

Children Engaging in Storybook Reading: The Influence of Access to Print Resources, Opportunity, and Parental Interaction

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Economic and social class differences in literacy-specific experiences and access to print resources have been widely documented. This study examined an intervention strategy designed to provide access to literacy materials and opportunities for parent-child storybook reading in three Head Start Centers. There were three specific objectives: (1) to examine the influence of text type (highly predictable, episodic predictable, and narrative) on patterns of interaction between parents and children; (2) to examine whether there were differences in these patterns of interaction between low proficiency and proficient parent readers; and (3) to examine gains in receptive language and concepts of print scores for children of low proficiency and proficient parent readers. Forty-one parents and their children participated in the study; 18 low proficiency parent readers and 23 proficient parent readers were involved in a 12-week book club. Results indicated that text type affected patterns of interaction and that parents' reading proficiency influenced conversational interactions, with different text types serving as a scaffold for parent-child interaction. Regardless of parental reading proficiency, however, children's receptive language and concepts of print improved significantly, providing further evidence for the importance of parental storybook reading on children's emerging literacy.

Might differential access to literacy-specific experiences contribute to growing and enduring disparities in reading performance? Although studies have shown that many poor families can and do provide rich literate environments (Anderson & Stokes, 1984; Neuman & Gallagher, 1994; Taylor &

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Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), others have argued that differences in access may have negative consequences for low-income children's long-term success in schooling (Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1993; Maeroff, 1988). Small- as well as large-scale analyses (McCormick & Mason, 1986; Mullis, Campbell, & Farstrup, 1993) have shown substantial differences in children's reading and writing ability as a function of the economic level of their families. Poor families have unequal access to materials, books, and social resources, differences that may critically influence parent participation and involvement in the educational experiences of their children.

An accumulation of studies (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1984; Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Hewison, 1988; Wells, 1985; Whitehurst et al., 1994) suggest that access to books and shared reading experiences are especially important in children's early language and literacy development. As an intensely social activity, book reading provides an interactive context for children to acquire and practice developing verbal and conceptual skills. Vygotsky (1978) and neo-Vygotskian views of development (Rogoff, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) emphasize that social guidance assists children with opportunities to participate beyond their own abilities, and to internalize activities practiced socially, advancing their capabilities for language development, independent thinking, and problem solving. Although some have recently questioned the strength of the explanatory power of parent-preschooler book reading (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994), correlational and descriptive studies (Bus et al., 1995) consistently demonstrate relationships with outcome measures of language growth, emergent literacy skills, and reading achievement.

Yet as reported by McGill-Franzen and Allington (1994), many low-income communities have few resources available in their homes or child care sites. McCormick and Mason (1986), for instance, reported large differences in availability of printed materials for children in the homes of low- and middle-income children. Lacking access to book materials, many young children, therefore, may not be exposed to the cognitive and linguistic richness of talk that experiences with books provide. Thus, differences in access to books may influence the amount of exposure, and the opportunities for young children to engage with literary materials, laying the groundwork for future disparities among middle- and low-income children.

This view contrasts sharply with a "culture of poverty perspective" (Tough, 1982) that has attributed low levels of parent involvement to lower values placed on education. Rather, an argument for access suggests that the variance in achievement lies not in the value placed on education, but on the resources and strategies available to enhance children's performance in school. Goldenberg (1987), for example, found that the low-income Hispanic parents in his study were highly motivated to help their children succeed, but were uncertain as to what they could or should do to promote reading, a

topic perceived to be in the school's domain. When provided with access to resources and information, however, poor and minority parents contribute significantly to their young children's language and literacy development (Neuman & Gallagher, 1994; Neuman & Roskos, 1993).

Consequently, concerns for access have laid the theoretical groundwork for many intervention programs that provide parents with books, reading strategies, and skills with the hope of encouraging frequent storybook reading and cognitively challenging talk with children. Handel and Goldsmith (1994), for example, developed a family reading workshop model for low proficiency adult readers, which involves lively discussions of children's books and instruction in specific reading strategies used by good readers. Read-aloud parent clubs (Segel, 1994), highlighting enjoyment of reading children's literature, provide workshops on models of enriched storybook reading and discussion of topics related to home literacy experiences. Other intervention approaches focus on training low-income parents in adopting new "scripts" with books, emphasizing book management, questioning techniques, language proficiency, and affect (Edwards, 1994; Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992; Whitehurst et al., 1994). Though varying in scope and design, programs like these provide parents with new models, opportunity to engage with books, and resources for sharing books meaningfully with young children.

