ways of assessing the children could differ from day to day based on situations or types of activities they were involved in. She observed the children in different settings and from different views. Sometimes she would observe the children from a distance when they were involved in play or conversation. Other times she observed the children closely when they were reading stories or working on different areas in the classroom.
Table 5
Head Start Teacher's Methods and Approaches to the Development of Literacy

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<th>Key Observations</th>
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<td><em>The Physical Environment</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning centers</td>
<td>- A variety of physical spaces is provided in which children and teacher can interact and share experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Display of print</td>
<td>- Print is everywhere in the classroom and serves many functional purposes</td>
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<td>Print rich environment</td>
<td>- Generous supply of materials, for reading, writing, and drawing, for children to interact with the print</td>
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<td><em>The Social Environment</em></td>
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<td>Organization</td>
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<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>- Encourage the children to work collaboratively with peers and adults</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Promote a sense of community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>- Gives the children the information they need to develop literacy skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>- Teacher finds the time to read with the children and learn along with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>- Teacher reinforces classroom activities and literacy procedure by modeling.</td>
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(C) Uses of Storybook Reading

| Introduction to book conventions           | - Title of the book, the author, and the illustrator.                      |
| Student involvement                       | - Comments                                                                 |
|                                          | - Questions                                                                |
|                                          | - Description                                                              |
|                                          | - Explanations                                                             |
|                                          | - Acting out                                                               |
| Increased access to books                 | - Books are placed around the classroom (and not only reading area)        |
| Interface with other curricular activities.| - Stories are expanded into nutrition and science activities               |
| Promotion of children's interests.        | - SBR used to promote children's interests.                                 |
| Student empowerment and self-direction     | - Children decide their seating arrangement                                 |
|                                          | - Children decide the books to read                                        |
| Challenge to children's imagination | - Role playing
| Appropriation of children's insights | - Children are encouraged to predict the title of a book or what happens next in the story
| Students' participation and involvement. | - Children are encouraged to share their point of view during SBR activity.
| Interface with key life experiences. | - Children are allowed to participate by listening, reading along, asking questions, commenting, and even changing the story
| Cultural appreciation | - Books relate to a specific developmental skill; SBR facilitates transfer of knowledge to other areas of learning;
| Intercultural sensitivity | - Selected books and materials reflect children's way of life; books are responsive to children's needs and interests.
| Development of listening skills | - Reading books about other cultures help the children to appreciate the similarities and the differences between them and other children who live in different parts of the world.
| - Children hear the stories or the events in the story attentively; children remember key elements of the story, remember sequences or specific things that happened to story; Children remember characters and events in the story.

(D) Teacher's Pedagogical Tools
- Conversation
  - Provides the children with the experiences they need to develop their oral language
- Involvement and participation
  - Children were involved in dramatization most of the time and almost in all the areas
- Singing and music
  - To get the children's attention
  - Involve children in activities
  - Deepen their interest
  - Encourage a full active participation by the children
  - Different types of questions used with different children (based on their different levels)
- Questions and answers
  - Teacher encourages discussions with the children or among the children
- Discussions
  - Instruction provided as needed through the whole day

E) Assessment Tools
- Observation
  - Listen to and look at everything the children did
- Self evaluation
  - Provide children with portfolio that reflect their progress in literacy learning
- Patterns of interpersonal relationship
  - Observation of children in their interaction with others and with literacy materials
- Questioning
  - Ask the children to explain what they are doing, ask children to retell a story
- Record keeping
  - Record children's literacy behavior during literacy activities
- Teacher's self assessment
  - Reevaluates her strategies, methods, and approaches to literacy
CHAPTER SIX

The Extent And Nature Of Students' Participation In Classroom Literacy Activities Including Storybook Reading

Introduction

This chapter reports the findings on the nature and extent of Head Start children’s participation in storybook reading and other literacy activities, and the factors that seem to encourage their participation. The findings are presented in three sections: a) aspects of storybook reading that seem to engage students the most; b) the role that students play during storybook reading and the extent of their participation in those activities; and c) the ways in which children engage in literacy activities including storybook reading. The findings indicate that the teacher is not the only source for literacy learning. The children play an important role in their own literacy learning as well.

Aspects of Storybook Reading that Seem to Engage Children

The study revealed keen interest and active participation in storybook reading by the children. Several factors seem to have stimulated the children's interest and participation. Three of those factors are identified for analysis: (1) storybooks, (2) teacher's presentation, and (3) the children themselves.

Storybooks

The books selected as reading material in this Head Start classroom included a wide variety of children's literature. The teacher knew a lot about children's books and seemed to have made the right decisions regarding the books that should be read at the
preschool level. The books selected appeared to suit the student’s abilities and to generate their interest. Particular elements of the books that appeared to generate interest were: format, style, characterization, and plot. Format refers to how the book looks and is presented. Style is the way the author writes the stories. Characterization refers to the main actors in the story. Plot refers to the main character's goal or problem.

**Format**

Children in this Head Start classroom seemed to be attracted by books with certain characteristics. They seemed to be drawn to large books that were attractive in so far that they were clearly illustrated with colorful pictures. The use of colors to portray story scenes was important to the children who were drawn to the colorful illustrations. The illustrations also appeared to enhance the story and the children seemed most likely to recall the story lines when the book was read a second or a third time. One book that appeared particularly appealing to the children in this Head Start classroom was *The Rainbow Fish*. The children often made comments about the illustrations and the colors used in this book. One dialogue between Cindy and David illustrates the point:

Cindy: "When you move the book, the color of the fish change."
David: "He used blue inside and white outside."

Another illustration of the children's comment on the colors used in the storybook is the student who went a step further to compliment the artist about the illustration. She said: "He is a cool artist because he put sprinkles on the fish."

In addition to illustrations and color, the children seemed to enjoy large sized print because then they were able to follow the story lines more easily. Although large books seemed particularly appealing, there were other books that were just as appealing to these children such as *Fish Out of Water*, *What Use is a Moose?*, and *Beach Play*. 
Overall, the initial interest and engagement in storybook reading in this Head Start classroom seemed to depend to a large extent on the use of color and illustrations and how much these added to the story.

**Style**

Another aspect of storybooks that seemed to engage the children was the way in which the book was written. When the dialogue was rhythmic, the children frequently repeated certain words or phrases as the story unfolded. For example, when Elizabeth read the book, *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, she repeated the sentence "I know an old lady who swallowed a fly, I don’t know why she swallowed a fly, perhaps she’ll die," adding a new animal that the lady swallowed on every page. The children soon learned the style of the book and were able to read with Elizabeth. The rhythmic flow of the language in the story gave a singsong effect or musical arrangement that appeared easier for the children to follow. The children seemed to read the story with Elizabeth, because they knew the order of what the lady ate, so they were repeating the same thing on every page.

Another book that encouraged the children to engage was *The Mitten*. The style of this book assisted the children to predict which animal would appear on the next page. On the left corner of each page in the story there was a small mitten with the picture of the animal found on the following page. The children soon noticed that and started to predict which animal would appear in the next page. Also, when Elizabeth read the book *What Use Is a Moose?*, the children were able to follow the way the story was written and read with the teacher by repeating certain sentences:

Elizabeth: "Jack made friends with a moose in the woods, so he brought the moose back to his house. What use is a moose?" asked Jack's Mom. "I'm
sure mooses have uses," said Jack. "And if you find a use for your moose, he can stay," said Jack's mom. Jack and his moose sat in the yard and they thought, and thought, and thought."

Sally: "I can see the moose."

Elizabeth: "Hey, I can hang wash on you to dry, moose," Jack suggested, "so he hung the wash on the moose. But"

David: "But it couldn't work."

Elizabeth: "But that was no use because it couldn't work. You know what he suggested next? ‘Can you drive, Moose? You can be Mom's Chauffeur,’ Jack said to the moose. But that was no use. What did he do?"

Allen: "He broke the car."

Elizabeth: "He broke the car. "Um, maybe you can work in the garden," said Jack. But"

David: "That was no use."

Elizabeth: "But, THAT was no use. Look what he did."

Allen: "What, what do you see?"

Elizabeth: "You tell me."

Allen: "Water splashed."

Elizabeth: "He does something and then"

Allen: "Water splashed."

Elizabeth: "You could make Mom her dinner," Jack said to the moose. But"

David: "But it's no use."

Elizabeth: "But even THAT was no use. Your moose is wrecking our house!"

Mom told Jack. And she got very angry. "We've got No use for a moose," she said. "He'll have to go back to the woods." And Jack was upset and so was the moose."

Use of rhythmic language and picture prompts that helped children predict story line, were two aspects of storybook reading that seemed to engage the children in this Head Start classroom.

Characterization

In general, the more credible and convincing the character, the more the children tended to repeat their dialogue. This was especially evident in the books *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, A Moose and Muffin*, and *A Pig and Pancake*. As the children become acquainted with the story line in the original story, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, they were able to predict and say what might happen in the sequels, *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* and *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*. When reading each book, the children would
always complete the sentences, "If you give a mouse, moose, pig _____, he would _____.

Plot

Generally the children seemed to have strong responses to story lines that were absurd. These "absurdities of reality" entertained them and often they would want to share the story again and again among themselves or with visiting adults. A case in point is the storybook Grandpa's Teeth. This story was not only funny, but also one in which the children were able to identify with the characters because a grandfather and a family dog were part of their personal experience. The story was about a grandfather who lost his teeth. The entire family went in search of grandpa's teeth. It became a community effort and grandpa was given a new pair of dentures. At the end of the book, the final page showed a family photo with grandpa wearing his new teeth. Included was the photo of the family's pet dog wearing grandpa's missing teeth. The children were so delighted with this story that they asked for it the next day. The following dialogue illustrates the children's interest in this particular storybook:

While the children were brushing their teeth, I joined the teacher's aide who was taking care of the tooth brush activity. When she told me about the story I missed the day before, Paul (who was getting his toothbrush) ran to the bookshelf and back with, Grandpa's Teeth. He showed me the book and asked me to read it for him. He sat on my lap while I was sitting on the chair, looking so excited and anxious to hear the story. It seemed that he liked the story so much, that he couldn't wait till I finished reading the whole page. He was turning the pages fast, looking forward to showing me the last page where the dog was wearing grandpa's teeth. He was so amused and laughed loudly when we reached that page. After I read the story for him, he went to brush his teeth while I found a space in the rug area getting ready for story time. While getting ready for story time, three of the children, Rose, Sally, and Cindy, were sitting around an adult who was reading Grandpa's Teeth.
This engagement and expression of interest suggests that these children may prefer stories that are humorous and reflect aspects of family life. Although the plot may not be realistic, they were able to appreciate odd possibilities and continue this engagement long after the activity.

Teacher's Presentation

The second aspect of storybook reading that seemed to engage the children is the story reader. Often, this is the teacher. Some of the important elements that the teacher emphasized in her storybook reading were: use of voice, use of props, acting, reading style, methods, and materials. Some of these elements (voice, acting, use of props, methods, materials) have been discussed and supported with illustrations in the section entitled, "Multiple Uses of Storybook Reading.” In this section, I will discuss the teacher’s reading style.

Reading Style

I observed that this teacher had several ways of reading storybooks. She often varied her reading style, depending on the type of book she was reading to the children. For example, when reading informational books, Elizabeth would stress important concepts that she wanted to transfer to other learning situations later in the day. For example, when she read the storybook My Father's Hands, she began by engaging the children in comparing the size of her hands to theirs. She first pretended to be holding a bird and whistled so that the children thought she was holding a bird in her hand. Next, she read the story about a father who worked in his garden and found insects (worms, snails, and beetles) and showed them to his daughter. In reading these kinds of book, she engaged the children in a discussion about some of the pictures they observed in the
story. The following dialogue illustrates the extent of the children's curiosity and wonderment as the teacher read the story *My Father's Hands*:

Elizabeth: "I bend close, knowing that nothing . . . ."
Child: "A cricket."
Elizabeth: "I bend close, knowing that nothing within my father's hand will harm me. Gently my father tips his hands softly urging the small one to open to my open palm."
Child: "Let me see your ___"
Elizabeth: "Green, prickly feet find their footing on my steady fingers. Look at what the manta is doing. Dad's giving her the manta and she opens her hand ___"
Child: "It's a cricket."
Elizabeth: "Well, a cricket's different than a manta. The manta's tilted pointed face, his huge round eyes watching me watch him. He is so light, so bold and so strange. I wonder what he thinks of me of my hand, soft and warm. And when he thinks, he leaps, scampering up my arm, hanging and swaying on my shirt."
Child: "He's checking her out."
Elizabeth: "I try to do that, get you ready for story time. My father plucks the traveler free and gives him back to me. His hand surrounding mine, we take the small one to his bush, watch him till he melts green in the greenness."
Child: "Wow."

When reading fictional stories, Elizabeth would allow the children to make comments about what they were learning. She appeared to be very interested in their comments about situations in the story that were unreal or characters that were given human qualities. For example, when reading the story *There's a Hippo in My Bath*, the children made several interesting comments:

   Cindy: "How could they all be in the bathtub?"
   Allen: "This tub is huge."
   As the story progressed and the teacher read about the two penguins that chased the soap, and slid down a smooth rock, the children excitedly shared their perceptions:
   Children: "It's not a rock!"
   Child: "It's going to eat the soap!"
   Teacher: "You are right. It's not a rock, but a whale."
   Child: "I ate soap before."
   Teacher: "Would you clean behind a hippo's ears and between his toes."
Children: "Ooooh, noooo!"
Child: "I will."

The teacher often brought her own personality into the reading and it is this that seemed to engage the children during the story. She tried to make the story come alive. She used a lot of facial expression to show the different emotions as well as varying her voice. When words demanded certain sounds, Elizabeth would whisper, snore, laugh, or cry to attract the children's attention and interest in the story. Her aim seemed to be to encourage the students to react to what they heard. This was obvious in her reading of *The Runaway Bunny, Tell me Again About the Night I was Born*, and *Guess How Much I Love You*. Elizabeth's reading style encouraged the children to participate by asking them questions to predict certain events in the story or by talking to them about how a character might feel or what he/she was thinking.

The Children

The third aspect of storybook reading that seemed to engage the children was the level at which they participated and found pleasure in the storybook. Their participation included being able to question, make comments, predict, and share personal experiences. The many instances in which they were able to repeat familiar words and use story line vocabulary were reinforcements of language development. One of the most meaningful aspects of children's participation in storybook reading was the opportunity to be active learners. The teacher allowed them to plan and organize with her. They were able to make decisions as to what should be included during storybook reading. One situation of being active participants in their learning was when Elizabeth introduced the story *Beach Play* for the second time in the classroom. Being familiar with the story, some of the children wanted to create the sense of a beach and enact what is likely to occur there.
The teacher decided to go along with the plan and include it in her story time. The children were told to pretend that they were at the beach. When the lifeguard (child) blew the whistle, the children were to leave the ocean (block area) and sit on the beach (story circle area). (see Appendix E, pictures 19a, 19b).

Elizabeth: "OK, lifeguard blew the whistle." 
Child: "Who made that noise?"
Children: "Elizabeth."
Elizabeth: "The whistle. The lifeguard blew the whistle. You've got to come to story time."
Child: "The lifeguard did it."
Elizabeth: "Try it again, blow. Watch. Wait, there's one more child coming in off the beach. Ready, blow! Do it again."
Child (laughing).
Elizabeth: "Ready to blow one more time? Listen, the next time you blow the whistle, all the children should be sitting on the beach, on their bottoms, getting ready for story time. Here we go. One more time, lifeguard, blow. He blew the whistle, that means everybody should be on the beach."
Child: "Take off your shoes, Sierra."
Child: "I don't have to."
Child: "You have to take off your shoes."
Elizabeth: "Did you get all the children out of the ocean?"
Child: "No, yes. Kathy is still in the ocean."
Elizabeth: "Who is still? Kathy is still in the ocean. I'm sitting up on my chair."
Child: "Kathy. You're still in the ocean."
Child: "Everybody get back in the ocean."
Child: "Everybody has to sit."
Elizabeth: "Let's put our sunscreen on. OK, put it all over. Got to put sunscreen on your face."
Child: "Don't forget to put it on your legs."
Elizabeth: "On your legs? Put it on your legs."
Child: "On your toes."
Elizabeth: "If you don't put sunscreen on you, you're going to get sunburned. Yes you do, you get sunburned."
Child: "She can't do it on our_____."
Elizabeth: "You got your sunglasses."
Teacher aid: "Get on the towel, Paul."
Elizabeth: "I'm ready."
(Children talking).
Child: "I have my sunglasses."
Elizabeth: "This sun is awful hot today. I'm so glad I've got my sunglasses on."
Child: "I don't."
Elizabeth: "Well, maybe you'll have to bring your sunglasses tomorrow for group time."
Child: "I'd better put my sun ___ on."
Elizabeth: "_____ A wonderful ____. Karen copied a wonderful beach poem to go along with our story."
Child: "Beach ball."
Elizabeth: "Where is my beach book."

Having the experience of being active in their learning, the children in this Head Start classroom tended to become more attentive to the special rewards that were offered in written language.

Roles of Students During Storybook Reading

Students in this Head Start classroom played three major roles during storybook reading: (1) listening, (2) conversing, and (3) being story helpers.

Listening

Listening involved passive participation. Sometimes the children would listen attentively with their main focus being the teacher and the storybook. At other times, they would engage in other activities while listening. For example, they may have played with a toy or looked in another direction. Occasionally, one or two would engage in side talk. From my observations, I noticed that girls listened for longer periods. They also sought to maintain an atmosphere of quietness so that they could listen and enjoy the story. On one occasion, when the teacher was reading Where is my Teddy?, some of the children were taking awhile to settle down. Just as the teacher stopped reading to take control of the group, one of the girls (Gilly) who was listening intently to the story turned on the group and said: "Ssssh, we want to listen to the story." This situation would occur several times during my field observation, with one of the girls always bringing the group back on focus. Boys, on the other hand, appeared to be easily distracted. Often their
distraction would create a commotion that required firm discipline. For example, on one occasion, while the teacher was reading *The Apple Pie Tree*, she had to stop constantly to correct two boys about their laughter and dialogue. Elizabeth liked for the children to become engaged in the story, but on this occasion both boys were distracting the rest of the class. Eventually, she had to send them out with the volunteers so that the others could enjoy the story. This kind of discipline was rare since the teacher was insightful and usually asked the other adults to sit among the boys. Listening attentively appeared to be a rare quality for some of the boys.

**Conversing**

The conversation that went along with storybook reading was another important focus. The children in this Head Start classroom were good conversationalists. They readily assumed this role during storybook reading with much enthusiasm and interest. This role also made them active participants during storybook reading. It was in this role that they were allowed to ask questions and make comments.

**Questioning**

Through questioning, the children in this Head Start classroom sought clarification of new vocabulary or concepts. For example, in reading *All Pigs are Beautiful*, the teacher used the word "wallow" to describe how the pigs rolled around in the mud. The word "wallow" was a new concept for the children, especially for one of the students who was intrigued by the word and wanted to understand its meaning. The teacher did not always answer questions. Rather those children who are familiar with certain words would share their meaning with their peers. For example, when the teacher read them *The Cows Come Home*, one of the children asked the teacher the meaning of
the word "bray." One of the boys made the sound of a donkey braying. This association of the word with the sound of the animal reinforced the concept not only to the child who did not know the word, but also to the entire group.