Nevertheless, some authorities have questioned whether the provision of books and encouragement to read together actually produce meaningful conversations around text (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993; Purcell-Gates, 1995). In their study of home literacy in Latino households, for example, Gallimore and Goldenberg (1993) found that providing short meaningful texts (*libritos*) had some effect on the "scripts" parents used with their children, but did not qualitatively influence meaning-based interactions; instead, parents appeared to apply their prevailing conceptions of literacy (which focused on decoding and pronouncing words) onto these texts as well. Further, some have raised doubts about efforts to impose certain literacy models on parents (Auerbach, 1989; Taylor, 1994), the assumption being that particular interactions typical of middle-class parents are more congruent with early literacy development (Edwards, 1994). Such training models tend to ignore culturally specific practices and the subtle process of intersubjectivity that may occur between parent and child through verbal and nonverbal interpretation. Studies (Rogoff, 1990; Tizard & Hughes, 1984) suggest that children's understanding emerges from connecting the familiar to the novel in collaborative activity, a process essential to enhancing cognitive growth.

Thus, in contrast to an approach that assumes that parents must acquire new values, or be trained to use new scripts, this study examined the effects of an intervention strategy designed to provide access to literacy materials

and discussion. It was guided by the belief that parents teach more than the mechanisms and strategies of reading during storybook activity with their children; rather, they convey their worldviews and values based on previous experiences (Heath, 1983; Leichter, 1984), and respond to children's initiations in literate activities according to what they choose as important and what they see are the purposes of such interactions. These purposes may be shaped by the type of text being read, by their desire to assist their children, as well as parents' own reading proficiency, all of which will reflect different patterns and styles of social interaction. As a sociocultural activity (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994) book reading allows parents and children to derive meaning from text in relation to their own lives.

Using this sociocultural perspective, Ada (1988) developed an intervention that engaged Spanish-speaking parents in reading and reflecting on children's literature stories from their own personal experiences. She reasoned that parents who were reflective would be better able to teach their own children how to relate storybook reading to their experiences. Using a set of four questions that probed these relationships, she found that parents were able to generate more meaningful discussions with children. Similarly, Delgado-Gaitan (1994) found in her intervention study that parent book discussion groups of children's literature focusing on personal experiences led to positive changes in parents' self-perception and efficacy in being able to participate directly in their children's literacy learning. Encouraged to consider text in terms of their own goals, parents in each case appeared to become more interactive in reading with their children.

The investigation presented here builds on and extends this research. Using an intervention approach adapted from Ada (1988), this study examines conversational interactions between parents and children during story readings in a book club. Previous studies (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Snow, 1983) have indicated that frequency and quality of interactive language behaviors influence what children "take" from the book reading event. Active discussions of stories appear to enhance children's vocabulary growth, understanding and recall of stories, and language production as well as their knowledge of print conventions (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Morrow, 1988; Whitehurst et al., 1994). However, studies of social interaction during storybook reading have rarely focused on how these patterns may be influenced by the type of text. Unlike previous research, this study conceptualized storybook reading as a jointly constructed event between parent, child, and text. Here, the role of text was explored as a critical variable in the interaction. Pellegrini and his colleagues (Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, & Brody, 1990), for example, reported that different types of text (i.e., in their case narrative and expository) for low-income children and their mothers appeared to affect the dyadic interaction around books. Extending this research, it was reasoned that different types of text might provide greater access to

participation in storybook reading among parents and children, especially for those parents who were less proficient in reading than others.

The purposes of this study were both descriptive and predictive. The investigation began by describing the linguistic features of book-reading events to determine whether there were identifiable patterns of storybook reading interactions as a function of text among parents and children in the book clubs. I then examined the extent to which joint readings varied for proficient and less proficient parent readers. Finally, I examined emergent literacy growth in receptive vocabulary and print conventions for children of proficient and less proficient parent readers involved in the book club program. Consequently, through qualitative and quantitative analyses, this study sought to provide a stronger foundation for understanding how access to literary resources may enhance children's access to literacy.

METHOD

Participants

Parents and children from three Head Start classrooms located in three Title 1 elementary schools in a large, urban metropolitan area participated in the project. Two of the centers served a majority of African-American children (80%; 19% Latino), and the other, largely Latino (83% Latino, 15% African American). All families were classified as low income by Head Start standards. Of the children 85% came from single-parent homes.

Recruitment for the book club was conducted by teachers at each site. Notices were distributed asking parents to participate in attending a 1-hr-long weekly club over a 12-week period designed to talk about and receive free children's books. Forty-one parents (18,12,11 per site; 37 mothers, 4 fathers), out of a total of 51 families agreed to participate; 26 of these parents were African American, 14 Latino, and 1 Caucasian. By self-report, 18 of these parents (12 Latino, 6 African American) indicated that they had significant reading difficulties and were currently enrolled in a school-based literacy program (Neuman, 1996). Most reported having few literacy resources for children beside coloring books and a small number of children's books. None regularly read to their children.

Procedures

Prior to the intervention, English-speaking children ($N = 39$; 2 of the children were Spanish-speaking only) were administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) (Dunn & Dunn, 1981) as a measure of receptive language, and the Concepts of Print test (COPT) (Clay, 1979) as an indicator of their knowledge of print conventions. Average scores were 22.19% ($SD = 17.37$) and 13.91% ($SD = 9.98$) for the PPVT and COPT respectively (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

Table 1. Descriptive Sample Statistics

Category	<i>N</i>	Average
Children's age (in months)	41	50.7
Parent ethnicity		
Latino	14	
African American	26	
Caucasian	1	
Parents' reading proficiency		
Low	18	
Proficient	23	
Concepts of Print Test (COPT) ^a (possible score 24)	39%	13.91 (<i>SD</i> = 9.98)
Peabody Picture Vocabulary ^a Test	39%	22.19 (<i>SD</i> = 17.37)

^a *N* = 39 (2 Spanish-speaking children were not tested).

Materials. Twelve illustrated story books were selected for the weekly book clubs. Literature selections were based on several criteria: Stories were chosen for their lively illustrations, interesting characters, and topics for young children, availability in both Spanish and English, as well as the book's potential to spark interaction between parent and child. Here, it was reasoned that different types of stories might provide differing levels of scaffolding for interaction between parents and children. For example, stories with highly predictable language and action sequences with accompanying illustrations seemed especially conducive to active participation, particularly for parents who might be less proficient readers than others. Stories with some predictable language and refrains, but with a more episodic structure and less frequent vocabulary, appeared to provide somewhat less scaffolding, whereas stories with no predictable language seemed more dependent on adult support for participation. Reflecting these distinctions, the book selections included stories with highly predictable language and familiar sequences (i.e., *Henny Penny*), episodic predictable texts (i.e., *Red Hen*); and narratives (i.e., *Snowy Day*). See Appendix A for selections.

The Book Club Model. Designed to be a meeting place for conversations about children's books and a time for parents and children to read together, book clubs were held weekly at each site, over a 12-period. All sessions were audiotaped to ensure fidelity of treatment. Sessions followed a similar format and were co-facilitated by a parent leader and a bilingual teacher from the community. Parents were free to select either an English or Spanish version of the story.

Each week began with a choral reading of a children's book. The facilitator would dramatize the action, emphasize repetitive phrases, and some-

times stop to ask questions as she read. Following the reading, the facilitator would then engage parents in a discussion of the story, focusing on three key questions:

- What would you want your child to take away from this book? Acting as a recorder, the parent leader would list common themes, distinctive qualities about the book, descriptive phrases, and unusual vocabulary.
- What kinds of questions or comments would you use to stimulate a discussion of the story? Various question types, like recall, prediction, questions that related to other experiences, and other books would be recorded.
- How would you help your child revisit this book? Parent suggestions like rereading or activity extensions such as visiting a zoo, making cookies, or going for walks together were described.

Conversations were designed to engage parents in analyzing events and ideas presented in the story, relating stories to their own personal experiences as well as helping to bridge these experiences to their children's early educational needs. In this respect, then, the discussion format assumed that parents had rich experiences to share with others that could be applied to children's literature selections.