Often, the children in this classroom asked questions to make sense of the story. While reading the story *Baby Duck and the Bad Eye-Glasses*, one of the children sought to understand and transfer his knowledge of babies:

Cory: "What was the baby duck's name?"
Elizabeth: "Her name spell B-A-B-Y, Baby."
Cindy: "Why doesn't she have a real name?"
Elizabeth: "That's a good question. I think Baby might be her name."

**Commenting**

Through comments, the children in this Head Start classroom were able to share personal experiences and express feelings about what they are learning. For example, just before completing the last page of *The Crayon Box That Talked*, Elizabeth was interrupted by one of her students who said, "When you forgive someone, that means they are your friends.” This comment was in response to the book that told a story about some crayons. In the story, each color felt that it was more important than the others. They were unkind to each other and teased one another until they were all enemies. Later, they realized that each of them was unique and special. It was this realization that brought them back together. The student's comment was a significant response to what he was learning.

Children also enjoyed talking about the illustrations and repeating familiar words. If they observed that story characters were nameless, they enjoyed giving them names, or deciding what situations could be added to the story. Sometimes before the story ended, they made predictions as to what may follow or how the story would end. In *Baby Duck*
and The Bad Eye-Glasses, as mentioned earlier in this section, the children were able to make predictions about the story’s character when questioned:

Elizabeth: "Why didn't the baby duck hop?"
Children: "Her glasses might fall down."

Another time, when reading If You Give a Mouse a Cookie, they predicted that the mouse would want some milk at the end.

**Story Helpers**

The children initiated the role of story helper as they volunteered to assist the teacher during storybook reading. At times, the teacher selected some students whom she felt needed encouragement to participate in storybook reading. Their roles varied depending on the chosen story. They might have helped to turn pages or to hold the book as the teacher read. Sometimes, the teacher allowed them to read the title of the book or the names of the author and illustrator along with her. When the story was familiar the story helper would read along with the teacher. This was noted in the story of the Three little Pigs. Story helpers would often repeat the line "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin, I will not let you in." Other times, they would recall what happened in the story based on the picture. For example, when reading Jasper's Beanstalk, the children recalled what the cat was carrying on his back and what he would do with those things. Other more involved roles included helping the teacher place illustrations on the flannel board, using hand puppets to emphasize dialogue, or role playing certain situations in the story. In the role-play situations, the children would dramatize as a group. For example, just before reading the book, The little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry and the Big Hungry Bear, the teacher initiated a pretend bear hunt game: "Let's go on a bear hunt." All the children huddled together, walking, pretending to look for a bear. Some
were crying out loud as though there were being followed by a bear. Others were saying: "It's here, its here," peeping under tables and behind doorways. When they returned to the circle, the teacher opened her hand to reveal a strawberry and said: "The bear is looking for this strawberry." The children hugged and screamed as they pretended the bear was close at hand. I observed that this type of role-play gave the entire group the opportunity to be story helpers and set the tone for reading the story.

Other times, the children would initiate role-play when they are familiar with the story lines. This was observed in the story *Five Little Monkeys*. One of the children suggested that it should be acted out. Initially there was an overwhelming number of children who wanted to act the role of a monkey. When the teacher pointed out that only five individuals were needed, one of the children suggested that they could do it a second time. In this way, the children themselves shared the role of story helpers among the group.

**Students' Engagement in Storybook Reading and Other Literacy Activities**

In this Head Start classroom, children's engagement in storybook reading was not the only activity that served as a catalyst for language development and literacy. My observations also revealed that students engaged in other literacy activities as well. Storybook reading sometimes influenced these other literacy activities. As the children listened to stories, they become conscious that books reflected their lives. Gradually, this was further enacted in personal situations among peers or within the classroom community. At other times, literacy activities were initiated by the teacher to reinforce the key experiences of the Head Start classroom. Students’ engagements consisted of: 1)
Collaboration in this Head Start classroom involved the children’s willingness to work together on a given task. This attitude was demonstrated at the beginning of the day in the morning circle. During this activity, the children planned the day's activities along with the teacher. They decided who would do what, how they could help each other, and when these plans would be done. Sometimes the children worked on art projects and role-plays. The teacher initiated some collaborative exercises in which all the children become involved. For example, after reading the storybook *Baby Duck and the Bad Eye-Glasses*, the teacher provided the children with a long sheet of paper that covered the length of the table. At the bottom of the paper, the teacher drew patches of grass and then invited the children to draw whatever they wanted. Together, the children did a mural with flowers, animals, the sun, clouds, and trees. Since they had just heard a story, much of what they drew was a reflection of some of the illustrations from the story. After working at this art activity, they decided that it should be placed in the hallway at the entrance to the classroom (see Appendix E, pictures 20a, 20b).

The children also initiated collaborative exercises. At one point, three of the children were in the block area creating and putting together different creations. Gradually, they decided to build a train using three empty boxes. They fastened the three boxes together with strings by boring holes at the sides. At the front of one of the boxes, they fastened a wooden handle. Later, they invited the teacher to use the handle to pull them along. After looking at it, the teacher pointed out that the string was not strong.
enough to pull the three of them. One of the children suggested that they go in search of
a stronger string. But before leaving, they asked the teacher to write a note saying "save
this train." Their collaborative effort in putting together this train was recognized as
valuable enough to save it from being thrown out.

Decision Making

A number of decisions were made throughout the day in this Head Start
classroom. Although the teacher was responsible for the children's learning and what
materials and equipment were needed to make this possible, she allowed the students to
make decisions that influenced their learning. They were encouraged to make decisions
in many ways concerning the various literacy activities they engaged in. They made
decisions about what happened during storybook reading. For example, when Elizabeth
was reading *The Crayon Box That Talked*, she told them that it was a poem and suggested
that she show the illustrations after she read the story. The children disagreed and made a
decision for the pictures to be shown along with the story.

They also made decisions about the physical environment and how print should
be displayed for constant reviewing. For example, the teacher had placed the picture
board with the children’s pictures on the wall next to the nursery rhymes. One of the
students felt that the rhymes could not be clearly seen. He moved the picture board
around so that both could clearly be seen and he could look at the nursery rhymes.

Decision making was also visible in planning activities for the week. When
planning was discussed, the children had the opportunity to talk about what they wanted
to do during the day in other literacy activities. They decided what classroom helpers
they would like to be as well as what activities they would like to engage in during work
My observations showed that plans were shared and decisions made in unique ways.

(Children on a phone pretending to tell the other party about their plans)
Gilly: "I am calling Jonathan in Mexico. I'll be working in the house, playing with sparkly dress and high heels."
David: "I'm calling my boss. I will play wedding with Gilly."

Another time during lunch, I observed the children involved in decision making. The teacher began by asking the children what they would like to do the following day. She took notes of all the suggestions. Then she went through them a second time asking the children to decide on the one they would like to work on. The children suggested making a bingo game. The teacher asked them if they wanted to make shapes or pictures. The children decided to make shapes.

Responsibility came along with this decision making and planning. Elizabeth gave the children opportunities to recall what they worked on. This happened at the end of the work time after they had implemented their plans. One of the children would volunteer to take charge of recall time. They decided how they would have their peers recall about what they did. On one occasion, one of the children used a stethoscope as a microphone for each student to do a recall (see Appendix E, picture 21a). At the end of the activity, to dismiss the group, he said:

"Who was a big, big listener, go and put your jackets on and get ready to go outside." Outside, one of the children noticed water in the sandbox. Her response was, "Whose responsibility is that the water in the sandbox."

This limited statement, made by the child, demonstrated that with decision-making comes responsibility. She knew that it was someone's responsibility to make sure that water was not used in the sandbox. From a wider perspective, decision making occurred in
interpersonal relationship between the children and when they came into conflict with each other. As regarded the use of materials and equipment and in the selection of ideas for plans, the teacher skillfully negotiated these situations through discussions with the individuals, allowing them to reach a solution through decision making.

On some occasions the children made a wrong decision. However, Elizabeth was always there to discuss it with them. For example, when a nurse came to the class to give some children shots, Paul was so terrified about the shot that he ran away from his Mom, heading to the cliff. Elizabeth went after him and got him back. She said: "It is okay for children to be scared, but it is not okay for them to run away. You can always use your words to say no."

**Choices**

For storybook reading, children had the choice to make book selections other than those selected by the teacher. Part of this was as a result of the children bringing books they discovered around the classroom. The children in this classroom also had the choice of reading any time and any place. They were observed bringing books for the adults to read throughout the day. This sometimes occurred even on field trips as they sat in the bus. The children also had the choice to read storybooks individually, in pairs, or in small or large groups (see Appendix E, pictures 22a-f).

In the classroom, choice in other literacy activities could be seen throughout the day. The teacher allowed them to choose how they would use classroom materials for individual presentations and group work. On one occasion for individual presentation, Elizabeth used a piece of cloth as a shawl to make her presentation during recall time. Then, she passed it along to her students. One of the children used it as a dress, another
as a belly shirt, another as a scarf, and one used it as a covering for her face to pretend it was a wedding dress (see Appendix E, picture 21 b).

Choice was also noted in working on class projects, as when Elizabeth did a science activity about seeds. She provided them with paper towels, beans, and plastic bags. She told them that they could plant the seed in the middle of a wet paper towel and put it in a plastic bag. One of the boys said he wanted to use dirt. Elizabeth told him he could get some from outside. He took a shovel and went to fill his plastic bag with dirt. The teacher encouraged him to share his choice with the class. He also shared some of his dirt with some who then decided to use dirt in their bags. Later, after the planting of the bean seeds, the children chose how they wanted to secure their bags. Some used yarn and others used tape to close their bags.

Elizabeth did not believe in limiting the children's use of classroom materials when allowing them to make their choices. She would begin the process by providing the beginning materials. During one small group time activity, I observed how Elizabeth allowed the children to explore and make choices to expand their learning. The experience is illustrated in the following dialogue:

At small group time, Elizabeth gave each child a piece of chalk. Kevin started to draw on the table. That’s when Elizabeth offered black construction paper for the children in case they wanted to draw on it. Rose came from the other group and told Elizabeth: "you can dip it (chalk) in the water. Eddie made it up." Elizabeth shared Rose's suggestion with the other children. She provided each child with a cup of water. Children started to come up with their own ideas. Some of them dipped the chalk in water and wrote on the paper. Kevin poured water on the construction paper and rolled the chalk on it to have colored water. He was using his hand in the water. When I asked him how it felt, he said, "it tickles." Sally and Tiffany colored their hands. Cindy traced her hand. Kevin had two colored chalks. He broke them into half and said he had four. Then he broke two of them again and said they became six. He shared a piece of purple chalk with Tiffany when she asked for the purple.
In addition to individual choices, the children were also provided with opportunities to discuss and make choices as a group. This was evident in the selection of songs that were sung at a program to which all the children in the Head Start classroom were invited. When the teacher received the class’s invitation, she shared with them what songs they could sing. They, in turn, made selections about which songs that they would enjoy singing. Elizabeth took a note of their choices and these songs were sung at the program.

**Exploration**

Engagement in literacy activities other than storybook reading occurred in the children's exploration through verbalization and also in exploring adult behavior.

**Exploration Through Verbalization.**

When the children were exploring through verbalization, they were usually interacting with materials. They also engaged in conversation with something that they learned before. For example, during playtime, the children were playing with Legos, animals, puzzles, and other toys of their choice. Tiffany was playing with a basket that included magnets, metals, and screws. She asked me as well as Sally to join her. The following illustration demonstrates these children's exploration of magnets:

When Sally joined us, I asked them why these were sticking together. Tiffany said, "because they are magnetic." She thought every thing in the basket was magnetic. When I put two metals together and they did not stuck together, I asked Tiffany: "Why don’t these two stick to each other?" Tiffany said: "Maybe because one of them is heavier." When I asked the same question to Sally. She knew that some of them are magnetic and that they attract some metals. Sally took a piece of magnet and went to the kitchen area to find things that can be stuck to the magnet. Tiffany joined us there and so did Elizabeth. Elizabeth took advantage of their interest in exploring what things can be attracted to the magnet. They used wood, plastic, and metal objects from the kitchen. Sally said: “When it pick up
metal it is magnetic.” After a few minutes half of the class were in the classroom exploring the metals and what sticks to magnets. (see Appendix E, picture 23a)

A few days later, the concept of magnets was reinforced as one of the children engaged in an exploration activity. Rose was playing and took a fishing pole (made of stick, string and piece of magnet at the end). When I asked her what she was doing, she said she was fishing. She did not know that the end of the string had a magnet. Suddenly, it stuck to the leg of the chair; she was surprised and said: “It stick to the chair.” I told her to try it on the seat (wood) and she did and said: "It doesn’t stick." When I asked her about the reason, she said she didn't know. I explained to her that the end of the string held a magnet that sticks to metals. She learned that information right away. Because then, she said, "Let’s look for other metals.” We went around the classroom looking for metals. She understood what metals were because when I would suggest a book or a plastic, she would say, even before trying it, “That’s not metal.” She enjoyed doing that and went to Elizabeth with her fishing pole which had a can attached to it. When Elizabeth asked her to explain what she was doing, Rose said: “When you want this magnet to stick, it should be metal.” Elizabeth took out a pocket watch which was partly metal and asked Rose to try it. Rose said: "Part of it is metal and part of it is not metal.” (see Appendix E, picture 23b)

Exploration through verbalization also occurred in the children's explanations of activities they were engaged in. The teacher used these opportunities so that the children could recall directions to what was previously done. For example, when one of the children was outside watching the aquarium in which they planted onion bulbs, the teacher asked her to tell how they planted the onion bulbs. The child responded: "First
thing we put dirt in there, make holes, put seeds in them, we cover the hole with dirt, water it." Other times, the children responded to what they had seen or felt. One time the teacher brought in a bunny rabbit in a box. The children were so excited. They reached out to pat the bunny and expressed different feelings about this experience (see Appendix E, picture 24). Here are some of those feelings:

Kevin: "I'll feed the rabbit carrot."
Paul: "Rabbit is soft and he feels good."
Tammy: "Rabbits feel like cotton."
Eddie: "Rabbit is cute and feels like cotton candy."
Sally: "The rabbit feels soft and makes me think of dog's fur."

Another situation when verbalization through exploration occurred was during a small group activity in which the children made comments in response to their interaction with some materials. Elizabeth provided the children with waxed paper, paper towel, cups of colored water (blue), straws, and coffee filters. The children started guessing what they were going to do. Cory said: "We gonna blow bubbles.” Elizabeth started by introducing the materials. She asked the children if they knew waxed paper. That's when one of the children said: "Its like plastic." Elizabeth allowed the children to touch the waxed paper. Then, she gave the instructions for the experiment while modeling it. She dropped some water on the waxed paper and some on the coffee filter. Elizabeth provided the children with the materials and allowed them to use them as they wished. Every child did his own experiment. They were so excited with their discoveries. They realized the difference between the waxed paper and the filter paper. Their responses and comments were varied.

Allen said (using a straw to blow the drop of water on the waxed paper): "Look, it became four drops. I made bubbles."
Rose: "I have a big one, when I blow, it become two."
Annie: "It's drying."
Paul said: "It disappeared!"
Cory said: "I made rain on mine."
Sally said: "I made a pizza."

**Exploring Adult Behavior**

The children's engagement in other literacy activities in this classroom sometimes involved exploration of adult behavior. They sought to initiate situations that they heard during storybook reading or observed from the adults and other influences in their life. The exploration of adult behavior took place through (1) Dramatization and (2) Reading and Writing.

Dramatization. Imitation or modeling of adult roles gave the children opportunities to use vocabulary suited to the situation. I observed several of these role-plays and dramatizations throughout the day. Following are three examples of the children's dramatizations in different areas and during different work times:

*At work time:* (Nancy, carrying a doll, approached Allen who was at the computer pretending to be in the office) (see Appendix E, picture 4a)
Nancy: "Can I use your phone. I want to call my baby's dad."
Allen: "You can use the phone in my office."
Nancy (handing the baby to me): "Can you hold my baby for while. I want to make a phone call."
Allen (pretending to leave and conversing with me): "I'm done at my work in the office, and I am not gonna do every thing my boss says.
Salwa: "Why not?"
Allen: "Because he ask me to do a lot. He tells me to write notes, and I am tired and I wanna go home."
(Allen begins to write something on a piece of paper using a pencil, folds it and puts it in an envelope)
Salwa: "What did you write?"
Allen: "Some thing that tell my boss get out of here."

*At Recess:* Two of the boys were wearing police caps and a police helmet. They approached one of the girls and one of the boys pretended to arrest her and said:
David: "I am a police man and I want to put you in jail."
Tammy: "If my mama see you put me in jail she will be very mad." David (pressing the numbers on a calculator): “This, I am gonna blow you and your mama. This place is about to blow."

Later another role-play evolved with two of the children, another girl, and myself. We were at the sandbox with the children engaged in making mud pies, tracing letters in the sand and relating stories to each other as they played. When I approached the sandbox, one of them began to speak to me. The following is the ensuing dialogue:

David (pointing to another boy): "You see that guy, he used to work for me."
Salwa: "Does he still work with you?"
David: “Not any more. He is bad. We're still friends even he is still evil and I am good.”
Salwa: “What did he do?”
David: "He made his evil force to come and get me."
David: "Mom can I use this?” (Turning to one of the girls)
Tammy: "You ask your sister."
David: "Sis can I use that?"
Annie: "Yes"
Tammy: "If she said yes you can use it." (Turning to Annie): "You use to not let him use it and now you're telling him to use it." (Talking to David): "She doesn't want you to mess with her collection.” (Looking at Annie): "I don't want him to mess with your collection and you want him to mess with your collection."
David: "I am 54, she is 16 going to kindergarten."
Tammy: "How old are you daughter?"
Annie: "16"
Tammy: "How old are you son?"
David: "143"
Tammy: "You shouldn't treat your sister like this."
David: "I am not. I am just making her a cake."
Tammy: "I am not gonna buy your sister any thing any more. She is gonna mess with her dolls and you gonna mess with your power rangers, twist their heads. Your sister let you to mess with her collection and that’s rude."
(Annie pointed at David with shovel).
David: "I will tell on you."
Tammy: "Don't talk to your sister like this"
David: "I am the big brother"
Tammy: "I'll wipe your butt."
David: "I'm telling dad."
Tammy: "Your dad is at work."
David: "Leave me alone."
Tammy: "What's wrong with you?"