Library pockets and small index cards were provided so that parents could write down questions they believed most useful for guiding discussions with their children. Some of the parents would then continue to discuss the book; others wanting additional practice would reread the text along with a facilitator. Following the discussion of approximately 40 min, parents then would visit their child's classroom and read their new book together for about 15 min, depending on the level of interaction. The less proficient parent readers might read the story to their child, or ask him or her to pretend to read it to them, or they might tell the child the story as they remembered it using the pictures as guide. All readings were tape-recorded; copies were provided to parents at the end of the project.

Parents were given a new book each week to add to their home libraries. No specific guidelines, however, were given regarding when or how often, or in what ways to read to their child. Rather, our goal was to provide opportunities for parents to talk about and share ways in which storybooks might enable them to spend enjoyable time with their children.

Measures. Recordings from the 4th, 8th, and 12th reading sessions in each club were used to analyze patterns of parent-child interactions. These recordings corresponded to the readings of three types of text: highly predictable (*Henny Penny*), predictable (*Red Hen*), and narrative (*Snowy Day*), read in counterbalanced order by parents in the three clubs. Selected among the 12 readings, procedures were similar for these sessions as all others.

Table 2. Definitions and Examples of Verbal Behavior Categories

Attention Vocative	Directing attention to picture or print ("Look! See the fox")
Bridging	Making connections from story content to everyday experiences ("Did you ever lose a mitten?")
Chiming	Reading along with the text (Parent: "Cocky Locky and Goosey." Child: "Loosey")
Clarifying	Explaining picture and/or text ("These tracks are made by a stick.")
Elaborating	Extending previous utterance with new information (Child: "A snowman." Mother: "Snow man or snow lady.")
Feedback	Correcting or confirming a response ("Yes, they're going to tell the king.")
Labeling	Labeling of objects or events ("It's snow.")
Managing	Getting the child involved ("Let's look at this together.")
Predicting	Asking for information not yet indicated in text ("What do you think will happen when Cocky Locky meets the fox?")
Recalling	Reviewing story details, plots, and/or theme ("Why do you think the boy is so sad?")
Repeating	Copying previous utterance (Parent: "It's a cat." Child: "A cat.")

Following the conclusion of the book club, the English-speaking children were once again administered alternative forms of the Concepts of Print Test, and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.

Coding

Tapes were transcribed verbatim for each of the three sessions. Conversation in the parent-child dyad was examined as an integrated unit, and not categorized separately for adult and child. Rogoff and Gauvain (1986) argued that meaning inherent in a jointly constructed instructional event is obscured by dividing cooperative actions of mother and child into behaviors for which only one is said to contribute. Therefore, all utterances (parent and child), apart from the reading of the text, were coded for content.

Two coders, trained in early literacy, independently reviewed eight randomly selected transcripts from each type of text. Each constructed a typology of utterances and then discussed and refined these categories. Eleven categories of interaction were identified. Once definitions and examples were described, we independently scored six additional tapes selected at random. Agreement ranged from 87% to 100% (see Table 2 for a description of each coding category). After reliability was established, the remain-

Table 3. Mean Percentage (and Standard Deviations) of Interactions by Text Type

Category	Highly Predictable	Predictable	Narrative
Attention Vocative	5.71 (9.11)	7.20 (10.36)	4.63 (8.03)
Bridging**	4.20 (6.81)	4.88 (6.91)	11.05 (13.72)
Chiming***	22.61 (29.50)	13.39 (17.07)	1.70 (7.98)
Clarifying	2.24 (3.47)	3.68 (8.52)	4.53 (9.04)
Elaborating	7.60 (11.61)	10.63 (12.83)	9.13 (12.78)
Feeding Back*	16.22 (9.86)	10.05 (7.22)	9.90 (9.62)
Labeling	11.00 (11.97)	13.37 (17.74)	7.43 (16.49)
Managing	3.41 (6.90)	10.24 (20.11)	10.50 (23.74)
Predicting	5.54 (10.63)	5.15 (7.71)	9.33 (17.55)
Recalling***	5.24 (6.61)	5.98 (7.59)	14.10 (19.25)
Repeating	15.46 (19.25)	12.56 (14.91)	17.85 (16.07)
Total number of utterances	34.51 (25.75)	23.76 (20.82)	26.70 (26.68)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

ing transcripts were coded, and percentages were calculated for each type of utterance per session, as well as the total number of utterances for the parent and child. A total of 122 transcripts were coded.

In examining the findings, quantitative analyses were conducted and augmented by qualitative descriptions, illustrating excerpts from the book reading sessions.