**At house area:** The children also dramatized occupations they learned about in the classroom or that they knew their parents to be involved in. One of the role-plays that they seemed to enjoy was pretending to visit the hair salon (see Appendix E, picture 25a). The following illustrates the children's dramatization at the house area, pretending to be hairdressers:

The children were using a box of hairdresser props that included hair dryer, rolls, combs and hair spray. They were fixing the adult's hair. When I joined them, David asked me to take off my scarf to fix my hair. When I did, David, Paul, and Tiffany were fixing my hair. Tiffany put a clip in my hair. Paul asked me for the money before he started fixing my hair. When I asked him how much he would charge me, he said $5. Paul brought a large sized fork from the house area and used it to comb my hair. Paul kept asking about his dollar. When I gave him fake money, he stamped on a piece of paper and gave it to me as a receipt, and asked me to sign my name.

**At recall time:** I also observed roles dramatized during recall time when children were supposed to be sharing what they did during their work time. Children's roles as bus passengers during their recall time is illustrated below:

The children sat on small chairs pretending to ride a bus. One of the boys said loudly: "every body fasten your seat belts." Sally was the bus driver and had a paper driving wheel in her hand and sat in front of every one. She walked around the children pretending to make sure they fastened their seat belts. As they pretended to drive along the children sang the words: "Children on the bus go up and down." With the help of the teacher, they included the names of each child who had to talk about his/her plans for the day. This enjoyable exercise allowed for exploration of roles, use of vocabulary, and engagement in a literacy activity that was a meaningful learning experience for the children. (see Appendix E, picture 25b)

**Act of Reading and Writing.** Exploration of adult behavior was also evident in their engagements with reading and writing. As they observed the many instances in which the adults around them used reading and writing, they sought to imitate this behavior within the classroom and with their peers. Since reading aloud during was a
common situation, many of the children engaged in dramatizing the act of reading. The following illustrates one such experience:

While waiting for the rest of the children to take their spaces for story time, Tiffany, Nancy, and Tabitha, each said they wanted to do the story time. Each began reading their storybook as they had observed the teacher doing. Tiffany started with the title, when she could not read the author, she asked Elizabeth for assistance. As she displayed the cover page, all of the children got their chairs and formed a circle. They all pretended to be teachers. Each was reading aloud. All the adults in the classroom including myself pretended to be the audience. Although the children were a bit loud, they were happy to perform a reading aloud activity. (See Appendix E, picture 26a).

"Pretend reading" was one of the solitary engagements in this Head Start classroom. Often individual children would engage in a "pretend reading" activity. On one occasion, Sally asked the teacher’s assistant to put on the record of Witch Brew. Pulling two chairs closer, she sat on one while she placed her legs on the other. She sat close to the record player and had a couple of sheets that had the words of the songs. While the music played, Sally pretended to read and sing along with the music (see Appendix E, picture 26b).

The children also attempted to decipher words as they read. This was noted after they wrote their names on an art activity:

Gilly: "I have A in my name."
Tiffany: "I have an A too."
Gilly: "Tiffany has two A's in her name."
Elizabeth: "That's right."
Cindy: "I have A in my name. Tammy has A and K in her name."

Later, after Gilly finished her picture, she wrote her name on it. When Elizabeth asked her to writer a lower case A, she did it easily. Then Gilly asked Elizabeth to help her write her friend's name, "Kat," on the picture. Elizabeth spelled the letters for her while she wrote them down.
Similarly, the children also dramatized the act of writing. They attempted to imitate words they used in conversations as well as what they heard from adults. They seemed to enjoy writing notes and letters about the things that they did during the day. On one occasion when the children were going out on a field trip, one of the girls wrote a note and asked the teacher to place it on the door. When asked what was written in the note, Deborah told the teacher that it was to remind her mother what to do. When the teacher asked Deborah to read her note, she read her scribbles, "Love Deborah. And take her to day care and the bus come by and take her home. Love Vie and Deborah."

The children also attempted to write familiar words seen around the classroom. When the teacher observed these attempts, she usually assisted them in discovering a method to write what they wanted. I observed this interaction between the teacher and a child who was interested in writing. The following illustration shows the uniqueness of this situation and the collaborative efforts of other children who offered assistance to their peers:

Gilly was interested in learning the names and the chores. Elizabeth told her that if she wanted to learn how to write some of it to bring her the note pad and a pencil, which Gilly did. Elizabeth read the first chore, "breakfast helper," and Gilly read the name of the children for that job (Kevin and Rose). The second was the "tooth brush helper;" Elizabeth suggested to Gilly that she try to write that since it was Gilly's job for that day. Elizabeth reminded Gilly about how to learn by looking at the letters of the words one by one and copying them down, one by one. Gilly started writing "tooth brush helper." When she reached the letter "e" she stopped, not knowing how to write it. Sally, who was sitting with me, said that she has the letter “e” in her name and asked if she could show Gilly how to write it down. Gilly allowed her to write the “E” for her. David joined in and asked to write down the next job, which was "stack chairs." Elizabeth was reading the letters loudly for them, while David was writing them down with Gilly's help. When David reached the letter “I” he asked if he could write the “Ss” first. Elizabeth explained that if he put the “S” before the “I” then the word would sound different: "Chasir." David asked Elizabeth what that word meant and Elizabeth told him she was not
When David struggled with the letter "S," Sally helped him with it. Elizabeth wrote each of the children's name and the date on their writings. Sally asked me if she could write something in my note pad. I gave her my note pad and pen and she scribbled something. When I asked her what she wrote, she said that she drew the cup of beads, which she worked on during her plans.

When the teacher observed these pretend situations, she usually fostered the children’s curiosity to write during formal class activities. For example, during a recall time, the teacher had each child explore his/her own writing using note-pads she made in the shape of ladybugs. Her purpose was to have the children use these ladybug writing pads to write the plans they wanted to do at work time. She told the children that each of them could write or draw their plans for work time. After they finished doing that, she asked them to read what they did. Some of the children held the paper as if they were reading from a book and would tell what they wrote. Cindy asked Elizabeth how to write, "house area." Elizabeth told her the letters and she wrote it down. When Cindy came across some letters that she did not know, Elizabeth wrote it on a separate piece of paper for Cindy to copy. On his part, David asked Elizabeth to tell him how to write the word "bottle." David didn’t need Elizabeth to write him any letters. He was able to write the letters while Elizabeth called them to him verbally (see Appendix E, pictures 27a-c).

In this Head Start classroom, the children also had the opportunity to explore media used for writing other than pens, pencils, crayons, chalk, papers, and chalkboards. They interacted with and used a typewriter and computer. They are very aware that these tools were used for writing. These experiences are illustrated in the following:

At one corner of the class, Sally was sitting at the computer and Kevin was sitting on the table with the type-writer. Kevin had a long jacket on, from the dress area; he was sitting by the table with many papers, a stamp pad, and different kind of stamps in front of him. He also had a calendar or a daily organizer in his hand and so did Sally. They were acting as if
they were working in an office. They were discussing some appointments. Each had a calendar opened trying to agree on a date. When I joined, Sally told me that I was invited to her party and she checked with a pencil on a page showing me when the party would be. Sally looked at the calendar in her hand then typed quickly using the keyboard. Kevin was stamping in the calendar and talking to himself. While Sally was going through the pages of the calendar, she ran into a note that Elizabeth had written previously. She identified her name and asked me if that was her name. When I said yes, she asked me to read what it said. I read it to her: "Sally will be coming at 1:00." Then she said that she remembered that note and she explained that she had a doctor's appointment on that day. Then she asked me when school would be over. When I told her probably in May, she opened her calendar on a page that had many numbers and started to circle around a set of numbers randomly while she was saying: "20, 21, 22, 23." Gilly joined Sally and asked to use the computer. When I asked Gilly what she was writing, she said: "I am writing to my daddy on this TV." I told her "you mean the monitor," pointing at the label on the monitor. She said yes. When I asked her what she was writing to her dad, she said she was telling him that she will stay over at Sally's.

Incidental Dialogue

The students did not only learn from their engagement with storybook reading and other literacy activities in the classroom. Of particular significance is the incidental dialogue that occurred in response to questions, conflicts, and observations among peers. These issues seem to be influenced by what the children may have learned at home or outside the classroom. Nevertheless, things were discussed as they arose in classroom activities. The main issues involved in incidental dialogue were about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors as well as religious beliefs. Below is a discussion about appropriate and inappropriate behavior that occurred during one work-time activity:

David brought out Scissors, paint brushes, paper plates, and paper. Carolyn asked him what else he needed. After I helped him set the plastic outdoor tables for coloring, I asked him the same question, what else he needed. He took a look at the table and said "water." We brought a cup of water for the watercolors. He had started making his picture when Allen joined us. While they were coloring, Allen used an inappropriate word.

Allen: "Hell."
David: "You can't cuss at school. Only at home"
Allen: "Yes I can."
David: "Salwa, can he cuss at school?"
Salwa: "No, it’s not nice to cuss either at school or at home."
Allen: "Yes, I can cuss if I want to."

Religious beliefs were discussed during a sandbox activity in the playground. Three children talked about their understanding of Easter, and about good and evil. It began when I asked them what they did for Easter.

David: “It's all about God.”
Allen: "He makes us alive."
Tiffany: "God is not real."
Allen: "Yeah, he let us die. We have to. If we don't we got sick and have to be."
David: "I am going to heaven."
Salwa: "You are going to heaven?"
David: "Uh huh, cause I am not going to hell."
Allen: "Me too. I am going all the way up to heaven."
Tiffany: "Oh, you're gonna see the angels up there."
Salwa: "Would you like to see an angel?"
Tiffany: "Yeah."
Salwa: "I would love to see an angel."
Allen: "Me too."
Salwa: "I think you are all going to heaven."
Allen: "Even you Salwa."
David: "Everybody that die go to heaven."
Salwa: "Everybody?"
Allen: "Except for the bad guys. They go to hell."
David: "I'll shoot the bad guys."
Salwa: "Who are the bad guys?"
Tiffany: "God is not real."
Salwa: "Tiffany why do you think that God is not real?"
Tiffany: "Because you don't get to see him."
David: "Because God is in heaven."
Tiffany: "No he is not."
David: "Yes he is."

At other times, incidental dialogues were triggered by the children's questions. Their curiosity generated new thoughts and ideas about things that gave the teacher insight into the planning of new learning activities. Usually, the questions were asked in relation to an activity that the children were working on. For example, on one occasion
the children were in the gathering place doing masks using construction paper, string, and scissors. Elizabeth had added some new dinosaurs to her collection and David was playing with them. David was curious about these new dinosaurs and began asking the teacher about their names. Although the purpose of the activity was to make masks, Elizabeth felt that the incidental learning about dinosaurs was important for David. She attempted to say the names, which he imitated.

At other times, the children's curiosity about animals arose when they overheard the teacher asking the aide if she could bring a rabbit to the class the next day. When the teacher’s aide said yes, the children became excited. One of the boys engaged the teacher in this dialogue:

Allen: "We can't have animals in here."
Elizabeth: "Yes we can, but we have to know how to work with them."
Allen: "Can we hold the rabbit?"
Elizabeth: "Thelma is going to tell us how to hold the rabbit."
Allen: "We hold them like this, gently." (pretending to hold a small rabbit).
Table 6.1

Extent and Nature of Students' Participation in Classroom Literacy Activities Including Storybook Reading

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<td>- Sharing of personal experiences</td>
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<td>- Planning and organizing with the teacher.</td>
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<td>(B) Roles of Students During Storybook Reading</td>
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<td>Story helpers</td>
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<td>- Read along with the teacher</td>
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<td>(C) Students' engagement in SBR and other Literacy activities.</td>
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<td>Decision making</td>
<td>- Children decide the materials to use, when and how</td>
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<td>Incidental dialogue</td>
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Focal Children's Engagement in Classroom Activities

Beyond my observation of the children's participation in classroom literacy activities, I was interested in in-depth analysis of possible similarities and differences in the children's approach to storybook reading and other literacy activities. I felt that understanding these similarities and differences in approach would shed some light both on classroom design and pedagogy. Secondly, I was interested in the way different children reacted to and made use of the resources and facilities available for their literacy learning and development. In this regard, I wanted to find out how the children interacted with others and material in this environment and how they reacted to the reading and writing activities. For these reasons, I selected four children for a special focus: Rose, David, Allen, and Cindy. This section describes these children and their responses to literacy activities, including storybook reading.

The section includes: (1) Profiles of the children, (2) Engagement in storybook reading, (3) Children's Storytelling, and (4) Engagement in other literacy activities. The profiles describe the children’s general description including family background, attitude to storybook reading, and level of participation in other literacy activities. Engagement in storybook reading, as the term is used in this study, refers to students’ interactions whenever stories were read. Children refer to this term (storybook reading) as "story time." As an extension of learning how children responded differently to stories, I asked each of them, individually, to read the story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, after the teacher read it to them. The four responded differently to my request. Two of them engaged in pretend reading. The other two shared the concern of being unable to read. However, when I asked those two to "tell" the story, they were able to recount what they
heard (See Appendix F for the transcription of Elizabeth's story telling). In an attempt to
capture these students’ engagement in other literacy activities, I observed specific
activities during work time, small and large group time, as well as during meal times.

Rose

Profile

Rose was an extremely shy and quiet girl from a biracial relationship. She had an
older sister who read to her regularly. She enjoyed storybook reading and was usually
attentive during that activity. She rarely commented or questioned, but her attentiveness
was remarkable. The teacher often planned activities for Rose to interact with her peers
since she preferred to be alone.

Engagement in Storybook Reading

Rose's engagement during storybook reading was generally one of passive participation.
She was usually very quiet and would not respond as the other students did. However,
she was a very attentive listener. This was evident in her expressions while listening.
She followed the teacher's expressions and even imitated some of it depending on the
story. Also, Rose was able to retell the story at the end of the storybook reading activity.
Although Rose was very passive during the story circle when all the children were
present, she was very animated when she made the storybook selection herself. The
following illustration shows how Rose's engagement during storybook reading with an
adult allowed her to be actively involved.

Rose had asked the teacher’s aide to read her a story. She pulled me to
join them on a pillow so I could listen to the story too. She sat in the
aide’s lap and listened to the story, *This is Your Garden*. When the aide
asked Rose if the flower in the picture looked like her plant, Rose walked
towards the shelf saying, "I'll show you." When she returned with the
plant, she asked me to look at it and smell it. She said, "It smell like
oatmeal." After the teacher’s aide completed the book, Rose took the book and began to look at the pictures that showed flowers and bees. She asked: "Is this a bumble bee? Why it is here?" The teacher’s aide explained that bees like sweet things. “That’s why it’s on the flower.” Then Rose asked if the flowers on that page were for the girl in the story. Rose went back to the front page of the book where there were small pictures of what you need to plant such as, seeds, sun, and clock. She said that these were the tools that the girl used. Rose started to explain how each of these was used. When she reached the clock, she said: "but I didn't see any clock in here (in the story)." Then Rose looked at the page where all kinds of flowers were there with their names below. She asked about all the kinds of flowers, their names. Then she pointed at the bugs in the picture of the flowers, saying: worms, ladybug, bumblebee, they are all coming to her garden. Beth told Rose that she could talk to her plant. Rose kissed her plant and said she would name it Christine. She said that she would take her plant outside with her to grow. When Beth told her she could talk to her plant, Rose commented: "Just like the story." Then she looked at the book again to compare what she did with the pictures of the tools needed in planting and she said: "It (her plant) will need some seeds like the story," and went to get some seeds. Later Rose came to me to show me how she added seeds and covered the plant with dirt to the top. I told her that the plant cannot breathe if it was covered with the dirt and may not grow. She asked me: “How can we save it." We went to the water table, which contained the dirt and emptied the can. She planted the plant in a small pot and watered it; then she put a cup beneath to prevent the water from spilling everywhere. She was so happy that she was telling everybody that she saved her plant.

Rose also displayed a love for books and reading. On one occasion, she pulled a storybook from the bookshelf and sat in the rug area and started to read the book as if there were an audience in front of her. She held the book up looking at the picture and pretended to read the story (see Appendix E, picture 28a). When I approached her, she told me that I needed to sit in front of her so I could see the story. Rose kept reading to me until she read me four books. Also, while reading Rose paid great attention to pictures and attempted to read words. The following illustration demonstrates Rose's interest in storybook reading:

Rose picked five stories from the bookshelf. She asked me to choose one for her to read me and she was supposed to pick one to read. She chose a
snake book. When I chose the story time book, she said: “You should choose the moose book.” She held the moose book and the snake book in her hands, raised them and said: "These are the best ones.” I chose the moose book as she suggested. She started to read me the book she chose first. She sat in front of me on the rug beside the shelf and started to read or pretend to read me the story while she was holding the book up for me to see. Some times she was pointing at the words as she was reading. While I was taking notes while she was reading, she stopped and told me as if she were an adult: "You are not listening. Put that thing down." I explained to her that I was writing what she was reading me so I wouldn't forget. Then she started to remind me, from time to time, to write down what she said. At the last page she showed me the picture of the author and said: "This is the picture of the author.” Then Rose read me the story *What Use is a Moose?* She did a great job reading it. She read it based on the pictures. However, she used many vocabulary words from the book and her story matched the pictures and the print on each page. When she reached a page where the Moose was going to be the mom’s chauffeur, she wasn't sure about the word and asked me, "What that says." When I told her chauffeur, She read: "You can be my driver." The story she read was like the following: "You can be the hanger to hang the cloth on. That won't work. You can be mom’s driver. That wouldn't work. You can be mom's daughter. That's won't work. I am a good moose; I can clean up. Not that way! Not that way! Get out of here you are a bad moose. But I want my moose." By the end of the story Rose faced the book toward herself. She was very interested and reading the book with great tone and facial expression. She was concentrating on the book and she didn't care about the noise around her. At the last page of the story, Rose showed me the picture and said: “You're a good moose.” It seemed that she knew that stories have happy endings. Rose ended up asking me: "Are you writing? Write this down."

**Rose's Storytelling**

- *The Big Caterpillar* (Title)
- One day it was laid on the egg, Pop! Opened the egg.
- Pop! Open the egg
- One day he ate through one apple, and it was still hungry
- He ate two pears, and it was still hungry
- One day, he ate 3 plums, and it was still hungry
- One day he ate (counting), 1,2,3,4, strawberries, and it was still hungry
- One day he ate four apples, and it was still hungry
- And one day he ate a cake, a nice ice cream, and pickles, a cheese, slice of (what is called) salami, a lollipop, and a cherry pie, and slice of weenie, a birthday cup cake, and a watermelon.
- He ate a leaf and it made him feel better.
- He make him a cone and when he came out,
• He was a big butterfly
• The end.

The following observations were made about Rose's story:

Rose imitated Elizabeth in every way possible. She told the story with great facial expression and variation in her voice. She started with the title of the book. She seemed to know that a story had a beginning and an end. She started her story with "one day" and ended her story with "the end." Rose gave more details than any of the other children could. She started most of the sentences with "one day" and ended them with "It was still hungry." Rose pointed at the pictures while reading. She remembered almost every thing Elizabeth read. For example, she recalled the caterpillar’s cocoon. Although she said the wrong word (cone), it was clear what she meant to say. Overall, Rose seemed to be able to recall the story with almost all the details. She also seemed to be aware of the story’s structure. She knew how to begin the story and how to end it. She told the story in a structural order and the right sequence. The match between the text and the retelling was very close.