RESULTS

Patterns of Book Reading

The first analysis examined patterns of book reading for the three book types (highly predictable, episodic predictable, and narrative) to determine whether there were variations in interactions across readings. Although only one exemplar of each text type was used in the analysis, differences could provide an indication of the importance of text type in the nature of storybook reading events. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with text condition as the within-subjects variable and the 11 types of interaction strategies as the dependent measures, revealed a significant text effect, Wilks's lambda $F(22, 214) = 3.04$, $p < .001$. Follow-up univariate F tests (2, 116 df) indicated significant differences in four utterance categories: bridging, $F = 5.39$, $p < .01$; chiming, $F = 10.85$, $p < .001$; feedback, $F = 3.06$, $p < .05$; and recalling, $F = 7.97$, $p < .001$.

Means and standard deviations, shown in Table 3, indicated that differences were most distinctive between the two predictable texts and the narrative text. Interactions around highly predictable text involved significantly more chiming and feedback, whereas interactions around narrative text involved more bridging and recalling of text.

The following example illustrates the nature of talk that often occurred when reading the highly predictable text, *Henny Penny*:

- Parent (reading): "Where are you going? The sky is falling and we must go and tell the . . .
- Child: king (chiming)
- Parent: king," (feedback) said Henny Penny, Cocky Locky, and Ducky Lucky. "Oh, may I go . . .
- Child: Too (chiming)
- Parent: . . .with you," (feedback) asked Goosey Lucy. "Certainly," said Henny Penny, Cocky Locky and Ducky . . .
- Child: Lucky (chiming)
- Parent: So they went along and they went . . .
- Child: Along (chiming)
- Parent: Until they met Turkey Lurky. "Where are you going . . ."
- Child: "The sky is falling, the sky is falling." (chiming)

In this example, the rhythm and rhyme of the text appeared to solicit the child's participation. Without specific request, the parent signaled the interaction through a kind of oral cloze technique, waiting for a response from the child (e.g., Ducky . . .). This was followed by an immediate feedback utterance to the response without breaking the rhythm of the text. In this respect, the reading resembled a form of responsive reading, with active participation from parent and child.

Although chiming was more frequently recorded for the episodic predictable text, clearly differences between this book type and others were not as stark as the differences between the highly predictable and the narrative text. In contrast to the highly predictable text, narrative text readings of the *Snowy Day* involved parents and children in getting meaning and linking the text with something that either involved or went beyond the child's own experience.

The following example from *Snowy Day* illustrates a very different type of interaction than that around the highly predictable text:

- Mother: "After breakfast, he called to his friend from across the hall, and they went out together into the deep, deep snow. Look at the tracks (pointing to the picture) (attention vocative)—what are they (labeling)—do you make tracks? (bridging)
- Child: Train tracks (bridging)
- Mother: Tracks are things that can be followed (elaboration)
- Child: He made lines (feedback)
- Mother: Right, they could follow a track. (elaboration) What happened to the snowball Peter put in his pocket? (recall)
- Child: I don't know (feedback)
- Parent: Where did it go? (recall)

Child: ummmmm

Mother: It melted, right? (recall) Does Peter like to play in the snow? (recall)

Child: Yes (recall)

Mother: What do you like to do? (bridging)

Child: Make a snowman (bridging)

Mother: Make a snowman or snow lady (elaboration). What else do you like to do in the snow? (bridging)

Child: I like... I like... I like to get snow all over me. (bridging)

Reading narrative text, therefore, involved greater emphasis on reconstructing certain events in the story, then moving outside of the text to take into account children's life experiences. Unlike the more collaborative reading in the highly predictable text, parent interactions took on more of a didactic role, with the child responding to questions related to the story.

These results suggest that different types of text tended to elicit different patterns of interactions between parents and children. Highly predictable text involved parents and children in more book-focused conversations, such as the chiming of familiar words and passages. These types of interactions have been described by some authorities (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Pellegrini et al., 1990) as low cognitive demand talk. On the other hand, narrative text seemed to engage dyads in more cognitively challenging talk, involving efforts to understand and make connections within and beyond the text.