Engagement in Other Literacy Activities

Rose's Reading Characteristics

Play Reading

Rose often engaged in play reading during the work time activity. This was sometimes a solitary activity for Rose. At times, she would seek an audience by asking an adult to sit with her. Play reading for Rose meant naming the pictures and making up stories while looking at the pictures. While reading Rose would use a reading voice and
reading expressions. The following illustrates how Rose could also play read from memory:

At the rug area, Rose sat on a chair with a binder in her hand. When I asked her about it, she said: “it is the song book.” She asked me to sing some of the songs for her. I told her that I could read it to her, but not sing it because I never heard of them before. She started with a song about the three little pigs. She read many of the sentences, while she was pointing at them that were there, but not in the right order. Then she sang *Mary Had a Little Lamb* and *Humpty Dumpty*. I sang with her. She remembered many parts of the song (see Appendix E, picture 28b).

**Reading Awareness**

Rose was aware that a story has a beginning, middle, and end. When she play read, she always began with "Once upon a time" and said "the end" at completion. She was curious about the print displayed in the classroom and would ask about it. For example, during lunch time, Rose asked Elizabeth, while pointing at the poster which hung on the wall behind Elizabeth: "What is that say?" Elizabeth replied, "It says welcome to our class, and it has every one’s name."

**Reading Skills**

Rose was able to identify her own name in the classroom. After the teacher had shared with Rose that the Welcome poster had all the children's names, Rose was able to identify her name by the first letter. On other occasions, when she used her toothbrush after lunch, she ran to the teacher saying: "I matched my name on the toothbrush holder." Sure enough, Rose had placed her toothbrush in the correct holder. Rose also displayed recognition that words have a symbolic representation. She tried to read words from the posters displayed in the classroom. On one occasion, after story time, the children went to their small groups. However, Rose stayed in my lap looking at the songs on the wall. She asked me to read one of them while she pointed at it. I read it for her once. Then she
said: "read it again, I didn't hear you." I read it again and asked her if she could read it and she read it as follows:

There was an old woman
Who lived in a shoe
Some soup with no bread
She send them to bed after spank them.

Reading Development

Rose read by naming and commenting on the pictures. She also believed that pictures should accompany words. She usually asked about the pictures if they were not visible. The following illustration demonstrates Rose's understanding that pictures highlight words:

When the children went inside, they washed their hands and sat on the rug at the gathering area. Elizabeth sat on the rug too, with the auto harp instrument in her hand. She had a book of the tunes for the songs that the children would sing. When the children were all there, we all sang the song. The children tried the song with Elizabeth while clapping. After that the children sang the lunch song and went to the tables. Rose stayed with Elizabeth asking her to see the song they were singing. Rose asked Elizabeth while pointing at the page “what does that say?” When Elizabeth read the page, which was about the six white horses, Rose asked Elizabeth where it said “the six horses.” When Elizabeth showed her, Rose asked: “Why the picture doesn’t show the six horses?” Rose reached the point that she knew that the illustration was related to the print or words.

Rose displayed reading development through her attempts to play at reading. She looked for pictures as cues for identifying words. For example, she could identify most of the children in her class by reading the pictures (symbols are given to each child to go along with their names) rather than the print.

After the toothbrush activity, the children gathered at the rug area with the educational toys and games. Rose held my hand and asked me to sit with her by the daily helper's (octopus) board. She collected all the children’s name symbol cards and asked me to pretend to be some of the children and choose the work I wanted to do. Then, I asked her if she could read the names of the children on the cards. At each card, Rose would pause
for a moment and think, then say the name. She knew all the names except for three of them.

Rose's Writing Characteristics

Writing as Art

Rose displayed an understanding of writing. She used writing with art to convey ideas. On one occasion, I helped Rose make a book based on the story If You Give a Mouse a Cookie. We were listening to the story on tape sitting by a wall that had a large painting of animals, mountains, and trees. When the lady on the tape said something about making your own story, I asked Rose what she thought about it. Rose identified the painting of the elephant on the wall as the animal she wanted to write about. We began by using several blank pages. On the first page I wrote the title she wanted. The following shows Rose's use of art to convey her story, "If You Give an Elephant a Cookie."

Rose pointed at the words on the cover page and said: "This say if you give a Elephant a cookie." She was telling me what she was drawing. She drew the juice and a cup. When Elizabeth said it was clean up time, Rose sounded disappointed.
Rose: "It’s clean up time!"
Salwa: "That’s okay, tomorrow I am going to bring the story and we can finish drawing as much as we can. I am going to bring it with me every day."
Rose: "But we don't know what page we are."
Salwa: “I know. I have numbered the pages, see”(showing her the numbers on the bottom of the pages).
Rose: “You're going in your car?”
Salwa: “Yes.”
Rose: “Okay.”
She started to draw the cover page. She drew a refrigerator with the juice and cup in it. Then, she drew watermelon in the refrigerator: "He is gonna eat watermelon." She asked me to write the words for the things she drew down on the page. She was telling me the words to write.
Then she drew a woman: "This is a woman. I made a woman now." Then she drew a bowl of cookies on the refrigerator and said: "This is a bowl of cookie."
When I asked her why she drew a woman when the story is about the elephant, Rose said: "This is a woman. The woman will feed the elephant.
And this is her little boy." Then she drew the elephant beside the refrigerator. She was describing the elephant while drawing it. "This is the eyes, this is the cheek."

I told her that we did the cover page. She told me that I didn't write the cookie and said: "Write cookie."

Rose took a total of twelve days to draw and color each page. (See Appendix G)

**Play Writing**

Rose frequently engaged in play writing. When she did, she provided random symbols and could say what they meant. For example, on a field trip Rose said: "I am going to take notes when we get to the hospital." She wrote down two symbols and when I asked her what she wrote, she said: "Safety places." See Figure 5. Rose was also able to differentiate what was play writing and real writing. On one occasion, another child approached me to write something in my notepad. After she wrote some scribbles and left, Rose smiled and said: "That's not writing." When I asked her why she thought it was not, she said: "No, that’s not writing, because this doesn't look like yours" (pointing at my writings). Rose did not only model adults reading, she also modeled their writing. For example, once she tried to write her name and she could not. That's when she asked me to write it so that she can copy it. Later she asked me to write other words and she copied them as well (see Figure 6).
Figure 5: Example of Rose's writing about "safety places."

Figure 6: Example of Rose modeling adult writing
David

Profile

David was a four-year-old, African-American boy. He was very enthusiastic and energetic, but maintained good behavior in the classroom. He followed the class rules and would usually tell others when they were not doing the right thing. He was very expressive and, during storybook reading, he was one of the very fluent children, asking or telling with details. David was known for his responsible attitude and his love for story time.

Engagement in Storybook Reading

David's engagement during storybook reading was one of active participation. He was very interested in books and enjoyed stories even when he felt unwell. Once, when David was not feeling well, Elizabeth allowed him to lie down on a floor bed. I approached him and asked him how he felt. He said he had a pain in his stomach and that he felt pain all over his body. However, he said that he would feel okay when story time came. He said that he liked stories and he wouldn't miss it. Elizabeth came to him and asked him how he was doing; David said: "I feel hurt everywhere." Elizabeth asked him if she could touch his forehead. Then she told him that if he didn't feel better, she would call his Mom. Later, he sat in my lap for story time.

When David was happy and well, he responded enthusiastically during the story. He always sought to give comments or ask questions. He also tried to make sense of the story and make connections to what he has heard before. On one occasion when the teacher was reading The True Story of The Three Little Pigs, David’s responses
demonstrated how engaged he could be during storybook reading. When the teacher read the part about the wolf needing a cup of sugar, David said loudly:

David: "That’s not the real story"
Elizabeth: "Stories have different sides. We've heard the story from the little pigs. Who do you think is telling the story now?"
David: "The bad wolf and I don't like him."
Elizabeth: “This is the real story.”
As Elizabeth continued reading, David became interested so much that he was able to predict what the second pig did.
Elizabeth: "The second pig"
David (interrupting Elizabeth): "The second pig made his house from sticks."
Elizabeth: "Yes"
David: "Who will do that?"
Elizabeth: "I don't know."
David: "Bears would knock it down."

Although, he was often engaged during storybook reading, he could be easily distracted. Yet he was able to recall aspects of the story or fill in missing information. For example, when the teacher was reading *The Baby Duck and the Bad Eye-Glasses*, David was able to complete a sentence:

Elizabeth (reading): "Baby trout 1,2,3, and she did not fall down and her glasses"
David: " Did not Fall."
Elizabeth: "How did you know?"
David: "Because of the picture."
Later in the story when Elizabeth spelled the word B-A-B-Y, David said loudly: "Baby."

David's enjoyment during storybook reading was very obvious. He displayed the ability to read words and understand stories more than any other child in this Head Start classroom did.

David's Storytelling

- We need a leaf first. You need to sit on a leaf.
- *The caterpillar* (Title).
- In the morning, no, in the night, when she did that (claps), it pops out. It was a HUNGRY CATERPILLR.
• The caterpillar ate one apple, two pears, 3 plums, (counting), five cherries, oranges.
• And he ate a chocolate cake, ice cream, pickles, cheese, slice of salami, lollipop, raspberry pie, and sausage and cup cake, piece of watermelon.
• He wanted so now he can feel better.
• He ate some leaves.
• He got bigger
• And he was a beautiful butterfly. That is it.

The following observations were made about David's story:

David started by asking for the props that Elizabeth used in presenting the story. He wanted to present the story exactly as Elizabeth did. David told the story with great facial expression and enjoyment. He acted like Elizabeth by clapping and saying "pop" for the egg to crack. He started with the title of the book and remembered many details in the story. He started off naming the right fruits and the amounts until he got to the strawberries. He mistook the strawberries for cherries and counted five instead of four. Generally, David gave enough details on each page and told the story in fundamental order and with enthusiasm.

Engagement In Other Literacy Activities.

David's Reading Characteristics

Play Reading

David engaged in play reading. He imitated his teacher's reading voice and reading expressions. When David read, he usually read from memory. He was able to make up a story while looking at pictures. For example, when I showed him four pictures, David was able to put them in order and make up a meaningful story based on the pictures. (See Appendix H)
David: "Once upon a time there was a little boy who made a cake. First he mixed up the thing, and then he put it in the oven. And then when it was baked, he took it out and he put the strawberries on there. And then when he got done, he put it, then it sliced and sliced the cake."

Salwa: "Great! Do you want to say something more about this story?"

David: "The story is about a little boy who ____ up and it was a good story but if I don't get time to finish, we can ___ away. And this little story about this boy who made a cake. It was a goodest little boy. He made all of it. That’s it."

Salwa: "Wow, that’s a wonderful story. Now that you made up this story, what can you call it? What could be the title?"

David "The Little Boy Who Made a Cake "Now I’m going to do this. And I’m going to have to get it all right. OK "

Salwa: "All right."

David: "Once upon a time, there was two children who was outside on Christmas. They rolled up a ball, then they put the ball over the top, and then they rolled it up under their ____. That was the boy here. And then they rolled up another ball and then they put that ball on top, and then they rolled up a little baby ball and then put it on top. And then they put carrots, they put a carrot for his nose, and buttons for his mouth."

Salwa: "Great! This is a wonderful story."

**Reading Awareness**

That David was able to create his own story demonstrates that he knows story structure and is able to give the main idea and add details. He was also aware of print and would ask for any adult to read printed information from items as well as from books. The following three examples highlight this characteristic in David:

**Example 1**: While the children were having cereal for breakfast (Cheerios), Elizabeth read on the back of the box: "free Fruitopia juice." David, who was sitting beside her, took the box and looked at it. He noticed the different kinds of Cheerios that were on the back of the cereal box. He asked Elizabeth to read the different kind of Cheerios on the box: "What these say?" The teacher read the names of the cereal to him. (see Appendix E, picture 29).

**Example 2**: The children opened the craft book to the Table of Contents. When Elizabeth read to them the contents each child would pick up what he wanted. When David joined in he was pointing at the words asking: "What is this?" Elizabeth told him the topics he asked about. Then he said that there were pretty things in the book.
Example 3: Elizabeth wrote children's plans on avocado shaped note-paper. In his plan, David said: “I'll help you get the kids settled and go to work time.” After Elizabeth read all the children's plans, David asked to identify the children's plans by reading their names on their paper notes.

Reading Skills

David understood that words are composed of alphabet letters, as was noted in the spelling of his name when asked by one of his peers. The three of us were sitting together. The girl had just written one of the children's names when she looked at me and asked:

Sally: "How to write David?"
Salwa: "D, O, (turning to David) could you help her write David?"
David: " It's D, A, V, I, D"

Similarly, David had an understanding of letter-sound relationships. He knows that the letter "D" can sounds like "duh" and "Dee," and that in his name the letter "D" say "Duh." This knowledge was transferred to other words that he would read from time to time.

David was aware that symbols made up words and that each word conveys an idea. I observed this reading skill in one of our reading activities. David and I read three stories together. I asked him to choose a book to read and he picked up If You Give A Mouse A Cookie. He started with the title. He remembered the story very well. I was amused while reading the story. He brought the second story and asked me to read the title with him. He pointed at the words while reading. While I read I moved my fingers quickly across each sentence. David said "no" and began pointing at each word. He asked me to read each word as he pointed to them.
David’s Writing Characteristics

Writing as Art

David engaged in writing words that he saw around the classroom. He participated in writing activities whenever the occasion arose during class. For example, when a small group of children were engaged in writing the classroom helpers, David was eager to join in. He asked if he could write down the next job which was "Stack chairs."

Play Writing

David engaged in pretend writing. He was aware that writing has a purpose and that one can return to it after it is written. During one of the work time sessions, I observed David's engagement in play writing. While I was sitting with Elizabeth and Cindy, who were working on an art activity making a smiling face, David approached Elizabeth with a hair roller in hand and said that he wanted more of that to fix some hair. Elizabeth told him that since it was almost clean-up time, he could do it tomorrow if he wanted. Then she asked him what she could do to remember; he said, "write a note." David took a piece of paper and wrote a note. I asked him what he was writing and he said: "I want to use stuff you fix the hair with and I want to fix every body's hair." Elizabeth asked him to put it somewhere that every one could see it. He stuck it on one of the tables. David's understanding of writing was also demonstrated later on during the year. The following illustration shows that:

One of the teacher’s aides, at the other table, found a nutrition activity on the cereal box and told Elizabeth about it. Elizabeth shared that with the children on her table: "Did you hear what Carolyn said? There is a nutrition activity on the back of the box. Meaning we make a kind of food." I was writing my notes when David asked me: "You write it so you
don't forget the recipe?" When I said yes, he asked me: "Why? For your son? Does he like Kix?" Then he asked Elizabeth to let him see the box.

**Phonetic Representation**

David demonstrated interest in written representation of word sounds. He was aware that letters have sounds and can be combined so that the composed words have meaning. This was noted when David attempted to write the words "football gloves." (see Appendix E, pictures 30a, 30b). The experience is demonstrated in the following dialogue.

When the children were almost done, David asked for a pen and a paper saying he wanted to write something down. He brought a note pad and a pen and started to write letters randomly (P R N F E R). He asked Elizabeth to read what he wrote. Elizabeth told him that was not a word and tried to spell it for him. She explained to him that he wrote letters and that letters have sounds and names. Then Elizabeth said the name of each letter while David said the sound. David had a word in his mind that he wanted to write. He wasn't sure what that thing was called. He tried to explain to Elizabeth what he was trying to write. He: "football girl." Then he drew something close to a glove. When Elizabeth wasn't really sure what he meant, he stood up and acted as if he were holding something that had been thrown to him and said, "the thing you hold ball with." Elizabeth told him he was talking about the gloves and he smiled and said yes. David told Elizabeth that he wanted to write it, but he didn't know how to write it down. Elizabeth told him the sounds of the letters while David said the letter and wrote it down. He was able to write all the letters of the word gloves except for the letter “G” which Elizabeth helped him with. Then he read the word slowly with Elizabeth. He pronounced the word while Elizabeth pointed at the letters. When I asked David if I could keep the note he wrote, he said that he would sign his name on it and give it to me, and so he did.

**Allen**

**Profile**

Allen was a four-year-old, white male of Appalachian background. He was the oldest child in the family. His younger siblings were twin boys. Allen was a very curious child who questioned everything that was new to him. He enjoyed putting things
together. Most times, one could find Allen in the block area trying to put things together. During story time Allen was generally alert. He often liked working more with adults than with kids his age.

**Engagement in Storybook Reading**

Allen was very engaged during storybook reading. He listened attentively and usually asked a lot of questions. Often the questions did not directly relate to the story. Often they had to do with the book conventions that the teacher shared with the children every day. He was interested in the author or the illustrator. At one point, Allen constantly asked, "who is it for?" It took a while for the teacher to recognize that he meant to whom was the story dedicated. From that time onward, the teacher began reading the dedication page. This situation revealed that Allen was accustomed to books and that reading stories was a regular routine for him. He was also very observant about the storybook read to them. At one time I made this observation:

Allen: "Why the book is not yellow any more?"
Elizabeth: "The reason that the book is not yellow because I put the book on a machine called a Xerox machine."
Allen: "I want to paint it."
Elizabeth: "Well you can help to be the illustrator. I copied the book so that I will have a copy to read. I didn't color it."
Allen: "I want to be the illustrator"
Gilly: "I want to be the author."
Elizabeth: "You can illustrate it at work time."

Allen likes physical contact during storybook reading; that is, he would often sit on an adult's lap to listen to the story. I observed this time and again during storybook reading time. Even when the teacher read to a small group of two or three children, Allen would find his way into the group and into the teacher's lap. For example, on one occasion, Elizabeth was sitting in the gathering place reading a story for Gilly who was
sitting on her side. A few minutes later, Sally joined them, interested, and sat on the other side of Elizabeth. Allen came along and stood over them listening very carefully to Elizabeth who was looking over at Allen while she was reading. Gradually, Allen found himself space in Elizabeth's lap and sat. When the teacher’s aide came with Allen's toothbrush asking him to brush his teeth, Allen took the toothbrush and said that he would brush his teeth after the story was over. He listened to the rest of the story with the toothbrush in his hand.

Allen sometimes engaged in reading on his own. He would select a book from the bookshelf and sit reading to himself. Reading for him was looking at the illustrations and making up stories. Some times, if it were a familiar story, he would say some of the vocabulary words that he had heard the teacher saying. Allen’s use of familiar vocabulary was always evident during storybook reading. For example, I noted his use of the vocabulary he had heard before when the story Hills of Fire was read to the class. The story was about a village that was situated close to a volcano.

Allen's interest in racing cars was also highlighted through storybook reading. One day he discovered a book on the shelf and brought it for me to read. The next day, he found the book again and brought it back for me to read. I read him the book again. He remembered many of the things I shared within him the day before. Allen kept asking me about the story again. He asked me to read the written words on the racecars. Then he took my note pad and drew a racing car with the lights and wheels.