Differences Between Less Proficient and Proficient Parent Readers

The second analysis examined whether patterns and frequencies of interactions varied on the basis of parents' self-reported reading proficiency. With self-reported proficiency level as the within-participant variable and the patterns of interaction as dependent variables, the MANOVA revealed a significant text effect, $F(12, 105) = 3.45, p < .001$. Subsequent univariate F tests (2, 116) indicated significant differences between low proficiency and proficient parent readers in five utterance categories: attention vocative, $F = 6.94, p < .01$; bridging, $F = 8.94, p < .001$; chiming, $F = 3.34, p < .05$; recalling, $F = 14.11, p < .001$; and repeating, $F = 4.02, p < .05$. Means and standard deviations, reported in Table 4, showed that parents who reported to have reading difficulties more often used strategies of attention vocative, chiming, and repeating, whereas proficient readers engaged in more bridging and recalling of the story.

One low-proficiency reader and his child, for example, reading *Henny Penny*, reflect this pattern:

Parent (reading): "Oh my, the sky is falling... look, at that (attention vocative).
What's this? (attention vocative)

Child: (silence)

Table 4. Mean Percentage (and Standard Deviations) of Interactions for Less Proficient and Proficient Parent Readers and Their Children

Category	Less Proficient Readers	Proficient Readers
Attention Vocative**	8.34 (10.84)	3.94 (7.26)
Bridging***	3.81 (7.08)	9.87 (11.42)
Chiming*	16.58 (23.51)	9.64 (20.16)
Clarifying	2.36 (6.57)	4.33 (7.97)
Elaborating	8.40 (11.24)	10.28 (13.16)
Feeding Back	10.54 (10.29)	12.06 (7.89)
Labeling	13.49 (18.05)	9.01 (13.37)
Managing	8.16 (16.65)	7.94 (19.90)
Predicting	6.32 (10.78)	6.89 (13.99)
Recalling***	9.13 (12.78)	19.99 (18.12)
Repeating*	10.79 (17.00)	5.55 (8.47)
Total number of utterances		
Highly predictable	41.72 (23.66)	28.87 (26.40)
Episodic predictable	23.44 (11.37)	24.00 (26.24)
Narrative	17.18 (20.31)	37.22 (27.99)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Parent: The sky (labeling)

Child: The sky (repeating)

Parent: See, See, this says, "The sky is falling."

In contrast, proficient parent readers and their children were likely to engage in talk about the story, as in this example:

Parent: Why did they think the sky was falling? (recalling)

Child: Because the nut falled on her head (recalling)

Parent: OK (feedback). Why do you think they're carrying them things on their head? (bridging)

Child: Because...

Parent: They think what? Cause they think the sky is falling? (elaborating)

Child: Yes (feedback)

These data revealed that low proficiency parent readers and their children were more likely to engage in book-focused interactions, compared with the interactions of more proficient parent readers; these dyads focused more on meaning-based interactional strategies. Subsequent analyses indicated significant interactions between book type and reading level, $F(24, 210) = 1.78, p < .05$. Univariate F tests showed significant differences for the repeating strategy only, $F(116) = 3.23, p < .05$: low proficiency parent readers and their children used repeating in narrative text more than those who were proficient readers.

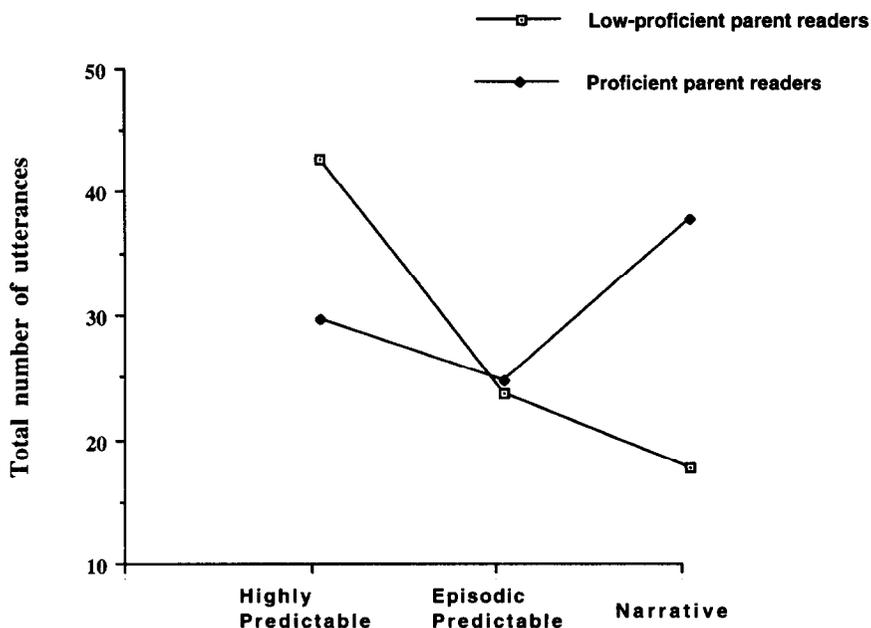


Figure 1. Total number of interactions by text type.