Allen's Storytelling

- The hungry caterpillar (Title)
- Ate one, it was hungry, ate 2 pears, 1, 3, 4, four strawberries
- Uhhh . . . 1 strawberries, 2 strawberries, 3 strawberries, 4 strawberries. Ate strawberry and another one, another one another one,
• The next day he had one cake, One pickle, one pizza, one cheese, one salami, one lollipop, one, blueberry cake pie, one sausage, one blueberry muffin, one watermelon.
• The next day he ate 2 green, 1,2,3,4, leaves.
• The next day he got. He is a fat caterpillar.
• Turn into a beautiful butterfly.
• The hungry caterpillar. (Title.)

The following observations were made about Allen's story:

Although Allen was very interested and attentive when Elizabeth read the story, he was not focused on what he was reading when I asked him later to read it to me. He was almost whispering while telling the story. He started the story with the title and ended the story with the title too. He paused throughout the story and took the time to think about what he saw on each page. Some times, instead of using complete sentences, Allen used fragments. Generally, Allen read the pictures and misnamed many of the pictures (i.e. strawberries, pizza). It was hard for me to understand what he was saying because most of the time he was mumbling.

Engagement In Other Literacy Activities

Allen's Reading Characteristics

Play Reading

Allen engaged in reading play like most of his peers in this Head Start classroom. He attempted to read his own notes when was at play. I noticed this when Allen made a plan for the next day to make play-dough. He pretended to write while Elizabeth called out the recipe. The following day, Allen went to the art area with his "note" and pretended to read what he had written before. Although he had not remembered all the information, he was able to say a few words such as water, salt, and flour. Together he and the teacher made the play-dough along with the other children. This display of
reading was rarely carried over to story reading. Allen was one of those children who would not sit for a long time pretending to read a story. He would rather play with blocks and other manipulative objects.

**Reading Skills**

Allen was able to identify single words from rote. One example of this was when Allen was given the job of classroom helper. From continual repetition of his peer's names, he was able to identify their names when appeared on personal items. I observed this one morning after breakfast. Allen's experience is demonstrated in the following illustration:

Allen and I did the toothbrush job. Allen was giving the students their brushes and I put some paste on the bottom of their cups. Allen was able to identify the children's brushes by their names. On two occasions I had helped him figure out the names on the toothbrushes. However, he was able to say most of the names.

Allen also used picture clues to predict what words may say. For example, he sometimes looked at the picture or logo on the box and say that it was giving him directions to build a house. Allen could identify some letters on the typewriter. He was constantly working on the typewriter pretending to write by calling out the letters that he knew.

**Allen’s Writing Characteristic**

**Writing as Art**

Allen saw writing as drawing and engaged in this activity whenever he could. He constantly asked adults to help him with drawing familiar items such as people. He had an eye for detail and often added relevant information. One day he asked me to draw a shoe:

Allen: "Can you make a shoe?"
Salwa: "Do you want me to draw a shoe or write shoe?"
Allen: "Draw a shoe."
(After I drew the shoe, Allen asked)
Allen: "Draw the other pair."
(After I drew the other pair...)
Allen: "Now, draw the person in the shoe."
Salwa: "I will draw the person and then I will draw the shoes. Do you want me to draw a boy or a girl?"
Allen: "A boy."
(I drew the boy with no hair or ears.)
Salwa: "Do you like it."
He took my pen and added the hair and drew two ears for the boy. (See Figure 7)

Figure 7. Allen's example of writing as art

Another time when we were on a field trip, Allen wanted help to draw a racecar.
When I did, he drew the ocean below the car. He then asked me to draw a "mean fish."
That’s when I drew him a shark and he said: "Do you know that sharks are so mean and we can't shoot them any more because they aren't many of them." Allen then remarked that we had done a lot of writing. Allen recognized that drawings could convey ideas as was evident in his request for the book about volcanoes. He was very interested in this book and wanted to draw the volcano to take home. When they were in the art area, Allen said to the teacher's aide: "Would you bring the book so I can draw the volcano?"

(see Appendix E, picture 31a)

**Play Writing**

Allen also pretended to play write, and often attempted to write his name (see Figure 8). He would scribble-write whatever thoughts he had on paper or conversations shared by his peers. At one recall time, Allen took the opportunity to pretend-write as the children talked about their plans for the day. The following illustration shows Allen's experience with writing play:

At recall time, we all sat at the rug area in a circle. Each child was supposed to share his plans and what he did. Allen grabbed a note pad and pencil and told the teacher that he wanted to write down the children's recall. While the children were sharing, Allen was scribbling on the note pad. One of the kids chose to use a puppet while she recalled her plans. So did the rest of the children. Tabitha shared her story of being mad at the paper puncher that did not work, in detail. Allen said, "that is so much plan, there is not enough room to write it all down."

Allen was aware that writing conveys meaning when read. He used writing to convey a message to his peers to reserve a specific swing in the playground by writing his name. Allen's interest in writing the message is shown below:

During recess, Allen was playing on the swing. He taped both sides of the swing. When he was asked about that he said because he wanted to. When the tape was cut off, Allen said: "tapes make me angry." Carolyn asked Allen again about the reason for using the tape and he said: "I put a thing to make a sign for tomorrow." Elizabeth asked him if there were
other ways of putting signs and Allen said that he could also make sign using marker and paper. He asked me if he could use my note pad. When I gave it to him, he wrote his name, some letters of his name. While Allen was writing his name, Elizabeth was reading the letters he wrote: "A I T N. Elizabeth wasn't sure about the letter “N” when he wrote it first, then she said it was an “N.” That’s when Allen said that he had “N” in his name and Elizabeth said that she had “N” in her name too. After Allen finished writing his name Elizabeth asked him: "how would the others know what this says?" Allen answered easily: "they will read it." Then he asked me to take his picture on the swing with the sign he taped. (see Appendix E, picture 31b)

![Figure 8: Example of Allen play-writing his name.](image)

Cindy

Profile

Cindy was a white, four-year-old girl. She had an older sister and a younger brother. She had lot of books at home and was a very interested in storybook reading
with her peers. She was very sociable and engaged in role-play. Her creativity was best seen during art activities. She spent most of her time in the art area.

**Engagement in Storybook Reading**

Repeating words, phrases, or comments made by her peers showed Cindy’s engagement during storybook reading. She responded based on cues given and might comment or ask questions if she did not understand a concept. Her questions were mostly about illustrations. Cindy was very interested in the illustrations and would question the teacher if there were any differences; once she noted: "Why the story is not colored?" If the illustrations were outstanding, Cindy would say so. When the teacher was reading the storybook *The Rainbow Fish*, Cindy said: "That's one cool artist. When you move the book the color of the fish changes." Storybook reading was an enjoyable experience for Cindy because of the social engagement with friends. It appeared that Cindy had access to books at home. On one occasion when the teacher showed the class a new book she was about to read, Cindy said: "I saw that book because I borrowed it." Cindy also appeared to understand what might be real or unreal. When the teacher read *Jasper's Beanstalk*, Cindy commented: "There is no such thing as a giant beanstalk."

Perhaps it was this access to books other than at school that limited her engagement in solitary reading. I rarely observed her select books and read on her own. She seemed to enjoy doing other activities with friends. However, when a new book was introduced Cindy would be excited and would want to sit on her teacher's lap. I noted this with the story of *Grandpa's Teeth*. Apparently it was also a favorite for Cindy since I observed her asking one of the adults in the class to read the book to her and two other friends.
Cindy also looked for ways in which she could add details to a story. When the teacher told the children the story of *The Rooster and the Sultan*, Cindy was so interested that she offered her art works for the teacher to use in telling the story. When Elizabeth told the part about the Sultan living in the castle, Cindy brought a picture of a castle she had drawn and her crown. She put it on the carpet and Elizabeth said that that was the castle where the sultan lived and that was his crown (see Appendix E, picture 15a).

Cindy's Storytelling

- He cracked out of a little egg.
- It went on a leaf
- He ate one apple, two pears, one (what are these?) 3 plums, (counting) five cherries, 6 strawberries.
- He ate a cake, ice cream, pickles, some cheese, sausage, a lollipop, and some pizza, some sausage, a cup cake, a watermelon.
- Then he got on (what?) The caterpillar is climbing on the ---stem.
- It wasn't a little caterpillar any more. It turned into a beautiful caterpillar, no I mean a beautiful butterfly.

The following observations were made about Cindy's story:

Cindy started by giggling and saying that she could not read. When I asked her to tell me the story and not read it, she did with a sort of shyness. Cindy did not start with the title; she went directly into the story. She seemed to tell the story by reading the pictures. When she came across some pictures that she was not familiar with (e.g. plums’ stems), she would ask about them. Like David, she mistook the four strawberries with the five cherries. She also mistook the five oranges with six strawberries, the salami with the sausage, and the pie with pizza. Over all, Cindy was able to know the main theme of the story. She used her own words in telling the story by looking at the pictures on each page.
Engagement In Other Literacy Activities

Cindy’s Reading Characteristics

Play Reading

Cindy pretended to read books, posters, and any print in the classroom. She could recognize single letters in words and name them. I observed this one day during lunch. Cindy's eyes fell on a poster that displayed the senses. She got up and walked toward the poster and pointed to the word "touch." She said: "I know what is this. It is a C."

Reading Skills

Cindy was not only able to identify individual letters in words, but also could identify them when written. She could differentiate between letters and words, as was noted on a field trip when I sat next to her in the bus. This experience is illustrated below:

Cindy asked me to write something. She started to fill the columns with letters and numbers. When I asked her what she did, she said: "a calendar. These are letters (pointing at first line). Theses are numbers (pointing at second line). These are letters (pointing at third line). These are the letters (pointing at fourth line)." Cindy identified some letters including letters of her name.

Cindy's interest lay in the craft book she found in the art area. Perhaps Cindy realized that the pictures in the craft book could be created by following the words found below them. This knowledge allowed her to build upon her interest in castles. She created an entire fairy tale scene using the patterns seen in a craft book. The teacher helped her to create the scene by showing her how to read the pictures. The following illustration shows when Cindy first begun her creation:

Cindy came to Elizabeth with the craft book telling her she was interested in making a crown, "I am making this." She asked Elizabeth to read it to her and say how to do it. Cindy told Elizabeth that she didn’t know how
to read. Elizabeth said: "You say you don't know how to read, read the pictures." Cindy started to look at the pictures and read to her. Elizabeth asked her what materials could be used to do the crown. Cindy brought a paper plate for Elizabeth. Elizabeth cut her a pattern of a crown and asked her if that size was good enough. Cindy said it was small. Elizabeth asked her what she could do. Cindy: "Bring another bigger paper." Then Elizabeth brought another larger piece of paper and asked Cindy: "Is that what you wanted?" Elizabeth showed Cindy how to fold the paper and create a crown. When Elizabeth asked her what they could do from there, Cindy said: "Color it." Cindy brought the water paint and started coloring and brought egg cartons and seashells for decoration (see Appendix E, pictures 32a, 32b).

Later on the same week Cindy made her own castle with the help of the teacher and another child (see Appendix E, pictures 32c, 32d).

Cindy used the language of literacy when reading. She was aware that words could be used to say what is happening in a picture. She would pretend to read by looking at pictures and making up suitable sentences. I used sequence cards (see Appendix H) with Cindy on a pretend reading activity. These are some of the sentences that Cindy created in response to her observation about the pictures.

Cindy: "___ one, two, three, four. I know there was going to be 4."
Salwa: "Yes, it should be four. OK, tell me what happened. Which one is first thing that happened?"
Cindy: "He was putting it out for her to sleep on and then she hug her teddy bear and she went to sleep."
Salwa: "OK, and then?"
Cindy: "She took the blanket out and then she hug her teddy bear."

Although Cindy could use suitable vocabulary when engaged in pretend reading, she was aware that words have sounds and that the act of reading involves letter-sound relationships. She could retell a story after it had been read to her, but when asked to read the story, she usually responded by saying, "I cannot read" or "I don't know how to
read." I tried to get her to read the book *A Fish out of Water* after the teacher read it for story time.

Salwa: "Would you read this book for me? What was the title of the book?"
Cindy: "Hmmm, I don’t know."
Salwa: "What is this?"
Cindy: "A fish."
Salwa: "It was a fish out of ____.
Cindy: "Hmmm. You sound it out."
Salwa: "You want me to sound this out?"
Cindy: "I mean you start it out."
Salwa: "This little fish."
Cindy: "No not like that!"
Salwa: "How?"
Cindy: "OK, just what like you did ____ I want to do it after you."
Salwa: "How do you want me to sound it out."
Cindy: "You read it and then I read it.
Salwa: "This little fish has said to Mr. Carp. I want him. I like him and he likes me. I will call him Otto."
Cindy: "Hmm, I forgot."
Salwa: "You know what?"
Cindy: "What?"
Salwa: "You don’t have to say the exact words. Just tell me what you remember from this story. Just tell me what’s happening here. What do you think?"
Cindy: "He’s pointing at the fish and then he put water in the ____ pot and then He’s going to take out the fish and then he’s going to put it in the pot."
(Cindy told the whole story wonderfully)

**Cindy’s Writing Characteristics**

**Writing as Art**

Cindy used her interest in castles to display her writing skills. One day she asked me to draw a castle. When I did she said that it was not a castle and told me she knew how to draw one. After drawing the castle, she told me that she could draw another kind and proceeded to do so. At the same time she explained what she was drawing. She included a star and a king in the picture. Each time she drew a castle, she would include more details in the picture (see Figure 9). Cindy's interest in drawing castles is explained below:
Cindy was sitting in the rug area working on her phonic notebook. She was tracing the letter “K.” After that she started to draw a castle behind that page. Cindy’s drawing was rich in details. She drew flags on the top of the castle. She described the picture by explaining that there were different sizes of fish in a lake below the castle. She drew many windows and doors for the castle. Then she drew a person on one of the windows and asked me how to write the word “help.” I wrote her the word on my note pad and she copied it beside the person. She drew as she said: "a horse and man driving on it." Then she asked me: "how you spell, "I save you?" I wrote her the sentence and she copied it on her picture. When the teacher joined us she was amazed with the picture she made. She asked Cindy if she could make a copy of the picture for me before taking it home by the Xerox machine.

Figure 9: Example of Cindy drawing a castle.
Play Writing

Cindy enjoyed play writing. She scribble-wrote and attempted to write in cursive (see Figure 10). She would often ask to use my note pad and pen to write. Once, she approached me and asked to write some thing in my note pad. When I asked her about what she wrote, she said that she wrote her name in cursive. The first two letters of her name were clear and it seemed like cursive. She could write the letters of her name correctly. The letters showed general directionality although they were different sizes (see Appendix). She could also write the names of her peers by copying the letters from the daily helper's wall chart. Once she did, she said: "I copied Kiki's name. Look!" Then she wanted her teacher to include a message along with what she copied.

Cindy: "Can you write I am still your best friend. It's a secret."

Generally, when Cindy was unable to write something she would ask an adult to write it for her. During recall time when the children were asked to write their plans, Cindy asked the teacher how to write "house area" because she wanted to include it in her plan. Elizabeth told her the letters and she wrote them down. When she came across some letters that Cindy did not know, Elizabeth wrote them on a separate paper for Cindy to copy.

Writing Awareness

When Cindy play-wrote she knew that each spoken word is a separate entity. I observed her pretending to write her plans, word by word, pausing after each and leaving a space between the words she wrote. Many of these words included random letters and she usually accompanied each writing activity with pictures. Once she wrote “M O I E
D.” She identified the letters “O,” “I,” and “E” and told me that she wanted me to write the story that the letters said. She dictated this story to me:

"It is a sunny happy day. Happy Mother day. Love you Goodbye. And I will miss you daddy."

Then she started to draw the story. She drew a house with a door and windows. She decorated it with a heart, star, and a smiling face. (See Figure 11)

Cindy used different materials to demonstrate her writing skills. When making a castle with another girl, out of an empty box, she used the yarn to make different letters of the alphabet. I observed this interaction with Cindy and her piece of yarn:

Cindy: "What letter is that?"
Elizabeth: "It looked like an O"
Cindy (smiling): "It’s O. We are making letters."
Elizabeth: "Do you know that letters make words and then words make sentences."
Cindy: "Yes."
Elizabeth: "You both have the letter O in your names."
Then, Cindy made the letters I and K. When I asked her about them she said: "I made O, K, and two I's."

Cindy was also observed using tissue papers to form the letters of her name. She would roll the tissue paper into tiny balls, place glue into paper and form the balls into letters. Cindy also pretended to write on the computer and on the typewriter. Although this equipment did not work, Cindy would use blank paper and letter stamps to print "words" and pretend that she wrote them on the computer or typewriter. She continually asked about letters that she was not sure of when she needed to write a word.
Figure 10: Example of Cindy writing in cursive

Figure 11: Example of Cindy drawing picture of a story
Patterns and Variability Across Focal Children

My observation of the children's engagement in classroom activities can be summarized into themes: (1) Engagement in storybook reading, (2) story telling, (3) reading play, (4) reading awareness, (5) reading skills, (6) reading development, (7) writing and art, (8) writing play, (9) writing awareness/development, (10) writing skills/phonemic and writing.

Engagement in Storybook Reading

The children in this Head Start classroom engaged in storybook reading in different ways based on their interest, theme of the stories, new books, and illustrations. They also played a variety of roles during storybook reading such as: passive participant, attentive listeners, active participants. They asked questions, commented on the story, pointed at words, read with the teacher, predicted words or what would happen next, repeated some words or phrases, responded enthusiastically, added to the story, connected the story to other stories they heard before, recalled aspects of the story, retold the story after it was read to them, pretended to be a teacher and read the book to others, and drew pictures based on the story.

The children also demonstrated their understanding of book conventions by asking about the author, illustrator, dedication, and illustrations. While imitating the teacher, they held the book as the teacher did, and pretended to read by looking at the pictures and some of them would point at words while reading the story.
**Story Retelling**

The children's ability to retell a story that was read to them varied. I observed the following features in their story telling: imitating the teacher; reading with variation in voice and facial expression; awareness of story structure (start with title, know that stories have beginning and ending, and follow the right sequence); mistaking some words in the book for others; pausing while reading; looking at the pictures while reading; reading with enthusiasm, enjoyment, shyness, or whispering; using their own words in reading; using complete sentences and fragments; mumbling; and asking about unfamiliar pictures or words.

**Reading Play**

In their play, the children practiced pretend-reading. They saw play reading as a solitary moment, naming pictures, making up stories while looking at pictures, using reading voices and facial expressions, imitating the teacher, attempting to read their own notes, pretending to read any print in the environment, reading notes written before, and pointing at words.

**Reading Awareness**

The children demonstrated some of their reading awareness in a variety ways. They were aware that stories had a beginning and ending. They also knew the story structure and were able to give the main idea and details and to retell stories read to them. They demonstrated awareness of print and asked adults to read the print in books and other items. They showed curiosity about the print in the classroom and would inquire about printed items by pointing at them. In pretend reading, they used the language of literacy, looked at the pictures and made suitable sentences, using suitable vocabulary.
They knew that words have meanings and sounds and that the act of reading involves letter/sound relationships.

**Reading Skills**

The children displayed their reading skills in different ways. The following skills were observed: identifying their own names and letters of their and their peers’ names; recognizing that words have symbolic representation and that each word conveys an idea; understanding that words are composed of alphabet letters; knowledge of letter-sound relationships; pointing at words while reading; and identifying single words from rote.

**Reading Development**

The children showed some reading development. They would read by naming and commenting on the pictures. They felt that words should be accompanied with pictures. They used picture cues to identify or read words. They read the print in their classroom environment. They developed some book conventions such as reading from left to right and from top to bottom. When reading a story, they also learned to begin by introducing the title of the book and the author. They began to build interest in different styles of books; they preferred books with illustrations, color, rhymes, and repetition.

**Writing as Art**

The children displayed different writing characteristics, including: writing play, writing and art, and writing. In writing and art, the children displayed their understanding of writing. They used art to convey ideas, including letters or words in their art work, and combined writing with drawing to convey ideas. The children displayed their writing skills by writing their own storybooks and by drawing and coloring the pictures.
Play Writing

The children displayed writing awareness in different ways. During their play, they used pretend-writing, scribble-writing, and random letters or symbols. They understood that writing has purpose. They were also aware that writing conveys meaning when read.

Writing Awareness/Development

They used writing to convey messages, refer to specific objects, and take notes on field trips. They wrote from left to right and from the top of the paper. They were able to perceive the differences between real writing and play writing.

Writing Skills

The children manifested several writing skills, including: writing their own names or letters of their and their peers’ names as well; writing in cursive; knowing that each word is a separate entity; awareness of the space/word relationship; asking adults to spell words for them to write; and asking adults to write words that they could not write themselves. The children established interest in names and sounds of letters and knowledge of letter/sound connection.

Table 6.2
Focal Children's Reading and Writing Characteristics*

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<th>Allen</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Cindy</th>
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Note: *As explained and illustrated in this chapter
+ : Observed characteristic
CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion

Several concerns motivated this study. Some of these were theoretical. Others were personal and professional. This chapter identifies some of the concerns and indicates the extent to which they have been addressed by the findings reported in the last chapter. To a very large extent, this study was based on the theory of “emergent literacy,” with particular reference to language acquisition, classroom management, and pedagogy. On a general level, I was interested in finding out the extent to which the concept of emergent literacy can applied in a practical setting and the nature of its influence on teaching, learning, and related activities in that setting.

Personal and professional concerns evolved from my experience as a kindergarten teacher in the Kuwaiti educational system where I observed young children struggling to learn standard Arabic. The experiences of these children re-emphasized the need for a more useful model to facilitate their language acquisition and transition from informal Arabic to formal Arabic and, also give Kuwaiti kindergarten children a firmer language base to build upon for higher grade levels.

The discussion in this chapter addresses those concerns. The presentation is in three parts. Part one discusses the concept of “emergent literacy” as it was observed in an actual classroom setting, with particular reference to the interface between storybook reading and other literacy activities in early literacy education. Part two examines the implications of some of the major findings of the study for educational practices and
children’s language learning and development. Part three explores the relevance and applicability of “emergent literacy” to Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms.

Theoretical Implications

The central tenet of emergent literacy is that language development begins at infancy and continues throughout life. This, as has been observed (Chapter Two), is a rejection of traditional beliefs and the so-called "reading readiness paradigm" and maturationalist theory which assumed that there is a point of readiness in young children when reading and writing can occur, and never before that time. Based on those assumptions, considerable research effort was made to identify "mental" and "experience" factors that, presumably, determined the child's "reading readiness." The influence of these presumptions in education and instructional practices have been examined (see Teale & Sulzby, 1986). For example, instruction in reading and writing could not begin until children had acquired a set of prerequisite skills. Secondary writing skills could not be taught simultaneously with reading. Writing had to wait until children had learned to read. Moreover, children’s previous experience was very largely ignored, with emphasis given to the presumed “logical sequence” of formal skills.

The inadequacies of the reading readiness paradigm and maturationalist theory have been recognized. Recent language-acquisition research indicates that oral and written language proficiency tend to develop simultaneously (Teal & Sulzby, 1986). Research evidence further emphasizes the importance of early childhood and environmental print awareness in the development of literacy. Contrary to the maturationalist belief that the neural processes necessary for reading and writing develop
automatically at appropriate points in the child’s life, the evidence seems to suggest that children learn to read and write long before formal instruction at school. Moreover, they learn those skills concurrently and complementarily. It is now believed that children develop literacy from real-life situations in which they use reading and writing to "get things done." Very importantly too, children are believed to develop literacy through active engagement and social interaction with adults (e.g., by listening to stories read to them).

This section examines the findings reported in the previous chapters in light of those theoretical assumptions. It also signifies other observations that seem to go beyond the six widely accepted tenets of emergent literacy.

**Children Learn to Read and Write Long Before Formal Instruction at School**

The belief is that children exhibit reading and writing behaviors very early in their development. For example, most of them are able to identify signs and labels, as well as name common objects in their homes and community. They tend to experiment with reading by modeling adult behaviors in pretend reading. They experiment with writing by drawing and scribbling (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Research also suggests that there is no specific age for children to be ready for reading and writing. It is believed, however, that there is a point at which children have sufficient information about reading. Eventually, they begin to see relationships between symbols, print, and spoken language. This aspect of emergent literacy was substantiated in my observation of the children in this Head Start classroom. The teacher explained that:

Reading begins LONG before that. Children need to understand that the symbols [they can identify] have meanings. Symbols like the McDonalds’ sign, or the Kentucky Fried Chicken sign, or Hardees, or Burger King. So when they come to understand symbols, then they can come to understand
that words are made up of symbols. Like when you're singing songs and finger plays. I mean there are things that happen that set them up for reading the written word. So they learn all that stuff before there's a formal reading and writing program. There has to be a good foundation for later learning.

I observed that the teacher in this Head Start classroom empowered the children in her classroom to use their prior knowledge to explore reading and writing behaviors. Through storybook reading, the children become more familiar with the spoken word and could identify this with print. The read-aloud method of storybook reading also appears to have developed their interest in learning to read and write. After many storybook reading activities, I observed the children's interest in their attempt to retell the story through writing or drawing. For example, after the teacher read the story of *Hills of Fire*, the children drew illustrations of the story and asked the teacher to write their descriptions below their drawings. One of the children asked the teacher for the book to copy the page about the volcano.

**Children Learn Reading and Writing Concurrently and Interrelatedly**

Current research seems to contradict the notion of reading preceding writing or writing preceding reading. The evidence seems to suggest that all aspects of language, both oral and written, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities tend to develop simultaneously and to complement each other (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). My observations/findings seem to support this element of emergent literacy. The teacher saw all components of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) as important to children's literacy development. Through storybook reading, the teacher involved the children in all components of language. Using storybook reading, she tried to develop children's listening and speaking abilities through conversations about the story. The
children developed their oral language skills by asking questions, commenting, predicting, retelling, and reenacting stories. She used a particular story in various literacy activities in which the children used some form of reading or writing. For example, after reading the story *If You give a Mouse a Cookie*, the children were able to create their own story based on similar story lines found in that story. The children drew pictures and then dictated the words they wanted to use in their story for the adults to write.

**Children Develop Literacy From Real Life Settings/Situations In Which They Use Reading And Writing To "Get Things Done"**

Functional aspects of literacy are perceived as important elements in order for children to learn reading and writing. Children are believed to experience literacy by doing. They are also believed to acquire the skills in using literacy to function as a member of their families and community. As children engage in activities that reflect real-life situations, literacy is believed to become functional, meaningful, and authentic. That is, it becomes an integral part of their cultural knowledge, and not a set of separate skills they acquire. By experiencing the functions and values of different forms of print, children are believed to learn the written language. In describing the role of functional literacy on the development of her students' reading and writing, the teacher explained:

They’ll see it [reading and writing] as just a natural part of life. It doesn’t have to be a burden, and it doesn’t have to be so strenuous. It just becomes a natural way of doing things, and it has some meaning in that child’s life at home. Not just at school, but it has some meaning at home.

The teacher's use of functional literacy in this Head Start classroom was observed in her daily routine and rituals with the children. It assisted her in organizing activities and tasks for the children to accomplish. The children usually began the day with the morning circle in which they shared important news or information of personal interest.
They selected their tasks as daily helpers by identifying their names and placing them alongside the task they wished to do for the day. Following this, the children had breakfast during which they talked about the things they were eating. During one of these meal times, the children learned about the different kinds of milk that can be used with their cereal. For example, one of the children noticed the teacher using milk from a different color box. She was curious and asked the teacher why she was not using the same milk as the other children. The teacher showed the children the label "Fat Free" and together they discovered the differences and why some people use it. Tooth brushing is also another activity in which the children use functional literacy. They read their names to identify their toothbrushes and replace these in corresponding places after use. This was also seen when children identified their names for their cubbyholes and portfolios.

**Children Develop Literacy Through Active Engagement and Social Interaction With Adults**

Young children learn reading and writing while they interact with specific adults who model the process for them and who provide them with the opportunities to explore print and written language on their own. Through exploring and experimenting adults may provide the child with a fact that the child can memorize although not necessary understand or comprehend it. By providing concrete objects, adults give children the opportunity to interact, explore, and experiment, which eventually helps them to construct their own knowledge. In sharing her experience, the teacher related how the lack of opportunities to explore and develop can hinder children’s literacy development:

> I think you need to have materials accessible to them. You need paper, pencils, markers, and books. You put the materials there and they will use them if they have it accessible. Let me give an example. I went to visit another daycare and one of the little girls saw the teacher's pen and paper
lying on the table. And she started writing on the teacher's paper. And I said, "Excuse me, whose paper is this?" She said it was the teacher’s. And I said, "Does she know that you’re writing on her paper." And she said no. And I said, "You might want to ask her permission if you can write." And I said, "Do you have some paper that you get and write your own messages?" And she said, "No, we have to ask for it." And I thought, what a wonderful opportunity for this child to write or to practice with just scribbles on pages or making deliberate marks or whatever--and that moment had been lost forever, because he couldn't just go over and get the paper and pencil when he wanted it and to be able to write it as he needed it. And it was a painful moment. So I said--I shouldn't have done it--but I said, "You know, are you wanting to write?" He said, "Yeah." And I said, "Well, do you think you could ask the teacher if you could have some paper that you could write." And that's exactly what he did.

Children are also believed to learn literacy when they are read their favorite stories over and over again. Reading stories to children is not so much for them to memorize the words; rather, it is the way in which children make meaning of the stories read to them. When adults read to children, they provide opportunities for children to be socially interactive and actively engaged in storybook reading. In emphasizing the importance of active engagement and social interaction, the teacher explained how storybook reading promotes literacy learning. In her words:

We read that book one time. And then we came back and they wanted to read it again. When we came back the second time, they actually were telling parts of the story, without me giving a whole lot of information. They were actually giving the sentences about what was going to happen. I think the pictures were cues, but they could remember what the next phrase was going to be. And children don’t know automatically to do that, to remember the stories, unless they are actively involved or unless they are interested.

This teacher also provided the children with a good role model for developing literacy. The teacher modeled reading and writing all the time by taking notes on things to remember, writing messages, and dictating to the children. This showed the children that writing is meaningful and has purpose. She encouraged the children to develop their
oral language by simply involving them in conversations. She never responded to the children in a negative way. She often asked questions for clarification in order to encourage them to give more description and details. Sometimes, she would repeat what they said using new vocabulary. The teacher was also a good listener. She listened to the children attentively and with respect to show them that what they say is meaningful and important, hoping to encourage and help develop their oral language. The teacher also provided the children with different activities in different areas in the classroom to encourage the children to converse with each other. The teacher respected the diversity and the differences in the children's level of oral language and tried to build on them.

Children Develop Literacy By Passing Through Different Stages and at Different Ages

Children's learning to read and write is believed to be developmental. This development is also believed to be individual. All children do not pass through the stages of reading and writing at the same age. Instead, they pass through the stages of reading and writing at different ages and in a variety of ways (Teale & Sulzby, 1988). It is evident that the teacher recognized this element of emergent literacy among her children in this Head Start classroom. In sharing her thoughts about the children's development in reading and writing, the teacher said:

I think they will have reached a developmental age, not a chronological age. Let's compare some of the children here. They all either 4 or 5 years of age, in close proximity to each other, or just a few months or whatever. Developmentally, in the area of literacy development, they are all on differing levels. I think it takes a certain developmental age for them to want to do it, or to have the prerequisite skills that it takes for reading, or that it takes for the beginnings of reading. You can take a child who is 5 years old. There is one of them in here now. She was 5 in December. She loves books, but she has no interest in reading. Sitting there pretending to read or whatever. Then we have a 4-year old who is right on the verge of it. He is wanting to read. Dominic, even though chronologically he is younger than the 5-year old, he is developmentally higher. His
developmental age in literacy is much higher. So I think it depends on the child, it depends on the prerequisites, the good solid skills that they have prior to beginning to read. You have to have that basis, that good basis, or the good foundation for later learning.

The teacher did not teach all her children on the same level. The children were directed towards their own interest and ability levels. The teacher's practice of organizing centers encouraged and supported the children's developmental needs. Children who were ready to read were able to engage in reading from a wide array of books. Children who were ready to write were able to use all kinds of materials for drawing and writing. Children who were still at the hands-on stage were able to manipulate a variety of objects. While the children were engaged in these centers, the teacher made observations, took notes, and built upon what she observed about the children's interest and ability levels.

Children Develop Literacy By Listening to Stories Read To Them on a Daily Basis

Storybook reading is widely acknowledged as one of the best ways of encouraging children's literacy development. Reading to children is regarded as an effective way of teaching them how to read and introducing them to another form of language that is used in writing. It is believed that exposing children to books helps them construct meaning and build on their knowledge by learning new vocabularies, expressing themselves, giving meaning to the context of the book, and constructing their own knowledge. That was evident in the children's storytelling or pretend-reading of a story after it had been read to them. The children would read the story or retell it using their own words and some of the formal words they heard. That is not to say that they memorized the story. Rather, they told it based on their personal memory of the story and its meaning, which is regarded as an important step in literacy development.
The teacher in this Head Start classroom regarded storybook reading or reading aloud as central to literacy learning in her classroom. She described the importance of books in helping children develop oral language, learn about print, and build on their knowledge and experiences. The teacher not only read storybooks to her children, she made them come alive by using props and encouraging the children to reenact them. She integrated storybook reading into other literacy activities in the classroom. She explained:

Literacy and storybook reading in this classroom is the basic. What am I looking for? I think it is going to be ... if we strengthen it here, it is going to be the foundation for their successes for later, because they will have a connection that the written word has some meaning. And that in these books, they can determine a sequence of events. Or they can recall events. Or they can recall characters or the mood of a book, or the rhythm of a book. And it is carried into other parts of their development. It is carried into mathematics. It is carried into social sciences. It is carried into science. It is carried into so many other parts of education.

Other/Additional Elements of Emergent Literacy

In addition to the six central tenets of emergent literacy listed by Sulzby and Teale (1986), the teacher in this Head Start classroom possessed other characteristics, which I am not only note-worthy, but also worthy of consideration as further elaboration of emergent literacy. These important characteristics were:

1. Play as a vital element and facilitator of emergent literacy.
2. Print-rich environment as stimulant for children's literacy development.
3. Children's interest as vital for literacy learning.

Play as Vital Element of, and Facilitator of Emergent Literacy

Play is a natural characteristic in the development of children and also has a unique role in children's literacy development. Play provides a natural medium for
children to practice reading and writing and other forms of language exploration (Fields & Spanger, 1995). They are able to imitate and model what they have come to recognize as adult behaviors. Through play, they use other kinds of communication that includes speaking, listening, reading, and writing that supports literacy development. By exploring and experimenting with the processes of language, children continue to practice their emerging skills within their social grouping. In the teacher's classroom, the daily plan includes "free play time" or "work time" as she called it. During this period of time, children take part in activities of their own choice and interests, which is important to their learning. They engage in exploration and dramatic play. Through these activities, the children explore their environment and imitate adult's behavior and roles, through which their language development is enhanced. I observed the children in this classroom using reading and writing during their dramatic play. They took notes, they worked on the computer and the typewriter, and they wrote messages, signs, recipes, and prescriptions. The following is the teacher's explanation of how pretend-play is used in her classroom to encourage the children's emerging skills:

If they are pretending to just write a list that this say chocolate chip cookie then that simple act of writing helps them make that connection, that writing has some importance. Well, when they write something, they’ve got to come back and read it. So just that simple act of writing helps them make the connection of the importance of reading or the importance or writing. So have them pretend and eventually they will start progressing and they’ll say, “Oh, this really doesn’t look like cookie, when I see it on the package. It doesn’t look like cookie.” And they they’ll start cleaning it up a little bit. And they’ll start making the letters and the letters will be more pronounced, like this. They will be more purposeful letters. And they’ll be closer to what they actually look like, what the symbols actually look like.

Print-Rich Environment as Stimulant for Children's Literacy Development

One of the significant features in this Head Start classroom was the opportunity
that the children get to interact with familiar signs, symbols, pictures, and words. These were displayed on walls, tables, objects, specific areas, and materials. The abundance of this display of signs, symbols, pictures, and words was described by the teacher as a "print rich environment." In describing how she sets up her classroom, the teacher said:

There should be words everywhere. There should be labels on things to identify things. There should be pictures because children first actually first learn the meaning of the written word by symbols or by pictures. They come to know a recognized symbol or pictures or shapes--they come to know that first. And then we accompany that with the written word, associated with that picture. So, eventually the children will come to know that that written word has some meaning that's attached with that picture, or that's connected with that picture. So our room is set up in that fashion. There are meanings everywhere, words everywhere. We try to write as much as we can and just fill the environment and make it what we call environmentally rich with print.

In doing so, the teacher encouraged the children to read more than books. With print displayed every where in the classroom, the children's interest in reading was encouraged. I observed the children reading the name cards, daily helpers' chart, and poems that the teacher posted around the classroom. They also read the books on the shelves. I also observed the children using writing materials (papers, pencils, and crayons) to copy what they observed in this environment. By employing this practice, the teacher encouraged the children not only to look at books as a source of information, but also to become aware of other forms of reading materials in this environment.

Children’s Interests as Vital for Literacy Learning

Children seem to learn when the experience or activity they engage in is interesting and meaningful to them. In this Head Start classroom children's personal interest was used as a "stepping stone" to develop the teacher's plans into meaningful activities for the children's engagement. As the teacher explained: "We look at what the
children’s needs are and do the planning based on those things." Many of these personal needs and interests were tapped from storybook reading. Others were derived from observing children's engagement throughout the day. The teacher explained:

We try to focus on their interests or something that came up the day before. Like one day, the children were just into mixtures, mixing stuff together. So the next day we decided to do a small group on mixing things together.

In storybook reading, the teacher sometimes introduced a story without initially knowing what the children's responses would be. Sometimes through reading a story, the children's interest was generated and, from that interest, other activities were planned or other storybooks selected. This is what the teacher said:

I use a new book for story time to share and try to develop some interest. I might choose that book based on something that happened the day before. Tomorrow, we might do some thing about bugs or insects. But we’re choosing it based on some children’s interest about what they would like to see, what they would lie to know about.