The analysis also revealed a significant interaction in the amount of talk among parent-child dyads of differing reading abilities. As shown in Figure 1, low proficiency parent readers and their children engaged in more talk using the highly predictable book, whereas proficient parent readers interacted more when reading the narrative text. Together, these results suggest that the type and frequency of conversational exchanges between parents and children were influenced by the book type and the parents' reading ability. For parents who lacked proficiency in reading, the highly predictable text with its repetitive language and rhyme appeared to act as a scaffold for active participation with their young children. For parents who were more at ease in reading, such a scaffold appeared unnecessary. They engaged in more conversational interactions with narrative text. With greater facility in reading, these dyads appeared to be less bound to the text than low proficiency parent readers and children. Consequently, the narrative text seemed to elicit more conversations both within and beyond the text than the other text types.

Indicators of Emergent Literacy Growth

The final analysis looked at gain scores in receptive language skills and concepts of print for children of low proficiency and proficient parent readers.

Table 5. Children's Scores on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Concepts of Print Test Before and After the Book Clubs

Catery	<i>N</i>	Pretest	Posttest
PPVT*	39	22.19 (17.37)	45.11 (31.05)
Less proficient	17	22.33 (20.16)	46.22 (31.81)
Proficient	22	24.17 (15.19)	45.04 (33.42)
COPT**	39	13.91 (9.98)	32.30 (20.88)
Less proficient	17	13.06 (14.57)	37.50 (22.18)
Proficient	22	14.61 (4.31)	28.41 (20.77)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

These gains, of course, cannot be attributed solely to the intervention because an equivalent control group was not available. However, they can provide evidence of whether or not growth occurred over the 3-month period for these Head Start children.

As shown in Table 5, children's scores indicated significant changes in emergent literacy growth. Gains in children's receptive language from pre- to post-test rose significantly, $F = 9.55$, $p < .001$, as well as their concepts of print, $F = 10.01$, $p < .001$.

Although growth was evident for all children, gains for children of low proficiency parent readers were even more striking than those for children of proficient parent readers. In fact, mean scores for children of low proficiency parents doubled on receptive language and almost tripled on the concepts of print. Though speculative until replication with appropriate control groups, these data suggest that given a range of resource materials that encouraged active participation, all parents, even those who lacked reading proficiency, meaningfully contributed to their children's emergent literacy abilities through regular storybook reading.

Changes in children's knowledge of print conventions were examined more specifically by conducting an item analysis of scores from the concepts of print measure. This analysis revealed that for most children, concepts learned throughout the 3-month period included knowledge of the front of the book, the fact that print (not the picture) told the story, directional rules of left to right, and the concept of word and letter. No growth was shown in more detailed knowledge of word sequence, letter order, letter identification, and punctuation. Taken together, these data indicate that more global concepts, rather than specific print features, seemed to be learned in the context of storybook reading.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Numerous studies (Allington, 1994; Kozol, 1991; Madden et al., 1993) have revealed the inequities among economically advantaged and disadvantaged

children in access to literacy-specific experiences and print resources. Large social class differences have been reported in the availability and use of print materials in child care centers (Neuman & Roskos, 1993) as well as in homes of low- and middle-income children (McCormick & Mason, 1986). Consequently, given the reported benefits of reading to young children, differential access to books and other resources may seriously impact the emerging literacy abilities of poor children living in economically disadvantaged homes and communities.

This study examined an intervention strategy designed to provide access to literary materials and opportunities for parents and children in three Head Start centers. It argued that parents convey more than just print skills to children during storybook reading; rather, they communicate their beliefs and practices in the context of social interaction. Book clubs, therefore, were designed to engage parents in the active process of constructing meaning from their own perspective and interests and then involving their children in highly interactive storybook reading. However, for those parents who lacked reading proficiency themselves, it was reasoned that "access" might involve not only provision of materials and opportunities, but also additional supports to enhance children's interactions with print and to make reading more comprehensible to children. Thus, our intervention examined how different types of books, ranging from highly predictable to narrative texts, might act as a scaffold for parent-child interactions.