The teacher understands that the children would not learn if they did not have the desire or if it was not meaningful to them. Aside from the storybook reading, children's interests and needs are reflected in the teacher's encouragement to participate in other literacy activities. She also considers children's interest as sustained through reading and writing. To support and build upon this interest, I observed the teacher role play reading and writing. She read children's favorite books that they might bring to her outside of the storybook reading time. She also wrote them notes about what they need to do during group time or wrote as they dictated based on individual conversations. They, in turn, modeled her behaviors as they engaged in solitary activities. That, as she explained, helps the children to understand the importance of reading and writing and that reading and writing have meaning and purpose. When the children begin to show interest in
reading and writing, they will tend to read and write by exploring the print in their environment and asking questions.

Personal and Professional Implications

In looking at the personal and professional implications of this study, it was important to consider how this teacher achieved success in engaging students in storybook reading as well as in using this activity as a bridge to other literacy activities. Three things really stood out in this study for my personal and professional development. They are: 1) the critical importance of storybook reading for literacy development; 2) the influence of a print-rich, multi-centered classroom environment in literacy development; and 3) the usefulness of varied pedagogical approaches to literacy development. These three facets of literacy development seem to have contributed significantly to the success experienced in this Head Start classroom.

The Critical Importance of Storybook Reading for Literacy Development

In the Head Start classroom where I conducted my research, storybook reading was the foundation upon which the teacher developed many of her strategies and approaches to language teaching. Her practice included using storybook reading as a daily activity and exposing the children to a variety of books. Many of these stories led to the development of other activities that incorporated other areas of the curriculum such as social studies, science, math, and language. The teacher was able to use storybook reading to teach these content areas in an informal way because she was able to identify aspects of storybook reading that could be transferred into interesting and fulfilling activities that met the requirements of other content areas. The findings of this study
suggest that storybook reading can be used not only as a source of enjoyment, but also as a stepping-stone for children to develop their oral language. This observation agrees with researchers who emphasize the importance of storybook reading and its positive relation with language and literacy development (Mason & Allen, 1986; Teale, 1984).

Storybook reading also served as a bridge to other literacy activities. It was effective in developing children's interest in reading and writing because as they read or heard stories, they wanted to write or retell the story. They also wanted to illustrate the story, which is a form of symbolic representation or composing. When I think of reading and writing at the kindergarten level, I also think of all the creative ways in which young children express language, which may include drawing illustrations as well as scribbling. These are all acceptable ways in which young children make sense of their world through literacy (Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

Storybook reading in this classroom appeared to fosters young children’s creativity. Using a variety of books enables children to see the different ways in which the authors write and to learn to be creative themselves. For instance, in one of the children’s frequently read books, Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, the letters of the alphabet become the characters who climb a coconut tree. Personification of such abstract concepts becomes a creative way for young children to learn letter formations. The availability of a variety of books all around the classroom encouraged the children, at their own leisure time, to read for themselves, to the teacher, or to one another in small groups.

Often the children were actively involved when stories were read to them. This engagement occurred largely as a result of additional materials that the teacher used to
motivate the children and interest them in the stories. There was no formal assessment during storybook reading. Rather, the teacher made observations about their interests and transferred them other literacy activities.

The Influence of a Print-Rich, Multi-Centered Classroom Environment in Literacy Development

The physical structure and organization of this Head Start classroom was a significant aspect of my observation. This classroom epitomized the "print-rich environment," with books, labels, and writing materials available and displayed everywhere. Suitable materials were displayed on low shelves, at the children's level, so that they were able to be independent in securing literacy tools. The physical spaces in this classroom were organized in a way that promoted exploration, literacy development, and children's involvement. Creating centers were enticingly located, thus providing children with opportunities to explore, manipulate, and interact with each other. There were no assigned seats for the children throughout the day. The children followed the activities they wanted based on their needs and interests.

Underlying the structure and organization of the classroom where this study was conducted seems to be the notion that children need spaces in order to grow physically and socially, as well as mentally. When a classroom is organized in such a way that learning tasks are located all around the room, children tend to develop a sense of community. In such cooperative learning settings young children also have the opportunities to form communities of inquiry that include adults and peers. This allows them to discuss, explain, and control their own learning and perform their chosen tasks (Palincsar & Brown, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). They learn group dynamics and eventually
come to see themselves as a community of workers. Cooperative learning settings also aids in developing a social environment where young children explore the notion of relationships. They learn what constitutes proper social skills (turn taking, good manners, cooperation, etc.). They learn language codes as socially acceptable systems for exploring their ideas and differences in opinion (Duffy, Lowyck, & Janassen, 1993).

This is in complete contradiction to traditional classrooms where all children are usually on the same task at the same time. In traditional classrooms also, the space utilization and arrangement of the furniture tend to limit group interaction and purposeful group learning.

The Usefulness of Varied Pedagogical Approaches to Literacy Development

The teacher's use of multiple strategies in her practices seems to have had an impact upon the kinds of literacy learning in which the children engaged. This section highlights three strategies that I believe are particularly noteworthy for storybook reading and literacy learning in the early years. They are freedom of choice, children's interest, and dramatic play.

Freedom of Choice

Freedom of choice was a significant feature of this teacher's practice. It is one of the basic ways that values are expressed in the form of action. It is also the deliberate selection among alternatives in an attempt to achieve a desired goal without argument or the persuasion of others (Seelely, 1981). The children were given the opportunity to choose learning activities, books, and other manipulative materials in the classroom. The teacher played the role of facilitator, offering the child alternatives in learning. In doing so, they were able to engage in decision making, sharing a sense of autonomy,
responsibility, and control in their experiences as learners. Choices also extended to the children becoming involved with the teacher in planning for future learning. The teacher gave the children active roles to play in planning, deciding, and carrying out tasks. This kept them engaged and willing participants. Designing the curriculum seemed to be meaningless without the participation of the children. The teacher would ask, "What can we do?" but she would also give them a lot of strategies on how to do things.

Feinberg, Kuchner, and Feldman (1998) emphasize the importance of offering choices in early childhood settings. They suggest that children become more interested in and engaged with their environment when guided and encouraged to make real choices based on their individual needs. Selecting books, toys, constructions, materials, and activities allows young children to initiate their own play and provides them with positive learning experiences (p. 20).

Children's Interests

The importance of children's interest in early education has been a topic of discussion by progressive educators who favor child-centered learning. The general conclusion is that teaching from children's interest enhances personal growth in self-knowledge and encourages children to realize their potential (Dewey, 1913; McGill-Franzen, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978).

The Head Start classroom that I studied employs a child-centered approach to teaching and learning. The teacher observed the children during their interaction with others and with classroom materials. She also observed how they approached different situations and used these observations to understand their interests better and to determine what could be further provided to build on those needs. She also was a good
listener, attentive and patient with the children's suggestions, questions, and comments. She also used conversation as a means to engage children in talking about their interests in an attempt to capture those interests she might have missed through observations or listening.

Making observations, being a good listener, and in general, being responsive to children's needs seem to be effective classroom practices in the classroom I studied. Moreover, these practices help in identifying children’s interests and planning meaningful learning activities.

Dramatic Play

The importance of dramatic play as an educational tool has been recognized by American researchers for a long time. Drawing upon the insights provided by such educational theorists as Vygotsky and Piaget, more and more innovative teachers are using different forms of drama to stimulate active learning in the classroom. One widely recognized and highly respected example is Vivian Gussin Paley. One of Paley’s dramatic tools is “fantasy play” – a method she uses to promote autonomy, questioning, discovery, and creativity. She sees this type of dramatic play as revealing the “secrets from within” the children – unlocking the doors to the children’s perceptions, understandings, fears, anxieties, uncertainties, and hopes (see Wiltz & Fein, 1996).

In the classroom where I carried out this research, the teacher not only emphasized the children's cognitive learning (academic), she was very concerned about the children's social and emotional development. One way she attempted to foster that was through dramatic play. The teacher encouraged the children to get involved in dramatic play any time, anywhere. Sometimes she participated in their pretend play.
Through dramatic play, children were given the opportunity to imitate the roles of important people in their lives and roles of characters they knew from TV or books. In doing so, she gave the children the power of choosing their own words in their attempt to recreate these characters (Davidson, 1996).

In this classroom, both children and adults were often engaged in dramatic play. Children were involved in such activities all the time. Through dramatic play, they were encouraged to develop their language because they discussed their roles and play read and write. They learned about writing materials. They learned about computers and typewriters, and pretended to write letters and messages and constructed an understanding about reading and writing. They did not learn conventional literacy, but they developed functional literacy using the materials available in the classroom. "Although play is not a necessary condition for learning language and literacy skills, play is probably the best environment for these abilities to thrive" (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988, p.64).

**Important Lessons for Teachers**

Prior to this study, my understanding of storybook reading was typical of someone reared in my cultural (Kuwaiti) tradition. In Kuwait kindergarten classrooms, children have story time once or twice a week. It is not a daily activity. The use of stories in Kuwaiti kindergarten is limited to story telling. Teachers read the stories by themselves and then share them with the children using the spoken form of the language. Teachers do not read stories from the book while showing the pictures to the children. They do not share the actual book with the children. However, they use scenes from the story that they draw themselves to show the children while sharing the story. After a
story telling activity, teachers use the traditional technique to assess children's understanding by asking questions about the name of the characters and what they learned from the story. As a follow-up activity, the children may retell the story or color scenes from the story. This routine is used often by almost all Kuwaiti teachers. The teacher first reads the story, memorizes specific information, and then relates this to the children. Illustrations are shared, following which the children are questioned for understanding. Strategies for determining understanding are sequencing of picture clues that highlight the main ideas of the story. The storybooks that teachers read in Kuwaiti kindergarten classroom are selected by the Ministry of Education and based on concepts and themes that are related to our culture. All the children in all Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms hear the same stories during the same period of time. Due to the scarcity of books, teachers do not have a lot of choices from which to select the books based on observed children's interest.

The findings of this study have changed my beliefs and, in particular, have significantly broadened my understanding of ways in which storybook reading can become an important feature in Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms. I no longer see storybook reading as an activity in which children engage purely for comprehension, rather as the nucleus of curricular activities, especially at the preschool level and the life-force of successful literacy learning in early years. Following are some of the implications of the findings of this study for the typical kindergarten classroom in Kuwait:

I think there is a need for teachers in Kuwait to understand the value of storybook reading and its role in developing children's language. Children need to be exposed to
written language simply by being read to. They need to listen to stories read to them on a daily basis in order to learn the formal language and to learn about the process of reading and book conventions. Goldfield and Snow (1984) emphasized the importance of storybook reading in helping children to learn book conventions. According to Cochran-Smith (1983), children's experiences with stories have important influences on their language acquisition and development and their reading and writing skills.

The traditional way of assessing the children needs to be changed. Teachers need to integrate the stories they hear or read into other areas in the classroom. Questioning the children after reading the story does not necessarily show children's understanding. Some of the children may have learned, but may be unwilling to talk in the classroom, as I saw from my experience. Some children do not have the confidence to talk in front of a group.

There is a need to consider the children's interests when selecting the storybooks to make learning more meaningful and books more enjoyable for them. There is also a need for Kuwaiti children to be exposed to other cultures by reading them books from other cultures. When children are interested, it encourages their engagement and active participation, which can help them to construct their own knowledge and learning. As much as possible, Kuwaiti teachers should try to make the learning process very meaningful and enjoyable for the children. They should try to avoid meaningless routines in their classroom in order to keep children interested and engaged.

Educators planning for and organizing the physical environment of Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms do so from a traditional perspective. Most of the space available is assigned to chairs and tables for small groups to work individually on assigned tasks.
Learning centers are situated around the classroom giving less focus to exploratory learning. Although these learning centers are equipped with the appropriate learning materials, children are not expected to manipulate these materials until directed by the teacher. In addition, display of print is limited to labeling of various learning centers (Science, Art, educational toys, learning, and house area) and the children's names. Also, only when a concept has been taught or is being taught, do teachers display the relevant information. Concepts such as the weather and calendar are permanently displayed throughout the school year. However, little else is permanently displayed in the classroom setting.

There is a need for Kuwaiti kindergarten teachers to create an environment that is meaningful to children as learners and that enable them to transfer what they learn to the real world. Children learn by exploring their physical environment through observing, touching, and being involved in meaningful activities. They learn more effectively when they are actively manipulating things. They are able to build their own knowledge or understand the world through their active engagement, experimenting, and exploration rather than receiving information passively (Feinberg, Kuchner, & Feldman, 1989). They learn further through group activities that provide a forum for sharing, discussing, planning, collaborating, singing, dramatizing, and problem solving. How educators arrange and organize the physical environment can meet these needs and satisfy children's interest (Seaborne, 1971).

Traditional programs that emphasize subject matter should also be modified to include activities that influence social growth. Freedom to move around the classroom and participate in different learning experiences can provide Kuwaiti children with the
interaction they need to develop language and social skills as well as a feeling of belonging.

Freedom of choice is not a common practice in Kuwait kindergarten classrooms. The traditional approach to education embraces a top-down model where classroom teachers carry out educational goals and objectives dictated from a governing body. However, within the prescribed classroom materials, teachers need to consider how they can use choice as a strategy for giving students some autonomy and experience and for developing confidence in their learning.

Choice also denotes active involvement and hands-on experiences. In Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms children spend a great part of their day seated on chairs and listening to the teacher. Children in these classrooms need more freedom to move about selecting from classroom materials and building on their interests. They also need freedom of choice to model literate behaviors and assist less-experienced peers in their literacy development. These kinds of interactions support researchers’ views of mentor/student relationships that occur in literacy learning characterized by camaraderie and non-competitiveness (Harste, Woodward, & Bruke, 1989; Smith, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978)

In Kuwaiti Kindergarten classrooms, children's interests are generally neglected. Classroom activities are teacher-centered in which the teacher takes most of the control and sees her role as directing the children and giving instructions most of the time. Although the children do engage in learning and, at the end of the school year are able to accomplish many learning tasks, this kind of learning relies on a passive memorization of concepts. Children are not always able to transfer this knowledge to the development of
oral language, to the outside world, or to other subject areas. Kuwaiti teachers need to consider the kinds of learning opportunities they are providing. They need to take the children's point of view into account regarding their interests and use these in planning meaningful, transferable literacy activities. It is very important for Kuwaiti teachers to make the children the focal point of the classroom. They need to think of ways that help young children to develop and learn and be active members in the society.

In Kuwaiti kindergartens, the children are involved in dramatic play only at the house area for a short period of time. Allowing children to engage in pretend play whenever and wherever they want will help them to develop some literacy and satisfy their need for being in charge and in control. As the literature seems to suggest, through dramatic play children learn naturally. They decide what they want to learn and when to learn it. Kuwaiti teachers need to understand the importance of dramatic play in helping the children explore literacy when they are provided with an appropriate environment (place), materials, and time that will allow them to expand on their thoughts and themes. Children can also explore reading and writing when they play at reading and writing and use writing materials. In doing so, children begin to build an understanding of the importance and the function of reading and writing (Davidson, 1996).

When teachers give the children the time and the space and props they need for their pretend play, they are providing them with opportunities to interact socially with each other and with adults. In turn, children explore reading and writing and start to see themselves as readers and writers.
Summary

The findings of this study suggest many more factors to consider in promoting literacy development. What was discussed in this chapter are only a few of the more significant ones. Together they indicate critical importance of: 1) storybook reading; 2) the influence of a print-rich, multi-centered classroom environment; and 3) the usefulness of varied pedagogical approaches for helping children to think, communicate, listen, speak, read, write, and draw with understanding and confidence. The implications of these for educational practices are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Future Exploration and Suggestions for Actions

This research has opened my eyes to new methods of teaching which I will model in my new position as an assistant professor in the Kuwait Basic College of Education. The institution prepares pre-service teachers for teaching children in kindergarten and elementary schools. As an instructor in the Curriculum Instruction Department, my role is to train and teach students who will be kindergarten teachers. This research has given me the new insights as well as the tools for training these student teachers and, hopefully, preparing them to initiate necessary child-centered transformations in Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms.

My strategy for achieving this goal is to model in my teaching the kinds of instructional principles and practices that, if transferred and implemented in Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms, could significantly improve teaching and learning in the Kuwaiti educational system. Aspects of teaching and learning where I plan to concentrate are: (a) integrated learning; (b) learner-centered education; (c) collaborative learning; (d) variation in methods; (e) student empowerment; and (f) personal construction of knowledge.

**Integrated Learning**

The practice in Kuwait, so far, has been to present the subjects as stand-alone areas of knowledge, ignoring obvious relationships between the subjects that students are
taught. I hope to correct this unfortunate impression by emphasizing the unity of knowledge and demonstrating to the students how the various subjects they are taught are interrelated to one another.

**Learner-centered Education**

Children, like all other human beings, seem to prefer activities that reflect their needs and interests. For that reason, I plan to give my students the opportunities to work in groups of their choice based on their interests, needs, and preferred materials and topics. I believe that giving students opportunities to express their needs and choose the issues they want to discuss will promote active participation and ensure their involvement. I therefore plan to allow my students the freedom to choose their activities, equipment, projects, and working partners. Trusting them in these areas, I believe, will help the pre-service teachers to become more interested in and engaged with their environment, and might encourage them to make real choices based on their individual needs.

**Collaboration**

Working collaboratively with peers and adults in the classroom has been found to promote a sense of community and social skills. That is the principle upon which I plan to base my instructional practices. Specifically, I plan to provide the students with opportunities to work collaboratively on given tasks in the classroom and out of the classroom. I plan to develop tasks that enable students to participate in developing ideas, concepts and learning, and that also give me the opportunities to learn along with them too. In so doing, I hope to be able to promote a sense of community in which the
students teach and learn from each other. Moreover, I hope to be able to provide the students with the suitable guidance to enable them to develop a strong self esteem and faith in their capability of obtaining the knowledge on their own.

**Variation in Methods**

Traditional notions of education is that students learn best by listening to the teacher and by following instructions. I believe that this perception need to be reconsidered. While some students might prefer to “listen,” other may like to explore, or to find things out for themselves. To reflect varying styles of learning, I plan to create a learning environment in which students have the opportunities to explore, manipulate objects as well as interact with each other.

I believe it is important to use different methods of teaching. Standing in front of the students and doing all the talking is definitely not one of them. Rather, I hope to provide the students with the learning experiences that meet the different needs and interests of the students. I plan to take the students on field trips to the kindergarten classroom in which they can connect the theory with practical action. I would also provide my students with video tapes about important issues and practices in kindergarten classrooms. Very importantly, I plan to provide the students with the opportunities to work in small group activities where they can be involved in discussions. I also plan to encourage large group sharing in which the students can present and share their work with others.
To assess the effectiveness of my methods and practices, I plan to ask the student at the end of each class to write an "exit slip" in which they write about their thoughts, recommendations, ideas, and suggestions.

Student Empowerment

Students need to be engaged in learning experiences that develop the sense of ownership in their daily education. I hope to help my students to develop a sense of ownership by encouraging them to create or develop portfolios. I plan to encourage students to write on topics of their choice and select examples from their work to showcase themselves. Experience indicates that when students have interests in what they are doing, they are inspired and engaged. That’s when learning takes place.

Personal Construction of Knowledge

Contrary to popular impression, knowledge is not something to be given and received. It is a personal construction. Accordingly, I plan to emphasize the importance of literacy for personal and social growth by providing the students with a variety of reading materials that they can choose from to read for their personal development. I hope to provide them with the opportunities to work with children and to be able to transfer some of what they learned in the class into action. I plan also to emphasize on the role of reading as a process of constructing meaning through the interaction of the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by written language, and the context of the reading situation. I hope to encourage interaction between students by providing them with opportunities to converse and to share their knowledge, their points
of view, and their experiences and also develop their thinking skills. The students would be given the chance to express their thoughts, experiences, viewpoints, suggestions, and understandings by engaging in discussions, writing reflections papers, making visual representations, presenting what they learned from their readings to others, and synthesizing the materials. My purpose in doing that is to encourage the student teachers to appreciate the importance personal knowledge and to take more active roles in the construction their knowledge.

Future Research

As a teacher of Kindergarten Pre-service Teachers, I plan to extend my research on early literacy development and try mobilize the necessary commitment, energy, and resources to implement useful ideas. My goal is to explore specific classroom facilities and procedures for promoting literacy development among kindergarten students and generally serve the educational needs for the Kuwaiti students. To this end, I plan the following research and promotional activities:

Design a course of study which includes a series of collaborative activities that will enable the students to rethink and reform their methods in ways that reflect the emergent literacy perspective. Among other things, such activities would enable them to keep track of new research on early childhood education and try to implement the new theories in their teaching, including: reading storybooks to the children on a daily basis; putting available materials in their classroom to better use; and sharing control and working collaboratively with the children and their peers.
Thereafter, I plan to follow-up with a longitudinal study of the pre-service teachers who try to transform some of these ideas into suitable classroom practices in their field experiences. Specifically, I plan to study a Kuwaiti classroom in which storybook reading is read on a daily basis. I am interested in examining the Kuwaiti teacher's role during storybook reading. I will examine the ways in which the teacher engage children in story events and how that might influence their literacy development. Does she encourage students to talk during storybook reading? Does she encourage or discourage diversity of responses during storybook reading? What is the purpose of using storybook reading in the classroom? What are the different approaches? What kind of experiences she provide to engage children in the story? How can the introduction of storybook reading to children in the Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms help them in developing oral, written language and concept of print.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the constructivist principles that I plan to model as an instructor in the Kindergarten Curriculum Instruction department in the Kuwait Basic College of Education, as well as the follow-up action research that I have planned will significantly contribute to improved literacy development in particular, and more student-centered, and more beneficial instructional practices in Kuwaiti kindergarten classrooms.
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Appendix A

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent For Participant’s Parent

Title of Project: Emergent Literacy Development in a Head Start Classroom: One Teacher’s Beliefs and Practices About Children’s literacy Learning Through Storybook Reading

Investigator: Salwa Jawhar, Ph.D. Candidate, EDCI
Dr. Rosary Lalik, Chair

I. Purpose of Research

This research is being conducted as a part of the requirements for a Ph.D. The main purpose of this study is to better understand one successful preschool teacher’s beliefs, practices and approaches to literacy development in a Head Start classroom. The role she plays in the literacy learning of the children she serves and the ways in which she includes storybook reading, as a literacy activity into her curriculum. In addition, I seek to see how story book reading fits into the wider perspective of school literacy and emergent literacy within this context.

II. Procedures

This ethnographic study will be built around personal interviews and classroom observations. Data will be collected to study literacy learning of the children through storybook reading. I will be visiting the classroom twice a week for five months. I will spend the whole school day in the setting. Participation of your child will be simply by taking part in regularly planned classroom activities.

During my visits, I will be observing and taking notes on the classroom environment and the storybook reading sessions. I will ask your child to read or tell me a story and I may read to him/her as well. I will also collect some of the children’s drawings and writings which I will examine to identify aspect of emergent literacy.

I will also audio-tape children stories, and some of the storybook reading sessions in order to obtain more detailed data about the process of storybook reading and literacy development. I will also video tape some classroom activities including the storybook reading events from time to time to examine any changes or progress in the children’s behavior during storybook events. Finally, I will take some pictures of the classroom environment and classroom activities to provide a vivid description of the classroom and to support my interpretation.

III. Risks and Benefits of Participating in this Project

For participating in this study, the risk will be no more than minimum. No physical risks of any sort will be involved. The results of this study will be useful to teachers and parents who seek effective strategies for reading to young children. It will provide valuable insights into classroom teaching with potential implications for school programs dedicated to the development of early literacy skills for education students. It also provides insights into training and continuing education for k/pre-school teachers.
IV. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher will at no time release the names or any other identifiable information regarding the participants. All the information and data I gather in this study will be confidential and will be used only by me. Pseudonym names rather than the subject’s real name will be used to protect their anonymity. Audio and video materials are not for publishing, they will be destroyed one year after completion of the study.

V. Compensation

There is no compensation for participants in this study.

VI. Freedom to withdraw

Participation in this study is voluntarily. Even though you may give your consent, your child will not be required to participate against his or her will. You have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time during the process.

VII. Approval of Research

This research project has approval from the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and the department of Teaching and Learning

VIII. Subject’s permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide the rules of this project

________________________________________________________
Parent’s Signature      Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Salwa Jawhar    (540)-552-6944

Dr. Rosary Lalik    (540)- 231-8384

Dr. Tom Hurd    (540) -231-5281
I Purpose of Research

The main purpose of my proposed study is to examine one apparently successful preschool teacher and her approaches to literacy development in a Head Start classroom. Another purpose of this study is to better understand the role that this Head Start teacher plays in the literacy learning of the children she serves, and the ways in which she includes storybook reading, as a literacy activity, into the curriculum.

(II) Procedures:

This ethnographic study will be built around personal interviews and classroom observations. Data will be collected to study literacy learning of the children through storybook reading. I will be visiting the classroom twice a week, for five months. Data collection techniques for this study will include the kinds of interactive methods typically associated with ethnographic research. Texts and illustrations of books read aloud, drawings and notes, audio/video-taped transcripts of children’s retelling a story and discussion, will be analyzed to examine students’ performance and comprehension; interviews with the classroom teacher, utilizing her own words when describing educational beliefs and practices concerning the use of storybook reading will be used to determine how she uses storybook reading to promote literacy development; and the researcher journal that will include the field notes from classroom observations will also be used.

(III) Risks:

There are limited risks involved in this study. For the children, there are no risks. For the teacher, the risks involve having to reevaluate teaching philosophies and practices. No physical risks of any sort will be involved.

(IV) Benefits of this Project:

I believe that the results of this study will be useful to teachers and educators who seek effective strategies for reading to young children.
(V) Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality:

All the information and data I gather in this study will be confidential and will be used only by me. Pseudonym names rather than the subject’s real name will be used to protect their anonymity. Audio and video materials are not for publishing, they will be destroyed as soon as the study is over.

VI. Compensation:

There is no compensation for participants in this study.

VII. Freedom to withdrew:

Participation in this study is voluntarily. Participants and/or their guardians have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

VIII. Approval of Research:

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the department of Teaching and Learning

IX. Subject’s permission:

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide the rules of this project

________________________________________________________
Signature      Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Salwa Jawhar   (540)-552-6944
Jan Nespor     (540)- 231-8327
Tom Hurd       (540)  -231-5281
Appendix B

Bibliography of Children's Literature Used By The Teacher


Children's Books.


• How long have you been a preschool teacher?
• How long have you been teaching in Head Start Programs?
• What other schools, grades levels have you taught?
• What degree do you have? Where did you get your degree?
• Why did you choose the Head Start to work in?
• How often do you read stories for your children?
• What have you learned about SBR?
• How did you used SBR in your classroom when you first started?
• How did you changed your way of using SBR?
• How do you introduce storybook too the children in your classroom?
• What are some of the ways in which you reinforce stories in your classroom?
• What do you do to keep children attentive and interested while you read a story?
• What types of books are mainly used in HS classroom? Does public preschool classrooms use the same books?
• Where did you gather /learn your approaches & strategies of using SBR?
• What are some of the ways you evaluate the approaches you use?
• Does the children ask you to read some particular stories?
• Do you organize reading around specific themes?
• Do you ask the children to bring stories to the classroom?
• Do you encourage children to take stories home? How?
• How do you involve parents into reading stories to their children?
Appendix C

Interview with the Teacher, March 22, 1999, (Literacy & SBR)

- How would you describe yourself, what would you say about yourself?
- Can you talk about what made you decide to be a pre-school teacher for young children? Was there any person or event that influenced your decision, and how?
- Can you tell me where you did your academic studies? What did you major in?
- Can you mention some of the courses that you liked most and why you liked them? Can you remember any of them?
- How long have you been teaching?
- Where did you work before? Did you enjoy that more than your job now?
- Was there any reason why you chose this particular school, or you just applied for it?
- So if you want to talk about the philosophy of this school, what would you say it is?
- What do you like about teaching? And what don’t you like about teaching?
- What is the importance of education for children?
- What do you hope that your children get in this classroom?
- How do you think children learn?
- Could you describe your picture of a good pre-school teacher?
- How would you describe a typical day in this classroom?
- How do you do your planning? How are the lessons planned? What is written down? Ways to present activities?
- Does your children have any role in your planning?
- How would you describe literacy and storybook reading, in particular?
- What importance do you see in storybook reading and literacy in your classroom?
- Do you see the relationship between storybook reading and literacy?
- What elements in storybook reading do you see as promoting literacy in life?
- How do you explain your role during storybook reading and the students’ role? In storybook reading and literacy?
- How do you start to make sure to get them involved before you begin to read a story?
- Are there any other ways of using the stories that I didn’t see in your classroom?
- What aspect of storybook reading seems to engage the students?
- How do the children engage in the story? To what extent is their participation in the story? What do they do?
- Does the storybook reading relate to the students’ other classroom activities?
- Just briefly, what have you done differently this year?
- Can you tell me if you notice any changes across the year from the beginning of the year until this month — in the children?
Interview with the Teacher, April 20, 1999 (Environment & Emergent Literacy)

• How do you construct an environment to encourage literacy?
• Can you tell me about other kinds of literacy events that occur in this classroom?
• Is the notes you're taking in the class just model of writing process for the children, or is it something for your own use?
• How do you assist children's literacy performance?
• Do you use flashcards to help your student recognize isolated words on sight? If yes, is it suitable technique for teaching them to read?
• Are workbooks and a basal readers important for children to learn how to read?
• How do your students benefit from hearing favorite stories repeated to them?
• Do you encourage your students to join in sometimes while you read? How?
• Do you believe by pointing to the print as you read leads a child to form a bad habit?
• Do you think it is necessary to check your students understanding by asking them questions at the end of each story?
• When would you say real reading begins? Is it when a child begins to say the words as they are printed on a page?
• How important are letters of the alphabet and sounds of these letters for children to know before they begin to write?
• Do you think children should know how to form the letters of the alphabet correctly before they try to write messages, notes and stories?
• Should children have lots of experiences practicing to write words, then sentences and stories before they write on their own?
• How are children's early scribbling related to their development in writing stories or messages or anything else?
• Do you think your students need workbooks to learn how to write?
• Do you think your students need to now how to spell correctly before they begin to write?
• Should a child know how to read before they begin to write?
• Do you think that learning to read and write are similar to learning to speak?
• Do you think that reading to children help them learn to write?
• Is it important that children see significant adults read and write?
• Do you think that children must be at a certain age to before they are able to read and write?
• What are some of the important things that your students learn about reading and writing in your classroom that can help them when they begin formal reading programs?
Appendix D

An Inventory check list for children's reading and writing characteristics

Characteristics of Emergent Readers

Reading Play

• Play include pretend reading
• "Reads" the picture in a book by naming pictures, by making up a story while looking at pictures, and by telling the general sequence while turning pages.
• "Reads" the story in a book from memory
• Use a reading voice and reading expressions

Reading Awareness

• Use the language of literacy
• Identifies the beginning, middle, and end of a story with the main idea coming first and details added later.
• Demonstrates awareness that language can be written down and read later.
• Visually follows top to bottom, left to right cues as teacher points.
• Show curiosity about environmental print.
• Differentiate between pictures and words.

Reading Skills

• Realizes that symbols stand for entities and that a word is a symbolic representation of its meaning: from this realization the child discovers that the length of a word does not depend on the physical characteristics of the object itself.
• Recognize own written name.
• See first letter of own name in environmental print
• See other letters of own name in environmental print
• Differentiate between words and spaces.
• Read single words from rotes in environmental print
• Read single words from rotes in books, uses picture cues to predict words in books, and uses print cues as well as picture cues to predict words in books
• Understand that words are composed of alphabet letters that consistently say the same sounds.
• Looks for words patterns
• Demonstrates knowledge of letter-sound relationships.

Reading Development
• Curious about print in own environment- names of letters, signs, labels, and logos.
• Play at reading: "read pictures" rather than print
• Begin with naming and commenting on the pictures, then telling stories from the pictures.
• Read print in own familiar environment.
• Know that print is a source of information and enjoyment.
• Begin to develop a "sense of story"
• Focus on the whole story rather than on individual words
• Begin to develop knowledge of some conventions of prints, front to back, directionality of books.
• Relay on an adult or older child to read text.
• Like books with illustrations, repetition, rhyme.

**Characteristics of Emergent Writers**

**Writing as Art**

• Using art to convey ideas
• Art includes letters.
• Combining writing with art to help convey ideas
• Letters show general directionality, although some letters reveals or right to left writing may appear
• Writes single words from rote or environmental print

**Writing Play**

• Play includes pretend writing
• Play includes scribble writing
• Play includes random symbols
• Play includes writing random letters

**Phonemic Representation in Writing**

• Demonstrates interest in names of letters
• Demonstrates interest in written representations of specific speech sounds
• Demonstrates knowledge of some letter-sound associations
• Demonstrates knowledge of some letter names
• Child develop from asking: what does this say? Of own writing to asking: How I write ____?
• Child's ability to spell words emerges developmentally according to the following sequence which is represented in kindergarten journals:
• Represent words by writing beginning sounds
• Represent words by writing beginning and ending sounds
• Use invented spelling

Writing Development

• View writing as something people do and like to play at writing; are curious about letters and sounds
• Combine drawing and writing but drawing convey most of the meaning
• May not intend to convey a particular message and may as k: "What does this say?"
  Of own writing
• Play at writing may produce: scribble writing, random symbols, random letters, and single letters that represents a sound
• May produce some conventional words as well as play writing.

(Adopted from Mielenz (1998).  Enhancing The Literacy Development Of Your Preschoolers And Kindergartners  pp.9-57)
Appendix E

Picture Book

For further information, contact the researcher at the following address:

Email: sjawhar@vt.edu
Appendix F

Elizabeth's presentation of the story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*

Elizabeth gave each of the children a green leaf (made of construction paper) to sit on.

She also gave each of the children a piece of white fabric to cover themselves pretending to be eggs.

Elizabeth: "When you hear me say pop, I want you to come out of your eggs. In the light of the moon a little egg laid on a leaf and pop out of egg a tinny and very hungry caterpillar."

Cindy: "It ate apple."

Elizabeth: "On Monday, he ate one apple, but you know what, he was still ……"

Children: "Still hungry."

Elizabeth: "On Tuesday he ate how many pears?"

Children: "Two."

Elizabeth: "But he was.."

Children: "Still hungry."

Elizabeth: "On Wednesday, he ate three .."

Children: "Berries."

Elizabeth: "It looks like berry, but it is called plumbs."

Elizabeth: "On Thursday:"

Elizabeth: "On Friday"

Elizabeth: "On Saturday, he ate a .."

Children: "Cake."

Elizabeth: "A chocolate cake."

Children: "Ice-cream."

Elizabeth: "Ice cream cine."

Children: "Pickle"

Elizabeth: "Pickle."

Children: "Cheese."

Elizabeth: "Cheese."

Children: _

Elizabeth: "This is called salami."

Children: "Sucker."

Elizabeth: "There is another name for sucker."

Children: "Lollypop."

Elizabeth: "And one piece of.."

Children: "Pie."

Elizabeth: "Not just any pie."

Children: "It's blueberry pie."

Elizabeth: "It could be blueberry because it has a little bit blue in it. It's Cherry."
Tammy: "I like blueberry pie."
David: "I like cherry pie."
Elizabeth: "One
Children: "sausage."
Elizabeth: "One Sausage."
Children: "Cup cake."
Elizabeth: "One cupcake."
Children: "Water melon."
Elizabeth: "A piece of watermelon."
Elizabeth: "The next day it was Sunday again. The caterpillar ate through one night
green leaf. And after that he felt much better, but you know what."
David: "He wanted to turn into butterfly."
Elizabeth: "He wanted that but he didn't know that at first, David."
Elizabeth: "He wasn't hungry any more, and he wasn't a little caterpillar any more. He
was a big…"
Children: "Fat caterpillar."
Elizabeth: "Then he build a small house called…"
Children: "Cocoon."
JANET: "He stayed inside…"
Gilly: "Till Sally and when he come out he turned into a butterfly."
Elizabeth: "You heard this story?"
Children: "Yes we did."
Elizabeth: "He nibbled a little hole in that cocoon and then guess what come out."
Children: "A little butterfly."
Elizabeth: "It turned into a beautiful butterfly."
Tiffany: "It’s a boy Butterfly."
Elizabeth: "Tell me why you think it’s a boy butterfly?"
Tiffany: "Because it looks like one."
Elizabeth: "What is a boy butterfly look like?"
Elizabeth: "It has bigger ears than girls." (pointing at antennas).
Appendix G
A story created by Rose

If You Give An Elephant A Cookie
If you give an elephant a cookie,

he will want a glass of juice to go with it
He will want a banana

Then, he will want an apple
Then, he will want ice-cream.

When you give him some of your favorite ice-cream, his hands will get sticky.
When his hands get sticky, he will want to take a bath.

When he takes a bath, the water will splash everywhere.
When he is done, he will want a towel to dry himself.

Then, he will want to relax.
Then, he will want to read a book.

Then, he will want to listen to his tapes.
When he listen to his best music, he will want to dance.

When he dances so much, he will get hungry.
Then, he will ask for another cookie

And chances are If he asks for a cookie,
He is going to want a glass of juice to go with it.

The End

Rach
Appendix H
Four-scene sequencing cards used by the focal children Picture book
I am a mother of three boys. I am from Kuwait. As a former kindergarten teacher in the State of Kuwait, I was always interested in finding meaningful activities that help children develop literacy in early years. I got my undergraduate in Early child education from the Basic College of Education in Kuwait. I got my Masters and Ph.D. from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. My new position will be as an assistant professor in the Basic College of Education in Kuwait. My role will be to teach and train pre-service teachers who will teach in kindergarten classrooms.