Results of the study indicated that patterns of book reading varied according to the type of text. Reading of highly predictable stories involved a collaborative form of reading together, with parents and children interactively responding to the rhymes and rhythms of text. With fewer repetitive phrases, the episodic predictable story seemed to elicit somewhat similar patterns, although it was less involving. The narrative text, on the other hand, engaged dyads in greater interaction around the meaning of the story and its connections beyond the text. Previous studies of parent-child interactions (Edwards, 1991; Ninio, 1980) have often ignored text as a critical factor in examining categories of talk in storybook reading. In contrast, this study confirms research by Pellegrini and his colleagues with Head Start families (Pellegrini et al., 1990). Storybook reading is a jointly constructed social activity that occurs between parent, child, and text: Type of text affects parents and children's teaching and learning strategies.

Patterns of reading, however, may differ according to parents' own reading proficiency. Low proficiency parent readers in this study tended to engage children in chiming and repeating text, providing feedback when appropriate, whereas other, more capable readers involved children in recalling and bridging behaviors. These patterns relate to previously defined categories of low cognitive demand behaviors (i.e., chiming) and high cognitive demand behaviors (i.e., bridging). Nevertheless, even considering these differences in patterns of interaction, children of both low proficiency,

and proficient parent readers improved dramatically in receptive language and concepts of print measures, although factors other than book reading may have contributed to these gains.

These results raise interesting implications. Research by Whitehurst and his colleagues (Whitehurst et al., 1994), as well as others have suggested that high cognitive demand talk, like asking "what" as opposed to recitation-like questions, significantly advances children's language and early literacy. As a result, numerous interventions have focused on training parents in these particular interactional techniques (Edwards & Panofsky, 1989; Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992). Although not discounting the importance of high cognitive demand talk, results from this study suggest that different types of talk may also contribute to children's literacy learning. For example, even though described as low cognitive demand, responses like chiming "Henny Penny, Goosey Loosey" and repeating alliterative phrases clearly emphasize phonemic awareness skills which are known to play a pivotal role in early reading (Adams, 1990; Stanovich, 1986). Further, the frequency of opportunity to engage in conversations appears to influence children's language and literacy learning. Snow and her colleagues (Snow, Baines, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991), for example, reported that mealtime conversations, offering rich opportunities for parents and children to talk, contributed to children's oral language and ultimately their early literacy abilities. Particularly for children from non-English-speaking backgrounds, Krashen (1989) has shown that the frequency of conversations or comprehensible input is essential in language acquisition and vocabulary growth. These findings, therefore, highlight the importance of oral language opportunities in storybook reading and the contributions that different types of interactions may make toward children's early literacy.

Yet, in spite of the many calls by educators to "regularly read stories to children," documentation of differences in parents' reading ability in this study may indicate why many do not. Parents in our clubs who reported a low level of literacy initially found themselves struggling with reading and not enjoying the experience of reading together with their child. However, access to reading materials that encouraged interactivity, using highly predictable books with clear illustrations, along with the social support of their peers and facilitators, seemed to enhance parents' sense of efficacy and sheer enjoyment in fostering their children's skills as well as their own. It was rare for parents not to attend sessions—in fact, subsequent book clubs have continued even after the leaders have gone. These results extend the findings of Ada (1988), Delgado-Gaitan (1994), and Neuman, Celano, and Fischer (in press), by demonstrating that a low-cost intervention involving parents and children in a socially organized activity can be a highly effective approach for family literacy programs.

Observations of storybook interactions between parents and children during the book clubs raise a final important implication. Through the pro-

cess of intersubjectivity—the sharing of focus and mutual understanding—it was evident that parents engaged children in the intimacy of conversation in drawing connections from the familiar to the novel, linking new situations to more familiar ones—sharing their worlds and personal histories. These activities has been viewed as central to cognitive growth (Tizard & Hughes, 1984). Once again, it suggests the critical role that parents play in children's early literacy learning and the influence of access to print resources, opportunities, and parental interaction in storybook reading.

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APPENDIX A

Children's Literature Selections

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